

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LIX

No. 7

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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THE DIVINE WORKER

I face earth's happenings with an equal soul;
In all are heard Thy steps: Thy unseen feet
Tread Destiny's pathways in my front. Life's whole
Tremendous theorem is Thou complete.

No danger can perturb my spirit's calm:
My acts are Thine; I do Thy works and pass;
Failure is cradled on Thy deathless arm,
Victory is Thy passage mirrored in Fortune's glass.

In this rude combat with the fate of man
Thy smile within my heart makes all my strength;
Thy Force in me labours at its grandiose plan,
Indifferent to the Time-snake's crawling length.

No power can slay my soul; it lives in Thee.
Thy presence is my immortality.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 143)

THE DIVINE BODY

(Continued from the issue of June 2006)

BUT what would be the internal or external form and structure and what the instrumentation of this divine body? The material history of the development of the animal and human body has left it bound to a minutely constructed and elaborated system of organs and a precarious order of their functioning which can easily become a disorder, open to a general or local disorganisation, dependent on an easily disturbed nervous system and commanded by a brain whose vibrations are supposed to be mechanical and automatic and not under our conscious control. According to the materialist all this is a functioning of Matter alone whose fundamental reality is chemical. We have to suppose that the body is constructed by the agency of chemical elements building up atoms and molecules and cells and these again are the agents and only conductors at the basis of a complicated physical structure and instrumentation which is the sole mechanical cause of all our actions, thoughts, feelings, the soul a fiction and mind and life only a material and mechanical manifestation and appearance of this machine which is worked out and automatically driven with a figment of consciousness in it by the forces inherent in inconscient Matter. If that were the truth it is obvious that any divinisation or divine transformation of the body or of anything else would be nothing but an illusion, an imagination, a senseless and impossible chimera. But even if we suppose a soul, a conscious will at work in this body it could not arrive at a divine transformation if there were no radical change in the bodily instrument itself and in the organisation of its material workings. The transforming agent will be bound and stopped in its work by the physical organism's unalterable limitations and held up by the unmodified or imperfectly modified original animal in us. The possibility of the disorders, derangements, maladies native to these physical arrangements would still be there and could only be shut out by a constant vigilance or perpetual control obligatory on the corporeal instrument's spiritual inhabitant and master. This could not be called a truly divine body; for in a divine body an inherent freedom from all these things would be natural and perpetual; this freedom would be a normal and native truth of its being and therefore inevitable and unalterable. A radical transformation of the functioning and, it may well be, of the structure and certainly of the too mechanical and material impulses and driving forces of the bodily system would be imperative.

What agency could we find which we could make the means of this all-important liberation and change? Something there is in us or something has to be developed, perhaps a central and still occult part of our being containing forces whose powers in our actual and present make-up are only a fraction of what could be, but if they became complete and dominant would be truly able to bring about with the help of the light and force of the soul and the supramental truth-consciousness the necessary physical

transformation and its consequences. This might be found in the system of Chakras revealed by Tantric knowledge and accepted in the systems of Yoga, conscious centres and sources of all the dynamic powers of our being organising their action through the plexuses and arranged in an ascending series from the lowest physical to the highest mind centre and spiritual centre called the thousand-petalled lotus where ascending Nature, the Serpent Power of the Tantrics, meets the Brahman and is liberated into the Divine Being. These centres are closed or half-closed within us and have to be opened before their full potentiality can be manifested in our physical nature: but once they are opened and completely active, no limit can easily be set to the development of their potencies and the total transformation to be possible.

But what would be the result of the emergence of these forces and their liberated and diviner action on the body itself, what their dynamic connection with it and their transforming operation on the still existing animal nature and its animal impulses and gross material procedure? It might be held that the first necessary change would be the liberation of the mind, the life-force, the subtle physical agencies and the physical consciousness into a freer and a diviner activity, a many-dimensional and unlimited operation of their consciousness, a large outbreak of higher powers and the sublimation of the bodily consciousness itself, of its instrumentation, capacity, capability for the manifestation of the soul in the world of Matter. The subtle senses now concealed in us might come forward into a free action and the material senses themselves become means or channels for the vision of what is now invisible to us or the discovery of things surrounding us but at present unseizable and held back from our knowledge. A firm check might be put on the impulses of the animal nature or they might be purified and subtilised so as to become assets and not liabilities and so transformed as to be parts and processes of a diviner life. But even these changes would still leave a residue of material processes keeping the old way and not amenable to the higher control and, if this could not be changed, the rest of the transformation might itself be checked and incomplete. A total transformation of the body would demand a sufficient change of the most material part of the organism, its constitution, its processes and its set-up of nature.

Again, it might be thought that a full control would be sufficient, a knowledge and a vision of this organism and its unseen action and an effective control determining its operations according to the conscious will; this possibility has been affirmed as something already achieved and a part of the development of the inner powers in some. The cessation of the breathing while still the life of the body remained stable, the hermetic sealing up at will not only of the breath but of all the vital manifestations for long periods, the stoppage of the heart similarly at will while thought and speech and other mental workings continued unabated, these and other phenomena of the power of the will over the body are known and well-attested examples of this kind of mastery. But these are occasional or sporadic successes and do not amount to transformation; a total control is necessary and an established and customary and,

indeed, a natural mastery. Even with that achieved something more fundamental might have to be demanded for the complete liberation and change into a divine body.

Again, it might be urged that the organic structure of the body no less than its basic outer form would have to be retained as a necessary material foundation for the retention of the earth-nature, the connection of the divine life with the life of earth and a continuance of the evolutionary process so as to prevent a breaking upward out of and away from it into a state of being which would properly belong to a higher plane and not to a terrestrial divine fulfilment. The prolonged existence of the animal itself in our nature, if sufficiently transformed to be an instrument of manifestation and not an obstacle, would be necessary to preserve the continuity, the evolutionary total; it would be needed as the living vehicle, *vāhana*, of the emergent god in the material world where he would have to act and achieve the works and wonders of the new life. It is certain that a form of body making this connection and a bodily action containing the earth-dynamism and its fundamental activities must be there, but the connection should not be a bond or a confining limitation or a contradiction of the totality of the change. The maintenance of the present organism without any transformation of it would not but act as such a bond and confinement within the old nature. There would be a material base but it would be of the earth earthy, an old and not a new earth with a diviner psychological structure; for with that structure the old system would be out of harmony and it would be unable to serve its further evolution or even to uphold it as a base in Matter. It would bind part of the being, a lower part to an untransformed humanity and unchanged animal functioning and prevent its liberation into the superhumanity of the supramental nature. A change is then necessary here too, a necessary part of the total bodily transformation, which would divinise the whole man, at least in the ultimate result, and not leave his evolution incomplete.

This aim, it might be said, would be sufficiently served if the instrumentation of the centres and their forces reigned over all the activities of the nature with an entire domination of the body and made it both in its structural form and its organic workings a free channel and means of communication and a plastic instrument of cognition and dynamic action for all that they had to do in the material life, in the world of Matter. There would have to be a change in the operative processes of the material organs themselves and, it may well be, in their very constitution and their importance; they could not be allowed to impose their limitations imperatively on the new physical life. To begin with, they might become more clearly outer ends of the channels of communication and action, more serviceable for the psychological purposes of the inhabitant, less blindly material in their responses, more conscious of the act and aim of the inner movements and powers which use them and which they are wrongly supposed by the material man in us to generate and to use. The brain would be a channel of communication of the form of the thoughts and a battery of their insistence on the body and the outside world where they could then become effective directly, communicating themselves without physical means from mind to mind, producing

with a similar directness effects on the thoughts, actions and lives of others or even upon material things. The heart would equally be a direct communicant and medium of interchange for the feelings and emotions thrown outward upon the world by the forces of the psychic centre. Heart could reply directly to heart, the life-force come to the help of other lives and answer their call in spite of strangeness and distance, many beings without any external communication thrill with the message and meet in the secret light from one divine centre. The will might control the organs that deal with food, safeguard automatically the health, eliminate greed and desire, substitute subtler processes or draw in strength and substance from the universal life-force so that the body could maintain for a long time its own strength and substance without loss or waste, remaining thus with no need of sustenance by material aliments, and yet continue a strenuous action with no fatigue or pause for sleep or repose. The soul's will or the mind's could act from higher sources upon the sex centre and the sex organs so as to check firmly or even banish the grosser sexual impulse or stimulus and instead of serving an animal excitation or crude drive or desire turn their use to the storing, production and direction towards brain and heart and life-force of the essential energy, *ojas*, of which this region is the factory so as to support the works of the mind and soul and spirit and the higher life-powers and limit the expenditure of the energy on lower things. The soul, the psychic being, could more easily fill all with the light and turn the very matter of the body to higher uses for its own greater purpose.

This would be a first potent change, but not by any means all that is possible or desirable. For it may well be that the evolutionary urge would proceed to a change of the organs themselves in their material working and use and diminish greatly the need of their instrumentation and even of their existence. The centres in the subtle body, *sūkṣma śarīra*, of which one would become conscious and aware of all going on in it, would pour their energies into material nerve and plexus and tissue and radiate them through the whole material body; all the physical life and its necessary activities in this new existence could be maintained and operated by these higher agencies in a freer and ampler way and by a less burdensome and restricting method. This might go so far that these organs might cease to be indispensable and even be felt as too obstructive: the central force might use them less and less and finally throw aside their use altogether. If that happened they might waste by atrophy, be reduced to an insignificant minimum or even disappear. The central force might substitute for them subtle organs of a very different character or, if anything material was needed, instruments that would be forms of dynamism or plastic transmitters rather than what we know as organs.

This might well be part of a supreme total transformation of the body, though this too might not be final. To envisage such changes is to look far ahead and minds attached to the present form of things may be unable to give credence to their possibility. No such limits and no such impossibility of any necessary change can be imposed on the evolutionary urge. All has not to be fundamentally changed: on the contrary, all

has to be preserved that is still needed in the totality, but all has to be perfected. Whatever is necessary for the evolutionary purpose for the increasing, enlarging, heightening of the consciousness, which seems to be its central will and aim here, or the progression of its enabling means and preserving environment, has to be kept and furthered; but what has to be overpassed, whatever has no longer a use or is degraded, what has become unhelpful or retarding, can be discarded and dropped on the way. That has been evident in the history of the evolution of the body from its beginning in elementary forms to its most developed type, the human; there is no reason why this process should not intervene in the transition from the human into the divine body. For the manifestation or building of a divine body on earth there must be an initial transformation, the appearance of a new, a greater and more developed type, not a continuance with little modifications of the present physical form and its limited possibilities. What has to be preserved must indeed be preserved and that means whatever is necessary or thoroughly serviceable for the uses of the new life on earth; whatever is still needed and will serve its purpose but is imperfect, will have to be retained but developed and perfected; whatever is no longer of use for new aims or is a disability must be thrown aside. The necessary forms and instrumentations of Matter must remain since it is in a world of Matter that the divine life has to manifest, but their materiality must be refined, uplifted, ennobled, illumined, since Matter and the world of Matter have increasingly to manifest the indwelling Spirit.

The new type, the divine body, must continue the already developed evolutionary form; there must be a continuation from the type Nature has all along been developing, a continuity from the human to the divine body, no breaking away to something unrecognisable but a high sequel to what has already been achieved and in part perfected. The human body has in its parts and instruments that have been sufficiently evolved to serve the divine life; these have to survive in their form, though they must be still further perfected, their limitations of range and use removed, their liability to defect and malady and impairment eliminated, their capacities of cognition and dynamic action carried beyond the present limits. New powers have to be acquired by the body which our present humanity could not hope to realise, could not even dream of or could only imagine. Much that can now only be known, worked out or created by the use of invented tools and machinery might be achieved by the new body in its own power or by the inhabitant spirit through its own direct spiritual force. The body itself might acquire new means and ranges of communication with other bodies, new processes of acquiring knowledge, a new aesthesis, new potencies of manipulation of itself and objects. It might not be impossible for it to possess or disclose means native to its own constitution, substance or natural instrumentation for making the far near and annulling distance, cognising what is now beyond the body's cognisance, acting where action is now out of its reach or its domain, developing subtleties and plasticities which could not be permitted under present conditions to the needed fixity of a material frame. These and other numerous potentialities might appear and the body become

an instrument immeasurably superior to what we can now imagine as possible. There could be an evolution from a first apprehending truth-consciousness to the utmost heights of the ascending ranges of supermind and it may pass the borders of the supermind proper itself where it begins to shadow out, develop, delineate expressive forms of life touched by a supreme pure existence, consciousness and bliss which constitute the worlds of a highest truth of existence, dynamism of tapas, glory and sweetness of bliss, the absolute essence and pitch of the all-creating Ananda. The transformation of the physical being might follow this incessant line of progression and the divine body reflect or reproduce here in a divine life on the earth something of this highest greatness and glory of the self-manifesting Spirit.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 549-57)

The transformation to which we aspire is too vast and complex to come at one stroke; it must be allowed to come by stages. The physical change is the last of these stages and is itself a progressive process. The inner transformation cannot be brought about by physical means either of a positive or a negative nature. On the contrary, the physical change itself can only be brought about by a descent of the greater supramental consciousness into the cells of the body. Till then at least the body and its supporting energies have to be maintained in part by the ordinary means, food, sleep, etc. Food has to be taken in the right spirit, with the right consciousness; sleep has to be gradually transformed into the yogic repose. A premature and excessive physical austerity, Tapasya, may endanger the process of the sadhana by establishing a disturbance and abnormality of the forces in the different parts of the system. A great energy may pour into the mental and vital parts but the nerves and the body may be overstrained and lose the strength to support the play of these higher energies. This is the reason why an extreme physical austerity is not included here as a substantive part of the sadhana. There is no harm in fasting from time to time for a day or two or in reducing the food taken to a small but sufficient modicum; but entire abstinence for a long period is not advisable.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1473)

‘LET THY LOVE MANIFEST’

December 16, 1913

PURE and disinterested love, Thy love in what we are able to perceive and manifest of it, is the sole key that can open all hearts that seek for Thee. Those who follow the path of the intellect may have a very high and true conception; they may have all the information about the true life, the life One with Thee, but they do not *know* it; they have no inner experience of that life and are ignorant of all contact with Thee. These men whose knowledge is intellectual and whose action is confined to a construction which they believe to be the best, are the most difficult of all to convert; it is harder to awaken the consciousness of the Divine in them than in any other person of goodwill. Love alone can work this miracle, for love opens all doors, penetrates every wall, clears every obstacle. And a little true love does more than the most beautiful speeches.

Lord, let this pure flower of love blossom in me, that it may give its fragrance to all those who come near us, and that this fragrance may sanctify them.

In this love lie peace and joy, the fount of all strength and all realisation. It is the infallible healer, the supreme consoler; it is the victor, the sovereign teacher.

O Lord, my sweet Master, Thou whom I adore in silence and to whom I have entirely consecrated myself, Thou who governest my life, kindle in my heart the flame of Thy pure love that it may burn like a glowing brazier, consuming all imperfections and transforming into a comforting warmth and radiating light the dead wood of egoism and the black coals of ignorance.

O Lord, I turn towards Thee with a devotion at once joyful and solemn and I implore Thee:

Let Thy love manifest,

Thy reign come.

May Thy peace govern the world.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, pp. 40-41)

ON DREAMS

AT first sight one might think that the subject of dreams is an altogether secondary one; this activity generally seems to have very little importance compared to the activity of our waking state.

However, if we examine the question a little more closely, we shall see that this is not at all the case.

To begin with, we should remember that more than one third of our existence is spent in sleeping and that, consequently, the time devoted to physical sleep well deserves our attention.

I say physical sleep, for it would be wrong to think that our whole being sleeps when our bodies are asleep.

A study based on certain experiments conducted according to the strictest scientific methods, was published some twenty years ago by Dr. Vaschid in a book entitled "Sleep and Dreams".

The doctors who carried out these experiments were led to the conclusion that mental activity never really ceases; and it is this activity which is more or less confusedly transcribed in our brains by what we know as dreams. Thus, whether we are aware of it or not, we always dream.

Certainly, it is possible to suppress this activity completely and to have a total, dreamless sleep; but to be able in this way to immerse our mental being in a repose similar to the repose of our physical being, we must have achieved a perfect control over it, and this is not an easy thing to do.

In most cases, this activity is even heightened, because, as the body is asleep, the internal faculties are no longer focussed on or used by the physical life.

It is sometimes said that in a man's sleep his true nature is revealed.

Indeed, it often happens that the sensory being, which throughout the whole day has been subjected to the control of the active will, reacts all the more violently during the night when this constraint is no longer effective.

All the desires that have been repressed without being dissolved—and this dissociation can only be obtained after much sound and wide-ranging analysis—seek satisfaction while the will is dormant.

And since desires are true dynamic centres of formation, they tend to organise, within and around us, the combination of circumstances that is most favourable to their satisfaction.

In this way the fruit of many efforts made by our conscious thought during the day can be destroyed in a few hours at night.

This is one of the main causes of the resistances which our will for progress often encounters within us, of the difficulties which sometimes appear insurmountable to us and which we are unable to explain, because our goodwill seems so integral to us.

We must therefore learn to know our dreams, and first of all to distinguish between them, for they are very varied in nature and quality. In the course of one night we may often have several dreams which belong to different categories, depending on the depth of our sleep.

As a general rule, each individual has a period of the night that is more favourable for dreams, during which his activity is more fertile, more intellectual, and the mental circumstances of the environment in which he moves are more interesting.

The great majority of dreams have no other value than that of a purely mechanical and uncontrolled activity of the physical brain, in which certain cells continue to function during sleep as generators of sensory images and impressions conforming to the pictures received from outside.

These dreams are nearly always caused by purely physical circumstances—state of health, digestion, position in bed, etc.

With a little self-observation and a few precautions, it is easy to avoid this type of dream, which is as useless as it is tiring, by eliminating its physical causes.

There are also other dreams which are nothing but futile manifestations of the erratic activities of certain mental faculties, which associate ideas, conversations and memories that come together at random.

Such dreams are already more significant, for these erratic activities reveal to us the confusion that prevails in our mental being as soon as it is no longer subject to the control of our will, and show us that this being is still not organised or ordered within us, that it is not mature enough to have an autonomous life.

Almost the same in form to these, but more important in their consequences, are the dreams which I mentioned just now, those which arise from the inner being seeking revenge when it is freed for a moment from the constraint that we impose upon it. These dreams often enable us to perceive tendencies, inclinations, impulses, desires of which we were not conscious so long as our will to realise our ideal kept them concealed in some obscure recess of our being.

You will easily understand that rather than letting them live on unknown to us, it is better to bring them boldly and courageously to the light, so as to force them to leave us for ever.

We should therefore observe our dreams attentively; they are often useful instructors who can give us a powerful help on our way towards self-conquest.

25 March 1912

THE MOTHER

(*Words of Long Ago*, CWM, Vol. 2, pp. 30-32)

GREEN TIGER

(This poem seems to have an occult air about it on the whole. But perhaps it is more surrealistic? What would you say of its quality and value?)

GREEN TIGER

There is no going to the Gold
Save on four feet
Of the Green Tiger in whose heart's hold
Is the ineffable heat.

Raw with a burning body
Ruled by no thought—
Hero of the huge head roaring
Ever to be caught!

Backward and forward he struggles,
Till Sun and Moon tame
By cutting his neck asunder:
Then the heart's flame

Is free and the blind gap brings
A new life's beat—
Red Dragon with eagle-wings
Yet tiger-feet!

Time's blood is sap between
God's flower, God's root—
Infinity waits but to crown
This Super-brute.

