

# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LIX

No. 6

---

*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

---

### CONTENTS

#### *Sri Aurobindo*

SURRENDER (Poem) ... 413

GAYATRI ... 414

THE DIVINE BODY ... 415

#### *The Mother*

‘THOU ART MY LIGHT AND MY PEACE’ ... 417

#### *M. P. Pandit*

SRI AUROBINDO’S GAYATRI ... 418

CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO A PROPOS A GUJARATI TRANSLATION  
OF MAURICE MAGRE’S IMPRESSIONS OF THE ASHRAM ... 422

#### *K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran)*

CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO REGARDING  
MINNIE CANTEENWALLA’S POEM “TREES” ... 430

#### *Priti Das Gupta*

MOMENTS, ETERNAL ... 433

#### *S. V. Bhatt*

PAINTING AS SADHANA: KRISHNALAL BHATT (1905-1990) ... 439

SRI AUROBINDO ON KRISHNALAL (From a Sadhak’s Correspondence) ... 444

#### *Ranajit Sarkar*

DUTCH PAINTING IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY ... 446

#### *N. Shakuntala Manay*

A JOURNEY TOGETHER (Poem) ... 454

#### *Mangesh Nadkarni*

SRI AUROBINDO ON HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA ... 455

#### *M. S. Srinivasan*

HISTORY OF THE FUTURE ... 464

<i>Kripa</i>		
CALL TO THE QUEST (Poem)	...	469
<i>Devdip Ganguli</i>		
THE ADVENTURE OF CONSCIOUSNESS—INDIA’S SPIRITUAL EVOLUTION	...	470
<i>Narad (Richard Eggenberger)</i>		
TEHMI-BEN—NARAD REMEMBERS: ON EDUCATION	...	476
<i>Prema Nandakumar</i>		
DEVOTIONAL POETRY IN TAMIL	...	481
<i>Maggi</i>		
ALL SUDDENLY (Poem)	...	490
<i>Gary</i>		
PANCHASSEE-MOUNTAIN	...	492
<i>Pujalal</i>		
NAVANIT STORIES	...	496

## SURRENDER

O Thou of whom I am the instrument,  
O secret Spirit and Nature housed in me,  
Let all my mortal being now be blent  
In Thy still glory of divinity.

I have given my mind to be dug Thy channel mind,  
I have offered up my will to be Thy will:  
Let nothing of myself be left behind  
In our union mystic and unutterable.

My heart shall throb with the world-beats of Thy love,  
My body become Thy engine for earth-use;  
In my nerves and veins Thy rapture's streams shall move;  
My thoughts shall be hounds of Light for Thy power to loose.

Keep<sup>1</sup> only my soul to adore eternally  
And meet Thee in each form and soul of Thee.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 153)*

1. Leave.

## GAYATRI

तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं रुपां ज्योतिः परस्य  
धīmahi ।  
यन्नः सत्येन दीपयेत् ॥

(*Tat savitur varam rūpam jyotiḥ parasya  
dhīmahi, yannah satyena dīpayet*)

*Let us meditate on the most  
auspicious (best) form of Savitri,  
on the Light of the Supreme  
which shall illumine us with  
the Truth.*

N.B. The invocation in the Mantra is to the Sun God *savitṛ* (सवितृ). Accordingly in its English rendering the word *Savitri* should be read in that context.

## THE DIVINE BODY

*(Continued from the issue of May 2006)*

THERE is one problem raised by sex for those who would reject *in toto* the obligations imposed by the animality of the body and put forward by it as an insistent opposition in the way of the aspirant to a higher life: it is the necessity of the prolongation of the race for which the sex activity is the only means already provided by Nature for living beings and inevitably imposed upon the race. It is not indeed necessary for the individual seeker after a divine life to take up this problem or even for a group who do not seek after it for themselves alone but desire a wide acceptance of it by mankind as at least an ideal. There will always be the multitude who do not concern themselves with it or are not ready for its complete practice and to these can be left the care for the prolongation of the race. The number of those who lead the divine life can be maintained and increased, as the ideal extends itself, by the voluntary adhesion of those who are touched by the aspiration and there need be no resort to physical means for this purpose, no deviation from the rule of a strict sexual abstinence. But yet there may be circumstances in which, from another standpoint, a voluntary creation of bodies for souls that seek to enter the earth-life to help in the creation and extension of the divine life upon earth might be found to be desirable. Then the necessity of a physical procreation for this purpose could only be avoided if new means of a supraphysical kind were evolved and made available. A development of this kind must necessarily belong to what is now considered as the sphere of the occult and the use of concealed powers of action or creation not known or possessed by the common mind of the race. Occultism means rightly the use of the higher powers of our nature, soul, mind, life-force and the faculties of the subtle physical consciousness to bring about results on their own or on the material plane by some pressure of their own secret law and its potentialities, for manifestation and result in human or earthly mind and life and body or in objects and events in the world of Matter. A discovery or an extension of these little known or yet undeveloped powers is now envisaged by some well-known thinkers as a next step to be taken by mankind in its immediate evolution; the kind of creation spoken of has not been included among these developments, but it could well be considered as one of the new possibilities. Even physical science is trying to find physical means for passing beyond the ordinary instrumentation or procedure of Nature in this matter of propagation or the renewal of the physical life-force in human or animal beings; but the resort to occult means and the intervention of subtle physical processes, if it could be made possible, would be a greater way which could avoid the limitations, degradations, incompleteness and heavy imperfection of the means and results solely available to the law of material force.

In India there has been always from the earliest times a widely spread belief in the possibility and reality of the use of these powers by men with an advanced

knowledge of these secret things or with a developed spiritual knowledge and experience and dynamic force and even, in the Tantras, an organized system of their method and practice. The intervention of the Yogi in bringing about a desired birth of offspring is also generally believed in and often appealed to and the bestowal on the child so obtained of a spiritual attainment or destiny by his will or his blessing is sometimes asked for and such a result is recorded not only in the tradition of the past but maintained by the witness of the present. But there is here still the necessity of a resort to the normal means of propagation and the gross method of physical Nature. A purely occult method, a resort to supraphysical processes acting by supra-physical means for a physical result would have to be possible if we are to avoid this necessity: the resort to the sex impulse and its animal process could not be transcended otherwise. If there is some reality in the phenomenon of materialisation and dematerialisation claimed to be possible by occultists and evidenced by occurrences many of us have witnessed, a method of this kind would not be out of the range of possibility. For in the theory of the occultists and in the gradation of the ranges and planes of our being which Yoga-knowledge outlines for us there is not only a subtle physical force but a subtle physical Matter intervening between life and gross Matter, and to create in this subtle physical substance and precipitate the forms thus made into our grosser materiality is feasible. It should be possible and it is believed to be possible for an object formed in this subtle physical substance to make a transit from its subtlety into the state of gross Matter directly by the intervention of an occult force and process, whether with or even without the assistance or intervention of some gross material procedure. A soul wishing to enter into a body or form for itself a body and take part in a divine life upon earth might be assisted to do so or even provided with such a form by this method of direct transmutation, without passing through birth by the sex process or undergoing any degradation or any of the heavy limitations in the growth and development of its mind and material body inevitable to our present way of existence. It might then assume at once the structure and greater powers and functionings of the truly divine material body which must one day emerge in a progressive evolution to a totally transformed existence both of life and form in a divinised earth-nature.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 547-49)*

## ‘THOU ART MY LIGHT AND MY PEACE’

**December 13, 1913**

GIVE me Thy light, O Lord, grant that I do not fall into any error. Grant that the infinite reverence, the utter devotion, that intense and profound love I bring to Thee may be radiant, convincing, contagious, and be awakened in every heart.

O Lord, Eternal Master, Thou art my Light and my Peace; guide my steps, open my eyes, illumine my heart, and lead me on the paths that go straight to Thee.

O Lord, Lord, grant that I may have no other will than Thine and that all my acts may be an expression of Thy divine law.

A great Light floods my whole being, and I am no longer conscious of anything but Thee....

Peace, peace, peace upon all the earth.

THE MOTHER

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, p. 39)*

## SRI AUROBINDO'S GAYATRI

तत् सवितुर्वरं रूपं ज्योतिः परस्य धीमहि।  
यन्नः सत्येन दीपयेत्॥

*Tat savitur varam rūpam jyotiḥ parasya dhīmahi,  
yannah satyena dīpayet*

Or, in English:

Let us meditate on the most auspicious (best) form of Savitri, on the Light of the Supreme which shall illumine us with the Truth.<sup>1</sup>

(सवितुः) of Savitri (परस्य) of the Supreme (वरम्) auspicious (best) (रूपम्) form (तत्) that (ज्योतिः) Light (धीमहि) let us meditate on (यत्) which (नः) us (सत्येन) with the Truth (दीपयेत्) shall illumine.

(ii)

And this is the explanation of the Mantra by Sri Kapali Sastriar, approved by Sri Aurobindo:

सवितुः स्रष्टुः परस्य पुरुषस्य वरं श्रेष्ठं कल्याणतमं रूपं योगदृष्टिलभ्यं शरीरभूतं (परार्थे प्रकृतिभूतं) तत् ज्योतिः ध्यायेम। यत् सावित्रं परं ज्योतिः नः अस्मान् सत्येन सतः परस्मात् (तज्ज्योतिषश्च) अनपेतेन नित्येन भावेन दीपयेत् प्रकाशयेत् ज्वालयेत्।

(सवितुः परस्य वररूपज्योतिष्यनिनास्माकं इह जीवयाव्रासु सत्यप्रकाशलाभः प्रतिपादितः)

ज्योतिषः स्तुत्या ज्योतिष्मतः स्तुतिराक्षिप्तये सत्यैकस्वरूपत्वेऽपि ज्योतिर्ज्योतिष्मतोः (शक्तिशक्तयोः) उभयरूपत्वग्रहणात्,  
इह नः श्रीभगवदुपदिष्ट श्रीमातृसाधनानुगुण्येनेन्यं च गायत्री ग्रहणक्षमा भवति॥

तथा च,

तत्सवितुरित्यस्य मन्त्रस्य  
परः श्री अरविन्दः ऋषिः  
गायत्री छन्दः  
परं ज्योतिरम्बा देवता॥

Rendered freely in English, it reads:

1. Sri Aurobindo's own translation.



We meditate upon that Light which is the best, the most auspicious Form of the Supreme Person, Savitri the Creator. That is His body (what is Prakriti in the Higher Hemisphere) accessible to yogic vision. That Supreme Splendour of Savitri shall illumine us, irradiate us with Truth, with a constant state of being inseparate from the Supreme Sat and its Light.

The attainment of the Truth-illumination here in the journey of our life through meditation on the Splendour, the excellent Form of the Supreme Creator (Savitri), is thus posited.

By the laud of the Splendour, the laud is extended to the Splendorous as well. For though the Splendour and the Splendorous, Shakti and Shakta, have the state of one Truth-Form, the state of their dual form is accepted.

And this Gayatri comes to be acceptable here as in tune with the Sadhana of the Mother taught by our venerable Lord. So also, of this Mantra *tat savituh*,

the Seer is Sri Aurobindo the supreme,  
the Metre is Gayatri,  
the Deity is the Supreme Light, the Mother.

(iii)

Savitri is the Sun. Not the physical sun in our skies, but the Sun of Truth on the spiritual firmament. Savitri is the Creator of All (the root *su* meaning: to give birth, loose forth, impel etc.). He is the Supreme Divine in His poise for manifestation and He releases and impels all forms into existence. He is the Spiritual Sun on the highest summit of Creation, extended like an Eye<sup>2</sup> in the Heaven and it is He who is imaged by the solar orb on the physical plane of our universe. He is the Truth-Sun, the sole source of all Light and Life who is the Goal of the life-long Sacrifice and the object of the perpetual vision<sup>3</sup> of the Seers of the Veda. He is the supreme Purusha, the Brahman self-formulated as the Creative Person at the head of the Manifestation of which we are a part.

He creates. But in creating, He Himself enters and assumes the innumerable forms that people the vast system of universes. His forms are thus multitudinous. But there is a Form which is the highest Form of all forms, and that is the most natural and the best Form of Savitri: *Light*. Light is the vesture of Truth. The first and the characteristic form of Spiritual Truth is always Light and even our physical light which is a symbol of the spiritual Light, holds something of that Truth at its core. And being the natural form it is also the most enhappying—holding in itself the full content of the felicities of Truth, *prājavat saubhagam*, fruitful felicity.<sup>4</sup> This is the auspicious

2. *divīva cakṣuḥ ātatam* (Rig Veda I.22.20).

3. *sadā paśyanti sūrayaḥ* (*Ibid.*)

4. Rv. V. 82.4.

form, *rūpam kalyāṇatamam*, which the Rishi lauds:

The Lustre which is thy most blessed form of all, that in Thee I behold.<sup>5</sup>

But this Lustre is not seizable by our gross sight. It is only the inner Eye opened by Yoga, after an adequate purification and enlightenment of the being, that can perceive it. Perceive where? Within the heart. The Supreme Light which is *above* this triple world in the Ignorance is also there within the heart of every creature. Says the Chhandogya:<sup>6</sup>

The Light which shines above this heaven, above all the worlds, above everything, in the highest worlds not excelled by any other worlds, that is the same Light which is within man.

This Form of Light is the very body of the Consciousness-Force of the Lord, the *Parā Prakṛti* in the three higher worlds of Sat, Chit and Ananda constituting the Upper Hemisphere, the *trīṇi rocanāni* of the Veda, His Shakti, the Self-revealing Nature of the Divine Existent who is termed the Sat, the Sole Truth, Satya. She is active, bringing out what is held in the infinitude of the Being of the Lord. She mothers the creation of Forms out of the Formless; She is the Divine Mother. She has brought into being all these systems of universes and it is also She, the same Light-Force, the Shakti that sustains and builds them up in the mould of the Intention of the Supreme Lord. Only She can fulfil that Purpose in us. She also could relate us to the real Truth of our existence, the Satyam which each of our thousand movements struggles to express, aware or unaware, in however imperfect or misguided form. Let us invoke Her to awaken in us a consciousness responsive to Her workings and forge a living union of our aspiration with Her Will. Let us meditate upon Her. Let us wait upon Her expectantly with all the energies of our being gathered up and focussed in the mind so that the full charge of Her illumination is received in our intelligence and held firmly. So shall She, the Light of the Truth, settle and spread over the entire expanse of the multiple being of ourselves and set it aglow with the Flame of the Truth. As the poet sings:

पवित्रं तत् परं ज्योतिः सत्यं तदमृतं वपुः।  
इह सर्वाङ्गमस्माकमात्माज्ज्वलयेदपि॥

Pure is that Supreme Splendour;  
Truth is that body Immortal.

5. *Iśa Upaniṣad*, Verse 16.

6. यदतः परो दिवो ज्यातिर्दीप्यते विश्वतः पृष्ठेषु सर्वतः पृष्ठेषु तमेषु लोकेष्विदं वाव तद्यदिदम् अस्मिन्नन्तः पुरुषे ज्योतिः।

*Vide also Kuṇḍalinī Upaniṣad:*

आत्मानम् अघ्नूमज्योतिरूपकम् प्रकाशयन्तम् अन्तस्थं ध्यायेत्। (III. 26)

Let it here occupy all our parts  
and illumine them as well.<sup>7</sup>

It is not the mind alone with all its faculties that is to receive the Light. The whole of ourselves, *naḥ*, is to be reborn into that Luminous Truth.

(iv)

For the Sadhaka of the Poorna Yoga of Sri Aurobindo the significance and value of this Mantra—in Gayatri metre—is obvious. It is the same *Jyotiḥ*, Light, invoked in the Mantra, that is embodied in the person of the Mother who initiates the movement of Yoga in the individual and leads it up to its crowning realisation of the supramental Illumination. Hence it is meet that She is the Deity of the Mantra. And the Mantra charged as it is with the spiritual Dynamis of its Seer, Sri Aurobindo—the Creator and Impeller of the Supramental Life on earth—is a *King Idea* that

Can link man's strength to a transcendent Force<sup>8</sup>

and so ensure the glorious fulfilment of the object of this Yoga.

M. P. PANDIT

(*Japa*, pp. 37-47, published by Dipti Publications, Pondicherry, 1991)

7. Sri Kapali Sastriar: *Ahnikastava*: Verse 23, *Srimadaravinda-tripadastavastrīṭyah*.

8. *Savitri*: Book I Canto II.

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

(Continued from the issue of May 2006)

[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.]

“Le jardinier sait cela et il veille avec d’autant plus d’amour sur son petit peuple délicat.”

[The gardener knows this and he watches with a greater love over his delicate little people.]

Then comes the great difficulty. There are no Gujarati words for the two flowers, convolvulus and glaïeul. There are two possibilities open to us: as Herbert suggested in a different context, to place the French or English words as they are and give a note of explanation; or to put the names of any two flowers, if it is not likely to change the general meaning, say કેતકી [ketakī] or ગંધારજા [gandharāja], પારિજાતકા [pārijātaka] etc.

If they are flowers that actually are in the gardens of the Asram; also the names chosen must be of flowers that have the quality described in the passage (flexible—éclatante—offrande perpetuelle). Otherwise Herbert’s suggestion can be followed.

Do you like the word ઉદ્યાનપતિ [udyānapati] for “gardener”? I felt the માળી [mālī] in Gujarati—or બાગવાના [bāgavāna] rather vulgar, used more for the coolie who works there. Jyotin and Manubhai, [inmates of the Ashram] cannot certainly be called માળી [mālī].

I suppose not. The word you have used sounds better.

I think, it is better to take up Herbert’s suggestion and put the French names as they are.

*In the next sentence there is a difficulty of construction in Gujarati. The literal translation sounds awkward but I have put in the small phrases: [Gujarati translation.]*

Yes, that is all right.

28 February 1937

*“le jardinier est le souverain indiscuté des petits habitants des pots de terre, des futures fleurs rayonnantes, de toute la beauté de demain.”*

*[the gardener is the undisputed sovereign of the little inhabitants of the earthen pots, the radiant flowers of the future, all the beauty of tomorrow.]*

*[નિર્વિવાદ સમ્રાટ nirvivāda samrāṭa = undisputed sovereign] seems to me doubtful but I could not find a better adjective. બિનાહરિફ [binahariph] is one but that means one who has no competitor. One can say, so far as I know, નિર્વિવાદ સત્ય [nirvivāda satya] etc. but with સમ્રાટ [samrāṭa]?*

It sounds doubtful. Is there a word for “absolute” monarch that might do?

28 February 1937

*The words for “absolute monarch” in Apte’s [Sanskrit] dictionary are સમ્રાજ [samrāj] and અધિરાજ [adhirāj] but then the sense of “indiscuté” [undisputed] does not come out.*

સમ્રાજ [samrāj] & અધિરાજ [adhirāj] mean emperor, overlord, not absolute monarch. George VI is a Samrat, but he is in no way absolute. I find in a dictionary નિરંકુશ [nirankuśa], આપમુખત્યારા [āpamukhatyāra], સ્વેચ્છાદિના [svecchādhīna]. Would the first word do at all?

*“C’est le plus modeste des disciples et sa modestie s’allie cependant à une aristocratique hauteur.... Il fait penser à un mandarin très sage, un mandarin du nord de la Chine né d’une famille aussi ancienne que celle de Confucius.... il rend la justice un évantail à la main et il distribue avec une grande sévérité des peines absolument insignifiantes.”*

*[He is the most modest of disciples and yet his modesty is combined with an aristocratic pride.... He makes one think of a very wise mandarin of North China born of a family as ancient as that of Confucius.... he handles justice as if it were a fan and he metes out with a grand severity punishments that are absolutely trifling.]*

*The word નિરંકુશ [nirankuśa for “absolute”] is suitable, I think.*

*I have put કલ્પુ છુ [kalpu chu] for “je le vois” [I see him].*

That is all right.

*By “hauteur” does he mean the height of Pavitra’s body or some inner aristocratic nobility?*

The latter.

Is ચતુર [catura] the exact word for sage which means not intelligent, clever or skilful but wise?

*In Apte’s [Sanskrit] dictionary there are several words for “wise” = વિદગ્ધ [vidagdha], પાંડિત [pandita], ધીર- [dhīra], all pell-mell. For “Sage” would શાંન [śānā] do? The word ડાહ્યા [dāhyā] is the right one but rather dull.*

I suppose it would do.

*For “insignificant”, I propose નાજીવ [najivī].*

That is right, I think.

*In the above translation, I find the last line very unsatisfactory.*

Is it so unsatisfactory? The word indulgence used in this sense is difficult to translate, I suppose.

*The words “wise” and “wisdom” seem to create difficulty. In Gujarati it is given ડાહ્યાપાણ [dāhyāpaṇa] and some others: શાંનપાણ [śānapaṇa], ચતુર-ઈ [caturāī], સમજ [samaja], બુદ્ધિ [budhdhi].*

All these are quite inappropriate. The word you have chosen [પ્રજ્ઞ-prajñā] is probably the best.

*“Connaître un homme” would mean ઓળખાણ [olakhana] but the word seems a little commonplace. I thought of using સમગમ [samāgama], but that would be a “contact”. Do you think the following construction be better?*

I think it gives the sense better. Connaître means really to meet and associate with here.

