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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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A Clarification

Nolini Sen had been coming to the Ashram since 1939. He settled here permanently in the year 1944 and not in 1941 as mentioned on p. 41 in the article "Of Saints, Sages and Angels" in the January 2006 issue of this journal. The error is regretted.

THE SELF'S INFINITY

I have become what before Time I was.
A secret touch has quieted thought and sense:
All things by the agent Mind created pass
Into a void and mute magnificence.

My life is a silence grasped by timeless hands;
The world is drowned in an immortal gaze.
Naked my spirit from its vestures stands;
I am alone with my own self for space.

My heart is a centre of infinity,
My body a dot in the soul's vast expanse.
All being's huge abyss wakes under me,
Once screened in a gigantic Ignorance.

A momentless immensity pure and bare,
I stretch to an eternal everywhere.

SRI AUROBINDO

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

THE DIVINE BODY

A DIVINE life in a divine body is the formula of the ideal that we envisage. But what will be the divine body? What will be the nature of this body, its structure, the principle of its activity, the perfection that distinguishes it from the limited and imperfect physicality within which we are now bound? What will be the conditions and operations of its life, still physical in its base upon the earth, by which it can be known as divine?

If it is to be the product of an evolution, and it is so that we must envisage it, an evolution out of our human imperfection and ignorance into a greater truth of spirit and nature, by what process or stages can it grow into manifestation or rapidly arrive? The process of the evolution upon earth has been slow and tardy—what principle must intervene if there is to be a transformation, a progressive or sudden change?

It is indeed as a result of our evolution that we arrive at the possibility of this transformation. As Nature has evolved beyond Matter and manifested Life, beyond Life and manifested Mind, so she must evolve beyond Mind and manifest a consciousness and power of our existence free from the imperfection and limitation of our mental existence, a supramental or truth-consciousness, and able to develop the power and perfection of the spirit. Here a slow and tardy change need no longer be the law or manner of our evolution; it will be only so to a greater or less extent so long as a mental ignorance clings and hampers our ascent; but once we have grown into the truth-consciousness its power of spiritual truth of being will determine all. Into that truth we shall be freed and it will transform mind and life and body. Light and bliss and beauty and a perfection of the spontaneous right action of all the being are there as native powers of the supramental truth-consciousness and these will in their very nature transform mind and life and body even here upon earth into a manifestation of the truth-conscious spirit. The obscurations of earth will not prevail against the supramental truth-consciousness, for even into the earth it can bring enough of the omniscient light and omnipotent force of the spirit to conquer. All may not open to the fullness of its light and power, but whatever does open must to that extent undergo the change. That will be the principle of transformation.

It might be that a psychological change, a mastery of the nature by the soul, a transformation of the mind into a principle of light, of the life-force into power and purity would be the first approach, the first attempt to solve the problem, to escape beyond the merely human formula and establish something that could be called a divine life upon earth, a first sketch of supermanhood, of a supramental living in the circumstances of the earth-nature. But this could not be the complete and radical change needed; it would not be the total transformation, the fullness of a divine life in a divine body. There would be a body still human and indeed animal in its origin and fundamental character and this would impose its own inevitable limitations on the higher parts of the embodied being. As limitation by ignorance and error is the

fundamental defect of an untransformed mind, as limitation by the imperfect impulses and strainings and wants of desire are the defects of an untransformed life-force, so also imperfection of the potentialities of the physical action, an imperfection, a limitation in the response of its half-consciousness to the demands made upon it and the grossness and stains of its original animality would be the defects of an untransformed or an imperfectly transformed body. These could not but hamper and even pull down towards themselves the action of the higher parts of the nature. A transformation of the body must be the condition for a total transformation of the nature.

It might be also that the transformation might take place by stages; there are powers of the nature still belonging to the mental region which are yet potentialities of a growing gnosis lifted beyond our human mentality and partaking of the light and power of the Divine and an ascent through these planes, a descent of them into the mental being might seem to be the natural evolutionary course. But in practice it might be found that these intermediate levels would not be sufficient for the total transformation since, being themselves illumined potentialities of mental being not yet supramental in the full sense of the word, they could bring down to the mind only a partial divinity or raise the mind towards that but not effectuate its elevation into the complete supramentality of the truth-consciousness. Still these levels might become stages of the ascent which some would reach and pause there while others went higher and could reach and live on superior strata of a semi-divine existence. It is not to be supposed that all humanity would rise in a block into the supermind; at first those only might attain to the highest or some intermediate height of the ascent whose inner evolution has fitted them for so great a change or who are raised by the direct touch of the Divine into its perfect light and power and bliss. The large mass of human beings might still remain for long content with a normal or only a partially illumined and uplifted human nature. But this would be itself a sufficiently radical change and initial transformation of earth-life; for the way would be open to all who have the will to rise, the supramental influence of the truth-consciousness would touch the earth-life and influence even its untransformed mass and a hope would be there and a promise eventually available to all which now only the few can share in or realise.

In any case these would be beginnings only and could not constitute the fullness of the divine life upon earth; it would be a new orientation of the earthly life but not the consummation of its change. For that there must be the sovereign reign of a supramental truth-consciousness to which all other forms of life would be subordinated and depend upon it as the master principle and supreme power to which they could look up as the goal, profit by its influences, be moved and upraised by something of its illumination and penetrating force. Especially, as the human body had to come into existence with its modification of the previous animal form and its erect figure of a new power of life and its expressive movements and activities serviceable and necessary to the principle of mind and the life of a mental being, so too a body must

be developed with new powers, activities or degrees of a divine action expressive of a truth-conscious being and proper to a supramental consciousness and manifesting a conscious spirit. While the capacity for taking up and sublimating all the activities of the earth-life capable of being spiritualised must be there, a transcendence of the original animality and the actions incurably tainted by it or at least some saving transformation of them, some spiritualising or psychicising of the consciousness and motives animating them and the shedding of whatever could not be so transformed, even a change of what might be called its instrumental structure, its functioning and organisation, a complete and hitherto unprecedented control of these things must be the consequence or incidental to this total change. These things have been already to some extent illustrated in the lives of many who have become possessed of spiritual powers but as something exceptional and occasional, the casual or incomplete manifestation of an acquired capacity rather than the organisation of a new consciousness, a new life and a new nature. How far can such physical transformation be carried, what are the limits within which it must remain to be consistent with life upon earth and without carrying that life beyond the earthly sphere or pushing it towards the supraterrrestrial existence? The supramental consciousness is not a fixed quantity but a power which passes to higher and higher levels of possibility until it reaches supreme consummations of spiritual existence fulfilling supermind as supermind fulfils the ranges of spiritual consciousness that are pushing towards it from the human or mental level. In this progression the body also may reach a more perfect form and a higher range of its expressive powers, become a more and more perfect vessel of divinity.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Essays in Philosophy & Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 536-39)

Of all the domains of human consciousness, the physical is the one most completely governed by method, order, discipline, process. The lack of plasticity and receptivity in matter has to be replaced by a detailed organisation that is both precise and comprehensive. In this organisation, one must not forget the interdependence and interpenetration of all the domains of the being. However, even a mental or vital impulse, to express itself physically, must submit to an exact process. That is why all education of the body, if it is to be effective, must be rigorous and detailed, far-sighted and methodical.

The Mother

(On Education, CWM, Vol.12, p.12)

GURU GOVIND SINGH

A LIFE of Guru Govind Singh, written by Shri Basanta Kumar Banerji, has been received by us recently. In this book, the character of Guru Govind Singh and his political activities have been brought out in a very fine manner in simple and lucid style. But the tenth Guru of the Sikhs was not merely a military leader and statesman. He was also a great religious personality and a preacher commissioned by God. He gave a new form to the sattwic type of religion in Nanak, with its rich store of Vedantic thought. This fine biography could thus have avoided a touch of incompleteness, had it given a full account of the Guru's views on religion and the transformation that he effected in Sikh religion and society. The writer has made it easier to appreciate the Guru's character and the historical causes and circumstances of his advent, by giving the early history of the Sikh people. It would have helped a great deal in understanding the results of the tenth Guru's extraordinary work and the fruit of his mighty endeavour, had a brief account been likewise given of the subsequent events.

The history of the Sikhs has Guru Govind Singh as its central theme. The true biography of this great personality could be nothing but the history of that people to whose organisation he applied all his strength and genius. In the absence of both the early and the later history of the Sikh community, a biography of Govind Singh would present a rather fragmentary appearance, like the trunk of a tree shorn of its roots and branches. It is to be hoped that the author will add the missing parts in the second edition of his work and make it a beautiful whole by giving a full description of the great Sikh personality's views on religion and his work in the cause of social reform.

On reading this book, the mind is powerfully attracted by the magnanimous nature and extraordinary activities of this great hero, patriot and founder of the Khalsa. Any one who has given himself to the work for the national cause or is thinking of doing so will find this life augmenting his strength and fortifying the divine inspiration.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Translated by Sanat K. Banerji from the original Bengali book review published in *Dharma*, N° 8, October 1909. The English version appeared in *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual* 1967.)

‘THOU SHALT BE THE TEACHER...’

November 25, 1913

THE greatest enemy of a silent contemplation turned towards Thee is surely this constant subconscious registering of the multitude of phenomena with which we come into contact. So long as we are mentally active, our conscious thought veils for us this overactivity of our subconscious receptivity; an entire part of our sensibility, and perhaps not the smallest, acts like a cine-camera without our knowledge and indeed to our detriment. It is only when we silence our active thought, which is relatively easy, that we see this multitude of little subconscious notations surging up from every side and often drowning us under their overwhelming flood. So it happens that, as soon as we attempt to enter the silence of deep contemplation, we are assailed by countless thoughts—if thoughts they could be called—which do not interest us in the least, do not represent for us any active desire, any conscious attachment, but only prove to us our inability to control what may be described as the mechanical receptivity of our subconscious. A considerable labour is needed to silence all these useless noises, to stop this wearisome train of images and to purify one’s mind of these thousand little nothings, so obstructing and worthless. And it is so much time uselessly lost; it is a terrible wastage.

And the remedy? In an over-simple way, certain ascetic disciplines recommend solitude and inaction: sheltering one’s subconscious from all possible registration; that seems to me a childish remedy, for it leaves the ascetic at the mercy of the first surprise-attack; and if one day, confident of being perfectly master of himself, he wants to come back among his fellowmen in order to help them, his subconscious, so long deprived of its activity of reception, will surely indulge it more intensively than ever before, as soon as the least opportunity offers.

There is certainly another remedy. What is it? Undoubtedly, one must learn to control one’s subconscious just as one controls one’s conscious thought. There must be many ways of achieving this. Regular introspection in the Buddhist manner and a methodical analysis of one’s dreams—formed almost always from this subconscious registration—are part of the method to be found. But there is surely something more rapidly effective....

O Lord, Eternal Master, Thou shalt be the Teacher, the Inspirer; Thou wilt teach me what should be done, so that after an indispensable application of it to myself, I may make others also benefit from what Thou hast taught me.

With a loving and trustful devotion, I bow to Thee.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, pp. 35-36)

SHE LEADS US TO HIM SHE BRINGS HIM CLOSER TO US

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

(Continued from the issue of January 2006)

129. A Few Centuries

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.

(M 9: 282-83)

130. Planchette

But those who indulge in this exercise,¹ an exercise of unhealthy curiosity, get what they deserve; for the atmosphere we live in is filled with a great number of small vital entities which are born of unsatisfied desires, vital movements of a very low type, also the decomposition of larger beings of the vital world; indeed, it is swarming with them, you see. It is surely a protection that most people do not see what is going on in this vital atmosphere, for it is not especially pleasant; but if they have the presumption to want to come into contact with it and set about trying automatic writing or table-turning or... indeed, anything of this kind, out of an unhealthy curiosity, well, what happens is that one of these small entities or several of

them have fun at their expense and collect all the necessary indications from their subconscious mind and then furnish these things to them as clear proofs that they are the person who has been called!

I could write a book for you with all the examples I have known of these stories, for people are very proud of doing things like this and immediately write them down, giving “proofs” of the truth of the experience which are so ridiculous that they should be enough to show them that someone was making fun of them! I had another instance, very recently, of somebody who fancied that he had entered into contact with Sri Aurobindo and was receiving sensational revelations from him—that was comical in the extreme.

But anyway, as a rule, it is—oh! most often—it is your own forces, your subconscious mental and vital forces which you put into the planchette—and you make sensational revelations to yourself! One can do many things in this way.... Once I wanted to prove to people that what they were evoking was nothing but themselves; so I had a little fun, simply with a concentration of the will, tapping the furniture, making tables walk and, well!... As for automatic writing, you only have to withdraw your conscious will into yourself, to let your hand go—just like this (*gesture*)—and leave it free, and then the hand will begin to make movements; but there is a little part in you which is interested and would like these movements to make sense and this little part appeals to the subconscious mind which begins to make sensational revelations. Indeed, it is a booby-trap, all this business, unless one does it scientifically—but then, scientifically, one realises that it leads to nothing, nothing at all except just passing your time in what you consider an interesting way.

In some cases vital entities really get hold of you, and there it is dangerous. But fortunately these cases are not very frequent. Then it becomes very dangerous.

* * *

1. Calling up forces by using the planchette.—Ed.

(M 9: 363-64)

Mother, Sri Aurobindo wrote the book Yogic Sadhan in this way...

No, no! It is not that at all. You must not confuse things. That was something different. Sri Aurobindo *knew* with whom he was in contact, he did it deliberately and chose the person he was in touch with, and that had nothing to do with the little entities I am speaking about, nothing at all, at all. It was something that took place in the mental world, directly; you must not confuse things. This has no connection, none at all.

(*Silence*)

One can, if one has the knowledge, the control, the power, the ability to go into a certain state of passivity—one can very easily lend one's hand to someone, deliberately, knowing who it is and acting on a higher plane, but that already demands a great consciousness and a great self-mastery, which is not within everybody's reach. One must have quite a considerable inner development to be able to see whom one is dealing with on a particular plane and willingly lend oneself to the experiment with full knowledge of what one is doing and without losing one's control. Not everybody can play with that. But to work the planchette, one only has to delude oneself enough for it to start working!

What you are telling us now, Mother—does it form part of the occult sciences?

It was simply to make an experiment, that's all.

(Silence)

It is not a good way of approach, as a general rule, for in the inner field, in the domain of inner development, this corresponds to the need to read novels. People whose minds are insufficiently developed, whose minds are still in a tamasic state and half inert, need to read novels in order to wake up. It is not the sign of a very commendable state or at any rate a very high one. Well, in the field of inner development this corresponds to the same thing. When one is in a very rudimentary state, when one has no intense inner life, one needs to read novels or to create novels for oneself, and then one indulges in experiments of this kind and believes one is doing very interesting things.... This has the same interest as novels—not even literary novels but cheap romances, those published on the back of newspapers.

Sri Aurobindo told me that some people needed this because their minds were so inert that this shook them and woke them up a little! Well, that is the same thing. Some people may need to do exercises of this kind to awaken their vital a little, which is sleepy and inert and... this gives them a little interest in life. But still, one can't say that these are very valuable occupations. They are pastimes, amusements.

And this has never served to prove anything to anybody. One could say, "Oh! It is to make you understand that there is an inner life, an invisible life, and it puts you in touch with things you don't see and proves to you that they exist". That is not true.

(M 9: 365-67)

131. The Integral Yoga

In fact, so long as there is any doubt or hesitation, so long as one asks oneself the question of whether one has or hasn't realised this eternal soul in oneself, it

proves that the *true* contact has not taken place. For, when the phenomenon occurs, it brings with it an inexpressible something, so new and so definitive, that doubt and questioning are no longer possible. It is truly, in the absolute sense of the phrase, a new birth.

You become a new person, and whatever may be the path or the difficulties of the path afterwards, that feeling never leaves you. It is not even something—like many other experiences—which withdraws, passes into the background, leaving you externally with a kind of vague memory to which it is difficult to cling, whose remembrance grows faint, blurred—it is not that. You *are* a new person and definitively that, whatever happens. And even all the incapacity of the mind, all the difficulties of the vital, all the inertia of the physical are unable to change this new state—a new state which makes a *decisive* break in the life of the consciousness. The being one was before and the being one is after, are no longer the same. The position one has in the universe and in relation to it, in life and in relation to it, in understanding and in relation to it, is no longer the same: it is a true reversal which can never be undone again. That is why when people tell me, “I would like to know whether I am in contact with my soul or not”, I say, “If you ask the question, that is enough to prove that you are not. You don’t need an answer, you are giving it to yourself.” When it is *that*, it is that, and then it is finished, it is no longer anything else.

And since we are speaking of that, I shall remind you of what Sri Aurobindo has said, repeated, written, affirmed and said over and over again, that his yoga, the integral yoga, can begin *only after* that experience, not before.

So, one must not cherish any illusions and fancy that one can begin to know what the supermind is and form any idea of it or assess it in any way, however minimal, before having had *that* experience.

Therefore, if you want to advance on the path, you must very modestly start on your way towards the new birth, first, and realise it before cherishing the illusion that you can have supramental experiences.

To console you I may tell you that by the very fact that you live on earth at this time—whether you are conscious of it or not, even whether you want it or not—you are absorbing with the air you breathe this new supramental substance which is now spreading in the earth atmosphere. And it is preparing things in you which will manifest *very suddenly*, as soon as you have taken the decisive step.

(*Silence*)

Whether this will help you to take the decisive step or not is another question which remains to be studied, for the experiences which are occurring and will occur more and more frequently now, being of a radically new kind, we can’t know beforehand what is going to happen; we must study, and after a thorough study we shall be able to say with certainty whether this supramental substance makes the work of

new birth easier or not.... I shall tell you this a little later. For the moment it is better not to rely on these things and, very simply, to start on your way to be born into the spiritual life.

When this happens to you, almost all the questions you ask yourself or ask me will be solved.

And anyway, your attitude to life will be *so* different that you will understand what is meant when one speaks of living spiritually. And at that moment you will also understand a *great* thing, a very great thing: how to live without ego.

Until then, you cannot understand it. The whole of life is so dependent on the ego that it seems absolutely impossible to live and act except with or by the ego, but after this new birth you can look at the ego with a smile and say to it, "My friend, I don't need you any more."

This is also one of the results which brings you a very decisive sense of liberation.

(M 9: 336-38)

132. The One Thing which Counts

Perhaps, after all, something is being prepared and one day it will spring up to the surface.

That is what I hope for.

One day you will tell yourself, "Just think! I have been here so long, I could have learnt so much, realised so much and I never even thought of it! Only like that, now and then." And then, on that day... well, on that day, just imagine, you are going to wake up all of a sudden to something you never noticed but which is deep within you and *thirsts* for the truth, thirsts for transformation and is ready to make the effort required to realise it. On that day you will go very fast, you will advance with giant strides.... Perhaps, as I said, that day has come now after five years? I said, "I give you five years...." Now the five years have passed, so perhaps the day has come! Perhaps you will suddenly feel an *irresistible* need not to live in unconsciousness, in ignorance, in that state in which you do things without knowing why, feel things without understanding why, have contradictory wills, understand nothing about anything, live only by habit, routine, reactions—you take life easy. And one day you are no longer satisfied with that.

It depends, for each one it is different. Most often it is the need to know, to understand; for some it is the need to do what must be done as it should be done; for others it is a vague feeling that behind this life, so unconscious, so futile, so empty of meaning, there is something to find which is *worth* being lived—that there is a reality, a truth behind these falsehoods and illusions.

One suddenly feels that everything one does, everything one sees, has no

meaning, no purpose, but that *there is* something which has a meaning; that essentially one is here on earth for something, that all this—all these movements, all this agitation, all this wastage of force and energy—all that must have a purpose, an aim, and that this uneasiness one feels within oneself, this lack of satisfaction, this need, this *thirst* for something must lead us somewhere else.