Sri Aurobindo's Comment:

“Very powerful and original poem. There may be some doubt as to whether the images have coalesced into a perfect whole. But it may be that if they did, the startling originality of the combination might lose something of its vehement force, and in that case it may be allowed to stand as it is. At any rate it is an extremely original and powerful achievement.”

K. D. SETHNA
(AMAL KIRAN)

(The Secret Splendour, 1993 edition, pp. 139-40)

MOMENTS, ETERNAL

(Continued from the issue of June 2006)

*Mother Durga! Rider on the lion, giver of all strength, Mother, beloved of Siva!...
O Mother of the world, dispel all ills....
Mother Durga! Giver of force and love and knowledge....*

TODAY is Durga-puja, 28th Ashwin 1398 (15th October 1991).

Shakuntala, Krishna and several others are decorating the Meditation Hall under Milli-di's guidance. People keep dropping in to have a glimpse. My mind goes back to the days of yore. The first Durga-puja took place here in 1944, the year that I stayed back in the Ashram for good. Watching the billowing white clouds unfurl on the bright blue autumn skies, I would remember the Durga-puja in Bengal. That was a time when I felt a little heavy-hearted. The thought that kept weighing on me was how I was going to spend these days of the Puja all alone. I kept wishing:

“Ah, if only there was Durga-puja here too!”

In South India during this same period there were various colourful Pujas connected with other gods and goddesses, especially Ganesh. But unfortunately there was no tradition of Durga-puja! I suppose each state or region has selected and focusses on one particular deity, Vishnu, Shiva, Kartikeya or Ganapati. In the Ashram itself, however, pujas had never been celebrated. That is why I could never imagine that my wish could come true.

On the *saptami* (the seventh day of the Durga-puja) I went to the Ashram and what did I see? Minnie-di, Milli-di, Gauri, Bibha, Krishnalal-ji, Jayantilal-da and some others were busy decorating the Meditation Hall below and the staircase with vines and flowers. Ila-di (Chitra's mother) was also deeply absorbed in the work. Sujata, Sumitra, Suprabha, Chitra and the younger ones were running around getting everything that was needed for the decoration. Very nervously I stood near Nolini-da's room and watched all this while my childhood memories of the Puja in Bengal overwhelmed me.

In our uncle's house (in Patgram, in the Niyogi House) the preparations for the making of Durga's image started almost a month earlier than the actual Puja. The artists who made this image were truly spiritual people by nature. We youngsters would surround them in the Durga-*mandapa* (the pavilion where the Durga-image is made). It was but natural that we made a lot of noise and the artists would tell us:

“Keep quiet now! Can't you see we're making the image of the Mother?”

Some would run away out of fear but I stayed on to watch with great curiosity the making of the image right from the beginning. Once the bamboo frame was ready, the body and the limbs were made with stuffed straw. Then a coat of clay was put over it which was subsequently painted. One thought kept buzzing in my head even as I

watched all this:

“Good Lord !What kind of Ma Durga is this? How can this be a goddess? This is but a doll!”

These preparations went on for over a month.

One day I could not hold myself any longer and I blurted out:

“Where is Ma Durga? When will She come?”

The oldest among the artists answered:

“The day there is the *cakṣudān* ceremony (the bestowing of the eyes), the *prān-pratisthā* (descent of the Presence) will happen. That is the day when Ma Durga will come down into this clay image.”

My child’s mind was delighted to hear this.

Let me tell you about another incident in this connection. I was reading something on the life of Rammohun a few days back and I found out that when Rammohun was a little boy he was once watching the making of the Durga-image. Then the Puja started. Everyone recited a mantra and bowed to the image of the goddess. Little Rammohun, however, did not. He said:

“But this is only a doll of clay and straw. I have seen it being made. How can this be divine?”

Everyone was shocked. His father scolded him fiercely. An atheist had been born in a Brahmin family! Rammohun’s mother, Tarinidevi, came running to save the boy from further disgrace. Durga was a goddess, the Mother of the Universe, but little Rammohun refused to understand. He had seen the artist making the image and he himself had applied some clay onto it.

His mother began crying in helplessness. Little Rammohun could not bear to see his mother’s tears. So he quickly bowed to Ma Durga and said:

“O Lord of my Mother, I bow down at Your Feet!”

However, I could not doubt this clay image like little Rammohun because the artist had himself explained to me that Ma Durga descended into the statue as soon as the *prān-pratisthā* happened.

In a child’s innocent mind such an explanation left a deep imprint. Don’t they say: It is with Faith that you meet Hari, with argument you push him very far away. And so we little ones used to really feel the presence of Mother Durga in the clay image. She was for us an ever-living goddess.

Mother Durga! We are thy children, through thy grace, by thy influence may we become fit for the great work, for the great Ideal. Mother, destroy our smallness, our selfishness, our fear.

As children we were greatly attracted to lions but greatly frightened too. We would watch the lion in awe.

“The lion is the Mother’s vehicle,” the artists explained to us.

We did not quite understand what that meant.

“Can you touch the lion?” Kalpana-mashi asked me.

With firm steps I moved towards the lion and embraced him.

“See! I am not scared!”

I looked straight at the lion and said:

“What if you’re jungle-king! You cannot cross my way!”

We had just read the story of Sarvadaman where these lines occur:

World-tamer is my name, you I’ll tame today.

What if you’re jungle-king! You cannot cross my way!

And now I was bent on showing some more heroic acts! But then the chief artist came running:

“Move away, move away! You should not touch anything before the Puja is over!”

“I am not scared of the lion,” I said. “That’s why I showed it to them. The lion is my friend. I love him very, very much!”

Everyone started laughing and said:

“You’re a real hero!”

Let me tell you why I started talking about the lion. About a year or two after coming to the Ashram I dreamt one night that I was standing alone in the Meditation Hall. There was nobody anywhere around. But as soon as my gaze fell on the staircase I saw a huge white elephant coming down. This elephant was so stunningly beautiful that I cannot describe it. All of a sudden I saw an enormous tiger coming to attack this white elephant. But just then an extremely handsome gigantic lion jumped on the tiger. What a battle followed between the two! I quickly hid behind one of the columns of the Meditation Hall and began watching the battle. There was no way of escape for me and I was terrified.

When I went to see the Mother the following morning, She asked me:

“What did you dream last night?”

The Mother used to ask me this question every morning and listen most attentively to my dream. I too enjoyed recounting it to Her. One could fill up whole storybooks just with all these dreams. The Mother used to ask almost everybody about their dreams. This dreamworld is a strange, mysterious world. Both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have explained the deeper meaning of dreams to sadhaks and sadhikas in writing as well as orally. So anyway, I told the Mother about my dream in minute detail. She listened with great interest and then said:

“Why did you feel scared of the lion? That is my vehicle. The lion is your friend.”

I just kept staring at the Mother, transfixed. That childhood memory returned while I was embracing the lion during the Durga-puja and telling everybody:

“The lion is my friend.”

But I could not take my eyes off the Mother.

Everything in a man's life is preordained. I began to understand this slowly with time.

When the Mother Herself said: "The lion is my vehicle. He is your friend", my heart filled with joy. I cannot translate that experience. Quite a few years later I prepared and offered to the Mother some golden buttons in the shape of a lion's face for Her gown. Dyuman-bhai had got me everything I needed. In the translation-class I offered a lion-shaped paperweight to keep her papers together. Bhabhi-ji (Violette) had got this brass paperweight for me from Delhi.

So the lion was indeed my friend. In childhood one's consciousness and power are very much awake. That is what I discovered in this churning of my childhood memories.

This tremendous attraction and affection that we Bengalis have for the Durga-aspect of the Mother, this too is surely preordained. Nolini-da has written:

The Bengali's puja is that of the marvellous variety of the Divine, of plenitude. The Bengali's deity is not one but many, a combined Power of all the deities together.... In the image of the Bengali puja I see the synthesis of diverse divine powers. The worship of the Ten-armed one has not captured the heart of any other community as it has the Bengalis. There is in Bengal too the worship of each of the different gods but it is the worship of the Ten-armed Mother that is truly the puja of the Bengalis....

The main goal of the Bengali is that Divine Plenitude that comes about by the commingling of the divinity of all the gods in every limb and at every level. This is why the Bengali's deity is this compound form. Silent Shiva Mahadev is above all and towers above still and firmly established. This Ten-armed One wielding diverse arms is but His expression. This Narayani Lakshmi bestows beauty, wealth and good fortune. Saraswati is the source of divine knowledge, Kartikeya, the source of divine heroism. Ganapati is the symbol of this combined sadhana. To such an extent that the representation of the pure Shakti of the physical consciousness is the lion, the king of the animal world.

On the *Mahāṣṭami* (the eighth day) the puja acquired a much more festive, colourful rhythm. There was a collective *ārati* in the evening. How our uncles used to dance while doing the *ārati* carrying big incense-burners! Each one tried to outdo the other, showing off his skill. The whole *Chandi-mandapa* was enveloped in incense-smoke! Through this smoke the image of Mother Durga looked really mysterious! Father also would join this competition with the drummer. And we little ones would let ourselves go in this dancing in the courtyard. There was so much joy and enthusiasm all around!

Our uncles were from Patgram, a well-known village in the Dacca district. After undivided Bengal was cut up into two by our blind foolish politicians, this village

was swallowed up by the all-destroying fury of the Padma river. No trace was left of the village. Today you see only water everywhere, just water. I feel the village was unable to bear the pain of this partition and so drowned itself into the bottomless deeps of Padma. Like Sita's entry into the netherworld.

We used to collect all sorts of flowers during these few days of the Durga-puja: *Shiuli*, land-lilies, clitoria (especially the white variety). The boys used to get white and pink lotuses from the lotus ponds. These flowers are a must in the floral offerings for Durga-puja. It was after coming to the Ashram that I discovered that every flower had an inner meaning. The Mother had named flowers according to this inner meaning. The *shiuli* flower was called *Aspiration* by the Mother, the lily was called *Divine's Grace*. What is astonishing is that these flowers bloom during Durga-puja in autumn! The first line of *The Mother* comes to mind:

There are two powers that alone can effect in their conjunction the great and difficult thing which is the aim of our endeavour, a fixed and unfailing aspiration that calls from below and a supreme Grace from above that answers.

It is amazing to think that our reverent rishis and munis had experienced this confluence of aspiration and divine Grace in their consciousness thousands of years ago. And they established this tradition of offering both these flowers during Durga-puja. The descent of the Mother's Compassion onto the earth is made easier when from our side the fire of aspiration rises within us. We did not know anything about the special force and importance of flowers, either in our childhood or even later, until we came here.

The significance of the white and blue *aparajita* that we used to collect for the Durga-puja is also particularly pertinent. The Mother called the blue *aparajita*, *Radha's Consciousness*. Radha is the symbol of this deep yearning for the Lord in our human consciousness. Pure love and limitless tenderness, consecration and surrender. The significance of the white *aparajita* is *Purified Senses*.

A poem from my childhood comes to mind:

*'Defeated' you are before flowers all,
Then 'Un-defeated' why do they you call?
No fragrance doth your heart exhale,
Or colour to lift your aspect pale!*

*From black-eyed flower tears run down
I've nothing, poor me, I have no renown.
The name you've given me with so much grace
Is all I have, dear, nothing more can I trace.*

*My only refuge is the goddess' Feet,
Worshipful adoration is my life's heartbeat.
Will She too, like you, send me crying away,
Who everything knows, send me crying away?*

Compared with other flowers, the *aparajita* flower holds such an important place for us and this poet's poem is indeed so true. *Worshipful adoration is my life's heartbeat*. This line seems to describe Radhika's profound yearning to offer herself entirely to Sri Krishna. How marvellous indeed!

How we enjoy reading the Mother's *Radha's Prayer*! What the Mother is showing us through this prayer is how to lose oneself totally in the Divine:

Thine are all my thoughts, all my emotions, all the sentiments of my heart, all my sensations, all the movements of my life, each cell of my body, each drop of my blood. I am absolutely and altogether Thine, Thine without reserve.

(To be continued)

PRITI DAS GUPTA

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

As to the gods, man can build forms which they will accept but these forms too are inspired into man's mind from the planes to which the god belongs. All creation has the two sides, the formed and the formless,—the gods too are formless and yet have forms, but a godhead can take many forms, here Maheshwari, there Pallas Athene. Maheshwari herself has many forms in her lesser manifestation, Durga, Uma, Parvati, Chandi, etc. The gods are not limited to human forms—man also has not always seen them in human forms only.

*

The lion with Durga on it is the symbol of the Divine Consciousness acting through a divinised physical-vital and vital-emotional force.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 22, pp. 389-90)

THE ENERGIES THAT TRANSMUTE AN AGE

Sri Aurobindo and the Emergence of an Integral Culture*

SRI AUROBINDO offers the world an integral vision harmonising the spiritual, intellectual and material aspects of life and culture. His philosophy does not accept the rational mind as the last stage in the evolution of consciousness, yet neither does it deny the value of the intellect. Sri Aurobindo holds that an alliance of spiritual and intellectual forces is needed for a transformation of humanity that could lead to the solution of our agelong and ever more pressing problems.

The influence of this vision on human thought up to the present and, more important, its possible impact on the direction humanity might take in the future, can be looked at in two ways. The obvious way is to examine Sri Aurobindo's writings and consider their effect on the relatively small but growing number of people who have read them and on the potentially much larger number who will eventually read them or come to know their message. Insofar as he was a thinker, Sri Aurobindo's primary visible means of acting on the world was by writing. He certainly did not neglect this conventional method of propagating ideas. As a result, his voluminous works are inevitably the focus of most discussion of his contribution to humanity.

But as a master yogi, Sri Aurobindo may have had other ways of working towards the fulfilment of his vision. If we entirely overlook this dimension of his action, we may miss his full significance. For it is conceivable that Sri Aurobindo's consciousness has invisibly shaped our times to a far greater degree than we are aware.

In Sri Aurobindo's epic, *Savitri*, in two passages in a canto describing the Yoga of King Aswapati, we come across these lines:

He heard the inspired sound of his own thoughts
Re-echoed in the vault of other minds;
The world's thought-streams travelled into his ken...

Apart he lived in his mind's solitude,...
A Power worked, but none knew whence it came.
The universal strengths were linked with his;
Filling earth's smallness with their boundless breadths,
He drew the energies that transmute an age.¹

The mythological setting of *Savitri* hardly conceals the fact that the epic is largely an account of Sri Aurobindo's own inner experiences. These passages in the poem agree closely with what we can gather from other statements by him about his Yogic

* This paper was presented at a national seminar on "Sri Aurobindo and the Future of Humanity", sponsored by the University Grants Commission, held on January 17-19, 2005, at the India International Centre, New Delhi.

consciousness and way of working.

An important and little-known source of information about Sri Aurobindo's inner life is the diary he kept for many years, which has recently been published under the title *Record of Yoga*. Here we find abundant evidence that he was systematically developing what are traditionally known in India as "siddhis" and was using them in ways that resemble what he described in *Savitri*.

Sri Aurobindo found that such powers are part of the normal action of the *vijñāna* or suprarational consciousness and therefore latent in all of us. As he pointed out:

All siddhis exist already in Nature. They exist in you. Only owing to habitual limitations you make a use of them which is mechanical and limited. By breaking these limitations, one is able to get the conscious and voluntary use of them.²

Commenting on the notion that siddhis should be shunned because they lead away from the purity of the spiritual ideal, Sri Aurobindo noted that this restriction cannot be applied to those who seek the Divine "in His world-fulfilment as well as apart from the world". He went on to say:

Indeed, there is a stage reached by the Yogin, when, unless he avoids all action in the world, he can no more avoid the use of the siddhis of power and knowledge than an ordinary man can avoid eating and breathing.... All the ancient Rishis used these powers, all great Avatars and Yogins and vibhutis from Christ to Ramakrishna have used them; nor is there any great man with the divine power at all manifest in him who does not use them continually in an imperfect form without knowing clearly what are these supreme faculties that he is employing.³

The direct communication between one mind and another which is supposed to occur in the exercise of some siddhis is considered to be possible because of what Swami Vivekananda called the "continuity of mind". As Vivekananda said in a talk on "The Powers of the Mind":

Each mind is connected with every other mind. And each mind, wherever it is located, is in actual communication with the whole world.⁴

If this is true, then there is no reason why a powerful mind like Sri Aurobindo's should not influence other minds around the globe. Sri Aurobindo himself wrote:

Consciousness in one material being communicates with the same consciousness in another material being by certain fixed methods such as speech, gesture, writing etc. and unconscious mental communication. But these limitations are mere habits and other methods are possible.... Consciousness in itself is free to communicate

between one mind and another without physical means consciously and voluntarily.... In the same way there is a power in the consciousness of acting upon other conscious beings or even upon things without physical means or persuasion or compulsion.⁵

In passing, I might mention that even from a scientific point of view, such ideas do not look as far-fetched today as they might have a few decades ago, especially before the experimental verification of the phenomenon of “entanglement” predicted by quantum theory. The discovery that pairs of particles separated by large distances show correlations in their behaviour that are inexplicable on the basis of classical physics suggests intriguing parallels to telepathy. The implications of quantum entanglement are the subject of much debate, but some scientists acknowledge, in principle, that it could help to bridge the gap between the physical sciences and the field of parapsychology.

Sri Aurobindo’s diary shows that he was observing telepathic phenomena daily and recording many of his observations. In one entry in 1912, early in the *Record of Yoga*, he noted that his ability to read the exact thought-contents of the minds of others had lagged behind his telepathic perception of their character, feelings and general states of mind. Suddenly this changed and he wrote:

Today, however, the veil was lifted, the barrier finally broken. Not only did telepathy & thought-reading abound, but in a single day the proof of correctness began to be ample.⁶

Sri Aurobindo’s insistence on proof and his frequently sceptical attitude towards his own experiences are notable features of the *Record of Yoga* which show his essentially scientific temperament. While he distinguished between the methods of inquiry appropriate to the physical domain and those applicable to the spiritual field, his approach was fundamentally consistent with the scientific method.

Sri Aurobindo used the Sanskrit word *vyāpti* for a form of telepathy related to the “thought-streams” in *Savitri*. He explained:

Vyapti is when the thoughts, feelings etc. of others or any kind of knowledge of things outside yourself are felt coming to the mind from those things or persons. This is the power of receptive Vyapti. There is also a power of communicative Vyapti, when you can send or put your own thought, feeling etc. into someone else.⁷

Both “communicative Vyapti” and “receptive Vyapti”, that is, both the transmission of thoughts to others and the awareness of their thoughts entering one’s own mind, are implied in the first passage I have quoted from *Savitri*:

He heard the inspired sound of his own thoughts
 Re-echoed in the vault of other minds;
 The world's thought-streams travelled into his ken....

The second set of lines I quoted from the third canto of *Savitri* is strikingly reminiscent of a particular passage in the *Record of Yoga*, though the lines in the poem were written many years after the diary entry. On January 10th, 1915, Sri Aurobindo wrote in his notebook:

the growth of the Vijnana in many forms increases, its *mahattva* is not destroyed by the opposition....

It is applying itself unperceived to the minds of all and overcoming the opposition of the littleness, besieging the mentality of the world with the Truth.⁸

The phrase about “applying itself unperceived to the minds of all” calls to mind the line in *Savitri*:

A Power worked, but none knew whence it came.

The *mahattva* or vastness of the Vijnana “overcoming the opposition of the littleness” reminds us of the “boundless breadths” filling “earth’s smallness” in Sri Aurobindo’s epic:

The universal strengths were linked with his;
 Filling earth’s smallness with their boundless breadths,
 He drew the energies that transmute an age.