*“La ville est posée au bord de la mer dans un cercle d’étangs et de palmiers. Un soleil de feu la brûle perpétuellement et fait bouillir les dalles de ses terrasses. Celui qui la contemplerait d’un aéroplane ne verrait que des pierres plates et*

*calcinées autour de la statue de Dupleix et du drapeau du gouverneur. On entend les corbeaux s'appeler entre eux et quelquefois il y a des silences comme il n'y en a dans aucune ville."*

*[The town stands on the sea-board within a circle of lakes and palms. A fiery sun scorches it perpetually and makes the tiles of its terraces glow. One who would contemplate it from an aeroplane would see only the flat and scalded stones around the statue of Dupleix and the flag of the governor. The crows are heard calling to one another and sometimes there are silences that we find in no town.]*

*The first sentence I had to divide in two parts. But at the point કાગડોળ [kāgadāo], the translation is somewhat awkward—that is to say, too abrupt, having no connection with the preceding sentence. Some conjunction, I feel, could be added.*

The sentence cannot be connected in that way—it is a description made up of a mass of casual details, the connection being that they make part of a whole and it is only that whole that keeps them together.

*The underlined words are an explanation because in Gujarati the idea of the શાશ્વતવિભાગ [śāśvatavibhāga] does not seem to be clear. [Translator added an extra line in Gujarati].*

Yes, it could not be understood without an explanation. The translation is good.

*"C'est dans cette ville que, de tous les points de l'Inde, les hommes sages sont venus pour vivre dans l'ombre du maître, une ombre dont la projection est une tache de lumière."*

*[It is in this town that, from all the quarters of India, wise men have come to live within the shadow of the Master, a shadow that projects a spot of light.]*

*Again "homme sage" brings difficulty. I have given something like the old word or જિજ્ઞાસુ [jijñāsu] would be better?*

Yes, that is better.

*Also for "projection de l'ombre", છાયાનો અગ્રભાગ [chāyāno agrabhāga] is not quite clear. That would mean that the અગ્રભાગ [agrabhāga] alone is luminous. Is the "projection" only a "tache de lumière" and not the "l'ombre" itself, one might ask.*

I don't think અગ્રભાગ [agrabhāga] will do—projection is something thrown out from itself by the Shadow. Also *tache* [French] is something bigger than a બિંદુ [bindu]. It is

a play upon words. Vivre dans l'ombre is a stock phrase (like the shade of atma) and he plays upon it by adding that what this shadow throws out is light.

For “projection” I find: પ્રાલંબન [pralanban], ઉત્સેદધ [utsedha] or વિસ્તાર- [vistāra] એ છાંયનો વિસ્તાર- એ તો જ્યોતિની એક રેખા [e chāyāno vistāra eto jyotinī eka rekhā]. I prefer વિસ્તાર- [vistāra].

For “tache” (spot), I find ભિંદુ [bindu], અંક [aṅka], ચિન્હ [cinha], ડાઘ [dāgha], none of which are pleasing, so I thought of રેખા [rekhā] which means a streak or a line, it is a finer word than લિસોટો [lisoto] which means the same thing, and it is bigger than a ભિંદુ [bindu].

Both these words are, I think, well-chosen.

“Si l'ombre du maître fait de la clarté lorsqu'elle s'étend, de quelle matière est donc pétri son corps de chair? Un corps semblable à celui de tous les autres hommes. Un corps qui est né d'une femme, qui a bu le lait de sa mère, qui a mangé, qui a connu les intervalles du sommeil, sur le crâne duquel les cheveux ont poussé, qui a eu des ongles à ses doigts, en souvenir d'aïeux lointains qui ont gratté le sol et déchiré leur nourriture pour vivre.”

[If the Master's shadow illumines the very moment it spreads out, of what matter then is moulded his body of flesh? A body resembling that of all other men. A body that is born of woman, has drunk its mother's milk, taken food, known the intervals of sleep and on whose head had grown hair and whose fingers have nails, in remembrance of far ancestors who have scraped the soil and torn from it their life's nourishment.]

I do not understand with what the phrase “en souvenir d'aïeux” [in remembrance of ancestors] goes. I have joined it to the phrase “qui a eu des ongles à ses doigts” [whose fingers have nails], but then it becomes confused. Perhaps it goes with all the preceding sentences.

It goes only with ongles à ses doigts—but there is no reference to agriculture. It means that man in his nearly animal state scratched the soil with his nails (to dig up roots probably) and tore the food he found to eat it; these were the aïeux lointains. Their civilised descendants have no need to do that, but have nails which remind one of this evolution—for the nails were then strong and indispensable, but now they are merely remnants. That is to say—he has a human body born of a woman, the human body which has developed from animal ancestors and still keeps traces of its origin.

“Le maître a vécu parmi les hommes de la terre, il a été en occident, il a étudié les langues et les philosophies, il a traversé les mers, il a vu les peuples différents, il a mesuré l'ignorance et l'injustice. Il a souffert de l'oppression de ses frères



*et lutté pour les libérer.”*

*[The Master has lived among men of the earth, he has been to the West, he has studied the languages and the philosophies, crossed oceans, seen various peoples, taken measures of ignorance and injustice. He has suffered the oppression of his brothers and fought for their freedom.]*

“Il a...lutté pour les libérer” *[He has...fought for their freedom]* would be યુદ્ધ આદ્યું છે *[yudhdha ādhryun che]*, but in Gujarati it would give the sense of “he has begun a fight” or “he is fighting”—almost a present tense. Hence I have to use હાનું *[hantu]* which in French would mean “Il avait lutté”. The same for the first sentence: if I were to write મનુષ્યો વચ્ચે વસ્યા છે *[manuṣyo vacce vasyā che]*, it is open to the interpretation, “he is now living”.

That is all right. In the French it is clear that these are things of the past—so there must be no ambiguity about it in the Gujarati.

11 February 1937

*“La sagesse humaine qu’il possède il l’a arrachée à la vie quotidienne comme on lui arrache son pain quotidien. C’est pour avoir touché la racine de la douleur, cette douleur cachée et déchirante qui est derrière l’image des manifestations, comme l’âme est derrière le corps, que ses yeux sont devenus si profonds et que son visage s’est creusé, comme le champ, lorsque la charrue l’a retourné.”*

*[The human wisdom that he possesses he has wrested from day-to-day life just as one wrests one’s daily bread. It is by touching the roots of sorrow, the hidden and hurting sorrow behind the figure of all manifestation, like the soul behind the body, that his eyes have grown so deep and his face hollow, like a field when it is turned by a plough.]*

Instead of મનુષ્યો હાલેવણ *[mānuṣī ḍahāpaṇa]* would it be better to put વ્યવહાર-જ્ઞાન *[vyavahāra jñāna]*

What he means is not worldly wisdom or practical wisdom, but the human wisdom which pierces through the appearances and knows what is the truth of human life.

*Is his description of you not made from the photographs he has seen?*

I suppose so—as he has not seen me.

“face à face avec lui-même” પોતાના આત્મા સાથે સંમુખ થઈ *[potānā ātmā sāthe sammukha thai]*. The whole phrase would be: *[Gujarati translation]*.

That will do.

*“Mais la sagesse divine, celle qui est au-dessus de toute douleur et ne peut y participer, il l’a atteinte, face à face avec lui même dans la solitude de la prison. Les quatre murs d’une cellule, comme des miroirs rayonnants, lui ont permis de voir ce qu’il n’est donné à nul homme de contempler, le mystère des causes, le chemin qui mène à l’union parfaite. Aussi immobile que le cyprès par un jour sans vent, que la pierre attachée à la montagne par les liens de l’argile, il a suivi la route infinie, qui n’a ni borne kilométrique, ni auberge et il a atteint le but qui rend l’homme divin.”*

*[But the divine wisdom, that is above all pain and cannot take part in it, he has come face to face with in the solitude of a prison. The four walls of his cell, like shining mirrors, have allowed him to see what is given to no man to contemplate, the mystery of causes, the path that leads to the perfect union. Still as a cypress on a day without wind, as a stone fixed to the mountain by bonds of clay, he has pursued his infinite way which knows neither a milestone nor an inn, and has reached the goal which makes man divine...]*

In the French it is “face to face with himself”, not “face to face with God”. Here the “but” makes a contrast between the sagesse humaine and the sagesse divine and the different ways by which they are got—the one by mixing in life, the other by the solitary facing oneself in prison. In the original the order of the words is such as to emphasise the contrast. In the translation it is rather effaced at both points; is it not possible to bring it out?

Apart from this the translation is very good.

*The only difficulty is about “face à face avec lui-même” [face to face with himself]: the Gujarati પોતાની જાણે મહોડા [potāneja mhoḍe mhoḍa] or પોતાની સાથે મહોડામહોડા [potānīja sāthe mhoḍamhoḍa] seem awkward. There are two Sanskrit words मुखमुखी [mukhāmukhī] and सम्मुख [sammukham], but how to join them with “lui-même” is the question.*

Is it not possible to find something if one uses the word आत्मा [atma] for self. What is meant is that the divine wisdom comes by looking away from outward things (unlike the human wisdom) and looking at one’s self face to face.

*The contrast is brought about by keeping the French order and the addition of à [to].*

Yes, that is all right.

*“C’est toujours le doute que l’on émet avec le plus d’ardeur, car le doute est plus vivace que la foi et plus avide de s’exprimer. Mais sa foie était si intense*

*que lorsque j'émettais un doute devant elle, elle le dissipait aussitôt, sans vaines paroles, rien qu'avec cette chaleur inexprimable qui provient du foyer de l'âme."*

*[It is always doubt that one utters with the greatest of ardours, for doubt is more living than faith and more avid of utterance. But her faith was so intense that as soon as I expressed a doubt before her, she dispelled it, without vain words, with nothing save that inexpressible warmth which comes from the hearth of the soul.]*

*I don't see how Magre can attribute "le doute" [doubt] to the lady (pages 126-127). In what sense does he mean "doute" here? Has she doubted the Divine or the spiritual life or what? In the last paragraph of page 126 he says that as his own faith was increasing, there was something in her which was failing and when his aspiration was at its height there was a despair and dryness in her mind. I think he misreads her sentiments. She must have found the atmosphere here very congenial and looked forward to a long stay and spiritual gain; when he decided to run away, she was naturally dragged along with him and that gave her a sense of despair and dryness. Since Magre must have promised a long stay here, she may have been surprised at his weakness and instability—and disappointed in him.*

*And how can he say that his aspiration towards the spirit was at his height? It must have been below par since he was going away from a place where his aspiration could have been fulfilled. The doubt was rather in him as "émet" []; it is on page 130 wherein he pleads for Nirvana of the Buddha.*

He had formerly always held the Buddhist view of things, so it was difficult for him to adapt his mind to a new view that contradicted it. What you say is to a great extent true, but still she had some elements in herself that may have opened the door to doubt.

(Concluded)

*The descent of the supramental can hasten things, but it is not going to act as a patent medicine or change everything in the twinkling of an eye.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 35)*

## **CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO REGARDING MINNIE CANTEENWALLA'S POEM "TREES"**

Sri Aurobindo—

Will you please comment on this poem of my sister's, correcting wherever you find the expression not sufficiently imaginative or euphonious. I have myself endeavoured to remove a few blemishes. Parts of it strike me as fine.

Amal  
15-1-33

### **TREES**

What endless tales they impart!  
As I sit beneath their shadows,  
Listening to their wayward voices—<sup>1</sup>  
From a vastness far surpassing  
The undulation of the prairies  
And a beauty that's more vital  
Than the sunset and the moon-glint  
Woven by a dreamer's dream  
Into a heaven of gossamer,  
I derive an understanding,  
A friendship that is more alive,  
More human than a human heart!

Though there be not a soul  
With me as I watch the gloaming,  
Watch afar the camp-fires rising  
Like serpents in a fantasy,  
The trees wooed by the lazy breeze  
Cease not their deep and friendly tones.  
They tell me secrets of the stars—  
Why they gleam brighter in the autumn,  
And why the spirits haunt the pinewoods  
When the maiden moon appears.  
Scanning Nature I vision God,  
Mingled as gold with common clay.

The willow by the wayside,  
 She<sup>2</sup> has a wistful tale for me,  
 An ancient tale of gloom and sadness  
 That is in her heart when the shadows fall.  
 The cypress with her slender beauty  
 Speaks of youth and pensive love,  
 Love that is stronger than mighty rocks.  
 The little stunted cactus bushes  
 With hatred burst their thorny hearts,  
 Embittered by the vile\* of mortals.  
 The ample oaks like chanting Druids  
 Teach me vast harmonies of soul.

When the spirit of storm awakens  
 Midway in his aerial sleep,  
 And raving rushes, armed with lightning,  
 Tearing through the giant forests,  
 I afrightened, cowering watch.  
 But the pine trees laugh aloud,  
 Laugh at the force of icy blasts  
 And bend and trick the wily winds,  
 Till beaten they hurry homewards,  
 Leaving the trees<sup>3</sup> scathed but victors.  
 So they teach me courage<sup>4</sup> to face life's fight  
 And not to whimper when I am shaken!

Minnie N. Canteenwalla

Sri Aurobindo's comment: It is very poetic but the rhythm does not satisfy the ear, because she has abandoned rhyme, yet keeps a metrical movement that for its perfection needs rhyme. Of course that can be done, but to carry it through calls for a subtle technical skill. (16.1.33)

1. Amal's explanatory note typed in the right margin ran:

v.1: "legends" connected up with the next line by "with" in place of "from," so that "vastness" and "beauty" become direct qualifications of legends. This was Minnie's original version.

\* Sri Aurobindo underlined this word and put a question mark in the left margin.

Amal's three queries typed in the margins and Sri Aurobindo's two answers:

2. Would you advise the omission of "She?" Sri Aurobindo: Yes.

3. Shouldn't there be an adjective before "trees"—"tall" or "great?" Sri Aurobindo: Yes, the rhythm is defective.

4. Is "courage" necessary to the sense or the rhythm?

K. D. SETHNA  
(AMAL KIRAN)

[Deep Footprints—a collection of poems by Minnie N. Canteenwalla (née Minnie D. Sethna)—was brought out by her poet-brother Amal Kiran in 1983. A few of these poems had been commented upon by Sri Aurobindo. "Trees" appears for the first time in print.]

*One with the Transcendent, calm, universal,  
Single and free, yet innumerably living,  
All in thyself and thyself in all dwelling,  
Act in the world with thy being beyond it.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

(*Collected Poems*, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 568)

## MOMENTS, ETERNAL

(Continued from the issue of May 2006)

### Ascent from Inconscience (1)

*Janaka is seated high above, down below sits Janika.*

ONE day after Her walk, standing under the Neem tree, the Mother remarked:

“I have begun the work in the Inconscient.”

I was taken aback. Who else could penetrate this bottomless dense Darkness beside the Mother? Who else could dare?

Sri Aurobindo has written in *The Mother*:

...she has consented to the great sacrifice and has put on like a mask the soul and forms of the Ignorance. But personally too she has stooped to descend here into the Darkness that she may lead it to the Light, into the Falsehood and Error that she may convert it to the Truth, into this Death that she may turn it to godlike Life, into this world-pain and its obstinate sorrow and suffering that she may end it in the transforming ecstasy of her sublime Ananda. In her deep and great love for her children she has consented to put on herself the cloak of this obscurity, condescended to bear the attacks and torturing influences of the powers of the Darkness and the Falsehood, borne to pass through the portals of the birth that is a death, taken upon herself the pangs and sorrows and sufferings of the creation, since it seemed that thus alone could it be lifted to the Light and Joy and Truth and eternal Life. This is the great sacrifice called sometimes the sacrifice of the Purusha, but much more deeply the holocaust of Prakriti, the sacrifice of the Divine Mother.

(SABCL, Vol. 25, pp. 24-25)

I had just read an Upanishadic parable by Nolini-da.

The Supreme Purusha felt very lonely and said: “How can one be happy alone?” And so the Supreme Purusha or Brahman divided himself. The Indivisible One Supreme Being by dividing himself became a Dual Being: Brahman and Brahma-shakti, Ishwara and Ishwari, Purusha and Prakriti, the two standing on two poles of the earth’s axis, as it were. Having separated and moved far apart in time, the Mother, the Eternal Shakti entered the depths of Inconscience. She became the most gross inconscient Matter. And Brahman on the other side became the contrary of his Shakti, Nothingness. The Two became opposites.

Here I am now, standing next to that Divine Mother, that Supreme Shakti. And She is herself telling us:

“I have come down to Inconscient Matter. My work in the Inconscient has begun.”

A shiver of strange fear coursed through my whole being like lightning. And yet I told the Mother like one who knows:

“And so? After finishing Your work on the other planes You have now taken up the Inconscient. This is Your most important work.”

And I started listing out all the different planes. With eager enthusiasm I declared:

“Mother, You need to work now only on the Inconscient!”

The Mother listened quietly to my racing knowledge and my ignorance, then laughed:

“No, no. Don’t think it to be that simple. This realm of the Inconscient is so dense in obscurity, so full of dangers, that no one has so far dared to touch it. No one has even touched it, let alone transform it! You cannot know what might come up at the slightest tremor. All the filth and mire, chaos, disorder, wickedness, hypocrisy, falsehood, deceit will come up and overwhelm the whole world, why even the Ashram. You haven’t the vaguest notion of these things. It is difficult to imagine now the dreadful things that will happen in the Ashram. People will become aware of such wrong movements within them that they will be flabbergasted. Chaos and confusion will cover up everything, each and every human being as well. The sway of Falsehood will increase.”

A horrible dread came over me as I heard the Mother say all this. The Mother’s way of saying it, Her powerful, deep voice sounded like the first taste of the all-sweeping fury of pre-monsoon storms. As if the whole earth was being weighed down by the gathering black clouds of Falsehood. As if we were slowly sinking into some bottomless pit of Darkness.

I am reminded here of a strange experience from my childhood.

I was about ten or eleven then. I loved playing in the pond. I would wake up very early in the morning, finish all my revisions for school, and then head for the pond with a group of friends. We swam and played in the pond happily till the time when some elderly person of the family came and asked us to come out. And when the rains came, our joy knew no bounds. In that solitary environment as a ten- or eleven-year-old girl, I would go straight into the pond and lose myself delightfully in Nature. Nobody in the house even knew about it. One day all by myself I cut my long hair short in European style! I would wipe my head, feel all refreshed and return home. So one day when one of my friends told me, “Right at the bottom of the pond is the fishes’ home,” I at once became curious and naturally I wanted to discover it. How was it that I had not sought this out all these days? And so one afternoon I came out of the house through a window and ran to the pond to dive in and find the home of the fishes. I just could not get to the bottom of the pond. I found myself out of breath. Ah! it was so frightening! With that tremendous pressure of the water I felt I would never be able to come up again. I felt I was going to die under water.

I felt exactly the same upon hearing the Mother’s words, as if I was drowning in



some bottomless blackness. There is no limit to the terrible pressures the lower nature creates, the kind of obstacles and hindrances it raises on the path of life, of sadhana. However, the Mother Herself is present in our midst. Her touch pushes all that is wrong in the lower nature to come out in the open at unstoppable speed. Like a dormant volcano that wakes up once again. Fire and smoke start belching out. Like Sita, the whole earth is going through a dreadfully frightening test of fire. All the filth that remained blocked up in the Inconscience is now staring at the whole earth and at humanity.

The “churning of the ocean” has begun. The ocean is this universal creation, the ocean of creation. And the churning is this deep turmoil in creation which is assuming rampantly worldwide proportions. Here is the original story of the “churning of the ocean”:

When Arani is rubbed Agni (fire) is born. Arani means that which contains Agni within it, Agni that is Chit-Shakti (consciousness-force) and tapas-shakti (force of tapas). And Arani is our body, this material envelope. Arani is also called Agniyoni. Rishi Vishwamitra says in the Veda: *Manthata Narah*. O man, churn. Churn your being so that you can awaken Chit-Shakti.

Now let me tell you the story of the churning of the ocean as recounted in the *Bhagavat*.

There was tremendous darkness in the whole of creation. The Asuras were running wild. The gods (signifying divine aspiration) went to Vishnu. Vishnu told them: “You won’t be able to battle with the Asuras. The Asuras are very powerful. You have to become strong. Drink *amrita* (the nectar of immortality). Churn *amrita* out. This churning can happen only when you join all the oceans. Take the Asuras along.”

*Mother, give to our heart and mind a titan’s strength, a titan’s energy...*

The ocean is the world-creation. The Mandar mountain is the churning stick. This Mandar mountain is this physical being, our body. This churning goes on in this body too.

Vasuki is the rope. Vasuki is the Life-Force. And so using our Life-Force as the rope, the body as our churner or Mandar mountain, we have to churn the ocean of life.

The first thing that will come up as a result of this churning or this sadhana, is *halahal* or poison. On the path of sadhana, the first thing that rises in the sadhak is all the poison from inside. And it is this *halahal* that is graciously drunk by our ever-ready redeemer, Shiva.

The Divine, by accepting to drink this accumulated poison that rises from the human sadhak, is in fact protecting him.\*

I stood there speechlessly for some time. Then I whispered to the Mother:

“How long shall we remain in this state, Mother? Won’t the lower nature get

\* I am grateful to Amalesh Bhattacharya for the inner significance of this story.

transformed? We only want to be as you wish us to become.”

The Mother answered reassuringly with great tenderness:

“It will happen, it will happen. A day will come when, if I ask you, ‘Priti, give me a needle,’ you will ask me, ‘Where is the needle?’ Then I will tell you, ‘Go and open that cupboard. You’ll see there is a box on the left. Open this box and you’ll find another smaller box. Open that box. There will be many needles in this box. Take the one that is right at the bottom and bring it to me.’ Everything will be perfectly organised and orderly. There will be no place for the slightest looseness anywhere.”

Hearing these words from the Mother I told myself that the Mother’s work will be accomplished in this very manner, within us, in the Ashram, in the world, in the whole creation. The Mother will pull us out of the deep pit of Inconscience with Her hand.

I breathed a breath of happy relief.