And one day, you ask yourself, “But then, why is one born? Why does one die? Why does one suffer? Why does one act?”

You no longer live like a little machine, hardly half-conscious. You want to feel truly, to act truly, to know truly. Then, in ordinary life one searches for books, for people who know a little more than oneself, one begins to seek somebody who can solve these questions, lift the veil of ignorance. Here it is very simple. You only have to... do the things one does every day, but to do them with a purpose.

You go to the Samadhi, look at Sri Aurobindo’s picture, you come to receive a flower from me, sit down to a lesson; you do everything you do but... with one question within you: Why?

And then, if you ask the question, you receive the answer.

Why?

Because we don’t want life as it is any longer, because we don’t want falsehood and ignorance any longer, because we don’t want suffering and unconsciousness any longer, because we do not want disorder and bad will any longer, because Sri Aurobindo has come to tell us: It is not necessary to leave the earth to find the Truth, it is not necessary to leave life to find one’s soul, it is not necessary to give up the world or to have limited beliefs in order to enter into relation with the Divine. The Divine is everywhere, in everything, and if He is hidden... it is because we do not take the trouble to discover Him.

We can, simply by a sincere aspiration, open a sealed door in us and find... that Something which will change the whole significance of life, reply to all our questions, solve all our problems and lead us to the perfection we aspire for without knowing it, to that Reality which *alone* can satisfy us and give us lasting joy, equilibrium, strength, life.

All this you have heard many a time.

You have heard it—Oh! There are even some here who are so used to it that for them it seems to be the same thing as drinking a glass of water or opening a window to let in the sunlight.

But since I promised you that in five years you would be able *to live* these things, to have a concrete, real, convincing experience of them, well, that means you ought to be ready and that we are going to begin.

We have tried a little, but now we are going to try seriously!

The starting-point: to want it, truly want it, to need it. The next step: to think, *above all*, of that. A day comes, very quickly, when one is unable to think of anything else.

That is the one thing which counts. And then...

One formulates one's aspiration, lets the true prayer spring up from one's heart, the prayer which expresses the sincerity of the need. And then... well, one will see what happens.

Something will happen. Surely something will happen. For each one it will take a different form.

That's all. I am glad you gave me this.

(M 9: 373-75)

133. Kali—The Great Liberating Power

As today is Sri Aurobindo's birthday I thought that instead of reading the Dhammapada I could read to you something which will both interest you and show you how Sri Aurobindo visualised our relation with the gods.

You know, don't you, that in India especially, there are countless categories of gods, who are all on different planes, some very close to man, others very close to the Supreme, with many intermediaries.

You will understand better what I want to tell you if I mention the gods of the Puranas—like those we saw the other day in the film—who in many ways are, I must say, inferior to man (!) although they have infinitely more power.

There are gods of the Overmind who are the great creators of the earth—until now. There are the gods of the Vedas who are mentioned in everything that has come down from the Rishis. And there are the gods of the Supermind, those who are going to manifest on earth, although of course they exist from all eternity on their own plane.

Here Sri Aurobindo is speaking mostly about the Vedic gods, but not exclusively nor in a very definite way. At any rate these gods are higher than the gods of the Puranas.

Here is what Sri Aurobindo tells us.

In fact, it is a prayer:

Be wide in me, O Varuna;
 be mighty in me, O Indra;
 O Sun, be very bright and luminous;
 O Moon, be full of charm and sweetness.
 Be fierce and terrible, O Rudra;
 be impetuous and swift, O Maruts;
 be strong and bold, O Aryama;
 be voluptuous and pleasurable, O Bhaga;
 be tender and kind and loving and passionate, O Mitra.

Be bright and revealing, O Dawn;
 O Night, be solemn and pregnant.
 O Life, be full, ready and buoyant;
 O Death, lead my steps from mansion to mansion.
 Harmonise all these, O Brahmanaspati.
 Let me not be subject to these gods, O Kali.¹

So Sri Aurobindo makes Kali the great liberating power who ardently impels you towards progress and leaves no ties within you which would hinder you from progressing.

I think this will be a good subject for meditation.

* * *

1. *Thoughts and Aphorisms*, in SABCL, Vol. 17, p. 85.

(M 9: 376-77)

(Concluded)

The ascent to the divine Life is the human journey, the Work of works, the acceptable Sacrifice. This alone is man's real business in the world and the justification of his existence, without which he would be only an insect crawling among other ephemeral insects on a speck of surface mud and water which has managed to form itself amid the appalling immensities of the physical universe.

This Truth of things that has to emerge out of the phenomenal world's contradictions is declared to be an infinite Bliss and self-conscious Existence, the same everywhere, in all things, in all times and beyond Time, and aware of itself behind all these phenomena by whose intensest vibrations of activity or by whose largest totality it can never be entirely expressed or in any way limited; for it is self-existent and does not depend for its being upon its manifestations. They represent it, but do not exhaust it; point to it, but do not reveal it. It is revealed only to itself within their forms. The conscious existence involved in the form comes, as it evolves, to know itself by intuition, by self-vision, by self-experience. It becomes itself in the world by knowing itself; it knows itself by becoming itself. Thus possessed of itself inwardly, it imparts also to its forms and modes the conscious delight of Sachchidananda. This becoming of the infinite Bliss-Existence-Consciousness in mind and life and body,—for independent of them it exists eternally,—is the transfiguration intended and the utility of individual existence. Through the individual it manifests in relation even as of itself it exists in identity.

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 18, pp. 42-43)

MIRA

[An unpublished poem by Amal Kiran and his correspondence with Sri Aurobindo]

“I am the cyclic gale
That blows from paradise to paradise!
Renounce thy arduous oar
Of ego-enterprise
And open out faith’s song-charmed helpless sail
For me to bear thee like a precious child
Within my arms across the bitter wild
Waves of world-grief unto the halcyon shore!

“Why fret to pierce with hungry dwarf-surmise
The veil of void unlimited azure
Dim-hung against thy molecule of sight?
I am the crystal medium of far light,
Wherethrough the unattainable galaxy
Shall pour upon thy soul a mother’s intimate love!

“Know’st though the fathomless silent sacrifice
Of Spirit immortal donning flesh for thee,
Crushing the radiant rose-heart of eternity
To quintessential tears
That all thy solitary universe
May fill with perfume of God-tenderness?
One sole reward I ask: ‘No longer rove,
But suffer my still hand to bless
With pure miraculous palm
Curved to a boon of firmamental calm
Thy narrow pain* of gross earth-heavy thought!

“ ‘Couldst thou but bring thy overwrought
Pale feet upon my path of grace divine,
No need thenceforth to grope and toil, for mine
A straight trance-hush progressing silverly
From goal to goal of heavenward ecstasy!
Thou shalt reach blindfold by mere faith in me!

* To Amal’s query “Is ‘pang’ better than ‘pain’?” written in the left margin of the original, Sri Aurobindo answered “No”.

Yearn but to feel thy sonhood, and a white
 Omniscient flame shall burgeon in thy night:
 Persuade thy mortal darkness to obey
 My form of mystery-impregnant clay
 And lo, thy long-lost godhead shall be born afresh,
 A myriad splendour, from the visionary womb of my soul-flesh.' ”
 my visionary womb of spirit-flesh.' ”

Amal's note to Sri Aurobindo:

Does this poem express even an iota of what its name stands for? I shall be happy to know the opinion of Mother and yourself.

22.9.33

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

It is a good poem and it certainly expresses something of the truth—an essential something.

* * *

Amal's note:

Any good—these lines perhaps you will remember having seen some of them before—in a poem I have rejected.

The glory of her mind
 Sweeps through the earth a magic wind,
 A storm of love that cries:
 “Renounce, O man, thy arduous oar
 { wayward
 Of { brooding enterprise,
 And open out faith's song-charmed helpless sail
 For me to bear thee like a precious child
 Upon my breath of beauty o'er the wild
 Waves of world-grief unto the halcyon shore!
 My rush is truth self-beaconed, not thy pale
 Stranger-surmise:
 I am the* cyclic gale
 That blows from paradise to paradise!”

A variant for the penultimate line:

I come to thee—a cyclic gale.

24.10.1934

* [Sri Aurobindo crossed out “the” in line 12 and replaced it by “a”.]

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

It is not successful—the mind is seeking for the intuitive inspiration but has not got it and not having got it tries to reproduce it or imitate it out of its own material.

I don't mean to say that it is not a good poem,—I am speaking of the success from the point of view of the perfect inspiration.

[Sri Aurobindo drew a vertical line beside the last 4 lines of the poem]

The last four lines seem to me to catch the intuitive inspiration. Possible some few changes might vivify and transmute the whole, but for the moment I don't see what they are.

* * *

[A modified version of this poem was published as "The Mother" in *The Secret Splendour* (1941). It appeared as "Storm-Light" in *Overhead Poetry* (1972) and in *The Secret Splendour* (1993) along with Sri Aurobindo's comment.]

STORM-LIGHT

The immortal music of her mind
 Sweeps through the earth a lustrous wind—
 "Renounce, O man, thy arduous oar
 And, opening out faith's song-charmed helpless sail,
 Reach on my breath of love the ecstatic shore!
 My rush is truth self-beaconed, not thy pale
 Stranger-surmise:
 I am a cyclic gale
 That blows from paradise to paradise!"

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

This is now quite perfect. Only, the lines 2-5 are now of the Illumined Mind, with a strong undertone of the effective, the first and last four intuitive. This is not a defect.

The poetry of the Illumined Mind is usually full of a play of lights and colours, brilliant and striking in phrase, for illumination makes the Truth vivid—it acts usually by a luminous rush. The poetry of the Intuition may have a play of colour and bright lights, but it does not depend on them—it may be quite bare; it tells by a sort of close intimacy with the Truth, an inward expression of it. The Illumined Mind sometimes gets rid of its trappings, but even then it always keeps a sort of lustrousness of robe which is its characteristic.

MOMENTS, ETERNAL

(Continued from the issue of January 2006)

Learning French from the Mother

I HAD the privileged opportunity of being in class with the Mother all by myself. You cannot imagine my nervousness during these classes. At that time I did not know much French nor did I have any practice of it. I just did not feel like opening my mouth because I felt it would be greatly embarrassing. But with a gentle smile the Mother would go on talking in French. She, however, succeeded in planting the seed of self-confidence in the mind of a novice. Everyday She would offer me the flower called *Calm and modest self-confidence*. In the beginning I couldn't bring myself to speak in French but then slowly and most surprisingly that fear completely left me.

She would open the book and say:

"Today we shall read this page."

And She herself read it out. If She had difficulty in seeing a word She would tell me, indicating with Her finger, to get the magnifying glass from the cupboard:

"Look there."

My mind would go completely blank and I would shrivel up with fear. I would open the cupboard but I just couldn't find the magnifying glass!

The Mother would keep repeating:

"There it is, there!"

And finally I did manage to find it.

I used to break out into a sweat. After the Mother's first reading, it was my turn! I would read on. If I raised my eyes to look at the Mother I would see Her in deep meditation, Her body totally immobile and Her hands placed together on Her lap. A profound stillness had enveloped the Mother and taken Her very far away. She would be sitting there, bent slightly forward. And just a few moments earlier She had been directing me to find the magnifying glass in the cupboard while reading out the text in French!

The door near Her chair, to the south, was kept open. That chair of the Mother is still kept in the same place. When you go up to the Mother's room on the second floor you go past this chair just before getting to the staircase. After bowing to Her in Her room we once again bow to Her by bowing to this chair. How long this chair has stood there carrying the blissful memories of the past! Let us come back to my class.

I would sit there and keep looking at the Mother silently. One of the *Service* tree branches stretched out onto the terrace. There was a festival of golden yellow flowers on it and the flowers kept falling on the terrace one after another, moved by the wind: clusters of flowers swaying gently and eyeing the Mother in that silence-

wrapped form—as if greeting Her with “*Bonjour, Douce Mère!*” (Good Morning, Sweet Mother!)

Sitting there at the Mother’s Feet I would fill my eyes with that solitary form of the Mother absorbed in meditation and my heart spilled over with pure bliss. A marvellous thrill coursed through my mind and body. Those enchanting days haven’t left me even today...

One day during the class the Mother asked me rather unexpectedly:

“Can you cook?”

I was quite flustered by Her question! And I’ll tell you why.

I was then thirteen or fourteen. One day my mother was to go somewhere in the evening so she called me and said:

“You’ll cook today. I have to go out on some important work.”

I was thrilled and got down to cooking. *Alur dam!* But I put too much water! It would take a long time for the vegetable to be ready. So what could I do while waiting? I decided to make use of that time to revise my lesson for the following day. Time just flew! Suddenly a smell of something burning wafted into my nostrils! I rushed to the kitchen only to find that everything had turned black. Just a few potatoes on top were looking at me as if laughing teasingly. The memory of that burnt vegetable flashed in my mind on hearing the Mother’s question. I nodded heavily:

“No, I cannot cook.”

The Mother remained silent for a while. Then She said:

“If you can get me some eggs I can make you thirty different kinds of dishes with them.”

I was stunned! The Mother could also cook! And so many recipes as well! I was truly astonished and even more taken aback when She said:

“It was while cooking that I would study and write and prepare my work and reflect on important matters. *Paroles d’autrefois* was mostly written while I was cooking.”

I was flabbergasted. How can cooking and deep thinking happen at the same time? But for the Mother no work was big or small. She could be absorbed in deep thought even while cooking. Whereas we have difficulty in shifting our concentration from one work to the next! But with the Mother everything is possible.

On another occasion She asked me:

“Can you sing?”

The sky seemed to fall on my head! Was I supposed to sing now? I remembered my childhood again. We two sisters used to often talk about singing. Our mother was very keen on our taking up music. A singing teacher was engaged who came every evening. He was more of a sadhak by nature. A *tulsi*-garland around his neck, an ochre *panjabi* on his body. He taught us only devotional songs. One of these songs began with: *Koruna tor jaani maago, aashbey shubhodin.* (I know your Compassion well, Mother. Auspicious days will surely come.) He used to sing this song over and

over again. And even as he sang tears would flow down his cheeks. He asked me very often to sing this song. And I enjoyed singing it. Dada often teased us:

“What kind of songs are you learning! Listen to all the songs that I have learnt.”
And he would sing to us beautiful modern songs.

When the Mother asked me about singing I thought I would sing *Koruna tor jaani maago, aashbey shubhodin*. But then I began to feel shy. Moreover I did not have a very musical voice. My sister Tapati had an extremely sweet voice. Dada had a marvellous singing voice. My sister was part of Dilip Kumar Roy’s singing troupe. The Mother would often listen to their singing at the Playground. One day the Mother told Tapati:

“You have a lovely voice, indeed.”

She had been able to recognise her voice from among the whole group. In any case, to come back to the story, I told the Mother:

“No, I cannot sing.”

Now it was my turn to be surprised. Suddenly the Mother began humming and then singing quite clearly. What an amazingly melodious voice She had! I had never imagined that someone could look so beautiful while singing. In rapt enchantment I went on gazing at the Mother. My inner being was filled with an unearthly experience...

This class with the Mother started in a strange way. The Mother had asked four or five of us to go to a lady for our French classes. We used to go to her in the evenings. One day because of a severe headache I could not go to this class even though I had revised my lesson. The lady would not believe that the headache was the real reason. She felt I had not done my homework.

“You’re lying,” she reproached me.

That was it! That night I could not sleep because I was upset. The following morning when I went to see the Mother, She at once looked at me and asked:

“What’s the matter?”

I started weeping! Then I told the Mother everything.

The Mother replied:

“Is that all? Then from today I shall teach you.”

And this is how my class with Her started. An apparently insignificant incident in my life brought along a golden opportunity for me to be close to the Mother all alone.

After the first lessons were over, the Mother started reading out from *Belles Histoires* to me. When She was reading the story called ‘*Patience et Persévérance*’ I noticed that some lines from a Punjabi song were written at the beginning. I really wanted to learn the pronunciation of these Punjabi lyrics. What did the Mother do to satisfy my curiosity? She called Lakshmibai and asked her to read out the Punjabi song. Lakshmibai read out the song:

Sada na bageen bulbul boley

Sada na baag baharaan.

Sada na raaz khushi dey hondey

Sada na majlis yaaraan.

(Forever the bulbul sings not in the garden.

Forever Spring blooms not midst flowers.

Forever gladness stirs not in the kingdom

Forever friends adorn not an assembly.)

It was the same Lakshmibai with whose dog I had had an amusing experience. I had always been terrified of dogs and so when I settled here for good and was walking on the street I would run onto the footpath every time I crossed a dog. Dogs too would start growling for no reason the moment they caught sight of me. Probably they sensed my vibration of fear. A few days after my coming here I became very friendly with Pratima who had also just become a permanent member of the Ashram. We were of the same age and both of us worked in Sahana-di's tailoring department. Pratima also shared my fear of dogs. And so we were always together, going to the Dining Room for our three meals or going to the seafront for a walk. One evening we had just come out when from the nearby mill two huge alsatians ran out. (This house was later bought by the Ashram. Dr. Sanyal-da used to live there. Today it is the building that houses the Homoeopathy clinic, an Allopathy section and it housed for some time the School for Perfect Eyesight.) We bolted as soon as we saw these tiger-sized dogs. But how could we compete with the dogs? Pratima stumbled on the road while I managed to climb onto the footpath. The doorman of the house came out running hearing our cries and reined in the dogs.

And then there was Goldy who manifested in the life of these brave heroines! Good heavens! There were dogs even on the way to the Mother! I was in a real fix!

When the Mother offered us flower-blessings at ten in the morning at the head of the stairs leading to the first floor, near the small room, Lakshmibai used to come with a huge tray on her head. This tray was full of all kinds of lovely roses. She had her own rose-garden in her house. She would come up the staircase, go past the Mother and go to the Mother's inner room. And accompanying her would be this famous Goldy whom the Mother loved very much. In fact it was the Mother who had named him Goldy. It was indeed a most beautiful dog. His body was covered with shiny golden fur and that was probably why the Mother had named him so. Lakshmibai used to take a lot of care of her dog. Everyday Goldy would go straight to the Mother without bothering about anybody and lift his front paws and hug the Mother. The Mother showered a lot of affection on Goldy and talked to him. Looking at Goldy one would imagine he understood everything. He too was delighted to show his love for the Mother. Then he would go to Sri Aurobindo's room and get His darshan as well! I am told that Sri Aurobindo would gently stroke his head for a while.

I am sure you all know that Sri Aurobindo had a dog. This was certainly long before the Mother arrived in Pondicherry. And who does not know about the Mother's cats? One of Her cats would come everyday during the meditation and sit in a chair to meditate with all of us, sometimes even go into trance! Only when the Mother made a certain kind of noise would the cat come out of her trance. We were told later that this cat had been reborn as a human being! Certainly Goldy too must have been reborn as a human!

However I was terrified of this Goldy. I would go to the Mother fearlessly only when Goldy had gone back. I don't know what happened one day. It was half past ten and thinking that Goldy must have certainly seen the Mother and gone back I headed for the Mother's darshan. Hardly had I lowered my head after greeting Her with "*Bonjour, Douce Mère*" that I felt Goldy on my back! God knows from where he had materialised like a storm. I screamed, terrified! I jumped up and went behind the Mother and grabbed Her very tight. I was trembling and screaming at the same time! The Mother too was unable to release Herself from my grip. Finally She forcefully brought me in front of Her. And what a scolding She gave me! A lot of people were waiting behind me. I was in a pitiable state then.

"You are terrified of a simple little dog! How will you ever do the sadhana? Remember that this path of sadhana is not all that easy. You will have to face all kinds of dangers and difficulties. It is a most arduous, most dangerous path. You need tremendous courage to walk on it."

As soon as I heard this from the Mother I remembered something Nolini-da had told me. I used to go to see Nolini-da every evening and open my heart out to him. After my parents' departure it was Nolini-da who looked after me. I would even get my letters from him without having to go to the Post Office. One evening I went to Nolini-da as usual. After talking to me about all sorts of things, he said:

"Priti, this path of sadhana that you have chosen looks very simple but the moment you touch it you get such a shock!"

