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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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LILA

In us is the thousandfold Spirit who is one,
 An eternal thinker calm and great and wise,
A seer whose eye is an all-regarding sun,
 A poet of the cosmic mysteries.

A critic Witness pieces everything
 And binds the fragments in his brilliant sheaf;
A World-adventurer borne on Destiny's wing
 Gambles with death and triumph, joy and grief.

A king of greatness and a slave of love,
 Host of the stars and guest in Nature's inn,
A high spectator Spirit throned above,
 A pawn of passion in the game divine,

One who has made in sport the suns and seas
Mirrors in our being his immense caprice.

SRI AUROBINDO

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

THE DIVINE BODY

(Continued from the issue of April 2006)

STILL the inconveniences of the animal body and its animal nature and impulses and the limitations of the human body at its best are there in the beginning and persist always so long as there is not the full and fundamental liberation, and its inconscience or half-conscience and its binding of the soul and mind and life-force to Matter, to materiality of all kinds, to the call of the unregenerated earth-nature are there and constantly oppose the call of the spirit and circumscribe the climb to higher things. To the physical being it brings a bondage to the material instruments, to the brain and heart and senses, wed to materiality and materialism of all kinds, to the bodily mechanism and its needs and obligations, to the imperative need of food and the pre-occupation with the means of getting it and storing it as one of the besetting interests of life, to fatigue and sleep, to the satisfaction of bodily desire. The life-force in man also is tied down to these small things; it has to limit the scope of its larger ambitions and longings, its drive to rise beyond the pull of earth and follow the heavenlier intuitions of its psychic parts, the heart's ideal and the soul's yearnings. On the mind the body imposes the boundaries of the physical being and the physical life and the sense of the sole complete reality of physical things with the rest as a sort of brilliant fireworks of the imagination, of lights and glories that can only have their full play in heavens beyond, on higher planes of existence, but not here; it afflicts the idea and aspiration with the burden of doubt, the evidence of the subtle senses and the intuition with uncertainty and the vast field of supraphysical consciousness and experience with the imputation of unreality and clamps down to its earth-roots the growth of the spirit from its original limiting humanity into the supramental truth and the divine nature. These obstacles can be overcome, the denials and resistance of the body surmounted, its transformation is possible. Even the inconscient and animal part of us can be illumined and made capable of manifesting the god-nature, even as our mental humanity can be made to manifest the superhumanity of the supramental truth-consciousness and the divinity of what is now superconscious to us, and the total transformation made a reality here. But for this the obligations and compulsions of its animality must cease to be obligatory and a purification of its materiality effected by which that very materiality can be turned into a material solidity of the manifestation of the divine nature. For nothing essential must be left out in the totality of the earth-change; Matter itself can be turned into a means of revelation of the spiritual reality, the Divine.

The difficulty is dual, psychological and corporeal: the first is the effect of the unregenerated animality upon the life, especially by the insistence of the body's gross instincts, impulses, desires; the second is the outcome of our corporeal structure and organic instrumentation imposing its restrictions on the dynamism of the

higher divine nature. The first of these two difficulties is easier to deal with and conquer; for here the will can intervene and impose on the body the power of the higher nature. Certain of these impulses and instincts of the body have been found especially harmful by the spiritual aspirant and weighed considerably in favour of an ascetic rejection of the body. Sex and sexuality and all that springs from sex and testifies to its existence had to be banned and discarded from the spiritual life, and this, though difficult, is not at all impossible and can be made a cardinal condition for the spiritual seeker. This is natural and unescapable in all ascetic practice and the satisfaction of this condition, though not easy at first to fulfil, becomes after a time quite feasible; the overcoming of the sex instinct and impulse is indeed binding on all who would attain to self-mastery and lead the spiritual life. A total mastery over it is essential for all spiritual seekers, the eradication of it for the complete ascetic. This much has to be recognised and not diminished in its obligatory importance and its principle.

But all recognition of the sex principle, as apart from the gross physical indulgence of the sex impulse, could not be excluded from a divine life upon earth; it is there in life, plays a large part and has to be dealt with, it cannot simply be ignored, merely suppressed or held down or put away out of sight. In the first place, it is in one of its aspects a cosmic and even a divine principle: it takes the spiritual form of the Ishwara and the Shakti and without it there could be no world-creation or manifestation of the world-principle of Purusha and Prakriti which are both necessary for the creation, necessary too in their association and interchange for the play of its psychological working and in their manifestation as soul and Nature fundamental to the whole process of the Lila. In the divine life itself an incarnation or at least in some form a presence of the two powers or their initiating influence through their embodiments or representatives would be indispensable for making the new creation possible. In its human action on the mental and vital level sex is not altogether an undivine principle; it has its nobler aspects and idealities and it has to be seen in what way and to what extent these can be admitted into the new and larger life. All gross animal indulgence of sex desire and impulse would have to be eliminated; it could only continue among those who are not ready for the higher life or not yet ready for a complete spiritual living. In all who aspired to it but could not yet take it up in its fullness sex will have to be refined, submit to the spiritual or psychic impulse and a control by the higher mind and the higher vital and shed all its lighter, frivolous or degraded forms and feel the touch of the purity of the ideal. Love would remain, all forms of the pure truth of love in higher and higher steps till it realised its highest nature, widened into universal love, merged into the love of the Divine. The love of man and woman would also undergo that elevation and consummation; for all that can feel a touch of the ideal and the spiritual must follow the way of ascent till it reaches the divine Reality. The body and its activities must be accepted as part of the divine life and pass under this law; but, as in the other evolutionary transitions, what

cannot accept the law of the divine life cannot be accepted and must fall away from the ascending nature.

Another difficulty that the transformation of the body has to face is its dependence for its very existence upon food, and here too are involved the gross physical instincts, impulses, desires that are associated with this difficult factor, the essential cravings of the palate, the greed of food and animal gluttony of the belly, the coarsening of the mind when it grovels in the mud of sense, obeys a servitude to its mere animal part and hugs its bondage to Matter. The higher human in us seeks refuge in a temperate moderation, in abstemiousness and abstinence or in carelessness about the body and its wants and in an absorption in higher things. The spiritual seeker often, like the Jain ascetics, seeks refuge in long and frequent fasts which lift him temporarily at least out of the clutch of the body's demands and help him to feel in himself a pure vacancy of the wide rooms of the spirit. But all this is not liberation and the question may be raised whether, not only at first but always, the divine life also must submit to this necessity. But it could only deliver itself from it altogether if it could find out the way so to draw upon the universal energy that the energy would sustain not only the vital parts of our physicality but its constituent matter with no need of aid for sustenance from any outside substance of Matter. It is indeed possible even while fasting for very long periods to maintain the full energies and activities of the soul and mind and life, even those of the body, to remain wakeful but concentrated in Yoga all the time, or to think deeply and write day and night, to dispense with sleep, to walk eight hours a day, maintaining all these activities separately or together, and not feel any loss of strength, any fatigue, any kind of failure or decadence. At the end of the fast one can even resume at once taking the normal or even a greater than the normal amount of nourishment without any transition or precaution such as medical science enjoins, as if both the complete fasting and the feasting were natural conditions, alternating by an immediate and easy passage from one to the other, of a body already trained by a sort of initial transformation to be an instrument of the powers and activities of Yoga. But one thing one does not escape and that is the wasting of the material tissues of the body, its flesh and substance. Conceivably, if a practicable way and means could only be found, this last invincible obstacle too might be overcome and the body maintained by an interchange of its forces with the forces of material Nature, giving to her her need from the individual and taking from her directly the sustaining energies of her universal existence. Conceivably, one might rediscover and re-establish at the summit of the evolution of life the phenomenon we see at its base, the power to draw from all around it the means of sustenance and self-renewal. Or else the evolved being might acquire the greater power to draw down those means from above rather than draw them up or pull them in from the environment around, all about it and below it. But until something like this is achieved or made possible we have to go back to food and the established material forces of Nature.

In fact we do, however unconsciously, draw constantly upon the universal energy, the force in Matter to replenish our material existence and the mental, vital and other potencies in the body: we do it directly in the invisible processes of interchange constantly kept up by Nature and by special means devised by her; breathing is one of these, sleep also and repose. But as her basic means for maintaining and renewing the gross physical body and its workings and inner potencies Nature has selected the taking in of outside matter in the shape of food, its digestion, assimilation of what is assimilable and elimination of what cannot or ought not to be assimilated; this by itself is sufficient for mere maintenance, but for assuring health and strength in the body so maintained it has added the impulse towards physical exercise and play of many kinds, ways for the expenditure and renewal of energy, the choice or the necessity of manifold action and labour. In the new life, in its beginnings at least, it would not be necessary or advisable to make any call for an extreme or precipitate rejection of the need of food or the established natural method for the maintenance of the still imperfectly transformed body. If or when these things have to be transcended it must come as a result of the awakened will of the spirit, a will also in Matter itself, an imperative evolutionary urge, an act of the creative transmutations of Time or a descent from the transcendence. Meanwhile the drawing in of the universal energy by a conscious action of the higher powers of the being from around or from above, by a call to what is still to us a transcending consciousness or by an invasion or descent from the Transcendence itself, may well become an occasional, a frequent or a constant phenomenon and even reduce the part played by food and its need to an incidence no longer preoccupying, a necessity minor and less and less imperative.

Meanwhile food and the ordinary process of Nature can be accepted, although its use has to be liberated from attachment and desire and the grosser indiscriminating appetites and clutch at the pleasures of the flesh which is the way of the Ignorance; the physical processes have to be subtilised and the grossest may have to be eliminated and new processes found or new instrumentalities emerge. So long as it is accepted, a refined pleasure in it may be permitted and even a desireless ananda of taste take the place of the physical relish and the human selection by likings and dislikings which is our present imperfect response to what is offered to us by Nature. It must be remembered that for the divine life on earth, earth and Matter have not to be and cannot be rejected but have only to be sublimated and to reveal in themselves the possibilities of the spirit, serve the spirit's highest uses and be transformed into instruments of a greater living.

The divine life must always be actuated by the push towards perfection; a perfection of the joy of life is part and an essential part of it, the body's delight in things and the body's joy of life are not excluded from it; they too have to be made perfect. A large totality is the very nature of this new and growing way of existence, a fullness of the possibilities of the mind transmuted into a thing of light, of the life converted into a force of spiritual power and joy, of the body transformed into an

instrument of a divine action, divine knowledge, divine bliss. All can be taken into its scope that is capable of transforming itself, all that can be an instrument, a vessel, an opportunity for the expression of this totality of the self-manifesting Spirit.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 541-47)

He energised conscious-force (in the austerity of thought) and came to the knowledge that Matter is the Brahman. For from Matter all existences are born; born, by Matter they increase and enter into Matter in their passing hence. Then he went to Varuna, his father, and said, "Lord, teach me of the Brahman." But he said to him: "Energise (again) the conscious-energy in thee; for the Energy is Brahman." (Taittiriya Upanishad. III. 1, 2.)

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The affirmation of a divine life upon earth and an immortal sense in mortal existence can have no base unless we recognise not only eternal Spirit as the inhabitant of this bodily mansion, the wearer of this mutable robe, but accept Matter of which it is made, as a fit and noble material out of which He weaves constantly His garbs, builds recurrently the unending series of His mansions.

Nor is this, even, enough to guard us against a recoil from life in the body unless, with the Upanishads, perceiving behind their appearances the identity in essence of these two extreme terms of existence, we are able to say in the very language of those ancient writings, "Matter also is Brahman", and to give its full value to the vigorous figure by which the physical universe is described as the external body of the Divine Being. Nor,—so far divided apparently are these two extreme terms,—is that identification convincing to the rational intellect if we refuse to recognise a series of ascending terms (Life, Mind, Supermind and the grades that link Mind to Supermind) between Spirit and Matter. Otherwise the two must appear as irreconcilable opponents bound together in an unhappy wedlock and their divorce the one reasonable solution. To identify them, to represent each in the terms of the other, becomes an artificial creation of Thought opposed to the logic of facts and possible only by an irrational mysticism.

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 18, p. 6)

‘WHY ALL THIS NOISE...’

November 29, 1913

WHY all this noise, all this movement, this vain and futile agitation; why this whirlwind carrying men away like a swarm of flies caught in a storm? How sad is the sight of all that wasted energy, all those useless efforts! When will they stop dancing like puppets on a string, pulled they know not by whom or what? When will they find time to sit quietly and go within, to recollect themselves and open that inner door which screens from them Thy priceless treasures, Thy infinite boons?...

How sorrowful and miserable seems to me their life of ignorance and obscurity, their life of mad agitation and unprofitable dispersion!—when one single spark of Thy sublime light, one single drop of Thy divine love, can transform this suffering into an ocean of delight!

O Lord, my prayer soars towards Thee: May they know at last Thy peace and that calm and irresistible strength which comes of an immutable serenity—the privilege of those whose eyes have been opened and who are able to contemplate Thee in the flaming core of their being.

But the hour of Thy manifestation is come.

And soon hymns of gladness will burst forth on every side.

Before the solemnity of this hour I bow down in devotion.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, p. 38)

AN OLD CHALDEAN LEGEND

LONG, long ago, in the dry land which is now Arabia, a divine being incarnated upon earth to awaken in it the supreme love. As expected it was persecuted by men, misunderstood, suspected, pursued. Mortally wounded by its assailants, it wanted to die quietly in solitude in order to be able to accomplish its work, and being pursued, it ran away. Suddenly, in the vast desert land there appeared a small pomegranate bush. The saviour crept in under the low branches, to leave its body in peace; and immediately the bush spread out miraculously, it grew higher, larger, became deep and thick, so that when the pursuers passed by, they did not even suspect that the One whom they were chasing was hidden there, and they went their way.

While drop by drop the sacred blood fell, fertilising the soil, the bush was covered with marvellous flowers, scarlet, large, crowded with petals... innumerable drops of blood.

These are the flowers which express and contain for us the Divine's Love.

THE MOTHER

14 November 1955
(Kali Puja)

(Words of the Mother—III, CWM, Vol. 15, pp. 192-93)

CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO A PROPOS A GUJARATI TRANSLATION OF MAURICE MAGRE'S IMPRESSIONS OF THE ASHRAM

[Editorial note: The June and July 2005 issues of Mother India carried a reprint of the English translation of a chapter on the Ashram from Maurice Magre's French book A la Poursuite de la Sagesse.

We publish in this issue portions of Sri Aurobindo's correspondence with Dr. Naik, an inmate of the Ashram from 1931 to 1938, who made a Gujarati translation of Maurice Magre's impressions of the Ashram. In order to clarify the points being discussed, we have included the relevant portions of the text from Magre's book, and the English translation that appeared in Mother India.]

I got from T, Maurice Magre's "A la Poursuite de la Sagesse" in order to read the portion about the Asram. He has written very fine things, almost to an exaggeration, especially about us as "the perfect ones". I thought of translating it into Gujarati and getting it published in the form of a booklet for Gujarati sadhaks. Is it worth doing?

YES, it would be worth doing.

22 January 1937

*

I have begun to translate into Gujarati "L'Ashram de Pondichéry" by Maurice Magre. There are certain things I do not understand. I begin with page 99 of the book "A la Poursuite de la Sagesse". What does he mean by "Aucune étoile du berger ne brille sur leurs terrasses"? [No star of the Shepherds gleams on their terraces.]

It means there is no publicity, no public announcement or anything outward to show that this is the place of spiritual wisdom. The reference is of course to the star that led the shepherds or the Four Kings to the cradle of Christ.

"brillent comme des épées derrière les rayons des bibliothèques" [shine out like swords from the shelves of the book-cases]

What "épées" [swords] does he mean behind the shelves?

It simply means that they shine like swords—shine very brilliantly; there is no special reference.

“Il fait penser à un mandarin très sage” [He makes one think of a very wise mandarin]

Does it mean he makes one think of a mandarin?

It means “He reminds me of a very wise mandarin”, he gives the similar impression.

I have translated the first four pieces of Maurice Magre’s “L’Ashram...”. There are some exaggerations in his perceptions: “les hommes les plus sages de la terre” [the wisest men of the earth.] and “Ce sont des Parfaits entre les hommes” [These are the Perfect Ones amongst men.] is saying too much for the sadhaks—and I feel almost ashamed that it is not really so. Of course a man can’t know the details in four or five days and perhaps he felt the atmosphere far superior to that of the ordinary world. But it is difficult to put such things in Gujarati, for to the externalised Gujarati mind it is rather the other side that strikes one more, and words like “Parfaits” [Perfect Ones] and “les plus sages” [the wisest] translated in Gujarati as પૂર્ણ પુરુષો [pūrṇa puruṣo] or સંત [santa] or જ્ઞાની [jñānī] or સુજ્ઞ [sujña] or even ડાહ્યા [dāhyā] seem almost ridiculous in view of the defects of the sadhaks.

I remember that in the 1921 Non-cooperation times Mahadeo Desai, Secretary of Gandhiji, had a habit of exaggerating the importance of spinning, satyagraha and everything else, and he wrote very alluring articles in “Navjivan”. To us it seemed funny at times. Here, fortunately, it is the impression not of a concerned party, but of an outsider.

Magre like many others got an immediate strong impression of the atmosphere of the Asram—most feel it as an atmosphere of calm and peace, something quite apart from that of the ordinary world. He thought it was the atmosphere of the people. Besides, of the few who saw him, he saw only the best side. Also many here if not most have something in their appearance different from people outside, something a little luminous, which a man of sensitive perceptions like Magre could feel. The other side becomes apparent only if one stays long and mixes in the ordinary life of the Asram or hears the gossip of the Sadhaks. People from this country, Gujaratis or others, more easily see or feel this side and do not feel the rest because they enter at once into relation with the exterior life of the Asram.

4 February 1937

*

Here is a translation of the first paragraph of Maurice Magre’s “L’Ashram de Pondichéry” [page 99].

“Dans l’Ashram de Pondichéry sont réunis les hommes les plus sages de la terre.... Aucune étoile du berger ne brille sur leurs terrasses et les rois mages

n'en connaissent pas le chemin."

[In the Ashram of Pondicherry are gathered together the wisest men of the earth.... No star of the Shepherds gleams on their terraces and the Magi-Kings do not know the way to them.]

I do not want to overload you with these translations but I am sending this first paragraph so you can see how it looks. It is almost faithful, but here and there the change of a word or a phrase to suit the Gujarati has been introduced.

However for "wise" I am not satisfied, there are ડાહ્યા [dāhyā], પ્રજ્ઞ [prājñā], ધી- [dhīra], મુમુક્ષુ [mumukṣu], even સંત [santa]. But I ameliorated the sense of "les plus sages" and put merely અતિસુજ્ઞ [ati sujñā], which means something like "very good".

It seems all right except in the sentence about the star and the kings. Is it not possible to express in some way the idea that it is a star of annunciation that is meant? Also જાદુગર-લે [jādugaro] will hardly do. The Roi Mages refer to the king sages from four quarters of the world who in the legend received the intimation of the birth of the Saviour (Christ) and came to the cradle in Bethlehem; Mages means here not magicians but Mage. It is taken from the Mage of Persia who were Yogis and men of wisdom, so જાદુગર-લે [jādugaro] won't do.