If as early as 1915 Sri Aurobindo was aware of the power of a higher consciousness which he called Vijnana “besieging the mentality of the world”, it might be interesting to study changes that were occurring at that time to see if they show any signs of the effects of such an action of unseen forces. But I propose to jump instead to the present, when the modern age is being transmuted before our eyes. Sri Aurobindo did not expect a sudden and miraculous transfiguration of human life. He used the image of a siege, and a siege is not over in a day; it is usually a long drawn-out affair. The powers of the old order are well fortified behind the walls of their limited ideas and narrow interests. Only recently has it become relatively easy to point to significant developments that could plausibly be connected with the kind of spiritual energies Sri Aurobindo was trying to channel into the earth’s atmosphere.

In 1996 an article entitled “The Rise of Integral Culture” appeared in an American journal called the *Noetic Sciences Review*. Written by a sociologist named Paul Ray, the article was based on an extensive survey in the United States. The results of this

survey when analysed seemed to indicate that nearly one fourth of the population could be seen as members of a newly emerging “subculture of values” within American society. Dr. Ray called these people “cultural creatives” because he perceived them to be the principal agents of a massive process of cultural change that is taking place. He wrote:

The empirical data of my “American Lives” survey show that the appearance of the Cultural Creatives since the 1970s heralds a transition to Transmodernism and what may well be the birth of the new and distinctive social force that I am calling Integral Culture.⁹

The term “Integral Culture” was not Ray’s invention. He goes on to say:

Interestingly enough, the vision of “Integral Culture” as a positive way of transcending Modernism has been around for more than 50 years, first given voice by the great Russian-American sociologist Pitirim Sorokin in *The Crisis of Our Age*.

Sorokin (1889-1968) was a Russian émigré who was the head of Harvard University’s department of sociology from 1930 to 1944. He is regarded as one of the most original and important as well as controversial figures in American sociology. A distinctive feature of his system of thought is its acceptance of the “supersensory-superrational” domain as a component of reality with corresponding means of cognition which the social sciences cannot afford to overlook. The integration of this domain with the empirical-sensory and rational modes of being would be achieved in the “idealistic” or, in Sorokin’s later writings, “integral” culture which, according to him, is likely to replace the collapsing “sensate” order of the present Western civilisation. His book *The Crisis of Our Age* was published in 1941, the same year as the last volume of his *Social and Cultural Dynamics*, which he had begun to publish in 1937.

Since Paul Ray is a sociologist, it was natural that Sorokin should have influenced his thinking. But Sorokin was not his only source of insight into the meaning of the social changes he was observing. Ray’s article continues:

Three major thinkers each embraced the same broad concept with analogous spiritual ideas in the same period (1930s and 1940s), apparently independently of one another....

Besides Sorokin, the other two were Sri Aurobindo and the Swiss-German philosopher Jean Gebser (1905-73).

Ray traced the origin of these ideas to the 1930s and 1940s on the basis of the publication dates of the principal works of the thinkers in question. In Sri Aurobindo’s case, this meant primarily *The Life Divine*, which first appeared in book form in the

two-volume edition of 1939-40. However, Sri Aurobindo had actually begun to publish the original version of *The Life Divine*, as well as several of his other works, twenty-five years earlier in a monthly journal, the *Arya*. Though he did not use the specific term “integral culture”, integrality was the distinctive characteristic of his evolutionary philosophy and integral Yoga as expounded in the *Arya* as far back as 1914. A working definition of integral culture that should be acceptable to all who share such an ideal could be taken from any of several passages in the writings he published at that time, such as these sentences from the Introduction to *The Synthesis of Yoga*:

Preserving and perfecting the physical, fulfilling the mental, it is Nature’s aim and it should be ours to unveil in the perfected body and mind the transcendent activities of the Spirit. As the mental life does not abrogate but works for the elevation and better utilisation of the bodily existence, so too the spiritual should not abrogate but transfigure our intellectual, emotional, aesthetic and vital activities.¹⁰

Chronologically, then, in terms of the development of ideas, Sri Aurobindo preceded Sorokin and Gebser. Ray mentions that “Sorokin, at least, later became aware of Aurobindo’s work, and greatly admired it.” Ray did not know that Gebser also, late in his life, came to know of Sri Aurobindo and paid a similar tribute. On a spiritual pilgrimage to India in the early 1960s, Gebser was deeply moved by his visit to Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, where more than anywhere else he felt himself to be in the presence of the emergent “integral consciousness” he had tried to evoke in his writings.

Georg Feuerstein tells us that in “the winter of 1931, Gebser had received in a flash of inspiration the concept of his later work” and that he dedicated the rest of his life “to making explicit what he had intuitively grasped in that moment”.¹¹ This revelation seems to have come through a momentary contact with the plane of Vijnana, as Sri Aurobindo called it, reminding us of the notation in the *Record of Yoga* about the Vijnana “besieging the mentality of the world with the Truth”.

Sri Aurobindo defined Vijnana as “the large embracing consciousness... which takes into itself all truth and idea and object of knowledge and sees them at once in their essence, totality and parts or aspects”.¹² He considered this to be “the original, spontaneous, true and complete view” of things “of which mind has only a shadow in the highest operations of the comprehensive intellect.”¹³ Gebser arrived at a similar understanding of the “integral structure of consciousness” which is to supersede the present mental structure. Whereas Sri Aurobindo said of the Vijnana that its “movement is a total seeing and seizing”,¹⁴ Gebser coined the term *synairesis* for a cognition that involves a “total grasping” of things, with the result of going “beyond mere synthesis, which is a mental-rational concept, to achieve a total integration of all parts simultaneously”.¹⁵

We may see Gebser and Sorokin as examples of individuals who were unusually receptive to the action of the consciousness whose manifestation on earth was the aim of Sri Aurobindo's work. Perhaps they were among those to whom Sri Aurobindo was referring when he wrote in *Savitri*:

He heard the inspired sound of his own thoughts
Re-echoed in the vault of other minds....

Sri Aurobindo anticipated that the ideas that would emerge in the next stage of the social cycle would first “declare their trend in philosophy, in psychological thinking, in the arts” before they could “be successfully applied to the remoulding of the life of man.”¹⁶ It is in agreement with his expectations that thinkers such as Sorokin and Gebser were ahead of the general Western mind by at least a few decades.

Paul Ray believes he has amassed evidence that the transformation of humanity which Sri Aurobindo and a few other visionaries wrote about early in the last century is beginning to take place in a section of the population that is becoming too large to ignore. Whatever we may think of his attempt to label and quantify the trends he has studied and to connect them with ideas that may seem to go beyond what is immediately demonstrable, his observations do point to something significant that is happening today in America and elsewhere. The term Integral Culture is an apt description of the optimal outcome towards which many seemingly unrelated lines of change may be converging. The prominence given to an Asian thinker in this Western attempt to understand the direction in which civilisation is moving is a striking feature of Ray's analysis, agreeing with his conception of Integral Culture as “a synthesis of diverse views and traditions, including philosophies of East and West”.

In the year 2000, Paul Ray published with co-author Sherry Anderson a book, *The Cultural Creatives: How 50 Million People Are Changing the World*, further elaborating upon the ideas that had been put forward in “The Rise of Integral Culture” and raising the estimate of the number of cultural creatives in the U.S. by six million from the 1996 figure. In the aftermath of the events of September 11, 2001, studies by psychologists have suggested that the trauma actually reinforced the movement in America towards a more integral culture, despite contrary pathological responses in some sections of the population. In an article entitled “Evolution of Consciousness in Response to Terrorist Attacks: Towards a Theory of Cultural Transformation”, published in the *Humanistic Psychologist* journal in 2002, Kathleen Wall and Olga Louchakova wrote:

Summarizing the quantitative data, there is significant evidence of a cultural shift from an economic definition of the “self” to an emphasis on higher values, belonging (interconnectedness), spirituality, and resilience, in response to the trauma of the events of 9/11.¹⁷

The authors explained these results by the fact that trauma “shatters old structures of consciousness, both in the individual and collective psyches, and provides an opportunity for the development of either healing and imaginative new structures or pathological and rigidified reactions.” They noted that “accounts frequently showed remarkable shifts in self-identification. In these accounts there is a sense of a living cosmic soul.... Many people reported, directly or indirectly, a sense of connection with the whole of humanity.” Wall and Louchakova, like Ray, referred to Sri Aurobindo and Gebser as sources of a model of integral consciousness that helps to make these phenomena more intelligible.

Not long ago, when the end of the Cold War was being proclaimed as the “end of history”, conditions looked propitious for completing the spread of the modern Western type of civilisation over the entire globe and fulfilling the dream of the rational mind, a dream described by Sri Aurobindo in a passage in *Savitri*:

Then science and reason careless of the soul
 Could iron out a tranquil uniform world,
 Aeonic seekings glut with outward truths...,
 Inflicting Matter’s logic on Spirit’s dreams
 A reasonable animal make of man....¹⁸

Modernism has been associated with an attempt to impose on the world, partly by force and partly by persuasion or seduction, the kind of rationalistic and materialistic civilisation that has developed in Europe and America in the last few centuries, a civilisation whose ideal is essentially to make the human being a “reasonable animal”. To some extent, the effort to universalise this civilisation has been made in good faith in the belief that it would produce the best possible way of life for everyone.

But today the claims of Western modernism are being fiercely contested—even while its most outward aspect, that of technological progress, is being accepted almost everywhere and some of its genuinely universal values are still extending their beneficial influence on human life. This is evidently just what Sri Aurobindo expected. In the passage in *Savitri*, after the lines about science and reason ironing out “a tranquil uniform world”, he continues:

So might it be if the spirit fell asleep;...

Then there are two more “If”s representing contrasting alternatives to the triumph of science and reason. Either or both of these might radically change the course of events:

If Life’s dire heart arose not in revolt,
 If God within could find no greater plan.¹⁹

These two lines in *Savitri* appear to sum up what is happening today. On one side, we

see the rise of terrorism and the clash of civilisations representing the revolt of “Life’s dire heart”, as symbolised most dramatically on September 11, 2001. On the other side, we hear of the emergence of an integral culture that would, on the contrary, be more conducive to a clasp of civilisations and might transcend the limits of the rational conception of human possibilities—perhaps pointing to the “greater plan” of which Sri Aurobindo spoke. If we suppose the energies of the Vijnana to be still besieging the mind of the world, as Sri Aurobindo saw early in the last century, we may assume that they are working for this “greater plan”. Sri Aurobindo expressed a qualified optimism in *The Human Cycle*, where he wrote that

if the common human mind has begun to admit the ideas proper to the higher order that is in the end to be, and the heart of man has begun to be stirred by aspirations born of these ideas, then there is a hope of some advance in the not distant future.²⁰

The prospect of a truly integral culture arising as the successor to modernity and to the present troubled and enigmatic transitional period often called postmodernity is still something of a speculation or a dream. But the kind of ideas Sri Aurobindo referred to as being “proper to the higher order that is in the end to be” are becoming more and more widespread. Those who hold these ideas may prove to be, in Sri Aurobindo’s words, “the yet unrecognised vanguard of humanity.”²¹

RICHARD HARTZ

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THE MOTHER GIVES ME WORK

[Bibha-di gives us the following account of the work she had done in the Ashram. Bibha Biswas is the younger sister of the late Sanjiban Biswas who was an ashramite and an artist. She came from Chittagong in 1941 and has been here since then. Now she runs a small handicraft department “Batik Work” in the Ashram.]

I WAS twenty-one years old when I came to the Ashram. I was accompanied by my mother and younger brother. This was in 1941. A few days later, Nolini-da called me and asked me, “Will you do some work? The Mother has given you work with Bimala in the Hand-Weaving [handloom] Section. She would like Sanjiban’s designs to be hand-woven.” I did not know Bimala. “Never mind,” Nolini-da said. “Bimala will contact you herself.” So my work started in the recently-formed Hand-Weaving Section. This was a small building situated on the street opposite the present-day automobile workshop of the Ashram on Rue Saint Gilles. There was a big loom which was used only by Bimala-di. She had ordered a smaller one. Till it arrived I did different jobs in the section. Once the smaller loom was set up, I started working on it. We made small *gamchhas* (Indian towels), bed-sheets and bed-covers which were given to our Ashram Store, for general distribution. Once we made some handkerchiefs also, which the Mother liked very much. She would distribute these on the occasion of Darshan. Once I wove six sarees with a red border. These were of five metre length. When I placed the packet containing them on the floor in front of the Mother and opened the packet, She was surprised. “What!” She exclaimed, “You have done these sarees on the loom?” “Yes Mother,” I replied. She was so happy and kept looking at the sarees for some time. Then, She called the others who were present there, to show them these sarees woven on our loom. Immediately She gave the sarees to a few sadhikas present and She just heaped up on my palms flowers of so many different kinds. I was indeed blessed!

About a week after my starting the work with Bimala-di in the Weaving Section Nolini-da wanted me to see him again. “The Mother has given you work with Anjali,” he said. “The work starts at 6 p.m. She washes some clothes used by Sri Aurobindo. You are to help her in the work.” A song of gratitude and joy welled up from my heart. How did the Mother know my long-cherished dream? When I was about 7 years of age, I had seen a movie on Chandidas, the saint-poet of Bengal. In the film, a young lady, his devotee, was washing his clothes. At that time itself I had the firm conviction that I too, one day, would wash the clothes of such a lord. Now, after so many years, how did the Mother fulfil my wish? Later I came to know that the names of four young ladies had been suggested to the Mother for this work. These names were written on different pieces of papers. The Mother picked up the bit of paper that contained my name. So I joined Anjali to help her in this work. This work I did along

with my work in the Weaving Section. (A more detailed account of this work will appear in a later issue).

Within a few days of my arrival, as I was coming out of the Dining Room Tara-ben took me to a room situated in the Dining Room premises. This she used as a kitchen where she did some cooking for the Mother. It was nearing the Darshan Day of the 15th August. Tara-ben wanted to send a dish to the Mother decorated in a special way. For this she gave me some mashed potato which was coloured red by the addition of beetroot juice. This she asked me to mould into the shape of a lotus flower. So I formed a lotus flower for her. This red lotus was placed in a glass bowl; its centre was kept empty. Tara-ben placed a small bowl of soup in that place. This was sent to the Mother on Darshan Day. Again, a few days later, Datta called me for the same work. She wanted a white lotus to be moulded, for the same purpose. Later, when the Mother's kitchen was organised, Lila-ben who was in charge of that kitchen, invited me to work there for this type of work. I continued doing this too.

I had worked in the Weaving Section for five years but as there was not much work in the section, the Mother asked me to leave that work and work in the School Library, with Medhananda.

In 1946, Amrita-da sent me a note: "Please go to the Ashram Press from today. The Mother asked me to inform Pantulu [who was in charge of the book-binding section of the newly-started Press] and I did it last night." The note was dated 12.7.1946, and the time indicated 6.30 a.m. So I left the work in the school and from then on I worked full time i.e., 7.30 a.m. to 11.30 a.m. in the morning and again from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. in the afternoon. This I did for six years. My work of washing Sri Aurobindo's clothes every evening from 6 p.m. continued along with the work in the Press, till 1950.

When the School Library was shifted to its present premises along with the main Library which till then had been in the Ashram main building, Medhananda who was looking after the School Library was put in charge of the whole complex. The Mother called me and said, "Medhananda needs you." And then with a broad smile She added, "I knew that you are indispensable." The Mother told me that the collections of Her art books were now sent to this place. She wanted me to take care of these books. If any repair was needed, they should never be sent out for that work. I should myself do that work. Thus I started my work in the Library. I worked there for thirteen years.

Let me recount to you an interesting incident. Once, the Mother sent us a volume of *Arya* for repair. The binding of the book was eaten up by white ants. The pages were detached. The white margins around the printed matter on many pages were also damaged badly. Medhananda showed me some notes written by Sri Aurobindo on the bottom margin of quite a few pages. He informed me that these were written by Him when he was explaining to the Mother something about the Tantras. What was remarkable was that the book was so badly damaged by the white ants but their onslaught stopped wherever there was some writing in Sri Aurobindo's hand. Not a

single handwritten letter was touched by the vermins. “But,” I told Medhananda “we do not have the requisite materials for this work.” We needed onion-skin paper and a small press to keep the book under some pressure after the pages were repaired. The damaged place for the page had to be carefully pasted over using this special paper and then put under even pressure. After some time the paper can be taken out and the rest of the binding procedure could be continued. Medhananda informed the Mother regarding our problem. The very next day a press was delivered to the Library. Udar had been asked by the Mother to get one made for the Library and as was Udar’s wont, it was immediately made and given. But what about the onion-skin paper? The Mother did not have it with her. The very next day, however Medhananda arrived at my work place with a radiant smile and gave me a file containing a sheaf of onion-skin paper. How? From where did he get the paper? Well, it seems that the very next day after our appealing to the Mother, She received a packet offered to Her by someone in Bombay. That packet contained these papers. Inscrutable indeed are Her ways of working.

The Mother was scheduled to visit the Library. I completed the repairing of the book given by Her and kept it on my long work table. She first visited the other rooms of the Library. When she entered my work room, she immediately recognised the book—the volume of *Arya* She had given us for repair. She was very pleased with the work.

I had also to take drawing classes in the School twice a week. During this period, I continued doing all the different types of work given to me by the Mother.

Unfortunately, I suffered a mild stroke soon after this and was unable to do my work for some time. When I recovered somewhat, I prepared a few handkerchiefs with Batik work. These I sent to the Mother on my birthday. The Mother sent me one Blessing packet through Amrita-da. She had instructed him that I should continue this work. What is interesting is that without any conscious planning, I chose to do the Batik work on the very spot where the Mother had taken her seat during her visit, years back in 1947, to my room. Gradually a few ladies learnt Batik work from me and we organised and formed a department. Later, on 9.8.1969, Nolini-da opened the newly-formed department. He gave us a board with the name given to it by the Mother. The board bore the name BATIK WORK written in the Mother’s own handwriting. We informed the Mother that we would try to run the place without asking for anything from Her. We were informed that She was happy with our decision.

I have received so much love all through my life! Is it possible without Her Grace? How She has moulded me at every step. “Whenever you do something, do it for me. Then whatever you do, you will be able to do it beautifully,” was Her luminous guidance. Again, I remember, I had once a bad type of stomach pain. She asked me, “Do you eat in Dining Room?” “Yes, Mother.” She said, “Whatever you eat, always think that you are eating for me.”

Every now and then we received such guidance and help from Her. The Mother

was so enthusiastic about our work. I find that I myself get the joy of losing my identity in the work I am doing. This gift is also Hers. Now, when completing 86 years of my life, I still like to work without wasting time. This is Her grace. And I pray that for the rest of my life She may guide me as She always has.

BIBHA BISWAS

ROSEBUD

Twig-broken spirit,
leaves drooping depressed.
Little rosebud
contemplating death.

Fresh cool raindrops
wash clean and green.
Kindness binds
and straightens,
Life flows.
Little rosebud
contemplating bloom.
A smile in itself
and a smile for all
who see.

ANITHA MURTHY

DUTCH PAINTING IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

(Continued from the issue of June 2006)

AMONG the many qualified artists gifted in different degrees, the foremost at that time was Rembrandt van Rijn. He was born in 1606 in a well-to-do family who lived in Leyden. This year (2006), marks the fourth centenary of his birth. Exhibitions and seminars are being arranged for that occasion in Holland and in many other countries as well.