### **Ascent from Inconscience (2)**

You would remember that I told you about that incident from my childhood where I had to struggle with all my force against the immense pressure of water to come back to the surface of the pond. What a happy relief to be able to breathe normally again. I sat next to the pond all by myself. A hushed silence was all around. Not a living creature anywhere in sight. I experienced an indescribable joy that day after escaping from the clutches of death. I felt the same after hearing these reassuring words from the Mother.

This world-encompassing churning will be followed by the appearance of the white horse, Uchchaishrava, that is the Divine Shakti. After the Mother’s work in the Inconscient is over, after the *halahal* is removed, the spiritual Shakti will awaken. From the Inconscient the Mother will re-emerge carrying the pot of *amrita* (the nectar of immortality). This pot of *amrita* is immortality. The asuras cannot gain immortality. Only the gods got *amrita* or immortality. Man will get his part too. That was the reason why the Mother plunged into the Inconscience. Now it is no more in the subtle world. It is down into this material world that Brahman and Brahmashakti have descended. The difficult work that the Supreme Purusha and Brahmashakti, the Mother, the Eternal Shakti began from the beginning of this creation in the subtle world is coming to a close. That is what the Mother’s reassuring words seemed to indicate. Our lower nature will get transformed when Brahmashakti herself has taken a human form in this world of Falsehood and Brahman himself is present in the form of Sri Aurobindo.

When Sri Aurobindo was preparing to leave his physical body one of his attendant-sadhaks courageously asked:

“Are you not using your Force to cure yourself?”

“No.”

Everyone was thunderstruck. The sadhaks imagined that they had probably not heard clearly. And so the same question was put to Him once more. And once again, the same answer.

“Why not? How is the disease going to be cured otherwise?”

“Can’t explain; you won’t understand.”

The Divine, by accepting to hold the poison churned up from the world within Him, has been protecting us. That *halahal* has remained within him for all this time. In answer to one of the questions by the sadhaks He simply answered:

“The time is extremely critical.”

At the moment of renouncing His body to the material Consciousness, to Inconscience, He brought down the Supramental Light.

The Mother has said:

“Whenever I entered His room, I saw that He was continually bringing down the Supramental Light.”

Many of Sri Aurobindo’s attendants could also see that His body was aglow with a golden Light.

When Sri Aurobindo had completely withdrawn from this body, the Mother addressed this prayer to Sri Aurobindo on our behalf:

*To Thee who hast been the material envelope of our Master, to Thee our infinite gratitude. Before Thee who hast done so much for us, who hast worked, struggled, suffered, hoped, endured so much, before Thee who hast willed all, attempted all, prepared, achieved all for us, before Thee we bow down and implore that we may never forget, even for a moment, all we owe to Thee.*

9 December 1950

Now let me tell you about the Mother. A girl (a dentist) used to go to the Mother every day. She was the only one who could properly clean the Mother’s teeth. She worked with a lot of gentleness and care. One day while she was cleaning Her teeth suddenly a lot of black phlegm came out of the throat. Seeing that black phlegm, the Mother observed:

“There is so much Falsehood, so much corruption in man and in the creation! And in trying to protect man and the world from the grip of these negative forces, I have had to swallow all this poison. In this way I am protecting the world and man.”

We know that Shiva had swallowed *halahal* and it was lodged in his throat. But that was in the subtle world. And now Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were doing the same with all the poison and falsehood and deceit that were being churned out from within us and thus They were protecting the world and humanity.

Every time the Mother has come down into this physical world, Brahman too has been present near Her in a physical body. Where there is Parvati, there is always Mahadev, Shiva. Where there is Ishwari, there is also Ishwara. Even though two they

are in fact One. One cannot exist without the Other. The Mother has clearly revealed:

*Without him, I exist not; without me, he is unmanifest.*

We have seen in the Vedic parable that the Supreme Purusha divided himself. And the One Unique Supreme Being thus became Dual: Ishwara-Ishwari, Brahman-Brahmashakti, Supreme Purusha and Eternal Shakti became opposites. But this is not their end. But did the Vedic Rishis know that the Supreme Purusha and the Eternal Shakti even after separating would come down into this world below, into this Inconscience itself? And that Ishwara and Ishwari would start their work in the Inconscience together? That They would take birth in a human body and take the plunge into Matter? Was this unimaginable, astounding event waiting to take place only for us?

They have brought down the Supramental Light into this Inconscience. It is immaterial whether we understand or not but it is because Brahman and Brahmashakti have been uninterruptedly labouring from the beginning of time that, as a consequence, the Supramental Light has reached today this material Consciousness, this pit of dense Inconscience. Just a little more needs to be done. We shall wait for Them in eager expectancy to grant us Their vision in divine bodies on this earth.

*(To be continued)*

PRITI DAS GUPTA

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

*When there is a pressure on the vital world due to the preparing Descent from above, that world usually precipitates something of itself into the human. The vital world is very large and far exceeds the human in extent. But usually it dominates by influence not by descent. Of course the effort of this part of the vital world is always to maintain humanity under its sway and prevent the higher Light.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 6)*

# PAINTING AS SADHANA

**Krishnalal Bhatt (1905-1990)**

*(Continued from the issue of May 2006)*

9

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

2/8/34: Mother,

It seems my fly-tox pump is leaking from the joint. To whom should it be given for repair?

Mother: To Pavitra.

2/8/34: Mother,

One of my teeth is decaying and small pieces come out while eating. A part of it has already become hollow. What shall I do?

Mother: Dayashankar will give you some medicine to put with a cotton swab in the hollow tooth. The cotton has to be renewed at least once a day.

3/8/34: Mother,

I am sending a drawing of sea which I want to present to Sjt. Nandalal Bose if Mother permits. May I ask the Mother's opinion about the picture?

Sri Aurobindo: Your picture is exceedingly fine and you can certainly send it.

11/8/34: Mother,

Before I give final touches to this picture I send it to you for suggestions wherever necessary. The composition, as it is done in a long panel, has become a little difficult for me to manage.

Especially, it seems to me that the foreground is not well managed in the whole composition, also it may not be distinct from the background. Are there any corrections to be made?

Sri Aurobindo: Mother was very pleased with it and finds the composition very good. She cannot think of any corrections to suggest.

22/8/34: Mother,

I received a letter from my mother about ten days back. In it she writes affectionately to me to write letters to her and my father because I did not answer to my father's letter a long time back. She informs me of my father's health which is going worse and worse due to constant fever, dysentery, etc. They are very eager to

see me once there, and she writes, “Once you come and from [*rest of the letter is cut out along with the lower half of his own letter which continues*] satisfaction from me. I do not understand how to answer them so as to satisfy them. May I hope some solution from Mother?

Sri Aurobindo: It is impossible to satisfy them unless you become like them or satisfy their desire. But what you can do is to wish their true good in your heart and write sincerely from the aspiration within you.

22/8/34: Mother,

I require a magnifying glass. I gave a chit in the stores for it, but Purushottam said that there was no m[agnifying] glass in the stores. So may I ask for a kind permission from Mother for one magnifying glass to be bought from the market?

Mother: Yes.

Mother [*on white chit paper*]: 27.8.34

Krishnalal,

I would like a crown representing the waves at the surface of the sea with some fishes. Will you do the drawing of it?

It is to go with a sari representing the bottom of the sea. The foam of the waves will be embroidered with silver and the fishes with gold.

27/8/34: Mother,

Herewith I offer a book of designs for needle work by Sjt. Nandalal Bose. It was lying at my place with some other things of mine which I received a few days back from my brother.

Mother: It is very interesting and will be quite useful.

28/8/34: [*end*] to-morrow at 4 p.m. (about the hollow tooth)

I hope Mother will give her kind permission for the treatment.

Sri Aurobindo: Yes.

1-9-34: Mother,

Herewith I send two rough sketches for the crown design which you suggested. They are done in two different styles. Mother may select one for the embroidery work and give me suggestions for corrections necessary for the work. The forms I will make more exact in the final drawings. The colours in the design are simply for making the drawing clear.

Sri Aurobindo: Mother has written her choice on the design she has chosen. Both are very good, but this one will perhaps be more suitable for the embroidery.

4/9/34: Mother,

After the 15th Aug. the thoughts of going to my place pressed on me vigorously for some days. I rejected them constantly but still they come though very mildly.

Since a week I get dreams during my sleep in which I see myself amidst my family trying to help it in many different ways such as, in travelling, in requirements, in washing and such household works etc. During these dreams I am so much engrossed in them that I do not find any part of my being separate from them.

Why do they come so often? Can there be some opening on my part?

Sri Aurobindo: The dreams rise from the subconscious. Such dreams go on recurring even when there is nothing in the waking mind, until the old impressions fade out of the subconscious—but that often takes a long time.

K: Last night I had a dream when I saw my mother and sister working and I also began to work with them. Then I saw something eatable and began to eat. At that time I felt sleepy and my head heavy and so I woke up, and actually I found that the whole part from the head to the throat was under some influence and was felt under very hard pressure. I took some time to recover from that. What influence it can be and where from it might have come to me?

Sri Aurobindo: This and the thoughts are not from the subconscious. It is the influence of some strong thoughts or pressure from over there [*family?*] coming in the shape of a formation sometimes in dreams sometimes in waking.

[Undated]: Mother,

I want to try some fresco paintings. I have learnt Italian-style fresco which is permanent even if exposed to the sun or rain.

For that I want to try in different varieties of colours. May I inquire about special powder colours for the fresco work, if they are available at Bombay?

I heard at Shantiniketan that in France powder colours are available. Will you let me know anything about such colours (to be used as water colours)?

Mother: I have never used powder colours myself, so I have nothing to say.

K: Will you permit me to do some painting on everite?

Mother: Yes, you may try and see what it gives. Ask some small bits from Chandulal, to begin with.

7-9-34: Mother,

I send the crown design which is completed. Mother may give the better idea while giving it for embroidery as to how the eyes and other parts of the fish can be made clear in the work.

Mother: The design is very pretty indeed and will surely make a very successful crown.

K: Mother, I have the idea of doing a fresco in big size (about 6ft by 4 and half ft) on one of the exposed walls of the Ashram. I want to do it in the style in which I did in Arjava's house (on wet plaster). The two walls for this work that I can suggest are

- (1) A part of the wall of Anilbaran's room facing Champaklal's terrace,
- (2) wall of Pavitra's room facing the Mother's room.

May I put this idea for Mother's approval and ask for the selection of some exposed wall for the work?

The subject of the fresco is "Sea".

Mother: This idea of fresco seems to be a very good one and the wall of Anilbaran's room on Champaklal's terrace quite an ideal place. There is only one point: will the lime hold on that wall which is now painted. This is to be asked from Chandulal.

It would be very nice to have a sea view there.

8/9/34: ...In that case may I pray for the decision of Mother for the intended fresco?  
 Sri Aurobindo: Mother has asked Chandulal what he can suggest for the place. We begin in the last wing of the Library House in February (from the New Prosperity to the main-building). Then if you give the size of the fresco, we will keep a place for your painting.

11/9/34: Mother,

Yesterday Chandulal suggested the wall over the B.D. office for the fresco. I find the wall rather too exposed.

Sri Aurobindo: That is impossible.

K: I showed another wall to Chandulal in the Ladies' House. There is sufficient space between two windows in that house. Chandulal saw the wall and said that it could be worked over for the new plaster for fresco. May I know Mother's idea for these walls?

Sri Aurobindo: You might possibly do it there.

*[The fresco was made between those windows on the south-facing wall of the Embroidery Department.]*

14/9/34: Mother,

Since some days my mind and particularly my vital remain in a quiet condition, this is what I think about the present condition. During this condition I am able to reject the ideas and impulses that rise up or come from outside and keep myself quiet. The same condition continues till going to sleep. But during the sleep I find that the attacks from the hostile vital beings are increasing and result into nightmares or passing of the sexual substance etc. Why there is more disturbance in dreams when the waking hours are more quiet? And is there any lapse in my attitude in this condition?

Sri Aurobindo: There is no lapse—but it often happens that when thrown out of the waking consciousness these things go down into the subconscious and for a time become active in dreams, but that does not last.

15/9/34: Mother,

I have prepared the picture of the fresco which I send for Mother's approval.

Mother: It is quite good and surely will look very fine.



K: On the wall it will not have all the details and colours like this. I will have to do it in broad masses and more decoratively. From this drawing I will enlarge the outline to 6ft x 4-1/2ft which is the measurement on the wall.

25/9/34: Mother,

I will begin fresco-work from to-morrow morning. The work will be divided into three parts. Everyday plastering one part and painting over it. So it will take three days to finish the work. [*In the right margin K has sketched the three-tiered seascape.*]

Vishnu will remain with me to help.

Sri Aurobindo: Very good.

29/9/34: Mother,

The fresco-work is completed. The work is not quite to my satisfaction due to some reasons. The lime mortar was not of the proper consistency which was informed beforehand. The green colour (from B.D.) which, it was said, was meant for the lime has faded within two days. And also there might be my inefficiency of technique in this kind of work.

In spite of all this the fresco-painting looks good to me except for the fading green colour.

Sri Aurobindo: As soon as Mother can find time, she will go and see.

(*To be continued*)

S. V. BHATT

*Art washes from the soul the dust of everyday life—Pablo Picasso*

*Art is not what you see, but what you make others see—Edgar Degas*

*To see we must forget the name of the thing we are looking at—Claude Monet*

## SRI AUROBINDO ON KRISHNALAL

*(From a sadhak's correspondence)*

Sadhak: I was planning to show Krishnalal how to do frescoes directly on cement mortar plaster, but he seems hesitant to experiment even on a small scale. He is preparing the new fresco as they do them at Shantiniketan. And he does not seem to be able to put a greater energy into it—as X says he is weak nervously and physically.

Sri Aurobindo: I don't think X is quite right. He has the timidity of the artistic temperament which is careful and scrupulous about its work and does not want to do work without regard to its capacity and experience.

26 September 1934

\*

Sadhak: What I meant was that Krishnalal could have done the whole fresco yesterday before 5 p.m.—but he did only a third of it. The fresco is not his original conception or inspiration, after all; he is copying it from an existing picture. Any artist with the mastery of technique he has, should not find it difficult to put more concentration and energy into his work. We read of artists working hours together on their works.

Sri Aurobindo: These things are matters of temperament. It is not a question of mastery of technique only as with a craftsman. A craftsman can go on working regularly always for any amount of time. An artist is not the same. He depends on his temperament (whether he is a poet, painter or sculptor) and its response to a certain flow of force. If anything in it gets dull or jaded or does not respond, he ceases working—or if anything else goes wrong or is not responsive in him. Copy or original makes no difference to his method—he brings the same temperamental attitude to both. Of course there are artists whose temperament is so buoyant that they keep the flow at command almost (like Harin with his poems), painting or working every day for hours together. Others cannot—they work sometimes more, sometimes less—sometimes after long intervals etc.

27 September 1934

\*

Sadhak: I forgot that artists do not follow a fixed rule like most others—the best of them do a little one day and forget it for several days, begin again and then suddenly finish it in a day—so it is natural that Krishnalal would not hurry up or go by a fixed rule.

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, it is because they are instruments of a Force which does not come when they want but as it wants.

27 September 1934

\*

Sadhak: Yesterday V enthusiastically told Krishnalal that she would like to learn painting, make frescoes etc. Krishnalal replied that it is not easy—it is not as easy as embroidery which is done with repetitive stitches once the design has been made and traced; in painting one has to conceive what is to be painted and the inspiration has to be got. V and I felt that this reply was rather too egoistic and fussy.

Sri Aurobindo: Are you sure that Krishnalal meant anything else than to state the fact? If V had said that to the Mother, she would have had to make the same reply in substance. Painting is an enormously difficult art needing years of training and a special faculty if one is to do in it as well as V does in embroidery.

28 September 1934

\*

Sadhak: Today J talked to me about how sticky and hard Krishnalal's psychological formations are, how there is a want of largeness and wideness in his outlook on things and how dangerous it would be to him if pressure were put on his vital ego. My idea is that Krishnalal is very quiet and reticent and concentrated in his work. Of course, as X said, "He keeps a wall against you"; he certainly does keep a wall against me and assumes an air of superiority. I gave him all the available facilities for his work, but he behaved like a person rather self-centred and narrow. If I were to keep as stony a wall against him, he would not have easily got these facilities for work.

Sri Aurobindo: I have always thought Krishnalal to be quiet and sincere. Every artist believes he has inspiration, otherwise he would not have the confidence to go on with his work. He has not, I think, a pronounced vital ego. I do not know about his attitude to you, possibly he has been prejudiced by others if he has the attitude J attributes to him and you feel.

28 September 1934

*(From as yet unpublished material)*

## DUTCH PAINTING IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

*(Continued from the issue of May 2006)*

As a consequence of the historical, the political and the financial revolutions in Holland we see that in the seventeenth century: (1) there was a diminution of wealth and power of the Church (2) and those of the King; and, (3) the emergence of a new rich bourgeois community. An independent Republic, a new faith and the wealth of the influential merchant-class gave rise to a fresh enthusiasm and joy of life. The seventeenth century is known as the golden age of Holland. This new enthusiasm and joy did not find expression in literature, science or philosophy as much as it did in painting. Dutch art represents best the independent expression of the country and its self-discovery.

The power of creativity was revived in the whole nation through painting. Communities of artists grew up in different cities. On the walls of every other house, not only of the rich but also of the the middle class, many types of pictures were hung. The artists of the time considered themselves to be craftsmen mainly and were members of their guilds. The demand and price of a painting increased in terms of the recognition and respect given to the artist by the guild.

For Rembrandt alone, seventeenth century Holland would have been considered great in the History of Art, even if no other artist had been born at that time in the country. But his vast genius has not been able to overshadow the work and fame of his numerous contemporaries. It was the age of a wide and extraordinary awakening in the field of art which brought about an urge towards a multifaceted expression in painting. Reproductions of different types recreating various aspects of the world, show that nothing is outside the range of the artist's brush—flowers and fruits, the dead hare after the hunt, the wild fowl, or the deer,—everything on earth that can be perceived by the senses.

You cannot acquire creative power although the techniques of composition can be learnt by practice. Students came to many master-artists. After completing their training they started creating on their own, independently. Innumerable were the artists who were skilled, but not all were equally gifted. But their compositions cannot be discarded as insignificant, whatever their talent. Many of them specialised in certain domains and achieved excellence; the expertise they have shown in their own field cannot be called commonplace. Whether endowed with genius or not, they were all talented people. Some of them have done portraits, some have painted natural sceneries, others still life and yet others have chosen to depict scenes from daily life.

In front of me, on the table, lies an open book: it gives a brief life-sketch of a hundred Dutch artists of the seventeenth century, and one or two colour reproductions of the paintings of each artist. One has only to turn the pages to know their individual skills. Over and above that, all the pictures together give a feel of the diversity of Dutch painting of that time... I open the book at random, without any specific aim—

a still life: a stone-table covered partly by a carelessly placed white tablecloth, several folds of which are hanging down. The blue bag of a hunter is lying on the table but is only partly visible as the rest of the table-top is fully used up for keeping the hunted game—three wild fowl with no trace of life in their eyes, but the feathers are bright with variegated colours; beside them lies another bird, a very small one, of different hue,—a soothing yellow with a touch of blue. On the wall at the back hangs another wild fowl not so distinctly visible in the semi-darkness of the room. In front of this wild fowl, hangs a rabbit, head downwards, the soft white hair of its breast is lighted up. We cannot see the source of light, but understand that both the table and the wall are faintly illuminated by the light from an open window on the left. Also suspended on the wall is a brass horn and streaks of light are reflected from it. (*“After the Hunt”* by Willem van Aelst, 1627—after 1683)

Another picture after a few pages done by an artist specialising in interiors. Here, it is the courtyard of a house. The eye is first drawn to a woman, with her back to the spectator. We understand from her dress that she is the mistress of a moderately well-to-do household. In the courtyard, squatting in front of her is another woman, perhaps the maid of the house. Arm outstretched, the mistress must be giving her some orders. There is a fish on a burnt clay plate in front of the maid who has just lifted up the tail with a ladle. Some cooking vessels can also be seen in front of her. The courtyard is tiled with yellow bricks. A white brick-wall stands on the right. A hand-operated water-pump with a basin underneath is seen very close to the wall; there is a wooden bucket nearby and a broom is propped up against the wall. At the back there is a low wooden fence with a rose plant close to it, and on top of it a dirty yellow duster. Portions of houses on the other side and behind the fence can be seen. On the left-hand side is an open door. Someone in a long coat and a hat is coming towards the house along the street, outside,—he could be the master himself. The sky is overcast but it is not dark; there is a strip of blue sky peeping through. We see a leafless tree against the sky, but on the rose plant there are new shoots by which we guess that it is less cold now. The attire of the three men also gives us that impression—so, we can say that spring has come. (*“Courtyard”* by Pieter de Hoogh, 1629—after 1683)

As I keep turning the pages, more and more sceneries come into view: many people on the ice in winter—some are skating, others are playing and a horse is pulling the sledge. A beautiful winter scene. On another page, I see a farmer’s family: they are warming themselves near the fireplace. On the wooden floor lies a pair of skates. Some other artist has done a boat on a stormy sea; it is tossed about by the unruly waves and the wind... By yet another artist: a natural scenery, a river bank lined by windmills. Some have painted portraits—not only of the rich but also the poor people, the gypsies and the drunkards. One picture shows a doctor examining a patient. Another, under the shade of a tree—cows, sheep and the shepherd boy. One picture shows a horse standing in the meadow, while a cow is being ferried across the river in a boat. Vast plains stretching till the horizon are depicted in some, while the sky rises above

everything, limitless, infinite. A wide canal in some picture, or, somewhere else, in a common household, a room in total disarray...