I kept looking at Nolini-da's face in awe. I was nonplussed. It all sounded like a riddle to me. I had barely arrived and did not know anything about sadhana. As I could not live in Feni without the Mother, I had come away.

That day I came to know even more clearly from the Mother Herself how difficult this path was. How strewn with dangers! One needed to be vigilant at every moment.

*Durgam giri, kantar maru, dustar parabar
Langhite hobey ratri-nishithy, jatrira hushiyaar.*

(Mountains impassable, deserts and dense forests,
shoreless oceans—

These must be crossed at the dead of the night.

Be alert, O travellers!)

I accepted the flower-blessings from the Mother and came down. Everyone on the staircase was laughing. After this incident my fear of dogs was considerably reduced. I would still start calling out the Mother's name every time I saw a dog from afar. I became frightened of the fear itself.

And so in this way accepting the challenge right from the beginning and declaring war, I began walking on the path of progress.

One day while the Mother was teaching me I noticed that She was smiling. After a few moments of laughter, She told me:

“There was a person who had advanced a lot on this path of sadhana. I was describing to him the supramental beings, how they would be, what kind of life they would lead, etc. When I told him once that supramental beings would not require food any more, they would be freed from this necessity of eating, there began a procession of all the wonderful delicacies before him.

“‘Oh, no,’ he moaned, ‘I won't be able to eat all these delicious things, such mouth-licking dishes will not be enjoyed any more!’

“He was overcome with such gloom!”

And saying this the Mother burst out laughing!

This man lost such an incredible opportunity just for the petty pleasure of food! And so all of us, we keep losing the real aim of life because we get caught in some petty pleasure or the other.

The Mother is feeding us food that She has cooked but we refuse to take it. In a prayer from *Prayers and Meditations* the Mother says:

Since the man refused the meal I had prepared with so much love and care, I invoked the God to take it.

Nolini-da has written:

What food had the Mother prepared that man refused to accept? It was nothing other than a divine life here on the bosom of the earth prepared with supreme love and divine ananda by this Light and this Power beyond, something that only gods can enjoy.

To attain this divine life in our present state is still a distant reality for us. To convert this goal into a realisation is still beyond our reach.

Nolini-da says:

Man rejected it because for him this was too high and too great. He is an earth-bound creature and his confines are narrow. He can acquire only that, enjoy only that which is ordinary and petty, or just an atom of this gross earth....

The Mother asked mankind a simple question:
 “Are you ready?”

But we continue to live in the same darkness. Our arrogance, our revolts continue to strangle us. Who amongst us has escaped from the grip of hurling criticisms against the Mother’s work. And besides, how full of ego we are. We humans have squandered this unsolicited Compassion of the Mother. We have been tarnished with our unrepentant nature. We have still not become worthy of being dignified children of the Mother. That is why I say that we have squandered our inherited wealth.

(To be continued)

PRITI DAS GUPTA

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

THESE TEARS

I said God was a name,
 That He was not, what utter rot!

He tapped me on the shoulder
 And I grew even bolder.

He said “Look I am everywhere,”
 I managed all things to outstare.

“You are the outworn superstitions
 Of an idiotic mysticism.”

He held me in His tender arms.
 I fought. “I’ll not be taken by your charms.”

But then He entered my breast,
 These tears must tell you all the rest.

MAGGI

PAINTING AS SADHANA

Krishnalal Bhatt (1905-1990)

(Continued from the issue of January 2006)

6

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

6.12.33: Mother,

Last night in dream I saw three pictures. One was that of a god whose ten to twelve heads were cut off by Chakra. The heads and the Chakra were seen in the picture as if just after the action of cutting. The figure was standing calmly. In dream some name of the god was suggested which I have forgotten.

Sri Aurobindo: It sounds more like an Asura killed by Vishnu than a god.

K: Another was a pair of two pictures of God Vishnu. Both were seen side by side. In the one Vishnu was lying in his abode heaven quite at ease. In his front two figures fully dressed as warriors of those times were sitting, and towards his legs Laxmi was sitting, though she was not seen there was her suggestion. The details were not clear but atmosphere was of rest in his own place.

In the other of the pair Vishnu was lying but uneasy. The suggestion of Laxmi was the same as in the former one. The figures of the warriors were not there but some other figures may be round about. The background was airy and of light yellowish green colour. Vishnu was telling to the persons present, "Finish up all the works soon, I may have to go, at any moment my devotees call me." Then all of a sudden he commanded Arjuna, "Finish the yagna before to-morrow, I will have to go."

Do these dreams signify anything?

Sri Aurobindo: Probably only dreams of the mental plane founded on old legends.

8.12.33: Mother,

Will you kindly solve my following doubt pertaining to painting?

I send, herewith, a coloured print of a picture of mine which is titled, "Flames of Wrath", and some photographic prints of Sri Rabindranath Tagore's pictures for reference. Sri Nandalal Bose had suggested to me that in my picture "Flames of Wrath" the flame was not correctly drawn from the view point of art. According to him the drawing of flame did not convey its own meaning. For that he suggested to me to study the old—especially Tibetan—paintings.

The flame of anger which I have drawn is according to what I actually perceived at the time. In the picture the flame of anger is becoming intense and rising higher and at its highest bursts into darkness. This is how I perceived. Does this picture go

out of the range of art because it is not according to tradition? Should an artist always depend on the traditional rules to make a picture a piece of art? Are these rules not the limitations for an artist?

The pictures of Sri R. N. Tagore do not follow the tradition, even then they are considered in art. How far they are justified?

On the other side there are pictures, technically perfect but very poor to express this inner theme. How much are they justified?

Sri Aurobindo: The Mother finds the pictures of Tagore hideous and monstrous; she would not dignify them with the name of art. But it is not because they depart from tradition. The Mother does not believe in tradition—she considers that Art should always develop new forms—but still these must be according to a truth of Beauty which is universal and eternal—something of the Divine.

As for your picture she finds it expressive. She felt at once what it meant—so the criticism of Nandalal does not stand.

10. Dec. 33: Mother,

Since some days I do not feel to do any painting even though my general atmosphere seems to me better. I am not able to understand where lies the difficulty. Will you kindly throw light over this matter?

I have marked a change after coming here. In the beginning when I came here I used to go for walks and get inspired from nature. But now that is gradually diminished. What kind of change can be this?

Sri Aurobindo: It is a state of transition. You will get out of it as you progress.

[10.12.33]: Mother,

I send you the picture about which I told you on the day of the interview.

I began it long ago but was doing it at intervals. I have tried to finish it. I would like to have your suggestions as to when it requires more finishing or if it is overworked, also general criticism over the picture.

Sri Aurobindo: The landscape is admirable, full of light and beauty (the figures not so successful).

It is not overworked. Something more is needed for the finishing.

[Undated]: Mother,

May I suggest one idea for the framing of “The Wave”? Instead of one whole glass if three pieces in the same size are used then, I think there will not be much danger of breaking of the glass or of the frame becoming very heavy, for in this case we can use thinner glasses. Only difficulty is that there will be two vertical lines on the picture where the glasses meet. [*Here K drew a sketch (1.5” x 3”) showing the vertical joints.*] Will this look good and is it practicable?

Mother: I had thought also of making the frame like a window through which the

picture would be seen. But I have asked for the celluloid sheet we shall see first if is all right if not we shall try the other thing.

[N.B. In K's album this letter is placed just before that of 4.11.33 where he asks permission to begin this painting. Did this discussion then precede completion? Or is it based on preliminary sketches?]

12-12-33: Mother,

I received this telegram from Bachubhai, a friend of mine, who is the manager of a monthly magazine and under whom my younger brother Sudama works. Sudama is about 25 years old and is one of the two brothers who are earning.

Mother: The intention of such a telegram is obvious, for how can your friend expect that your going there can cure your brother....

14-12-33: Mother,

To-day I received a letter from my father which I forward for your information. The envelope was addressed to Purani with a letter also to him.

My father has stopped the box with some of my things which my brother was to send.

In reply may I write to him of following substance?

My stay here is for indefinite period. And for the family affairs they should manage considering me absent for a long time.

Sri Aurobindo: Yes.

[On the 15th a cyclonic storm hit the town. Correspondence was stopped, some ashramites said, to give more time to Sri Aurobindo and Mother to control the forces behind the cyclone (as it was done for the cyclone that occurred three years previously) and save the town from severe damage. Some said the cyclone was the hostiles' reaction to the descent of 24th November. Then, as now, people crowded on the beach to 'enjoy' the mountainous waves and the wild sprays.]

19/12/33: Mother,

To-day I received a letter from the friend who had wired. He writes of the following substance: "Sudama (my brother) suffers from fever since last Monday (11th). It is typhoid and is serious. The heavy weakness which follows after the crisis in this fever is now in the beginning, so we do not know what will be the condition in crisis. In this condition we have thought it fit to call you. He will be relieved by your presence from the burden which he has on his mind due to your absence and he will have much of mental rest. So without any considerations you should start."

I send this letter only for your information. As you wrote before I cannot cure him.

Will you kindly instruct me as to what kind of answer I should return?

Mother: You might answer to this effect that you do not think that you could be of any help by going there, and that you think that whatever help can be given, can better be done from here than from anywhere else.

2? 12.33: Mother,

To-day I received letters from my wife and brother. I put before you the summary ...*[rest of this side cut out; on the reverse is written]* advice as to what I should reply. Sri Aurobindo: These difficulties and the reproaches also are inevitable for a sadhak coming away from his family. If he wants to stay there he must be prepared to face them and live them down. Many have had to do that before you.

27.12.33: Mother,

Since a week I am attacked by suggestions of illness. They come in different forms, which I reject as soon as I become aware of. Still I suffer from cold at times.

Yesterday I was attacked by a peculiar atmosphere. In the morning when I was taking bath suddenly I felt that the whole bathroom was filled with a kind of suffocating air. My head became heavy and dizzy. Then for the whole day I was as usual. But again at night before going to bed I felt dizziness. When I went to bed for sleep I tried to concentrate on Mother; I had some visions coming from above, from which only one, of "White Ganesh", I remember. But soon after this that peculiar atmosphere surrounded me as if trying to suffocate me. My whole body began to ache. For nearly more than an hour I suffered in body and mind both as if crushed down. At times calling for your help and trying to reject the atmosphere I passed the period after which I slept. I am not able to understand what kind of atmosphere or hostile force was that. Will you oblige me by explaining about all this and what kind of attitude I should keep now?

Sri Aurobindo: The main thing is to remain very quiet, know what it is and repel it refusing to be either alarmed or affected.

K: To-day I have received more information of my brother's sickness in a letter from my place. I put some contents from it for your information.

On last Friday my brother's condition was very serious. He could not pass urine. Three doctors were called. My brother wanted again to wire for me and was eager to see me by his side. He and another younger brother are angry with me because when there is serious sickness in the house and economic condition is bad I am trying to search God. My mother is calm in all this. My wife is daily weeping and the child does not get the proper nourishment and so it is to be nourished on milk from outside. In this condition they want me to return and manage everything there and then to come back here.

Can this condition at my place be responsible for my above-said atmosphere? Has it any connection in that way?

Sri Aurobindo: I think it is mostly that that brought the attack.

28-12-33: Mother,

Can this sickness of my brother have any relation with my stay here for Sadhana?

Sri Aurobindo: No relation.

K: Are the hostile forces trying to bring the attack on me in that way or does it come to strengthen my sadhana?

Sri Aurobindo: Whatever happened like that is to be used as an occasion for affirming the strength of the sadhana.

K: Is it possible that if anyone tries to hinder in other's sadhana one may be attacked by hostile forces?

Sri Aurobindo: It is possible. A hostile vibration can always put one in relation with disastrous forces of a similar kind and their dangerous vibrations.

30-12-33: Mother,

To-day in the early morning I awoke with the memory of this landscape. I was not fully out of the sleep when I saw it but I remembered it clearly.

Can it have any meaning?

Sri Aurobindo: Pine trees usually indicate a pure aspiration.

30-12-33: Mother,

Nolini told me that the glass and the frame for the picture have arrived, and that you want the picture to be framed on the 2nd Jan.

If you have no objection I and Purani may take out the picture in the morning, frame it during the day time and leave it upstairs in the evening to-morrow. We think a day is sufficient for that work.

Mother: Yes, but I have nobody to hang up the picture once framed, as the work is a little difficult (it must be hung from the ceiling) and I would like to have the picture there for the midnight blessings.

[1933]: Mother,

Since some days a strange feeling overcomes me. I remain in a suffocating atmosphere and feel helpless—without your guidance and protection. It takes a long effort to come out from that atmosphere.

I seem dull in my general work and painting also. I am not much inclined to draw or read, so I lie down in the cot and pass the day. In the evening I go for a walk.

I received the fixative but found it not useful to fix pastel works. By its use the colours become darker and dull. And so I return the picture of the vision semi-fixed.

To-day I send you a simple colour-combination that I saw yesterday. Sometimes I close my eyes and see many different kinds of colour combinations having many different shades. These have no regular forms. This, which I send has some shape in it and the colours are quite simple, so I put it on paper.

Have these abstract colour-combinations any meaning?

Sri Aurobindo: It is movements of forces that you see. Each colour represents some kind of force.

As for the suffocating atmosphere, it is a wrong Influence that has come in and is obstructing the consciousness and preventing the contact with the Mother. You have to reject it and wipe it out from your atmosphere.

The Mother had told you once that in your human figures you did not seem to be in contact with the right Influence and you had said that you felt the contact with an eternal Beauty in Nature but had not the same contact with regard to the human figure. It will be better then, now that you are practising the Yoga and to be in contact with right Influences only is very important, to avoid dealing with the human face and figure at present. In Yoga what may seem to the mind a detail may yet open the door to things that have strong effects on the consciousness, disturb its harmony or interfere with the sources of inspiration, vision and experience.

30-12-33: Mother,

I do not do any drawing or painting taking inspiration from nature because I am not inclined to it now-a-days. Instead of that I feel a kind of movement going on in my inner being; though it is not clear to me yet I feel that something will take form sooner or later. I keep aspiration for the divine Truth to manifest through my art. When such movement is going on I see hazy forms in variety of colours coming down but it is disturbed by some mental movement. This is as I understand it.

I will be much obliged if you will throw some light in this matter. Am I on the right path and what should I do to avoid mental disturbance?

Sri Aurobindo: Yes—you are on the right path.

K: Is it possible that I may become lazy by waiting for the inspiration from within and not doing any work till then?

Sri Aurobindo: No.

K: In that case is it necessary for myself to do some practice work to keep in touch with drawing?

Sri Aurobindo: Of course you can do one little study work every day.

Mother is constantly putting you in relation with a world of true harmony and it is that that you feel trying to come down—but you must keep your mind very quiet to receive it.

*

1934

4/1/34: Mother,

A few days back I was reading the criticism on the art of Muzumdar. In it there is the description of Sri Chaitanya and Sri Krishna in relation to his pictures.

While reading the description I had the feeling horripilation many times; at

times it passed from the head to feet and again back. In what being was this opening and receptivity? And can it be helpful to read such writing often?

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, it is good.

K: On the same evening I went out for a walk when I was in continuation of the same mood, and all of a sudden I felt the presence of Sri Aurobindo around me. Nearly for 45 minutes I remained in that experience. But as it was time for dinner and your darshana I returned to Ashram and the mood, gradually, passed away.

Sometimes I feel overwhelmed by your love and am filled with delight. At such times should I sit quietly and receive and allow that consciousness to continue in spite of other works to be done during that time?

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, it is better to be quiet and let it continue.

Jan '34: Mother,

I have heard Arjava is to shift from his present room. In that case, if you have no objection may I suggest that the room up-stairs will be more convenient to me and for my work also due to glass windows?

Sri Aurobindo: Mother had already decided to give you the corner room which is very suitable for your painting.

9-1-34: Mother,

When an artist brings down one form from the world of harmony and expresses it through a material—stone or paper and colours—does that form become permanent for this physical world? If we say it is permanent what becomes of it when that material perishes?

Sri Aurobindo: In the material it lasts only as long as the expression—of course it may last in the subtle physical behind.

K: If this form of the higher world can be expressed in stone then is it not more convenient to express it through the physical body which is more conscious than the stone? If it is possible how can it be expressed?

Sri Aurobindo: Your question is not quite clear. How do you envisage the expression in a physical body?

10-1-34: Mother, I will try to put clearly yesterday's question.

The physical body is more conscious than the stone. Then, to express the form from the higher world is it not convenient to use the physical body rather than the stone? Supposing an aspect of beauty is to be expressed, the sculptor will have to carve the stone and give a form which will show beauty. But the body being more plastic can he not show the same aspect perfectly by dancing?

If it is so why to go to other materials for expression?

Sri Aurobindo: But dancing is a movement—not a form. The body can express a rhythm brought down, but how are you going to make it express a new form?

12-1-34: Mother,

To-day at about 11 a.m. I had the experience of going into trance (I think because it was very similar to the one which I had some days back). In it I saw your different aspects, but as they were not clear I could not distinguish between them. The experience lasted nearly for one hour and a half. The main thing that I felt throughout was silence within and around me. This silence then continued for the whole day. The outside noise was there but I felt I was protected from it by the layer of silence around me. Afterwards I had a little heaviness on the head, sneezing and effect of cold for about an hour in the afternoon.

Will you kindly explain me what is the true nature and significance of the experience and what is the relation of cold etc?

Sri Aurobindo: The experience of the silence was certainly the descent of the fundamental silence which prepares the transformation of the consciousness—it is the beginning of the spiritual peace. You saw the aspects of the Mother probably because they were present in the work that was being done.

As for the cold it may have been due to some resistance in the body (head) or else to the body during the trance having been too much open to the atmosphere and as there is still something of the wave of cold and headache in the atmosphere and it got touched for a moment.

13-1-34: Mother, this landscape I did when I was yet in the influence of the experience—yesterday. Does it convey any mood?

Sri Aurobindo: It suggests solitude in a wide silence.

13-1-34: Mother,

The human figures that I draw are not expressive, on the contrary they open the way for evil influence. It is like that from the very beginning.

What can be the origin of it? And generally what kind of influence it brings? What may be the reason that that influence is avoided in my landscape painting?

Sri Aurobindo: Your relation with Nature has been much more psychic than your relation with human beings. You must have met the latter mainly in the vital plane and not come in close contact with the eternal Beauty behind. In Nature you have felt the touch of the eternal and infinite and entered therefore into a true relation with her.

The influence that comes in the human figure is a force of disharmony and ugliness—a manifestation of ignorance in form.

15/1/34: Mother,

I see such mountain peaks very often now-a-days. They are seen in different colours—in reds, yellows, blues, etc. This is one of these seen with white temples or buildings on its summit.

What kind of movement this can show?

Sri Aurobindo: Aspiration and will to reach the highest heights.

15/1/34: Mother,

To-day Purani gave me the information from a letter to him that the [my] child died on last Saturday.

And the second item is that my brother who recovered from typhoid fever, though very weak, is a little angry with me and so he would not like to write to me or speak with me because I did not go there in his sickness in spite of his sympathetic attitude towards me.

What should be my attitude as a sadhak in both matters?

Sri Aurobindo: The right attitude is perfect equanimity and faith that the Divine's Will is always for the best.

K: When I knew this news I thought it good to remain quiet. So I went to my room and began to aspire for the peace. After some struggle mind was thrown in the background, and I felt my head very light and cool. I felt also Mother's presence and her aspect in vision—there were different lights and visions too.