7 February 1937

*

I have tried to detail the idea of the "étoile du berger" [star of the Shepherds], instead of making a literal translation. My version is: કાર્તિકેશ્વરના જન્મસ્થાનની ભાળ આપના- શુક્રનો તારો આ ગ્રહોની અગાસીઓ ઉપ- પ્રકાશતો નથી તેમજ -જર્ષિઓ ને આ ગ્રહોના માર્ગની ખબર- નથી [krāīstanā janmasthānānī bhāl āpanāra śukrano tāro ā grahoni agāsio upara prakāśato janāto nathī temaja mārājḥ rājarṣio ne ā gruhonā mārganī khabara nathī.]

It becomes longer but makes the sense clearer. I don't know if there is any similar idea in Rama's or Krishna's or Buddha's birth or somewhere in Kumarsambhavam which we can lift up and put down. But that would not represent the idea in connection with Christ.

Yes, I suppose this will do.

"Il y a un atelier pour le menuisier et une salle où l'on pétrit la farine. Les reliures des livres brillent comme des épées derrière les rayons des bibliothèques.... Chacun trouve sa liberté dans l'harmonie de l'amour."

[There is a workshop for the carpenter, and a room where flour is kneaded. The bindings of books shine out like swords from the shelves of the book-cases.... Each finds his liberty in the harmony of love.]

I have changed some of the constructions to suit the description in Gujarati. The underlined words show a little change—either the addition of a word to suit the description or a different turn.

“où l’on pétrit la farine” I have put લોટ દળવાની ઘંટી [loṭa daḷavānī ghanti] but “pétrit” means putting water in the flour and then kneading and pressing it. એક ઓ-ડીમાં મસળવામાં આવે છે [aika oradīmā loṭa masaḷavāmā āve che] is literal translation.

For “l’harmonie” I don’t know if એકતાર- [ekatāra] is correct.

I suppose it is. The rest seems to be all right, but I don’t quite catch this પુસ્તક બાંધનારો [pustaka bāndhanārō]. The word is reliure which means the binding of a book. Is the translation correct?

7 February 1937

*

I had mistaken the word “reliures” for “relieurs”. Now I find it difficult to understand the idea itself “Les reliures des livres brillent comme...”. Reliure is the art of binding books—how can it shine like the swords? Does it mean the books are bound well or refers to the instruments used in binding.

No, here it is not the art of binding—it is the bindings of the books themselves that he describes as shining on the shelves.

“Tous les disciples sont beaux d’une beauté que l’on ne peut définir, qui n’entre pas dans le cadre des proportions, qui se joue de la science de la forme. D’où ont-ils reçu cette beauté? Etais-elle déjà enclose dans les germes sexuels de leurs parents et n’a-t-elle fait que s’épanouir par le mystère de la vie? Ou l’ont-ils reçue quand ils ont frôlé le sol sans herbe des cours sept fois purifiées, n’est-elle que la manifestation inférieure de la grâce de l’esprit qui est venue se poser sur eux quand ils ont franchi la porte de l’Ashram?”

[All the disciples have a beauty that cannot be defined, that is not contained in a system of proportions, that sports with the science of form. From where do they receive this beauty? Was it already enclosed in the germ-cells of their parents and has it merely blossomed through the mystery of life? Or did they receive it when they brushed past the grassless ground of the seven times purified courtyards, is it only the inferior manifestation of the grace of the spirit which alighted on them when they stepped through the gate of the Ashram?]

Somehow I did not wish to translate the idea “germes sexuels” as વીર્ય [vīrya], which is the usual word, and have instead put -રક્ત [rakta]. I don’t know if such a liberty can be taken.

The translation is very good indeed. But *cours* does not mean मार्ग [mārga], it is the “courts” of the Asram he is speaking of. He does not give three alternatives but only two. Did they get it by birth or did it come upon them as soon as they passed the gates and entered the courtyards of the Asram? The two parts of this sentence “ou l’ont-ils reçue” and “n’est elle que la manifestation” are only two ways of saying the same thing.

7 February 1937

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The Gujarati construction of the translation about the “brook chosen above all others which becomes the Ganges” was found a little too long and they say that the જે... ને [je...te] is not allowed in Gujarati, so I avoided it. Is my new version somewhat better?

It seems all right. In Bengal যে—সে [je...se] [Ben.] is a very common construction and of course it abounds in Sanskrit. How does Gujarati replace it or express the same construction?

7 February 1937

*

“Qui dira jamais de quelle source cachée coule la beauté de l’homme bon et détaché du monde? Les eaux les plus cristallines ne décèlent jamais l’argile souterraine qui les a filtrées et il paraît qu’au milieu des entassements de rochers, là où tout est glace et granit, personne n’a pu voir le point exact où naît le ruisseau, élu dans la hiérarchie des ruisseaux, qui devient le Gange.”

[Who shall ever say from what hidden spring flows the beauty of the man of goodness, detached from the world? The most crystalline waters never reveal the subterranean soil that has filtered them and none has been able to see in the midst of the rock-masses, where all is frozen and granite, the precise point where takes birth the stream chosen from the hierarchy of streams to become the Ganges.]

It is good—but you avoid the touch about the little brook chosen above all others which becomes the Ganges.

7 February 1937

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“Derrière une des maisons de l’Ashram il y a une cour silencieuse où le jardinier est le roi. Là, sont les boutures de toutes les plantes qui doivent, selon les moments de leur croissance, tenir leur place dans les jardins des autres maisons. Et il y a même des boutures choisies, des boutures touchées de la grâce, qui seront sur

la fenêtre du maître et qui donneront une fleur parfaite où il contempera au soleil levant la beauté multi-forme de la terre.”

[Behind one of the Ashram houses there is a silent courtyard where the gardener is king. Here are the cuttings of all the plants that, in the season of their growth, have to take their place in the gardens of other houses. And there are even some choice cuttings, grace-touched, that will be on the window of the Master and give a perfect flower in which he will contemplate at sunrise the manifold beauty of the earth.]

The above construction is defective—not allowed in Gujarati. It seems they cut the phrase into two separate sentences when there is a construction with “which” or “that”. [...]

This seems more elegant. The sentence with the relatives strikes one as a little embarrassed and involved.

7 February 1937

I am keeping your translation so as to be able to compare it at leisure with the original; I will send in the morning. It will be more convenient like that when you send your translations, for in the afternoon the time is short and I have no leisure to consider carefully everything.

12 February 1937

(To be concluded)

Moreover, it is a well-known fact that one grows into the likeness of what one loves. Therefore if you want to be like the Divine, love Him alone. Only one who has known the ecstasy of the exchange of love with the Divine can know how insipid and dull and feeble any other exchange is in comparison. And even if the most austere discipline is required to arrive at this exchange, nothing is too hard, too long or too severe in order to achieve it, for it surpasses all expression.

*

Since we have decided to reserve love in all its splendour for our personal relationship with the Divine, we shall replace it in our relations with others by a total, unvarying, constant and egoless kindness and goodwill that will not expect any reward or gratitude or even any recognition. However others may treat you, you will never allow yourself to be carried away by any resentment; and in your unmixed love for the Divine, you will leave him sole judge as to how he is to protect you and defend you against the misunderstanding and bad will of others.

The Mother

(On Education, CWM, Vol. 12, pp. 69, 70)

PUNCTUATING OUR WORLD-VIEW

AN EXERCISE WITH THE PASSAGE OF TIME

WHAT punctuation-mark could better express our state of mind face to face with the modern world and its enigmatic as well as ominous movement from day to day than the sign of interrogation?

Some might be stirred to use the exclamation-sign because every day an unpleasant surprise is in store for us making us sit up straight and evoking from our hearts a desperate “Oh!”

Others might vote for the colon: they would do so on the following ground: each sunrise reveals more glaringly the import of unpleasantness suggested by the previous sunset.

Still others would select the semi-colon; they would like to symbolise their sense of a continual heaping up of disagreeable developments; each such development would appear to add its own new shade to the significance of the last; the new shade in turn leads on to the next frightful *nuance*.

A few might plump for the comma, with the plea that the pause between event and event is a mere seeming, and the same old story of misfortune unfolds itself, piece after piece, without any apparent end, any sign of a new turn.

Perhaps a yet smaller group would pick out the full-stop. They would indicate their impression of a cleavage between one day's evil and another's. They would discern a jerkiness and discontinuity and illogic. It would be as if the world-spirit were in an interminable state of nightmare on abrupt surrealist nightmare.

As an alternative to the full-stop a handful might make a dash for the dash—the cleavage and discontinuity and jerkiness and illogic of events make a headlong series—they give us no time to arrive at a conclusion about anything—the surrealist nightmares take the bit between their teeth and gallop at breakneck speed everywhere to nowhere.

But am I wrong in saying that the large majority of thinking people would favour the question-mark? How well it combines something of all the implications by its very vagueness! And in addition this is what it represents: the tension of undecidedness we have all the time. The tension comes of our long-drawn-out uncertainty about various problems; it is also born of our anxious straining after solutions that seem to keep ever eluding us. All the empty succession, the pointless continuity, the immeasurable monotony of our life is there, with their answer-defying problems. And there is yet something more. The answer-defiance brings us again and again to a halt. And at last—at long last—we feel our hopes dashed—till we begin doubting the value of every position—and the one who questions what will happen to the world tomorrow asks himself “Will even the questioner live beyond today?”

But all punctuation severs to a greater or lesser degree what is really the single indivisible expression of One Existence and One Consciousness and One Delight thrown into everlasting play by that Unity's multitudinous vision of its own truth and if we could pass beyond a punctuated view of the world we should know each today as the enigmatic and ominous appearance worn by an evolving mystery of divine Selfhood which carries the fulfilling sense of an eternal answer to every quivering question of time.

K. D. SETHNA
(AMAL KIRAN)

(*The Sun and the Rainbow*, pp. 84-86)

The usual rule given by yogis is that one should not speak of one's experience to others except of course the Guru while the sadhana is going on because it wastes the experience, there is what they call kṣaya of the tapasya. It is only long past experiences that they speak of and even that not too freely.

*

The Light left you because you spoke of it to someone who was not an adhikārī. It is safest not to speak of these experiences except to a Guru or to one who can help you. The passing away of an experience as soon as it is spoken of is a frequent happening and for that reason many yogis make it a rule never to speak of what happens within them, unless it is a thing of the past or a settled realisation that nothing can take away. A settled permanent realisation abides, but these were rather things that come to make possible an opening in the consciousness to something more complete—to prepare it for realisation.

*

I thought it was understood that what I wrote to you about persons was private. Experiences one's own or others' if one comes to know of them, should not be talked about or made a matter of gossip. It is only if there can be some spiritual profit to others and even then if they are experiences of the past that one can speak of them. Otherwise it becomes like news of Abyssinia or Spain, something common and trivial for the vital mass-mind to chew or gobble.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 23, pp. 925-26)

PAINTING AS SADHANA

Krishnalal Bhatt (1905-1990)

(Continued from the issue of April 2006)

8

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

28/3/34: Mother, often I fly kites in dreams. Sometimes I am bringing it down from the sky where it is flying at such a height that it is not even seen.

Has this any significance?

Sri Aurobindo: It is when formations are sent up for fulfilment (aspirations, imaginations etc).

[Undated]: Mother,

I send designs numbered (1) & (2).

No. (1) I saw in dream. I was painting that design on your sari in a very skilful way with the brushes. The colours in dream were more soft.

No. (2) was seen in vision. The form in it was not so exact.

Will you [*added by Sri Aurobindo*] kindly write to me the explanation of these?

Sri Aurobindo: No. 1 is the flower of perfect creation on the blue of Krishna.

No. 2 indicates a movement of Light pushing its way through a vital atmosphere.

2/4/34: Mother,

I have begun the drawing for the painting of "The Cloud and the Evening". This picture I did before I came here, which was not given full justice.

In this drawing, outline of the Cloud which represents self-contained power and majesty has come well. Now I am trying to put the figure of the evening which may represent adoration and joy. The figure (the head) of the Cloud has some vague resemblance with Sri Aurobindo, which I saw in inner vision and also I had identification while drawing it. In trying to draw the figure of evening I have identification with it, but I am not able to put it on paper.

Is it that I should wait till it comes in the inner vision or I should try to draw it when there is identification? Which is the better way for the artist?

Sri Aurobindo: Both ways are good—it depends on the artist. Some can do without seeing, others need to see.

2/4/34: Mother,

The experience of the Mother's presence and of the descending movement are

still continued. But they are interrupted now. They are often succeeded by tamas or by a kind of dryness or sometimes by a feeling in which I feel as a stranger. In this way the experiences are followed by such interrupting feelings. Kindly will you explain me the reasons behind this kind of process?

Sri Aurobindo: It is another part of your being that comes on the surface.

3/4/34: Mother,

Generally I feel the Mother's presence descending in inner self, but yesterday I had the experience that the Mother's presence descended surrounding me; and I felt as if I was broadening and so merging in the presence around me.

Sri Aurobindo: Both can and should be felt. After getting the inner consciousness one can get a wider consciousness extending to any distance around oneself—both should be filled with the presence of the Mother.

K: Another part of my being that comes on the surface follows immediately the higher experiences. What can it be due to?

Sri Aurobindo: There are many parts of the being, some open, some less open, some closed. All have to open to the higher experience.

6/4/34: Mother,

My past relations of the family and friends and mostly of sex are reviving during the day time. Sometimes when they begin to rise I am a little unconscious but very soon I become conscious of them and reject them. The Mother's presence is also descending and so it becomes easy to make them weak. They come repeatedly but then are weaker.

Are these suggestions from hostile forces for disturbance or they come from the subconscious due the pressure of sadhana?

Sri Aurobindo: From the subconscious.

K: And as the same relations rise repeatedly is it that any part in me consents to them?

Sri Aurobindo: There must be still an influence of them on some elements of the being. It takes time to get rid of them altogether.

K: I am not able to concentrate over the drawing which I have begun. Can it be due to this movement?

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, probably.

9/4/34: Mother,

Can there be any truth behind the social relations? If so what can it be?

Sri Aurobindo: It is truth of ordinary life—but it is not for the spiritual seeker.

K: At times I get into thoughts in which I find that I am involved in quarreling or becoming angry and other restless incidents. Ordinarily I have never been able to quarrel or beat anybody in actual life. I am surprised when I become conscious of

such thoughts. What movement can there be behind such thoughts?

Sri Aurobindo: In ordinary life your vital is under the control of the mind and psychic—in the dreams it becomes free and acts according to its instincts.

[Undated]: Mother,

I saw this vision today in meditation. The sword came from the left hand side and stood erect on the summit of the mountain. Will you kindly write to me the symbol of this?

Sri Aurobindo: Coming from the left, it must mean the sword of the Shakti—and the golden light would indicate Mahakali. It comes from the mountain-summit, that is the highest part of the consciousness to destroy all attacks or difficulties.

9/4/34: Mother,

Herewith I enclose a letter which I received today from my father. He writes to me very pathetically and mildly.

What should I do in this matter?

Sri Aurobindo: You can give him a kind answer, asking him not to grieve and explaining that you cannot go.

K: [*end of K's translation of his father's letter*] ["...Once you come satisfy us and then go, I do not like to cheat you. You believe me to be dead otherwise you cannot write no to me. You have obeyed every word of mine but this time you have clearly written no that is because the times are changing. Have mercy on somebody of the family. ["]]

He also writes about the difficulties of social customs and caste customs, about the marriages of my brothers and sister, about the hard life and his own sickness.

Sri Aurobindo: There is nothing new in all that, so I suppose there is nothing new either to say in reply.

11/4/34: ...I want a servant for cleaning the furniture and glass windows twice a week.

Formerly Shanti used to send the servant once a week for such extra work. Then it is stopped. I reminded him and he told me that he will arrange fixed days for fixed rooms. But he has not put it in practice. Will you kindly make the above arrangement for me?

Sri Aurobindo: We have told Kodandaraman to see to these things.

14-4-34: [*end?*] Since last three or four days I feel a little uneasiness before going to sleep. But last night I was disturbed much. I wanted to meditate before going to sleep, I tried but could not and so went to sleep. I did not get sleep and felt uneasiness, fatigue and suffocating effect on the brain.

What can be the reason for this kind of disturbance?

Sri Aurobindo: Be a little on your guard psychically when you meet X—put some guard between yourself and him or put us between you and him.

16/4/34: Mother,

I have finished the picture according to my capacity. The main theme of the picture is preserved and the surrounding background is also harmonious that is what I think. But I think the picture should be and can be finished more technically and artistically. I have felt it a weak point in me that I could not finish perfectly my pictures. In this one I want to overcome that weak point of mine and for that I will be glad to show the picture to the Mother and receive the instructions if the Mother can spare some time.

Sri Aurobindo: Mother will see and let you know tomorrow.

17/4/34: Mother,

When I was in the family life, that is before I came here, I was strongly attached to the family as all the members were affectionate to one another. After I decided to take up this life I have lost the feeling for the family members. Sometimes I have the idea that they might be suffering a little more due to my absence but then I have no feeling for them. In this way have I become harsh and indifferent to the family? What can be the true movement behind this?

Sri Aurobindo: When one enters the spiritual life, the family ties which belong to the ordinary nature, fall away—one becomes indifferent to the old things. This indifference is a release. There need be no harshness in it at all. To remain tied to the old physical affections would mean to remain tied to the ordinary nature and that would prevent the spiritual progress.

24/4/34: Mother,

May I hope to get the explanation from Sri Aurobindo about this last picture? What is the significance that lies behind it?

Sri Aurobindo: It gave the impression of the power of the expressed consciousness coming out of the unexpressed (and therefore apparently dark) Supreme.

[Krishnalal refers here to his painting “The Golden Purusha” which was distributed as the Darshan Day card of April 24, 1956 with the following message:

1956

29 février – 29 mars

Seigneur, Tu as voulu et je réalise:

Une lumière nouvelle point sur la terre,

Un monde nouveau est né,

Et les choses promises sont accomplies.

29 February – 29 March
 Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute:
 A new light breaks upon the earth,
 A new world is born,
 The things that were promised are fulfilled.

The Mother

24th April 1956

The manifestation of the Supramental upon earth is no more a promise but a living fact, a reality.

It is at work here, and one day will come when the most blind, the most unconscious, even the most unwilling shall be obliged to recognise it.

The Mother

[Interested readers may also refer to pages 1008, 1010 & 1011 of the November 2004 issue of Mother India]

4/May/34: Mother,

I have the idea to do some decorations on the walls of the library. For decoration I think of copying some floral designs of Ajanta in egg-tempera style with help of Anilkumar and others who would like to do the work.

Sri Aurobindo: Why not the Reception Room? The Library walls are hidden by bookcases.

K: I put this idea before the Mother for approval and advice.

Sri Aurobindo: It is a very good idea.

K: If it is approved I would like to see designs from the two volumes which Mother has got, and I will be very happy to invite Mother's selection of the designs.

Sri Aurobindo: Mother will call you one day for the purpose. She has only one book. You can take the book and make your selections and when they are ready Mother will call you.

Mother is asking for your pictures back.

[at the bottom of the page K had written: "Begun 7.6.34. Finished this work on 27.6.34."]