Leyden is a flourishing city near Harlem and Amsterdam. The first ever university of Holland was established there in 1575. Paintings were very much in demand in Leyden. To satisfy that need, there were art schools and ateliers for competent artists. Rembrandt, the fifth son who was specially intelligent, was sent to the university by his father for higher studies. But the son wanted to become an artist. Neither of his parents objected to it; for, in those days, it was possible for an artist to lead a comfortable enough life just like any other craftsman. For three years he received his art-education in a studio in Leyden. After that, at the age of 17, he was trained by another master in Amsterdam. It was then that he came to know the active, busy and wealthy port of Amsterdam. Rembrandt's name is indelibly linked to this city. Amsterdam was then the most important city in the Low Countries and the trading centre of the world.

Both his teachers had been to Italy. He learnt about Italian art from them. He started his career under the influence of foreign ideas and standard methods. But, within a few years, he was able to discover his own path. The inmost truth of Dutch art gradually found full expression in his work.

We see an artist of nineteen or twenty, at work in his own studio at Leyden. Very soon he gained success. There, for six years, he painted portraits on commission. His main aim in portraiture at that time was to recreate as faultlessly as possible the physical features of the sitter, that is to say, the way his clients wanted it done. As a young artist, he used at that time the chiaroscuro technique of the Italian master Caravaggio. It was just a common mode of expression. But, later on, he brought out such depth and subtlety in the same technique that the play of light and shade became the language of his own artistic style.

One of the special features of Rembrandt's portraits is that all through his life he had painted on his own a number of pictures of his nearest relatives. Needless to say, these were not commissioned. At the beginning of his career, in Leyden, he had mostly done portraits of his mother and father, his sisters and brothers. This was also the time when he began doing self-portraits,—of which there are about sixty in all.

In 1631, he left his birthplace and went to Amsterdam. There too, in a very short while, his artistic talents found recognition. The following year he received a most gratifying order, that of painting a group-picture of Doctor Tulp's anatomy class. At that time, Frans Hals was the top-ranking artist of group-portraiture in the nearby city

of Harlem. Rembrandt understood that he had to do something new in such a way that his own originality and innovation would be established in the world of art. He centralised the light effect on the corpse, creating thus an unimaginable dramatic impact which proved his audacious temperament: the dissection of the corpse became the main theme. When we stand in front of the picture, the first detail that catches our eye is the lighted corpse lying on the table. Then we notice the figures beside it: Doctor Tulp with the dissecting scalpel in hand and, to his right, seven student-doctors who are watching, full of curiosity. One dissected muscle of the forearm is held up by Doctor Tulp on his scalpel; but, the attention of the instructor is not turned that way. He has done that on a corpse any number of times, so, we see a sort of detachment in his look. Whereas, for the others, it is just the opposite: they are all leaning forward towards the dissected arm of the corpse. Their curiosity is great: everyone's eyes are fixed on the corpse. As spectators, the focus of our look is the same; thus, we too become like the characters of the scene—the dramatic presentation is successful. The play of light and shade is also extraordinary. It is as if all the faces have become visible in the light reflected by the pale and white corpse. The faces of those in front are more clear as the light decreases at the back.

The doctors liked this group-picture of the anatomy class. In a short while, Rembrandt came to be known all over the city. Commissions for portraits started coming to him from various quarters.

In 1634, Rembrandt married Saskia—she had lost her father who had left a huge fortune to her. Wealth and physical well-being came into Rembrandt's life. Seen from an ordinary point of view, Saskia was not beautiful but she had a special grace of her own. Rembrandt has painted her in many different ways—in domestic surroundings or as the heroine of legendary tales. His pictures were at that time very much in demand and his earnings were great. He led the life of a rich man with Saskia. Apart from portraits in colour, all through his life he did many scenes from the Bible, as for example, the Christ on the Cross; Mary and Joseph's Flight to Egypt; the blinding of Samson. His chiaroscuro technique continued to evolve in new lines through all these pictures in oil. Shadows, semi-darkness and the play of light brought into these creations a greater depth and intensity of life. You have to see the original, otherwise you cannot grasp the mystery of that chiaroscuro, nor its magic power of transmuting the outer form.

Rembrandt's most famous work was created in 1642. It is a very big picture—438cm long, 365cm wide. In the National Museum of Amsterdam, it appears suddenly in front of the spectator at the end of a corridor. It is a group-picture known nowadays as "The Night Watch". Actually, it is not a night scene at all. Through the centuries, covered by smoke and dust, the colour has faded; that is how, by mistake, this name was given in later years. Even now it is usually known by that name, although the surface has been cleared and the picture has regained the brightness of its daylight effect. It describes Captain Banning Cocq's company of civic guards. Everyone of

the Company had paid a hundred florins each to get his portrait done. In this huge painting, we see an example of Rembrandt's wonderful creative and dramatic imagination. Today, in this picture, we see a deep insight, an independent and original thinking, a movement, a life, and a perfect use of the light-and-shade technique. We are wonder-struck and full of admiration for it. In front of our eyes is revealed an extraordinary greatness.

Rembrandt is portraying here Captain Banning Cocq's small band of soldiers who are on their way out of the city to join a tournament. The scene conveys their tremendous restlessness, and an unabated movement of pleasure. Sixteen people of the Company had asked for their own simple portrait, as was done by other artists of the time. Everyone had paid the same amount, their pictures would be done in the same way, each one would get the same importance. But Rembrandt worked at the promptings of his own creative genius, no one else's personal wish could determine the line of his expression. The picture he eventually created had, as on a cinema screen, many other people around these sixteen—curious people in the street, even a dog in the foreground. The civic guards refused to accept this picture: they had not paid for painting other men in the street or a dog! They were incapable of understanding the real value of the work or appreciating it.

Along with this blow there came into Rembrandt's personal life another misfortune: Saskia died of consumption one year after giving birth to a child who they named Titus. Two sorrowful events in the very same year brought a change in Rembrandt and as a result, his artistic vision underwent a metamorphosis. But suffering and personal affliction could not suppress his creativity; on the contrary, the experience of sorrow brought about a deeper inwardness. Portraits done in this last phase of his life, along with his self-portraits and scenes from the Bible, reveal a liberation and an extension of his artistic skill. Light and shade combine in an even more mysterious way and seem to point towards the Unknown Source of human fate.

Rembrandt's new style, the full-fledged expression of his talents, was not understood by the bourgeois mentality of Amsterdam. The number of clients decreased and so, his earnings too were on the decline. Towards the end of his life, he had to fight with the cruel hardships of poverty. But, as the outer demands decreased, the inner urge had the opportunity to express itself unhindered.

During the very last phase, in 1649, another woman came into his life. Her name was Hendrickje. She took charge of the whole household, the child Titus and Rembrandt. In 1652, a girl was born to them. They named her Cornelia. Hendrickje's affection, motherliness and depth of feeling enlivened Rembrandt in the artistic ventures of the last years of his life.

Rembrandt did not have much of a business mentality. Deeply in debt, he had to sell off his house, his collection of pictures and even his furniture. Hendrickje and seventeen-year old Titus started a business of paintings. Four people's daily meals could thus be procured. The artist was able to get absorbed in his creative work. At

that time, he had done many wonderful portraits of Titus and Hendrickje which were deeply expressive and full of warmth. He had used them also as models for painting scenes from the Bible. He also did some portraits of a few true friends who had not abandoned him in his days of misfortune. These serve as excellent examples of his power of expression in art.

Two other group-portraits also had been painted by him on commission. The syndics of the cloth-guild got their picture done. According to some people this composition is the very epitome in group-portraiture: five syndics with a servant in the background. Their positioning is perfect: simple and natural, not artificially worked out. Everyone in the picture has a marked individuality. There is a variety in their postures: one is leaning slightly forward, another is caught by the artist in the act of rising from his chair. They are five elderly people whose distinct personalities have been clearly brought out. They are examining an open register kept on a table covered with a red cloth. They all seem fully aware of their responsibility. The contrast between the expression on their faces and that of the servant is quite noticeable. The servant has no responsibility, he has only to keep waiting.

Realism has reached here its fullness of expression. The physical features have become the reflection of the inner nature. There is no spirituality here, everything belongs to the material world, all is human. Nowhere else, it would seem, the essence of the outer personality and the human mentality has been so effectively brought out.

That very year—1662—when the picture was completed, Hendrickje died. This affliction seemed to heighten Rembrandt's artistic vision and he plunged entirely in the creation of new pictures. His sustained discipline probed deeper, and the invisible became visible in the picture: an inner peace illumined the portraits of human beings on earth.

The lack of aesthetic taste in his contemporaries and the difficulties of his own life wounded him again and again—affliction, suffering, poverty and old age—but his artistic genius never abandoned him.

In 1668 his only son Titus also died prematurely. He himself lived on in the empty house only for a short while more, with his daughter Cornelia. In 1669 he passed away.

All through his life, Rembrandt had done several portraits in colour, sometimes of only one person, sometimes of a couple, and at times of a whole family. Apart from these, there are two large-size group-portraits. All these are pictures of man. In his legendary or biblical paintings also we get again the image of man. Whatever their theme, all the pictures correspond to the "World-Reflection" group. An imaginary heaven or hell, the creation of Earth, the Last Judgment are themes which he never attempted. We perceive the portrayal of his contemporaries even in pictures on biblical themes. Sons of God or divine messengers have also appeared in the guise of the normal human being. Living people had served as models for these. The picture of Saint Paul is a portrait of Rembrandt himself.

The main subject of his creation was man. Many are the pictures where he has expressed the survival of man or different aspects of his struggle in life. While looking at the variety of his portraits, we are automatically reminded of Shakespeare. In Shakespeare's time there was a great awakening in England, of power, wealth and culture. The life-energy of England found vast expression in poetry and drama—just as it found it in painting in Holland. Shakespeare is the greatest representative of that revival.

Shakespeare and Rembrandt have both embodied the soul of their country, each through the medium of a different art. They have both portrayed multifarious facets of the human being. Shakespeare presented to the spectator the distinctive features of each of his characters, men or women. Everyone in the play is like a living person, a unique individual. Shakespeare has never imposed his own personality upon them, the gestures or the speech, the thinking or the philosophy are all their own. He has seen, and his vision has touched the very core of each character. That seeing could reach all the hidden corners of the dark recesses of the human mind.

Rembrandt too has revealed different aspects of the inner self of man. He too did not try to explain. His pictures bear little of the stamp of his personality. Even when he has drawn his own portrait he has looked upon himself as another person, without any attachment: "I am another, I see that other man and show him here." On many occasions this detached observation has brought out the truth of his own self in his self-portraits. There is no pretence anywhere, nothing is concealed.

Wherever there is a human being, there is bound to be some drama of life. In Rembrandt's group-portraits we come in touch with an effective transcription of the play of real life. In a picture, men do not move, nor do they speak; and yet, in line and colour a successful and tense situation in the panorama of life is captured through a small dramatic moment never seen before—this moment has a far-reaching effect; even after seeing the picture again and again, we cannot gauge its limits.

After Saskia's death, at the beginning of the last phase of his life, Rembrandt felt attracted to natural sceneries. In some of his biblical pictures he had used earlier a landscape in the background. At times, he had also drawn imaginary landscapes which enhanced the mystery of light-and-shade and conveyed the charmed spectator's sympathetic response to Nature. But, his own real self is best expressed in his line-drawings and etchings of landscapes. To appease his grief-stricken heart, during this time, he used to leave the house, the studio, and go out of the city in the midst of pure all-encompassing Nature. And, with quick strokes he would draw a scenery. Back home, he would turn these sketches into etchings. One such earlier etching is called "Three Trees": the sky occupies almost three-fourths of the picture on top, below are the plains of Holland, and, on a small hillock at the right, are three trees facing infinity. Drawn in simple, almost straight lines on one side of the sky, dark clouds show signs of an impending storm. The trees wait for the storm spellbound. In such natural sceneries we see vast spaces, purity and depth of feeling.

In Rembrandt's time the etching-technique was something new. Entirely on his own, he succeeded in bringing this particular process to a height in the domain of art, in Holland. He gave at the same time the value of art to line-drawing. Other artists have also done sketches as a preliminary to their work in oil, but, none of these have been preserved because drawing was not considered by them to be an art in its own right. Rembrandt had understood what power of expression there could be in drawing. We also see, but the thing we have seen fades into nothing as soon as we turn our eyes away. Only for a short while does the memory of this small momentary feeling linger. Such passing experiences were caught at that very instant by Rembrandt. He was able to capture with quick strokes of the pen that which strikes us when an emotion first awakens in us and fills us with delight, sorrow or wonder. His line-drawings are sketches of such moments. We get a feel of his "modernism" through these sketches. In the history of modern art we find many artists who want to catch and fix the fleeting moment of a mood, a feeling or a sensation. Drawing has been re-evaluated today, and is considered to be a full-fledged art, independent and complete. It is from the point of view of this re-evaluation that the art-lover has learnt to see and appreciate Rembrandt's line-drawings and understand that it also was one exceptional aspect of his genius. In this field he ranks on par with the German artist Dürer. Four hundred paintings in colour by Rembrandt, about three hundred etchings and one thousand two hundred odd sketches have been found.

Rembrandt's work is so vast, so varied, so full of a sense of mystery, that it is almost impossible to find another artist to equal him. Several well-versed specialists and many experienced art critics have discussed Rembrandt's work and ventured into the vast world of his pictures; but, they have as yet not been able to find a limit to his genius. In Western art, Rembrandt's place is at the very top. The seventeenth century is the golden age of Holland when the Goddess of trade and commerce showered on the land her special grace; and her greatest son, representing that age, is Rembrandt.

Those who painted portraits in the seventeenth century were not all of them lovers of art. We have already seen how Frans Hals was able to maintain his artistic independence even after satisfying the demands of his clients. By mid 1640, Rembrandt's understanding had evolved to such a degree that he refused to accept any other point of view. He was an artist and was not under any compulsion to pay heed to the wishes of his client. Because he was totally free as a creator, his inner vision alone, along with his artistic talent, was to determine the form of his expression—not anything or anyone else.

When someone sat in front of so great an artist as Rembrandt to get his portrait done, he would feel that an unseen force was taking possession of him. With the power of his creative genius the artist was seeing without effort his inner personality through the contour of his face, the position of his hands, the expression of his eyes, the lines on his forehead. André Malraux has said, "Rembrandt was the first artist whose models were sometimes afraid of seeing their own portrait." Indeed, many of

us are afraid of looking at our real personal nature.

The artist engulfs the model within his art—whatever that subject may be: a human being, an animal, a thing or a natural scenery. There is no question any more of epoch or culture, religious faith, rank or power, high or low. Very often society does not understand an artist of this calibre; it rejects him and treats him as an outcaste. That was exactly what happened to Rembrandt.

(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 Greek Apollo or Venus or a Madonna or a Raphael is a human form idealized to perfection,—moulded to meet the criterion of beauty which the physical eye demands. The purely aesthetic appeal of such forms consists in the balance and symmetry, the proportion and the adjustment, a certain roundedness and uniformity and regularity, which the physical eye especially finds beautiful. This beauty is akin to the beauty of diction in poetry.

Apart from the beauty of mere form, there is behind it and informing it what may be called the beauty of character, the beauty revealed in the expression of psychological movement. It corresponds to the beauty of rhythm in poetry. Considered aesthetically, the beauty of character, in so far as it is found in what we have called formal art, is a corollary,—an ornamental and secondary theme whose function is to heighten the effect of the beauty of form, or create the atmosphere and environment necessary for its display.

Nolini Kanta Gupta

(The Coming Race and Other Essays, pp.177-78)

PAINTING AS SADHANA

Krishnalal Bhatt (1905-1990)

(Continued from the issue of June 2006)

10

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

8/10/34: Mother,

One of my younger brothers is editing an annual number of a hand-written magazine. He asks for a picture drawn by me. Can I send him the picture which I send herewith?

Mother: Yes.

[Undated]: Mother,

I saw Udayshankar who came before two days as guest of Dilip. I have the inclination towards dancing which I remember to have told to Mother twice during the interviews. And so I specially took interview from Udayshankar and asked him some instructions and movements [*here Krishnalal's "for beginning" changed by Sri Aurobindo to "needed to learn"*] dancing. He showed me some exercises for it which I have begun slowly.

May I know from Mother if it is desirable for me to continue its practice?

Sri Aurobindo: Dancing is a private thing—we can't deal with it as part of the Yoga. So it depends on your choice.

15/10/34: Mother,

Before some days I was replied for a point on dancing that dancing was a private thing and could not be dealt with it as a part of the Yoga. May I know why it is considered a private thing? Can it not become a part of the Yoga just as poetry, singing and painting are accepted and treated?

Supposing one takes to it as part of the Sadhana can it be a hindrance in the sadhana? If it is a hindrance what kind of disturbance is it likely to bring?

Sri Aurobindo: If it is done in the right spirit, it can. But we answered like that because Udayshankar's coming brought only the vital side with it and dancing on the vital side is a personal affair and cannot be part of Yoga. It would only raise the vital turn in the consciousness.

16/10/34: Mother,

I think I went to see Udayshankar to know from him only some technique of

dancing. May I request Mother to let me know whether my inclination towards dancing is from vital side only?

Sri Aurobindo: Wait some months more. If the urge is still there it may be deeper than the vital.

25/10/34: Mother,

Herewith I send a letter of my friend Jayantilal Parekh of Shantiniketan who came for a day in last June to see me. He is...at Madras and is eager to come to the Ashram. [*rest is snipped off*]

Sri Aurobindo: Is this the one who wrote to the Mother when he was here about your wife and family and the necessity of your going back?

25/10/34: [*end*] Tagore's party. I know him since his going to Shantiniketan and am having correspondence with him now and then.

Mother, I have lost my correspondence bag.

Sri Aurobindo: He can come and see you and the Ashram, but seeing Mother is not possible.

Mother [*on white chit-paper*]: 26-10-34,

Krishnalal,

I am sending you your picture for framing. I could not mount it as a Japanese kakemono because there are too many insects here.

31/10/34: Mother,

Herewith I offer two pictures which Mother will kindly accept.

Sri Aurobindo: They are very good.

K: I have the idea for starting a big picture (size 5 1/4 ft x 3 1/2 ft) on cloth. I have already mounted the cloth on the drawing-board. The idea is that the cows are returning in the late afternoon after grazing [*"Go-dhuli"*] towards the town. As the cows are fresh after grazing in the open the whole herd of them is moving with vigour leaving a golden cloud of dust behind them.

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, it may make an interesting picture.

[*By the end of the next month this painting was hung in the Reception Room. See exchanges on 19 and 30 November below. It is still there.*]

8/11/34: Mother,

I send the outline drawing of the picture of the cows which I started. I had to take it off because it had begun sticking with the drawing-board due to the sticky substance used to fill up the joints and other spaces. And so there were many folds and creases. There is also a mark of the joint of two papers which I had to join for the background of the cloth. So it is now not possible to work over this cloth. I will have to mount

another piece of cloth. For this one I had used one of my used chaddars.

For the new one I require a piece of washed cloth of the size of this picture which Mother will kindly grant for me.

The present drawing board is not good for the use of painting because the paper sticks to it and in a few days the joints begin to expand.

Mother will kindly see the outline drawing of the picture, and also see the back of the picture which has the mark of sticking.

Mother: I have seen the picture, the drawing is very nice. For the cloth you can ask from Datta. She has *new* pieces of dhoties which are already bleached and can be washed again.

Any board will always have joints and the difficulty will be the same. In France they are never used, the cloth is fixed on a wooden frame leaving the painted part quite free. It seems to be the best method and the most practical too; these frames are generally done with deal-wood and the pictures remain attached to them. If you want you can ask one from Amrita.

9/11/34: Mother,

Today Datta showed me her stock of pieces of washed dhotis. But there is no piece which can be used for painting. Some have patches, some are loose and small etc.

So I intend to use one of my washed chaddars.