As I turn the pages of the book, I see pictures on a great variety of subjects and activities, many different types of pictures. The first thing we notice is that they are all transcriptions of the material world of the senses. We also see that the artists are not imagining anything, not trying to teach us anything, nor looking for anything beyond what is perceived by the senses. They have been moved so deeply by whatever they have seen that it has never occurred to them that one could search for something beyond the visible world. With a patch of colour or the stroke of a brush, on canvas or on wood, they have caught the reflection of a life familiar to them, of their family or the beauty of nature around them. But almost in every picture, every colour scheme, we come in touch with an extraordinary skill, a wonderful capacity to hold faultlessly together the physical life and the world they love.

Paintings of seventeenth century Holland were usually meant to be hung on the walls of houses. After the Iconoclastic Riots (1556) there was no place for any picture or statue in the Protestant Church. After the formation of the Republic, there was no need to paint pictures any more for beautifying royal palaces. People bought paintings mainly to make their homes more attractive.

Restraint and lack of ostentation come naturally to the Dutch character. The measure of everything is small. Just like the country, the houses too are small in size. Even in the world of thought, the Dutch mind hesitates to take wings in order to scale greater heights. It is mad enough to be natural, more madness than that does not seem necessary. Large-size paintings are very rare in their art; only a few group-pictures are big in size. Meant for community halls, these were ordered by rich corporations, joint companies or associations—like merchants, doctors, civic guards or heads of philanthropic societies.

In the new social, political and religious set-up, Dutch art discovered its own identity. What artists created in the earlier days for palaces and the Catholic Church, was influenced by the Italian Renaissance; for, those who placed the order wanted pictures done in that style. In the seventeenth century, the number of artists and art-teachers following this foreign technique decreased. Painters could exercise their right to work according to their own vision and judgment. Art-critics have not been able to explain even today, why new artists like Frans Hals started painting suddenly in an independent way. The brush-strokes became simple and natural, and a straightforward understanding was established between artist and sitter. However rich or powerful the model, the artist learnt to adhere to his own values and personal distinctive character. One reason for this change could be that the new middle class, the dominant citizens were those who bought the pictures and got their portraits made, who had with great effort through trade acquired so much wealth, and who did not have much knowledge of art and their taste and outlook were mediocre. It is also possible that many of them had an inferiority complex in what concerned art and culture.

As mentioned above, the line of approach adopted by Dutch artists was realism, a representation of the material world, the "World-Reflection". They got the opportunity to experiment and judge their work in new ways and achieve their own independent modes of expression. The unsuccessful artists have certainly imitated mechanically the physical world, but many in number were those capable and talented ones who have left an original stamp in their artistic creation.

The earlier buyers—the royal court, the Catholic Church, the nobility—used to consider the artist as a mere craftsman belonging to one category or another of the lower strata of society. In the new situation of the Dutch Republic, this distinction between high and low became less marked. The artist did not want to accept any more the domination of his client. Between them a deeper and more personal relation developed: the artist learnt to guide in terms of his own judgment the wish and the demand of the buyer. He started depending on his personal self and capacities, a firm confidence in his own talents developed. Artists wanted to sell their work—for, that was how they earned their living—but they did not want to comply any more with the demands of the buyer. That is why, even after reaching the heights of fame, some of them had to live in poverty.

After liberating their country from foreign rule, the Dutch gained independence: they did not allow any other king to take over the administration of their land; they established their republic; they struggled against the vagaries of the Ocean to build ports and cities on their own; they sacrificed their lives to safeguard Protestantism. This awakened in them the consciousness of their identity and confidence in their own powers. Painting is the expression of the awareness and pride of independent Holland. Through Dutch art we get a picture of their country—we see the rich and the poor, the common and the exceptional people, the seas around them, the fields, the animals, the flowers and fruits of their land. It may seem, therefore, that Dutch painting is narrowly limited to its geographical and national boundaries. Does that not diminish the greatness of art? To see familiar things in depth and in detail may limit the subject matter geographically, narrow down perhaps its extent, but it has brought out from common things and familiar life such a deep beauty that it becomes universal. We cannot say: I do not gain anything by it, or, this art belongs to another race, another social group, a different culture. In what way am I related to it? There is certainly a gain: all human beings are related to one another. We find that the artist has succeeded in expressing the interdependence, the life, the love for the beauty in Nature in all human beings, by giving a form to the essential truth of these in himself.

In seventeenth century Holland, there were innumerable painters. In Amsterdam alone, there were about three hundred artists in the middle of the century. I shall say a few words about three of the greatest among the most talented painters in Dutch art. Their names are associated with three different cities: Frans Hals has worked all his life in Harlem; Rembrandt in Amsterdam and Vermeer in Delft. Several cities in Holland had established guilds. There was practically no connection between the guilds



of one city and another. The artists' guilds were like those of the craftsmen, for, painting was still considered to be a craft. Sometimes, just like the craftsmen of one family, father and son, uncle and nephew, everyone painted pictures.<sup>6</sup>

Needless to say, everyone was not equally talented even if they were all well-trained. Each city had shops where paintings were sold according to the demands of the people. If they wanted to buy a natural scenery, they went to an artist who was an expert in that field; for portraits, they looked for someone who had already proved his worth and was publicly recognised as a portraitist.

Frans Hals was a portraitist. All his two hundred odd pictures, apart from one or two exceptions, are portraits done in oil on canvas or on wood. He must have done many more paintings in his long life, but all could not be saved from the cruel ravages of Time. Like the work of other artists of the seventeenth century, most of his pictures are preserved in museums of Europe and America, while some are scattered here and there in personal collections.

In the earlier part of the seventeenth century we see that Holland had an indigenous style in portraiture. The influence of Italy which was till then quite active diminished considerably after the Iconoclastic Riots of 1556 and the Reformation. Many of the earlier artists had been to Italy, but that Italianism disappeared almost entirely when the domination of the Church of Rome was not there any more.

In the early stages of Dutch portrait-painting, we see that the artist is looking at the model only from the external point of view. His seeing is clear; there is no trace of any mental interpretation, nor is there any attempt to delve deeper. The aim of the artist is to reproduce as fully as possible what is perceived by the eye—that is to say, the complexion, the attire, the physical appearance of the sitter. In this first stage, therefore, we come across an almost perfect, faultless craftsmanship. The artist does not try to project himself in any way: he has nothing to say in particular; and yet, there are portraits which bear the stamp of an individual skill.

The artist looks at the model with his external vision, but in an impersonal way, in great detail. He does not think of toning down or beautifying the natural features, or even putting into them a deeper meaning. The very basis of the Dutch portraitist's approach to his art is an accurate reproduction of reality without distortion. Such an exact imitation of life is not usually called great art. To achieve that, some other factor has to come into play. An inner vision has to be there behind what is perceived by the physical eye. In the portraits done by Frans Hals, we come in touch with the artist's

6. The Brueghels were a Flemish family of painters :

Pieter Brueghel, the Elder (1528-1569), his eldest son (Pieter Brueghel the Younger—(1564-1638), his second son (Jan Brueghel—(1568-1625), his grandson and many others of the family.

Several persons in the Hals family were artists: the greatest is Frans Hals (*ca.* 1580-1666), but his brother Dick and son Harmen Hals are also quite well-known.

Salomon Ruysdael (1603-1670) and his better known nephew Jacob van Ruysdael (1629-1682) were both landscape painters. (*Translator's note*)



independent, personal approach which looks within. The growth of the inner vision and personal style has brought in new elements, and his technical excellence has developed into great art. From a craftsman, Frans Hals became an artist.

Not much is known about the life of Frans Hals. He was born in the Southern Low Countries some time around 1580. To avoid living under the Spanish Catholics, his father escaped with his family and took refuge in Harlem, situated in the Dutch Republic. Frans was only ten or eleven years old at that time. He spent his whole life in the small town of Harlem where he learnt to draw and paint, and, it was there that his talents blossomed, developed and found ultimate expression.

In the beginning of his career, he used to paint in the style prevalent at that time. He never thought of acquiring an original technique of his own. But when he was about forty, a new element became apparent in his art. The breath of life took possession of the resemblances achieved through skill in his craft. He discovered his own personal style by gradually liberating himself from other influences, including the skill and discernment of his earlier training. His most successful pictures charm the modern eye even now for their composition, use of colour and restraint. In the portraits commissioned by rich clients also, instead of outer glamour, pomp of wealth and attire, the personality of the sitter, the subtle play of his inner nature became evident, with an unemotional, honest and almost cruel naturalness.

Abanindranath Tagore says, "Whether people will like the work or not—that is the consideration of those who paint at the order of others. But the one who is working prompted by an inner need does not aim at pleasing any master,—his attention is wholly turned to the perfection of the work." From the time Frans Hals had discovered his own artistic individuality, he did many portraits but never gave up his independence. It seems he had said, "In portraiture to recreate the semblance is the work of a servitor: the artist has to conceal the traces of that servility."

Quite often, we notice that portraitists who paint to order, work in accordance with the wishes of their client. In the seventeenth century, people used to get their portraits done for posterity. Apart from the capacity to pay for the picture, they had practically no other merit. Most of the people painted by Frans Hals have not been remembered by history. It was only to earn his living that he did these portraits. But even in what he did to order or at the demand of other people, he could efface all trace of "servility". He was not satisfied with only the external features of the model—that certainly was there—but, over and above that there was something else, something that added to the outer form the stamp of the hidden human nature. That is how the portraits became universal instead of remaining bound to a family out of respect, loyalty or fear. Even after three hundred years and more, the common spectator, not only the Dutch, but belonging to other cultures and other schools of art, find in these portraits the reflection of the eternal self and the universal in man.

Apart from portraits of individuals, Frans Hals had done a few group-pictures on commission. They are large-size paintings, showing more than one person. In every

city, at that time, high-ranking officials of the different committees that existed there got their portraits done together. One such wealthy and influential committee was that of the civic guards. Two of these group-pictures portray officers of this committee. After the overthrow of the Spanish rule it was time for peace. In society, the officers of the civic guard were held in great esteem. They used to meet from time to time and big feasts were arranged for them. Frans Hals painted three different pictures of these feasts. He brought about a revolution in the composition of collective portraits. Before him too, some people had done group-portraits, but, in their pictures the people were seen side by side, there was no unity in the composition. There was no reason or artistic purpose that could justify the presence of more than one person in the picture. It was Frans Hals who brought into his group-picture a dramatic unity: every portrait had a separate identity and yet was a part of the whole. Such group-portraits were done at the order of some influential committee. Those who were seen in the picture were all of the same rank. They wanted to get equal importance. Leaving aside earlier conventions, Frans Hals found a way of bringing about a cohesive unity in the group-composition. His first group-portrait was done in 1616. That was when he had introduced the dramatic element. It was the picture of officers of the committee of civic guards of Harlem, where ten top-ranking officers are seen with two young men. Both these young people are holding the banner of the committee; they are not officers; they don't seem to have taken part in the feast. Frans Hals has positioned his characters in such a way that it has created a natural dramatic situation. The people portrayed on the canvas are not lifeless,—some are busy talking, some have a wine glass in their hand, some are listening intently to what the others are saying. A few others are seated around the table—their very posture shows satisfaction after a meal.

Every officer has received the same attention on the canvas, no one's face is hidden in any way. But all of them are not facing front, some are seen at three-quarters profile as they are leaning forward while speaking to the officer beside them. Some of these officers are bald, others wear beards and moustaches—blond in shade. There is a predominance of dark colours in the picture. The attire is sombre, almost black. Only the scarf worn across one shoulder and coming to the waist and the frilled white muslin collar give it some colour. On one side of the wall in the background, a golden-coloured velvet curtain hangs in many folds. On the two banners also there are patches of several colours. Through an open window at the back, a clump of trees can be seen vaguely and above that, a greenish sky.

On the dinner table is spread a fine white cloth with white designs woven on it. In metal trays and on the tablecloth are scattered here and there leftovers of the feast: if this portion of the picture is seen separately, it gives the impression of a beautiful still life.

After concealing whatever is a slavery to the client's demands, in order to rise above it and establish his own artistic independence, Frans Hals had experimented all his life with colours and varied processes in painting. From the time his newly

discovered personal style was found, he had at his own fancy done portraits of a few common people and succeeded in bringing out the ordinary joys of the moment— aspects of merrymaking, laughter and fun, lively excitement, simple pleasures of the five senses. Pain and sorrow are also depicted. Behind the curtain of apparent delight, certain pictures suggest the shadow of an undefined melancholy. But liveliness is the dominant note in these paintings. He gets an opportunity to use bright colours and swift brush-strokes. In the earlier portraits done by him to order, the use of the brush is restrained, the colouring is subdued,—one shade blends imperceptibly with the one beside it. In such work done by his own choice, the freedom in the use of colour and composition would be considered no less than sheer audacity according to the norms of his time. There is no attempt whatsoever to conceal the brush-work. It would seem that the process discovered by Frans Hals in the use of colour evolved into the mode of painting used by Van Gogh.

From then on, even for commissioned portraits, Frans Hals started using this new technique in a limited way. The portraits done towards the end of his life are even more lifelike than the earlier ones. His artistic vision and skill went on evolving till the end of his life. He died in 1666. He was then around eighty. The year before his death, he created his last two group-portraits. There was in Harlem a charitable society to help the aged among the poor. One picture portrays six men trustees and, the other, five women trustees. Some art-critics today consider this last one to be the very best among all his famous works: in front of us are five old women—on the skin of their faces and hands the appearance of old age has been personified. On seeing them we tremble bodily in apprehension. It is not just their decrepitude that brings this feeling, but much more their mental attitude; for, they consider themselves to be compassionate: they might have donated large sums of money to their institution, but, on seeing them, the type of thought that arises in the spectator is that the old people who are part of this charitable society are even more afraid of these “compassionate women” than of death. They themselves might have been unfortunate in life—as spinsters or widows; there is no one in the world to love them, nor is there any hope of getting some affection from any one whosoever. We seem to have reached here the threshold of present-day pessimism and hopelessness.

It is impossible to think of seventeenth century Dutch art without Frans Hals.

*(To be continued)*

RANAJIT SARKAR

(Translated from the original Bengali article that appeared in *Sandhitsu* in the issue of August 2005, by Amita Sen, with help from Shyamoli Kapoor)

## A JOURNEY TOGETHER

A butterfly in the bathroom,  
Till noon became eve;  
There was no speech between us,  
But an unknown hand struck the harp of heart.  
Beauty ran through the sinews,  
And truth danced on the feet of delight,  
And the keyless door opened.  
It was a point of entry,  
As though came to sight  
A sudden reality.  
We had taken the journey together  
And magically glimmered  
A strangeness in our souls.  
I could never imagine,  
We could become one.

N. SHAKUNTALA MANAY

## SRI AUROBINDO ON HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA\*

DURING the period when Sri Aurobindo was publicly engaged in the swaraj movement, he regarded swadeshi, boycott and national education as the three major planks of that movement. If I were asked to name the three planks of our work today, I would say sadhana leading individuals to psychicisation and spiritualisation, social transformation along the lines indicated by Sri Aurobindo, and, to enable us to achieve both these on a sufficiently large scale, a national education. Sri Aurobindo once described such a national education for India as “an education proper to the Indian soul and need and temperament and culture... not indeed something faithful merely to the past, but to the developing soul of India, to her future need, to the greatness of her coming self-creation, to her eternal spirit.”<sup>1</sup>

Today, thanks to the growing economic prosperity of the country, new educational institutions are coming up everywhere which seek to emulate and even improve upon the public schools in England and the private schools in the U.S. We now have in our country courses in a range of subjects including weight loss, personal grooming, pronunciation, and social etiquette. Major cities in India are vying with one another to open business schools with curricula that Harvard and Stanford could well be proud of. Our youth are being taught how to be prosperous, how to succeed in business, how to remain fit and so on. Of course, there is nothing inherently wrong in any of these innovations, but there is no higher value in them. This approach seems to regard man as a pleasure-seeking animal whose mind and senses and body have to be improved to serve the selfish interests of personal and national ego. The West has walked this path of hedonism and unabashed self-gratification for over two centuries and it has reaped a rich harvest of material prosperity but also created a barren landscape of spiritual ruin and impoverishment. The West is becoming more and more a well-manicured and organised spiritual wasteland. If the present trends in Indian education are unchecked or allowed to gather momentum, we will soon have Indian youth educated in the Western way and with a Western mindset, and before long they will create a similar wasteland out of India. The new trends in education are not much of an improvement on the Macaulayan model which we pursued until recently in the country and that model aimed at transforming Indians into brown sahibs. One of the purposes of this talk is to draw your attention to this unfortunate tendency that is growing rapidly in the country in the wake of economic liberalisation.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are the pioneers of a new system of education known as integral education. Although as yet there are very few educational institutions in the country which have been able to incorporate the system in its entirety, an awareness of the principles of integral education has been slowly spreading, thanks

\* A talk given on August 14, 2005 at the Annual Conference of Sri Aurobindo Society held in Pondicherry.  
1. Sri Aurobindo: “A Preface on National Education” in *The Hour of God*, SABCL, Vol. 17, p. 192.

to the Ashram school, and a few other schools such as the Mirambika school run by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Delhi Branch. There is already a growing corpus of writings on this subject, beginning with the Mother's writings, published in *On Education*, Volume 12 of the *Collected Works of the Mother*, and elsewhere.

Although the principles of integral education apply to all levels of learning, higher education or what is called university education has its own peculiar problems, which need to be identified and addressed. Sri Aurobindo knew these problems first-hand. He was a college teacher for over thirteen years, from 1893 until 1906 in Baroda and then served for a short time as the Principal of the National College, in Kolkata. Thus, from the time he arrived in India from England almost until he entered his cave of tapasya in Pondicherry, he was actively involved in higher education. And prior to his return to India in 1893, he had spent a little over two years as a student in Cambridge, which along with Oxford, exemplified Western university education at its best.

Although Sri Aurobindo's views on higher education in India have not yet received much attention, they have a great contemporary relevance, because among other things, their central focus is on the concept of a national education. Since India gained independence, we have had several Commissions which have examined our system of university education, tried to diagnose what is wrong with it and suggested remedies for the flaws in the system. To name only the two most famous of these, we had the Radhakrishnan Commission and then the Kothari Commission. But long before them, Sri Aurobindo had made several pertinent observations about the system of higher education in India. It is true that he never attempted a systematic critique of this subject and therefore we are obliged to piece together his views on this subject from his references to it found in his writings and talks. But Sri Aurobindo's diagnosis of what was wrong with higher education in India, and the measures he suggested to give the country a decent system of education have not yet been improved upon since he offered them more than a hundred years ago.

In recent years we have had a big debate in the media about making Indian education truly national. But most of this debate has been vitiated by political claptrap on both sides, and topics such as what subjects to teach have dominated this debate. This is in no way a new debate. More than a century ago, Sri Aurobindo touched upon the same theme. He pointed out that there was unanimous agreement in the country that the education given in our schools and colleges has impoverished the national mind, soul and character because it was imposed by a foreign hand and was foreign in its aim, method, substance and spirit. Now the foreign hand has gone, but in its aim, method, substance and spirit our education has remained alien to the genius of the country.

There is a vociferous section of our intelligentsia which takes objection to the very notion of a national education because it believes that there can be no justification for such an idea in this age of globalisation. It is believed that national education is nothing but the undesirable and unprofitable intrusion of a false and narrow patriotism

into a field in which training in good citizenship has a legitimate place but not patriotism. Mankind and its needs are the same everywhere, they say, truth and knowledge are one and have no country; education likewise must be a universal thing, without nationality or borders. What, for instance, would be a national education in science? Would it imply rejecting the modern method of science because it has come to us from Europe? Would it mean going back to the imperfect scientific knowledge of classical India, exiling Galileo and Newton and all those who came after and teaching only what was known to Bhaskara, Aryabhatta and Varahamihira? After all, we live in the twenty-first century, we cannot revive the India of Chandragupta or Akbar; we must keep abreast with the march of truth and knowledge, fit ourselves for existence under the prevailing circumstances, and our education must therefore be up-to-date in form and substance and modern in its life and spirit. Similar objections were raised against the concept of a national education by some of Sri Aurobindo's contemporaries. How did he respond?

Sri Aurobindo was second to none in holding that true national education had to be modern and up-to-date in its content. He said:

The living spirit of the demand for national education no more requires a return to the astronomy and mathematics of Bhaskara or the forms of the system of Nalanda than the living spirit of Swadeshi a return from railway and motor traction to the ancient chariot and the bullock-cart. There is no doubt plenty of retrogressive sentimentalism about and there have been some queer violences on common sense and reason and disconcerting freaks that prejudice the real issue, but these inconsequent streaks of fantasy give a false hue to the matter.<sup>2</sup>

The real issue, Sri Aurobindo asserted, is not a choice between modernism and antiquity, but between an imported civilisation and the greater possibilities of the Indian mind and nature, not between the present and the past but between the present and the future. We seek not to return to the fifth century but to initiate the centuries to come. We seek not a reversion to the past but a step forward from the present artificial falsity to India's own greater innate potentialities. That step is demanded by the world, as well as by the Shakti of India.

In our own time, most of the debate on the current educational system versus a national education has centred around the subjects to be taught and the content to be imparted. As Sri Aurobindo pointed out, acquiring various kinds of information is only one of the purposes of education and not the main one, its central aim is the building up of the powers of the human mind and spirit: it is the evocation and formation of knowledge, will, character, culture, spirit—that at least, if not more. And this aim makes an enormous difference. If all that we needed was the acquisition of the

2. *Ibid.*, p. 194.



information put at our disposal by science, it would be enough for us to intelligently take up the science of the West. But the real question is not merely what science we shall learn but what we shall do with that science; the question is not how we shall acquire the scientific mind and recover the habit of scientific discovery, but how we shall relate it to the other powers of the human mind and spirit. Scientific knowledge has to be related to other kinds of knowledge more intimate to and not less light-giving and power-giving parts of our intelligence and nature. And there the peculiar cast of the Indian mind, its psychological tradition, its ancestral capacity, its native turn and disposition towards knowledge—these cultural elements are of supreme importance to our education. A national education does not require us to ignore modern truth and knowledge, but it does require us to take our foundation on our own being, our own mind, our own spirit.