5/May/34: Mother,

May I know if any masonry work is to be done in the Reception Hall? If it is to be done and walls to be plastered I wish to get the portions of the walls which are to

be decorated plastered with great care so that for some years they may not crack and require any repairing. If the plaster which is already there is strong enough it will do for the painting purpose, only the white-washing will have to be rubbed off from the portions to be decorated, and a wall to be levelled because it is not even.

Sri Aurobindo: Ask Chandulal—tell him that Mother has sanctioned some painting, so whatever is needed must be done.

K: The colours to be used for wall painting are mostly earth and stone colours. In such colours red and yellow are available here. But for green a soft stone—Terre Verte—is to be ordered from Madras. If the Mother approves, Amrita can be asked to order one pound of Terre Verte through Venkatarama Shastri or Natesan.

Sri Aurobindo: Yes.

7/5/34: Mother,

Herewith I send a Gujarati magazine in which there is a colour-print of a picture by Ravishankar Raval—a friend of mine who came a few days back.

The picture is supposed to represent Purusha and Prakriti. May I know how far is the picture successful? Or as it is, what does it convey?

Sri Aurobindo: The picture is tolerably good, but the symbolism seems to me neither accurate nor profound—it is as if he had done the picture first and fixed the meaning afterwards.

18/5/34: Mother,

I send three drawings of designs for the crown. As I was asked to be very particular for the measurement of crown which was given to me I did not make any change in the general shape and so in two of my designs I am not quite free. Afterwards when I knew that a little change can be done in height I did some necessary change in the third design which was not finished like two others.

Sri Aurobindo: All the designs are very beautiful, so beautiful that the Mother does not want to send any of them over there—as it may be spoiled or not sent back. She will have them used for three embroideries on saris each by a different worker in the Ashram.

K: Can I buy some big papers and colours for wall-painting from the market and give the bills to Amrita?

Sri Aurobindo: Yes.

Mother [*on blue chit-paper*]: 19.5.34

Krishnalal,

Your crown-designs are very fine indeed.

I had this reproduction of a beautiful lacquer which, I thought, would interest you, so I am sending it with my blessings.

Mother [*on blue chit-paper*]: 19.5.34

Krishnalal,

I am sending you back the roll. The two drawings are extremely good and surely the effect on the wall will be excellent.

19/5/34: Mother,

I would like to see the other crown-designs before any of them is sent out if possible and if Mother has no objection.

Sri Aurobindo: Yes. Mother is sending. But Sanjiban's has already been sent.

K: Anilkumar and Sanjiban came to see my designs and I have shown them. [*rest is cut out*]

30/5/34: ...If it is on everite it can be taken out whenever necessary or removed to any other walls.

Sri Aurobindo: But will it hold on everite? Till now I think the attempts have not been successful.

K: I find it necessary to grind the colours finely for fresco-work. So for that the mortar and pestle of polished stone is required. Can Mother kindly arrange for that? I think it will be needed very often.

Sri Aurobindo: Speak of it to Rishabchand—he may have something.

31/5/34: Mother,

Rishabchand has got the mortar and pestle of rather big size and very rough as he says. I require them to be of polished stone so that colours can be ground into a very fine powder.

Sri Aurobindo: Enquire from people who are likely to know where it is to be found. Those we have are used for food or medicines, so cannot be used for painting. If one can be found in the bazaar, it can be brought.

K: Today at noon I had a talk with Chandulal as to where and how the everite should be fixed. Then he tried to explain me that everite will remain projecting at least at a distance of 3 to 4 cms. from the wall. I am not able to understand his point. I explained him my viewpoint that the painting being wall-decoration should remain in level with the wall or at the most the thickness of the everite may project. I put this point for Mother's consideration.

Sri Aurobindo: The everite cannot be fixed in the wall except with a frame of wood below. So how is it to be done? If not so fixed it will come out.

31/5/34: ...painting. As there is no need of doing this tempera painting on wet plaster it can be done directly on everite or wall surface, and so there is no fear of its falling off the surface.

[*Under this K pencilled "(colours mixed in yellow of egg)"*]

I have used a green of some kind of copper-salt on one of the everite pieces. I think that will serve for the green in this painting at least.

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, it is all right. It is better than to do on everite.

4/6/34: Mother,

I think of beginning the painting on everite from this Thursday in my room. For the preparation of the colours to be used, daily 3 to 4 eggs will be required. At times 6 eggs will be required. What should I do for its management?

Sri Aurobindo: Speak of it to Dyuman.

6/6/34: ...I have asked Sanjiban, Anilkumar and Vishnu that we begin work on Thursday but it seems only for the everite we have to postpone the work. The colours and the eggs and other materials are ready. Will Mother kindly see that they are sent in time if possible?

Sri Aurobindo: You will have some everite pieces today.

12/6/34: ...August.

(About Nishikant) In the case that he stays here up to August his request is that he may be permitted for the daily pranam and meditation.

He explained his idea to Nolini so he will also let you know.

Sri Aurobindo: Mother will see him at Pranam—he can come this morning.

12/6/34: [...] finished within two days.

In that case I put the suggestion before Mother that the repairing, if it is to be done, or white-washing or any other preliminary work for fixing the frames should begin now.

Sri Aurobindo: Speak to Chandulal about it.

K: My idea for the colour of the white-wash of the walls is that they should be of light almond colour, which I think will match with the colouring of the paintings.

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, if they can do it.

K: May I invite Mother's idea and suggestions about this?

14/6/34: ...asked me for my brushes and colours to which I replied that I could not give without the Mother's permission. I think I am not wrong in giving him that answer.

Sri Aurobindo: Quite right.

18/6/34: Mother,

To-morrow I require a coolie for half a day for grinding and sieving colours.

Mother: Ask him from Chandulal before 7.30 A.M.

27/6/34: Mother,

The tempera painting for the walls is finished today.

Four days back I had inquired from Amrita about the cup-board. He said that it was ready and might have gone for the application of green solignum. As I do not like that colour I asked him if grey colour can be applied to which he replied that that colour is not sanctioned but if I did not like green solignum he could manage to get it done with colourless solignum if the cup-board was not applied with the former one. The next day he told me that as the cup-board had not gone for solignum he had managed for colourless solignum. But today in the morning he gave me the news that he had made a mistake and that mine was already done in green solignum before I informed him first. And so today he asked me to write to Mother if I wanted to get the colour changed because he was not going to ask Mother about that. I said alright and was hesitating whether I should write or not.

But it seems that Amrita has put the matter before Mother because he told me in the evening, "Mother says that the grey colour is less in stock and is reserved for the windows and doors so if you are very particular you can prepare your colour and apply it by yourself."

As Mother seems to have said like that I might do it myself if Mother does not find any inconvenience anywhere and in that case I pray Mother for the permission for the zinc paint and necessary oil for that.

Sri Aurobindo: Yes—you can have the zinc paint and oil.

30/6/34: Mother,

To-morrow when I come for the interview can I bring two of the everite pieces of the tempera-painting to show them to Mother?

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, certainly.

4/7/34: ...The price for the stone is Rs. 1-4 as. per seer which is much less than what we heard. The terms are given to a merchant and I think are reasonable. Can I put order for it for one seer?

Mother: Yes.

K: Terre-verte (green stone) is also available, though its sample and price are not sent it seems its price is the same or about the same. So can I put order also for one seer of terre-verte?

Mother: Yes. The lapis-lazuli I had seen before was very deep blue like ultramarine blue. It is much more beautiful and probably it is that kind which is costly.

9/7/34: Mother,

Since last six or seven days I feel much pressure on the vital nature. Generally I feel surrounded by the ideas of sex-impulse. At this time I try to remain quiet and call down the Mother's or Sri Aurobindo's presence. But sometimes the impulse is

so strong that it does not allow to concentrate or to remain quiet.

In this what should be my general attitude to face it?

Sri Aurobindo: Take care about conversations, avoid all legitimations in the mind and keep yourself free from surrounding influences in the atmosphere.

16/7/34: Mother,

Yesterday in the evening some ideas were coming to me about sex-impulse. I tried to separate myself from them and was successful but a kind of loneliness in the vital followed. How should this loneliness be avoided?

Sri Aurobindo: It comes because some part of the vital is clinging to the sex idea, and when you separate yourself from it, it feels the loneliness of frustrated desire. You must bring the light into the part so that it may change.

K: After that at night before going to sleep I tried to put the Mother's protection. But in dream I saw a being in the form of a dark woman who came and sat near my legs and asked me for sexual intercourse. I did not consent but might be leaning to consent. Before any action of the sex could take place with the being the sexual substance passed and I woke up.

Sri Aurobindo: It must be the result of the ideas that passed in the evening. Rejected from the conscious they returned at night upon the subconscious.

K: At times I have such dreams and the sexual substance passes. In this where am I mistaken? During waking hours I try to be alert and watchful even then how am I so much open to sexual impulse in the dreams?

Sri Aurobindo: Even when one is alert, some part of the vital—as is shown by your experience of the loneliness—is not yet quite free. This aids the subconscious to send up these dreams. If you can bring the light and the will to change into this part, the dreams will have less hold, although they cease entirely only when all parts of the vital and physical are free even in their less conscious parts where mechanical responses still linger even after the mind and higher vital have rejected the sex impulse.

[Undated]: ...win that habit of mine.

But I have seen that I never felt happy or I never justified my those actions. Always afterwards I would pray God to save me from that. And perhaps so I am not drowned in it. Here in this atmosphere I feel quite free of that, though at times past memories come and soon pass away. May I hope complete forgetfulness of that past?

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, certainly; the past does not count once you have resolutely turned your back upon it.

18/7/34: Mother,

I send three of Nishikanto's pictures which he wanted me to forward to Mother. He also wanted me to write to Mother for Mother's criticism on them.

May I hope to know Mother's idea about the pictures for myself?

Sri Aurobindo: Many details of the execution show a remarkable skill, e.g. the luminosity of the mountains, the water is alive etc. What is faulty in the composition as a whole is the lack of unity and harmony, and the absence of the tranquillity and greatness which one would expect in a mountain scene. Instead there is a chaotic agitation. But all the same the paintings are by no means ordinary or negligible.

(19.7.34): ...for the permission of Darshana on August 15th [*for Kanta*].

Sri Aurobindo: It is not advisable that she should come now.

20/7/34: Mother,

I send herewith two portrait studies which I did recently.

I will be much glad to invite suggestions from the Mother because I have not much experience in portrait studies.

Sri Aurobindo: In the portrait of Vishnu the shading of the part in light is strong and it gives a confused appearance and kind of restlessness to the drawing. The expression conveys the outer disharmony of the nature, but the harmony behind is not brought out.

The portrait of Jaswant is much better.

(To be continued)

S. V. BHATT

Art is skill, that is the first meaning of the word. —Eric Gill

Every artist dips his brush in his own soul, and paints his own nature into his pictures. —Henry Ward Beecher

*What is real is not the external form, but the essence of things ... it is impossible for anyone to express anything essentially real by imitating its exterior surface.
—Brancusi*

What a society deems important is enshrined in its art. —Harry Broudy

A work of art which did not begin in emotion is not art. —Paul Cézanne

*Painting from nature is not copying the object; it is realizing one's sensations.
—Paul Cézanne*

DUTCH PAINTING IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

(Courtesy *Sandhitsu* where the original Bengali was published in August 2005)

RIGHT at the outset, I must tell you that I am no expert in the field of painting; I am neither an art-critic nor a historian conversant with the subject from that angle. I simply consider myself to be an *amateur* who loves to visit art galleries and exhibitions. I have seen art collections in several countries of Europe and been charmed by them, I have enjoyed and appreciated them and tried to gather as much knowledge as possible about art and artists on the whole. Even today, whenever the opportunity arises, I go to see modern or contemporary art exhibitions. I have learnt about art and appreciation of art through books and lectures on the subject. My interest in this field dates back to quite a few years. So, when the editor of *Sandhitsu* asked me to write something on Dutch painting, in spite of my initial doubts and hesitation, I accepted.

The seventeenth century is a unique era in Dutch art. Before that too, there were artists born in Holland and after that also in every century, nay, every decade, several artists have enriched the art in many ways. Some of them have even brought about a revolution in western art in general. Van Gogh, the Dutch artist of the latter part of the nineteenth century is in the history of art an unforgettable name.

Many outstanding artists appeared in seventeenth century Holland, some of whom were real geniuses. Never anywhere had so many aspects and such a variety of paintings found expression at one time in so small an area. What is the reason behind this vast creative work and inspiration? What are the special features of Dutch art? ... These two questions need to be answered, if we want to understand the subject.

Four or five hundred years ago, the boundaries of the Dutch-speaking regions were not the same as those of the country in Northern Europe we call Holland today, known politically as “Netherlands”, which means “Low Countries”. The different European nations had not yet taken shape. Flanders, the Dutch-speaking province of Belgium, was still part of the Netherlands. Present-day Holland could be called the Northern Low Countries and Flanders the Southern Low Countries. Quite often, nowadays, the art of the North is referred to as Dutch and that of the South, as Flemish.

The history and political geography of sixteenth century Europe are rather intricate.¹ The power of the Pope, head of the Catholic Church situated in Rome, was

1. India during this period was ruled in the North by the Moghuls who had also conquered part of the South. Theirs was supposed to have been an administration marked for its efficiency, opulence and brilliance in art and culture. In Europe it was a time when French culture was spreading its influence everywhere. In fact, Descartes, the father of Western philosophy, was a French thinker who believed that serious matters could be discussed only in one's mother tongue and wrote in French. He spent twenty years of his life in Holland (1629-49) where, with his student, the Princess Elizabeth, daughter of the ousted Bohemian king, he discussed philosophy and the different aspects of Science. His book published in 1637 has all the conviction and warmth of a manifesto, *Discours de la méthode*, where he defined the four steps to be taken by the human mind to achieve logical independent thinking.

(Translator's note)

strong not only in matters concerning religion but in politics also. Temporal power had intoxicated the Catholic institution. The vanity of wielding so much power over the people along with bigotry in religion created a frighteningly dangerous situation. After the Italian Renaissance,² there were many people who could not unquestioningly accept the superstitions of the Middle Ages and the illogical faith in the Church. Some even started criticising the malpractices of religion. The way to liberate oneself from religious blindness and narrow superstitions was revealed during the Renaissance through the influence of intellectual approach and scientific observation. But Religion and Politics started using Science for increasing their own power. Science is an independent way of thinking; so, out of fear, Religion tried to strangle it to death in many ways. All who criticised the unenlightened and illogical teachings of the Church were burned to death. The greatest of these victims, who fell a prey to this cruel suppression practised by the Church, was Giordano Bruno.

If we look at the political situation in the Europe of those times we find it subdivided into many kingdoms large and small. The king of Spain was powerful. The empire of Charles V extended over a huge area of Europe, not only Spain, but Austria, Germany, the Low Countries, North and South, part of Italy and Peru and Mexico in America were all under his sway. But in the present context, it is mainly the connection between the Low Countries and Spain that has to be considered.

The huge empire of Spain was not ruled by one centralised administration. Within its borders several countries and provinces existed under the domination of feudal kings who did not refrain from wars, menaces, murders or oppression to secure their power or increase their sway over a larger area in the region. They opposed or supported the Catholic Church according to their own interests of the moment. The national awareness of to-day was not yet there, it had only started taking shape. The idea of the language quite naturally combined with the idea of the nation. Because of the influence of the Church, in earlier times Latin was used in all educated circles. Gradually, after the Renaissance, the regional languages gained ground. The connections with the language started becoming more and more precise. Apart from that, the Renaissance mentality was not ready to accept without question the supremacy of the Church. On the other hand, the Church too did not want to lose in any way its

2. The Renaissance in Europe was initiated in Italy by Petrarch in literature and learning, by Giotto and after him by Masaccio, in art. It was a revival of art, letters and learning which grew in depth and influence through the 14th, 15th and the 16th centuries. It marks the transition from the Middle Ages to the modern times. Some people think it is a complete breakaway from the medieval times but that did not happen suddenly at one go. The legacy of the earlier times was visible in many ways in the works of great artists and writers of the Renaissance period... "The Middle Ages had lived strongly and with a sort of deep and sombre force, but, as it were, always under the shadow of death and under the burden of an obligation to aspire through suffering to a beyond; their life is bordered on one side by the cross and on the other by the sword. The Renaissance brings in the sense of a liberation from the burden and the obligation; it looks at life and loves it in excess... It is Hellenism returning with its strong sense of humanity and things human, *nihil humani alienum* [Nothing human is alien to me], but at first a barbarised Hellenism, unbridled and extravagant, riotous in its vitalistic energy, too much overjoyed for restraint and measure," says Sri Aurobindo in *The Future Poetry*, CWSA, Vol. 26, pp. 69-70. (*Translator's note*)

own power in religious or temporal matters. The Church was involved in many conspiracies and activities competing with others. Lawlessness and the lowering of values often go hand in hand with gain in power. The Pope in Rome held sway over all Catholics. To increase the sovereignty of the Church, the Popes encouraged some wealthy and powerful individuals and pardoned all their sinful acts so that their road to Heaven was open and secure.

We have already pointed out that some people could not accept the malpractices of the Church. Foremost among them was Martin Luther of Germany. The cleansing began. But the Catholic Church was unwilling to accept the corrections suggested by the reformers as that would diminish its own power. A confrontation between the Catholics and the opposing Protestants began. Kings and nobles, big and small, joined them as and when the opportunity arose. Because of this war of religions in Europe thousands of people lost their lives.

One of the aims of the opposing faction was to remove the ostentations of the Church and its misuse of power. According to historians and other writers, the Pope, the Cardinals and highly-placed priests exceeded by far the wealth and pomp of kings and nobles of the times.

To replace this ostentation by the Christian ideal of poverty and spread again the ethics of the Ten Commandments given by Moses was the aim of the movement initiated by Luther and, later on, joined by the French reformer Calvin. The poor and the uncared-for commoners of society, especially in Northern Europe, joined the Protestants by the hundreds, heedless of the danger of cruel punishments. Some kings and nobles also accepted their leadership, either attracted by their religious idealism, or, simply because that would increase their political power.

The Protestants in the Low Countries started a movement seeking independence. They wanted to be ruled according to the law of their own country by their own people. They also demanded the freedom to practise the religion of their choice. In 1556, the nobles and the Governor of the Low Countries sent a letter to Margareta, sister of the former king of Spain Charles V and aunt to the ruling king, Philip II; they appealed for Protestants to have the freedom to practise the religion they believed in. Margareta agreed to their demand. After that, many Protestants who had left their country came back to their motherland. They revealed openly many proofs of the oppression practised by the Catholic powers. People got excited and revolted.

On the other hand, in the Southern Low Countries, the financial situation worsened. The workers of the cloth-mills and the ports were discontented and agitated: for, although they were dying of hunger, they found no perceptible change in the show of wealth among the religious bodies and the Catholic Church. These dissatisfied people attacked the Catholic establishments all over the Low Countries and plundered costly objects made of gold and silver. The Calvinists had taught the people that idol-worship was wrong: so, in the Catholic churches statues and pictures of Mary, Jesus, the Saints and other religious paintings were destroyed in great numbers. These

Iconoclastic Riots of the year 1556 are an important landmark in the history of Dutch painting.³

To put down the revolt, Philip II sent the cruel and stern Alva to the Low Countries. Two of the rebel leaders were beheaded. Alva's methods of repression worked for some time. But, step by step, the rebels succeeded in occupying the greater part of the Northern Low Countries. The Protestants of the South came away to the North and the Dutch Republic was established there. A new era began in the history of this democratic country of seven constituent provinces. The Protestants in the Republic were greater in number; whereas, in the Southern Low Countries, the influence of the Catholics remained unchanged.