Mother: Surely she did not show what I meant. I shall speak to her about it.

(Nov. 34): Mother,

As I want to begin a big picture on cloth I require a piece of cloth (2 yds) of the kind of the sample enclosed herewith. I will require also,

4 ounces of arrowroot,

1 ounce of zinc powder (pure white).

Will you kindly favour me to make arrangement for these things?

Mother: For the cloth, you can see with Datta if she has this kind of cloth. The arrowroot you can ask from Satyen and the zinc powder from the B.D.

(Nov. 34): Mother,

In the B.D. there is only zinc paint, prepared in oil, which is not useful for my purpose. I require zinc powder which, I think, I can get from the dispensary with your permission.

As Datta had handed over the cloth to Kanai Babu I took it from him.

Mother: You can ask the white zinc from the dispensary, but it is not quite certain that there will be enough to give you. In that case it will have to be bought at the Government Pharmacy.

19/11/34: Mother,

The picture of the cows remains to be finished. But before that I would like to show it to Mother. Is it possible for Mother to arrange some time for it?

Mother: I will try to find a moment to-morrow at 12.

21-11-34: [end] accompanies herewith. Will you kindly give him [*over this is pencilled, for the album, (Jayantilal Parekh)*] the permission?

Sri Aurobindo: Yes.

[Undated]: Mother,

I have begun the classes for drawing. All are interested in them. I showed them how to put even washes with colour and also have shown them that their drawing is weak. They have shown their desire to do drawing from the beginning.

Now they want to show me their drawings whenever they do and want my suggestions and corrections.

Should I give them suggestions and corrections?

Sri Aurobindo: Yes—since they have gone to you they are progressing.

K: Today I send the drawing of the flower of Divine love. I have no appropriate red for it, so I could not bring out its brilliancy.

Sri Aurobindo: It is excellent.

K: Can I give my clothes to washerman for washing?

Sri Aurobindo: Yes.

Mother: The appropriate red can be got here in a small box of colours worth 5 annas. You can ask Champaklal where it can be got.

30/11/34: Mother,

The picture of the Cows [*“Go-dhuli”*] is fixed in the frame and is ready to be hung. May I request Mother to suggest the height at which the picture should be hung? May I suggest to Mother to see the wall and the picture to-morrow in the evening when Mother comes for the distribution?

Sri Aurobindo: The Mother will go and see at 5 tomorrow.

4/12/34: Mother,

I had a talk with Sanjiban for a portfolio of the size of drawing papers. He told me that the cardboard of that size was available and the portfolio could be made. May I ask from Mother for the kind sanction for one portfolio?

Mother: Yes, you can have it done.

11/12/34: Mother,

I have done a picture which is nearing completion.

I would like to show it to Mother and have suggestions wherever necessary,

especially because there is the drawing of human figure. Can Mother find some time at Her convenience?

Mother: I shall see your picture with pleasure but I have absolutely no time free before the 18th, next Tuesday. If you do not mind waiting until then I shall see you that day.

19/12/34: Mother,

May I know on what plane can be the origin of this picture?

Sri Aurobindo: It is from the mentalised vital.

K: What significance does it convey?

Sri Aurobindo: Dawn—bringing the sun out of the darkness.

K: Does the execution of the picture bring out the reality of the thing behind?

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, it is very well done.

[Undated]: Mother,

I have tried to do a picture on a Japanese board by giving washes of colour. I find that the board does not take the colours evenly. I will experiment with other sheets in different styles.

I liked the boards, they are tempting to work on.

Sri Aurobindo: The picture is very good.

(To be continued)

S. V. BHATT

The smallest feline is a masterpiece.

Art is never finished, only abandoned.

Where the spirit does not work with the hand there is no art.

Leonardo da Vinci

TEHMI—LETTERS FROM THE MOTHER—ON ART

Tehmi's letter to the Mother:

Sweet Mother,

Could I offer You this little thing? (Is it called a stole or a shawl?) It is very, very old, but it is just a few days ago that Maman had someone bring it from Bombay. I know well that it is not worthy of You, Sweet Mother—nothing is—but the moment I saw it I thought of You. So, I place it at Your feet with all my love. Will You use it, Sweet Mother?

The Mother's note:

The scarf is very beautiful and surely I shall wear it thinking of you and feeling your faithful love.

With my love and my blessings.

* * *

Regarding a packet of cards sent to the Mother by Tehmi, the Mother wrote:

On opening your packet, on seeing the cards, I said spontaneously: "This Tehmi is a marvel!"

With all my love.

* * *

Tehmi's letter to the Mother:

Sweet Mother,

You will not scold me? I have caught the contagious fascination of making "marbled papers" and I have made a few. I have made these cards for You with bits of paper, but there are others, bigger and somewhat different. I do not know what You would like to do with them. Will You see them, Sweet Mother? If You wish, I will give them to Champaklal to show them to You.

The Mother's answer:

Your papers are delightful and I received them with joy, and they will all be very useful. Give them to Champaklal so that he can show them to me.

All this creates a very pleasing atmosphere of beauty.
With my blessings

* * *

Letter from Tehmi to the Mother

Sweet Mother,

Because You have liked the first papers that I made, I had the courage to do some others. It is a small series, this time, with a single theme, Sweet Mother. Can I hope that You will find them good also? Always it seems to me that one plays with little nothings and one cannot do anything truly worthy of You.

Only Your grace and Your divine heart accept all that one offers.

The Mother's reply:

The "series" is magnificent, a real work of art! I shall write now letters on the mountains of dreams! It is a beautiful idea.

With all my affection.

* * *

Tehmi, my dear child, not only is it beautiful, but also interesting and evocative, and will surely be very useful.

I spent a good while looking and reading.

With all my love and blessings

* * *

A note from the Mother:

To Tehmi with my love

The offering is charming
the quotations wonderful
and the pictures exquisite!
blessings

* * *

1.1.60

To Tehmi, my dear child,
 Bonne année!
 With love and blessings.

The painted roses are so beautiful.

* * *

Lots of beautiful quotations on very beautiful pictures, received with joy and blessings.

* * *

Tehmi, my dear child,

I keep them religiously. It is touchingly full of living light and divine force.
 With love

* * *

Letter from the Mother:

Tehmi, my dear child,

The pastel that you have sent is really beautiful. Is it about this that you say that it has not been successful?

It is the first time that I see this flower and it has given me the impression of a formidable puissance of tranquillity.

That is why I said: integral supramental Power
 With my love and my blessings.

* * *

The Mother is referring here to a painting of a heart with roses on the birthday card She sent to Tehmi:

Here is a beautiful image of Tehmi's heart which tells her better than any other thing: Bonne Fête! on my behalf, with all my love and my blessings.

* * *

A note from the Mother:

These leaves are so beautiful.
With all my love.

* * *

A letter from the Mother:

Tehmi, my dear child

I was looking for a picture which would be worthy of being offered to you on your birthday. You have brought it to me.

It is the one which you have sent me that I will give you, for you alone will be able to keep it with the love and respect it merits.

It is really beautiful.

I shall see you on Monday the 17th, at 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

With all my love and my blessings.

* * *

Tehmi my dear child,

I have received all the lovely things.

It so happens that I have an egg to spare that I am sending you so that you eat it thinking of me and all my love for you.

blessings

* * *

Tehmi, my dear child,

Yes, the cards are very pretty, like all that you do.

With all my love

* * *

To Tehmi all my love and blessings.

How pretty the cards are!

Because of you I make many persons happy!

* * *

Tehmi, my dear child,

Not only do I like these things, but they are precious and useful—I always find just the right one for someone who needs to read and meditate on what is written. So they do not remain with me for long, but go to make people happy.

With my love.

* * *

It is never too late for beautiful things!

Love

NARAD (RICHARD EGGENBERGER)

A MYSTERIOUS CALL

A call came unexpectedly.
 The pages of memory fluttered
 Taking me to someone seated within.
 I entered the shrine once again
 Where she stood in great majesty.
 Her eyes spoke of an ageless wonder,
 Her limbs held the strength of the gods.
 I was awed by her beauty,
 Yet her smile built the harmonies
 That course through the rhythm of life.
 A living force brought the presence,
 And gave meaning to all movements.
 A part that had suffered being apart
 Discovered its identity,
 Was ablaze in her imperial glow.
 The mysterious call bridged the gulf
 Between me and her.

N. SHAKUNTALA MANAY

THE ADVENTURE OF CONSCIOUSNESS—INDIA'S SPIRITUAL EVOLUTION

(Continued from the issue of June 2006)

Vaishnavism and Tantra

FOR the next thousand years, Shankara ruled, but all was not lost. The Purano-Tantric system which was subdued during Buddhism came back in a big way after Shankara's Hindu revival. Broader lines of experience developed. Vaishnavism, and Tantra especially, flowered during this period after remaining in the background for centuries.

Almost as a revolt against the excessively rigid mental scholasticism of the then existing spiritual traditions, Vaishnavism approached the divine through the heart and emotions. The Vaishnava was not satisfied with Buddhist nihilism and Vedantic peace, he sought for the love and joy of the Divine. We find the earliest mention of the gospel of devotion and bliss in the Taittiriya Upanishad, but it is here that is developed the possibility of man's joy of the Divine in the world, the universal Ananda, the play of the Mother, the sweetness and beauty of God's Lila.⁵² The Vaishnava did not look upon this world as unreal, but as a creation made by the Will of the Lord in his divine Play, a Lila.

A few quotations from Sri Aurobindo's writings best elucidate the basic principles of the Bhakti Yoga: "The principle of Bhakti Yoga is to utilise all the normal relations of human life into which emotion enters and apply them no longer to transient worldly relations, but to the joy of the All-Loving, the All-Beautiful and the All-Blissful."⁵³ "In the Yoga of Bhakti it is the emotional nature that is made the instrument. Its main principle is to adopt some human relation between man and the Divine Being by which through the ever intenser flowing of the heart's emotions towards him the human soul may at last be wedded to and grow one with him in a passion of divine Love. It is not ultimately the pure peace of oneness or the power and desireless will of oneness, but the ecstatic joy of union which the devotee seeks by his Yoga."⁵⁴ "But worship is only the first step on the path of devotion. Where external worship changes into the inner adoration, real Bhakti begins; that deepens into the intensity of divine love; that love leads to the joy of closeness in our relations with the Divine; the joy of closeness passes into the bliss of union. Love too as well as knowledge brings us to a highest oneness and it gives to that oneness its greatest possible depth and intensity."⁵⁵ "...this Yoga is catholic in its use of all emotional relations, so that even enmity and opposition to God, considered as an intense, impatient and perverse form of Love, is conceived

52. *Essays on the Gita*, CWSA, Vol. 19, p. 360.

53. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 39.

54. *Ibid.*, Vol. 24, p. 561.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 549.

as a possible means of realisation and salvation.” But, “This path, too, as ordinarily practised, leads away from world-existence to an absorption, of another kind than the Monist’s, in the Transcendent and Supra-cosmic.”⁵⁶

The attitude of the Vaishnava is essentially an entire self-giving to the Lord, an intense offering of all of himself to the Divine. However long it may take, the Bhakta patiently waits to hear the footsteps of Krishna and for the call of his flute. As one popular song goes, “All my life I have been seeking you and still you are not there, but still I seek and cannot cease to seek and love and adore.”⁵⁷ The seeker must be impassioned for the Sought before the veil can move aside and the Face manifest that alone can satisfy the soul after its long sojourn in the desert.

The Bhakti movement was also a revolt against conventions. The princess Mirabai defied all custom as she sang the name of Krishna in the streets of her kingdom unveiled in front of her subjects. Kabir too spoke out against ignorant beliefs in his own way. There is an interesting story in this connection. As most readers would know, dying in Varanasi is considered a sure way of attaining salvation. Dying in the nearby village of Maghar, however, will ensure you are born an ass in the next life. After living his whole life in Varanasi, Kabir chose to die at Maghar on purpose and wrote the following lines before dying:

*Kya kasi kya usar Maghar
Raam hridaye bas mera
Jo kasi tan tyej kabira
Ramie kun teij nihara
Sakal janam harapuri gavaya
Marat baar maghar oodi dhaya.*

What it says essentially is what is this talk about Kasi and Maghar when the Lord Rama is seated in my heart?

However, in spite of the beauty and wideness of its approach, severe shortcomings developed in Vaishnavism. Emotions associated with human love, such as revolt, the pangs of separation, and suffering became a part of certain Vaishnava sects. Moreover, in its attempt to use every human emotion as an approach to the Divine, vitalistic deterioration, corruption and degradation set in. Also, the ultimate aim of the individual was even here a release from life and rebirth. After realisation of the Divine in life, the Vaishnava sought a release into the eternal Brindavan above, the goloka beyond.

Tantra attempted an even bolder synthesis and approach. After the Vedantic stress on Purusha, and Shankara’s demeaning of Prakriti as unconsciousness and ignorance, Tantra placed a greater emphasis on Prakriti as Shakti. It worshipped the higher Prakriti as the divine Mother who holds in herself the Supreme Purusha, and is the sole effective

56. *Ibid.*, Vol. 23, p. 39.

57. *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 787.

force for all attainment. Thus, the world exists not by the power of Maya, but by the power of the Divine Mother who creates and maintains it in the delight of her consciousness. The central term of the Vedanta is Consciousness, pure and simple. Tantra says that consciousness is Energy as well. That Chit is Tapas is the central principle of the Tantra.⁵⁸

The method of the Tantra was very bold indeed, for instead of escaping from manifested Nature and its difficult obstacles to the spiritual life, it seized upon them and compelled them to become the means for a richer spiritual conquest. Not only mukti, liberation, but also cosmic enjoyment, bhukti, was its object.⁵⁹

It embraced the whole of Life in its scope as the Lila of the Divine; along with divine knowledge, divine works and divine Love, it uses also the secrets of the Hatha and Raja yogas, the use of the body and of mental askesis for the opening up of the divine life on all its planes. Moreover it grasps at the idea of the divine perfectibility of man, possessed by the Vedic Rishis but thrown into the background by the intermediate ages.⁶⁰

The following hymn is from a Tantric compilation called *Tantrasāra* and takes us immediately to the core of the Tantric spirit. This is a translation by Arthur Avalon, upon which Sri Aurobindo has commented.

The “opening is the highest philosophy expressed with great poetic force”:

The cause and Mother of the world,
She whose form is that of the Shabdabrahman,
And whose substance is bliss.

Thou art the primordial One,
Mother of countless creatures,
Creatrix of the bodies of the Lotus-born, Vishnu and Shiva,
Who creates, preserves and destroys the worlds....
Although Thou art the primordial cause of the world,
Yet art Thou ever youthful.
Although Thou art the Daughter of the Mountain-King,
Yet art Thou full of tenderness.
Although Thou art the Mother of the Vedas,
Yet they cannot describe Thee.
Although men must meditate upon Thee,
Yet cannot their mind comprehend Thee.

In between we have “a remarkable piece of Yogic imagery”:

58. *The Yoga of Sri Aurobindo*, CWNKG, Vol. 4, p. 182.

59. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 24, pp. 611-12.

60. *Essays on the Gita*, CWSA, Vol. 19, p. 10.

O Mother! like the sleeping King of serpents
 Residing in the centre of the first lotus,
 Thou didst create the universe.
 Thou dost ascend like a streak of lightning,
 And attainest the ethereal region;—

Finally, in the closing stanzas, we have “a sensuous description of the physical goddess”:

O Gauri! with all my heart
 I contemplate Thy form,
 Beautiful of face,
 With its weight of hanging hair,
 With full breasts and rounded slender waist,
 Holding in three hands a rosary, a pitcher and book
 And with thy fourth hand making the jñanamudra,—

This is Sri Aurobindo's comment: “Its opening is full of the supreme meaning of the great Devi symbol, its close is an entire self-abandonment to the adoration of the body of the Mother. This catholicity is typical of the whole Tantric system, which is in its aspiration one of the greatest attempts yet made to embrace the whole of God manifested and unmanifested in the adoration, self-discipline and knowledge of a single human soul.”⁶¹

Its twofold division into the right-hand and left-hand paths, Dakshina Marga and Vama Marga, started from a profound perception. In the ancient symbolic sense of the words, Dakshina and Vama, it was the distinction between the way of Knowledge and the way of Ananda — Nature in man liberating itself by right discrimination; and Nature in man liberating itself by joyous acceptance. However, as is wont to happen, the principles of Tantra were lost in its machinery and became a thing of formulae and occultism. On one hand, occultism and hankering for siddhis and powers characterised Tantrics, and on the other, the Vama-Marga Tantrics, seemed to make a method of self-indulgence and unrestrained social immorality.⁶² Moreover, in spite of its stress on Prakriti, and its life-affirming philosophy, like every other school in India, the Tantra too held that the ultimate liberation was a release into a world beyond, a Shivaloka of perfection elsewhere.

Integral Yoga

Finally we are ready to look at the Integral Yoga. But before doing so let us review

61. *Early Cultural Writings*, CWSA, Vol. 1, pp. 574-75 (for poem and quoted passages).

62. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 42.

quickly all the ground we have covered.

The Vedas and Upanishads were clearly a great beginning of the yogic endeavour and they contain in seed form all the spiritual traditions that come after it. The Upanishads continue the Vedic movement, though in a less symbolic fashion and focussing exclusively on the esoteric aspect; this is followed by a further simplification and broadening of base by the Darshanas, which appeal to the mind, and the Puranas which appeal to the heart and vital being of man. While the Upanishadic line develops prominently the Purusha aspect, the Tantra evolves parallelly in the background with its emphasis on Prakriti as Shakti. Then come the ascetic and otherworldly philosophies of Buddha and Shankara. Post-Shankara sees a gradual decline of India, except for a few spiritual flashes, like the Bhakti and Tantra movements which keep the inner fire burning. However, even they become completely degraded by the 19th century.

All the systems we have studied, without exception, whether they believe in the reality of the world or in its negation, affirm that a transformation of man is impossible. Most say that it is indeed possible to realise the Divine, but even then a division is created in the being. The inner being lives in the peace and joy of the divine realisation, while the outer personality is either sublimated to some extent, or left entirely unchanged. As Vivekananda puts it, "Human nature is a dog's tail that will not bear straightening out." Thus in all cases, the final salvation is an escape or a release beyond, either in the Vedic world of the Sun, in Buddha's Nirvana, in Shankara's Brahmaloaka, in Tantra's Shivaloka, or in Vaishnavism's Goloka.

Now what does Sri Aurobindo say? What is new in his yoga?

As against all we have just seen, Sri Aurobindo affirms that, "Life is the field of a divine manifestation...: here, in life, on earth, in the body,—*ihava*, as the Upanishads insist,—we have to unveil the Godhead; here we must make its transcendent greatness, light and sweetness real to our consciousness, here possess and, as far as may be, express it. Life then we must accept in our Yoga in order utterly to transmute it; we are forbidden to shrink from the difficulties that this acceptance may add to our struggle."⁶³ And again in his words, "I am concerned with the earth, not with worlds beyond for their own sake; it is a terrestrial realisation that I seek and not a flight to distant summits. All other yogas regard this life as an illusion or a passing phase; the supramental yoga alone regards it as a thing created by the Divine for a progressive manifestation and takes the fulfilment of the life and the body for its object."⁶⁴ This is a completely different from the escapist standpoint of the past yogas. Moreover Sri Aurobindo is not content with an individual salvation but seeks a change for the entire cosmic existence.

But what is it that prevented the past yogis from making such a bold statement?

63. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

64. *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 91.

What is the key that Sri Aurobindo has found?