There is another unstated and often unrecognised assumption made by those who are opposed to national education. It is that we have to acquire Western knowledge and fit ourselves for Western civilisation because only so can we live and prosper. This is what our education must do for us! The idea of national education challenges the sufficiency of this assumption. The scientific, rationalistic, industrial and pseudo-democratic civilisation of the West is now in the process of transition to a new paradigm. The age of individualism and reason is slowly dying and making way for a new one. Sri Aurobindo called it the subjective age. This is how he described this new age that is coming upon us everywhere: It will be an age in which man will be able to know himself more completely by “becoming actively self-conscious and not merely self-critical,” by “living in his soul and acting out of it rather than floundering” about on the surface of life, “by putting himself into conscious harmony” with the inner light and power that lies behind his superficial mentality “and by enlightening his reason” and dynamising his action through opening to “this deeper light and power”.

In this process the rationalistic ideal begins to subject itself to the ideal of intuitional knowledge and a deeper self-awareness; the utilitarian standard gives way to the aspiration towards self-consciousness and self-realisation; the rule of living according to the manifest laws of physical Nature is replaced by the effort towards living according to the veiled Law and Will and Power active in the life of the world and in the inner and outer life of humanity.<sup>3</sup>

At a time when the most advanced minds of the West are beginning to turn to the genius of Asia for the hope of a more spiritual civilisation, it would be disastrous if we were to put our trust in the dissolving and moribund past of Europe. Our future lies not in the Western educational system but in a modern system of national education. Sri Aurobindo spoke of this need. He wrote:

3. Sri Aurobindo: *The Human Cycle*, SABCL, Vol. 15, p. 24.



We want not only a free India, but a great India, India taking worthily her place among the Nations and giving to the life of humanity what she alone can give. The greatest knowledge and the greatest riches man can possess are hers by inheritance; she has that for which all mankind is waiting. But she can only give it if her hands are free, her soul free, full and exalted, and her life dignified in all its parts.... But the full soul rich with the inheritance of the past, the widening gains of the present, and the large potentiality of the future, can come only by a system of National Education. It cannot come by any extension or imitation of the system of the existing universities with its radically false principles, its vicious and mechanical methods, its dead-alive routine tradition and its narrow and sightless spirit. Only a new spirit and a new body born from the heart of the Nation and full of the light and hope of its resurgence can create it.<sup>4</sup>

Although the mind of humanity is much the same everywhere, there is also something called the mind and soul of an individual and even something that can be characterised as the mind and soul of a people or a nation. And true education must pay proper attention to all these three.

Three things have to be taken into account in a true and living education: the individual in his commonness and his uniqueness, the people of a nation and universal humanity. A true and living education must not only help to bring out to full advantage all that is in the individual man, but must also help to put him into the right relation with the mind and soul of the people of the country to which he belongs and of the humanity of which he is an inseparable part.

Our ideal of education will necessarily depend upon our conceptions of the individual and his life, the nation and its life, and humanity and its future. India has had her own perception in all these matters. India has not seen man merely as a living body developed by physical nature which has evolved certain impulses and desires, a mind and an ego, a vital animal, whose life and education must be turned towards a satisfaction of these desires and impulses under the government of a trained mind and reason to the best advantage of the personal and national ego. Nor has India seen man pre-eminently as a reasoning animal, a mental son of physical Nature, and his education as a cultivation of the mental capacities, nor as a political, social and economic being and his education as a training that will fit him to be an efficient, productive and well-disciplined member of the society and citizen of the State. All these aspects have received considerable prominence in Indian education but they have been subject to a larger vision.

India has always seen man primarily as a soul, a portion of the Divinity enwrapped in mind and body. She has recognised in him a mental life, an intellectual

4. Sri Aurobindo: "National Education, Message for National Education Week", *Supplement*, SABCL, Vol. 27, p. 505.

life, an ethical, dynamic and practical life, an aesthetic and hedonistic life, a vital and physical life, but she has seen them as the modalities of a soul that manifests through them and grows with their growth. And yet these modalities are not the soul itself, because at the summit of its ascent the soul rises to become something greater than them all—a spiritual being. It is this supreme manifestation of the soul of man that India has recognised as the ultimate and highest goal of human life.

Similarly for India, a nation is not merely an organised State, an armed and efficient community prepared for the struggle of life and putting all at the service of the national ego, but a great communal soul and life that has its own Swabhava and Swadharma, embodied in its intellectual, aesthetic, ethical and dynamic, social and political forms and culture. Our cultural conception of humanity must be in conformity with this vision of the universal manifesting in the human race, evolving through life and mind but with a higher spiritual aim. We must see the soul of humanity advancing through struggle and concert towards oneness, increasing in experience through the process of living, maintaining a needed diversity through the varied cultures and life-motives of its many peoples, searching for perfection through the development of the powers of the individual and his progress towards a diviner being and life, but searching also, though more slowly, after a similar perfectibility in the life of the ace.

It may be possible to dispute this description of the aims of the human being, of the nation and humanity. Most of our intelligentsia look upon any reference to ancient India and its concept of man as necessarily obscurantist. This only shows that they are still prisoners of the fundamentalism of rationality which characterises the dying moments of the age of objectivity. They have yet to wake up to the newer paradigm of spirituality which, however vaguely and haltingly yet, characterises the subjective age. If at all we need a debate in the country, it is on these issues. We have to decide whether we are going to be faithful camp-followers of the West or whether we are going to be true to our spiritual tradition.

So far, we have been discussing the concept of national education and why Sri Aurobindo gave it such importance. Now let us quickly review the observations he made on some of the other aspects of higher education in India.

He found the education in India prevalent in his time deficient in several respects. He once made this caustic comment on it: “If the physical training it provides is contemptible and the moral training nil, the mental training is also meagre in quantity and worthless in quality.”<sup>5</sup>

People often say that since a degree is necessary to get a job, people try to get a degree and are not interested in getting an education. But Sri Aurobindo did not find anything wrong in linking a degree with a job. For it must be recognised that pure enthusiasm of knowledge for knowledge’s sake is a rare thing in any culture. People normally seek knowledge for other purposes, such as acquiring prestige in society or

5. Sri Aurobindo: “Education, Intellectual”, *The Harmony of Virtue*, SABCL, Vol. 3, p. 125.

a lucrative job or a respectable profession. Instead of regarding this as a problem, why not use it as an opportunity? Let us make it absolutely necessary for a student to get a good education in order to get a degree. If a student can get a degree on the basis of a worthless education, he will naturally feel that a good education is unnecessary, and he won't take the trouble to acquire it. But change this state of things, make culture and science essential for getting the degree, and the same student will strive to get them in order to obtain his degree. Pure enthusiasm of knowledge for the sake of knowledge works only for exceptional minds.

Sri Aurobindo has hinted here about the need for using examinations to promote the learning we desire our students to acquire. If the examinations are not properly planned, students tend to learn the technique of passing them without acquiring the knowledge or the skills they are expected to acquire. Now, this insight into the examination system as a facilitator of learning is a recent one, and it is remarkable that Sri Aurobindo was speaking about it more than a hundred years ago.

To give the student knowledge is necessary; but it is still more necessary to build in him the power of using his knowledge. Sri Aurobindo found higher education in India of his time entirely deficient in this respect. As he humorously put it, we aim to produce skilled carpenters but end up producing only timber depot managers. Here are his own words:

It would hardly be a good technical education for a carpenter to be taught how to fell trees so as to provide himself with wood and never to learn how to prepare tables and chairs and cabinets or even what tools were necessary for his craft. Yet this is precisely what our system of education does. It trains the memory and provides the student with a store of facts and second-hand ideas. The memory is the woodcutter's axe and the store he acquires is the wood that he has cut down in his course of tree-felling. When he has done this, the University says to him, "We now declare you a Bachelor of Carpentry, we have given you a good and sharp axe and a fair nucleus of wood to begin with. Go on, my son, the world is full of forests and, provided the Forest Officer does not object, you can cut down trees and provide yourself with wood to your heart's content." Now the student who goes forth thus equipped, may become a great timber merchant but, unless he is an exceptional genius, he will never be even a moderate carpenter. Or to return from the simile to the facts, the graduate from our colleges may be a good clerk, a decent vakil or a tolerable medical practitioner, but unless he is an exceptional genius, he will never be a great administrator or a great lawyer or an eminent medical specialist.<sup>6</sup>

The first fundamental mistake has been, therefore, to confine ourselves to the

6. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

training of the passive memory and the storage of facts and to neglect the training of the mind's three great active operational faculties: the power of reasoning, the power of comparison and differentiation, and the power of expression. All of us have these faculties in some measure but they demand cultivation, which is the real essence of education. If not cultivated in youth, they atrophy for lack of use, they become rusted and coated with dirt, they become feeble, partial and narrow. The assumption of our educationists is that we have only to supply the mind with a smattering of facts in each department of knowledge and then the mind can be trusted to develop itself. But this assumption is contrary to the universal experience of civilised nations. The intellectual degeneration of gifted races has always begun historically with the neglect of these three mental powers and the excessive cultivation of mere second-hand knowledge. If the present neglect of these powers continues in our country, it will inevitably lead to irretrievable degradation and final extinction.

The very first step in reform must therefore be to revolutionise the whole aim and method of our education. We must accustom teachers to devote nine-tenths of their energies to the education of the active mental faculties, while the passive retaining faculty, which we call memory, should occupy a recognised and well-defined but subordinate place, and we must direct our school and university examinations to the testing of these active faculties and not of the memory.

The country is still suffering the effects of two centuries of an education which has paid scant attention to the cultivation of a progressive mind. Indians have proved themselves very capable in borrowing knowledge but rather poor in creating new knowledge. We respect authority and tradition too much and do not challenge them sufficiently or subject them to critical scrutiny. This can be seen even today in the lives of many educated and otherwise progressive Indians who blindly accept on many an occasion what authority and tradition have sanctioned.

About one thing Sri Aurobindo was always very clear. He was not in favour of the mere revival of some past principle, method or system, however great it was in the past. Such a revival, he warned, was bound to be sterile and hopelessly inadequate to the pressing demands of the present and the far greater demands of the future. But he also said that taking over the English, German or American university system, with a gloss of Indian colour over it would be an exercise in futility and would in no sense deserve the name of a national education.

Spirituality has always been the master key of the Indian mind and it should characterise our university education as well. This emphasis on the spirit in no way undervalues the greatness of the material laws and forces, but enhances them. For it perceives that life cannot be fully understood or lived until we understand the right relation of the physical with the supra-physical. It recognises that man cannot understand the complexity of this universe with his superficial sight, and that there are powers behind him and within him—only a small part of which he is aware; it is by being conscious of these powers that man can exceed himself. To be spiritual is to

believe that there are ranges of life beyond our life, ranges of mind beyond our present mind and that above them there are the splendours of the spirit. It is by training his will and knowledge that man can conquer these ranges of life and mind, transcend his present limits and attain the treasures of the spirit—wisdom, power, light and love. Ancient India set forth to find the way to this perfection with the logical practicality and a sense of science and organised method which distinguished her mentality among ancient civilisations. This yearning to grapple with the infinite and possess it has characterised India. This is what is meant by spirituality: the constant attempt to seek to manifest the spirit more and more as a result of which our works in all spheres become more and more excellent. Nothing is more modern than this spirituality and nothing will satisfy the aspirations of humanity today unless it is imbued with this spirituality.

MANGESH NADKARNI

*For further reading :*

Sri Aurobindo: *The Harmony of Virtue*, SABCL, Vol. 3, pp. 125-29.

” : *The Hour of God*, SABCL, Vol. 17, pp. 191-252.

” : *Early Cultural Writings*, CWSA, Vol. 1, pp. 353-469.

The Mother: *On Education*, CWM, Vol. 12.

*In a general way, education, culture, refinement of the senses are the means of curing movements of crude instinct and desire and passion. To obliterate them is not curing them; instead they should be cultivated, intellectualised, refined. That is the surest way of curing them. To give them their maximum growth in view of the progress and development of consciousness, so that one may attain to a sense of harmony and exactitude of perception is a part of culture and education for the human being.*

*The Mother*

(*On Education*, CWM, Vol. 12, pp. 120-21)

## HISTORY OF THE FUTURE

(Future of Human Potential—Towards a deeper Humanism and Ecology—  
Evolution of Consciousness—Science of Consciousness)

WE were discussing so far in our previous articles the history of the past and the present. In the next series of articles, beginning with the present, we will try to do what is called in modern futurology “scenario building”; we will try to sketch a line of future possibilities in the light of Sri Aurobindo and Mother’s vision, with an emphasis on the brighter and the more luminous possibilities. To a too-earthly and pragmatic mind many of these future verities may appear dreamy and utopian. But what else is human progress but a progressive realisation of our utopias and dreams. And, as Sri Aurobindo says in his epic poem, *Savitri*: “Earth’s winged chimaeras are Truth’s steeds in Heaven”. (CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 52) Truth’s steeds may sometimes use our winged chimera to descend into earth, carrying their heavenly possibilities!

### Future of the Human Potential

Futurology is now emerging as a new and fledgeling field of knowledge. *Modern futurology tries to plot the future trends in the external life of man—in economics, society, politics, business and technology. But we will be presenting here an alternative scenario with an emphasis on the future of the Human Potential, especially the potentialities of the inner being of Man, his psychological and spiritual potentialities.* For we believe that therein lies the future drift of human evolution. In other words, while modern futurology is concerned mainly with the future of human society, our approach to futurology will focus on the future of Man and his potentialities.

In all futuristic thinking, especially in our present condition when we are in the midst of a radical evolutionary leap, the most important factor which has to be understood clearly is the nature of change in the governing ideas and motifs. For each phase of human evolution was governed by a set of central motifs. The first phase of evolution was governed by the ideals of religions, ethics and philosophy; the second phase by the ideals of political and social organisation; the third, the modern age, by the ideas of economics, industry, commerce, science and technology. What will be the governing ideas of the future cycle of evolution?

We believe that the central theme of the future evolution of humanity will be Growth of Consciousness. In fact the entire terrestrial evolution is a growth in consciousness. But in the past, this evolution is worked out subconsciously and indirectly through external means and aims, without a clear understanding of its significance. In the future, growth of consciousness will become more and more the conscious aim and purpose of all human activities and it will be effected more directly through internal means. In this article we will discuss the main motifs which will drive the future

growth of human consciousness and its potentialities.

### **Towards a deeper Humanism and Ecology**

The seeds of the future are cast in the past and the sattwic and spiritual movements of the modern age which we surveyed briefly in one of our earlier articles contain the seed ideas of the future. The future of humanity depends on how creatively it responds to these sattwic and spiritual ideals. But they may have to be modified and transformed to suit the spiritual needs and the future destiny of humanity.

The intellectual, social and political humanism trying to achieve human unity and the perfection of the outer life through the mental idea and outer organisation has to be replaced by a spiritual humanism which seeks mainly for an inner unity and inner perfection of humanity and the outer unity and perfection only as a spontaneous expression of this inner realisation. Similarly, the ecology movement has to deepen and broaden its conceptions of Nature and the unity of Man with Nature in the light of an aesthetic and spiritual vision of Nature. In this spiritual vision, Nature is not merely a physical and biological energy. Nature is, in the Indian spiritual thought, the living, conscious, and universal creative Energy of the Spirit. She is consciousness and creative energy inherent in the Consciousness of the Spirit. And the human being is not only physically, but also psychologically and spiritually a part of Nature. Not only are our body and our physical life part of Nature, but our mind and soul are also part of the universal Mind and Soul of Nature. The aim of a spiritual ecology is to realise a living and conscious communion with the universal Force of Nature and live in harmony with Her laws not only physically but also in all the levels of our being—physical, psychological and spiritual.

### **Evolution of Consciousness**

What are the future possibilities for the spiritual movements of the modern age? If the sattwic movements and ideals of the West have to be spiritualised, the spiritual movements and ideals of the East have to be integralised to embrace the world and human life. This is already happening in the emerging spiritual movements. But among all spiritual movements of the modern age, the most comprehensive exponents of an integral life-embracing spirituality are Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. So, we believe, this integral spiritual vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother will be one of the major governing ideas of the future. Let us look a little more deeply and closely into Sri Aurobindo's integral vision.

According to Sri Aurobindo, terrestrial evolution from Matter to life and from life to Mind is in its essence an evolution of consciousness and not, as modern science thinks, an evolution of form alone. Evolution of form is only the outer expression of evolution of consciousness. A supreme and eternal Consciousness is the creative source



and essence of the individual and the universe. This consciousness, as it evolves, creates the appropriate form for its self-expression. So the terrestrial evolution as studied by modern science, from the physical, biological, animal to the human, is the outer expression of a progressive inner evolution of consciousness from Matter to Mind. But according to Sri Aurobindo, Mind is not the summit of evolution. There is a higher supramental consciousness beyond mind but within Man's reach if not yet within his grasp. It remains deep within him as an unmanifest potential. To unveil and manifest this spiritual potential within man will be the next step in human evolution. This, in a nutshell, is Sri Aurobindo's vision of terrestrial evolution. We will not enter into any detailed analysis of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, which is beyond the scope of our discussion here. We will confine our discussion to the implications of Sri Aurobindo's vision for the future history of humanity.

The ancient spirituality in general tended towards some form of ascetic illusionism, dismissing the world as an incurable illusion, and an escape from the world, outwardly to the monastery, mountaintop or a forest, and inwardly in a deep trance into a world-denying transcendent Beyond, as the solution to the problem of life. This was the dominant note of ancient spirituality. In contrast to this, Sri Aurobindo's vision presents a life-affirming and world-transforming spirituality; it conceives the world and its evolution as a real and progressive manifestation of the divine consciousness, culminating in an integral spiritual transformation of the terrestrial life in the Consciousness of the Spirit. In this integral spiritual vision, the aim of life is not an escape into the higher consciousness of the Spirit, abandoning the earthly life, but a reshaping, remoulding and transforming the earthly life in the light, power and values of the higher Consciousness of the Spirit beyond Mind. This means a New Humanity and a New Civilisation living in and acting from the Consciousness of the Spirit. Just as the human species with a mental consciousness emerged from the animal species and created a mental civilisation, a New Species with a supramental, egoless and universal consciousness will emerge from the egocentric mentality of man and create a supramental and global civilisation. But this will not be an outer globalisation connected together by technology and organisation, but a inner globalisation of consciousness, a global humanity consciously unified in the deepest inner core of its being in a global consciousness.

Until the advent of man on Earth, the terrestrial evolution from the material biological, animal to the human organism, was effected by universal Nature unconsciously or subconsciously without the conscious participation of the evolving organism. But with the advent of the self-conscious mind in man, the human organism has acquired the capacity to participate consciously in the terrestrial evolution. The future evolution from Man to Superman has to be a conscious evolution. Our present human species and its civilisation, both individually and collectively, is given the choice to either consciously participate in this higher evolution and transform itself into a supramental being or be discarded by Nature as an evolutionary failure and get



destroyed like some of the prehistoric civilisation or be superseded by a superior race of beings descending from the higher spiritual worlds.

This evolutionary vision of Sri Aurobindo sheds a deep insight into the nature of the progress which the present humanity will be called upon to make in the future. The nature of the past evolution was predominantly in the outer life of the race; it is mainly material, economic, social and political and cultural progress. We would like to clarify here we are not saying that there has been no inner evolution of humanity in the past. That will be a contradiction of the very theme of our quest and our earlier discussions. What we are trying to say here is that whatever inner progress humanity has achieved in the past comes as a subordinate result or aid to outer progress and not the central conscious aim. Nature's task in the past and in the present seems to be to prepare the outer mind and life of the race for a future spiritual destiny. Some of the earliest civilisations like the Indian or the Greek had the conception of inner progress in the intellectual, aesthetic, ethical and spiritual levels and made the attempt to create an outer social structure favourable to the inner progress of people. But this effort ended only in creating a small group of intellectual, artistic and spiritual elite, while the large majority of the masses remained stagnant and unprogressive. Perhaps humanity at that time was not yet inwardly and outwardly prepared to realise and manifest the spiritual ideal in the whole of human life. Further evolution and progress of humanity up to the present time is probably an extensive inner and outer preparation of the human consciousness and life for a comprehensive realisation of the integral spiritual ideal in every activity of human life. The post-modern age is perhaps the last phase of this preparation. The precise nature of this preparation we will discuss in our subsequent articles. Once this preparatory work is over, then the evolutionary need for outer progress ceases. And further growth in the future has to be in the inner psychological and spiritual dimensions of the human being and the self-expression of this inner growth in the outer life.

But how to realise this inner spiritual awakening in Man? Here comes the other great Idea of the future: The Science of Yoga.

### **Science of Consciousness**

The eminent historian Arnold Toynbee was reported to have said in one of his talks that in the future, when religion replaces technology as the driving force of evolution, India will be the leader of the world. But we believe that the central idea of the future will not be religion but Yoga or to be more scientifically precise, Science of Consciousness.