Our subject is related not only to the political and the religious but also the financial revolution. After Portugal and Spain, it was the Dutch who started ruling the sea-routes to America in the West and India and greater India in the East.⁴ The Dutch Republic became wealthy through commerce with the outer world. One section of its society earned a great deal and became extremely rich. The rise of the Protestants, the formation of the Republic and the newly-earned money through commerce, all three have much to do with Dutch art of the seventeenth century.

The historical, political and religious changes in the country brought about a new social and cultural set-up which was the true self of Holland. We shall see later on how this situation affected Dutch art.

If we do not now touch upon the distinctive features of Dutch art, it will be difficult to understand the special qualities of independence and talent of the artists of the seventeenth century.

In Indian aesthetics, two lines of approach in art have been defined: one, the "God-Reflection", the other, the "World-Reflection". The second depicts images of the earth, while the first gives form to the imagination, or, expresses what is perceived in meditation. The aim of the artist through "God-Reflection" is to create something beyond Nature: he does not find the visible world faultless or beyond criticism; that is why, he devotes himself to the creation of wholly perfect pictures by eliminating the defects of ordinary forms. The earthly woman becomes an ideal goddess, un-

3. 1556 was an important year for India also. Akbar had ascended the throne of Delhi that year (1556) at the age of 13. Little did he know that, later on, his mind would try to embrace all religions and find for his subjects a way towards unity and brotherhood. The Portuguese (Vasco da Gama—1498) were already active in the west coast of India, for the past fifty years or so. Trade with them and the Arabs had made the Hindu kingdom of Vijayanagara, in the South, a very rich and powerful empire. (*Translator's note*)

4. The Dutch had played an important role among foreign traders in the India of the times. They mostly outdid the others because their only aim was successful trade: they had built all along the route to India factories which were guarded by their own soldiers. Their trade was very well planned. Tavernier, the famous French traveller writes: "The Hollanders usually carry away six or seven thousand bales, and would carry away more, if the merchants of Tartary and the Moghul empire did not oppose them; for, they buy up as much as the Hollanders, the rest the natives keep to make their stuffs." The Dutch exported to the Philippines, Java and the neighbouring islands silk, carpets and satins mixed with silk and gold threads. The Dutch also transported silk goods from Bengal and Gujarat to East Africa and to Pegu (Burma—*Myanmar*). (*Translator's note*)

seizable and beyond the senses. The artist who adopts “World-Reflection”, on the other hand, paints the visible world of the senses—men and women as they are, our physical life and everyday surroundings. In art, according to the place and age, one or the other gained in predominance. As a result of the trends of the times, sometimes one line of approach, and sometimes the other was considered to be greater. But for the connoisseur and the art-lover great art can be created in both the approaches. “If it is art and gives true pleasure,” says Abanindranath Tagore, “the dream of the heavenly world is to the artist quite as real and beautiful as images of the earth that are equally real and inconceivably attractive.”

The main line followed in Dutch art corresponds to what is known in Indian aesthetics as “World-Reflection”, that is to say, picturisation of things as perceived by the senses. In the seventeenth century this trend took a new turn in Dutch art. “World-Reflection” had already originated there in the fifteenth century in the Southern Low Countries but, at that time, the main aim of the artist was to work on religious themes. Much of that art was meant to educate people, to make religious teachings more concrete to the ordinary human understanding. The subject matter was mainly drawn from the Jewish-Christian legends or from folk tales and history. But realistic forms were used so that people might see with their own eyes the hellish punishments that would be the consequence of sinful acts and the heavenly rewards of good deeds. Adam and Eve as forerunners of the human race are supposed to have been created in the very image of God, and yet, Jan van Eyck, the great Flemish artist of the fifteenth century, has painted them as real human beings—there is no question here of any extra-terrestrial beauty. Viewers and critics of the nineteenth century, guided by the precepts of their age, had found these figures extremely ugly. To the eyes of Fromentin, the famous French art-critic, they look like savage creatures; no one knows from which jungle they have appeared, not ashamed in any way of their own lack of beauty.

This picture went against all concepts of beauty of the Romantic age and was quite outside Fromentin’s range of appreciation, and yet, he had to admit that in the world of visual art no one could be compared to van Eyck.

After van Eyck, Hieronymus Bosch in the Northern Low Countries and Pieter Brueghel the Elder in the South most often reproduced, even in their pictures on supernatural themes, the physical appearance of common human beings, wildlife, flowers and plants, and natural scenery as perceived by the senses. The subjects are drawn faultlessly, executed and presented to the spectator in the fullness of their reality. The sceneries are life-like, not in any imaginary world, but stretching out towards earthly horizons. In human figures also, it is the physical man who appears on the canvas in a vivid way. All the aspects of man are revealed—the ludicrous, the ugly, the cruel, the diseased and the blameworthy. But in the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries, “World-Reflection” usually was expressed in the context of “God-Reflection”. Brueghel’s pictures of the seasons—he has done wonderful paintings of

the four seasons—are entirely of the earth. But realism is fully evident even in his representations of Greek or Biblical legends. A Biblical story speaks of the innumerable innocent children killed by the soldiers at the orders of King Herod. There is a picture by Brueghel on this theme. The artist has not tried to show an imaginary Israel of Herod's time but has painted a scene of the Southern Low Countries. The village in the picture is familiar to him, just as the peasants are none other than his countrymen, and, the soldiers are Spaniards. This great creation describes ironically the contemporary political situation of his time.

Even if the main subject matter is religious or legendary, we see in many paintings of this period, natural surroundings, normal human life, games and amusements, daily activities or scenes of farms and farmers. In some pictures the artist reproduces material things as they are. Very often rich people commissioned artists to paint on religious themes; these they donated to the Church and every painting had to include a semblance of the donor. Rich and respectable people as well as high-ranking priests got their portraits done.

In the sixteenth century the influence of Caravaggio,⁵ an Italian artist, brought about in the Low Countries a major change in portrait-painting. Kings and Queens, Popes and Cardinals, or nobles were not Caravaggio's models; his models were the common man—the drunkard, the gambler, the soldier. He was familiar with the lower strata of society—the half-lighted world of the tavern has been depicted through his pictures. It is from Italy that a few sixteenth century artists of the Low Countries imported this realism of Caravaggio. We have to remember this backdrop of the earlier evolution when we consider the predominance of “World-Reflection” and realism in the Dutch art of the seventeenth century. But let me say one thing here. Mere reproduction of a material object, however accurate is not art. Someone who has learnt the technicalities can imitate Nature. *Yad drishtam tallikhitam* (What I have seen, that I have expressed) may cross the boundaries of craft but may not be true art at all! It is difficult to explain in words what makes a picture art or a mere imitation of the visible. For that, you need to have a personal insight into painting. Quite often, we look at a thing without really seeing it. We have to educate ourselves so as to be able to do that. If the eye is not trained we are usually satisfied with a superficial impression. The first stage of this training teaches us to observe separately different parts of the picture. Even if at first glance we look at the full painting, we cannot grasp it as a whole. After we have learnt to see in detail, our observation gradually registers the furniture pieces in the vicinity, the mirror on the wall, the reflection there of either another face or maybe a part of the room itself, the carelessly discarded pair of shoes on the floor, and an open book on the table, all these gradually

5. Caravaggio (1569-1609) Italian painter, head of the school of the “Naturalisti” (i.e. unmodified imitators of ordinary nature). He had adopted a style of potent contrasts of light and shadow. His best-known pictures are: “The Entombment of Christ” (Vatican); “St. Sebastian” (Rome); “Alof de Vignacourt and his Page” (Louvre); and “Supper at Emmaus”. (*Translator's note*)

strike the eye. After that, if we are aware of the technical side, we understand also the brush-stroke, the lines and the composition. Thus, seen again through a trained eye, the significance of the picture can at last be understood in its totality. But only when it touches the depths of our being and overwhelms also the heart, can it be called true art. The eye which grasps all the aspects is a deeper vision, not our usual way of seeing which is often incomplete. When we look at a picture, whatever enters the mental understanding, not the perception of the heart, is not quite faultless. This does not happen only to us, many well-known art-critics and connoisseurs of painting make such mistakes. Our perceptions lack purity. That is why, what is considered great art in one period may not be appreciated by viewers belonging to another age. But, in the long run, there is one critic whose verdicts are more or less accepted by all, and that critic is Time. The real merit of all great art is judged rather sternly by Time. Many have not been able to appreciate the three greatest Dutch artists of the seventeenth century in the right light: Frans Hals, Rembrandt and Vermeer.

(To be continued)

RANAJIT SARKAR

(Translated by Amita Sen, with help from Shyamoli Kapoor)

Choose only one master—Nature.

*

Painting is the grandchild of nature. It is related to God.

*

Practise what you know, and it will help to make clear what now you do not know.

(Quotes from Rembrandt)

MOMENTS, ETERNAL

(Continued from the issue of April 2006)

The Body and Integral Yoga

How can one ever forget those days, Anju, Paroma? You too have grown up right from childhood under the shade of the Mother's Love. The Mother's laughter, the Mother's words are still glowing in your memory's treasure-house. Once you have known and received the Divine Mother Herself as your mother and as your friend then the very tenor of your life changes. On the heart's lyre is always heard the strain:

Ey sansarey dori karey raja jaar ma maheshwari.

(Whom need I fear in this world, O king, when my mother is Mother Maheshwari herself?)

As a human being rests in happy confidence in the shade of a tree, we too began gradually growing up trustingly in the shade of the Mother's Love. Without a thought, without a worry but with one single aim: to keep moving towards the Mother. There was no rest in this movement nor an end. From time immemorial we human beings have been moving towards Her, carrying the glowing torch of aspiration in our hand. A hundred Nachiketas have been born within us or rather the Mother awakened them with Her golden wand. What endless questions, endless curiosity in those hundred Nachiketas about this new life! And so on every Wednesday and Friday the Mother would sit in front of the map of India in the Playground and answer those endless questions in easy French in a simple way. The Mother wanted to light in Her children an ardent longing for the Divine, for Light, for Ananda, for Freedom, for Immortality. And year after year, those inexhaustible question-answer sessions carried us human beings forward in that conscious yearning for the Divine.

Like the sunflower, we were always turned to the Mother and our new life unfolded. A sense of total trust and openness was instilled in us in every cell by the Mother, our universal Mother. Let me give you some instances of this total openness and trust. Whatever the little ones do is extraordinary, isn't it? You have a fever? Go and tell Mother. The Mother looks at the little boy for a few seconds. A smile dawns on the boy's face. As soon as he wakes up from sleep, his fever has disappeared! What? Did I ever have fever?

I am reminded here of Kaké, Tara and Lata's brother. After finishing all Her work in the Playground, the Mother used to sit and attentively watch the captains' exercises. With limitless patience Pranab would teach each captain vaulting, parallel bars, freehand exercises and all kinds of other things. During this time, I would sit with Gauri and several others near the Mother. One day, suddenly, Kaké who must have been about four then, came out of Dortoir (a children's boarding in the

Playground) and went straight in front of the Mother. Very quietly he took the Mother's footstool from under Her Feet and sat down near Her without the slightest fear or hesitation. He looked at the Mother, smiled a little and then became absorbed in watching the captains exercising. The Mother too smiled tenderly at Kaké. And from then Kaké would regularly come and sit on the Mother's footstool near Her. Like a sweet little puppy.

Hema and Prema too did something similar. The Mother was sitting, watching the tug-of-war at the Sportsground with tremendous interest. All of a sudden two bright little pretty girls appeared from nowhere and came and sat down near the Mother's Feet as if that spot had been kept for them. They sat there and started watching the game attentively. We were quite astounded to see that the two little girls had not the slightest fear or hesitation in doing this. Like two puppies they sat near the Mother's Feet in total openness and trust. The Mother kept looking at them from time to time. The little ones had this same kind of relationship. They looked upon the Mother as their best friend. And on the strength of this intimacy and openness they began to progress. The Mother's Grace and the children's boundless trust began working even in the atoms of the body. The Mother has asked for this work to be done? That was it! Everyone ran excitedly to accomplish that work, however difficult or strenuous it might be. A flood of ananda flowed over the Ashram then.

From 1950, the activities in the Playground were in full swing. Before the sporting activities started, the captain of each respective group would assemble his boys and girls in a line. The children were all quiet and disciplined. It started with 'concentration'. The body was first consecrated at the Mother's Feet before starting the activities. And there was another 'concentration' at the end of these activities. During the second 'concentration' even as they offered all the activities they had done that day, a silent prayer went up from each of us that we may be blessed with a healthy body. Such a great way of doing karmayoga and sadhana simultaneously (in the guise of sports!). This was taking place for the first time, not just in the Ashram, but on the whole earth! To have children doing the sadhana! And the Integral Yoga on top of it! And this *agni-tapasya* started with work on the body. The Playground became the field for life's sadhana. Unknown to the children the great work was initiated to enable the Mother's Force and Light to work even in the gross human body.

That is why I said sadhana in the guise of sports! How difficult this sadhana is! You cannot ignore the body. *Annam Brahman*, Matter also is Brahman! Until now the body had been rejected from the path of sadhana but now the Mother radically changed the course of such thinking. So great is the weight of this change that we might be able to understand its full import only in the future. The Divine Light shall break upon this earthly body itself.

The elderly watched the younger ones with great affection and stupefied wonder as the Mother's new unimaginable mode of action unfolded! The seriousness and

sobriety of speech and action brought about by centuries of hard and severe *tapasya* began melting under the glow of the children's cheerful energy. The elderly too began participating in the Mother's new way of action. They felt as if rejuvenated in body, mind and spirit.

As soon as we entered the Playground we all felt a new atmosphere, as if we were in fairyland. As if a festival of ananda was on. The solemn seriousness of the elderly was removed by the Mother. And the elderly too with new-found eagerness joined joyfully in the Mother's karmayoga, this sadhana of the transformation of the body. They began mixing with the children as friends. Nolini-da, Pavitra-da, Amrita-da, Dyuman-bhai, Purani-ji, Nirod-da and many others became our best friends. We could speak with them most freely. In the beginning we used to say about them (of course, behind their backs!) that these were people who were forbidden to laugh! When the elderly got into their group uniforms they started feeling young! What enthusiasm they put into their Marching and exercise! Rolling in the dust just like kids! The Mother had wiped out the notion of age from all of us. All began breathing the air of the New World in the Playground. I feel like saying:

*Meditation forget, leave flowers aside!
Let clothes tear, on dust-clouds let's ride!
In Her karmayoga let us join all,
What if from our bodies sweat does fall!*

Nolini-da's eightieth birthday was wonderful proof of this notion of age having been wiped out from the grown-ups' mind. The devotees from Calcutta, the children of the Mother all decided to celebrate Nolini-da's eightieth birthday with great festivity.

They asked for the Mother's permission but She refused saying:

You are trying to spoil my work. Here I am trying to wipe out the notion of age from Nolini's mind and there you want to put the weight of age on his shoulders! That won't do.

Nolini-da says:

I may narrate here a little incident concerning me personally. It was with regard to the question of age. When someone informed Mother that they wanted to celebrate, perhaps it was my eightieth birthday, in a magnificent manner, a gala celebration, Mother roared out: "No, no, you are spoiling my work. All the while I was trying to make him forget his age and you are trying to insist on his age."

Age also is a thing to be forgotten.

The elderly had understood that the sadhana for the transformation of the body had now begun. A great change had come about in the life of the Ashram.

I remember the year 1941. I had come with Tapati and our father for the first time. It was for the Darshan of 15th August, Sri Aurobindo's birthday. It is impossible to forget that tranquil, pure atmosphere. One automatically became indrawn on entering the Ashram. Such a massive peace reigned over the Ashram! Every sadhak and sadhika was in a meditative state. They spoke very little. Every moment of their life was a conscious endeavour to consecrate themselves at the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's Feet. It is thanks to them that we have received clear directions and guidance in dealing with the various problems and difficulties on the path of sadhana, in the ways of preparing oneself for this path. They used to write innumerable letters to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo about their difficulties. Every volume of *Letters of Sri Aurobindo* was such a help to all of us.

These were the same people who on the Mother's guidance began participating in the Playground activities. They resolved to try and harmonise the inward and the outward life with the aim of following this new path of sadhana: *All life is Yoga*. They took to it with great ease and simplicity. Nolini-da has described beautifully how these people felt on entering the Playground:

...As soon as we stepped into the playground, a new atmosphere enveloped us, a new life full of joy, happiness and delight and freedom. When we used to put on our group uniform, we felt quite different from what we were normally. Old people with their blue shorts in our group, really old people—felt very young, youthful and trotting about as if they had left their age behind with all their cares.

Let me now tell you something about the elderly women. They too began participating in the Playground activities, in daily Marching and other sports. They did not feel any hesitation or difficulty in adapting to shorts. They had all gone through the grind of worldly life from a very young age. Their lives had been lived within very narrow confines and constraints. They broke the confines of that rigid life and society in order to take up the path of Integral Yoga. And they deserve all our respect. On the Mother's instruction these grown-up women let go instantaneously of all of their social habits and traditions. These grown-up women were proof of how easily the Mother's Force works with women. In a second the Mother broke the age-old shackles that had bound women so inextricably. Sahana-di, Amiya-di, Aruna-di (Sahana-di's elder sisters), Rani-di, Swarna-di (Minu's mother), Usha-di (Tejen-da's wife), Mota Kakima (Pranab's aunt), Prafullamayi-di (Pranab's mother), Vimla-di, Abha-di and many other elderly women took to shorts quite easily and joined the Marching. In the General Marching everyone, old, young, men, women, boys, girls participated with a lot of gusto. You cannot imagine how difficult it was for the elderly

women to do this Marching.

Shorts! And on elderly women besides! There was a flutter all around. The Mother wanted to show through them that there was no difference between men and women. It was difficult even for the disciples of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo to accept easily that girls should wear shorts, not to mention people from outside. How many letters full of criticism, anger and spiteful slander were sent to the Mother.

For Her, the Marching was a challenge. Be it society, be it the world, be it age, nothing could dissuade Her. The most amazing thing was that these women had been wearing saris right from the age of ten or so. And their saris were worn in a very traditional style. Always under the strict eye of the elderly in the family. Even the young girls were not spared. Thus it is easy to understand what a huge challenge it was for these women to suddenly get into shorts. The elderly men did not have this feeling, though. They did not have to go through any revolution as far as their dress was concerned.

Eternal Sacrifice

My mind often goes back to the memories of that evening...

Pranab had just given the solemn order for 'Rassemblement' in the Playground and everybody ran to their spots in their respective group. The Mother came out of Her room and stood in front of the map of India. Four or five of us girls—Minnie-di, Milli-di, Violet, Gauri and I—always waited for the Mother near the map. The Mother came in front of the map of India, stretched out Her arms on either side and said:

"Je suis crucifiée." (I am crucified.)