In between I had lapses when some hostile atmosphere was trying to attack me especially a black shadow was covering the right side of my body. By asking for Mother's help I was protected from all that. One hour passed like that, still I tried to separate myself and go deep. And quite a new experience, for me, began. My physical body seemed to be sinking somewhere and becoming smaller and smaller and some body like vibration separated and as if was revolving just over the physical body. I felt a great pressure of that vibration as if it will break me down. At that time I remembered that I had such experiences before when I used to suffer from fever. The vibration-like body seemed big like an elephant in proportion to [my] physical body which was like an ant.

Sri Aurobindo: The experience must have been that of your vital being coming out of the body and standing above it.

K: When this was going on in full force I had to get up to open the door of the room which was being knocked at. Then again I sat for some time and had to allow my self to come in the ordinary condition. There was in the evening, headache, heaviness of the head and nervousness in the body. Was it due to untimely disturbance or due to pressure?

Will you kindly explain me about the whole movement and give me guiding instructions?

Sri Aurobindo: It was due to untimely disturbance, not to pressure. It would have been better not to get up and open.

(To be continued)

AT PONDY BEACH

Gentle waves caressing Pondicherry shore
Vision of tranquil beauty to behold
Whispers of delight to float in.

Vast and fluid music in motion
Emerging from fathomless depth
Permeating space and submerging soul.

Breeze of undulating oneness
Musing the song of
Sweet prolonged embrace.

Aurora's awakening rays,
Twinkling stars' smiling beams from the vast beyond
Lord Varuna revealing sublimely His supernal self.

Pondicherry shore—coming to you
Is experiencing myself in soul
As moments of bliss turn into everlasting enchantment.

ARUN VAIDYA

TEHMI-BEN—THE EARLY YEARS

(Continuation of “Tehmi-ben—Narad Remembers” from the issue of January 2006)

TEHMI’s childhood was idyllic, surrounded by the trappings of royalty, infused with beauty and wonder, a fairy tale to fulfil any youngster’s most vivid imagination and people a world of dreams with pageantry and splendour.

Tehmi: “When we were young we lived in a palace. The Durbar hall was just below us and we used to peep and watch them (the guests) beautifully dressed in their *saffars* (headdresses). The Bhopal colours were always light blue, a greenish blue, very beautiful. They used to look so nice. They were finely dressed—with white coats nicely buttoned up. We could peep but not be seen. The Viceroy and other Princes would come to the Durbar. The hall was paved with marble and there were pictures (on the walls). When the hall was not being used we used to roam about the place in the morning. When there was an occasion they used to put a string of coloured lights all along the terraces. We were not supposed to show ourselves.

“We were quite lucky to be brought up like that! Our father and mother never gave us the idea that it was special. A very big palace, the old palace of the Begum and she gave it to my father. There must have been some talk of shifting my father from that place (the big palace). The prince said, ‘He is not to go unless he wishes. He can stay as long as he wants.’ Then no one could contradict the prince. We had a very nice time in Bhopal.

“We saw the regiments with the elephants and the camels. They would come to the huge compound in front of our house. The chief man arranged all the regiments in the compound, that is still in my mind.

“I remember, when we were playing in the garden of one of the princes, a huge cobra reared up in the grass. Our servant came and hurried us off and one of my father’s friends who was in the military came and shot it.

“In those days we were not afraid. When mother said we should go in and call father, we had to run through that great hall with the huge tiger heads jutting out from each side of the walls. There were skins of other animals all over the floor. I remember that double feeling very clearly. We were old enough to distinguish (that the tigers were dead) and young enough not to be able to throw out the imagination. The rulers were Muslims and great *shikaris* (hunters).

“My father would go with them sometimes. They would build a *machan*, a little house in the trees, to sit and wait for the tiger to come. (*Makan* is house in Hindi.) They would watch and wait. My father would describe how they would tie a bait (usually a goat) to attract the tiger. The tiger could smell the animal and the poor animal could smell the tiger and would be frozen to death but they would kill the tiger before it got to the bait. His (father’s) friends were Muslims and were very

good shooters. When we saw tigers in cages they had double bars on the cage and we were told not to go near. But the tigers in cages were already quiet.”

* * *

Tehmi: “We had wonderful peaches from Quetta in Baluchistan. That was in the days before Pakistan when we were in Bhopal.”

Narad: “Tell me about the Prince’s palace.”

Tehmi: “My father was a good friend of the prince and he used to go and visit him. We would sit with my mother in the car. When it was time my mother would send us in to ask my father to come. There were two huge tiger skins on the wall with the heads of the tigers jutting out with their teeth exposed. It was both a reality, in that we knew they were dead and yet we used to still tremble to go past. In children the distinction is not clear between appearance and reality.”

* * *

Tehmi: “One of the prince’s palaces was on the top of one of these hills and we used to go there practically every day. The palace on the hill was huge with glass panels and very huge halls.”

Tehmi: “The elephant regiment used to come, so wonderfully decorated, and the camel regiment, so beautiful, and the horse regiment. The occasions were so frequent we became used to it, the band and a lot of pomp and show. The official used to come in a procession to the Durbars.”

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Tehmi: “The Bhopal Begum was a very powerful lady ruler. There was a line of these lady rulers. Powerful Muslim ladies, no fooling with them. They used to meet the Viceroys and Governors on their own terms. No veils.”

N: “Good rulers?”

Tehmi: “Yes, powerful, good. There were no disturbances under them. There was a succession of two or three of them and the last ruler was the Nawab, the son of the last Begum. He was a friend of my father.”

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Tehmi: “My father was not only a doctor, he was a surgeon and the head of the hospital. He himself had a whole hospital built, operating theatre and everything. Once we had gone to the hospital. He made us sit in a corner and said ‘Don’t make any noise or stir.’ We watched from a very long distance. They brought a patient in on a stretcher and my father did an eye operation! It was not his specialty but he had the knowledge. He told us that he once operated on a horse that was brought in from

the fields in terrible pain. Its stomach—it was in intense pain and he relieved it of the pain.”

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Tehmi: “My father would often say, ‘Why did he (Sri Aurobindo) come to Pondicherry instead of the Himalayas?’ I would say, ‘He did it for me because I can’t take cold weather.’ ” [Then she added,] “Of course, I can’t take heat either!”

Tehmi: “My father bore everything without complaining. He was a real yogi. He would get up early in the morning at 5:00 a.m. and take a bath in ice-cold water with buckets that filled up during the night. Then he would say his prayers. He would pray for hours.”

Tehmi: “My father was very strong and disciplined. My mother was very sweet but also strong and disciplined.”

* * *

Tehmi: “My mother was also a doctor, a gynaecological surgeon. She had an Irish degree. After her marriage she didn’t practise any more. In Bhopal it was a very dangerous affair and father wouldn’t let her practise. If a child died in surgery, for example, these Muslims were very fierce people and you can’t say what they would do. The Begum wanted her to be in charge of the gynaecological hospital but father said No! Father was a very bold person. All the people under him used to respect him a lot and assist him as he wanted.”

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Tehmi: “We often went to the Begum’s palace and were allowed to roam freely there. Even if we picked fresh pears from the trees no one would say anything. But if they offered anything at the palace our mother instructed us never to take anything but cardamom.”

N: “For what reason? She wasn’t concerned about poison, was she?”

Tehmi: “Perhaps not that but since it was offered from the servants she was concerned— especially that it might not be clean.”

Tehmi: “There was a huge lake in Bhopal. It was miles long and very beautiful and very clean. We would drive along the lake and we used to roast the fruits (Water chestnuts) that grew in the water. The roads were red and beautiful.”

Tehmi: “The princes used to catch all kinds of animals and send them to us. We ate deer, pheasant, rabbit and peacock. I stopped eating meat when we went to Bombay.”

N: “When were you in Bhopal?”

Tehmi: “Only when we were young. Afterwards we only went to Bhopal for the holidays. The house was very large in Bhopal. It had everything. The holidays were very nice.”

N: “When did you live with your father?”

Tehmi: “From the age of eight on we studied in Bombay and went to Bhopal for the holidays. Bhopal was a very beautiful place.”

* * *

N: “What language did you speak at home?”

Tehmi: “Gujarati, and to the servants, Hindi. In Bombay also we spoke Gujarati. But Gujaratis laugh at Parsi Gujarati!”

Tehmi: “In Bhopal the educated people spoke a high form of Urdu. There were only Urdu and Islamic schools in Bhopal.

Tehmi: “We had a nice old servant (in Bhopal) whose name was Ram, a very sweet servant he was and mother used to rely completely on him. He used to take us for walks in the evening to a garden nearby. My brother was younger than I and he used to pull Ram’s moustache and play with him like that. We were brought up calling Ram, Ram, Ram. He took more care of us than mother. I also remember, when mother used to go out for something she would post him near our bed. Ram was a very sweet man. He may have been 30 or 35. He was so loving, very loving. He used to take care of us like his own children. My brother used to manhandle him and play with him.”

Tehmi: “Our aunties’ house was a huge house. So many of us were living together, my uncle, my mother’s brother, and her sister. Our aunties brought us up with so much care, so much love. Our parents were in Bhopal.

“In the evening we used to go for a drive with my father and go to one of his friends’ gardens and eat. The gardener would be somewhere in the offing but he wouldn’t care. We used to have big pears like this!” (Tehmi shows the size with her hands.)

Tehmi: “It is a different kind of weather altogether. There it was heat, it was dry heat. At night, in the evening, it was very cold in certain seasons. We used to use blankets.”

Tehmi: “We adapted to the climate in Pondicherry because the mind was not on these things.”

N: “When did you take piano lessons?”

Tehmi: “Oh yes! Since childhood. A music teacher came to give lessons to my cousin. She was one of those professors. Afterwards my cousin got married and since the piano was hers she took it with her. Then I began to study the violin. I liked the violin very much.”

N: “Did you listen to a lot of music when you were young?”

Tehmi: “Not really. My one auntie used to play the piano very well and the other the violin.”

Animated and with brightened eyes Tehmi would recount these magical experiences of childhood filled with joy and love and I would sit entranced by her words, in the special atmosphere of her room in Golconde where she lived for more than 50 years, a room filled with love and gratitude for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and the grace and blessings They had bestowed upon her.

NARAD (RICHARD EGGENBERGER)

Notes:

Baluchistan—A mountainous desert region in southwestern Pakistan and southeastern Iran.

Begum—A title of respect for a woman of high rank in some Muslim communities.

Bhopal—A city in central India, the capital of the state of Madhya Pradesh, said to have been founded by the Parmara King Bhoj (1000-1055), who had his capital at Dhar. The city was originally known as Bhojpal named after Bhoj and the dam ('pal') that he is said to have constructed to form the lakes surrounding Bhopal.

Durbar—formerly, an official reception held by a local prince or British governor in colonial India. [Pers.: *darbar* a prince's court, literally a door of admission.]

Gujarati—a language spoken in the Indian states of Gujarat and Maharashtra.

Nawab—a deputy or viceroy in the Mogul empire, a Muslim prince or noble.

Parsi—a descendant of the Zoroastrians who emigrated from Persia to India in the 8th century.

Quetta—the capital of the province Baluchistan in Pakistan. It is located in a densely populated district in the northeast of the province and situated in a river valley near the border with Afghanistan. Quetta has a population of about 650,000. The city is dominated by a Pashtun majority and a Balochi minority with an eclectic smattering of smaller groups. Pushto, Balochi, Persian (Hazaragi dialect), Brahui, Sindhi, Punjabi and Urdu languages are spoken in large parts of Quetta, giving the city a very multicultural feel.

Urdu—the official literary language of Pakistan, closely related to Hindi; widely used in India (mostly by Moslems); written in Arabic script.

Viceroy—somebody who governs a country or province as a substitute for the monarch. The term derives from the Latin prefix *vice-*, meaning "in the place of" and French *roi*, meaning "king".

MANINDRA (1935-2005)

*“Death is but changing of our robes to wait
In wedding garments at the Eternal’s gate.”*

WE still cannot believe that Manindra, the indomitable warrior of Gloria has passed away from our midst. The very land on which he walked everyday breathes his loving and caring presence, as Manindra breathed the very presence of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and sang Their glory in his life and action.

Soft, unassuming and generous, simple, dedicated and sincere, and above all, true, forthright and courageous—perhaps these few words describe his personality. As the Mother says, straightforwardness and courage are rare qualities that belong to the very pure in heart, mind and soul. Every work that was given to him, Manindra performed to the best of his ability, giving of himself as a consecration to the Mother.

A brief account of his early life is given here. Manindra had suffered from rickets as a child and learnt how to walk only after the age of seven. While other children played and went to school he sat all alone watching and dreaming ... dreaming of a better life different from the ordinary. So one evening, he walked and walked in the direction of the sun and eventually ran towards it as it dipped below the horizon to his utter disappointment. This shows his childlike curiosity and persistence in trying to resolve the problem at hand.

But how did he come to the Mother? Well, unknown to him his elder brother Umapada was already a devotee of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. In the evenings, as soon as he came home from work, he used to shut himself up in his room for an hour. Manindra wondered about this secret and on peeping through the keyhole found that his brother was sitting in meditation before the photos of (as he later came to know) the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. When his brother found this out, he slapped Manindra very hard. But the curious result of this beating was that Manindra turned to the Mother. Strange are the ways of the Divine. Sometimes the Mother calls her own child even with a beating.

When his brother was transferred to another place, and was taking these photos with him, Manindra clung on to the Mother’s picture and pleaded with his brother to let him have it. His mother then asked Umapada to leave that photo for him.

“Above all preferences we want to be at the service of the Divine.”

When Manindra joined the Ashram on August 14, 1955 he was given the work of washing the vessels in the Dining Room. He was punctual, careful and hard working. He was then given the responsibility of cooking rice. He worked in the Dining Room for nine years. Sincere and diligent he also joined the group activities of physical education and was regular even when he was not well.

The Mother used to give two handfuls of groundnuts in place of one to those

who volunteered for the construction work going on in the Cottage after the group activities. The volunteers joined the queue first and the rest came after.

One day Manindra had a splitting headache and joined the queue later, being unable to gather himself for the work at Cottage. Despite this the Mother gave him one handful of groundnuts, held on to his hands and gave him a second handful. Manindra was in a quandary. “The Mother wants me to work and yet I am unable to walk, leave alone work. What am I to do?” He dragged himself along intending to go home and pondering over the Mother’s gesture which could never be erroneous. Soon enough he found himself at the construction site with everyone expecting him to arrive since there was concreting work to be done that evening. He never realised when he had missed the turn to go home or when his headache had vanished. He worked with zeal and enthusiasm through the night!

There was once a notice in the Ashram inviting those interested in planting a thousand coconut tree seedlings in Coco Land at Lake. Manindra immediately enlisted himself as a volunteer. When he reached the Lake Estate on the day of planting he found to his surprise that he and Kashinath’s father, Kulkarni, were the only inmates who had turned up. Dyuman-bhai handed him the first seedling blessed by the Mother and Manindra single-handed planted all the seedlings. This singled him out as a conscientious and sincere worker, nay the servant of God, the Mother’s warrior, ready to work towards the achievement of the goal. Dyuman-bhai was very happy with Manindra’s zeal for work and thus wanted him at Lake Estate. But he could be released from the Dining Room only when Vedprakash-ji joined the Ashram and was trained to cook rice.

Manindra was sent to the Lake Estate in 1964 where he worked under X in the dairy. One evening Manindra noticed that the persons who were to deliver paddy straw for the dairy were taking away some bamboos in their bullock cart. He did not know if this was permitted by Louis Allen, the person in charge of the work at the Lake Estate, and therefore reported it to him. Louis immediately asked: “Where is X?” He had left to go to Pondicherry. So Louis said: “Hereafter you will look after the dairy.”

The Lake dairy consisted of several sickly cows and Manindra knew nothing about dairy farming. On handing over the charge X explained to him that there were medicines to be given at regular intervals. Following this procedure mechanically did not feel like the right thing to do. The inner guidance did not allow him. So one day, he just buried the medicines and prayed to the Mother for her guidance. Everyday he bathed the cows, brushed them and cleaned their hooves with love. Soon enough they grew healthy and one by one they all delivered and the sickly herd was transformed to productive cows—the dairy was on a sound footing.

In those days Gloria Land was an annexe of the Lake Estate. Changing responsibilities brought Manindra to Gloria Land on January 15, 1966. On the 29th of the same month, the Mother separated the Gloria management from the Lake management

and Manindra worked under Mr. Sheshadri, the retired Joint Director of Agriculture of Tamil Nadu. He was a very sweet old man but tied down by his grooming in the conventional methods of agriculture. He came as an adviser to help the Ashram farms and used Gloria Land for growing fodder for the cows in the Lake Estate. Manindra worked under his guidance.

Gloria, the land of 98 acres, which belonged to Dr. André, was sold by his daughter Gloria to the Mother in 1963 after her father had passed away. It was the most poor and arid land in that area, for it had very little good soil and much limestone in many places, which was made into lime to be used for construction at the Lake and also for the swimming pool in the Sports Ground.

Dyuman-bhai's dream was to make the Ashram self-sufficient in milk, rice and vegetables. Manindra worked under Mr. Sheshadri, growing bananas, rice, coconuts and vegetables, but he did not like to use chemical fertilisers and fell sick while spraying chemical pesticides. He followed all the instructions but was convinced that this was not the right type of agriculture. He did alternative experiments on his own in little plots. He did not know what was the right type of agriculture but he wanted the freedom to make mistakes and to learn from them.

“All is always for the best; but it is sometimes, from the external point of view, an awkward best...”

Manindra always felt he was guided. While working in the Dining Room he used to hear a voice telling him: “Not here, not here, elsewhere, elsewhere.” The same voice continued while in the Lake Estate and finally stopped, much to his dismay, when he was sent to Gloria!

Working single-handed and living alone at Gloria, he often missed the direct contact with the Mother. In desperation he wrote to the Mother knowing full well that her physical presence extended to 10 miles: “I have read that your physical presence extends up to 10 kilometres and Gloria is beyond that so can you bring me closer or extend your umbrella up to Gloria Land so I can feel your concrete presence?” Manindra hoped that the Mother would overlook his cleverness regarding the mix-up with kilometres and miles and give him work close by.

In the late evening, after all the work was over he brought out his cycle to take the letter to the Ashram. At the entrance to Gloria his wheel unexpectedly knocked against the root of a tamarind tree and he was thrown headlong to the ground. When he regained consciousness he saw that the cycle was damaged, it could not take him to Pondicherry. He looked around and slowly became aware of the Mother concretely visible in everything: trees, fields, soil, stones: “As though a thousand Mothers were there with me standing as fence posts all around Gloria!” he was to recount later.

Dyuman-bhai could not have found a better and more suitable person than Manindra to turn the arid land of Gloria that he had purchased for the Ashram into a

glorious fertile land with the use of organic fertilisers and organic pest control.

In later years Manindra would often say to his daughter or others who thought he should not miss the chance offered to him to do such and such a thing: “I will do this only if I feel from within that it is right.”

The Dairy at Gloria Land

Dakshinapada gave Manindra one small female calf brought on a cycle-carrier and a former worker too gave him a cow in gratitude for some kind act done to him by Manindra. This was the beginning of the dairy at Gloria Land. Left to graze around, the calf grew. Both cows became pregnant and delivered calves. The milk he received was much more than the people in Gloria could consume, so Manindra sent it to Surendra, who supervised the local cows that came to be milked for the Ashram in his part of the dairy.

At the end of the month Surendra paid for the milk but Manindra did not like to be paid for the milk he was offering to the Ashram. Surendra insisted that Manindra needed the money for the upkeep of the cows and to buy more cows to have more milk. This is how Gloria became the largest supplier of milk from the first cows offered and subsequently purchased from all over India. On the 14th February, 1969, he wrote a letter to the Mother, excerpts of which are given below:

With the Mother’s blessings I feel I can in the course of the next four or five years help in taking the Ashram to a stage of self-sufficiency. I have every hope that with the Mother’s blessings I will come out successful in organising this section well and running it independently on economic lines...

At the same time I assure Mother that I will work it on my own account and not draw extra money from the Ashram for the purpose...