The word "Yoga" has become well-known all over the world. But the real meaning and significance of this great science of India is not fully understood. The popular conceptions associate the word with the physical and breathing exercises, Asanas and and Pranayama of Hatha Yoga, because this is the most popular form of Yoga. But

even with Hatha Yoga, most of its modern practitioners are not aware of the true aim of the path. For in its original conception, Hatha Yoga is not merely a system of physical and breathing exercises for maintaining excellent health; it is one of the paths towards spiritual liberation. The original treatise on Hatha Yoga contains, apart from instructions on Asanas and Pranayama, moral, psychological and spiritual disciplines for altering consciousness. So even Hatha Yoga is not merely a physical discipline but a psycho-physical science.

Thus, Yoga is in its essence a Science of Consciousness for accelerating the psychological and spiritual development of the individual. It is the science, process and the discipline by which we can raise the centre of our consciousness from the egocentric mentality to the egoless and universal consciousness of our higher self and spirit. And this, precisely, will be the main thrust of the future evolution of humanity. In ancient India, Yoga was taught and practised mainly as a path for the spiritual development and liberation of the individual. The deeper truths and the methods of the Sciences of Yoga were taught by the Masters of Yoga to a few fit disciples. In this way, the science was preserved and transmitted through a system of secret spiritual initiations, culture, tradition and schools of Yoga. These spiritual traditions preserved the higher and inner truths, principles and practices of the science in their purity and taught them to a few chosen seekers. A fragment of this spiritual wisdom and practices contained in Yoga, and taught to the few and fit initiates, reached the masses in a diluted form through religion, mythology and symbols. But in ancient India, the spiritual traditions and cultures were so strong, vibrant and innate to the civilisation, that even the diluted fragment which reached the masses had sufficient power to create a widespread spiritual temper among the masses.

In the future we may witness the Science of Yoga, breaking away and coming out from the dungeons of popular religion and the caves of esoteric spirituality, becoming a secular Science of Consciousness applying itself to every activity of human life. In the past, Yoga was applied to the psychological and spiritual development of the individual. And this inner development realised through Yoga expressed itself mainly through the cultural activities of the higher mind of humanity, like religion, art, literature and philosophy creating a spiritual, intellectual and artistic elite. But in the future, Yoga as a Science of Consciousness will be applied more comprehensively and extensively to every activity of the individual and collective life, not only to the spiritual, artistic and intellectual activities of culture, but also to the economic, social and political activities involving creation and distribution of power and wealth, work, enjoyment and relationships. The inner development or growth of consciousness achieved through Yoga will express itself through all these activities, raising the individual and corporate life of humanity as a whole to a higher level of consciousness.

The science of the modern age explores the secrets of matter and the laws of the outer life and applies its discoveries to enhance the productivity, efficiency, prosperity and enjoyment of the material, economic, social and political life. The science of the

future will explore the secrets of Consciousness and the laws of the inner being of man, and this will be done with all the capacities and qualities added to the human consciousness by the modern scientific mind. These discoveries in the realm of consciousness will be applied for the moral, psychological and spiritual development and well-being of the inner as well as the outer life of Man. This will be done with all the capacities added on to human consciousness by the modern technological and managerial mind or in other words, the capacities added to the pragmatic mind of humanity during the modern age.

*(To be continued)*

M. S. SRINIVASAN

---

## CALL TO THE QUEST

O, you, inert, asleep, in ignorance curled,  
Wake up and walk towards the star;  
For you alone, in this dark wide world  
The mystic heights beckon from afar.

Pause not too long on this winding way  
To catch your breath, or have a rest,  
Be wary of the Beast in search of prey.  
With the Name in your heart, proceed on your quest.

The gods in their heavens watch and wait  
For you to open their golden gate,  
And lead them back upon this earth  
To help the world in its wonderful Birth.

KRIPA

# THE ADVENTURE OF CONSCIOUSNESS—INDIA'S SPIRITUAL EVOLUTION

(Continued from the issue of May 2006)

## Buddhism

WE now come to a peculiar stage in Indian spirituality when two of the most well-known spiritual figures of India actually left her weaker and lifeless. The two leaders were separated by almost a millennium and yet they represent one movement in essence, one completes the other. Buddha and Shankara have had a tremendous influence on India for the last two thousand years. As Sri Aurobindo says, “Buddha has gone out of India indeed, but Buddhism remains... what it destroyed no man has been able to restore, what it left no man has been able to destroy.”<sup>33</sup>

Let us see what exactly is the philosophy of Buddha and what does it lead to. In the world as we see it, there are two aspects which present themselves to our mental perception: first, self-conscious, self-governing existence, and second, mechanical Force. Our outlook on life will depend on what we consider to be the mutual relationship between these two entities. If we hold that mechanical Force is subject to a self-conscious and self-governing existence, then we are led to the conception of a Divine Power, Brahman, Isha, or God, who is the true governing force of existence. Then mechanical Force, or Karma, reveals itself as the conscious will of that Sole Existence. This is the view of the Upanishads and the Veda. On the other hand, if we hold that self-conscious existence is subordinate to mechanical Force, then we will be inevitably driven towards a tyrannous self-existent Necessity, a law of Karma that is inexorable and mechanical. This is the view of Buddhism, and of Mayavada, with a slight modification.<sup>34</sup>

Put more simply: Buddha was deeply affected by the sorrow in the world and he sought desperately a solution to relieve it. From his experience, Buddha believed that this creation is founded upon sorrow. Even what appears to us as pleasant has sorrow at its root. *Sabbe samkhara anichcha. Sabbe samkhara dukha. Sabbe dhamma anatta.*<sup>35</sup> He did not believe in a Transcendent Divine, nor in a personal soul. Just as the idea of a car is only a name for the combination of the engine, the chassis, the axles, suspensions, wheels, and the nuts and bolts that hold it all together, so is individual soul or ego only a name for the combination of forms, ideas and sensations. Moreover, the law of cause and effect, the law of Karma is binding on the individual. Karma drives the human soul through endless experiences, from good to evil, and from evil to good, from joy to pain and from pain to joy, like a tennis ball kept continually at play by two

33. *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 13, p. 136.

34. *Sri Aurobindo Archives and Research Journal*, December 1979, p. 173.

35. *Dhammapada*: #278.

equally skilled players. Thus, as he cannot appeal to the Grace of a divine that does not exist, nor can he escape from the bondage of his ever-recurring Karma, the only thing for him to do is to quit this world and enter into another state behind or beyond this creation, a Nirvana, from which there need be no return. But there can be no freedom, no possible liberty except by a disintegration of these combinations, ideas, sensations etc. that constitute him; the car has to be pulled apart so to say. So Buddha said that the motive power which keeps Karma in motion is desire, and if the individual can overcome this desire, then he can untie the knot of the ego, achieve a dissolution and self-extinction, and enter Nirvana. Then alone will he be free from the otherwise endless cycle of rebirth and sorrow.

Thus, while in the philosophy of the Upanishads, phenomenal existence is determined by a conscious Prakriti under the Will of the Purusha, for Buddha, phenomenal existence is determined by blind and inexorable Karma. While Karma for the former is a subordinate instrument of rebirth, an elastic and flexible bond, Buddhism imposes Karma as an ineluctable Necessity and a rigid chain. While Vedanta becomes by its

	<b>Vedanta</b>	<b>Buddhism</b>
<b>Existence determined by</b>	Conscious Prakriti under Will of Purusha	Inexorable Karma
<b>Karma</b>	Elastic, flexible bond	Ineluctable Necessity
<b>A Gospel of</b>	Self-realisation	Self-extinction

fundamental conception, a gospel of self-realisation in a world which is secretly *anandamaya*, all-blissful, Buddhism becomes by its fundamental conception, a gospel of escape by self-extinction from sorrowful and intolerable bondage.

There are some philosophical loopholes in Buddha's thought, but as Sri Aurobindo writes, "Buddha avoided always the logical difficulty and seized on the practical fact.... Compassion in him which far more than reason and logic was the master key of his thinking...."<sup>36</sup>

The most drastic consequence of Buddhism was the inauguration of the monastic order, which became since then the supreme goal of human existence in India. In the

36. SAARJ, December 1979, p. 172.

Buddhist conception, you are either a householder or an ascetic, a monk or a layman. It erased the transition of the Caturashrama system of Hinduism, and upset the balance that prevailed. This, as Sri Aurobindo writes, “weakened...the life of society by its tense exaggeration and its hard system of opposites.”<sup>37</sup> “...under its influence half the nation moved in the direction of spiritual passivity and negation, the other by a natural reaction plunged deep into a splendid but enervating materialism. Our race lost three parts of its ancient heroic manhood, its grasp on the world, its magnificently ordered polity and its noble social fabric.”<sup>38</sup>

A number of reasons can be posited for the coming of Buddhism. This is an important question because if we are to consider Buddha as an avatar, we must try and figure out what is the role he had come to play. Let's look at a few possibilities:

1) The deeper significance of the Vedas had drowned under the mass of ritual and rite. The Vedic law had become a mere convention. One view says that Buddhism was born to rub out these dead deposits on the parent body of Hinduism. This it did by being anti-ritualistic and denying the supreme authority of the Vedas, for, in the Vedic religion of the time he found only blind custom, and nothing to answer to the deeper problems of existence.<sup>39</sup>

2) The Vedic view of the world is that life is an expression of the Divine Presence. It was a younger humanity that affirmed that the world was born in delight, it moves from delight to delight, and it consummates in delight. They sang of immortality, of the solar light, of men being the children of Heaven and Beatitude. But in the pursuit of things divine, they became blind to human problems. That the material life of man is a texture of death and disease, replete with suffering and sorrow, was not given due recognition. So Buddhism was a kind of counterbalance against this happy but one-sided view of things. It was not a quest after the ultimate truth, or even a zeal to realise the Divine that drove Buddha in his spiritual quest; it was the everyday problems of the ordinary man which troubled him, and for which he, in his compassion, sought a permanent and radical solution.<sup>40</sup> The Upanishads saw delight and ecstasy and laid down the foundation for the path of the Everlasting Yes; Buddha saw the dark shadow of existence and proclaimed the Everlasting No, which as Nolini-da writes, is somewhat euphemistically called the Middle Path.<sup>41</sup> Again, as Nolini-da writes, perhaps “a negative approach was needed for man to rise out of its too earthly a tegument, to glimpse his divine possibility beyond before he could hope to build it here below. The long reign of Siva was a necessary

37. *The Renaissance in India*, CWSA, Vol. 20, p. 127.

38. *Harmony of Virtue*, SABCL Vol. 3, p. 173.

39. *Essays on Mysticism*, Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta, (CWNKG), Vol. 2, p. 276.

40. *Ibid.*, pp. 280-83.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 277.

preparation for the advent of Vishnu.”<sup>42</sup>

3) Another view says that before Buddhism Indian spirituality remained in the lofty regions above the mind. In our eagerness to reach the spiritual we gave scant recognition to the mental and the rational. In the golden age of the Vedas, man lived with his sense married to the Dawn; he was intuitive and imaginative, full of a natural, unspoilt, unsophisticated happiness and hopefulness. Neither the Vedas, nor the Upanishads make use of logic or reason for knowledge and expression. But the age of Reason had to come. Buddha ushered in such an age of reason and ratiocination.<sup>43</sup> Mind is an inferior power of consciousness, lesser than the spirit, but it has its utility in the fullness of human development, and its place in the scheme of things.<sup>44</sup>

4) Buddha showed us a direct path to the Supreme, overleaping all the intermediate stages to a supreme but negative liberation.

5) Finally, as Sri Aurobindo simply puts it, “Buddha stands for the conquest over the Ignorance of the lower nature.”<sup>45</sup>

Whatever the reason for Buddha's coming, the conception of life as an endless bondage, could only lead to a gradual cessation of life.<sup>46</sup> With diminishing vitality, and an increasing ascetic tendency, India plunged into spiritual darkness, and the idea of a terrestrial realisation receded into the background. This sorry state of affairs wasn't helped by the advent of Shankara.

### Shankara

Shankara came a thousand years after Buddha and added further fuel to the ascetic fire. Referred to by the orthodox brahmins of his time as *pracchanna Buddha*, or the masked Buddhist, Shankara completed the movement that Buddha began.

Let us look at Shankara's philosophy. Unlike Buddha, Shankara asserts the existence of the Atman, the self or soul, and of a Supreme Reality, the Parabrahman. He admits, with Buddha, that Karma is an absolute rule for the individual in manifestation—the conscious soul immersed in the phenomenal universe is subject to the law of cause and effect and is thus condemned to be reborn endlessly unless he chooses to escape. But, he says that the soul need not forever be bound to the revolving wheel of its own manifestations. Freedom is the ultimate spiritual experience, and the door of escape is, as for the Buddha, in an ultimate act of knowledge which denies the existence of the phenomenal world. Where there is only One, there can be no relation

42. *Ibid.*, pp. 277-78.

43. We see a similar movement occurring at the same time led by Socrates in Greece and Confucius in China, and other philosophers in India.

44. *Essays on Mysticism*, CWNKG, Vol. 2, pp. 280-83.

45. *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 392.

46. *Sweet Mother (New Talks)*, CWNKG, Vol. 7, p. 247.



and action. Multiplicity is only possible by a delusion, a false conception, by a Maya, an illusion. Thus, the world is a creation of Maya and has no true or abiding existence; it is a mass of self-deceptions. Therefore, cessation from Karma, action, and the knowledge of the supreme reality, Brahman, is the door of escape from this world of endless Karma into the calm and peace of Brahman. Shankara does not explain how mystifying Maya came into existence. He only organises and arranges the process of this universal mystification.

The intellectual difference between the two systems is huge—after all, one accepts the reality of the world but denies the Divine; and the other denies the world but affirms the existence of the One Divine; one is a gospel of universal suffering and the other a gospel of universal illusion—but the temperament is the same. Both systems advocate an escape from life as the only possible solution to the problem of existence. As Sri Aurobindo writes, “...Shankara in the historical process of India’s philosophical mind takes up, completes and replaces Buddha...”<sup>47</sup>

So what was the role of Shankara in India’s spiritual evolution? By the time of Shankara, that is the 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D., Buddhism had taken a strong hold over the subcontinent. There was even a danger that Hinduism, especially its inner aspects, might be lost. Shankara saved the situation with some clever manipulation. He essentially put forth the same ideal of Nirvana but clothed it in Hindu terms with verses from the ancient scriptures to support his point of view. He commented extensively on the Upanishads and other revered scriptures and showed that they too speak of an escape into a supracosmic reality, which can liberate us from the chain of Karma and rebirth. In doing so, he brought back to the fore the ancient scriptures, even though his interpretations are biased to suit his ends. The irony is that though Shankara is still considered among the foremost expounders of the Upanishads, and even the Gita, he hardly presents these scriptures correctly, in their entirety, and with the full synthetic power of their vision. He captures only one side of the truth and posits it as an exclusive truth.

To illustrate this let us look at the first verse of the Isha Upanishad, a well-known Upanishad which places a lot of emphasis on works; many even consider it a predecessor to the Bhagavat Gita. The first verse of the Isha runs thus:

ॐ ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किञ्च जगत्यां जगत्।  
तेन त्यक्तेन भूञ्जीथा मा गृधः कस्यस्विद्धनम्॥

All this is for habitation by the Lord, whatsoever is individual universe of movement in the universal motion. By that renounced thou shouldst enjoy; lust not after any man’s possession.<sup>48</sup>

47. *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 18, p. 415.

48. *The Upanishads*, SABCL, Vol. 12, p. 63.



Now, as Sri Aurobindo writes, "There are three possible senses of *vāsyam*, 'to be clothed', 'to be worn as garment' and 'to be inhabited'. The first is the ordinarily accepted meaning. Shankara explains it in this significance, that we must lose the sense of this unreal objective universe in the sole perception of the pure Brahman. So explained the first line becomes a contradiction of the whole thought of the Upanishad which teaches the reconciliation, by the perception of essential Unity, of the apparently incompatible opposites, God and the World, Renunciation and Enjoyment, Action and internal Freedom, the One and the Many, Being and its Becomings, the passive divine Impersonality and the active divine Personality, the Knowledge and the Ignorance, the Becoming and the Not-Becoming, Life on earth and beyond and the supreme Immortality. The image is of the world either as a garment or as a dwelling-place for the informing and governing Spirit. The latter significance agrees better with the thought of the Upanishad."<sup>49</sup>

Shankara thus did ensure the collapse of Buddhism in India and the return of the Hindu dharma. But in truth, the ascetic and negating stamp of Buddha and Shankara has overwhelmed this nation for the last two thousand years. As Sri Aurobindo writes, "...everywhere broods its mighty shadow, everywhere is the impress of the three great formulas, the chain of Karma, escape from the wheel of rebirth, Maya."<sup>50</sup> About the effect of Shankara, he writes, "[Shankara] enlarged the original Vedantic seed of ascetic tendency into a gigantic growth of stillness and world-disgust which has overshadowed for centuries the lives and souls of hundreds of millions of human beings. On one side the race and the world have gained immensely, on the other it has suffered an immense impoverishment. The world-fleeing saint and the hermit have multiplied, the world-helping saint and the divine warrior of life come rarely and fail for want of the right atmosphere and environment.... Gone are Janaka and Ajatashatru, Arjuna and Vyasa, the great scientists, the great law-givers. The cry of OM Tapas with which God creates has grown faint in the soul of India, the cry of OM Shanti with which He withdraws from life alone arouses and directs the best energies of a national consciousness to whose thought all life is sorrow, self-delusion and an undivine thunder. Chilled is that marvellous and mighty vigour which flowed out from the Veda and Upanishads on the Indian consciousness..."<sup>51</sup>

*(To be continued)*

DEV DIP GANGULI

49. *Ibid.*

50. *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 18, p. 416.

51. *SAARJ*, December 1979, p. 175.

## **TEHMI-BEN—NARAD REMEMBERS: ON EDUCATION**

Tehmi: “We had a Jesuit Father who was round, really round. He was our French teacher and liked us very much. There were about four of us whom he especially liked and had us read all the time. He ignored the other students in the class. He would always say to us, ‘No rest for the wicked.’ He also said in his deep, gruff voice to the boys who couldn’t answer a question, ‘Memory is the faculty that forgets!’”

\*

Tehmi: “From childhood I liked poetry. We had a Jesuit Father who really didn’t know much English. His name was Father Fell. The boys used to tease him and say, ‘Father Fell, go to hell.’ As he was quite jovial, he would say, ‘Yes, yes, yes we shall meet each other there.’ When the boys made a lot of noise he would tell them, ‘Get out!’ We had large classes, two hundred in a class. Can you imagine? Half the students were girls at St. Xavier.”

\*

Narad: “What did you do in the Ashram when you first came? Did you teach?”

Tehmi: “I was working in the carpentry section and I used to do other odd jobs. Because some of my friends knew that I knew English, they brought me into teaching. I first taught English, both literature and poetry.”

\*

Narad: “Teaching was your major work (in life)?”

Tehmi: “Yes, you could say that. I taught a lot of French also, I was quite good at it. I was at the Jesuit Fathers’ college. They (the Fathers) were good friends of mine.”

N: “Teaching was your main work but did you love it the most?”

Tehmi: “I was always fond of painting and poetry. I always used to paint. I painted glass panels for a cupboard in Bombay. My auntie taught us painting from childhood.”

\* \* \*

### **Some Letters**

“Sweet Mother, most beloved,

A question concerning work has come up and I put it before You for Your decision, because You alone know what is best for the work and for me. Then You decide, Sweet Mother. It is good to do the work that You give me, instead of saying ‘I want to do this or that’...

It is the question of the new divisions for English classes at the University for next year.

At present there are two classes: the ordinary class of poetry, prose and writing that I take, and the supplementary class of history taken by Pearson.

Pearson proposes now to mix the two, and he also wants to share the subjects: that is, he wants to take prose in the regular class. I told him that Mother alone can decide if this decision is good or not, and that if Mother approves of it, I would have no 'objection'.

However, I don't very much like the idea of mixing the classes: He wants to put three new persons [...] in my class of regular students [...] etc., who have followed a methodical course during the last two years.

In regard to sharing the subjects, I do not know what would be the best thing for this class: if I continue to take all the subjects that I have taken this year, following the course for three years which I had prepared at the beginning, or if we divide the subjects between us. You alone can say.

I don't think, Sweet Mother, that there is a personal reason mixed in what I write (for a moment I thought of this), but if there is, You will see it and You will tell me what is necessary.

I place everything in Your hands.

Always in love and infinite gratitude,

Your child, Tehmi"

Mother's answer:

"I think it is preferable that you continue the same subjects (poetry, prose and composition) with the same students.

Pearson could take the two classes of history, and no doubt Amal will take the class of poetry for the new ones.

With my blessings."

[signature]

\*

"Sweet Mother,

I pray to You for Your guidance on an important point: When the classes were distributed for this year, I wanted very much to take the class of Sri Aurobindo's works. Now that it has been given to me, I feel strongly that I am unworthy of taking it.

I look at myself, full of faults and insincerities. I do not know what would be good for me: there is still the possibility of changing the classes, because the classes have not yet started.

I ardently pray for Your guidance, and Your light and Your force, so that I may be absolutely sincere and consecrated to You in all details of life, in all the parts of the nature.

At Thy feet, Sweet Mother, in all love,  
Thy child, Tehmi”

Mother’s answer:

“I find you completely capable and worthy of taking this class and I am sure you will be able to do it very usefully. You know that I will be with you.

Blessings”  
[signature]

\*

Mother’s letter to Tehmi:

“Tehmi, my dear child,

I have kept your letter for a long time before answering, now I read it again and I must tell you one thing. You have surpassed the stage where one can be insincere— You cannot take your classes like before because your soul refuses it. I propose to you to study with your students Sri Aurobindo’s poetry and if you want to study the technique, read whatever he has written on the future poetry, it will be an interesting and living subject which will open the door on the realisations to come.