Hardly had these words fallen on our ears that we cried out. Without even my knowing, I brought down the Mother's arms with a brisk movement declaring loudly: "Never, never! This can never be!"

How mind-boggling! We were speechless with pain and grief. *I am crucified!* Why did the Mother utter these words? What was Her sorrow? What was Her pain?

It was but natural to think of Jesus Christ. He had to bear so much suffering and persecution and in the end he was put on the cross. The Mother told us that Jesus Christ had come down to bring Light and Love to humanity on the earth. But man's ingratitude was such that man crucified him. But it was for this very humanity that his final prayer went up: *O Lord, forgive them for they know not what they do.*

Many centuries prior to this, another incarnation of the Divine had come down to the earth. His aim was to spread divine Love amongst humanity. But people began chasing him in order to kill him. They inflicted numberless wounds on his body as he continued to flee across the desert. Suddenly in the middle of this barren desert he saw a bush and ran to rest in its little shade. And in order to protect him from these heartless humans, all of a sudden this little bush became enormous. No one noticed

him as they went past this bush. They did not have the slightest suspicion that the one they were trying to kill had in fact taken refuge in that bush and was peacefully preparing to leave his body. Each drop of his blood as it fell on the branches of this bush turned into a crimson flower. What an exquisitely beautiful flower! The Mother called this flower *Divine's Love* and on Kali-puja day She would distribute this flower to us in a packet as Her blessing. What an amazing incident! We had heard this story from the Mother Herself in the Playground. The Mother also told us that this flower was for us a symbol and an expression of the Divine's Love. This story is a Chaldean legend.

Love, gentleness, tenderness are not always destined for man. All those who came down here to spread Love, gentleness and tenderness underwent only pain and suffering. That is why when we heard the Mother say *I am crucified* we could not hold our emotion. A mysterious subtle smile could be perceived on the Mother's face.

A dream of long ago comes to mind. In the dream I was freely moving in a vast, uninhabited house. On entering a very large room I noticed that seated on a high throne far away the Mother was crying profusely. Both Her hands were placed together on Her lap and Her head was bowed. I had never seen such a picture of sorrow. The Mother went on crying! Taken aback, I stood beside the door. There was not a soul in the house. I could not see anybody in this room either. A massive peace reigned all around. Seeing the Mother crying in such a setting I too could not stop my tears. One question kept returning again and again from within: What pain troubles Her? What grief? I do not know how long I remained in this state. Then suddenly I awoke. The Mother was crying! I felt a heaviness the whole day. The dream came back again and again in the midst of all kinds of activities.

I found out only much later by reading about the Mother's aspect of "The Mother of Sorrows" in *Savitri* that my dream had indeed some truth and then I understood the pain.

We have seen the Mother's eyes well up with tears very often. We came to understand only much later that the Mother's feeling for every human being, every living creature, every plant arose from Her Love, Tenderness and Compassion. She had come down to the earth in a human form. Perhaps that was why Her Love and Compassion were expressed in tears in order to feel Her children's pain and suffering.

I have been pity, leaning over pain
And the tender smile that heals the wounded heart...

(CWSA, Vol. 34, p. 504)

And look at the coincidence: the Mother asked me to recite that very passage about "The Mother of Sorrows" from *Savitri* for the 1st December programme in 1953. Our mother (Bibhavati) had left her body the same year on 12th October and

we were quite stunned and pained by her passing. As if someone had torn off my skin from my body. And so during this painful period our mother's illness-racked, pain-afflicted face would naturally come up before me while I was memorising these lines.

One day the Mother took me to Her Interview room in the Playground in order to see how I had been progressing with memorising these lines. After March Past I quietly followed the Mother to Her Interview room. And there in front of the Mother all by myself I began reciting lines about one of Her own aspects! It is impossible to express in words the pain I experienced while I was reciting these lines:

I have become the sufferer and his moan,
I have lain down with the mangled and the slain,
I have lived with the prisoner in his dungeon cell.
Heavy on my shoulders weighs the yoke of Time:
Nothing refusing of creation's load,
I have borne all and know I still must bear...

(*Ibid.*, p. 505)

It took me a while to collect myself after finishing the recitation. I saw the Mother looking at me fixedly, Her eyes brimming with tears. After some time She softly said: "The way you felt when Bibhavati left her body, as if 'someone had torn off your very skin from your body', I feel that same pain all the time and I bear it. Now you can probably understand how much pain and suffering I must undergo. I quietly go on carrying forever the weight of this indelible pain of the universe."

I am in all that suffers and that cries.

(*Ibid.*, p. 504)

At these words from the Mother a flooding pain overwhelmed me from within. And I understood why that day the Mother had flung Her arms on either side in front of the Indian map and exclaimed "*Je suis crucifiée*". I realised that the Mother was taking upon herself all the pain and suffering and sorrow of creation. And the deep significance of this aspect of the Mother is "the Divine Mother's eternal sacrifice".

(*To be continued*)

PRITI DAS GUPTA

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

I OFFER YOU, O LIGHT...

I offer you, O Light,
My two eyes;
Now I see you in all skies.

I offer you, O Pure,
My humble nose;
I smell you now in Heaven's rose.

I offer you, O Sweet,
My eager ear;
Everywhere your flute now I hear.

I offer you, O Wisdom,
My brain-cells;
There come from all sides Truth's angels.

I offer you, O Power,
My two hands;
At ease now they execute your commands.

I offer you, O Love,
My human heart;
Of you now it grows a part.

I offer you, O Consciousness,
My entity;
See, I merge in your Infinity.

ARUN SEN

THE ADVENTURE OF CONSCIOUSNESS—INDIA’S SPIRITUAL EVOLUTION*

SRI AUROBINDO and the Mother present us with a radically new way of living, a dynamic philosophy and a positive vision for the future. They have shown us that the truth does not lie in running away from life but in remaining in it, to transform it, divinise it, so that the Divine can manifest here, in this physical world. They confirm that a day will come when even the gross substance of Matter will reveal and manifest the now hidden face of the Spirit, “Even the body shall remember God”.¹ But that is not how it has always been. In fact, no system of yoga and no yogi has said anything similar in the past.

The adventure of consciousness has been one long journey and I have often wondered, “Is there an evolution in Indian spirituality?” And more specifically, “Where does the Integral Yoga stand in comparison with the past spirituality of India?” This article attempts to answer these questions. At the outset, Sri Aurobindo makes it amply clear that “Our yoga is not a retreading of old walks, but a spiritual adventure.”² The Mother too is unequivocal when she says that to show the continuity of history with Sri Aurobindo as the outcome and culmination is an *entirely* false approach.³ However, Sri Aurobindo also writes, “I regard the spiritual history...of India as a constant development of a divine purpose,”⁴ and again elsewhere, “[Integral Yoga] is the natural but still secret outcome of all the past spiritual endeavour.”⁵ So how can we reconcile these apparently contradictory positions? First, I will present the essential contributions of some of the major spiritual movements in a perspective of continuity, beginning with the Vedas. Then, I will look at the Integral Yoga to see wherein lies its newness. Finally, I will discuss how we can look at Indian spirituality from various evolutionary perspectives, all drawn directly from Sri Aurobindo’s writings to better appreciate the importance and the immensity of the work the Mother and Sri Aurobindo have come to accomplish.

The Vedas

We begin with the earliest dawns of civilisation, the age of the Veda. The mass of humanity was then still infra-rational and physical. However, co-existing with this mass in ignorance were a few enlightened rishis, the seer-poets of the Veda.

* This article is based on a talk the author gave when he was a student of the final year of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. Actual quotes are given within inverted commas. Sometimes, passages are adapted or paraphrased. The footnotes indicate the source.

1. *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 34, p. 707.

2. *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 101.

3. *On Education*, CWM, Vol. 12, p. 212.

4. *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 139.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

The very word Veda signifies knowledge. It is a knowledge that is considered eternal and supreme, for it was born not out of intellectual ratiocination, but through the intuitive vision and occult hearing of the rishis. Thus, the Veda is said not to have a human origin, neither a beginning nor an end.

The Veda is essentially a compilation of the visions and experiences of a number of rishis. The Vedas were never written down by anyone. The mantras were passed from generation to generation from memory and for a long time remained scattered without being systematised. Much later, twenty-eight successive rishis worked to compile the Vedas in a methodical manner, the last being Krishnadwaipayana Vedavyasa, the author also of the Mahabharata.

To protect their knowledge from the uninitiated, the rishis clothed their mystic truth-perceptions in symbols. The mantras thus carried a double meaning: one, the inner psychological and spiritual meaning known only to the initiate; and two, the exoteric and ritualistic meaning for the common man of the time.⁶

The outer religion took its stand on the mind of the physical man whose first idea of the Divine comes from the sense of a superior Power or Powers concealed behind the varied phenomena of Nature—a Power which is father and mother of his being, a Power veiled in heaven and earth, in the sun and moon and stars...in dawn and day and night and rain and wind and storm, in the oceans and the rivers and the forests, all the circumstances and forces of Nature's scene of action, all that vast and mysterious surrounding life of which he felt he was a part. In all of this the natural heart and mind of the human creature felt instinctively...that there was here some mysterious divine Multitude or mighty Infinite which takes these forms and manifests itself in these motions.⁷ This was made the first opening in man towards the Divine.

But for the initiates, there was a more profound inner mystic scheme: All of us are subject to the death, darkness and ignorance of mortal existence. To exceed these, and become "one of the immortals", we must turn from this falsehood to the Truth, from this darkness to the Light, battle with and conquer the Vritras and the Dasyus. This we can do by a communion with the divine Powers, by performing the inner yagna, and sacrificing all of oneself to the Gods.⁸ The gods of the Vedas are many

6. *The Renaissance in India*, CWSA, Vol. 20, pp. 198-200.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 198-99.

8. To better understand how inner truths are veiled by outer symbols let us take this example of the yajna, or sacrifice. Not only the sacrifice as a whole, but also the objects used in the rites are symbolic of the principles of the inner sacrifice which is the true one by which man calls upon the gods to descend and accept his offering, so that, with their help, he may ascend to the luminous heavens above. The following paragraph is based on *The Book of Lights—I*, Collected Works of T. V. Kapali Sastry, Vol. 1, pp. 16-17.

The main features of a yajna are: the sacrificer or Yagnamana, the officiating priests called Ritwiks, the offerings themselves and the fruits of the offering. The Yagnamana is the human soul or personality that offers the sacrifice. The Ritwiks are divided into four main orders. The first of these is the Hota, the summoner, who calls upon the Gods and whose chanting of the Riks leads the other priests. Kapali Sastry refers to the Hota as the "Immortal in the mortal" and my feeling is that, esoterically, the Hota may symbolise the psychic being, which is

and each has a special function in the battle of the aspiring soul against the dark forces. Theirs is the way to immortality, and man arrives at this supreme status by breaking beyond the limitations of his mental, vital and physical self and into the highest plane and supreme ether of the Truth which is the foundation of immortality.⁹

The aspiration and ascension of man is one of the most important ideas in the Vedas. The Vedas affirm that this universe exists in a framework of several planes of consciousness and it is possible for the human soul to travel upwards from plane to plane till he reaches the worlds of the Truth and disappears beyond them. These planes are seven in principle.¹⁰ It is interesting to note that this idea is developed in the Upanishads and even in the Puranas. The names of the planes change, there are subtle nuances in the meaning, but the fundamental idea remains the same.

Immortality is also a key notion. By immortality the rishis meant arriving at a divine universality and supreme infinity, knowing, feeling and expressing that alone in all of one's being and consciousness.¹¹ A limited and divided being is Ignorance; in the Vast, the integral infinite, we must seek for light, force and joy. In proportion as man widens and increases in the substance of his being, there brightens a loftier flame of will and vaster light of knowledge. The breadth of his power, force and strength increases, man ascends the planes of consciousness and becomes capable of immortality.

Another notion we find both in the Vedas and the Upanishads, but which is lost in later Indian spirituality, is the sense of delight that pervades all existence. "The Vedic Rishis declared with one voice that all existence is built upon delight, all things are born out of delight and move from delight to delight, and delight is their final

the key element in us that aspires for the Divine, that 'calls upon the Gods'. The second order of priests is Adhwaryu, he is the chief functionary, the executive head of the Adhwara, or sacrifice, who directs the other priests. However, the two parts of the word Adhwara, *adhwa* and *ra*, mean together, "taking to or accepting the path"; i.e. the pilgrim. Thus inwardly, the Adhwaryu is the God who helps the human soul to complete his journey and lead him to the goal of the sacrifice. The third Ritwik is Utgata; he chants the mantras which are supposed to delight the Gods. Inwardly again, he represents the God of rhythms who heals the imperfections, averts the failures and dangers on the path, and lifts up by the music of the gods, the human personality to the supreme felicity—Truth, Light, Immortality. Last comes the officiating priest Brahma; he witnesses and gives his sanction at every stage of the ceremony. He never moves from his seat, and is silent except when a crucial stage has been reached, or a mistake has been committed by the other priests. He culminates a Vedic rite by uttering the sacred syllable OM. The esoteric meaning here is too obvious—he is the God presiding over the Word, the sanctioning Purusha of the Mantra if one may say so. Just as the officiating priests signify gods or higher powers within, so the offerings to the yagna are also symbolic. *Ghrta*, clarified butter, symbolises brilliance and clarity; and *payas*, the yield of the Cow of light. The fruits of the offering which are frequently prayed for, are horses and cows. While for the external man, these meant real horses and cows, the esoteric meaning is clearly something else: *Go*, cow is the symbol of light, and *aswa*, horse, symbolises the vital force and life energies. The cow represents the power of knowledge (*jnana-shakti*), the horses, the power of doing (*kriya-shakti*). The Vedas are replete with such parallel symbolisms and it isn't difficult to see why the Vedas have been mistaken as the creation of a primitive peoples who propitiated and prayed to the Nature Gods for an increase of ordinary cows and horses!

9. *The Renaissance in India*, CWSA, Vol. 20, p. 203.

10. In Sri Aurobindo's terminology: Sat, Chit, Ananda, Supermind, Mind, Vital, Physical.

11. *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 19, p. 686.

culmination.”¹² How different from the later life-negating spiritual traditions of India!

The central teaching of the mystics can be summed up thus in the words of Sri Aurobindo:

1) “The thought around which all is centred is the seeking after Truth, Light, Immortality. There is a Truth deeper and higher than the truth of outward existence, a Light greater and higher than the light of human understanding which comes by revelation and inspiration, an immortality towards which the soul has to rise. We have to find our way to that, to get into touch with this Truth and Immortality,... to be born into the Truth, to grow in it, to ascend in spirit into the world of Truth and to live in it. To do so is to unite ourselves with the Godhead and to pass from mortality into immortality.”

2) The second mystic doctrine is that “There is the inferior truth here of this world mixed as it is with much falsehood and error, ...and there is a world or home of Truth, ...the Truth, the Right, the Vast, *satyam*, *ṛtaṁ*, *br̥hat*, where all is Truth-Conscious, *ṛtacit*. There are many worlds...but this is the world of the highest Light—the world of the Sun of Truth, *svaṛ*, or the Great Heaven. We have to find the path to this Great Heaven....” This, in fact, corresponds to the fourth out of the seven principles of the cosmos, the *viṣṇūna* of the Upanishads, the *maharloka* of the Puranas, and what Sri Aurobindo calls the Supermind.

3) “The third is that our life is a battle between the powers of Light and Truth, the Gods who are the Immortals and the powers of Darkness. These are spoken of under various names as Vritra and Vritras, Vala and the Panis, the Dasyus and their kings. We have to call in the aid of the Gods to destroy the opposition of these powers of Darkness who conceal the Light...and obstruct in every way the soul’s ascent. We have to invoke the Gods by the inner sacrifice, and by the Word call them into us,—that is the specific power of the Mantra,—to offer to them the gifts of the sacrifice and by that giving secure their gifts, so that by this process we may build the way of our ascent to the goal.”

4) “Finally, as the summit of the teaching of the Vedic mystics comes the secret of the one Reality, *ekam sat*, or *tad ekam*, which became the central word of the Upanishads.”¹³

To conclude, the Veda contains in seed-form all the future spirituality of India and of the world. As Sri Aurobindo writes, “At the root of all that we Hindus have done, thought and said through these many thousands of years, behind all we are and seek to be, there lies concealed, the fount of our philosophies, the bedrock of our religions, the kernel of our thought,...the summary of our civilisation,...a small body

12. *Essays on Mysticism*, Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta, (CWNKG), Vol. 2, p. 279.

13. *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, SABCL, Vol. 11, pp. 16-18.

of speech, Veda.... There is no part of the world's spirituality, of the world's religion, of the world's thought which would be what it is today, if the Veda had not existed."¹⁴

The Upanishads

Gradually, after the Vedic age, a ritualistic streak developed in India and there was a stress on the exoteric aspects of the Veda, even a danger of losing its inner significance. The symbolism that once served to protect the truths began to harden into an obscure crust. The Upanishads counter-balanced this trend. The Upanishadic rishis, through their own experiences, drew out from the Veda its essential truths, and put them down in a slightly less mystical language. The whole system was developed in a thoroughly scientific manner, using intuition rather than logic, "but still reposing for its material verity on a method of strenuous experiment and searching observation."¹⁵

The Upanishads thus played a crucial role in keeping alive the spiritual tradition begun by the Vedic rishis. It is because countries like Greece and Egypt didn't have a second revivifying movement like the Upanishads to demystify their ancient inner Mysteries, that we have nothing left of their spiritual past.

The Upanishadic period was a very special and intense period in Indian spirituality. Sri Aurobindo calls it "an epoch of immense and strenuous seeking, an intense and ardent seed-time of the Spirit."¹⁶ It is during this period that "the truths held by the initiates but kept back from ordinary men broke their barriers, swept through the higher mind of the nation and fertilised the soil of Indian culture for a constant and ever increasing growth of spiritual consciousness and spiritual experience."¹⁷

However, the Upanishads aren't really an interpretation of the Vedas. The Upanishadic rishis were seekers of a higher truth and used the Vedas as an authority or as an aid. The real work of the Upanishads was to found Vedanta, to become the crowning realisation of the Vedas. This highest spiritual knowledge has become, like the Vedas, the seed for endless spiritual and philosophical traditions around the world. Sri Aurobindo writes, "The Upanishads have been the acknowledged source of numerous profound philosophies and religions that flowed from it in India like her great rivers from their Himalayan cradle fertilising the mind and life of the people and kept its soul alive through the long procession of the centuries, constantly returned to for light, never failing to give fresh illumination, a fountain of inexhaustible life-giving waters. Buddhism with all its developments was only a restatement, although from a new standpoint and with fresh terms of intellectual definition and reasoning, of one side of its experience and it carried it thus changed in form but hardly in

14. *Sri Aurobindo Archives Research Journal*, April 1977, p. 31.

15. *Sri Aurobindo on the Veda*; Published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram 1992; p. 9.