In his quest for transformation, like the Vedic rishis, Sri Aurobindo began to ascend level after level of consciousness beyond the mind—Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuitive Mind, Overmind—and each of these levels he brought down into himself; but the transformation he sought could not be achieved. The spiritual mind-planes could not stand the corruption of human nature and were restricted in their ability to work out a change in human nature. It was then that he went a step further and discovered the Supermind principle. The Supermind is the only power capable of divinising the whole of existence, even down to matter, for it is in its very nature and essence a truth-consciousness free from Ignorance and limitation.

The idea of the Supermind, the Truth-Consciousness, is there in the Rig Veda in principle but it is undeveloped. In the Upanishads too we find mention of it in one or two passages, but only in seed form. In Sri Aurobindo's words, "...the idea of the supermind was already in existence from ancient times. There was in India and elsewhere the attempt to reach it by rising to it; but what was missed was the way to make it integral for the life and to bring it down for transformation of the whole nature, even of the physical nature."⁶⁵ In fact, this notion of descent after an ascent as a conscious process, is a key idea of the Integral Yoga.⁶⁶

As for our aim, we all know the word transformation. But what does it mean? Sri Aurobindo uses the word transformation in a special sense: He means by it a "change of consciousness radical and complete ... which is so conceived as to bring about a strong and assured step forward in the spiritual evolution of the being of a greater and higher kind and of a larger sweep and completeness than what took place when a mentalised being first appeared in a vital and material animal world."⁶⁷

Evolutionary Perspectives

We have now covered enough ground to look at Indian spirituality from various evolutionary perspectives:

1) A key idea in the Supramental yoga is the triple transformation. The triple transformation consists of the psychic, the spiritual and finally the supramental transformation.⁶⁸ Now out of the three stages of transformation, in Sri Aurobindo's words, "The first two have been done in their own way in other yogas; the last is a new endeavour."⁶⁹ Note that the sadhak of the Integral Yoga must fulfil the first two

65. *Ibid.*, p. 161.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

68. For a detailed explanation of the triple transformation, refer to *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 19, Book 2, Chapter 25.

69. *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1513.

transformations before he can commence the Supramental Yoga proper. The characteristic experiences of this yoga begin at a fairly late stage of the sadhak's development. In a sense the Supramental Yoga begins where other yogas end, but at the same time, the Integral Yoga is also, as Sri Aurobindo writes, "the natural but still secret outcome of all the past spiritual endeavour."⁷⁰ To further clarify what I just said, here's a question put to Sri Aurobindo and his reply:

Q: In what way have we all "worked through ages for the victory of the Divine"? How much has been achieved till now?

Sri Aurobindo: By the victory is meant the final emergence of the embodied consciousness on earth from the bondage of the Ignorance. That had to be prepared through the ages by a spiritual evolution. Naturally, the work up till now has been a preparation of which the long spiritual effort and experience of the past has been the outcome. It has reached a point at which the decisive effort has become possible.⁷¹

2) In *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, Sri Aurobindo gives us another perspective of the spiritual evolution in India divided into three broad stages. The Vedic was the first stage which prepared the natural, external, and physical man for spirituality. The Purano-Tantric was the second stage where man was put directly into contact with the divinity within him. The third stage will render man capable of taking up his whole mental, vital, and physical living into a divine living. Obviously, the Integral Yoga is the basis of this third stage.

3) The Hindu list of the ten avatars gives us another interesting perspective. Sri Aurobindo writes that the last three avatars, Krishna, Buddha and Kalki depict the stages of spiritual development upon earth. Krishna follows the normal course of evolution and opens the possibility of the overmind. Buddha and Shankara shoot from the Mind to the Nirvana, to the supreme liberation beyond. Kalki makes the necessary correction by realising the Kingdom of the Divine upon earth, which is what Sri Aurobindo has come to do.⁷²

4) Finally another way of looking at it: After reaching the height of the Vedas, there was a descent in Indian spirituality which attempted to take up each lower degree of man and link it to the spiritual at the summit. Thus the high Vedic age was followed by a great outburst of intellect and philosophy which tried to reach spiritual truth by the mind's speculative and logical thought; at the same time the thinking mind was used as a means of arriving at spiritual realisation, spiritualising this mind itself at the same time.

70. *Ibid.*, Vol. 22, p. 100.

71. *On Himself*, SABCL, Vol. 26, p. 451.

72. *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 402.

Then followed an era of the development of philosophies and yoga processes which used the emotional and aesthetic being as the means of spiritual realisation and spiritualised the emotional level in man through the heart and feeling.

Finally, Hathayoga attempted to arrive at the same achievement with regard to living Matter but could not succeed for it did not find the true basis of physical transformation, namely, the Supramental principle. As Sri Aurobindo writes, “We may say therefore that the universal Consciousness after its descent into Matter has conducted the evolution there along two lines, one of ascent to the discovery of the Self and Spirit, the other of descent through the already evolved levels of mind, life and body so as to bring down the spiritual consciousness into these also and to fulfil thereby some secret intention in the creation of the material universe. Our yoga is in its principle a taking up and summarising and completing of this process, an endeavour to rise to the highest possible supramental level and bring down its consciousness and power into mind, life and body.”⁷³

To conclude, it ought to be clear now why Sri Aurobindo regards “the spiritual history...of India as a constant development of a divine purpose,”⁷⁴ and why at the same time he says that “Our yoga is not a retreading of old walks, but a spiritual adventure.”⁷⁵ For, the yoga he puts forth is such a massive advance over all the past, that nothing comes even close to the scope of its realisation and aim. After all, we are talking about a new race upon earth, beings that will be to man, what the man is to the ape. Thus the Integral Yoga is not just another path, not just another spiritual practice added to the hundreds already existing. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have taken up the past in a giant sweep, achieved an entirely new synthesis, laid down a completely new path in uncharted territory, bridged the eternal chasm between heaven and earth, and made realisable the ancient aspiration to immortality, not merely as a realisation of the soul, but realisable, here, on earth, in matter. This is the grand experiment which we are all part of. This is the magnificent dream, nay, the certainty, which they have given to us as our ideal. This is the adventure we have embarked on, the great “adventure of consciousness and joy.”⁷⁶

(Concluded)

DEVDIP GANGULI
(Knowledge, 3rd Year)

73. *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

76. *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 2.

NOTHING IS LOST

When the roaring waves
 Of a *Khanda-Pralaya**
Crashed through my doors
 And swept me away,
I saw tiny fragments of
 All I had in life, and
Shattered bits of my cottage,
 My entire belongings
Floating merrily, singing and
 Dancing on the frothy
Surface of the turbulent sea.

My desperate screams to rescue
 A fellow man, drowning,
Had no response; nothing
 But the roar of the Giant
Waves, the nerve-chilling wind,
 The grisly sharks and
Monstrous whales, closing in
 Insidiously, and seagulls
Flying low, attempting to
 Prey on a chance-carcass,
Greeted my tearful eyes.

Yet, I saw a fantastic sight;
 The naked baby-God,
Balakrishna, with a mystic smile,
 Playfully floating on a
Charming, large Banyan leaf,
 Holding aloft the pretty flute;
His magnificent head, adorned
 With peacock-plumage,
Outshone the azure-beauty
 Of the saluting Sky-God.
Krishna touched my sinking
 Forehead and vanished.

SURESH DEY

* Mini-deluge.

HISTORY OF THE FUTURE

(Continued from the issue of June 2006)

(Globalism: Towards a Global Consciousness—Holism: Age of Integration and Synthesis)

Globalism: Towards a Global Consciousness

MUCH has been said and written about “Globalisation”—both for and against. We will not enter into the debate on the pros and cons of what is termed “Globalisation”. This term or idea was coined by modern thinkers to denote a contemporary phenomenon created mainly by advances in technology, in the field of transportation, communication, media, the internet and others, and its economic, social and political consequences.

We are, undoubtedly, moving towards a “global” future. So, the idea of “globalism” in different forms is likely to be a dominant theme in the thought and life of future humanity. As we have discussed in our previous article, in the past history of the race, collective consciousness of humanity had progressed from the family and the clan to the nation-unit; in the future it will be called upon to take the next step towards a supra-national aggregate and ultimately to a truly global humanity. But the question is what is the type and nature of globalism we are heading towards in the future? Will it be merely an outer economic or political unity held together by technology and the mutual interests of competing (or cooperating) egos or an inner unity felt concretely in the deepest core of our consciousness? In other words, will it be an outer unity created by a global organisation or an inner unity felt in a global consciousness? To answer this question we have to understand the deeper evolutionary significance of the present urge and drive towards globalisation.

Modern physicists studying the depth of matter and the ancient Indian sages studying the depth of the human psyche and spirit have both discovered that Unity is the fundamental law of life. Modern physics says that all matter, including our material body, is nothing but configurations in the unified field of space-time-energy. Similarly, ancient Indian sages saw with their inner vision that all creation including the so-called “inanimate” matter, is the expression of a unified field of consciousness-energy, *chit-shakti*, or in other words, that a global and transcendent Unity or Oneness of consciousness-energy is the essence of the individual and the universe. Even physical and biological matter is the expression of the energy of consciousness, but here the consciousness is involved and lost in movement of the energy. The terrestrial evolution is the gradual emergence of the involved consciousness to higher and higher levels of self-expression—from the stone, plant, animal and man. But human mental consciousness, centred around and conditioned by the ego is not the summit of terrestrial

evolution. Nature is moving towards the next step in evolution, which is to recover fully and consciously the original source of evolution, the global or unity-consciousness in the individual and the collective life of man and in the planet as a whole. So the evolutionary impetus of Nature in the future will be, predominantly, towards the realisation of an inner unity of the human race in a global consciousness and not merely an outer unity through a global society, government, or organisation.

This brings us to the question, if inner unity of global consciousness is the destiny of human and terrestrial evolution, what then is the significance of the present urge towards outer unity or globalisation? It prepares the outer mind and life of humanity to receive and manifest the inner unity. When humanity as a whole awakens to the inner unity, there will be the right environment, instruments and institutions to manifest and express the inner unity in the outer life.

We can see at present, the outer movement of globalisation created by technology, transportation, communication, the internet, media, and global business, has awakened the collective consciousness of humanity to the “connectedness” and interdependence of human life. The political, economic and cultural barriers between nations and people are no longer as hard and opaque as they were in the past and are becoming thin, porous and transparent. Multinationalism is now a well-established idea and practice in business, science and technology. The ideas and values of the Eastern culture are seeping into the West and openly or subtly influencing the Western mind. Similarly the values of the Western culture, flooding through the media and multinational business are influencing the work-ethics and lifestyles of Eastern youth in both ways, positive and negative. The cultural identities are expanding beyond national boundaries to global dimension. For example, a large section of the Indian diaspora forms a wealthy, highly educated, global cultural group very much attached to the Indian cultural and religious values.

All these developments and many others which are yet to come, will impress on the thought, sentiments and life of humanity a vivid sense of living in a “Global Village”. But this perception, sentiment, or the vital sense of globalism does not constitute a global consciousness.

For, all the new developments which are now called “globalism” (and its inner and outer results), are still egocentric, centred around and driven by the aims and interests of the individual and the collective ego. The ego’s range and the sense of identity might have enlarged to global proportions. This enlargement may bring about a certain amount of psychological modification in the consciousness of humanity. For example, when the ego’s range of identity expands beyond the family and the clan to the nation, it creates a new sentiment or feeling of patriotic nationalism. Similarly when the ego’s range of identity enlarges further to embrace a supra-national or global aggregate, it may create a new sentiment or feeling of a global citizenship. In fact many business executives, professionals, scientists and media-men who work in a multinational or multicultural environment, or travel frequently all over the world,

as well as thinkers, poets and artists who think on a vast scale in terms of humanity or the world, have this sense of a world-citizen in their thought or vital sentiment. But all these enlargements in the outer life, thought and sentiment, though helpful as a preparatory education, are not the global consciousness, precisely because they cannot liberate the human consciousness from the limitations and conditioning of the individual and collective ego. For example, a global multinational organisation may possess a strong and powerful collective ego, which can be very aggressive, exploitative and dominating. Similarly someone who feels himself to be a “global citizen” in his thought and vital sentiment can be very selfish and ambitious in his behaviour, emotions or action.

What then is this global consciousness? It is a consciousness in which there is no ego, individual or collective, small or big, which means, there is no sense of “I” or “mine” distinct and separate from others and the rest of creation. And when there is no ego, it leads to a concrete inner realisation of universal oneness, or unity-consciousness in which we feel others and all creation as part of our own universal Self. We believe that this renunciation and transcendence of the ego will be the major theme of the future evolution of humanity. Transcendence of the ego is one of the basic principles of the discipline in all spiritual teachings. But in the future, this principle of ego-transcendence will become a prominent theme not only in the moral and spiritual development of the individual, but also in the collective, secular life, in economics, society, politics. We will discuss this aspect of the future in greater detail a little later.

Holism: Age of Integration and Synthesis

The impulse and awakening towards the unity-consciousness leads to the awareness of the two dimensions of unity: Horizontal and vertical. The horizontal dimension leads to the consciousness of the universal Oneness of all existence; the vertical dimension leads to the unifying intuition which can create a perfect synthesis and integration of the inner being and outer life of man in a clear and conscious perception of the indivisible wholeness of life, or in other words, “Holism”. We have discussed the first aspect of unity in our previous section. Awakening in this horizontal dimension leads to the Global Consciousness. In this section we will discuss the future possibilities in the second, the vertical dimension of unity. But to foresee the future in this vertical dimension of unity we have to first understand the present condition of our consciousness in this dimension.

The past history and evolution of the human race was governed mainly by the ego in the Mind with Reason as the pilot and the highest faculty of knowledge. But the ego-mind-reason is in its essence a consciousness of division and analysis and not of integration or synthesis. To arrive at a truly creative synthesis we must be able to comprehend the indivisible unity and wholeness of life. But the egocentric mentality

is inherently incapable of comprehending the unity and wholeness of life because it is by its very nature a consciousness of division and analysis. It cannot see and feel the whole but can only see parts, fragments and aspects of the whole and most of the time mistakes the fragment for the whole. So its quest for knowledge begins with the perception of a fragment and proceeds through the analysis of the fragment as if it is the whole. And the result is an attitude to knowledge which creates an irreconcilable contradiction between what actually are complimentary aspects of existence and an outlook on life based on 'either-or' and 'that-or-this' approach. Thus we have the eternal tug of war between unresolved antinomies—capitalism vs socialism, democracy vs aristocracy, religion vs science, reason vs intuition, idealism vs pragmatism, spiritualism vs materialism. And human evolution stumbles on in a Hegelian zigzag from thesis and antithesis to dubious synthesis—dubious because, as we have indicated earlier, the human mind is inherently incapable of a true synthesis. Whatever syntheses the human mind has arrived at are superficial or eclectic compromises, which only shift the problem to a different domain or level, and not a deep synthesis which leads to a lasting solution. Had the human mind possessed the capacity for true synthesis, it would have by now solved most of its problems.

For as Sri Aurobindo points out, all problems are in essence problems of harmony; they are the result of a lack of balance and synthesis between the different aspects of life. The very fact that none of the antinomies of mind and life which we have listed earlier (and there are many more) have been satisfactorily solved shows that reason is inherently incapable of synthesis. It may arrive at some form of synthesis or insight into the whole at the conceptual level in thought or idea, but it doesn't have the practical intuition and the force to actualise this insight or synthesis in life and action.

This inherent defect of the human mind and reason can be more poignantly felt in the inner being of man. In most of us there is always an acute imbalance and disorder between the various parts of our being, our body, mind and heart, and their faculties of thought, sensations, feeling, will and action. The Reason was never able to achieve a perfect or even a satisfactory integration or harmony between the various parts or powers of our being. Each part of our being has its own legitimate needs, values and aspirations. Our body seeks for material survival, sustenance, ease, comfort; the will in the life and the dynamic force in us seeks for power, action, expansion, achievement, realisation, possession and enjoyment; emotions seek for love and for a harmonious relationship; the intellect seeks for knowledge and understanding; there is a deeper and higher part of our mind, which seeks for ideals like truth, beauty, goodness, harmony and unity. Our human Reason, which is the highest faculty available to us in our present stage of evolution, is called upon to integrate and harmonise all these faculties and their aspirations into a coherent whole. Anyone who has made even a little bit of sincere effort towards self-development, and has tried to control or integrate the various parts of his being using reason would have realised how hopelessly

inadequate it is for the task. Our Reason cannot do it because it has neither the light nor the power to harmonise the conflicting pulls of the different parts of our being.

For, our being or life is not entirely rational. Reason is not the highest source or destiny of our being or life; it is only a transitional or intermediate part or faculty of our being. There is a large tract of our being and life below Reason, for example, our subconscious instincts, vital impulses or the heart's emotions which are non-rational. Reason cannot control them because, first, their needs and aspirations are different from Reason, so they don't listen to or agree with Reason; second, they are much more concrete and powerful than Reason and its ideas and abstractions. Similarly there are large tracts of subliminal and superconscious regions behind or above Reason, which it cannot enter, unless it opens its consciousness to this unknown realm in a silent and humble surrender or they force themselves on Reason in the course of natural evolution. These suprarational ranges of our consciousness contain the deeper sources of our being and life and hold the key to the future evolution and destiny of our race and our planet. They contain a range of higher faculties and powers which can do what Reason cannot or is unable to do, and lead our human life to its highest fulfilment, harmony and perfection.

Reason may not be entirely incapable of enforcing some control or mastery over our being. But it is mostly a muted and forced control in which all other faculties are dominated and suppressed by a single rigid idea or ideal of the rational, ethical or aesthetic mind and will. But such a forced control can never lead to a true and lasting mastery over our nature. For, the suppressed faculties can at any moment surge up and destroy the forcefully-held and constructed edifice when the dominating faculty becomes weak or lax in its vigilance. But such a forced control can never lead to true mastery which comes only through harmonious integration of the personality. But the mind's approach and effort lead only to imbalanced human beings like the thinker, the visionary, the idealist, the poet or the artist for example, with no hold on the actual or practical realities of life; the pragmatic man with a narrow vision of life which cannot see beyond its nose; the efficient man who is immoral and the honest man who is inefficient. It should be noted here that whatever we have said regarding Reason applies also to the ethical and aesthetic faculties of the mind. They are also afflicted with the same inherent defect of the divisible mental consciousness. Similarly, when this inner imbalance expresses itself in the outer collective life it creates more or less same type of imbalance in the groups, and civilisations—for example, civilisations which are great in culture but weak in economy or polity and vice versa. This we have already discussed in some detail in our earlier articles.

This is the present condition of our mind. In future we may probably witness the gradual healing of this inherent malady of the mind through the emergence of new and higher faculties beyond Reason or a new mind altogether, which can not only conceive wholeness but also can feel, live, manifest and realise wholeness in our inner being and outer life.

As the human consciousness evolves rapidly into the future, there will be a growing awakening to the horizontal and vertical dimensions of unity. The first result of the awakening will be an acute awareness of the inherent inadequacy of Mind and Reason and the perpetual and insoluble conflicts it engenders in our consciousness and life. In the past evolution of our race, we have lived with these conflicts because they have not become sufficiently painful, acute or urgent for our survival or success in the outer life.

The spiritual minds of humanity, or most of them, had a clear, concrete spiritual insight, vision or experience of the whole and arrived at an intuitive synthesis and integration of the various parts of their being and different aspects of life. The intellectual and aesthetic mind of humanity, in its highest flights, on many occasions arrived at an intellectual or aesthetic insight into the whole and made some form of synthesis in thought and imagination. But the pragmatic mind of humanity was never able to arrive at any practical synthesis and integration of the different aspects and dualities of life in the outer life of the race. This is because the ideal of integration or synthesis has not become a pragmatic necessity for survival or success in the outer life. But in the future, as humanity moves closer towards its destiny, a stage may come when the need for a lasting solution to the conflicts of mind and life becomes a pragmatic necessity for survival and success in the outer life. When this happens it will lead to a sincere and earnest quest for synthesis and integration, not only in the thinking mind but also in the pragmatic mind. To this aspiration Nature will respond by bringing forward higher faculties which can lead to a lasting harmony of the inner being and outer life of man.