With my tenderness and my blessings.”  
[signature]

\*

1. What place, how much importance, is to be given to the study of English in our Higher Courses on the Arts side?

My difficulty is this:

Sri Aurobindo has given such an important place in Education to Literature as an Art (specially to Poetry as an education of the feelings) that I wonder why some of our teachers are almost trying to eliminate it or give it a very insignificant place on the plea that some students do not like Literature. (Which statement

also is a bit doubtful because practically all of them do, even the Science Course students yearn for a little Literature.)

2. At present many of our Higher Course students do not know sufficiently well any one language in which they could express their thoughts and feelings adequately and sensitively. Is this required or not, Mother? And if so, which language should they learn? Should it be a common or international language or their vernacular?

The Mother underlined “a common or international language” and wrote in the margin:

if any one language is known this is better

and drew an arrow pointing to the underlined “international language”.

3. Sri Aurobindo, in the “System of Education” describes how very sensitively words should be interpreted and handled. In English we try to do this through the appreciation of poetry, following Sri Aurobindo’s guidance in “Future Poetry” also, but I am accused of giving too much Literature. Some of the teachers want us to teach, as they say, “the language”, but I do not understand how this may be done in the higher stages and in an interesting way apart from reading what has been best thought and expressed in that language. The mere dry bones of grammar (specially in English, where there are as many exceptions as rules!) will bore our students utterly and would hardly help them to learn anything. What then should I do?

The Mother underlined “following Sri Aurobindo’s guidance in “Future Poetry” and wrote in the margin

this

At the bottom of the question She wrote

by studying carefully what Sri Aurobindo has written on all subjects one can easily reach a complete knowledge of the things of this world.

4. Are not the fine arts important in our education? The other subjects, history, philosophy, politics, economics, etc. do not seem to give any scope for an aesthetic training, hardly teach the student to love beautiful things or train the imagination or the creative faculties. (And Mother, You have often spoken to us of the importance of these things. The aesthetic side of the student’s nature is a

bit starved thus, if all the emphasis goes to those subjects. Then is it necessary to give them good Literature or not? and how much?

And how much English should be given till the last School class (Class 10) after which students enter the Higher Classes or leave?

5. Last of all, Douce Mère, what I really want to know is this:

What is the real purpose, the aim of our Education Centre? Is it to teach Sri Aurobindo's works? and these only? And all or some of these? Or is it to prepare students to read Sri Aurobindo's works and Mother's? Is it to prepare them for the Ashram life or also for other "outside" occupations? There are so many opinions floating around, and even those older people whom we expect to know make so many different statements, that one does not know what to believe and act by. Then on what basis can we work without any real sure knowledge? I pray, Mother, give us Your guidance.

The Mother's reply:

It is not a question of preparing to read these works or other works. It is a question of pulling all those who are capable to do so, out of the general human routine of thought, feeling and action; it is to give all opportunities to those who are here to cast off from them the slavery to the human way of thinking and doing; it is to teach all those who want to listen that there is another and truer way of doing, that Sri Aurobindo has taught us how to live and become a true being—and that the aim of the education here is to prepare the children and make them fit for that life.

For all the rest, the human ways of thinking and living, the world is vast and there is place out there for everybody.

It is not a number that we want—it is a selection; it is not brilliant students that we want, it is living souls.

[signature]

NARAD (RICHARD EGGENBERGER)

## DEVOTIONAL POETRY IN TAMIL

*(Continued from the issue of May 2006)*

### 5. The Originating Three

It was not as if the Indian genius had not known about the path of devotion prior to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. From Vedic-Sangam periods, Indians had always looked up with adoration to the Powers beyond for helping them attain the best things life could offer or ward off evils that attack mortality-bound man. But an event occurred with the coming together of three devotees in Tirukoilur<sup>1</sup> on a rainy, dark night, and their vision—call it the result of a unified yoga if you will—transformed the Indian approach to God. The object of adventure ceased to be a distant personality but very much an irresistible power of love who would ‘descend’ to be with us, nor would he ever care for the intermediaries who seek to obstruct this union.

The winds of change that marked this revolution in one’s approach to God spelt out two mighty transformations at the same time. The space between man and god that had hitherto been occupied by the priestly class and sacrificial ritualism was now narrowed down and primacy was given to one’s personal experience of the Divine. The deity and the devotee became one and the priests found their occupation almost gone. The linguistic barrier between the two was also lifted and even the divide between the Great Tradition and the Little Tradition vanished. Be it high-sounding Sanskrit or simple folk jingles in Tamil, all was welcome at the altar of devotion. The Tamil language that had a history as old as that of Sanskrit and which had grown to be the language of the elite was now compelled to speak in the accents of the common man without losing its essential sublimity. How did this come about? The change is marked by a unique, meaningful legend that is dear to the heart of the aspirant and is recognised as the source of the Bhakti Movement.

It was a dark, stormy night long, long ago. Perhaps 1500 years or more have passed since then. The temple of Vamana-Trivikrama in Tirukoilur was visible whenever flashes of lightning tore across the sky. For the rest, it was all dark, windy, rainy. A wayfarer who had been trekking from Kanchipuram visiting holy shrines managed to reach Tirukoilur in time to seek refuge. He knocked on the door of a house and it was opened immediately. Of course, he was welcome to come in and lie down in the narrow built-in space that led to the main hall. Known as the *dehall*, this space was just behind the front door. Poygai was happy that he had this shelter and he lay down, meditating upon the divine.

1. The ancient temple to Trivikrama in this town near Villupuram-Katpadi railway line has a history of two millennia. From inscriptional evidence it is seen that the temple was constructed and maintained by the Pallava kings and much later by the rulers of Vijayanagar. The town was the birthplace of Vanavanmādevi, the mother of Raja Raja Chola, and is associated with Tamil classical poets including Kapilar.

Just as he was dozing off, there came a knock on the front door. Was there a little space available for a pilgrim who has been walking from Mahabalipuram? Poygai opened the door, letting in Bhutam. "Come in, friend. There is enough space for two people to sit." Both were pious men and thus some time passed as they chatted marvelling on the ways of the divine. It was certainly still the hour before the gods awake when the two pilgrims heard a knock. When the door was opened, a third pilgrim joined them. With the coming in of Pey all the way from Mylapore, there was but enough space for them to stand. It did not matter, for they could converse on the *vishnumaya* with which the Divine thus veiled Himself.<sup>2</sup> But what was this?

There had been no knock, the three had not opened the door. Yet, another presence had entered, pressing them together with what can be termed only as the relentless force of Ananda. They wondered: What is this Delight that presses us together which cannot be seen nor felt in this night which seemed like an "unlit temple of eternity"? Poygai summoned all Nature to his aid to illumine the presence and burst out in poetic accents that sounded mantric:

With the world as the cup, the sea as ghee,  
The sun as the lighted wick,  
I have strung a garland of words in praise  
Of the Lord who holds the flaming discus  
To gain release from the ocean of misery.<sup>3</sup>

This verse seems to call upon all Nature to stand witness to the presence of the divine. Any part of this Nature, aye, even an atom, can reveal the immanent divine.<sup>4</sup> But Bhutam's reaction to Poygai's statement was that even the dark is light enough. The outer spaces can reveal the divine and so can the divine be realised in the inner countries of the mind! The material world and the planes of consciousness together can be a formidable combination to come face to face with God!

With love as the cup, aspiration as ghee,  
A ceaselessly joy-filled thought as the lighted wick,  
I have lit the flame of knowledge to Narayana,  
By means of the revelatory Tamil language.

2. Such has been the belief of Srivaishnavism. The great Acharya Alavandar (10<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) speaks of the "*yavanikā māyā jaganmohini*" (Your veil is Nature the Universal Illusion).

3. All translations from the works of the Alwars are by Prema Nandakumar.

4. Cf. William Blake:

To see a World in a grain of sand,  
And a Heaven in a wild flower,  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,  
And Eternity in an hour.



When the outer and inner world move in unison, spiritual illumination is compelled to occupy man's consciousness. The revealed God in this illumination bathes the pilgrims in a supernal light and the Presence that had pressed one's being is recognised as a spread of Ananda unifying their being:

I have seen the Mother, the golden image!  
 I have visioned the sun-like splendour too.  
 The battle-ready and fire-red discus golden,  
 And the whorled conch. All these did I see  
 In the person of my Ocean-hued Lord.

The Bhakti Movement as we know of it today may be said to have made its approach with this verse which saw the Supreme as the Two-in-One, an Eternal Union, the Presence that never fails the devotee in times of peace and war, in his attempts to live in tune with material nature and in his aspiration to adventure in the continents of the spirit. It was not merely a visualisation but a veritable onrush of love for the Supreme that marks the verses of the three Alvars. Speaking of this phenomenon, K. C. Varadachari says:

The divine love of God is such that one enters into the very being of God, losing oneself in the rapture of God's inner nature. A new perception of the Reality happens, which is altogether different from what one perceives from the point of view of the world and all with the over-welling love that God has for his creation. It is no longer with human love that one loves God; but with God-love that one perceives the world and all. This is parama-bhakti, not merely transcendent, but superior verily to that also.<sup>5</sup>

The immediate result of the experience in Tirukoilur was the emergence of three great hymnologists who became itinerant singers going from village to village and spreading the message of god-love. Each of them sang one hundred verses in the *antadi* pattern, where the last word of a verse becomes the first word of the following verse and the last word of the entire poem repeats the word with which the poem opened, thus achieving a magnetic, interlinked pattern. Poygai's hundred verses are known as the *Mudal Tiruvantadi* (the First Interlinked Poem).

Poygai's first verse (quoted earlier) reveals the macrocosm in a flash. Wonderment floods the poet when trying to visualise the creator of this world that has tiers of worlds rising above it and plunging below. Who is the cause of this marvellous creation? Can a received tradition help us in learning about the Creator? The Alvars drew help from the received tradition of myths and legends in this search for the Original Cause.

5. *Alvars of South India* (1966), p. 22.

They also called out to the Nature around to help them in this search. Their own one-pointed sadhana to come face-to-face with God gave them spiritual illuminations which gathered all in a seamless knot, making each one of the verses a remarkable experience.

To the Original Cause then. Tradition speaks of the churning of the ocean. When did this churning happen? Another myth speaks of the Lord receiving from Bali this world as a gift. When did this incident take place? Poygai marvels:

When was the ocean churned?  
Which world was accepted with the pouring  
Of waters?<sup>6</sup> I know not.  
All I know is that the ocean was controlled  
And calmed by you, and this is the earth  
Which you created, dug up, devoured  
And released again.<sup>7</sup>

Typical of the hymns of the Alvars, this verse shows their deep knowledge of the myths and legends concerning the Hindu pantheon. The incarnations of Vishnu helped them relate to their listeners immediately. Of the incarnations, the Vamana avatara was a special favourite. The Alvars came in the Vedic stream and this was understandable as the Vedas speak of Vishnu as the strider of the world in three steps. Also, the sadhana of the Alvars took into account the existing yogic systems and they were quite conscious of the need for Ashtanga Yoga. Poygai makes the point in a verse:

He is the Ethical Truth that leads man  
By controlling the battling doors five  
Of our senses; the Knower  
That stayed beneath the banyan shade  
Teaching dharma to the four,  
The One whose throat retained the poison.<sup>8</sup>

Incidentally, these early Alvars speak of the Supreme as Shiva with equal ease and Poygai even juxtaposes the complexion, mount, name, work and the armaments of Vishnu and Shiva saying how all this but refers to the same form, *meni onru*. Indeed, such is the love of God for man that he is prepared to take any form that the devotee gives him!

6. King Bali's wife poured water over Bali's hand as he made the gift to Vishnu who had come as the dwarf Vamana and begged for three spans of earth, thus validating the gift.

7. Verse 2.

8. Verse 4.

He takes the form desired by devotees;  
 Accepts the name decided upon by them;  
 Even as they love and envision Him  
 And meditate upon Him ceaselessly,  
 He becomes that image.<sup>9</sup>

But Poygai's constant preference is, of course, for Vishnu who is seen as the Lord of All-Auspicious qualities. Even the adjuncts of the Lord are seen as symbols that teach us the right path in the yoga of divine love. If one's aim is to be an eternal servitor to the Lord, one must learn from the ways of the serpent Adishesha.

The snake is to the Lord an umbrella when He moves;  
 A throne when He sits. Sandals when He stands;  
 A boat in the ocean; a glowing lamp; silken shawl;  
 And a bed to rest.<sup>10</sup>

To those who speak in vain to prove the existence of God, Poygai says firmly that God Is. It is for us to seek him and meditate upon the Divine. Sure enough, He never fails to reveal Himself:

My heart! The Lord exists. The Good One  
 Exists. He exists in the hearts  
 Of those who meditate. He who rests  
 In the milky ocean, the Lord who appears  
 On the Venkata Hill and both of them  
 Exist in the heart. Know this for sure.<sup>11</sup>

Bhutam speaks in the same vein for these devotees who enjoy the presence of God within them and without for the sake of gaining a supernal Ananda consciousness, which has nothing to do with the joys as we know of them in the mundane world. Though the Lord is within, the consecrated idol and the received tradition associated with the idols (Venkateswara, Ranganatha, Adinatha) help the devotee reach out to the higher state of Ananda. There were the innumerable mythological tales like Krishna showing the worlds in his mouth to Yasoda, the tearing up of Hiranyakashipu by Narasimha to guard Prahlada, the destruction of Lanka by Rama. The Alvars also drew the very best from Nature by a serene observation of its million-faceted

9. Verse 44.

10. Verse 53. Mythology associates Adishesha with Vishnu in many ways. For instance, when the newborn babe, Krishna, was being taken in a basket by Vasudeva to Gokula, Adishesha is said to have spread his hood and acted as an umbrella above the basket to safeguard the Divine.

11. Verse 99.

movement.

In one of his verses, Bhutam wonders how his heart has a natural propensity to go in search of the Divine:

After envisioning the Lord at Tirupati  
My mind with a desire to rise above,  
Like a creeper moving forward  
In search of a hold, passed the moon,  
And the skies above, and moves fast  
In an effort to gain the Supreme.<sup>12</sup>

One must needs remember in this context Sri Aurobindo's splendid evocation of the mind's quest in "Thought the Paraclete" written in 1934:

As some bright archangel in vision flies  
Plunged in dream-caught spirit immensities,  
Past the long green crests of the seas of life,  
Past the orange skies of the mystic mind  
Flew my thought self-lost in the vasts of God.  
Sleepless wide great glimmering wings of wind  
Bore the gold-red seeking of feet that trod  
Space and Time's mute vanishing ends.

Though the Alwar was pursuing the Divine thus in the inner countries of the mind, he was also watching the physical scenario with Ananda as he wandered in the hills and dales of Tirupati forests. He observed monkeys plunge into lakes at appropriate times to gather lilies and offer them to the Lord's worship, and then, oh! What is this love that moves the universes!

Venkata hill has pachyderms with showering rut.  
The bull elephant plucks the tender bamboo shoots,  
Dips them in the honey from the combs  
And offers it to its cow elephant standing nearby.<sup>13</sup>

The secret of the widespread popularity of the Alvars stands revealed in this verse cluster of Bhutam. As the common man stood helpless against the heavy ritualism of the Vedic stream and was yet pulled by a longing to remain in the same pathway and gain the Lord at the same time, Bhutam assured his listeners of the importance of the Name.

12. *Inrandaam Tiruvantadi*, verse 27.

13. Verse 75.

This is the end-significance of the Vedas;  
 O poor of heart! Learn to recite the Name.  
 If you know how to recite the Vedas, it is good;  
 If you cannot, call out the name, Madhava.  
 The Name is the précis of the Scriptures.<sup>14</sup>

The importance of the Lord's name has been brought to us repeatedly since times immemorial. If bhakti is the angel of the way in the yoga of divine love, the Name is the guardian-amulet. Sri Aurobindo has mentioned this in his epic, *Savitri*. Both Aswapati and Savitri are aware of the need for *nāma-smaraṇa*. When Savitri travels in the inner countries of the mind, there are soul-scorching scenarios which seek to deflect her from her chosen path. However, she moves on, firmly holding on to the Name:

As if in a long endless tossing street  
 One driven mid a trampling hurrying crowd  
 Hour after hour she trod without release,  
 Holding by her will the senseless meute at bay;  
 Out of the dreadful press she dragged her will  
 And fixed her thought upon the saviour Name;  
 Then all grew still and empty; she was free.  
 A large deliverance came, a vast calm space.<sup>15</sup>

Pey Alwar's *Moonram Tiruvantadi* marks the definite entry of Tantra in the yoga of divine love chosen by the Alvars. It is to be noted that Lakshmi was first seen by Pey, 'Tiru-k-kanden' (I have seen Mother Lakshmi). The idea of Motherhood has always been there in the ancient Indian vision (Vedic suktas on Sri, Bhū and Neelā, Sāṅkhya's positing of Prakṛiti) but it was Tantra yoga that placed Shakti as the prime and compelling force of existence. Tantra is a continuing force in Indian spirituality. Thus, in the last century we had the eminent Tantric scholar, Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni's epic paen to the various forms of wisdom goddesses in his *Uma Sahasram* which is a direct descendant of the *Kena Upanishad* where "the very beautiful" Uma Haimavati teaches Indra, Agni and Vayu the nature of Brahman that moves the entire creation.

For the Alvars, the detailed description in *Vishnu Purana* of Lakshmi's appearance during the churning of the ocean became a firm inspiration. In the Purana, Sage Parashara says Lakshmi is eternal, the mother of the worlds, ever in union with Vishnu, a universal presence as Vishnu:

Maitreya! All that is male among devas, lives that crawl and humans have the

14. Verse 39.

15. Book VII, canto 3.

portion of Lord Vishnu. All that is female is the portion of Lakshmi. There is nothing superior to these two.

From Pey Alwar onwards, this approach becomes the basis of spiritual experience, a constant turning of the child in man to the comforting mother as he is ever caught up in the uncertainties of earthly life. Lakshmi's presence prevents the Lord from acting as the firm and exacting judge, and Grace becomes a never-failing talisman for man. Pey Alwar calls upon the aspirants to take the name of god, and not a single name either. Recite several names like Narayana, *nāmam pala solli nārāyanā enru!* Even as one speaks out the various significant names, the forms rise before us, so many incarnations, each one a receptacle of all auspicious qualities! And such contrasting scenes too! One moment the Lord is conducting the Kurukshetra war. Another moment we see little Krishna allowing himself to be punished by Yashoda wielding the churning-rod for stealing butter! Presently He is the cosmic form helping in the churning of the ocean by gods and demons!

Pey Alwar enjoys singing about these various legends (more appropriately called "leelas") of the Supreme. Even as his heart is plunged in the immensities of traditional lore, his eyes note the captivating scenes on the Venkata hill, like Bhutam. Here the male elephant which has had a difference of opinion with its cow is hitting the rocks with its forehead to vent its anger, causing a shower of pearls;<sup>16</sup> there a pair of monkeys are sitting on a marble stone. Finding the reflection of the moon on the stone, the female monkey is pestering its husband to get her the moon; elsewhere an elephant is taking a honey-dripping flower to worship the Lord. Pey Alwar assures the aspirants that they need not undergo austerities like standing in the midst of five fires. It is enough if one offers a flower and brings together his hands in salutation to the Lord. Nor need the aspirants worry about the image of the Lord. Why argue whether the Supreme is Shiva or Vishnu? All, all is His image!

Flowing tresses, rising crown,  
A handsome axe, the discus.  
Encircling snake, golden waistband:  
Such is my Lord's image.  
Both the forms are appropriate  
For One who resides on the Venkata Hill  
Rich with splashing waterfalls.<sup>17</sup>

Simple Tamil words, mellifluous word-combinations and a sheer intensity of devotion mark these three hundred verses that opened a new chapter in India's spiritual history. Millions of devotional poems must have bloomed in the Tamil area immediately

16. It was believed that the forehead of elephants contained rare pearls.

17. Verse 63.

after. But no Establishment can be easily thwarted by new ideas, and hence, sometime after the last of the Alvars, Tirumangai, withdrew from the earthly scene, the devotional Tamil poesy of Vaishnavism seems to have been forgotten. The poetry of the Alvars was resurrected by Nathamuni (824-924 A.D.) who was an adept in yoga and a great musician. One day he was engaged in worship at the temple in his village Kattumannarkovil near Chidambaram when he heard a group of pilgrims sing some sweet Tamil songs:

My Lord who is like a nectar unceasing!  
 My Lord who makes my very physical form  
 Melt with love for you!  
 You are resting in Kudanthai,  
 Surrounded by streams of water swirling with breeze  
 From rich paddy stalks! I have seen  
 Your mind-ravishing form, O Lord!<sup>18</sup>

The song had an indication that it was part of a thousand verses sung by Satakopa of Kurukur. The pilgrims did not have any other information. Nathamuni went to Kurukur, the birthplace of Nammalwar, engaged himself in yoga by reciting the prayer to Nammalwar by his disciple, Madhurakavi. Nammalwar appeared to Nathamuni in his yogic vision and taught him all his works as well as the works of other Alvars. From then onwards, Nathamuni spent his lifetime propagating the songs, after anthologising them as *Nalayira Divya Prabandham* (the Sacred Four Thousand). As the spiritual leader of Vaishnava devotees, he made the poems a part of ritual service in temples dedicated to Vishnu that follow the Ramanuja *sampradāya*, thus gaining for the language an official recognition as a classical language.