The Mother had asked Manindra to keep the dairy in his name. He did as he was told but did not understand Mother’s wish at that time. Much later did he realise that the Mother in that way had given him a giant freedom for growth and expansion, which would not have been possible otherwise. When the time was right She asked Manindra to offer the dairy to Her. She had Manindra’s letter of offering read out in her room.

These are the two quotes printed on the Gloria Land letterhead:

If thy aim be great and thy means small, still act: for by action alone these can increase to thee.

Care not for time and success. Act out thy part, whether it be to fail or to prosper.

KAILAS, RICHARD, GLORY

NEW ELEMENTS IN SRI AUROBINDO'S YOGA*

CHILDREN of the Mother and my friends,

Dr. Mangesh Nadkarni has asked me to speak to you about the new elements in Sri Aurobindo's yoga. At the outset I would like to declare that I am not a yogi although I have had the good fortune of being close to some yogis in Sri Aurobindo Ashram. So the treatment of the subject will be largely of a theoretical nature. I will base myself on a letter written by Sri Aurobindo (*SABCL*, Vol. 22, pp. 98-101) on the subject, the photocopy of which has been made available to all of you.

But before I do so let me tell you an anecdote. There was a very disciplined man who said with some pride to his acquaintance, "See, I am a bachelor. I don't smoke or drink. I do my exercises regularly. I don't go to the movies and I don't attend parties. And you know, tomorrow I am going to celebrate my 80th birthday." "Yes, but how?" was the reply of the acquaintance. Behind this humorous exchange is the age-old question: How to celebrate life if not by sense-enjoyment? Yet we have heard from old, *muktim icchasi ched, visamiva visayanstyaja*. If you desire liberation, shun the objects of the senses like poison.

Many years ago, my teacher Arabinda Basu had an opportunity to meet a great Bhaktiyogi in Benaras. The yogi asked him, "What do you think is new in Sri Aurobindo's yoga." Knowing that he was in the presence of a great soul, Arabinda Basu kept quiet. Then the yogi himself said, "Even the senses shall realise the Divine." The profound spiritual intuition of the yogi conveys everything. It is a new art of life that Sri Aurobindo has come to teach us. A celebration of life not through sense-enjoyment in the ordinary sense but by perception of the *rasa* of the Divine in all the activities of life down to material life so that even the senses could partake in the Divine delight. And this art of life is based upon a new science of yoga, an extension of Brahmavidya into a new province of consciousness. As Sri Aurobindo puts it beautifully in *Savitri*:

The Spirit shall look out through Matter's gaze
And Matter shall reveal the Spirit's face.¹

Matter's gaze is the gaze of the senses upon its object but it will be the Spirit which will inform the senses. And the object of senses which is also Matter will respond to the gaze by revealing the concealed Spirit. In the Indian tradition the eye is considered chief among the senses. *Pratyakṣam kiṁ pramāṇam*, or as they say in English, "Seeing is believing." The regard of the eye, its gaze upon its object brings about a union of the Spirit in the subject with the concealed Spirit in the object and of this union Delight is born; a Delight, a Bliss which secretly sustains the universe even now.

* A Talk at Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry.

Now I will proceed to discuss the letter which I had mentioned earlier. I read.

By transformation I do not mean some change of the nature—I do not mean, for instance, sainthood or ethical perfection or yogic siddhis (like the Tantrik's) or a transcendental (cinmaya) body. I use transformation in a special sense, a change of consciousness radical and complete and of a certain specific kind which is so conceived as to bring about a strong and assured step forward in the spiritual evolution of the being of a greater and higher kind and of a larger sweep and completeness than what took place when a mentalised being first appeared in a vital and material animal world. If anything short of that takes place or at least if a real beginning is not made on that basis, a fundamental progress towards this fulfilment, then my object is not accomplished. A partial realisation, something mixed and inconclusive, does not meet the demand I make on life and yoga.

Transformation is a word which is bandied about freely among the followers of Sri Aurobindo. It is necessary to understand the exact meaning Sri Aurobindo attaches to the word. Common sense might suggest that it is some change of Nature. But it is not so. For Sri Aurobindo, consciousness is the fundamental reality. In his long Sadhana he explored the spiritual dimensions of Evolution. The biologist explores evolution from its external aspects. Sri Aurobindo does it from the side of consciousness. Just as the Life principle emerged from Matter and Mind from Life so Sri Aurobindo's yoga prepares us for the next evolutionary deliverance which is the Supermind. It was with this aim in view that he developed his yoga. Thus when we talk of transformation of the physical, it is a transformation of the consciousness in the physical which is meant. A new level of consciousness has to become operative in the physical. I go on to read and discuss the next portion.

Light of realisation is not the same thing as Descent. Realisation by itself does not necessarily transform the being as a whole; it may bring only an opening or heightening or widening of the consciousness at the top so as to realise something in the Purusha part without any radical change in the parts of Prakriti. One may have some light of realisation at the spiritual summit of the consciousness but the parts below remain what they were. I have seen any number of instances of that.

Spiritual realisation has been the aim of all yoga. But Sri Aurobindo points out that this is not enough for his yoga. Here it is important to understand the distinction between Purusha and Prakriti. This is the most basic dualism that the seeker encounters as he commences his journey. Purusha is the passively luminous soul and Prakriti is the mechanically active Nature. To use Sri Aurobindo's words,

Truly, we do not think, will or act but thought occurs in us, will occurs in us, impulse and act occur in us; our ego-sense gathers around itself, refers to itself all this flow of natural activities. It is cosmic Force, it is Nature that forms the thought, imposes the will, imparts the impulse. Our body, mind and ego are a wave of that sea of force in action and do not govern it, but by it are governed and directed. The sadhaka in his progress towards truth and self-knowledge must come to a point where the soul opens its eyes of vision and recognises this truth of ego and this truth of works. He gives up the idea of a mental, vital, physical "I" that acts or governs action; he recognises that Prakriti, Force of cosmic nature following her fixed modes, is the one and only worker in him and in all things and creatures.²

The old yoga stopped at this realisation. The method was to create a cleavage between inner being and outer nature. The Yogis were content to realise the inner being as the Purusha whereas outer nature continued to run in the same old grooves. But in this yoga the outer nature too has to be radically transformed. The difficulty is very great. The obstacles are seemingly insurmountable. Commenting on the obstacles Sri Aurobindo says,

The difficulty is great; for their hold is so strong, so apparently invincible that it justifies the disdainful dictum which compares human nature to a dog's tail,—for, straighten it never so much by force of ethics, religion, reason or any other redemptive effort, it returns in the end always to the crooked curl of Nature. And so great is the vim, the clutch of that more agitated Life-Will, so immense the peril of its passions and errors, so subtly insistent or persistently invasive, so obstinate up to the very gates of Heaven the fury of its attack or the tedious obstruction of its obstacles that even the saint and the Yogin cannot be sure of their liberated purity or their trained self-mastery against its intrigue or its violence. All labour to straighten out this native crookedness strikes the struggling will as a futility; a flight, a withdrawal to happy Heaven or peaceful dissolution easily finds credit as the only wisdom and to find a way not to be born again gets established as the only remedy for the dull bondage or the poor shoddy delirium or the blinded and precarious happiness and achievement of earthly existence.³

I go on to the next section.

There must be a descent of the light not merely into the mind or part of it but into all the being down to the physical and below before a real transformation can take place. A light in the mind may spiritualise or otherwise change the mind or part of it in one way or another, but it need not change the vital nature;

a light in the vital may purify and enlarge the vital movements or else silence and immobilise the vital being, but leave the body and the physical consciousness as it was, or even leave it inert or shake its balance. And the descent of Light is not enough, it must be the descent of the whole higher consciousness, its Peace, Power, Knowledge, Love, Ananda. Moreover, the descent may be enough to liberate, but not to perfect, or it may be enough to make a great change in the inner being, while the outer remains an imperfect instrument, clumsy, sick or unexpressive. Finally, transformation effected by the sadhana cannot be complete unless it is a supramentalisation of the being. Psychicisation is not enough, it is only a beginning; spiritualisation and the descent of the higher consciousness is not enough, it is only a middle term; the ultimate achievement needs the action of the supramental Consciousness and Force.

Descent is the master-word of this yoga. Descent is what brings about a change of Nature. But Sri Aurobindo is not satisfied with a partial transformation. The descending influence must touch not only the mind but the vital and physical and below in order that the change may be integral. For the integral transformation the very highest supermind must descend. In the old paths spiritual consummation was quite possible without the ascension and descent. I quote from the "Synthesis":

The very physical consciousness in man, the annamaya puruṣa, can without this supreme ascent and integral descent yet reflect and enter into the self of Sachchidananda. It can do it either by a reflection of the Soul in physical Nature, its bliss, power and infinity secret but still present here, or by losing its separate sense of substance and existence in the Self within or without it. The result is a glorified sleep of the physical mind in which the physical being forgets itself in a kind of conscious Nirvana or else moves about like a thing inert in the hands of Nature, jaḍavat, like a leaf in the wind, or otherwise a state of pure happy and free irresponsibility of action, bālavat, a divine childhood. But this comes without the higher glories of knowledge and delight which belong to the same status upon a more exalted level. It is an inert realisation of Sachchidananda in which there is neither any mastery of the Prakriti by the Purusha nor any sublimation of Nature into her own supreme power, the infinite glories of the Para Shakti. Yet these two, this mastery and this sublimation, are the two gates of perfection, the splendid doors into the supreme Eternal.

The life soul and life consciousness in man, prāṇamaya puruṣa, can in the same way directly reflect and enter into the self of Sachchidananda by a large and splendid and blissful reflection of the Soul in universal Life or by losing its separate sense of life and existence in the vast Self within or without it. The result is either a profound state of sheer self-oblivion or else an action driven irresponsibly by the life nature, an exalted enthusiasm of self-abandonment to

the great world-energy in its vitalistic dance. The outer being lives in a God-possessed frenzy careless of itself and the world, unmattavat, or with an entire disregard whether of the conventions and proprieties of fitting human action or of the harmony and rhythms of a greater Truth. It acts as the unbound vital being, piśācavat, the divine maniac or else the divine demoniac. Here too there is no mastery or supreme sublimation of nature. There is only a joyful static possession by the Self within us and an unregulated dynamic possession by the physical and the vital Nature without us.⁴

What Sri Aurobindo describes in these lines is the status of the Paramhamsa, which in the old yoga is considered a very high status. A shloka describes the Paramhamsas as *bālonmādapiśacajadavat*—childlike, maddened, demoniac and seemingly inert types. But evidently this is not enough for Sri Aurobindo.

We have heard about the stages of the yoga. The discovery of the psychic being and a preliminary change under its influence is the first stage. The realisation of the spiritual Self and a descent of the higher consciousness is the second step. The action of the Supramental consciousness and force is the third stage which culminates in lifting the aspiring soul completely beyond the line that separates Knowledge and Ignorance. The first two stages can in developed human beings proceed concurrently but the supramentalisation does not begin until the two previous stages are complete as complete can be. I go on.

Something less than that may very well be considered enough by the individual, but it is not enough for the earth-consciousness to take the definitive stride forward it must take at one time or another.

I have never said that my yoga was something brand new in all its elements. I have called it the integral yoga and that means that it takes up the essence and many processes of the old yogas—its newness is in its aim, standpoint and the totality of its method. In the earlier stages which is all I deal with in books like the “Riddle” or the “Lights” or in the new book to be published [Bases of Yoga] there is nothing in it that dis-tinguishes it from the old yogas except the aim underlying its comprehensiveness, the spirit in its movements and the ultimate significance it keeps before it—also the scheme of its psychology and its workings: but as that was not and could not be developed systematically or schematically in these letters, it has not been grasped by those who are not already acquainted with it by mental familiarity or some amount of practice. The detail or method of the later stages of the yoga which go into little known or untrodden regions, I have not made public and I do not at present intend to do so.

Sri Aurobindo believes that the advent of the Supermind is a thing decreed and

inevitable in the evolutionary march. Left to itself it may take Nature aeons to achieve this miracle. But man is different from the animal in that he is not only conscious but is conscious that he is conscious. Since he is self-conscious he can participate consciously and accelerate the tardy march of Nature. The method of doing it is Sri Aurobindo's yoga. It is a popular misconception that Sri Aurobindo's yoga is something brand new, as if it has come out of the blue. It has to be recognised that Sri Aurobindo had to tread many paths, develop along many lines of past yogas, perform a very arduous tapasya, surrender his whole being and consciousness to the Divine before the new elements were revealed to him. His yoga does not do away with the practices of the old yoga. What is new is that the exclusive solutions and extreme standpoints are rejected. In his commentary on the Gita, Sankara declares that *karma* and *jñāna* are incompatible. This is unacceptable to Sri Aurobindo. He does not believe that rejection of life is necessary in order to realise the Self. If you read Bankim or Tilak on the Gita you find an almost exclusive stress on the Karma aspect. They are satisfied with a moral and ethical elevation and the spiritual element is compromised. This too is unacceptable to Sri Aurobindo. Or take the Bhaktivadins who would like to find their liberation in *Vaikuntha loka*. Sri Aurobindo aims at perfection in the world, *ihaiva*, to use the Upanishadic phrase and not a high uplifted or ecstatic beyond as the end of yoga. In this context I would like to mention a philosophy of yoga which has many points of similarity with Sri Aurobindo's system. This is the system of Kashmir Shaivism. Arabinda Basu happens to be well-versed in this school. It is a monistic and tantrik system which accepts the world as real. It accepts the Shakti as the manifesting power of Shiva but stops short of transformation. Shiva knows itself as all, even as the body but the body does not know itself as Shiva. The final release therefore comes after the fall of the body. *Deha pate iva pūrṇa mokṣa*. The Tantrik systems give priority to *iccha* over *jñāna*, Will over Knowledge. But in Sri Aurobindo, Knowledge and Will, the masculine and the feminine, are on a par with each other.

What has to be recognised is the comprehensiveness of the aim and method. In *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo talks about the Sadhak of Integral Yoga.

Nor is the seeker of the integral fulfilment permitted to solve too arbitrarily even the conflict of his own inner members. He has to harmonise deliberate knowledge with unquestioning faith; he must conciliate the gentle soul of love with the formidable need of power; the passivity of the soul that lives content in transcendent calm has to be fused with the activity of the divine helper and the divine warrior.⁵

How is one to do this? Deliberate knowledge comes by calm reflection upon the facts of existence but the first effect of reflection is to destroy spontaneous faith. By using power in the correct manner one becomes an instrument of the Divine but

in the movement of power one is liable to forget the pure unchanging Self. In pursuit of power, even power for the sake of the Divine in us, our nature may be so hardened that the gentle soul of love can find no expression. So what is the remedy? The solution according to Sri Aurobindo lies in an all-inclusive concentration. An exclusive concentration may be of a temporary utility and here Sri Aurobindo does not hesitate to use the processes of the old yogas. But he abandons them as soon as their temporary use is over and returns to the wide all-inclusive movement of Purna yoga.

It must be clearly understood that the characteristic experiences of this yoga begin at a fairly late stage of the sadhak's development. One may read with fascination about the Mother's Yoga of the Cells in the *Agenda* but it would be quite foolhardy to attempt those things at an early stage of development. The first necessity for the sadhak in the beginning is to establish a direct contact in the surface being with the spiritual Reality. There are three principal ways in which this can be attempted. Using Sri Aurobindo's language I paraphrase these approaches. The soul may attempt to achieve this contact by using the thinking mind as the instrument and intermediary. At its highest the thinking mind is always turned toward the impersonal. But this transformation through the mind is insufficient. The complete divine dynamisation is not achieved. A second approach is through the heart. Because the occult seat of the psychic is behind the heart, in the early stages of the yoga the soul can best express itself through emotions. But by itself this movement is also incomplete. A third movement comes by consecration of the pragmatic will, and the result of this movement is the conversion of the ego-will in the life parts. By itself this too is insufficient for Sri Aurobindo's purpose. Integral Yoga aims at an integral realisation and complete unveiled manifestation of the Divine. To quote Sri Aurobindo,

A combination of all these three approaches, the approach of the mind, the approach of the will, the approach of the heart, creates a spiritual or psychic condition of the surface being and nature in which there is a larger and more complex openness to the psychic light within us.... In the nature there is a more powerful and many-sided change, a spiritual building and self-creation, the appearance of a composite perfection of the saint, the selfless worker and the man of spiritual knowledge.⁶

Let us proceed.

I know very well also that there have been seemingly allied ideals and anticipations—the perfectibility of the race, certain Tantric sadhanas, the effort after a complete physical siddhi by certain schools of yoga, etc., etc. I have alluded to these things myself and have put forth the view that the spiritual past of the race has been a preparation of Nature not merely for attaining the Divine beyond the world, but also for this very step forward which the evolution of the

earth-consciousness has still to make. I do not therefore care in the least—even though these ideals were, up to some extent parallel, yet not identical with mine—whether this yoga and its aim and method are accepted as new or not; that is in itself a trifling matter. That it should be recognised as true in itself by those who can accept or practise it and should make itself true by achievement is the one thing important; it does not matter if it is called new or a repetition or revival of the old which was forgotten. I laid emphasis on it as new in a letter to certain sadhaks so as to explain to them that a repetition of the aim and idea of the old yogas was not enough in my eyes, that I was putting forward a thing to be achieved that has not yet been achieved, not yet clearly visualised, even though it is the natural but still secret outcome of all the past spiritual endeavour.

We have heard of Sri Aurobindo as a poet, as a politician and as a philosopher. And yet in one letter he declares, “...I am not primarily a poet...”⁷ We know how he gave up a political career in response to an inner call. In reply to a letter of Dilip Kumar Roy he says, “I was never a philosopher, although I have written philosophy.”⁸ Sri Aurobindo in his mature years consistently saw himself as a yogi above all else. Great yogis seldom get carried away by the heat of the moment. The issue whether his yoga is accepted as new was a matter of little concern to him. What was of importance to him was whether his yoga was practicable. There is in it a repetition of many old things, there is a revival of old concepts which were lost due to an anti-pragmatic spirituality. Take for instance his interpretation of the Isha Upanishad. The Upanishad declares in its very first verse:

*Īśāvāsyam idaṁ sarvaṁ yad kiñca jagatyāṁ jagat
Tena tyaktena bhūñjīthā mā gridhaḥ kasya sviddhanam.*

Sri Aurobindo translates this as follows:

All this is for habitation by the Lord, whatsoever is individual universe of movement in the universal motion. By that renounced thou shouldst enjoy; lust not after any man's possession.

In the footnote to the above verse he explains the etymology of the Sanskrit word *vāsyam* which he has rendered as habitation as follows,

There are three possible senses of vāsyam, “to be clothed”, “to be worn as a garment” and “to be inhabited”. The first is the ordinarily accepted meaning. Shankara explains it in this significance, that we must lose the sense of this unreal objective universe in the sole perception of the pure Brahman. So explained the first line becomes a contradiction of the whole thought of the

*Upanishad which teaches the reconciliation, by the perception of essential Unity, of the apparently incompatible opposites, God and the World, Renunciation and Enjoyment, Action and internal Freedom, the One and the Many, Being and its Becomings, the passive divine Impersonality and the active divine Personality, the Knowledge and the Ignorance, the Becoming and the Not-Becoming, Life on earth and beyond and the supreme Immortality. The image is of the world either as a garment or as a dwelling-place for the informing and governing Spirit. The latter significance agrees better with the thought of the Upanishad.*⁹

The next verse of this Upanishad which is one of the more ancient Upanishads has been interpreted by Sankara even more artificially in order to be consistent with his world-negating ideal.

*kurvanneveha karmaṇi jijīviśecchataṁ samāḥ,
evaṁ tvayi nānyatheto'sti na karma lipyate nare.*

Sri Aurobindo translates this as,

Doing verily works in this world one should wish to live a hundred years. Thus it is in thee and not otherwise than this; action cleaves not to a man.