We will discuss the nature of these faculties a little later. First we need a little more clarity on the ideal of integration. Individually, it means integration of our physical, vital and mental being and all its faculties of thoughts, feeling, will and action around the deepest and innermost spiritual centre of our being. But this will not be a forced integration achieved through domination and suppression. The Spirit in us does not impose itself; it gently illumines, inspires and persuades each part of our being and its faculties to flower freely according to its unique nature, truth or law, dharma, in complementing harmony with other parts and faculties, and grow towards their highest potentialities. So, a free, harmonious and integral development of all the powers, faculties and potentialities of our being from the lowest physical to the highest spiritual level is the ideal of integration for the individual. For the collectivity, the ideal is the harmonious and integral self-expression of these powers of our being in the outer economic, social, political and cultural life leading to a perfect integration of the inner being and the outer life. When humanity awakens to this ideal and it begins to realise itself in the individual and the collective life of man, then all imbalances and conflicts which mar the present human life, governed by the divisive consciousness of mind, will be gradually healed and a great harmony will begin to reign over human life.

The imbalances of the truncated mind will be healed. Since all the faculties of the integrated human being will express themselves harmoniously through every human activity, there won't be any conflict or imbalances for example between ethics and efficiency or idealism and pragmatism. As a result, the pragmatic activities and institutions like business, politics or technology will be awakened to the ethical, aesthetic and spiritual dimension. Similarly idealistic activities and institutions which deal with the pure idea or the ethical, aesthetic or spiritual values will be awakened to the pragmatic dimension; they will seek and find methods to manifest and materialise their ideas and values in the outer economic, social and political life of man. The pragmatic mind of man will become more and more sensitive to the higher ethical, aesthetic and spiritual values and aims. The intellectual, ethical, aesthetic and spiritual mind will become more and more sensitive to the pragmatic realities of life. There will develop in the consciousness of the race a spiritual pragmatism and a higher integral intuition which can reconcile the higher aims, ideals and values of the ethical, aesthetic and spiritual mind with the pragmatic realities of the material, economic, social and political life. A higher intuition will develop in the race and reconcile all the conflicting "isms" of the mind in a transcending synthesis, not merely in thought, but in life and action. This will be the future ideal of integration which the Mother articulates succinctly:

"To be integral is to make a harmonious synthesis of all one's possibilities."¹

This brings us to the content of integration. What are the unmanifest possibilities in man which will manifest in the future? To answer this question we have to understand the nature of the higher ranges of our consciousness beyond the present condition of our mind.

(To be continued)

M. S. SRINIVASAN

Notes and References

A. According to Sri Aurobindo, the subliminal has luminous heights as well as lower abysses. At its highest levels it soars into the spiritual but at its lower depths it sinks into the subconscious darkness with dangerous and powerful dark forces. So when the subliminal awakens in man, it may throw up both of these possibilities.

B. According to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, our human mind in its present condition and limitations is not the true or higher nature of the mind. When the mind is transformed, it will shed its present limitation and a true Mind will emerge. This true mind will do the function for which it is created by the Divine. This function is to organise knowledge for clarity of thinking or communication or action. This may include all the activities which the present human mind does, like analysis, reasoning etc. But the true mind, since it is in direct and conscious contact or union with its spiritual source, will do its function with an intuitive and experiential understanding of the wholeness of life.

1. The Mother's conversation of July 14, 1965.

DEVOTIONAL POETRY IN TAMIL

(Continued from the issue of June 2006)

6. Father and Daughter

THE spiritual revolution that was begun by the Alvars had many facets. If the first three Alvars, Poygai, Bhutam and Pey, saw the Supreme as clearly as one sees a jewel placed on one's palm, Perialwar (circa 8th century) saw the Lord as a little babe growing up in every household. Thus the Supreme not only became a close presence but became an integral part of one's everyday experience. How can there be a demarcating line between the deity and the devotee when Baby Krishna is carried on the hips by Yashoda and placed in the cradle and rocked to sleep? It is obvious that generations of devotional singers have mesmerised us into the presence of the Lord by songs like Surdas's "*Jasoda Hari, palne jhulave*", thanks to the original inspiration that came from Perialwar's songs on Krishna's childhood, boyhood and youth.

Born Vishnuchitta at Srivilliputtur¹ to Mukundacharya and Padmavati, Perialwar was a pious Brahmin who loved growing a variety of flowers in his garden which he tended with maternal love. He enjoyed gathering fresh blossoms at dawn and stringing garlands for decorating the presiding deity of the place, Vatapatrashayi. Considered as an incarnation of the Lord's mount Garuda, Perialwar lived in the rainbow iridescence of Mother Nature, full of meditative love for the Lord. The *Vishnu Purana* which speaks of Krishna's birth and childhood was his favourite scripture. And so it came to pass that this little Krishna growing up in Gokula first mentioned in the Purana became a living experience for the devotee. His verses known as *Perialwar Tirumoli* inaugurated a new genre in Tamil literature called "Pillai-t-Tamil" (Childhood in Tamil).

Traditional accounts refer to Perialwar being called upon to take part in a religious contest in the court of the Pandyan King Vallabhadeva at Madurai. The *Guru Parampara Prabhavam* says that the Lord Vatapatrashayi appeared to Vishnuchitta in a dream and commanded him to proceed to Madurai and get the prize money. "But the prize money is for a Vedic scholar", exclaimed the humble devotee. The Lord assured Perialwar that His grace would accompany the garland-maker to the court. With utter humility Vishnuchitta proceeded to Madurai. We are not given details of the contest except that Perialwar won the day. The king was overjoyed and caused the victor to be seated on an elephant and taken in a procession around Madurai's streets. Even as Perialwar remained self-lost in the vast spaces of God's love for him, he had a vision of Narayana and Lakshmi riding the mount Garuda. Immediately Perialwar took up the bells hanging on the sides of the elephant, and using them to keep his

1. Srivilliputtur is one of the 108 temples sung of by the Alvars. The tower of Andal's temple in Srivilliputtur has been adopted as the emblem of the Tamil Nadu government.

beat, sang the decad “*Pallandu, pallandu*” which now forms the opening poem of the *Nalayira Divya Prabhandham*. In this poem, the devotee blesses the Lord with eternal life!

Hail your presence along with Lakshmi
Who has been residing in your breast
For years countless; and we too
Be never divorced from you; so be
The brilliant discus on your right
And the Panchajanya conch
That sounds thunderous in battles.²

In the course of twelve verses, the “*Pallandu*” projects the central ideal of Srivaishnavism which lies in becoming a perfect servant of the Lord.

Give up the race for material riches
Those who are the race of servitors!
Come to salute Lord Hrishiksha
Who pulled out by roots the dread race
Of sub-humans and dire demons.
Sing His thousand names.
He is the Lord of Immortals.
Recite the words to hail him for all time.

As he had thus blessed the Lord in ecstatic terms, Vishnuchitta came to be called Perialwar (the elderly Alwar) from then onwards. He returned to Srivilliputtur and led a peaceful and long life, offering flower garlands daily to Vatapatrashayi. His verses totaling 473 in number have been a concourse of endless delight in all these centuries.

Just as the “*Pallandu*” verses dared to “bless” the Supreme, Perialwar’s verses on Krishna as a growing child in Gokula revolutionise the aspirant’s approach to God. Perialwar begins with the birth of Krishna. People come streaming to Nandagopa’s palace on hearing that their chief has been blessed with a male progeny. The divine baby is placed in a golden cradle encrusted with gems of various hues, while deities come bearing gifts. Shiva offers a beautiful waistband, Indra sends anklets, Varuna, rows of pearls, Shakti sends scented powders for bath. Even Lakshmi sends beautiful garlands of fresh flowers. Such is the world of bhakti that we suspend logic, disbelief and time to enter it and lave in sheer Ananda consciousness. Here the Ananda takes the form of enjoying the sight of a newborn baby, which again is an indication of a firm affirmation of life. Once you enter this world, you leave behind all cares and

2. All translations from the poetry of the Alvars are by Prema Nandakumar, unless otherwise stated.

sorrows and fears of the mortal world!

The baby Krishna grows, and Yashoda invites the full moon to come and play with this lovely child. The baby, ornamented with chains and rings and ear-studs and waistbands is bounced to the tune of “*senkeerai*”:

Blue-lily complexioned! Image of a dark cloud!
 You love to dance on the hood of Kaliya
 In the forest lake, my lovely child!
 You had pulled out the tusks of the evil
 Elephant! Your feet had in a trice destroyed
 The wrestlers strong who had come
 To oppose you! O cowherd, do bounce for me once
 O Bull among the cowherds! Bounce to *senkeerai*.

Presently we see Krishna crawling all over the house like a little elephant. He is bathed by Yashoda who combs his hair, feeds him, decorates him with flowers. Unwillingly she sends him to the forest to graze cows and awaits his return anxiously in the evenings. As soon as he comes, caked with dust and looking darker than ever, he makes a dash for the milkpot and starts drinking from it. Yashoda pleads with him to go and change first and allow her to dress him up:

You go to graze cows
 Not knowing that you are medicine
 To us; wandering all over the forest,
 Your dark body wilting,
 You now drink the milk from the pot
 In a hurry, as others laugh at you.
 My Lord who is sweeter than honey!
 Let me decorate you with champak flowers.

But then, Krishna is Krishna. He drinks up the milk and curds stored in other houses, refuses to have his ears pierced, and is loved by all the cowherdesses though they cannot stop complaining about him either:

He devours the butter and dashes the empty pot
 Against the rock to enjoy the sounds.
 All that Krishna has done to wreak havoc here
 We cannot list, nor can we guard ourselves.
 You will not stop him either. His irritations increase
 Like pouring sour tamarind on a festering wound.
 Yashoda who hast given birth to this darling child!
 Please do call your son to your side.

The child grows up into a charming boy and the cowherdesses love to dance with him and listen to his music. He plays pranks with them and we have the episode where the cowherdesses beg him to return their garments. Not unoften Krishna's pranks are superhuman feats, as when he guards the cowherds from a variety of ills. One such is the Govardhan episode which Perialwar took from the *Vishnu Purana*. The lifting up of the Govardhan hill by Krishna to guard the cowherd clan from the furious rains sent by Indra has been a favourite and living image in Indian culture, but Perialwar is probably the first to give it to us in lilting Tamil verses of great beauty:

The Govardhan is a royal umbrella.
 It has for its spokes the five fingers
 Of Krishna's hand that is a red lotus;
 His broad shoulder is the stem.
 Water streams pour around as pearl strings.
 The hill itself is the protecting cloth.
 Such is the image of the holy Govardhan
 Seen upside down in the Lord's hand.

These verses on Krishna conclude with some of the finest pictures of Krishna playing the flute in the forest. We hear the notes of Krishna's flute in the *Vishnu Purana* for the first time. Perialwar adds embellishments and each of the ten verses on this aspect is like the projection of a colour slide. In the Brindavan groves the cowherds and cowherdesses gather to listen and even the denizens of the sky descend to stand like statues that have wet eyes. When the destroyer of Dhenuka, Pilamba, Kaliya and other demoniac forces now wanders in the groves playing the flute, Menaka, Tilottama and Rambha remain arrested in their dance movements, self-lost in the strains of the flute. It is the same Lord who had taken a terrifying form as Narasimha to kill Hiranyakashipu and who is now the very image of calm, quiet and beauty playing the flute. Perialwar goes on to describe such wonderful scenes that he had 'seen' (*puyiyul nān kandathōr arputham kelīr*); even the birds and animals were held fast in the nectarean net of music (*amuda gīta valai*):

As the tiny fingers stroked the flute,
 The red face grew intent on the stops
 And the eyelashes held drops of sweat.
 Varieties of birds flew out of their perches
 And lay around Govinda like dried up plants.
 The cattle spread out their legs,
 Bent their heads and stood still, ears unmoving.

Down the centuries, the Lord's flute-play imaged by Perialwar has been a

powerful icon to draw the devotees to the Divine Personality in the Bhakti Movement. Though primarily a Krishna-bhakta, Perialwar was also attracted to other incarnations. There is a deeply moving decad in which Hanuman speaks to Sita in the Ashoka grove. He conveys the message of Rama so that Sita can identify him as Rama's genuine ambassador. Rama had broken the bow of Shiva in Janaka's court to wed Sita; he had put an end to Parashurama's reign by stringing the latter's bow; Sita had bound Rama by a garland of jasmine when they were alone and she had won a contest;³ Rama had accepted without a moment's uneasiness Kaikeyi's command that he should proceed to the forest; Rama had made friends with the boatman Guha; Bharata had come to Rama in Chitrakoota; Rama had pierced one eye of the crow when the bird had pecked at Sita's breast; Rama and Sita had been separated due to a golden deer; these were the indications given by Rama when Sugriva had asked him. Thus the entire epic story is crystallised into these few verses in honeyed Tamil by Perialwar who then projects the moving moment of recognition for Sita:

She saw the signet ring sent
 By the Lord whose fame reverberated
 In all directions, when he broke
 The great bow mid the huge court;
 As she saw it, she said, "Hanuman,
 The identification is right", held it
 On her crown and grew very happy.
 Sita, her tresses adorned with flowers.

This decad is a masterly example of how the bhakti poets brought together the received tradition, made it dramatic for the common man by its emotional appeal through a sweet, simple poesy that everyone could understand and effortlessly enter into Ananda consciousness. Perialwar's verses on the impermanence of the physical frame of man and the need for meditating upon the Lord all the time give a rare assurance of mental well-being because of their spiritual content as well as their exquisite imagery, and their very positive outlook. Here is Perialwar's address to the diseases that keep attacking us, verses that can be used in psychological counseling of sick patients with great profit even today:

Tough, long-standing evil-doers!
 I have placed within my heart
 The wondrous Lord who incarnated
 As the little Dwarf of yore.
 Remember, this my body is now

3. This incident is not found in the *Ramayana* of Valmiki. Probably it was a familiar episode in regional versions.

A treasure-chest. Tarry not! Go away!
 The old days are gone for ever.
 The divine grace guards me now.

One of the most enduring and meaningful legends of the Bhakti Movement is the relationship between Perialwar and Andal, who also is one of the Alwars. Apart from giving importance to the feminine voice in the realm of the yoga of divine love, the legend brushes aside all those differences based on caste, creed, status and gender that had been dividing the society in the ages since the Upanishadic times. Andal, the first woman to be identified as a bhakti poet of the Vaishnava stream is also the only poetess who has been elevated to the state of a goddess. The temples to Vishnu belonging to the Ramanuja Sampradaya whether located in Srirangam, Kanchipuram, Tirupati or Pomona in the United States, have the installed icon of Andal as Vishnu's consort.

Andal (also known as Goda Devi) was found in a Tulsi bush by Perialwar. One day he was digging near the bush when his spade (*khanitra*) touched the body of a lovely child. This happened in the year Nala, in the month of Ashada, on the day of the Pooram asterix which was a *chaturdashi*. It is significant that Sita also was discovered by King Janaka when he was ploughing a field, and the bhakti world has identified Andal as a reincarnation of Sita who was herself known as Bhumija (the Earth-born) and hence an image of the Earth Goddess, Bhu Devi. The *Divya Suri Charitram* says that "Vishnuchitta foresaw that this child would speak in praise of the Lord; so he named her Goda in an auspicious moment." The word signifies "one who helps one's speech." M. Raghava Iyengar who has conducted deep research in the hymns of Andal has remarked that she must have lived in the early 8th century.

When she became a dazzlingly beautiful young maiden, Andal rejected any suggestion of entering the married state. To the pleadings of elders she said firmly: "If you say that I should marry a mortal being, I shall not live." Tradition avers that when she came to Srirangam, she became totally indrawn in love's ecstasy when she came face to face with the image of Lord Ranganatha and merged in Him. One of the decads of Perialwar seems to allude to this circumstance. Written in the form of a mother's lament that her daughter has chosen to follow the Lord to His residence, the verses refer to the house of Perialwar as having grown empty like "a lotus pond that has lost all petals due to an excessive shower of dew". The Lord has done mischief by taking away the innocent girl and would the mother-in-law bid a pleasant welcome to this darling maiden of hers?

I had but one daughter; I brought her up as Lakshmi,
 Famed all over the world. The Lord with lotus-eyes
 Has taken her away. Yashoda belongs to a superior tribe
 And is the proud mother of a great son.

Would she be pleased with this daughter-in-law
And welcome her and decorate her?

Andal's verses numbering 173 in the *Nalayira Divya Prabandham* are full of autobiographical intimations, and each decad concludes with a reference to Vishnuchitta. Some also refer to the author as Kothai, daughter of Vishnuchitta of Srivilliputtur. The 143 verses in her *Nachiar Tirumoli* have many charming revelations. Even when building sand castles using tiny winnows and little pots, Andal thought of the Lord:

Noble lion who smashed the pride
Of the elephant! One who sleeps
On the ocean with clear waves!
Don't you frighten us with your eyes,
We who loved you at first sight!
We have sieved thin sand granules
And built these castles with care.
Don't you break them down!

It is obvious that Andal grew in beauty, intelligence and affection, and all was subsumed in an utter devotion to the Divine which opened her eyes to the spiritual worlds beyond.

A world translated was her gleaming mind,
And marvel-mooned bright crowding fantasies
Fed with spiritual sustenance of dreams
The ideal goddess in her house of gold.
Aware of forms to which our eyes are closed,
Conscious of nearnesses we cannot feel,
The Power within her shaped her moulding sense
In deeper figures than our surface types.
An invisible sunlight ran within her veins
And flooded her brain with heavenly brilliances
That woke a wider sight than earth could know.
Outlined in the sincerity of that ray
Her springing childlike thoughts were richly turned
Into luminous patterns of her soul's deep truth...⁴

A *triveni sangam* of poetic excellence, aesthetic joy and devotional ecstasy, the *Nachiar Tirumoli* traverses the mystic's path of aspiration, anxiety, dark night of the

4. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, Book IV, canto 1.

soul and the rapture of gaining the vision of the Divine in colourful diction. One of the verses describes her long vigil—spelt out in terms of despair and hope:

In Tirumaliruncholai groves, mid Konrai blooms
That droop as golden strings from trees
I am also lying down, in a swoon;
When will I be able to hear the sounds of the conch
Blown by his lovely lips
And the twang of his Sarnga bow?

Her vision of the Divine is brought to us as a ‘dream’ where each phase of her wedding with the Lord is embroidered with rich imagery in the course of eleven verses. This verse cluster is sung at the time of Vaishnava weddings even today and charmed Sri Aurobindo to give a summarised version:

There were beatings of the drum and blowings of the conch; and under the canopy hung heavily with strings of pearls He came, my lover and my Lord, the vanquisher of the demon Madhu and grasped me by the hand. I dreamed a dream, O friend!

Those whose voices are blest, they sang the Vedic songs. The holy grass was laid. The sun was established. And He who was puissant like a war-elephant in its rage, He seized my hand and we paced round the Flame.

Nachiyar Tirumoli concludes with a scene that has sustained us to this day. Andal comes face to face with the Flute-Player of Brindavan which marks the end of the mystic journey:

Did any one of you see my Lord coming this way,
The same who is all tricks galore,
One who is ever full of a million lies?
We saw him in the grove of Brindavan,
Coming under the veil of the wings
Of Vinata’s son, Garuda,
Shading him from the heat of the sun.