The *Nalayira Divya Prabandham* contains the works of twelve Alvars who came from all walks of life. Nor class, nor caste nor gender is able to mark a division in the Alwar-world where all devotees belong only to one race, the race of devotees (*tondak-kulam*). All the different emotions have a play here and the Alvars are not unaware of sorrow and frustration on their path. But never once do any of the Alvars consider their goal as anything but the Divine who is seen as an infinite delight. There is never any fear of God, for this Divine Personality is all Ananda. Indeed what is there to fear when God has become the charioteer of your life's journey, the companion, the beloved? "There is nothing which is beyond the reach of the God-lover or denied to him; for he is the favourite of the divine Lover and the self of the Beloved."<sup>19</sup>

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

18. Nammalwar, *Tiruvaimoli*, V, 8, i..

19. Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Part III, chapter viii.

## ALL SUDDENLY

Always you take me by surprise  
With sudden tears that fill my eyes,  
Velvetness that lines my heart  
Or all at once a spark that reveals life:  
Your ineffable art.

In the cold and lonely night  
Compassion switches on your Light.  
And peace descends upon the troubled heart  
Then suddenly... all pains depart.

It's in the storm  
When passions swell  
And I could founder  
Suddenly You all my fires quell  
You make me see that all is well,  
Always suddenly...  
Suddenly all's well.

These blessed transient moments only seem to go away  
Though when they come I think  
This time I'll make you stay  
Of course this sends them on their way.

Despite all eager ignorance  
Despite all haste and will  
Something of all of them remains  
Like memory strands within me still.

These moments weave  
Despite the changing mood  
A growing certitude:  
You never go away  
Though I am not aware  
Within You're there, You're there.

The shuttle moves without a pause  
Backwards and forwards ceaselessly



In me there grows a continuity  
 And when the tapestry to Your design is done  
 Suddenly... all life will be  
 Your splendrous sun.

MAGGI

### **A Rope of Light**

(A vision of Champaklal)

19.3.1935

*The path that I was to follow was very long and arduous, I came across a number of intricate by-lanes which confused me a lot. I could not find my path despite many struggles. Finally, I looked up. I saw the Mother very high up. From there, she sent a rope down for me. After a while, I found that it was not a rope but white light—it was a luminous, straight road going up. I, then, realized that instead of struggling here and there, I should have looked up, as there is a straight road going right up.*

*I wrote this dream yesterday, but, it came earlier.*

*What does it mean?*

It is a symbol of the difficult seeking in the mind, vital and physical which one goes through until one looks up to the higher consciousness and follows the way of the Mother's white light; then the road becomes straight and luminous.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Visions of Champaklal*, pp. 67-68)

## PANCHASSEE-MOUNTAIN

(Continued from the issue of May 2006)

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

### **(6) Our Mother-creation... the 5 Panchassee peak-“seats”**

THE climb from Panchassee village ends in between the first two peaks, after an hour's toil, when we reach a summit area where the trail divides: we continue eastwards towards peak #1. Although these peaks have distinctive Vedic symbols present, the interpretation of their meaning remains a question; but the experience of Nature adoration on each peak could suggest a clue to their symbolism.

The moss on tree trunks fill with sunlight, and begin to look like a golden-green hair on the earthen skin of Panchassee mountain. These holy “seats” are near the cliff-side breaks in this jungle; sometimes we find ourselves eye to eye with a huge gliding hawk who has swooped low to have a closer look at us, as if a swooping Vedic-thought.

*Agni is Jatavedas, knower of the births, the worlds. He knows entirely the five worlds... The worlds in which, respectively, Matter, Life-Energy, Mind, Truth and Beatitude are the essential energies.*

(Sri Aurobindo, Hymns to the Mystic Fire)

Perhaps another expression of the Vedic culture is the folding of hands when the first oil lamp is lit in the evening: is this the Mystic Fire Agni as a living symbol in the home?

Archaeologists have found artifacts in the Ukraine that are attributed to the prehistoric Vedic period. Also the Ukrainian word for fire “ago” is the same as the local Himalayan village word, and is associated not only with the physical flames but also with the spiritual experience of the Mystic Fire. Could there be elsewhere on the Asian European landmass memories of a Vedic past as this Mountain culture possesses?

On the first Panchassee peak is a highly decorated symbol Tree, just like the ones we find by the Pokhara lakeside and all over these Himalayan regions. She has brass bells, red-coloured cloth, rice stalks and all manner of things hanging from Her trunk and standing around Her base, and looks outrageously colourful upon this “seat”. There is a small trail around Her trunk, then a wider and larger track around Her peak.

In Pokhara we can visit local shrines or simply walk along the lakeshore streets and stand amazed when we see the local ladies placing flowers on these divine tree trunks in the middle of the main road. In Nepal holy trees are planted in pairs, one to

symbolise the male and one to symbolise the female: generally the Banyan tree is the male and the Pippal tree the female, and they stand 3 metres apart upon a raised platform of flat stone. It is the female tree that is worshipped with the applying of coloured red powders and flowers and the rest of it, as we see now on Panchassee peak #1.

To meet Panchassee on the winter day of the celebration for Her bringing back of the sunlight, the local people climb these peaks to offer something to Her divine Motherhood. On each of these five different “seats”, or symbolic levels of consciousness, physical offerings of flowers and grain are made. And perhaps also offerings to the view of Vastness are made within an inner goal of Vedic Yoga. When we look out across Her vastnesses as they appear from the trail and on the peaks, it is in all directions that we see Her: She fills the visible Everywhere:

*...in the Vast, in the integral, in the infinite we must seek for the desirable riches of substance, light, force and joy.*

(Sri Aurobindo, Hymns to the Mystic Fire)

*...they are the Lords of Light and the Lords of Night fronting each other across the triple world of earth, heaven and mid-air, body, mind and the connecting breath of life.*

(Sri Aurobindo, The Secret of the Veda)

After a walk around the Tree-mother we return on the same trail towards peak #2. The aged Brahmin priest on this next peak calls out like an 80-year-old child when he places the red colour of Panchassee-mother’s blessing on our forehead. Continuing a tradition from time immemorial, this priest lives alone with Panchassee and Her circling hawks. In this Earth-mother blessing, it is his simple village feelings of devotion we can perceive: he calls from somewhere far away.

The previous afternoon in the lodge, a family elder became unwell for which a Brahmin buffalo-priest was called. These men live alone near the jungle in which their buffalo graze, and continue an antique culture similar in worship to that of the Toda buffalo-priests on the Nilgiri plateau. In the late afternoon a priest arrived with a handful of herbs. He wrapped these herbs around a freshly split piece of dry wood, and then lit this wood from the kitchen fire. While repeating some hardly audible sounds, he swirled the Fire-herb combination a few times above the head and then carried all of the unwell consciousness outside and away and left it somewhere in the forest: by the next morning the cure was complete.

When I gave the 10 kilos of potatoes from my rucksack, the priest was very grateful.

After the Hindu forehead blessing, the priest immediately took us some metres further along this peak-“seat” to the summit-cave of an ancient Sadhu called Sita-baba, who did his Yoga practice here. On the cave floor is the relief in stone of the

Female symbol he worshipped, only recently painted with cement, I imagined. The lore of this Yogi is one that suggests a Tantra-Yoga basis, as he was accompanied by a Shakti, a female, who also did Yoga atop this mountain and was at the physical level a symbol for the manifestation of his realisation. Beyond this cave, there is a tin sheet covered open-walled construction sheltering a huge fire-pit. During the Panchassee mela a Brahmin sits at the centre of this shelter and offers to say mantras to Sita-baba: he has a pile of rice in front of him that devotees will have given him for his chanting.

On the way to peak #3, down and over a rock wall to keep out grazing buffalo, we steeply descend and then climb nearly vertical steps, then horizontally cross a number of open areas from where devotees can view Her vastnesses. On one of these patches of green the morning sun ignites the shine in the leaves that decorate Her “seats”. The peak rocks look clothed in forests of a living sheen.

When we look from peak #3 southward across to the horizon, it is a view of hill-outlines disappearing into the distance. She takes us to a vast horizon of beauty in an infinity of blue. Softly Her mist-filled cloud veils move as enormous shadows across the Himalayan spaces in a morning breeze. These moments when we stare across the mountain-valleys and recollect the divine Mother tradition, the memory of village songs that describe the living experience of the Mother-mountain come to mind: She always gives solace.

Along the summit trail we pass many fallen ancient stone meditation huts that open out to the Mother-infinity. All over the grass on the third peak we find a collection of miniature three-walled rock houses with flat stone roofs, in which perhaps a local heart-filled prayer requests that in our next birth we will come again to this moment of loveliness, to this peak of blue sky-filled vastness and sunshine.

*The house in the Veda is the constant image for the bodies that are dwelling-places of the soul, just as the field or habitation means the planes to which it mounts and in which it rests.*

(Sri Aurobindo, The Secret of the Veda)

These little stone dwellings perhaps attest to the Vedic Yoga symbolism in which the mystic Flame was a central image and experience. A wood fire would most naturally fill these little stone “houses”, as is still the practice in local village homes. Also, being a Vedic symbol for our body in which the Mystic Fire dwells, these miniature “dwellings” are for the “soul”. On this peak we can view the slope some hundreds of metres below, where Sita-baba built his first Ashram 500 years ago according to local legend. Far below is visible this flat area where a mammoth tree grows out of huge rocks, splitting apart these rocks into the likings of a family, as if a Mother-tree with rock children.

Ram and Sita of the Ramayana period are also said to have visited this mountain. And when I am lost somewhere in the mind along the rock-stepped trail that

crosses these five Panchassee peaks, I leave the pilgrimage. It is as if one of the huge clouds that pattern the sky passes through my experience. And for a time I wander aimlessly along a thought-journey, forgetting everything else, even forgetting about the Mountain-path we are walking upon. It is the steep climb between the peaks that brings back again and again the vital perception of breathing. Even while we may strive to glide freely in the surrounding vastness as the large circling birds do, I experience long periods of unconsciousness. On a pilgrimage it is these periods of forgetfulness, symbolised perhaps in the separative aspect of mental experience that has intervened, that I lose the local feeling and thread of devotion to this Mountain-mother.

The trail between peaks is well defined, but in some places, up very steep-cut rock-steps to the fourth peak. This peak opens out only to the sky above because it is overgrown on all the sides with high jungle. These jungle walls enclose a large flat raised rock platform occupying half of the space, with empty stone water cisterns occupying the remainder: the path across the peaks runs between the two. Perhaps this stone platform with little triangular openings in the walls is where the traditional Vedic ghee-flame is placed as the Mystic Fire symbol.

This clarified-butter-Fire symbol goes back to the Vedic hymns when the Mystic Fire was called the “carrier of the offering”. The Mystic Fire is placed within the small stone triangles along the front wall of this flat stone platform above the two-stepped “seat” upon which we can also rest from the journey. In smaller village examples of this “seat”, there is often a long wooden plug that fits down from the top of the stone platform to the top of the triangle, that when removed would create the chimney for the smoke of the burning flame.

On the last of these jungled-peaks, there is little to see except in the look and the gesture of Mother Panchassee. Peak #5 is quite bare except for offerings scattered around, what may have earlier been a tree. I hear the shout of a barking deer nearby: the descent to the lake from here is close to vertical.

*...the pregnant hill sent forth its contents for the doer of perfect works; ...seeking plenitude of riches attained possession, then singing the hymn of light he became at once the Angiras.*

*(Sri Aurobindo, The Secret of the Veda)*

*(To be continued)*

GARY

## NAVANIT STORIES

### PILGRIMAGE

AT Batala, near Lahore, they were celebrating Guru Nanak's birthday. A vast multitude had gathered there and Maganbaba was requested to say something. The speech which he began with "*Achcha, to suniye...*" I reproduce in the following words:

Who am I to speak on Nanakshah—that Emperor of souls? All one can do is become His devotee. For what was His speech but *mantras* uttered in words of Light? If even one of them, arisen as they all were from His divine experiences, resonates in our soul and manifests in our nature, it would be enough. That is the crux, all the rest is just empty words; that is the purpose of our life—the Light and Power of the Avatars manifesting and establishing themselves in our earthly existence.

I shall tell you a story. All I have to say on the subject is illustrated in it.

There was an elderly couple, childless; their sole relative, a bright young nephew. The whole village respected and addressed them as Uncle and Aunt.

Aunt was enthusiastically religious: to be immersed in *japas* and *pujas* or going on a *yatra* (pilgrimage) were her chief occupations in life. She had relished the sacredness of Badri and Kedar, Kashi and Haradwar, Gangotri and Jamnotri, in fact of all time-honoured *teertha-sthanas*, and yet always on the lookout to take in newer ones.

Uncle, poor fellow, had never left home: simple, sincere, guileless, never bored or unhappy with his daily routine.

"Come on, do one *yatra* now! We are old, not much time left. Take at least one dip in the Ganges!" Aunt prodded relentlessly. And always the simple-hearted man replied "*Mana changā to katharoat-mein Gangā*"—(When the mind is at peace, Mother Ganges Herself flows into you.) This went on for years.

Until one day Aunt was determined: "This time you shall come. I can no longer travel on my own; I need you, what if this old body suddenly drops? I am not going without you. We will go to Kashi then on to Haradwar, and then...."

At Kashi, at the ancient Manikarnika *ghat* they took the purifying plunge in the Ganges, and then, keeping to the hallowed banks, set out for Haradwar. Uncle wanted to proceed peacefully: "Since we are here let us halt at these ashrams, bathe in their atmosphere, benefit by the discourses of saints and sages, and chant the holy Name with them." Aunt's was a restless soul, eager to gobble up as many *teerthas*, collect as much *punya*, in as short a time as possible. Her "Let us move on, we have spent a whole hour here" was wearing him out. Finally, when they reached an ashram where a *kirtan* was in progress, Uncle declared: "We are going to stop here and absorb these words. Tomorrow we shall resume your marathon." And they sat down among the devotees. Presently the guru began a *kirtan* of Nanakshah:

*Sadho! Mana kā mān tyāgo—  
Kāma, krodha, sangat-durjana ki, tāten ahanisha bhāgo!  
Sadho! Mana kā mān tyāgo....*

“O sadhu! Renounce the ego—  
Anger, lust and foul companions—flee from them both night and day!  
O sadhu! Renounce the ego....”

Both heard the *kirtan*; she with false ears and he with true ones. “I have had enough,” he told her afterwards. “Tomorrow we shall return home. The *yatra* is achieved.” Her pleadings and quibbles, baits and subterfuges failed to shake his resolve.

Back home, Aunt plunged into her *japas* and *pujas* and fasts and festivals, and when freed from them, regaled her friends with colourful tales of her various pilgrimages.

Uncle became even more withdrawn than before; he was often heard repeating *Sadho, mana kā mān tyāgo....* When someone pressed him for the reason he had returned midway from the pilgrimage, he said, “*Bhai!* What was the need to go any further? I discovered my life’s *mahamantra*: *Sadho, mana kā mān tyāgo*. To renounce the ego is now the *raison d’être* of my life, my whole *sadhana*.”

The nephew came and admonished him: “Uncle, don’t you see how you have harassed my poor Aunt? How could you turn back midway like this? You should have gone at least to Haradwar!”

“*Bhai*, but my pilgrimage was consummated! Where was the need of pointless treks and tiresome wanderings? I have been blessed by this *mantrik mahavakya* of Guru Nanakdeva: *Sadho, mana kā mān tyāgo*. It is enough for me. The *punya-phala* of all the *yatras* of the whole world, as far as I am concerned, lies in its practice: not in Kashi or Prayag, nor in Haradwar or Kailas; I don’t need now to tramp to Dwaraka or Puri or Rameshwaram, for I have received all I would have from doing that. There has been nothing thenceforth but to concentrate on that *mantra*, to organise every part of my being around it, saturate my life with it—*Sadho, mana kā mān tyāgo!*”

Being an emancipated young man, educated and worldly-wise, Nephew was suspicious of *dharma-bhāva*. He decided to subject his uncle to a rigorous examination. The opportunity was readymade: to celebrate the occasion of Uncle and Aunt’s successful pilgrimage he organised a community dinner. He talked to everyone in the village about his decision, but made not even a casual mention to Uncle or Aunt. He went to invite every single family of his community and the village, everyone, except Uncle and Aunt.

Aunt to Uncle: You have heard, haven’t you? Our nephew is inviting our entire community on the occasion of our pilgrimage.

Uncle: Yes, I have heard.

Aunt: But did he come to invite you or me? He behaved as if we didn’t exist!



Uncle: So what? Why does he need to consult us? Don't we already know?

Aunt: Even the whole village has been invited. We are the only ones cut off!

Uncle: You dear fool! What need have we of an invitation? Does one invite one's own family? Come, we shall ourselves go to his house.

Aunt: You seem to be out of your mind! How can one go like that, uninvited to somebody's house? And are you starving that you have to beg for a ladle of grub?

Uncle: When are you going to change? He is our own child! We should be the first ones to go there.

With that Uncle set out. And, fearful of what people would say if she did not go with him, poor Aunt followed in his wake.

At Nephew's, nobody paid any attention to them; let alone welcome them. "Did you see?" Aunt whispered in his ear. "What is there to see?" Uncle was unperturbed. "The poor boy is up to his neck in his duties. Why should he waste time in welcoming charades with us?"

Dinner was announced and people sat down in rows. None called them to join.

Aunt: Look at that! No one asks us to sit with them. We are not refugees from a famine! Come, we shall go home.

Uncle: Calm down, my dear. Come, we will go and sit in a row.

Tranquil in heart and mind, he calmly went and sat in the nearest row. Left with no alternative, struggling to contain her shattered pride, she forced herself to follow suit.

Guests and relatives on both sides were served with courtesy but they were bypassed, as if they were invisible. Burning with shame, Aunt's heart cried out, "O Mother Earth swallow me this minute!" But Uncle was unruffled. Calmly he kept calling every heedless server, "O *bhai*, you have forgotten to serve in our dishes!"

It was the nadir. The barricades Nephew's 'liberated' youth's mind had built around his heart burst. He ran headlong and fell at Uncle's feet, his tears inundating them. "Forgive me, Uncle! I am a criminal. Forgive my childish arrogance that prevented me from seeing how your *mantra* has transformed you into a living form of its Light. From this moment you are my Guru."

Uncle lifted him up and embraced him. "*Bhai*, what is this crime you talk about? Isn't it to be doubly criminal not to practice the Truth a pilgrimage bestows on us? Calm down, my son, do not grieve. Join me rather in celebrating this *mahavakya* of Guru Nanakdeva:

*Sadho! Mana kā mān tyāgo—*

*Kāma, krodha, sangat-durjana ki, tāten ahanisha bhāgo!*

*Sadho! Mana kā mān tyāgo...."*

PUJALAL

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



*If you want to be a true doer of divine works, your first aim must be to be totally free from all desire and self-regarding ego.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(The Mother, SABCL, Vol. 25, p. 15)*

\*

*You must strive, you must conquer all weaknesses and limitations; above all you must tell your ego: "Your hour is gone." We want a race that has no ego, that has in place of the ego the Divine Consciousness. It is that which we want: the Divine Consciousness which will allow the race to develop itself and the supramental being to take birth.*

*The Mother*

*(Notes on the Way, CWM, Vol. 11, p. 307)*

\*

*Egoism is a relatively easy thing to correct, because everyone knows what it is. It is easy to discover, easy to correct, if one truly wants to do it and is bent on it.*

*But the ego is much more difficult to seize, because, in fact, to realise what the ego is one must already be out of it, otherwise one cannot find it out. You are wholly moulded from it, from head to foot, from the outermost to the innermost, from the physical to the spiritual, you are steeped in ego. It is mixed with everything and you are not aware of what it is. You must have already conquered it, come out of it, freed yourself from it, at least partially, at least in some little corner of your being somewhere, in order to realise what the ego is.*

*The ego is what helps us to individualise ourselves and what prevents us from becoming divine. It is like that. Put that together and you will find the ego. Without the ego, as the world is organised, there would be no individual, and with the ego the world cannot become divine.*

*It would be logical to conclude, "Well, let us first of all become conscious individuals and then we shall send away the ego and become divine." Only, when we have become conscious individuals, we have grown so accustomed to living with our ego that we are no longer able to discern it and much labour is needed to become aware of its presence.*

*The Mother*

*(Questions and Answers 1929-1931, CWM, Vol. 3, p. 240)*

## BANDE MATARAM

I bow to thee, Mother,  
richly-watered, richly-fruited,  
cool with the winds of the south,  
dark with the crops of the harvests,  
the Mother!

Her nights rejoicing in the glory of the moonlight,  
her lands clothed beautifully with her trees in flowering bloom,  
sweet of laughter, sweet of speech,  
the Mother, giver of boons, giver of bliss!

Terrible with the clamorous shout of seventy million throats,  
and the sharpness of swords raised in twice seventy million hands,  
Who sayeth to thee, Mother, that thou art weak?  
Holder of multitudinous strength,

I bow to her who saves,  
to her who drives from her the armies of her foemen,  
the Mother!

Thou art knowledge, thou art conduct,  
thou art heart, thou art soul,  
for thou art the life in our body.  
In the arm thou art might, O Mother,  
in the heart, O Mother, thou art love and faith,  
it is thy image we raise in every temple.

For thou art Durga holding her ten weapons of war,  
Kamala at play in the lotuses  
and speech, the goddess, giver of all lore,  
to thee I bow!

I bow to thee, goddess of wealth  
pure and peerless,  
richly-watered, richly-fruited,  
the Mother!

I bow to thee, Mother,  
dark-hued, candid,  
sweetly smiling, jewelled and adorned,  
the holder of wealth, the lady of plenty,  
the Mother!

Translated by Sri Aurobindo

*Translator's Note.* It is difficult to translate the National Anthem of Bengal into verse in another language owing to its unique union of sweetness, simple directness and high poetic force. All attempts in this direction have been failures. In order, therefore, to bring the reader unacquainted with Bengali nearer to the exact force of the original, I give the translation in prose line by line. (*Karmayogin*—20th November, 1909)

With Compliments from Well-wishers