In the footnote Sri Aurobindo says,

*Shankara reads the line, "Thus in thee—it is not otherwise than thus—action cleaves not to a man." He interprets karmāṇi in the first line in the sense of Vedic sacrifices which are permitted to the ignorant as a means of escaping from evil actions and their results and attaining to heaven, but the second karma in exactly the opposite sense, "evil action". The verse, he tells us, represents a concession to the ignorant; the enlightened soul abandons works and the world and goes to the forest. The whole expression and construction in this rendering become forced and unnatural. The rendering I give seems to me the simple and straightforward sense of the Upanishad.*¹⁰

Thus Sri Aurobindo revives the ancient ideal of the Rishi which accepted life. It is true that there have been Rishis in all ages, but the ancient age in which the Rishi was the true guide of the society had given way to a spirituality which rejected the world as radically false and miserable.

In the last paragraph Sri Aurobindo summarises his position. Let us read it.

It is new as compared with the old yogas:

1. *Because it aims not at a departure out of world and life into Heaven or Nirvana, but at a change of life and existence, not as something subordinate or incidental, but as a distinct and central object. If there is a descent in other yogas, yet it is only an incident on the way or resulting from the ascent—the ascent is the real thing. Here the ascent is the first step, but it is a means for the descent. It is the descent of the new consciousness attained by the ascent that is the stamp and seal of the sadhana. Even the Tantra and Vaishnavism end in the release from life; here the object is the divine fulfilment of life.*

2. *Because the object sought after is not an individual achievement of divine realisation for the sake of the individual, but something to be gained for the earth-consciousness here, a cosmic, not solely a supra-cosmic achievement. The thing to be gained also is the bringing in of a Power of Consciousness (the supramental) not yet organised or active directly in earth-nature, even in the spiritual life, but yet to be organised and made directly active.*

3. *Because a method has been preconized for achieving this purpose which is as total and integral as the aim set before it, viz., the total and integral change of the consciousness and nature, taking up old methods but only as a part action and present aid to others that are distinctive. I have not found this method (as a whole) or anything like it professed or realised in the old yogas. If I had, I should not have wasted my time in hewing out a road and in thirty years of search and inner creation when I could have hastened home safely to my goal in an easy canter over paths already blazed out, laid down, perfectly mapped, macadamised, made secure and public. Our yoga is not a retreading of old walks, but a spiritual adventure.*

There is nothing to explain here. It has to be realised that this spiritual adventure is to be undertaken not for our own sake but for the Divine. Even transformation, on which Sri Aurobindo lays so much stress, is to make possible an unveiled manifestation of the Divine in the world. “The world is a manifestation of the Divine but paradoxically enough the Divine is not manifest in the world.” Once having seen through the disguises through which He veils himself presently, one has to become a channel through which He unveils himself in manifestation. I conclude with a sentence of Sri Aurobindo:

Our present limited consciousness can only be a field of preparation, it can consummate nothing; for all that it manifests is marred through and through by an ego-ridden ignorance and error. The true and divine self-fulfilment of Brahman in the manifestation is only possible on the foundation of the Brahman-consciousness and therefore through the acceptance of life by the liberated soul, the Jivanmukta.¹¹

We cannot, my friends, thus have a spiritual mission of our own; but by becoming truly the children of the Mother we are given the opportunity of participating in the world-mission of the greatest Jivanmukta of all, the greatest among the Brahman knowers—Sri Aurobindo!

HEMANT KAPOOR

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1. CWSA, Vol. 34, p. 709.
2. *Ibid.*, Vol. 23, p. 214.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 172.
4. *Ibid.*, Vol. 24, pp. 499-500.
5. *Ibid.*, Vol. 23, p. 78.
6. SABCL, Vol. 19, pp. 903-04.
7. CWSA, Vol. 27, p. 667.
8. *Sri Aurobindo to Dilip*, Vol. 2, p. 100.
9. *The Upanishads*, 1981 edition, p. 19.
10. *Ibid.*
11. CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 299.

'The Glimpse'

*Hardly for a moment glimpsed viewless to Mind,
As if a torch held by a power of God,
The radiant world of the everlasting Truth
Glimmered like a faint star bordering the night
Above the golden Overmind's shimmering ridge.
Even were caught as through a cunning veil
The smile of love that sanctions the long game,
The calm indulgence and maternal breasts
Of Wisdom suckling the child-laughter of Chance,
Silence, the nurse of the Almighty's power,
The omniscient hush, womb of the immortal Word,
And of the Timeless the still brooding face,
And the creative eye of Eternity.*

Sri Aurobindo

(*Savitri—A Legend and a Symbol*, CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 41)

A DAY BY THE SEA

OVER the years, I have walked on the beach in many cities of the world: in Mumbai, Chennai, Kanyakumari, Puri, Phuket, Bali, Penang, Hawaii, New York. I have even been on cruises to Alaska and on the Mediterranean Sea.

Now I walk regularly on the seashore at Pondicherry.

The experience of the sea here is totally different from the experience anywhere else in the world.

Elsewhere, I found the sea to be passive and monotonous. Through the day, very little changes in its character or mood. It would seem that the sea moves mechanically and aimlessly.

At Pondicherry, the sea has a character. It unfolds different experiences through the day. To begin with, you are never alone as you watch the sea. It transmits a sense of being alive and caring. Talk to the sea and share your problems. You will feel better and the sea will keep a secret. The loneliness you feel near the sea is personal. It does not subdue you or make you feel worthless. It is a stimulating loneliness.

This sea discourages you from being too anxious, too greedy or too impatient.

At the crack of dawn, you are enveloped in creative thoughts. As a painter or musician or writer you can expect to be inspired by an idea that captures you. And if you are not any of the above, you will be seized with philosophical thoughts. If you let yourself be driven by the waves of the sea, you are unlikely to worry about the coming of the new day. You will just enjoy the moment in complete oblivion of your surroundings. At this stage, the sea feels peaceful and the soft sound of the breaking waves provides a soothing background music to jog your mind towards creative thinking. If you pay attention to them, you may even have an inspiring thought that might speed up your progress.

I have walked on the seafront in the afternoon under the fierce rays of the sun. The noise level of the sea increases. All your thoughts rush towards the day's activities—intense, hectic, challenging, and sometimes even worrying. Your energy levels are at a peak. You have a desire to accomplish your task to perfection. Your mind analyses, is busy planning and evaluating.

In the evening, the experience of the sea takes a different turn. It is less noisy, more relaxed, and it signals the end of a satisfactory day. Now the sea guides you to slow down, to absorb all the day's learning and it asks you to leave all the worries behind. You have earned this resful feeling after a hectic day. This is also the time when you can pay a little attention to your body's needs: you can either relax your body or exercise it. The sea is there to refresh you.

At night, the sea's experience is quite extraordinary. The musical sounds are far more rhythmic and slow. It would seem it is singing a lullaby. The period of action and excitement has come to an end. The sea now teaches you to pray. The infinite expanse of the sea now begins to grow on you. This encourages you to introspect and

meditate. It silences your mind and empties you of thoughts. Nothing will now disturb the descending peace of the night.

Now all that is left is for you to walk to the samadhi of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and bow down for a few minutes. You will sleep well and safe.

You can actually practise all aspects of yoga at the seashore. No wonder though, for here is where Their Ships anchored well over 90 years ago.

RAMRAJ SEHGAL

THE MYRIAD CALLED 'I'

A piece of mortal bone and flesh
Mind and heart and cells a-throbbing,
Locked in a life-journey one-of-a-kind;

Or a son of God—warrior within
Fighting myself 'gainst masks of Fear
Campaigns unending—life after life?

The heart, confused, rational, pooh-poohs,
The body—a mere spectator
The soul smiles at himself.

Yet another question—left unanswered
In the myriad called 'I'.

ARNAB CHOWDHURY

DEVOTIONAL POETRY IN TAMIL

(Continued from the issue of January 2006)

2. Tirumurugatruppada

THE ancient Tamils had fashioned a rare aesthesis of their own by weaving God, Man and Nature into an inseparable whole. It is a highly visual theory that they present even as they categorise the landscape. Each region has its own special flower and deity.

1. *Mullai*. Consists of forest areas and is known by the flower Mullai (a particular variety of jasmine). The reigning deity is Tirumal (Vishnu).

2. *Kurinji*. Mountainous areas named after Kurinji, a flower that blossoms once in twelve years. The deity is Sevvai (Murugan, Subramania).

3. *Marudam*. Pastoral land named after a tree that lines streams. The deity is Indra.

4. *Neytal*. Sandy seashore represented by Neytal, a water lily. The deity is Varuna.

Acutely conscious of the variety in nature, the Tamils included the desert area as *Palai*. Since there are no deserts in Tamil Nadu, the area refers to any place that has been parched by summer. Palai is an evergreen tree that can survive any drought. The presiding deity is Kanni (Eternal Virgin or Mother Goddess).

Kurinji seems to have been a favourite of the ancient Tamils who considered Murugan as the Tamil deity. Since the mountainous regions with their forest streams and waterfalls can be soulful for lovers of Nature, the ancient Tamils excelled themselves in writing about the Kurinji area. Kapilar's *Kurinji-p-pattu* in 261 lines is a fine example of the closeness to Nature of these people more than two millennia ago. The poem also reveals the manner in which the ancient Tamils celebrated Nature and closely aligned it to man's life. Here is a heroine and her friend gathering a variety of flowers, a list of ninety-nine blossoms!

Kanji and the honey-sweet clustres of blue lily,
Pangar and white *kadambu*, bunched *thanakka*,
Inda and silk-cotton and the drooping cassia,
Adumbu, and bauhina, long-vined *avarai*,
Convolvulus and *palash* and the thick-clustred *ashok*,
Vanji and *bhittika* and *sindhuvara*,
Thumbai and the sacred basil, flame-like *kandal*,
Nandi and *narava* and scented *punnaga*,
Cotton and sponge-gourd, green thistle, sandal,

Eaglewood, big *punnai*, citron and rose-apple,
Irulvasi, *vengai*, *kurunda*, big and black...¹

One can understand that the Tamil culture began in these hilly domains where man moved in freedom and sought to live in tune with Nature. This is a land of youthful love and domestic bliss, both represented by the deity Murugan who is the intrepid slayer of Surapadman, the consort of Devasena the daughter of Indra. Murugan is also the lover of the huntress Valli. The manner in which he wooed Valli is a favourite image imprinted in the aesthesis of ancient Tamils.

A further proof of Tamil culture originating in the hills is the evidence of the development of their religious thought from the cult of Murukan. This cult of a Supreme God was in the hill regions associated with the beauty of Nature. The word Murukan itself means beauty, youth, and godhead, and the ancient Tamils associated the godhead with perennial youth and beauty reflected in Nature.²

As the hill tribes were hunters, Murugan was worshipped as a spear-wielding deity (Velan) and forest animals and birds (the elephant, the peacock) were associated with him as mounts and, of course his consort was the daughter of a hunter chieftain. He is worshipped with mountain blossoms like *kadambu* and is offered millet, honey and the blood of rams. His worship was known as Velan Veriyadal, a ritual of religious frenzy. This was seen as a curative ritual for young ladies when they fell sick:

Deliverance from ailments was thought to be attained by the offerings made by the priest and his frenzied dance. Dances formed an integral part of early ritual. The real sickness of the maids in *akam* poetry is love-sickness, and therefore, the maids laugh within their sleeves when taken to the temple or tree of Murukan. To obtain the husbands of their choice, or the grace of motherhood, women had recourse also to Murukan. He was worshipped with tears, and prayed to for rain as well as for the gifts of children.³

Velan Veriyadal would be a significant component of the bridal mysticism in the Bhakti poetry of the Alvars in the coming centuries. As yet, devotional approaches maintained a distance between the devotee and the deity. The aspirant was more like a subject paying homage to his king, lost in wonderment at the grandeur of the god-idea. Sangam poetry has given us a long poem on these lines. It is *Tirumuru-gatruppada*i, couched in sublime Tamil.

The “atruppada” is a poetic genre of ancient Tamils. The theme is as follows. A minstrel has received gifts from a generous chieftain. As this person is returning to his home, he meets a wayfarer who is in search of a patron. The beneficiary of the chieftain praises his patron in glowing terms to the new acquaintance and advises

him to go and receive gifts for himself as well. Belonging to the heroic age, the “atruppadai” narratives are about kings who had been generous with their gifts to indigent scholars. For instance, *Perumpanatruppadai* is a panegyric on the king of Kanchi. However, *Tirumurugatruppadai* presents a god in the place of a patron. For who can be more bounteous than the Supreme?

The Subramania cult has been present all over India since the Vedic times, and the Vedic Agni who is referred to as dwelling in the secret cave (*guha*) of the heart came to be worshipped as Skanda Kumara in later ages.⁴ Tamils seem to have been specially attracted to his presence among them:

He has been the object of deep devotion to the masses almost ever since the beginnings of recorded literature, under the name of Muruga, which among other things means also ‘beautiful’. Since it was the beauty of nature in all its aspects, in its untamed grandeur, as well as in the trim and orderly comeliness of field and farm, that evoked the passionate aesthetic response of the ancient Tamils, they identified Muruga with that beauty as the Omnipresent Spirit that pervades and inspires nature in all its moods and is graciously responsive to human prayers and aspirations.⁵

Generally we find temples to Muruga on top of hills for he is said to favour mountains as his residence. The *Tirumurugatruppadai* speaks of four temples which have remained famous during all these centuries: Tirupparankunram, Tiruchiralaivay, Tiruvavinankudi and Tiruverakam. As the poem opens, Murugan is compared to the sun who sustains the world and whose light can be seen by the human eye, as also the Supreme Effulgence radiating within our hearts:

Like the sun sung by many, that rises in the eastern sea,
And, wheeling right, sails far above, gladdening the hearts of men,
Shines the uncreated Light That glows in the heart
When the senses ten are stilled, and yet beyond its reach—
And That is He Whose mighty feet sustain the suppliant,
Dispelling his evil past, crumpling up his ignorance.⁶

This is Murugan whose “strong arm strikes like thunder” (*sel ural tadak-kai*) and who is the consort of Devasana. In his presence even immortals come down to rub shoulders with the masses of devotees. Celestial damsels dance in praise of Murugan while the she-ghouls leap in glee recording the god’s victory over Surapadman, the asura king. We are now given a glorious description of Tirupparankunram which appears to be the nursery of Mother Nature:

...to its west, amidst the fields,

Wide and black-loamed, grows the lotus prickly-stalked;
 In whose flower having slept the night,
 And at dawn waked the *neidal* honey-sweet,
 The swarm of fair-winged honey-bees finds, when the sun is out,
 With joyous hum the tarn blooms that have oped like eyes awake,
 In Tirupparankunram; and there He loves to dwell.

The image of Murugan is six-faced, and it is a multi-faceted splendour for the devotee. He sees in each of the faces a divine aspect of the Lord's guardianship that works both at the secular and sacred levels:

One face has kindled many lights to manifest
 The world without flaw that had been wrapt in darkness.
 One face, with love responsive to His lovers' praise,
 Is zealous to please them, and of His love fulfils their lack.
 One face works His will so sacrifices with spells
 Offered by Vedic rule by Brahmans are not hindered.
 One face makes clear the mysteries that baffle Scripture
 To them who trust Him, as the full moon lights up the quarters.
 One face destroys with vengeful wrath in battle
 The evil foe, and thus performs the sacrifice of war.
 And one face rejoices in the Kurava lass,
 Valli, the modest, with a waist like the flowering vine.⁷

Now the poet takes us to Tiruchiralaivay (modern Tiruchendur) probably to assure us that Murugan is equally at home atop a mountain and on the shores of the sea. At Tiruvavinankudi (now known as Palani) are elderly sages who fast for days together and cover themselves with the skin of the black antelope. Their minds are not clouded by anger (*setram neekkiya manaththinar*). Such is their intense tapasya that they know what mere scholarship does not teach, and they go about with minds that are not troubled by sorrow or hate. They are indeed exemplars of the *Gita*'s ideal of a *sthitaprajña*.

A careful reading of *Tirumurugatruppada*i helps us learn not only about the devotional heart of the ancient Tamil but also about his social life. From Tiruvavinankudi we move to Tiruverakam (the present-day Swamimalai) to learn about the Brahmin caste of the earlier days. They were learned and observed their first forty-eight years in studies and brahmacharya. Wedded to Dharma, they wore the sacred thread and performed fire sacrifices. They would also recite the six-lettered mantra invoking Murugan and worship his image at Tiruverakam with fresh blossoms.

The poem now rests for a while on the presence of Murugan evoked by the phrase, *kunruthoru aadalum* (dancing in the mountains). He is described as enjoying

the dance of the god-possessed Velan (The Spearman), indicating the origins of the Murugan myth in Tamil Nadu which seems to have conjoined with the Kumara cult from the north. It is also a reminder that the roots of the Bhakti Movement can be traced to these guileless devotees who firmly believed in the Supreme's manifestation on earth:

And thou shalt know He is present always in the hills
 Where the spearman, god-possessed, celebrates His festival,
 Crowned with a wreath of evergreen on which are strung
 Nutmeg and *takkola* with *ven-thali* and the wild jasmine.
 There the cruel hillmen, who draw the hefty bow to kill,
 Their breasts bedaubed with bright sandal paste,
 Dance the Kuravai dance merrily, to the little drum,
 Having with their kin from their highland hamlets drunk
 The honey-mead brewed in the long bamboo tubes.

The narrative then describes the ways of the god-possessed and the rituals of huntresses when they engage themselves in worshipping Murugan. They sprinkle red flowers in the area mixed with *tinai* corn soaked in blood. Instruments are played and horns blown, and the assembled devotees praise Murugan's elephant mount, Pinimukam. Placing together the palms in salutation and raising them above the head, they hail him as the foster child of the Kartika maidens and son of Shiva and Parvati. The praises are very much like those of liegemen hailing their chieftain:

Bridegroom of the fair, Lion among the world of fighters!
 Blest One, with the stout arm that grasps the spear,
 Piercer of the Krauncha, whose victory knows no wane!

After a beautiful prayer full of gripping epithets describing the divinity of Murugan, the poem concludes with the line, "Lord of the mountain with its grove of showering fruits" (*pazhamudir cholai malai kizhavone*). Does the expression "Pazhamudir cholai" refer to a particular abode of Murugan or is it just a general description of any hill-top temple with fruit-laden groves? There have been attempts to identify it with Tirumaliruncholai near Madurai which is famous for its ancient temple of Vishnu.

When we turn to the later Sangam period of epics, we find Murugan very much close to the common man in Tamil land, despite the probably total Sanskritisation of the tribal deity. The epic *Silappadhikaram* has a famous hymn to Vishnu presented as the dance of the cowherdesses (*Aychiyar-kuravai*, a version of the *Ras* dance of encirclement). Equally famous is the *Kunra-k-Kuravai* in the epic. It opens the third and last Book. Having burnt Madurai to cinders by her fiery power of chastity, Kannaki

wanders into the Vanji kingdom and stands forlorn beneath a *Vengai* tree (considered holy for Murugan worship). A group of hill-women come to her and say that she looks verily like their goddess Valli (the huntress who married Murugan). Who is she? Kannaki recounts her sad story to them. Presently a divine chariot descends from the heavens with her husband Kovalan. Both of them ascend the skies above. The hunters then celebrate the event with a dance which is known as *Kunra-k-Kuravai*. The songs by the author Ilango Adikal are cast in what may be seen as an early version of bridal mysticism:

O son of the Lord of the sacred Kailasa mountain! We worship at the feet—resembling *asoka* flowers—of the artless daughter of the hillfolk—whose forehead is like the crescent moon and who has the grace of the peacock—and pray that we may marry only our lord and not any other.

O son of Parvati, daughter of the mountain! Your beloved with the crescent-like forehead is also the daughter of our tribe. Exalted Lord! We worship at your pair of feet so that our lord may marry us openly.