16. *The Renaissance in India*, CWSA, Vol. 20, pp. 203-04.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 204.

substance over all Asia and westward towards Europe. The ideas of the Upanishads can be rediscovered in much of the thought of Pythagoras and Plato and form the profoundest part of Neo-platonism and Gnosticism with all their considerable consequences to the philosophical thinking of the West, and Sufism only repeats them in another religious language. The larger part of German metaphysics is little more in substance than an intellectual development of great realities more spiritually seen in this ancient teaching, and modern thought is rapidly absorbing them with a closer, more living and intense receptiveness which promises a revolution both in philosophical and in religious thinking; here they are filtering in through many indirect influences, there slowly pouring through direct and open channels. There is hardly a main philosophical idea which cannot find an authority or a seed or indication in these antique writings... And even the larger generalisations of Science are constantly found to apply to the truth of physical Nature formulas already discovered by the Indian sages in their original, their largest meaning in the deeper truth of the spirit.”¹⁸

The Upanishads arrived at three fundamental realisations:

a) They affirmed that behind the perpetual flux and variety of existence there is a supreme Unity, a True Reality.

b) They saw this reality as the true Self of all things. All phenomena are only its appearance, its clothing and outer manifestation. In our essence we are all that Reality.

c) Finally, they realised that this Reality is “the absolute, transcendent, eternal”¹⁹, immutable and indivisible.

As we can see all revolves around the notion of Brahman, “the idea of transcendental Unity, Oneness and stability behind all the flux and variety of human life.” As Sri Aurobindo writes, “The rooted and fundamental conception of Vedanta is that there exists somewhere, could we but find it, available to experience or self-revelation, if denied to intellectual research, a single truth comprehensive and universal in the light of which the whole of existence would stand revealed and explained both in its nature and its end. This universal existence, for all its multitude of objects and its diversity of forces, is one in substance and origin; and there is an unknown quantity, X...to which it can be reduced, for from that it started and in and by that it still exists. This unknown quantity is called Brahman.”²⁰ This is the pivot of all Indian metaphysics and has been till recently, the sum and goal of most Indian spiritual experience.

We meet a number of great personalities in the Upanishads, names that inspired this continent for millennia—the militant rishi Yajnavalkya and his wife Maitreyi,

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 330-31.

19. *Isha Upanishad*, CWSA, Vol. 17, p. 175.

20. *The Upanishads*, SABCL, Vol. 12, preamble.

the young boy Nachiketa, and Satyakama Jabala, who was taught by the bull and the fire, among many other fascinating personalities. Sri Aurobindo writes, "The Rishi was in that age the head of the human world. He was at once sage, poet, priest, scientist, prophet, educator, scholar and legislator. He composed a song, and it became one of the sacred hymns of the people; he emerged from rapt communion with God to utter some puissant sentence, which in after ages became the germ of mighty philosophies; he conducted a sacrifice, and kings and peoples rose on its seven flaming tongues to wealth and greatness; he formulated an observant aphorism, and it was made the foundation of some future science, ethical, practical or physical; he gave a decision in a dispute and his verdict was seed of a great code or legislative theory. In Himalayan forests or by the confluence of great rivers he lived as the centre of a patriarchal family whose link was thought-interchange and not blood-relationship, bright-eyed children of sages, heroic striplings, earnest pursuers of knowledge, destined to become themselves great Rishies or renowned leaders of thought and action.... Austere concentration of the faculties stilled the waywardness of the reason and set free for its work the inner, unerring vision which is above reason...; this again worked by intuitive flashes, one inspired stroke of insight quivering out close upon the other, till the whole formed a logical chain; yet a logic not coldly thought out...but the logic of continuous and consistent inspiration.... The energy of their personalities was colossal; wrestling in fierce meditation with God, they had become masters of incalculable spiritual energies, so that their anger could blast peoples and even the world was in danger when they opened their lips to utter a curse.... On earth the Rishies, in heaven the Gods."²¹

About Yajnavalkya,²² for instance, the Upanishads say that once the great realised king Janaka called an assembly of sages and rishis. He then said that whoever considered himself the best knower of Brahman may come forward and collect the reward of a thousand cows, each with gold nuggets tied to its horns. No one in the assembly had the temerity to declare that he was the best *knower* and therefore, most eligible. Then suddenly Yajnavalkya appeared on the scene and directed his disciples to lead the cows home. A hue and cry arose among the others: "How dare you do this? Do you think you are the most wise in the matter of Brahman, Yajnavalkya?" they asked. Yajnavalkya answered, "I have come here solely for the cows; as for Brahman, I leave it to the knowers of Brahman." "But this won't do," cried the others, and one by one they asked him question after question. All he answered perfectly and to their satisfaction until finally Gargi, a respected woman, got up and asked him, "Yajnavalkya, you once said that the earth is woven upon water? Upon what then is water woven?" "Air," he answered. "Upon what is air woven?" "Upon sky." "And sky?" "The world of Gandharvas." "Upon what is woven the world of

21. *Supplement*, SABCL, Vol. 27, pp. 156-58.

22. The reader may refer to a more detailed version of these stories in *Vedic Hymns*, CWNKG, Vol. 8, p. 139.

Gandharvas?” “Upon the Sun,” and so she was led by Yajnavalkya through successively higher and higher planes of consciousness, from the Sun to the Moon, then to the Stars, then to the Gods, to the King of the Gods, then to the Creator of the Gods, till he came finally to Brahmaloaka, the home of the One Supreme Transcendent Reality. Then Gargi asked him, “And upon what is Brahma woven?” Here Yajnavalkya cried halt and warned her, “Gargi, your questioning goes too far and beyond the limits. If you question further your head will fall off, for the Gods do not bear questioning about a thing that does not bear questioning.” And so Gargi stopped and Yajnavalkya was accepted as the best of rishis. It is difficult for us to identify all the gradations mentioned by Yajnavalkya but they are obviously psychological and symbolic. Enough for our purpose to see that they are mounting tiers of being and consciousness that lead in the end to the Supreme Brahman.²³

We meet Yajnavalkya again in a later stage of his life. He has gone through the cycle of Brahmacharya and Grihasta and is now preparing for Vanaprastha. He calls his first wife Katyayani and tells her that he must leave her and that he has divided his possessions equally between her and his second wife Maitreyi. She accepts without a murmur. He then goes to his second wife and tells her the same thing. Maitreyi tells him that she would rather follow him. Yajnavalkya discourages her and asks her to enjoy all the wealth he is leaving behind for her. And then Maitreyi asks Yajnavalkya one of the most beautiful questions ever posed. She asks him, “All these possessions, will they give me immortality?” “No,” replies Yajnavalkya, “they will not give you that.” And here is her second question, almost a mantra as it were, “What am I to do with that which does not give me immortality?” The quest for truth, the search for something deeper is so inspiring! Then Yajnavalkya lets her accompany him and gives her her first, now oft-quoted, spiritual lesson: “One does not love the other for the sake of the other but for the sake of the Self...”²⁴ The Upanishads are filled with such parables that are deeply insightful, even though quite baffling at times.

To sum up, if the Vedas are “the spiritual and psychological seed of Indian culture”, the Upanishads are “the expression of the truth of highest spiritual knowledge and experience...”²⁵

Post-Upanishads (Darshanas and Puranas)

After the great age of the Upanishads a number of movements occur which alter considerably the colour of Indian spirituality. Essentially, these movements represent

23. Once, presumably after this incident, Yajnavalkya visited the court of King Janaka during an assembly of seekers and men of knowledge. After greeting him with due respect, Janaka asked him, “What brings you here Yajnavalkya? Acquisition of Knowledge or of kine?” To which, the rishi replied, perhaps with a smile, “Both, my king—*ubhayameva samrat!*” Yajnavalkya’s reply indicates that the division between spirit and life was a later aberration in Indian spirituality.

24. The reader may refer to Sri Aurobindo’s writing “Ishavasyopanishad” in *The Upanishads*, SABCL, Vol. 12, which, among other things, discusses this verse.

25. *The Renaissance in India*, CWSA, Vol. 20, p. 342.

a broadening of base, that is, making the spiritual truths contained in the Vedas and the Upanishads available to a wider spectrum of people, as well as an opening of many doors and paths to the divine. The Epics, Darshanas, Puranas, Shaivism, Vaishnavism, Tantra, and the different paths of yoga such as Karmayoga, Bhaktiyoga and Jnanayoga all developed in this period. We'll take a look now especially at the Darshanas and the Puranas. The others we will see in their proper place.

Darshanas

The complex symbols of the Vedas and the Upanishads grew more and more unintelligible and antique. Inevitably, this resulted in greater emphasis on formalised action and unintelligent ceremony. The Vedas became more a book of works than a book of knowledge, and few understood the import of the Upanishads. Eventually superstition took the place of truth. However, reason arose to battle superstition and sought to explain these truths in terms of the mind.

Thus was born the age of great philosophies, many-sided epic literature, and the beginnings of science and art. It was a time of large kingdoms and empires, and a rich, complex structure of society. This was the time for reason to develop and try as best as possible to analyse life, and mould it in a most noble and full manner. It was a birth time and youth of the seeking intellect and, as in Greece, philosophy was the main instrument by which it laboured to solve the problems of life and the world. What had previously been approached through the intuition and the soul's force was now approached with the intellect. However, the peculiarity of India was that it always remained faithful to its parent light. Indian philosophy went back in some form or the other to the Vedas and the Upanishads, and recognised that spiritual experience was a greater authority than mere reason.²⁶ Another speciality was that the Darshanas were not mere speculation but closely allied to life. As Sri Aurobindo says, "Indian religion is Indian spiritual philosophy put into action and experience."²⁷ Also, "It is notable that no Hindu religion old or new has been able to come into existence without developing as its support a clear philosophic content and suggestion."²⁸

The Darshanas kept alive, in some form or the other, certain important truths. The Spirit, universal Nature (whether called Maya, Prakriti or Shakti) and the soul in living beings, Jiva, are the three truths which are universally admitted by almost all the philosophical schools of India. Universal also is the admission that the discovery of the inner spiritual self in man and a contact with God or Self or Brahman is the condition of spiritual perfection.²⁹ Also, the Vedantic concept of Purusha, Atman or Sad Brahman, survived as the fundamental conception. First, the relation between

26. *Ibid.*, p. 206.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 133.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 369-70.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 184.

this movement of becoming, which we call the world, to the absolute Unity or Brahman, and second, how the ego can return to that true Self or Divinity, were the practical and speculative questions that concerned the thought of India.

However, the Darshanas developed serious defects as well. The philosophers of India got more and more addicted to the secondary process of knowledge by logic, and increasingly drew away from the true process of knowledge by experience and perception. They began to dismember the many-sided intuitive harmony of the Vedic and Upanishadic truths, ruined their integrality, and formed instead various and often conflicting schools of thought. Moreover, the commentaries on the scriptures, Sutras and Bhashyas, grew more important than the scriptures themselves. Eventually Veda and Vedanta ceased to be living guides to knowledge and became merely the source for stray lines, often extracted out of context, to serve as weapons in the polemic disputes of metaphysicians.

Nonetheless as Sri Aurobindo writes, "It is indeed largely the work of these philosophers...that saved the soul of India alive through the gathering night of her decadence."³⁰ Spiritual concepts, even though greatly diminished and intellectualised, were at least available to every thinking man.

Puranas

In the Epics, and consequently, the Puranas, we have a further widening of spiritual experience. Just as the Darshanas did with the mind, the Epics and the Puranas tried to lay hold on the inner vital and emotional nature of even the most common man and awaken him to spirituality. Much of the deeper significance of the Veda was lost, but instead many new gates and pathways to the Divine were discovered. As Sri Aurobindo writes, the Puranas "attempted in fact to bring the mass into the temple of the spirit rather than leave them in the outer precincts. The outward physical sense was satisfied through its aesthetic turn by a picturesque temple worship, by numerous ceremonies, by the use of physical images; but these were given a psycho-emotional sense and direction that was open to the heart and imagination of the ordinary man and not reserved for the deeper sight of the elect or the strenuous tapasya of the initiates."³¹

The Vedic religion had no need of images, for the physical manifestation of its godheads were the varied forms of nature, but the "Puranic religion worshipped the psychical forms of the Godhead within us and had to express it outwardly in symbolic figures..."³² Thus, the Vedic house of Fire was replaced by the temple; the karmic ritual of sacrifice was transformed into the devotional temple ritual; the Vedic Gods yielded to the more precise conceptual forms of the two great deities, Vishnu and

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 371-72.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 210.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 373.

Shiva, and their Shaktis and their offshoots.

The idea of the Divinity in man was popularised to an extraordinary extent, not only through the concept of Avatarhood, but also by revealing that the Divine is discoverable in the heart of every human being. Alongside various systems of Yoga developed that sought to leverage some aspect of the human personality, such as love, knowledge, or work, and use it as a means to lead man to a union with the Divine or else to an immergence in the Absolute. The central spiritual truth remained the same, the truth of the One in many aspects. But the Puranas brought it more powerfully, widely and intensely home to the general mind and feeling of the people.

I must add here a word about the Gita. The Gita is a most profound, important and synthetic work, but the problem is that it deals with many aspects and each philosopher or spiritual figure has taken from it what has suited his purpose. Shankara stressed on physical renunciation, the Vaishnava on Bhakti, and the patriot on the soul's eternity. It is Sri Aurobindo who presents the Gita in a synthetic vision and gives it a greater spiritual significance than what it has had in the past. Moreover, it ought to be noted that even the Gita, with its stress on works, considers works only as a means to liberation, and the ultimate aim is not transformation, but a cessation from the chain of rebirth.

(To be concluded)

DEV DIP GANGULI

*A many-miracled Consciousness unrolled
Vast aim and process and unfettered norms,
A larger Nature's great familiar roads.
Affranchised from the net of earthly sense
Calm continents of potency were glimpsed;
Homelands of beauty shut to human eyes,
Half-seen at first through wonder's gleaming lids,
Surprised the vision with felicity;
Sunbelts of knowledge, moonbelts of delight
Stretched out in an ecstasy of widenesses
Beyond our indigent corporeal range.
There he could enter, there awhile abide.
A voyager upon uncharted routes
Fronting the viewless danger of the Unknown,
Adventuring across enormous realms,
He broke into another Space and Time.*

Sri Aurobindo

(Savitri, CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 91)

DREAM

It broke a knot of strings—
Was it an angel with fiery wings?

It flashed like a thought,
Like a star it shone,
It whispered a note,
And lo, it was gone!

It played on my sorrow,
It cleared my tears;
It stayed on my frown
And banished my fears.

I wanted to touch it,
I wanted to hold it,
I wanted to smell it,
And to my Self mould it.

It sprang into nature:
In a stunning hue
It sparkled in a stream
And shimmered on dew.

It darted across worlds
Towards heavens unknown;
One could not surmise
Where it had flown.

Forests of thoughts turned
To sunlit skies above
Lushed by the silken
Taverns of glowing love.

The ruins of the heart
Were cleansed by its strains;
Joy came dripping in
Like the beginning of rains.

Then came a mingling
Of heartbeats profound
With rhythms of Nature,
Its music and sound.

There remained a memory
Like a shadow at dawn,
Faint and mysterious,
Awaiting the morn.

A half-glimpsed beauty
In circles of light
Was compelled to forego
The jewels of night.

I was awake as in a dream
When a dancing sunbeam
Welcomed my eyes
To a glorious sunrise.

SURUCHI VERMA

*The soul that can live alone with itself meets God;
Its lonely universe is their rendezvous.*

Sri Aurobindo

(Savitri, CWSA, Vol. 33, pp. 460-61)

DEVOTIONAL POETRY IN TAMIL

(Continued from the issue of April 2006)

4. Buddhist Bhakti Poetry

THE image of Prince Siddhartha sitting beneath the pipal tree has been an icon for Indian religion and spirituality for the last two and a half millennia. Aurobindonians the world over are familiar with Sri Aurobindo's evocation of the image to suggest the futility of a scientific dissection of spiritual realisations:

A thyroid, meditating almost nude
Under the Bo-tree, saw the eternal Light
And, rising from its mighty solitude,
Spoke of the Wheel and eightfold Path all right.¹

Buddhism came to the Tamil land early along with its message of compassion. In those remote days, perhaps even before Jainism was introduced, Buddhism was a contender for the common man's attention along with indigenous gods and Vedic religion. At least there appears some vague consensus that Jainism came to South India during the Kalabhra interregnum (3rd century A.D.) But we have no clue as to the beginnings of Tamil Buddhism. It has been suggested that the name of Ilambhotiyar, one of the poets anthologised in the Sangam collection, *Nattrinai* suggests the wide prevalence of Buddhism in Tamil Nadu at that early age. In the poem a young girl expresses her despair that her beloved has chosen to leave her:

Friend,
I am ashamed to say
That men of honour will fail
To uphold what they cherish high in their life.²

Early Tamil Buddhists, like the Jains, were primarily teachers of ethical conduct, since they established schools to spread literacy. Accordingly, more than the land, it was the goodness of the people who inhabited the land which was important. This is how a *Purananooru* verse by Avvaiyar is seen as reflecting Buddhist thoughts:

Whether you grow rice or whether you are a forest,
whether you are a valley or whether you are a mountain,
if they are good men who inhabit you,
then you are good, land! and may you long flourish!³

Archaeological finds have revealed the strong position Buddhism held in Tamil land even in the early centuries of the first millennium. By then Buddhism was an institutionalised religion and there were rich and huge viharas. *Pattinappalai* by Kadiyalur Rudrankannanar which is one of the poems in the anthology *Pattupattu* has a clear reference to Buddhist viharas in Kaveri-p-poombattinam (Poompuhar) which was the residence of the Buddhist Sangha:

In the yards of mangers, where big bulls may feed,
Are cool little pools. From the dense-leaved, low-branched groves
Where the monks have their cells, the koel with its big black hens
Retreats, sick from the fragrant smoke of oblations
Made by hermits with matted hair...⁴

The reference to '*thavappalli thaazh kaavin*' (low-branched groves where the monks have their cells) is a clear indication that the Buddhist monks sat in tapasya in an atmosphere conducive to spiritual illumination. Another important reference to Buddhist presence in the context of bhakti literature occurs in the Sangam classic, *Madurai-k-kanji*.

Young women held fast to themselves
Little children ornamented with jewels
So they will not be lost; kissing them
And holding firmly their hands
That appeared like pollen-rich lotus buds,
They stood there, carrying flowers for worship,
And scented smoke, singing the glory
Of their Lord in that Buddha Vihara...⁵

The term, '*kadavut palli*' is interpreted as a Buddhist temple for there are also descriptions of an '*Andanar Palli*' (where Vedic Brahmins performed rituals) and a '*Saman Palli*' where Jains had their temple. The word '*pazhichuthal*' (reciting or singing) gains importance since Buddhists considered the act of praying to their Lord an important part of their rituals.

Of course, expounding Buddhist philosophy remained to the fore in the spread of Buddhism and taking part in disputes to prove its superiority was a way of life. Tamil Buddhists were even prepared to face the dangers of travel and the hostility of rulers if only they had a chance to take part in a disputation for proving the merit of their religion. We hear of the Tamil Buddhist monk Sanghamitra who went to Ceylon and proved the superiority of Mahayana Buddhism in the court of Godabhaya (4th century).

Emperor Ashoka's edicts in Girnar and Peshawar indicate that he built hospitals

for men and cattle and spread Buddhist thought in South India. How does one spread a religion? Not by disputation or sword alone! In any case, Ashoka had abjured violence. Hence Buddhism must have taken rapid strides through activities that go well with the common man who wants to live in peace, amity, comfort and prayerful togetherness. The early Buddhist activities included building of hospitals (as mentioned in the Girnar inscription), building temples, running schools, ritualism and literature. The early Tamil Buddhists excelled in all these aspects.

The Buddhist temples were obviously grand edifices even in the 3rd century B.C. when Prince Mahendra went to Ceylon taking the Buddha's message. It is surmised that he stayed in the seaside town of Kaveri-p-poombattinam and built seven viharas which are referred to in the epic as Indra viharas. Several Pali works like Buddhadatta Thero's *Abhidhammavavata* and *Vinayavinischaya* refer to Kailasa-like viharas in Kaveri-p-poombattinam. Acharya Dharmapala (5th century) who wrote commentaries for selected portions of Tripitaka lived in the Buddhist vihara at Pattathittai in Nagapattinam.⁶ Nagapattinam also had Sri Sailendra Choodamani Vihara. Tirumazhisai Alwar, the Vaishnava hymnologist is said to have ingeniously spirited away the golden Buddha at Choodamani Vihara in Nagapattinam.

What was the early ritualism of the Buddhists in Tamil land? It may be relevant to mention here that the Vedic religion gave prime importance to the fire sacrifice and in the Vedic times there was no image worship. It came later, perhaps during the time of the *Itihasas*. Worshipping a deity with flowers seems to have Buddhist origins and the importance given to flower worship in temples today might well have originated in the Buddhist viharas which were always situated in thick groves. The Bhakti poets of the Vedic religion integrated the flower offering so well in their rituals that the singers of hymns to Vishnu and Shiva speak of the glory of flowers and flower gardens in many ways. Perialwar and Tondar-adip-podi Alwar were both engaged in tending their gardens and stringing flowers for their deity.

When we speak of the early viharas, Kaveri-p-poombattinam immediately comes to our mind, thanks to the twin epics, *Silappadhikaram* and *Manimekalai*. The statements in these works are being corroborated by archaeological finds. Till a Tsunami wiped out the city (referred to as Kaveerapatna in Pali works), it had many viharas and a upavana (neighbouring garden) which had a temple of crystal enshrining the feet of Buddha.

Manimekalai describes prayers held by Buddhists who frequented these temples. Sutamati recites the prayer as taught by her teacher Sanghadharma:

Our Lord, self-taught, the essence of faultless things,
Incarnating in nature's several forms,
Always living for the good of others,
Never for himself: for the good of the world
His penance, with the idea of Dharma.

Hence his rolling the wheel of Dharma rays.
 He won victory over desire; Buddha's Feet
 Shall I praise, my tongue shall nought else do.

The goddess Manimekala who comes to watch the Indra festival at Kaveri-p-poombattinam prays at the *Peetika* (Seat) in the Upavana's crystal temple:

O Seer! The Pure! The Holy! The Ancient!
 How shall I praise thee? As one risen high
 Even in this world? Who burnt the three sins?
 Beyond anger? Foremost in knowledge?
 You have defeated desire; you are Joy.
 You have purged the enemy, bad conduct.
 Lacking a thousand tongues how shall I praise
 Thy feet adorned with the thousand-spoked wheel!

It may be noticed here that compared to the early Jain prayers (even in the epics), the prayers to Buddha are closer to human experience. Whereas the Arhat is seen at a distant elevation, the life-story of the Buddha remains very much near the heart of the devotee. Also, thanks to *Manimekalai*, the temple culture of the Buddhists is revealed in clear terms. The epic describes the Dharma Peetika in Manipallavam island which was a circular structure in marble. It rose from the ground by four and a half feet and spread thirteen and a half feet on all the sides. Atop the structure was a lotus square. Trees were planted around and they showered fresh blooms from their branches above. Because of the holy hush, even the birds would not fly around making noise.

Such temples were invested with supernatural powers. The Dharma Peetika was said to reveal one's past births. Not by any external voice but simply as a flash in the mind of the devotee who circumambulated the Seat and saluted with palms held above the head and prayed. From what we read in *Manimekalai*, devotional poetry was very important for the early Buddhists and they enjoyed using many similes to bring out the selfless services of the Buddha for establishing dharma on the earth. Goddess Manimekala's prayer at the Dharma Peetika in Manipallavam island is in mellifluous Tamil, easy to memorise:

Humanity had lost its dharmic sense,
 Its ears denying right advice.
 It was to inject good mid moral poverty
 Where no lamp shone to show the dharmic way
 You were born as the lovely morning sun.
 I bow at your feet. I hail this Seat

Meant for you as your own gracious form,
 I hold your holy feet on my head.
 I place flowers in worship. Guard me from sorrows!

One of the most beautiful hymns to Buddha is by the epic's heroine, Manimekalai who prays to him immediately after receiving the Amuda Surabhi. This is the nectar vessel which is gifted to her so that she can feed the indigent people with food that the vessel would produce at her wish.

O Hero who has defeated cupid!
 One who chased away the enemies of life!
 Striving ever for the good of others,
 You have denied for yourself the heavens.
 The state far beyond the reach of man's mind
 Is yours: you have given us the wisdom-sight.
 Your ears are deaf to evil speech.
 Your tongue is blessed with uttering truth.
 You wait among the sinful to save them,
 By you the snakedom was freed from fear.
 I can but bow to thy blessed feet twain
 But have no ability to praise you!

“By you the snakedom was freed from fear.” This refers to the Jataka tale which speaks of Buddha's teaching the way of compassion to Garuda who was the cause of terror for the race of snakes. He made Garuda give them nectar as well. Devotional poetry in Buddhism was appealing because it had the backing of the innumerable Jataka tales as also due to the emphasis that was placed on service to humanity.

A religion which spoke in such humanist accents must have produced an enormous amount of hymnology in Tamil. Unfortunately, very little has survived. Scholars have scoured commentaries and refutations (which also give references to prove a point or two) to bring together stray verses. Apart from *Manimekalai*, the one Buddhist work available in its complete form is *Veerachozhiyam* (11th century), a book of grammar by Buddhhamitra. Fortunately, Buddhhamitra cites some soulful hymns in the work and they assure us that Buddhist bhakti poetry was quite sumptuous at that time. One can imagine the tangle of bhakti and scholarship when persons following different religions elected the same language as their vehicle.

Here is an example. The Vedic religions say that Agastya learnt the Tamil language from Shiva who was its originator. Defending his audacity in choosing the local medium and writing a grammar on it, Buddhhamitra says that the Bodhisattva Avalokiteswara created the Tamil language and taught it to Agastya!

He resided beneath the Bodhi tree
 Unequalled in sublime tapasya,
 One who is unique in humanity,
 The Pure One. Buddhamitra of Ponpatri
 Surrounded by beautiful groves,
 Holds His feet on his crown
 And has chosen to write in Tamil.

“From Avalokita of shining qualities
 Agastya learnt Tamil
 And spread it on the earth. Dare
 You try to speak of Tamil?”
 One may question. I reply:
 “Well, the fly also wings in space
 Where Garuda has his pathway!”

A work of epic proportions, the loss of *Kundalakesi* remains irreparable. Only nineteen verses are now available and they give an idea of the fine bhakti poetry that could rival what we have in *Manimekalai*. The prayer that seems to have opened the epic marks an act of total surrender at the feet of the Buddha:

He had achieved Realisation
 Before anyone else;
 Till he gained That, he was engaged
 In bringing good to living beings;
 He taught others dharma.
 He never wanted anything for himself,
 And strove only for others.
 He, Buddha is our Lord.
 His feet are our refuge.

Calling upon his readers to forgive his shortcomings when praising Buddha, the author of *Kundalakesi* has familiar images do his job:

Those who are sick will not worry
 About the taste of the medicine;
 Those who raise a fire to chase away cold
 Care not for the harmful smoke;
 The Buddha renounced, rejected the evil
 That rises from thought, word and action.
 As I seek to speak of his fame,
 Scholars will not mind my faults in usage.

The ideal of renunciation held aloft by Buddha became an inalienable element of devotional poesy. Poets tried in various ways to make the common man understand the instability of earthly life. The author of *Kundalakesi* is bemused that while we weep inconsolably for the dead, we do not do so for ourselves. It is a memorable verse:

We died from life in the womb;
Then we bid goodbye to childhood;
Our boyhood also died;
Our youthtime of love died too.
Thus have we died at each stage
To reach this old age. This too will go.
Why don't we weep for ourselves
Who die every day?

Neelakesi was a Jain poem that rose to counter *Kundalakesi*'s Buddhist message. It is an irony of Time that the commentary on *Neelakesi* has quoted extensively from earlier Buddhist poetry and this is how some fine hymns have come down to us. The commentary also has some verses on Buddhist thought. Mylai Seeni Venkataswami has brought together some of the sweetest-sounding devotional poetry to show how the Tamil language was handled with a rare felicity by the Buddhists.⁷ The Tushitaloka (one of the Buddhist heavens) is praised even thus:

The friend that never rejects
The lotus of the devotee's heart;
The place of gods whose garments
Rival the sun's brilliant rays;
The immortals to whom devotees,
Scholars and sages pray,
Live in Tushitaloka, holding fast to Dharma.

Verse after verse speaks of the image of compassion seated under the Bodhi tree, Buddha whose heart immediately pours kindness into the existence of any life that is touched by sorrow, the Compassionate One who took births innumerable as lion, horse and deer to bring succour to mankind. Such poetry must have been very close to the heart of ancient Tamil Buddhists, as they were no doubt familiar with the Jataka tales which are said to have been composed between the 3rd century B.C. and the 4th century A.D. Most of them take place in and around Varanasi. Since Buddha's career as a teacher of Dharma began in Sarnath which is close to Varanasi, his presence must have remained fairly fresh in generational memory and gained colour as the centuries went by. The incarnational aspect of the Jataka tales must have come very

handy to Buddhist leaders in Tamil Nadu when they sought to popularise the religion in a big way through discourses, recitations and music.

But by the 11th century, Buddhism was very much on the wane in Tamil land. Sectarian disputes and the decadence of Buddhist institutions brought this chapter in Indian history to a close. As early as the 7th century, the Pallava King Mahendravarman had issued a warning to the monks of Kanchipuram in his farce, *Matta Vilasa Prahasana* (Tale of the Drunkard Monk). A religion that had established monasteries all over Tamil Nadu with an undeniably strong presence in the neighbouring Andhra country, and a way of life that had percolated to the tiniest villages in the countryside became a vanished past with dizzying speed. A great pity, for it was from Kanchipuram that a Prince went to China and spread Buddhism. He is venerated today as Bodhidharma. The roll call of honour listing Tamil Buddhists of repute includes Venudasa, Dignaga, Vajrabodhi, Aniruddha and Sariputra. But they have all become distant memories. Today Tamil Buddhism is just a handful of artefacts, a few poems, the grammatical work *Veerachozhiyam* and the immortal epic, *Manimekalai*.

With the publication of Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia*, interest in Buddhism was revived all over the world. In Tamil literature it stoked the creative fire in Desikavinayakam Pillay who made a transcreation of Arnold's classic as *Aasiya Jothi* (1941). Since in the intervening centuries Buddha has also been accepted as an avatar of Vishnu, devotional poems have been addressed occasionally to the Realised One beneath the Bodhi tree. The conversion to Buddhism by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar has also been instrumental in injecting a new life into Tamil Buddhism. Travelling recently in search of the lost temples of Buddhists in Kanchipuram, I was pleasantly surprised to come across a newly built shrine at Konerikuppam. Kannivel who showed me around said that the broken stone pillar with the figure of Buddha had been retrieved from a nearby Muslim Durgah. Since they had also found a Buddha head beneath a huge Pipal tree which had been completely uprooted, it is surmised the area must have been one of the ancient monasteries. The sculpted head with noble features has been kept in a glass case. Regular worship has been instituted with a brass bell, incense holder and other apparatus. Again, the Mahamuni Society has founded a new temple in Vaiyavur Road in Kanchipuram where a Sanchi-style enclosure has been built for the Bodhi tree. Regular worship has begun in the shrine which has the image of Buddha made by artisans from Mahabalipuram. Such new life must needs bring forth new devotional poetry as well.

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

Notes and References

1. "A Dream of Surreal Science", *SABCL*, Vol. 5, p. 145.
2. Verse 72. Translated by A. Dakshinamurthy.
3. Verse 187. Translated by George L. Hart and Hank Heifetz.
4. Translated by N. Raghunathan.
5. All translations from Tamil are by Prema Nandakumar, unless otherwise stated.
6. For a detailed list of Buddhist temples in Tamil country, see Seeni Venkatasami, *Baudhdhamum Thamizhum* (1980), pp. 38-75.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 163-72.

PHILOSOPHER

In the human predicament
 The philosopher is born,
 Carrying our burden
 On his shoulders,
 Keeping vigil
 When we're all asleep,
 Filling the vacuum
 With heavenly lights,
 Creating a panacea
 For all the ills,
 Arranging both stone and straw
 To make our home fresh and new....

And when we awake,
 He goes.

ANIL K. MOHAPATRA

OUT OF CONTROL OR BURNED OUT? THERE'S STILL HOPE, SAYS INDIAN PSYCHOLOGY

RECENTLY, Prince Charles called on UK citizens to spend more time in reflection and silence. He said we are moving too fast and are out of rhythm with nature, which is resulting in a loss of balance from people's lives. His words recall the ideas of ancient Indian psychology (2000-500 BC), which endures today in the spiritual psychology that underpins Hinduism. Two of the greatest commentators on Hinduism since the nineteenth century—Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo—have called on seekers of a better life to take heed of this psychology if they wish to possess inner freedom.

The keystone of human strength according to Indian psychology is purity—especially inner purity. Impurity creates barriers to human nature being able to function at its optimum level. It is classified as follows: “The impurity of mind is of two kinds. First, inertia or impurity due to lack of inclination to work; ... Secondly, excitement or impurity due to wrong impulses; ...” explains Sri Aurobindo writing in 1909.

Indian psychology ascribes these conditions to an imbalance in our nature, which is made up of three constituents known in Sanskrit as *gunas*. Sattwa is the principle of illumination and balance; Rajas is the principle of dynamic energy; and Tamas is the principle of inertia. These should be maintained in balance with no one *guna* predominating over the others. However, there is a hierarchy in the roles each must play, and a highest form into which each must be progressively transformed.

Sattwa must always be the guide and leader of Rajas and Tamas, which must be disciplined servants of illumined and enlightened perception (Sattwa). Rajas must finally become a superior force and Tamas must become a steadying and grounding principle rather than a principle that causes sloth and narrow thinking. Sattwa itself must lose certain limitations native to it. If Rajas—dynamic energy—predominates over the other two constituents there is the effect of spinning out of control and the “impurity due to wrong impulses”; if Tamas predominates, all that “nourishes lack of effort” arises in the nature.

Swami Vivekananda writing in the nineteenth century addressed a depressed and ailing India under the yoke of colonialism with the following words: “Rajas is needed, the country needs heroes of action, let the strong current of impulsion flow. Even if evil follows in its wake, it will be a thousand times better than this tamasic inertia.” Sri Aurobindo does not disagree but rounds off the analysis with the following rider: “Rajas cannot endure long if it goes along its own path without any control; ennui follows, tamas appears, as the sky, instead of becoming clear, is overcast and becomes devoid of the movement of air after a storm.”

There must be care in using the three *gunas* to analyse situations. In India, there was the tendency to blame all her troubles on the strong currents of spirituality flowing

through it and the strong religious forms that even today characterise the nation. As a result Indians had a tendency to say that the nation was too Sattwic a nation.

It is true that untransformed Sattwa has the limitation of, in Sri Aurobindo's words, "apathy towards works after we have achieved the joy of nearness to God". But Sattwa can yet never lead to the dark deluded inertia and ignorance caused by Tamas: "Sattwa can never be the cause of downfall; indeed a nation which is predominantly sattwic cannot remain bound in the chains of slavery." Sattwa, he goes on to say, is the source of the spiritual power of the man of true knowledge and the seer, as well as the warrior's prowess. "The cause of downfall of this country is not an excess of sattwa but want of rajas and preponderance of tamas. Owing to the lack of rajas, the sattwa inherent in us becomes weak and concealed in tamas."

So how can these situations, where Tamas effectively gets the upper hand, be avoided? How can a proper balance be achieved? "The only means of avoiding [the upsurge of Tamas or the imbalances of Rajas] is to engage powerful rajas in the service of sattwa," advises Sri Aurobindo.

How is this to be achieved? The answer he gives is twofold: "The means to rouse sattwa is the spiritual temperament—to renounce selfish interests and deploy all one's energies for the good of others—to make the whole of life a great and pure sacrifice by surrendering oneself to the Divine."

These tasks—unselfish action coupled with inner surrender to the highest principle of existence, which he calls "the Divine", that may also be called Truth or the Ultimate—in being inner changes, are typical of Indian psychology, which asks for changes in our direction and motivation in order to enrich, not to impoverish, life and man.

GIRIJA SHETTAR

(Based on "The Aryan Ideal and the Three Gunas" by Sri Aurobindo in
Bengali Writings, pp. 331-41)

Subjection of the soul to the confused play of the three gunas of Prakriti in their eternal entangled twining and wrestling, ignorance, a false, sensuous, objective life of the soul, enslavement to grief and wrath and attachment and passion, are the results of the downward trend of the buddhi,—the troubled life of the ordinary, unenlightened, undisciplined man.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Essays on the Gita*, CWSA, Vol. 19, pp. 98-99)

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of January 2006)

FROM the “grey anarchy”¹ of the world of “Little Life”, Aswapathy now approaches the world of “Greater Life”, a region ineffectual, without purpose still, where life see-saws between vain denial and dubious hope. It is a world of deceptive illumination.

As one who between dim receding walls
Towards the far gleam of a tunnel’s mouth,
Hoping for light, walks now with freer pace
And feels approach a breath of wider air,
So he escaped from that grey anarchy.

(Savitri, CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 173)

Aswapathy sees life in its beginnings, as it were:

Like blind souls looking for the selves they lost
And wandering through unfamiliar worlds;
Wings of vague questioning met the query of Space.
After denial dawned a dubious hope,
A hope of self and form and leave to live
And the birth of that which never yet could be,...

(Ibid.)

There is in this world a possibility of self-finding, a sureness of forces, an adventure of mind, “a touch of sure delight in unsure things...”²

Life laboured in a strange and mythic air
Denuded of her sweet magnificent suns.
In worlds imagined, never yet made true,
A lingering glimmer on creation’s verge,
One strayed and dreamed and never stopped to achieve:
To achieve would have destroyed that magic Space.

(Ibid., p. 174)

These are worlds of marvel, beauty, wonder and fancy. Yet here,

Nothing was solid, nothing felt complete:
All was unsafe, miraculous and half-true.
It seemed a realm of lives that had no base.