Here the tribal belles are referring to their lovers when they speak of “our lord”. The other great epic, *Manimekalai* has also references to Murugan worship which was apparently a part of the Indra Festival observed by ancient Tamils. It appears to have been a common sight to dress little children as the child Murugan to indicate the beginning of Murugan worship for the festival:

On the festival-happy path, one saw
 Children wearing jeweled golden chains
 Their dresses pasted with white mustard,
 Their top decorated with pearl-strings
 Around tresses held together by a clasp:
 From their lips yet in the lisping stage
 Dribbling drops made their guardian strings wet;
 The decorative scarf wound round their waist
 Waved in the breeze with rows of shining gems;
 These jewel-weighted toddlers were placed on
 Toy chariots and elephants of gold
 By ladies who cried: ‘Come hither and see
 The beginning of the festival
 Dedicated to Subramania!’⁸

This observance is not unlike hundreds of children enacting *Ramlila* in North India, celebrating the return of Rama to Ayodhya after destroying Ravana in Lanka. Also, till this day Janmashtami celebrations in Brindavan see the re-enactment of the

childhood exploits of Krishna by children. Such is the deep involvement of elders that they worship the child artistes at the conclusion of the dramatic presentation seeing them as the very images of Krishna, Balarama and the other persona of the Tenth Book of the *Bhagavata*. Kapilar's *Kurinchi-p-pattu*, a companion of *Tirumurugatruppadaï* in the *Pattu-p-pattu* group, describes the mountainous regions in visual images. Before a group of young girls go to gather a variety of flowers on the hill sides⁹—nearly a hundred varieties are mentioned—they have a bath in a mountain tarn filled by the rain-bearing clouds. Kapilar evokes the image of the child Murugan when describing the dark skies:

Poured out great torrents of rain on the hill-side,
 Sheathed with lightning that glanced like the leaf-blade
 Of the spear that the God-child, gaily decked,
 Grasps in His hand, along with the kettle-drum,
 To destroy the foe...¹⁰

Seeing the Supreme as a child whom one can fondle is a concept which would transform the yoga of divine love with the advent of Perialwar in the 7th century. Thus, the components of devotional poetry in Tamil may be found latent in *Tirumurugatruppadaï*. What could well have begun as Nature worship (the *Kadamba* tree, for instance) may have progressed to the personification of an ever-victorious hero. The natural turn from here onwards was towards a divine lover. Murugan remains the Handsome God, the charming lover who is not averse to playing mischief and leading the innocent Valli a dance with his disguises. While he is repeatedly made out to be the ideal lover and warrior, he is also associated with arts in ancient Tamil Nadu. The *Tolkappiyam* speaks of a dance associated with Murugan and Valli. Thus, in every way the Murugan presence in the Sangam Age was total.

Was *Tirumurugatruppadaï* considered a scripture by the ancient Tamils? The listeners of this narrative no doubt welcomed it with joy as it used the familiar genre of "atruppadaï" and "led" them to the world of religion with its attendant myths and legends, rituals and ecstatic music and dance. There is of course the assurance by the author to his listener that Murugan was one who could grant the knowledge that saves:

If thy heart is ripe for the freedom that will take thee
 To those blessed feet, and thou yearnest
 For the lasting knowledge that is the fruit of devotion,
 Thou wilt be blessed even now, thanks to thy fruitful past,
 With that liberation sweet, longing for which
 Floods the heart purified in many births.

But was the poem itself considered and recited as a scripture? The doubts were set to rest by the tenth century when the poem was included in the Saivite scriptural canon, *Panniru Tirumurai*, by the anthologist, Nambiyandar Nambi. The poem must have been very much in use as a daily prayer by devout Tamils of his day and so Nambi would have added it in the Eleventh Book of the *Tirumurai*.

The plan of the poem is, of course, an indicator of the reason for its popularity. Devotees have always found it enjoyable and mutually fruitful to travel as groups to various pilgrim sites. We have Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* as an excellent example. Devotees of Murugan must have found it a joy to listen again to the verses as their eyes rested on the sights on their way to the various temples, while they slowly wended up the mountains. It is also believed that reciting the poem daily guards one from the terror of death. In the same way, it has been a conviction with the masses that worshipping at these temples mentioned in the poem assures one of safety from life's perilous ways. Though the poem is a lyrical evocation of the mountainous region where wild elephants abound, commentators who came much later have deftly linked it to the Saiva Siddhanta philosophy. Finally, as Ponniah Jeyalaaki Arunagirinathan says, the poem is an example of spiritual democracy posited by the path of bhakti, as is shown by the life of the Saiva Nayanmars:

In the same way in *Tirumurukārruppatai*, Lord Murukan never discriminated between his devotees. In Tiruverakam he looks after the twice-born Brahmins and their rituals. In Kunrutoradal he remains the patron god of the tribal people, the Kuravas. It has been said that in *Tiruttontar Puranam* Lord Siva accepts non-vegetarian dishes from Kannappa Nayanar. In this case sincere love between the Lord and the devotee illustrate the bhakti ideology of dialogue. In the same way in *Tirumurukārruppatai* the Lord accepts non-vegetarian dishes from tribal people as an offering of their devotion. One could clearly observe and say that the same ideology, which rules the Tirumurai tradition is no different from the tradition of *Tirumurukārruppatai*.¹¹

Very few poems addressed to other deities like Murugan, Vinayaka and Parvati are found in the Saiva canon, *Panniru Tirumurai*. This indicates the overwhelming popularity of hymns to Vishnu and Shiva indited by the Alvars and the Nayanmars respectively. However, Murugan was welcome as he had an unassailable place in the heart of the Tamils, partly due to Sanskritisation when the "spearman" Velan of Tamil village folk became the Devasenapati, Commander-in-chief of the divine hosts (also the consort of Devasena). Again, there is a charm about the manner in which he courted and married the huntress Valli, thus retaining intact the early connection with the masses. Down these two thousand years and more the Murugan-Subramania worship in Tamil Nadu has reached high spires of devotional involvement with epic poems (Kachiappa Sivachariar's *Kandha Puranam*), folk songs (*Kavadi Chindu* of

Annamalai Reddiar) and hymnal garlands (Arunagirinathar's *Tiruppugazh*). The annual festival of Murugan's destroying the asura Surapadman in Tamil Nadu temples draws fantastic crowds as they must have done when *Tirumurugatruppada*i was composed. There is no better way of taking leave of this wonderful Tamil poem than going back to it to watch the ecstatic *tunangai* dance of the she-ghouls to celebrate Murugan's victory over the demon:

His long, bright, broad-leaved spear had put the sea,
 Hard-rocked and icy, in a turmoil and killed
 Soora, the Asuras' chief...
 In fair fight won, when with His six-fold form
 He had put fear into the Asuras' hearts,
 Severing the huge body, part man, part beast and felled
 The mango tree with bunched flowers drooping down,
 And thus annulled the Asuras' former gains.

(*To be continued*)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

References

1. Translated by N. Raghunathan.
2. Xavier S. Thani Nayagam, *Landscape and Poetry: A Study of Nature in Classical Tamil Poetry* (1997), pp. 58-59.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
4. "In the Puranas, apart from the slightly different versions, the Kumara is an effulgence of the great God, Father Shiva. He is born in the growths of the Earth, *saravana*, placed in the Waters, Ganga, who increase him in stature; he is nourished with milk by the fostering Lights of the Krittikas—in the Veda they are cows. He reaches the heights of the hill of being, the Mind Divine, called *manasa saila* (*Mahabharata*, Vana Parva, chapter 222). He gives help to Indra, gives battle to the asuric forces, victorious, cherished and adored by the gods returns to his Father." (T. V. Kapali Sastri, *Collected Works*, Volume One, p. 84.)
5. N. Raghunathan, *Six Long Poems in Sangam Tamil* (1997 edition), p. 96.
6. All translations from *Tirumurugatruppada*i are by N. Raghunathan.
7. Translated by N. Raghunathan.
8. *Entry into the Flower Garden*. Translated by Prema Nandakumar.
9. See Footnote no. 1.
10. Translated by N. Raghunathan.
11. 'Tirumurugatruppadai's Place in the Saiva Canon', Second International Conference on Skanda-Murugan at Mauritius, 2001.

PANCHASSEE-MOUNTAIN

(Continued from the issue of January 2006)

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

(3) The Vedic symbol “waters”... Fewa Lake

...Full of understanding, pure in discernment, close kin from his birth to earth and heaven he has founded the Bliss. The gods discovered the seeing Fire within the waters...

(Sri Aurobindo, Hymns to the Mystic Fire)

Pilgrims like myself who climb to Panchassee peak can begin with a ride in a local bus from the Lakeside.

From Pokhara at 10 kilometres an hour, along the Fewa Lake valley floor, the bus weaves its way by the lake edge for the first part of the journey. The lake is a glistening sunlit nature-experience, and in the Vedic Age would have been a Lake-mother symbol. At present there is no local remembrance for the meaning of the name of this lake, but it could well be that *Fewa* refers to something from an ancient culture. The symbolism of large bodies of water in Vedic nature imagery, as referred to by Sri Aurobindo, is:

...the waters in the Veda, ...are the symbol of conscient being in its mass and in its movements.

*

Then, they are apturah, they who cross the waters....

(Sri Aurobindo, The Secret of the Veda)

Gliding silently in a canoe across this sparkling sunlit lake, is a unique experience. With a slight canoe-roll as the paddles dip and pull through the waters, we effortlessly glide on the lap of this beautiful lake. She is the divine Mother or Wife or Daughter or Yogini of the Vedic Hymns, depending upon which aspect of Nature is being described. Leaning back and letting the canoe slow to a straightforward motion, the brilliance on the waters compels us to close the eyes. The Vedic female symbols have many nature parallels, for example Rivers, Mountains, Dawn and Day.

...and it is called upon to discover and keep the good, the straight and the happy path to the goal...

(Sri Aurobindo, The Secret of the Veda)

The canoe drifts in a slight breeze when we take up paddling again.

Everywhere around is the dark jungle green, as if the lake were a glistening light-entrance to somewhere beneath the surrounding mountains. And the sparkle of the sun upon these “waters” lights an electric image of sparks or fire. The sun changes the water colour as it passes across the sky, soft and still tints at dawn, a golden red of fire in the evening, and a white brilliance of a divine Female, Tara of the Buddhist texts, at noon.

Approaching the holy island of this lake, we can see it also as being held in the lap of a Lake-mother. And its outer wall is painted a white that sets it off even more than its rock relief and tree reflections. We paddle the canoe towards a cement-stepped landing, from which we can enter the temple courtyard. Large flat stones cover the complete area, with trees and filtered sunlight providing a dappled dress-print appearance. The temple is off to one side at the water’s edge, towards which we walk across the stone pavement.

I came once during a festival with Savitri and the children, and was amazed to see only ladies present, moving in long lines towards the sacred rock of this Island-mother. Beside the shrine at the water’s edge are huge lake fish that swish around and are fed. But huge fish. Not far away is a vendor selling paper bags filled with dhal for the fish-offering. This fish-symbolism is also visible in an east-west view of the Machhaputtre peak outline, and so idiomatically is called *The Fishtail Mountain*. That upward pointing mountain is related to this lake water and island with the common fish symbol. However, as the second part of this name means *son* in Sanskrit, perhaps the first part of the name, *Machha* is related to a Vedic “Mother” conception, that would fit in with the yantric imagery of the southern face of Annapurna. Inside this island temple is also a bare rock worshipped as the Mother of Strength and Force, as in the Bhadra-Kali temple in the township.

To return to Lakeside we paddle a large loop away from the Island-mother, in the view and direction of the fish-tailed peak of Machhaputtre. The sun is now high in the sky, searing the clear water with brilliance in the paddle wake and water-lines: it looks as if we are floating on a sparkling-diamond “waters”.

This lake water is replaced by rice-fields after the first quarter of the bus journey towards the Panchassee trailhead: a village called Gatee-cheena, along a very bumpy rock-strewn track. In the fall when the rice is a standing sun-filled gold, one can see the physical symbolism of the spiritual riches that Annapurna gives as Her blessing. This is a physical and psychological blessing, according to the Vedic Mother tradition.

But in the springtime, along this road, before the rice is planted, buffalo graze in the fields. Sometimes for the pleasure of the nature-experience I walk the 6 or 7 hours from Panchassee village back to Lakeside, during which half of the time is spent on this road or track. Walking through forest and fields towards the lake, one afternoon I chanced upon a Shepherd-wife singing at the forest edge while watching her buffalo across the road. She did not see me as I sat in the shade of some huge

trees and listened.

In the Nepali villages there is a tradition of song, perhaps to fill the long, lonely hours in the forests and fields. Like the classical Indian raga system, it has a central theme and melody with the body of the song created at the moment of expression. This lady sang happily while keeping the beat with a stick on a large rock, below the road beside which I sat. The feelings her voice expressed were of a quality of strength and force that the Himalayan culture possesses, but with a simple happiness in the melodic expression.

By the time the bus is filled with passengers the road ends at Gatee-cheena, and from here in every direction is only up towards the sight of Annapurna, and eventually to the Panchassee peaks.

After this nature experience with Annapurna and Panchassee symbols in Nepal, I was returning to Pondicherry from the Chennai train station when I stopped at Mamalapuram to visit a granite statue workshop. I was curious to know if anything new or different in granite had arrived, and wished to ask the owner of one of the workshops whom over the years I had come to know.

“Anything new?” I asked the young Tamil stone craftsman who was standing in front of an array of statues and garden ornaments of various shapes and sizes.

“Annapurna” was his reply.

(To be continued)

GARY

Even in its outward features it is less fixed than any classical tongue; it abounds in a variety of forms and inflexions; it is fluid and vague, yet richly subtle in its use of cases and tenses. And on its psychological side it has not yet crystallised, is not entirely hardened into the rigid forms of intellectual precision. The word for the Vedic Rishi is still a living thing, a thing of power, creative, formative. It is not yet a conventional symbol for an idea, but itself the parent and former of ideas. It carries within it the memory of its roots, is still conscient of its own history.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Secret of the Veda, SABCL, Vol. 10, p. 51)

THE ULTIMATE LESSON

(Free English rendering of the Poem 'Shesh Shiksha' by Rabindranath Tagore)

ONE day Govinda, the Sikh Guru was thinking in solitude about the events of his own life—the impression of resolution which appeared unbroken and complete on the golden canvas of youth, the hope that once occupied the whole of India—they are broken into hundred pieces, they are narrow, thin and apprehensive, they are dipped in danger today. Were all those misplaced then? Is life futile and meaningless? In acute conflict, of tired body and anguished heart, Govinda was brooding alone in the evening darkness.

Just then the Pathan came and told him, "I shall return to my country, so give me the price of the horse you purchased from me." Guru Govinda replied, "Salutation to you Shekhji, the price you will get tomorrow, please go today, brother."

The Pathan retorted sharply, "I want the price today itself." So saying he caught hold of his hand forcibly and rebuked him as a thief. On being scolded thus Govinda brought out his sword with lightning speed and the Pathan was beheaded in a twinkling of an eye and the soil was soaked with blood.

Seeing his own misdeed Guru shook his head and said, "Today I realise that my days are numbered. The evil sword has missed its target by shedding blood for nothing. The faith in my arms is lost for ever. I must strive to wash and wipe away this sin and shame—this will be the main work of my life from today."

The Pathan had a son of tender age. Govinda brought him near and started bringing him up under his direct supervision as his own son. He himself taught him all scriptures and the art and science of the use of weapons. That old hero-Guru would play with the boy in the morning and in the afternoon just like a boy himself.

Seeing all this the followers alerted the Guru, "What is this Lord, what is it? We are scared; whatever tender treatment you may give a tiger-cub, can its nature be changed? When it will grow up, remember Gurudev, it will be ferocious with sharp fangs."

Guru replied, "That is what I want of him. If I don't bring up the young one of a tiger to be a tiger what have I taught him then?"

Under the careful training of Govinda, the boy soon grew up to be a young man. He moved about with the Guru like a shadow, served him as a son, loved him as dearly as his own life, kept awake beside him as his right hand.

All the sons of the Sikh Guru had died in war. Now during his middle age the Pathan's son fully occupied the desolate heart of Guruji. As in the hollow of a thunder-burnt banyan tree an airborne seed from outside falls and grows up to be a tree, covering the old banyan with branches and leaves so the young Pathan did to Govinda.

One day the Pathan bowing down at Guruji's feet said, "My education is complete by your benevolent grace. Now if you permit me I can go out and join the king's

army to earn with my own capacity.”

Govinda remarked affectionately, keeping his hand on his back, “One lesson regarding your prowess still remains to be taught.” Next day in the afternoon Govinda came out alone and called the Pathan, “Come along with me with weapon in hand.” The devoted followers insisted in unison, “We shall also accompany you, we shall also accompany you.” The Guru directed, “No, you all go back!”

The two moved ahead slowly, wordlessly, towards the river-side. The flow of rain-water had cracked the red soil of the stone-strewn shore in a thousand ways. The huge Sal trees grew upwards in rows, below them thronged the baby-trees striving eagerly to have a share of the sky. The crystal clear knee-deep river water bordered the ochre-coloured sands.

The Guru signalled beside the river and the Pathan halted. The scorched-red light of the dying day was winging towards the western meadow casting lengthy shadows like the wings of a bat across the silent sky. The Guru called the Pathan—“Mamud, come here and dig this place.” From within the dug sand emerged a piece of stone tinged with blood. Govinda said, “This red stain on the stone is your own father’s blood. I beheaded him at this place without repaying debt nor giving him any time for defence. The time has come today—O Pathan, if you are a worthy son of your father unsheath the sword and killing the murderer of your father and offering his hot blood, worship the thirsty soul of his ghost.”

Roaring like a tiger the Pathan with bloodshot eyes jumped upon his Guru—Guru rested still like a wooden idol. Throwing aside the weapon the Pathan at once fell upon his feet and entreated, “O Gurudev, please don’t play such a game with a bad man. God knows, I had completely forgotten the fact of my father’s bloodshed. During these days I have known you, at the same time, as my father, Guru and friend. Let the shadow of that affection occupy my mind and heart and eclipse all thoughts of revenge. O Lord, please give me the sacred dust of your revered feet.” So saying he rushed outside the forest, did not look back nor stopped even for a while. Two drops of tears drenched both the eyes of Govinda.

From that day onwards the Pathan always kept afar from the Guru. Wouldn’t appear to awake him in the morning; wouldn’t wait at the doorway at night with weapon in hand; wouldn’t go to the river-side alone with the Guru for hunting. On being called wouldn’t go with him to any solitary place.

One day Govinda managed to play chess with the Pathan. Time passed by and the day ended without their knowing it. Mamud grew excited at being defeated over and over again. The evening came and gradually the night grew deeper. The companions returned home one by one leaving the two amidst a quiet and soundless night. The Pathan with bent head concentrated deeply on the game...

On a sudden the Guru hit the head of Mamud by throwing a chess-pawn and commented with a laugh, “One who comes to play with the killer of his father, can victory favour such a coward?”

At once the Pathan uncovered the sharp knife like lightning and pierced the chest of Govinda. The Guru spoke smilingly, “At last, you have learnt how to avenge a crime. This is the ultimate lesson I waited so long to give you—I bless you today for the last time, O my dear son.”

CHUNILAL CHOWDHURY

A teaching can be profitable only if it is perfectly sincere, and that means if it is lived at the moment when it is given....