(Ibid., p. 175)

The Traveller of the Worlds next comes to the Kingdom of the morning star. Here, Truth flames forth in the word, thrown up “from a chance tension of the soul”.³ The first faint raptures naturally lead to a “vaster hope”:

A progress leap from sight to greater sight,
A process march from form to ampler form,
A caravan of the inexhaustible
Formations of a boundless Thought and Force.

(Ibid., p. 177)

This is the region that “inspires our vaster hopes”.⁴ Immortality glimmers in the distance, a beckoning star, “And fills a little soul with the Infinite”⁵, but this striving Energy still does not have a conscious aim.

But labours driven by a nameless Will
That came from some unknowable formless Vast.

(Ibid.)

And it must be admitted that she has not altogether failed because “She has lured the Eternal into the arms of Time.”⁶ Yet has she no self-knowledge of her acts, the process of her working is difficult and her capacities are limited:

Insignificant her means, infinite her work;
On a great field of shapeless consciousness
In little finite strokes of mind and sense
An endless Truth she endlessly unfolds;...

(Ibid., p. 178)

She has a vision of her greatness and of her perfection which to her is a passion and yet this very effort entails pain. It is, as the poet says, “A rapture and pang, her glory and her curse”.⁷ Aswapathy sees the glorious and mighty effort of the vital world.

Evolution is a power that persists, and passes on. The struggle, the striving, start again and go on, apparently for ever. This is the seeming grapple between Prakriti and Purusha:

Although she is ever in him and he in her,
As if unaware of the eternal tie,
Her will is to shut God into her works
And keep him as her cherished prisoner
That never they may part again in Time.

(Ibid., pp. 181-82)

Prakriti keeps Him in her close embrace; He may wrestle, but He may not get away! There is a mystic truth behind it. This mystic struggle and embrace is really the law of life and evolutionary advance.

The play of consciousness here in the higher vital world is lit by Truth, but does not contain or hold the Truth as a permanent condition:

A consciousness lit by a Truth above
Was felt; it saw the light but not the Truth:
It caught the Idea and built from it a world;
It made an Image there and called it God.
Yet something true and inward harboured there.
The beings of that world of greater life,
Tenants of a larger air and freer space,
Live not by the body or in outward things:
A deeper living was their seat of self.

(*Ibid.*, p. 183)

The beings of the higher vital world are visible and, in that plane,

There is kept grandeur's store, the hero's mould;
The soul is the watchful builder of its fate;
None is a spirit indifferent and inert;
They choose their side, they see the god they adore.

(*Ibid.*, p. 184)

There is here a movement of higher life for the first time:

An ideal is their leader and their king:
Aspiring to the monarchy of the sun
They call in Truth for their high government,...

(*Ibid.*, p. 185)

Following the track of the march of the Life-Force, Aswapathy presently comes to

...a high release from pettier cares,
A mightier image of desire and hope,
A vaster formula, a greater scene.

(*Ibid.*, p. 188)

Higher still and higher, onward and forever onward, Nature circles above, aiming "at a target kept invisible".⁸ Here the atmosphere is ethereal rather than dense—more

and more ethereal with a flight into the higher regions. Aswapathy sees Nature's striving, the colours have a blinding dazzle,—but the white radiance of Truth can nowhere be seen. Nature has hidden intensities of beauty and joy—

In her green wildernesses and lurking depths,
In her thickets of joy where danger clasps delight,
He glimpsed the hidden wings of her songster hopes,
A glimmer of blue and gold and scarlet fire.

(*Ibid.*, p. 190)

True enough it is that the present error, defeat, pain, the reign of death, the empire of futility, will be exceeded, but for the time being “we strain to reach an unknown goal”:⁹

There is no end of seeking and of birth,
There is no end of dying and return;
The life that wins its aim asks greater aims,
The life that fails and dies must live again;
Till it has found itself it cannot cease.
All must be done for which life and death were made.
But who shall say that even then is rest?

(*Ibid.*, p. 200)

When human contraries are reconciled in a supreme self-existence and harmony, it will be possible for the earth to attain her dream.

In a high state where ignorance is no more,
Each movement is a wave of peace and bliss,
Repose God's motionless creative force,
Action a ripple in the Infinite
And birth a gesture of Eternity.

(*Ibid.*)

(*To be continued*)

NILIMA DAS

References

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|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. <i>Savitri</i> , CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 173. | 2. <i>Ibid.</i> | 3. <i>Ibid.</i> , p. 176. | 4. <i>Ibid.</i> |
| 5. <i>Ibid.</i> , p. 177. | 6. <i>Ibid.</i> , p. 178. | 7. <i>Ibid.</i> | 8. <i>Ibid.</i> , p. 188. |
| | | | 9. <i>Ibid.</i> , p. 200. |

PANCHASSEE-MOUNTAIN

(Continued from the issue of April 2006)

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

(5) Pilgrimage ... “the heavenly Breaths”

Our earth shaped out of the dark inconscient ocean of existence lifts its high formations and ascending peaks heavenward;...

(Sri Aurobindo, Hymns to the Mystic Fire)

Our conscious existence is a hill (adri) with many successive levels and elevations...

(Sri Aurobindo, The Secret of the Veda)

THE morning after the climb to Panchassee village is a subdued one. Even a clear vastness at dawn does not slake the physical fatigue, nor the spectacular view, on waking, of the Annapurna sunrise with reddened snow-clad peaks. But a mug of tea at 7:00 a.m. helps. The lodge Buffalo provides a milky sweetness to the black salt-tea. This rock salt is from the area of the Tibetan plateau inside Nepal, and is considered holy as well as healthy. The dark black colour of minerals that this salt encloses gives each large lump a distinctive trait, as if conscious of its local Dark divine Mother symbolism: the local holy river that flows from the Tibetan plateau called Kali-mother is also black. Black is the colour of the Mother of Strength and Force in Her darkness aspect: the white peaks of Annapurna are the White Mother—symbol of spiritual Light.

It was a bowing Tibetan salesman who arrived unexpectedly one afternoon, selling fresh juniper buds for the Tibetan style of incense burning, and did not need to bargain much to sell his product: he also sold black salt. By the time he and his wife reached this Panchassee village, they had been walking for nine days. Two large mugs of this flavoured salt tea at least moved us from the open air verandah, where we slept on the floor, towards breakfast. The view as we walked from the abandoned house where we slept, to the lodge kitchen, is directly towards the Annapurna skyline. This image of vastness is so symbolically suited to almost every conception of Mother-myth, that pilgrims surely have been coming here for thousands of years to have this view.

The Vedic Age is said to have ended about 5000 years ago when the Saraswati river dried up in what is now mostly Pakistan, forcing these people to move eastward to the Ganga river basin. But perhaps the Vedic culture always existed in the Himalayas

as across the landmass to Europe. For example there are still 50 sanskrit words in the Lithuanian language, which would suggest a very large Vedic influence extending to the Baltic Sea.

And perhaps Panchassee area, including the Pokhara township and 5 local lakes, might also have been a place of antiquity with many thousands of years of habitation, because food is plentiful. The local people grow rice in abundance that the monsoon rains singularly water, and with a lake full of fish they have ample time to appreciate their Nature-surroundings as a bountiful divine Mother. The summer soft green of young rice and autumn gold of ripe rice overlap according to elevation and variety: sometimes both touch the lake water. And both blend with a lake-tinted vastness that stretches to the Panchassee summit and then into the beyond, for She is the highest of the local hills.

When we finally start the last section of the climb to the Panchassee summit, it is 8:30 a.m. And I agree to carry potatoes up to the lone priest who lives on peak number 2, a gift from the Buddhist lodge-family. The religious background of the four village lodges is Buddhist, but they obviously have no hesitation to worship local Vedic and Hindu symbols. Further, one can observe that mental distinctions are of little value when the issue is of carrying potatoes.

In this last portion of the climb to the Panchassee peaks the view is of a more and more distant vastness. Also, as we continue up, views of the Panchassee pilgrim-village where we slept show how well it is nestled in a nature-saddle completely surrounded by jungle. We climb upwards through thick mossy rhododendron trees.

Panchassee-mountain is visibly an ancient pilgrimage site for the number of ruins on each cliffside that we pass. During the Vedic Age perhaps this same climb to the Panchassee summit allowed a Himalayan view of the Vedic symbol “lap of the Mother”, as translated by Sri Aurobindo. The Vedic image we climb in front of and see ever more clearly is a southern view of the Annapurna range. This view shows the Annapurna massif concaved in front of us (and Panchassee-mountain), with Machhaputtre separated from and in front of this Mother-massif, pointing upwards. The early Vedic myth of a divine Mother as the primal light in Nature, perhaps originally also occurred here because in the view from a local village, even the one we had just slept in, the new light of day appears to be born from beneath these highest of mountains.

And so it feels quite natural to place a wild flower in front of a roughly-chipped slate-rock etching of the divine Mother when we pass through a section of open Panchassee grassland. This symbol of the divine Female is in an outdoor unroofed and unwallled Nature-temple, upon a circular rock base surrounded by huge yellow flowers and a deep blue sky, attesting to a village perception of a local Shakti or Mother-nature “seat”. It is also in the grassland portions of the various Panchassee trails that the view opens out to Her vastnesses: the Mountain-mother physically seems to wear the hills as a garment.

The word nṛ seems to have meant originally active, swift or strong. We have nṛmṇa, strength, and nṛtama nṛnām, most puissant of the Powers. It came afterwards to mean male or man and in the Veda is oftenest applied to the gods as the male powers or Purushas presiding over the energies of Nature as opposed to the female powers, who are called gnā.

(Sri Aurobindo, The Secret of the Veda)

In the Vedic culture, the divine Female was a symbol Earth-mother who also provided us with everything in the psychological worlds. The male is outside of manifestation in this view. The masculine gender is symbolised as the bull, fire and the sun. Within this earthly Mother creation are both male and female symbols, and their psychological experience may be distinguishable as the difference between fire (male) and rock (female). Fire is present here in the world with us but is of a unique quality of physicality, one that we can see but not hold with our hands. The female symbol-rock, on the other hand, we can both see as well as hold in the hands. Experienced outside of the senses, the male symbol as a witness consciousness is understood through the meeting of a wild bull on a jungle path with room for only one. Freezing all movement, the wild bull is immobile as if outside of the manifestation, and not touchable by our wildly beating heart.

As we continue to climb towards Panchassee summit, sometimes steeply up, soon the breathing again becomes the mental focus. The normal workings of the mind are affected with the demands of the breath on this rough rock-stepped pilgrim-path. There must have been pilgrims climbing up these steps in the distant past, so spectacular is the view and strong the feelings of vastness. And each one invariably is forced to accommodate an experience of breathing.

Probably, there may have been different levels of experience of the Vedic symbol of the divine Breath, different levels from the physical to the psychological. Whether in meditation or movement the “churning of breath” is an experience described in the Vedas: thus in this pilgrimage there are parallel inner and outer experiences. Eventually we can make the distinction between the in-breath and the out-breath.

O young and seers and powers of the sacrifice,... come uttering the word to the high place (or desirable plane of earth or the hill),... rightly moving [on the path,...] ...give joy even to that which is not illumined...

(Sri Aurobindo, Hymns to the Mystic Fire)

In the springtime this upper area of Panchassee mountain is ablaze with sun-filled rhododendron flowers. Huge trees appear as if aflame against a brilliant blue sky, and we climb beneath their Fire. With time the steps slow, the breathing slows, the mind slows.

...uniting in themselves the vehement power of Vayu, the Wind, the Breath, the Lord of Life and the force of Agni, the Seer-Will, are therefore seers who do the work by the knowledge, ...as well as battling forces who by the power of the heavenly Breath and the heavenly lightning overthrow the established things, the artificial obstructions, ...in which the sons of Darkness have entrenched themselves...

(Sri Aurobindo, Hymns to the Mystic Fire)

(To be continued)

GARY

The image of this sacrifice is sometimes that of a journey or voyage; for it travels, it ascends; it has a goal—the vastness, the true existence, the light, the felicity—and it is called upon to discover and keep the good, the straight and the happy path to the goal, the arduous, yet joyful road of the Truth. It has to climb, led by the flaming strength of the divine Will, from plateau to plateau as of a mountain, it has to cross as in a ship the waters of existence, traverse its rivers, overcome their deep pits and rapid currents; its aim is to arrive at the far-off ocean of light and infinity.

And this is no easy or peaceful march; it is for long seasons a fierce and relentless battle. Constantly the Aryan man has to labour and to fight and conquer; he must be a tireless toiler and traveller and a stern warrior, he must force open and storm and sack city after city, win kingdom after kingdom, overthrow and tread down ruthlessly enemy after enemy. His whole progress is a warring of Gods and Titans, Gods and Giants, Indra and the Python, Aryan and Dasyu. Aryan adversaries even he has to face in the open field; for old friends and helpers turn into enemies; the kings of Aryan states he would conquer and overpass join themselves to the Dasyus and are leagued against him in supreme battle to prevent his free and utter passing on.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Secret of the Veda, CWSA, Vol. 15, pp. 377-78)

NAVANIT STORIES

MASQUERADER

A MASTER masquerader! In the week that he has been in town he has gone about every day in a different disguise, so perfect is his impersonation that even the most keen-eyed fails to unmask him. So completely does he immerse himself in his new personality that none can find a single slip. Such an adept is he in the art of transforming both his inner and his outer personality, so well-versed in the minutest details of the role he is playing, that one can't but believe he actually is what he appears to be.

Today he has come as a Jain Muni (monk), a large sack hanging from his shoulder, a staff in one hand and in the other his *bhiksha-patra* (vessel for alms).

"*Dharma-labha*," he announced, as he approached a solemn old couple sitting on an ornamented swing in a lavish room on the seventh-floor of their *haveli*. These people whom he mistook for Jains were actually Vaishnavas whose son, their only child, had recently died. No progeny to succeed them and not the faintest hope of begetting another child, their incalculable wealth and power incapable of bringing any solace,—in that state of mind they stood up reverently and greeted the Muni, "Welcome, Maharaj," and reverently awaited his discourse.

"What have you planned to do?" the Muni exploded. "This huge mansion, these vast estates, these hoards of gold, silver, jewels, ornaments, these royal clothes and luxurious trappings, you will be taking them all with you, *hein*?"

"Maharaj! How can that be?" the Seth humbly replied. "Has anyone ever taken away such things? They will all remain here. We shall depart empty handed."

"No! All this *shall* come with you. I will show you a way, listen to me. You are by yourselves now, with not many years left to live. Keep aside one lakh rupees for your own maintenance; and the remaining ninety-nine lakhs spend in works of charity. That way all that you give away will come with you as your own wherever you go after death."

"Yes, Maharaj," he agreed, "that is indeed the right way."

"Then take up the holy water and take the *Pachchakhan* vow."

Taking the consecrated water in his right palm, the Seth uttered the pledge, and then waited quietly for further instructions. His wife went near him and whispered in his ear, "What are you waiting for? Come, let us go and bring some offering for the Muni." They went into another room and piling up a large golden dish with pearls, diamonds and other precious stones brought it out and placed it at the Muni's feet. "Maharaj! Oblige us by accepting all this and bless us."

The Muni's face burned in anger: "How dare you offer wealth to a Jain Muni? Do you wish to thrust me into sin or what?" So saying, he kicked the dish and sent its precious contents flying all over the room. "We Munis never touch money, leave alone such stones. For us a slice of bread is quite sufficient."

The mortified couple rushed to their kitchen and came back with plates of food and fruits. Taking a small amount, the masquerader blessed them and quietly went away.

A few days later he returned to the same street in the guise of a Brahmin monk, with an ample shoulder bag for carrying alms, shouting repeatedly, “*Ekadashi punyaparevani!* Take a sadhu’s blessings! Alms, give alms!” When he stood before their *haveli*, the devout Vaishnava couple came out and gave him money and the customary ingredients with which sadhus cook their own meals. “May you become happy parents!” he blessed them.

Immediately, a doubt assailed the Seth’s mind. Didn’t that Muni have exactly the same voice? However, humbly and quietly, he enquired, “Maharaj, forgive me for saying this, but a Jain Muni who had graced our house a few days back spoke in a voice so much like yours....”

“You have guessed right, Seth. It was I who came that day as that Muni.”

“But Maharaj! That day you kicked away a large golden dish full of great wealth and today you have to go begging from house to house for a few coins and a few bowls of plain flour. What is the mystery behind this?”

“Seth, how is it you cannot understand it? That day I was a Jain Muni and, as you know, the Munis stay miles away from material wealth. How could I then even touch your jewels?”

“But that was only a disguise. Surely you were not a real Muni?”

“No, Seth, you are mistaken there. As long as I was in that guise I *was* a real one. How shameful it would be to take on the role of a Muni and then insult it like that? Haven’t you heard the Sutra ‘Play sincerely the role you take up; fulfill sincerely the declarations you make’?”

The Seth and Sethani were stunned. Taking up disguises merely to fill his belly this masquerader could stick to such an absolute self-discipline! Blessed is this man. How much have those who explicitly take up the path of Tapasya to learn from him!

PUJALAL

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

In our yoga we begin with the idea, the will, the aspiration of the complete surrender; but at the same time we have to reject the lower nature, deliver our consciousness from it, deliver the self involved in the lower nature by the self rising to freedom in the higher nature. If we do not do this double movement, we are in danger of making a tamasic and therefore unreal surrender, making no effort, no tapas and therefore no progress; or else we may make a rajasic surrender not to the Divine but to some self-made false idea or image of the Divine which masks our rajasic ego or something still worse.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 70)

HYMN TO THE MOTHER

Bande Mataram

Mother, I bow to thee!
Rich with thy hurrying streams,
Bright with thy orchard gleams,
Cool with thy winds of delight,
Dark fields waving, Mother of might,
Mother free.
Glory of moonlight dreams
Over thy branches and lordly streams,—
Clad in thy blossoming trees,
Mother, giver of ease,
Laughing low and sweet!
Mother, I kiss thy feet,
Speaker sweet and low!
Mother, to thee I bow.

Who hath said thou art weak in thy lands,
When the swords flash out in twice
seventy million hands
And seventy million voices roar
Thy dreadful name from shore to shore?
With many strengths who art mighty
and stored,
To thee I call, Mother and Lord!
Thou who savest, arise and save!
To her I cry who ever her foemen drave
Back from plain and sea
And shook herself free.

Thou art wisdom, thou art law,
Thou our heart, our soul, our breath,
Thou the love divine, the awe
In our hearts that conquers death.
Thine the strength that nerves the arm,
Thine the beauty, thine the charm.
Every image made divine
In our temples is but thine.

Thou art Durga, Lady and Queen,
With her hands that strike and her
swords of sheen,
Thou art Lakshmi lotus-throned,
And the Muse a hundred-toned.
Pure and perfect without peer,
Mother, lend thine ear.
Rich with thy hurrying streams,
Bright with thy orchard gleams,
Dark of hue, O candid-fair
In thy soul, with jewelled hair
And thy glorious smile divine,
Loveliest of all earthly lands,
Showering wealth from
well-stored hands!
Mother, mother mine!
Mother sweet, I bow to thee,
Mother great and free!

Translated by Sri Aurobindo

(Translations, CWSA, Vol. 5, pp. 465-66)

With Compliments from Well-wishers