(*Words of the Mother*, CWM, Vol. 14, p. 209)

A living and moving, not a rigid continuity, was the characteristic turn of the inner religious mind of India. The evolution of the Vaishnava religion from very early times, its succession of saints and teachers, the striking developments given to it successively by Ramanuja, Madhwa, Chaitanya, Vallabhacharya and its recent stirrings of survival after a period of languor and of some fossilisation form one notable example of this firm combination of a long continuity and fixed tradition with latitude of powerful and vivid change. A more striking instance was the founding of the Sikh religion, its long line of Gurus and the novel direction and form given to it by Guru Govind Singh in the democratic institution of the Khalsa. The Buddhist Sangha and its councils, the creation of a sort of divided pontifical authority by Shankaracharya, an authority transmitted from generation to generation for more than a thousand years and even now not altogether effete, the Sikh Khalsa, the adoption of the congregational form called Samaj by the modern reforming sects indicate an attempt towards a compact and stringent order. But it is noteworthy that even in these attempts the freedom and plasticity and living sincerity of the religious mind of India always prevented it from initiating anything like the overblown ecclesiastical orders and despotic hierarchies which in the West have striven to impose the tyranny of their obscurantist yoke on the spiritual liberty of the human race.

The instinct for order and freedom at once in any field of human activity is always a sign of a high natural capacity in that field, and a people which could devise such a union of unlimited religious liberty with an always orderly religious evolution, must be credited with a high religious capacity, even as they cannot be denied its inevitable fruit, a great, ancient and still living spiritual culture.

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Renaissance in India*, CWSA, Vol. 20, pp. 189-90)

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

K. D. Sethna (*An Introduction through Interaction*) by P. Raja. Published by Busy Bee Books, 74, Poincare Street, Olandai-Keerapalayam, Pondicherry - 605 004. Pages: 124. Price: Rs. 100; in Europe: € 7.

I CONGRATULATE P. Raja for bringing out a book which contains a biographical account collected through a series of interviews in order to celebrate triumphantly a genius, his life and achievements, depicting the vision of the man. Especially when P. Raja was doing the interviews, the two writers “engaged in a dialogue that focuses on many subjects dear to their hearts”. During most of the interviews I was present and thought that I was fortunate to have such an opportunity to come closer to the multifaceted genius that is K. D. Sethna.

The book is fascinating as it contains K. D. Sethna’s reminiscences of his “childhood, a variety of relationships, his poetry, his critical works and his inner quest”. K. D. Sethna was renamed Amal Kiran by Sri Aurobindo. From this book one can find that from his teenage he was a seeker of the spiritual life. He was born on November 25, 1904. His father, Dhunjibhoy Pestonji Sethna, was a well-to-do physician who spent most of his leisure time in his personal library.

In his introduction P. Raja writes:

Sethna had the privilege of having his early education at St. Xavier’s School and College, a Roman Catholic Institution managed by foreign Jesuit priests. As a Collegian, he won in his Intermediate Arts examination of Bombay University the Hughlings Prize in English and the Selby Scholarship in Logic. He passed his B.A. (Hons) in Philosophy and won the Ellis Prize in English, which a student not of Philosophy but Literature should have taken.... At this time his father suddenly died. He dedicated to his father his first book titled *Parnassians*, a critical assessment of the work of H. G. Wells, G. B. Shaw, G. K. Chesterton and Thomas Hardy, whom he considered the four outstanding denizens of Mount Parnassus, home of the Muses. The Parsi author, A. S. Wadia sent Wells, whom he personally knew, the article on him. Wells wrote back, “Your young man will go far.”

“But Wells didn’t know”, remarked Sethna in his characteristic jovial vein, “that I would go as far as Pondicherry!” In December 1927, when he was still a student of the M.A. class, Sethna visited the Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry and decided to stay there and practise the Integral Yoga.¹

How the disciple came to the Guru is an interesting story that is recorded by P. Raja in his interview with Amal Kiran, dated January 19, 1994:

P. Raja: What made you take interest in Sri Aurobindo?

K. D. Sethna: That would be connected with the question “What made me take interest in yoga in general?”... I had a friend who had done *Pranayama*. And he told me *Pranayama* gave him an abundance of energy... and energy, which could be used in any way he liked... no question of strict *brahmacharya* or spiritual objective. What he said struck me as very interesting and helpful to a young man. Therefore, I started reading books on Hatha yoga and Raja yoga in particular. While I was doing that, I got interested naturally in the works of Vivekananda. And Vivekananda gave me a greater perspective. Yoga is a means not just to amass energy which you can throw about as you like but to gather energy to concentrate on a certain aim which would lead you to the true self within you. And that was a very general sort of realisation.

...a theosophist plus an art-critic talked to me of Sri Aurobindo. And seeing the bundle of various qualities, even contradictory qualities together in me he said: “A complex person like you will only be satisfied with Sri Aurobindo. I have been to see Sri Aurobindo. I could feel that he had the cosmic consciousness.”²

An interesting story is narrated by P. Raja about how K. D. Sethna came to stay in the Ashram instead of pursuing a possible Oxford career. One day he went to buy a pair of shoes from Bombay’s Crawford Market. The shoes were put in a box, the box was wrapped in a newspaper sheet with a string that ran around. At home when he took off the string, the newspaper sheet fell open and he found a headline in bold letters that caught his attention. It read: A VISIT TO THE ASHRAM OF SRI AUROBINDO GHOSE. Sethna felt that it was like a Divine Call. At once he read the article and realised that Sri Aurobindo Ashram was the real place for him because life was not denied there. “Everything possible in you was sought to be brought out and geared to a divine purpose.”³

P. Raja interviewed K. D. Sethna again on January 21, 1994:

P.R.: Sir, in our previous talk with me you narrated some of your spiritual experiences. How did you conclude that they were spiritual? Why should we not call them mental experiences? Or why should we not say that they are hallucinations of your mind?

K.D.S.: Which particular spiritual experience are you referring to?

P.R.: The going out of the body and hanging in the space of your room.

K.D.S.: Yes. I have narrated only that experience to you. I personally would not call it a spiritual one. I would like to call it an occult experience. No question of realising God or getting information from Him comes in here. It was simply an experience out of the ordinary and contradicting our common impression and feeling that the body and we are inseparable.

P.R.: You mean materialism is ruled out?

K.D.S.: Yes.

P.R.: Can you tell me any of your experiences, which you would like to consider spiritual?

K.D.S.: Yes. The opening of the heart centre, for instance. You have a sense of a wall breaking down in your chest. And the discovery of the part of your being which is in constant self-sustained bliss. And the bliss is so intense that at times you feel that you can't even bear or hold it. So how would you call that a hallucination? Any thinking did not induce it or any desire as such, though of course the aspiration for the heart opening was always there, in the course of my spiritual life in the beginning. But this thing occurred all of a sudden. And there was no question of thinking that it was my imagination running riot. It carried the evidence of its own authenticity. No doubt, you could say that it was a subjective experience. But all experiences are subjective essentially, though there is some sort of objective correlative. Here there was no objective correlative. But I would say that it was not, truly speaking, subjective, but inner or spiritual or psychic.

P.R.: Well! Where do you stand now after several years of spirituality or aspiration for spirituality?

K.D.S.: That's difficult to say. I can say only that there is a source of constant peace within. And a constant awareness of a Divine presence, within and without. And a certain equanimity arising out of that inner peace, so that the usual things of life don't obstruct or disturb one. And I have the constant attitude of offering everything to the Divine. That's all I can say... A kind of spontaneous meditation like a warm flow from the heart's centre to the Divine.⁴

From the third interview dated January 28, 1994:

P.R.: You have written about philosophy, mysticism, poetry, history and spirituality. I would like to know what made you take interest in so many fields.

K.D.S.: You have limited my number of fields. I have taken interest also in scientific thought. "Why?"... I can't say. All these things interested me from the very beginning of my student life. Maybe I had the idea of being many-sided from the very start. I had heard of Goethe being like that. He was a scientist, a thinker, a poet and God knows what else... He was a great lover too.

....

P.R.: Who do you think has inspired you to take interest in all these fields?

K.D.S.: My father was versatile. It may be that, automatically, I've imbibed from him the notion not to be restricted to one branch of inquiry.

P.R.: Sir! You have already talked about your spiritual experiences with the Mother! But what about Sri Aurobindo? I would like to hear from you about

your first meeting with that great sage.

K.D.S.: The first meeting was rather far from being sublime. When I saw him first, I looked at his face, examined his nose, his moustache, his beard, his long hair. I thought that he was an acceptable guru for me. The next day I asked the Mother whether Sri Aurobindo had said anything about me. She said: "Yes." I asked her, "What?" She replied: "He remarked that you had a good face." I was examining his face. He must have been examining my face. Some kind of tit-for-tat!

P.R.: But both of you seemed to be carried away by physical appearances.

K.D.S.: I don't think he was carried away. That must be the only good thing he saw in me, possibly.

....

P.R.: Sir! If you think that poetry is inspired writing, is there any meaning in revising one's poems?

K.D.S.: Yes. Of course... Inspiration can be unobstructed or it can be slow and laborious inspiration by bits. Even is there is a flow, it may not be a perfect flow. There could be a deep flow and there could be a facile flow. And both could be intertwined too. Revision too is supposed to be done in a fresh spurt of inspiration; and not by mere striking out things.

P.R.: Mayakovsky believes that poetry writing is like giving birth to a child... painful. But Keats had a different definition: "If poetry does not come to you like leaves to a tree, let it not come at all." Whom do you support?

K.D.S.: I think the statement of Keats has to be understood in a special way because he corrected his poems quite frequently. What he meant was that poetry should come from a deep source of life, just as the leaves come... not that poetry could burst complete and perfect at the first blush every time.

...

P.R.: What is Sri Aurobindo's opinion about your poetry?

K.D.S.: At the beginning, it varied... some poems he found well, some imperfect. But as he trained me up, he has approved most of my work. He was a hard taskmaster. And his opinion I consider super-Coleridgean.⁵

From the fourth interview, dated February 10, 1994:

P.R.: In spite of these two operations [ca. 1909/10], you were unable to walk?

K.D.S.: No, no. They made me walk straight, though with a slight limp.

P.R.: When did you become a wheel-chair man?

K.D.S.: That was in March 1992. After the fracture I sustained to my right thigh bone. It was a thorough fracture at the most dangerous spot in the thigh bone, near the knee.

...

P.R.: When did you feel that you were an established poet?

K.D.S.: That was only when Sri Aurobindo complimented me. Before that, I was like all young men, with a sort of high conceit of my own powers. Only when Sri Aurobindo admired some poems of mine, I felt that the genuine spark was there.

...

P.R.: How far has the Ashram helped you in publishing your books?

K.D.S.: The Ashram has brought out four of my books. My *Talks on Poetry* and my book on Mallarmé and *Sri Aurobindo on Shakespeare* and *Sri Aurobindo—The Poet*.⁶

From the sixth interview, dated December 7, 1995:

P.R.: What is Sri Aurobindo's contribution to World Literature?

K.D.S.: First of all, the proper illumination of the meaning of Indian culture and civilisation. Secondly, the goal of all civilisations, the goal of historical processes. Thirdly, a new vision, which is that spirituality's ultimate aim, is to establish a new consciousness operative in life, and not a consciousness which shrinks away from the world's questions. Fourthly, the language appropriate for expressing the higher truths. His language, both in poetry and in prose, is meant to forge an expression adequate to the truth which lies somewhat at least beyond the mind's grasp.

...

P.R.: You have discussed Sri Aurobindo's poetry in several of your volumes. But what have you to say about his plays and short stories?

K.D.S.: His short stories are very few. I've written briefly about his plays in my book *Sri Aurobindo—The Poet*. As regards his competence as a playwright, I would say that he does bring to life his characters, through both their speech and their action, which is the aim of a true dramatist. In that not only is action important but the revelation of the consciousness at play through that action is important. And that comes by speech, dramatic speech.

...

P.R.: Among the Indian writers in English, Sri Aurobindo is the most discussed and written-about author. The volumes of works available on Sri Aurobindo are proof enough. Have you gone through these critical writings? Can you comment on their authors' calibre as critics?

K.D.S.: Not all. A few early critical works I went through and commented on because I considered them very wrong headed and not very sufficiently learned. The comments made by P. Lal, Nissim Ezekiel, and others don't matter much, because the authors are not great in the field of either poetry or criticism.⁷

From the ninth interview, dated September 29, 1996:

P.R.: What would you like to be in your next birth?

K.D.S.: I would like to be wherever Sri Aurobindo and the Mother would be, in whatever capacity and in whatever role.

P.R.: What do you think is the secret of your longevity?

K.D.S.: I don't think there is any secret as such. People tend to consider certain habitual movements of their lives as a key to their longevity. I read of an Englishman who said that because everyday he swallowed a living frog, he lived up to 90! But I've never done anything so exceptional. I have not even hung on to life. I have run all kinds of risks, gone through adventures which might have cut short my life, but still somehow all my hurdles have taken their leave. My school fellows who grew up along with me, as well as family members of my generation all have gone and I am the last rose of summer left blooming all alone, as Thomas Moore would have said about himself if he had reached my age.⁸

P. Raja's interviews with Amal Kiran give a complete picture of Amal Kiran as an exponent of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga.

NILIMA DAS

References

1. P. Raja, *K. D. Sethna (An Introduction through Interaction)*, pp. 1-2.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 18.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36, 43, 45.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 54, 56, 58.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 73-75.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

The Divine

*Frail boat of mine,
Be brave! Far though you wander,
Your prow will face a secret yonder:
Ever the gleam of a new horizon-line
Is the Divine.*

Amal Kiran

(The Secret Splendour, p. 539)

NAVANIT STORIES

MAJHI NAVHE, TUMCHI

NIRANJANNATH Sarin, a professor at D.A.V. College, Lahore, has come to Srinagar. His only son is very ill. Niranjannath was told by his doctor that a change of climate could help the child regain his health. The hopeful parents, their daughter and the boy live in a ground-floor apartment that they have rented for a month.

Magan-baba lives in the same building, in the apartment just above. An ever-smiling face, an ever-sweet speech. His neighbours have by now recognised the saint and stream in throughout the day for his advice and throng the place in the evening for *kirtan* and *satsang*. There is always a feast in his house, a feast of the purifying, liberating joy that the Name and the stories of the Lord's Lila always bring to His devotees. One who has partaken of this feast is bound to return the next time with a friend or two in tow. Thus a regular group of *satsangis* has gradually grown around Magan-baba.

Babaji: "Brother, why has this wailing and weeping been going on downstairs since last night?"

Satsangi: "Babaji, the poor professor's son died. His only son! The poor parents are broken, lost. Will you not go down to them and shower your grace on them? Surely they deserve your love and sympathy at this time?"

Babaji: "But my dear child, I don't know how to weep! If you insist I will go, but will I be able to help them?"

Satsangi: "Babaji, it is your life's work to make the weeping smile. If you go, it will be a great boon to them."

"All right then," says Magan-baba and goes downstairs. He finds Niranjannath and his wife sitting in one corner, tears still flowing down their cheeks, sorrow still darkening their faces.

"Professor sahib," Magan-baba calls, as he slowly walks up to them. Looking up silently, the miserable couple join their hands and can hardly control themselves.

"Professor sahib, tell me, what should I give you—logs of wood or cool water?"

The professor understands the implication and says, "Babaji! From you I ought to expect the cool water. There are many who bring me logs of wood."

Babaji: "If so, professor sahib, know that today you are being tested. You have examined many all these years. Today it is your turn."

The professor is perplexed. He wipes away his tears and asks, "My examination? What are you saying Baba. My only child has been cruelly snatched by God and you are talking of examinations?"

Babaji: "Yes, Niranjannath, yes, that is what I am talking about. God gave him to you, placed him in your trust. Now He has come and taken him away. What then are you crying about? Someone makes a deposit with a respected banker and when

he needs his savings he comes and takes it back. If at that time, the banker does not hand it over with a smile, would he be a gentleman or a thief? A true financier would welcome the depositor with a smile and immediately hand over what belongs to the man and feel a relief that a responsibility has been discharged. 'How dare he take back his deposit?' that accusation would never enter his mind. He would feel no regret in handing over the man's deposit. Professor sahib, whatever comes to us, children or any other form of wealth, it is given to us in trust, and it is a deposit He keeps with us. As long as it is with us, we must protect and nurture it with all our love and attention. But when He takes his deposit back from us, what is there to sorrow over? 'Take it, Lord, it was always Yours,' should be the smiling response of a gentleman."

"Babaji, I have failed in this examination. But henceforth, I shall not fail." The professor manages to smile through a face still clouded by the sorrow.

Babaji: "Professor sahib, it is not difficult to teach others. The true challenge is to teach oneself."

Niranjannath: "Yes, indeed, Babaji. That is the true test of one's knowledge."

Babaji: "Listen then to this story."

There was a Seth (businessman) in Mumbai. The *gadi* (servant) who had been working in his house for twelve years was now practically a member of the family. One day he had to go back to his native village on a special occasion. He asked for a four-month leave and Sethji gladly granted it. While taking leave the simple man was deeply moved, so close he felt to them all, but while bidding goodbye to his Sethji's youngest daughter, he couldn't restrain his tears, for the child had practically grown up in his arms. A week or so after the *gadi* left, the girl suddenly took ill and died. For days the house was drowned in the tears and wails of the stricken family. But in time the sorrow faded and life gradually came back to normalcy.

After four months, the *gadi* returned, full of happiness to be back 'home'. Enthusiastically he asked the mistress of the house about each member of the family, his eyes searching for the child. "Everyone is well, but our child died soon after you left." It was like a thunderbolt; the poor man was stricken dumb with grief. He went up to the Seth's room and cried out, "Sethji..." Hearing a familiar voice the Seth looked up from the newspaper he was reading and smiled, "Ah, so you have come! How are you?"

The *gadi* began to sob.

"Why are you crying?" the Seth asked, in surprise.

"*Mouli meli* (the child died)!" he replied and began to sob uncontrollably.

Sethji: "It's all right. It was the will of God. What use is weeping? All who come to this earth are bound to leave sooner or later. Death does not spare anyone. Calm down, my man. After all, it is His will that alone is done. What

can we really do about it? But tell me, how did your daughter die? What was her name?"

"*Majhi navhe, tumchi* (Not mine, yours)," he clarified, seeing that Sethji had misunderstood him. But the moment the Seth heard "*Majhi navhe, tumchi*," the newspaper slipped from his hands. And, as if his daughter had just died, he began to wail....

"You see, professor, as long as it was the *gadi*'s daughter, Sethji was calmly delivering sage advice. But when just the memory of the death of his own daughter touched him, his sagacity vanished. He failed in the test."

"Babaji, now I understand. We are grateful for your help." So saying, Niranjannath gets up, goes to the bathroom to wash his face, and then makes his wife do the same. They follow Magan-baba upstairs and join in the *kirtan* and *satsang*. By the time the group begins to disperse, the couple has been freed from the dark clouds constricting their hearts and minds—and in those clear inner skies the calm and cool full moon of *Sharad* (autumn) has risen.

PUJALAL

(Translated from *Navanit*, published by Shivasadan Granthamala Karyalaya, Maddhada, Gujarat, 1945)

"If at any time a deep sorrow, a searing doubt or an intense pain overwhelms you and drives you to despair, there is an infallible way to regain calm and peace.

"In the depths of our being there shines a light whose brilliance is equalled only by its purity; a light, a living and conscious portion of a universal godhead who animates and nourishes and illumines Matter, a powerful and unfailing guide for those who are willing to heed his law, a helper full of solace and loving forbearance towards all who aspire to see and hear and obey him. No sincere and lasting aspiration towards him can be in vain; no strong and respectful trust can be disappointed, no expectation ever deceived....

"Each time we feel that our heart is breaking, a deeper door opens within us, revealing new horizons, ever richer in hidden treasures, whose golden influx brings once more a new and intenser life to the organism on the brink of destruction.

"And when, by these successive descents, we reach the veil that reveals thee as it is lifted, O Lord, who can describe the intensity of Life that penetrates the whole being, the radiance of the Light that floods it, the sublimity of the Love that transforms it for ever!"

The Mother

(Words of Long Ago, CWM, Vol. 2, pp. 20, 21)