Her lifetime’s sadhana for a yogic union with the Supreme has been crystallised into guidelines for aspirants in the thirty verses of *Tiruppavai*. In this wake-up call the cowherdresses rouse one another. It is beautiful Margashirsha month when Mother Nature is cool and sattwik and the everyday scenarios have an enchantment that seems to touch them with the gold-dust of Krishna experience. And the camaraderie of it all!

Devil of a girl, don't you hear the keech-keech noise
 Of the Anaichathan birds everywhere?
 Or the clanging of the kasu and pirappu necklaces
 Along with the sounds of the churner
 In the milk-pots of the gopis,
 Famed for their fragrant tresses?
 You are a leader! Still lying immobile
 Even after hearing us sing of Kesava and Narayana!
 Effulgent lady! Please open the door.⁵

While calling upon those who take up the rite to avoid wastefulness and evil thoughts, the girls say that a rare compassion should fill our hearts towards all creation. Once all the girls have woken up, they go to Krishna and ask for the materials (*parai*) for performing rituals which include lamps and conches. What is this '*parai*' referred to often in the poem? A drum? A winnow in which auspicious things are kept? Like the Holy Grail of the Arthurian legends, the '*parai*' defies our analytical mind and has remained a teasing code from our devotional past. The Manipravala commentators assure us that '*parai*' is Andal's symbol for servitude (*kainkarya*) which is the desire of every sincere Vaishnava. The 29th verse makes this clear:

This is the significance of our waking early,
 Coming to you and worshipping your lotus-feet;
 Born in the cowherd clan,
 You must accept our humble services.
 Not for immediate boons have we come,
 O Govinda! For seven generations seven,
 We will be devoted to you and serve you alone.
 Cancel all other desires in us.

As the month of Margashirsha (December-January) reverberates with early morning recitations and special offerings in temples, serial lectures by eminent scholars and soul-enthraling dance and music performances on the stage, *Tiruppavai* retains its mystery when one tries to explain the verses. For each verse is a solid mandala by itself while it remains an inalienable part of the whole. Like Indra's necklace of pearls, each pearl reflecting all the rest, in *Tiruppavai* each verse relates to all the other twenty-nine *paasurams*. One or many, it is nothing but Ananda, the sheer Delight of Existence with Krishna as the centre of this Rasamandala.

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

5. Translations from the *Tiruppavai* are by R. Bangaruswami.

THE DREAM OF A CHILD

The stars twinkle in the distant sky
As flowers bloom on trees and plants,
So also the mother's face brightens
To see her smiling child!

Amidst such joy I shall not keep closed
The doors of my developing heart,
I shall sing, dance, and exult
At the advent of the crimson dawn.

I shall bathe in liquid gold
And put on an argent robe;
My seat will be lotus petals
My bed the carpet of green grass!

During my sleep at midnight
The mother will descend in my dream
And whisper into my ears
Her secret wisdom, soft and sweet!

At dead of night she will call me aloud,
"How long will you sleep, my child?
The East is aglow, birds chirp in trees
To invoke a marvellous day!

"The minstrel moves from door to door
Singing the awakening songs
And the temple throngs with devotees
With incense and flowers in hands.

"Please, awake, my little one,
I shall kindle you with mystic flame
And adorn your dreamy eyes
With the blue of the boundless sky.

"The sound of the auspicious conch
Will greet you at the eternal Altar
And the peacock perform the Victory Dance
With an unprecedented clarion's rhythm!

“By then the Sun-God will appear
 On the bright brow of Dawn
 To build a bridge of celestial Light
 Between the Earth and the Heavens.”

CHUNILAL CHOWDHURY

No, certainly I did not mean that the Vedantin who sees a greater working behind the appearances of the world is living in a different world from this material one— if I had meant that, all that I had written would be without point or sense. I meant a Vedantin who lives in this world with all its suffering and ignorance and ugliness and evil and has had a full measure of these things, betrayal and abandonment by friends, failure of outward objects and desires in life, attack and persecution, accumulated illnesses, constant difficulty, struggles, stumblings in his yoga. It is not that he lives in a different world, but he has a different way of meeting its ordeals, blows and dangers. He takes them as the nature of this world and the result of the ego-consciousness in which it lives. He tries therefore to grow into another consciousness in which he feels what is behind the outward appearance, and as he grows into that larger consciousness he begins to feel more and more a working behind which is helping him to grow in the spirit and leading him toward mastery and freedom from ego and ignorance and he sees that all has been used for that purpose. Till he reaches this consciousness with its larger knowledge of things, he has to walk by faith and his faith may sometimes fail him, but it returns and carries him through all the difficulties. Everybody is not bound to accept this faith and this consciousness, but there is something great and true behind it for the spiritual life.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, Vol. 22, SABCL, p. 120)

NEW FIELDS OF EXPERIENCE...

new ways *'to be'*

OUR embodied existence in the universe moves into unknown vistas of the future. A future that is shaping the present... in ways so powerfully visible that it would be difficult not to see them!

Our consciousness changes in qualities of perceiving, of feeling, of willing, of acting that were unknown to us only a decade earlier—or, even less! Our very bodies turn into a 'substance' of other hues—less dense and of a porous transparency. The 'form' grows beyond its limitations. And another way *to be*—to live and function in the world, with its structures, is being worked upon.

To seize this 'other' way, to make it more and more palpable in our lives seems to be our sole attraction.

All the 'knowings' of the past pale in comparison. A 'being' emerges... borne on the crest of a new wave... that rises from the oceans of the Infinite. Parameters of convention cease—psychologically speaking. There is no known 'psychology' to determine what is happening. It is a veritable adventure into the 'unknown'. An 'unknown' of 'being' itself...

What then are the 'tools' at our disposal? Are there any tools? Or, is there only the action... of a movement forward... into a future of hitherto unknown possibilities?

The seeds, possibly, of a new creation? The creation of a new man—who learns to live in another world? Or, who learns to live in the world in 'another' way!

To be, to live, to explore this 'other' way becomes the one pursuit of all our seekings.

February 2, 2006

ASTER

PANCHASSEE-MOUNTAIN

(Continued from the issue of June 2006)

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

(7) “the solar waters” ... Panchassee Lake

For even if the rivers... flow out of one heart-pleasing lake...

*... “I hold for you in the waters... the thought that wins possession of heaven
...by this thought may we pass through beyond the evil”...*

Sri Aurobindo, The Secret of the Veda

WE approach the lake from perhaps a hundred metres higher on Panchassee peak #5, and we again descend steeply, going down by near-vertical rock steps. At first only a small section of Her water is visible through the trees, but soon a circular form and grassland colouring comes to view as if set as a gemstone in a forest finger-ring.

Sometimes we find things in Nature to be so perfect, that the skeptic-mind wonders if our perception is an illusion. Much like the words of a Himalayan village song that describes how they sit on these peaks and look down at their beloved villages and know that even while they may live in an illusory perception of the world, the maya experienced has also a spiritual basis.

As we descend further, the trees thin more and more and expose the little stone pathway around Her lake circumference. It is an exquisite sight! These are Her waters-of-being held in the lap of the Panchassee mountain-top jungle.

At the bottom of the staircase I just stand and stare: the western edge of Annapurna is visible above the trees. I have been here before, I know the feeling of the lake in a personal way. I sit to rest, for now it is about 2 hours since we left the village lodge, and I question myself about this knowing of Her: what sort of memory might this be? There is something about this place of Nature that perhaps I have worshipped in past lifetimes, for in this lifetime there appears to be nothing scientific that could have prepared me for this experience.

A few metres further across the grassland edge and down to the water, the path divides. Local devotees sprinkle a few drops of lake water onto their heads and light incense at the water's edge. The walkway that encircles this tiny body of water ends at a miniature stone-temple on a tiny peninsula. Everything feels clear and clean and round and soft and alive.

Just behind, on the left, is a stone-roofed dwelling to serve as an overnight shelter for devotees. The grass is green and fills the approach to this heart-pleasing sight.

What is it about this scene that affects my psychological normality? Can something in my physical or other consciousness be here connected to nature and in particular to Her tinted lake-depths. The psychological parallel to the sense of sight has here a parallel in the feelings. Are these feelings connected to the reaching upwards for the sunlight by these plants and trees?

This Lake-mother, perhaps originally the tiniest of volcanoes, attracts devotees with a feeling of fire (of strength and force in divine Mother terminology). Maybe, it is the depth of water, the colour of clothes that seems alive in the atmosphere: when have I visited this lake before?

... as the ocean of the heart, ... out of which rise the waters of the clarity, ... they flow, ..., becoming progressively purified by the mind and the inner heart,...

Sri Aurobindo, The Secret of the Veda

Trying to absorb more of the atmosphere I lie on the warm grass and close the eyes, and experience the combination of two hours of deep breathing and this divine environment. The sense-warmth of the grass seems to merge with a warmth of the feelings and a beauty the mind images. Perhaps all of this influences the inner perceptions as the breath slowly begins to relax.

The breath however is still pounding away, relatively speaking, as I begin to look for more clues as to what exactly is the attraction and memory of this place. The lake experience is such that perhaps I abstractedly follow the breath pattern to where it meets in the centre of the chest,...but now I cannot remember the sequence of events.

...we must make use of them [sensations] with wisdom and discernment. Sensations are an excellent instrument of knowledge and education...

The Mother

Perhaps as a knowledge through sense, plus a nervous layer of experience (the sense of warmth on the grass and feelings of warmth in the heart), combine to produce something like contented moments in Nature. I then feel to be inside and outside at the same time: in “the lap of the Mother”.

The associations of this warmth become many. I settle further into the grass, it seems, into a depth linked to the psychological perspective associated through the feelings to a witness; somehow I sink below the breathing pattern, and find myself watching from the heart-centre.

After 10 minutes I roll over and lean on an elbow looking at this volcanic lake lost in the midst of a towering Himalayan aspiration. The lake appears like a blurred lapis in green malachite: the variety of surrounding deep tints paint the glistening waters in a colour-churned beauty. And for me these deeper colours seem related to

the experience of the Mother-nature aspect of strength and force. The Mother of strength and force has also the other Mother aspects and attributes as well. Perhaps it is a complexity beyond my capacity for intellectual integration that leaves some of this experience unexplained.

The mind occupies itself with images of this physical beauty, the vital with feelings of a psychological warmth; the physical is content with the physical warmth that is sensed while lying on the grass. But there is still something beyond all of this, something larger and deeper, but also integrated into this level of Nature experience: at the physical level also but with a layer of a deeper, maybe even a spiritual influence.

One sees in other Himalayan volcanic lakes that are quite round, a holiness of the form itself, the roundness, so to speak, seems also to possess a feminine quality. In the noontime sunlight the Panchassee lake inspires something that provides this relationship with an emotional (?) attraction. As a Vedic symbol, perhaps this lake breaks this divine Female's forest covering with a liquid door to mystic depths.

Then I move, first to readjust everything for a walk around the lake. Incense is lit and each one begins the circumambulation with a handful of sticks wafting perfumed smoke to the Lady of the Lake. At this moment my feelings assume control of a seeking for closeness, but they are very simple feelings, even childlike. Completing the circle must have occult knowledge contained within. I walk. I explain to myself that the influence of this beauty and warmth and physical exertion combines as a knowledge that expresses itself also in sense experience.

In the mystic vision of a Vedic spiritual-nature, we are brought very much more totally into the physical surroundings through devotion. I suppose that this devotion is somehow related to the warmth in sunlight, and in the warmth on the grass. Perhaps absorbing the feelings of upward-stretching trees reaching for sunlight, the devotion absorbed my habitually abstracted mind, as if fading it far into the background. The thoughts continue, but without their habitual volume, without causing the usual disturbance.

The first footfalls on the lake-path are filled with surprise as my steps bounce. On the undulating trail it is a simple happiness at being in Her company again. Separation and a re-uniting with the beloved is a part of the devotee tradition everywhere on the Indian subcontinent. And the steps around this lake-mother seem to take me into that heart symbolism. Perhaps the closeness to a seemingly perfect nature-beauty, something I can also touch and sit in the sun with, brings along primal memories: sitting in the sunlight for the experience of that divine Fire, perhaps.

The incense smoke wafts across the deep colours of the lake as my hand waves the sticks in a walking movement. The ancient stone-roofed shrine at the end of this pathway projects itself into the lake waters. I feel somehow more primitive than normal because the mind is far in the background. As I look across the lake water at the shrine, this image frames an example of aesthetic harmony, a sense of perfection, perhaps in the aspiration of those who built it. The pointed stone roof is also something

of an architectural masterpiece: I rest my eyes on the harmonious composition this view creates. How does all of this get integrated into the larger picture of the Himalayan-mother of strength and force?

Perhaps Panchassee has in Her tradition the divine Mother of Strength and Force simply because this is a requirement to get here. In spite of the local blood sacrifices to this Mother-aspect, the trance states of local priests, and the fear in the eyes of the lodge-family, I still feel I can approach Her: glimmering in the lake water She even seems to smile.

Each step along the final stretch of this rock-laid path around the lake is full of simple feelings, the ones that have a happiness as their basis. I stroll under a tree-lined canopy beside the water, getting closer to the tiny temple jutting into the lake with a low rock wall around it. I spot a place to sit on the wall where the sun is brightest, and head in that direction. Everything seems childlike, so to speak, and beautiful.

(To be continued)

GARY

Veda, then, is the creation of an age anterior to our intellectual philosophies. In that original epoch thought proceeded by other methods than those of our logical reasoning and speech accepted modes of expression which in our modern habits would be inadmissible. The wisest then depended on inner experience and the suggestions of the intuitive mind for all knowledge that ranged beyond mankind's ordinary perceptions and daily activities. Their aim was illumination, not logical conviction, their ideal the inspired seer, not the accurate reasoner. Indian tradition has faithfully preserved this account of the origin of the Vedas. The Rishi was not the individual composer of the hymn, but the seer (draṣṭā) of an eternal truth and an impersonal knowledge. The language of Veda itself is śruti, a rhythm not composed by the intellect but heard, a divine Word that came vibrating out of the Infinite to the inner audience of the man who had previously made himself fit for the impersonal knowledge. The words themselves, dṛṣṭi and śruti, sight and hearing, are Vedic expressions; these and cognate words signify, in the esoteric terminology of the hymns, revelatory knowledge and the contents of inspiration.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Secret of the Veda, Vol. 15, CWSA, p. 10)

NAVANIT STORIES

KING FOR A DAY

HUMAN life: to the traditionalist, the priceless good fortune attained after traversing eighty-four lakh earthly births; to the modern, the highest life form achieved through a slow struggling evolution on earth! The field of Sadhana, the gateway to Mukti, the starting point of Siddhis, the first auspicious rung of the ladder taking the tormented to the Ananda-planes, the Cosmic Ocean which, churned relentlessly by Suras and Asuras, transforms the human-animal into a god after bestowing countless divine treasures—above all, the Source of Immortality! Difficult even for the gods to obtain, human birth is their only pathway to the highest plane of Being. Even the Divine takes it up to assist earth-evolution. Then shall it be thrown to the winds? Shall this brief enthronement be spent in petty desires and shameful weaknesses?

An intimate friendship had grown among Prithwiraj, Praveen and Bholaram on account of their close association in school and at its gatherings, in the play fields and during excursions. But education over, family circumstances and responsibilities separated them. Prithwiraj ascended his father's throne, Praveen took up his father's flourishing trade, and Bholaram, the priest's son, survived on the pittance he received for performing religious ceremonies and the occasional gifts of the pious.

One day Praveen and Bholaram found themselves together. "Praveen," wailed Bholaram, "now that Prithwiraj is king, he has no time for us!"

"How can he, my friend? He may not even remember us! Such is the intoxication of power and wealth; such people are no longer in their right minds."

"No, no, his love for us was genuine. I can't believe things are as bad as you say. His heart was true and strong."

"Whatever the truth, appearances support my surmise."

"Come, let us go and meet him."

"Don't be silly. The guards will drive us away from the gates, mocking at our claims of friendship with the king."

"Then think of some other way, but we must meet him."

"All right, here is an idea. Tomorrow the king is as usual going to tour the city on his elephant. We shall block his path and hope for the best."

The next day they did as they had planned. When he saw that some people were blocking his path, Prithwiraj descended and found his friends lying on the road.

"Oh, it is Bholaram and Praveen! How happy I am to see you," he said embracing them both. "But why this strange way to meet me?"

"What other way did we have? You are leading a royal life and we are struggling somehow to make both ends meet. We thought you had completely forgotten us!"

"How could you do that? Our childhood is still fresh before my eyes. Those

were the days of true happiness, how can I forget them and you? Tell me what I can do for you two now. Ask for anything you wish.”

“What can we ask for? We would rather leave it all to the generosity of your love for us.”

“All right then, I grant each of you a full day on my throne. Tomorrow, Bholaram shall be the king and the day after, it will be Praveen. Make the best use of it, my friends.”

The royal announcement was made informing the people of the arrangement.

The Dewan was an astute man. Early in the morning he sent the royal elephant brightly caparisoned along with the royal bodyguards to escort Bholaram to the palace. The moment the dazed Brahmin reached its gates, he was surrounded by a drove of attendants who bodily carried him to the huge bathroom for a ceremonial bath with herbs, oils and perfumes. The poor fellow was lost in the scents, the spine-tingling touches of the women massaging and washing his body, and the music of their bangles and anklets as they moved about. The bath continued almost up to midday; then they dressed him in garments the likes of which he had never imagined could be made on earth, and escorted him with great pomp to the dining room. As if the intoxicating smells of the food decoratively spread out on golden plates and the aromatic drinks in silver goblets were not enough, he was served by the women with such bewitching manners and movements that he overstuffed himself and had to be helped out of his chair. He was led to the bedchamber, with its giant ivory bedstead, the soft downy bed with fluffy pillows and silken covers. With sweet-smellings *paans* in his mouth, two women fanning him and two massaging his legs and feet, he fell into a long blissful slumber. As soon as he woke up, they brought scented rose water in artistic silverware he had never seen before, washed his face and changed his clothes and sat him down in a royal lounge-chair. Colourful drinks, each vying with the other in sweetness, came next and he spent the rest of the afternoon drinking from the hands of the *apsaras* surrounding him. Finally, the Dewan entered the chamber and bowing low, announced, “Your Majesty, the royal elephants are ready to take you on a tour of your city.” And so he was taken out and displayed to his gaping subjects who thronged every street and balcony on the way. Basking in the bustling pageant Bholaram decided that not even the gods could match him in greatness. By the time the procession wended its way back to the palace the sun had set. The Dewan bowed to Bholaram and sent him home.

Bholaram’s reign had flashed by in consumption, indolence and pageantry, leaving behind neither name nor sign; left only were his beggar’s bag and eternal ridicule.

The next day was Praveen’s. And the Dewan came to his house, escorted him to the palace and invited him to the royal bath.

“Thank you, Dewan-ji,” Praveen said. “I have had my bath and breakfast. Lead me to the Durbar where my people await me.” The Durbar was packed to capacity.

King Praveen sat on the throne and ordered the Dewan, “Call the Treasurer without any delay.” The Dewan realised that here was a king indeed. The Treasurer was ordered to fetch the royal treasures. The Dewan was ordered to immediately bring Praveen’s parents in the royal chariot. As soon as they arrived, Praveen sat them on the throne and washed their feet in scented waters and honoured them with precious gifts and ornaments. Then he respectfully sent them back in the chariot filling it with gold and silver. Thereafter he honoured everyone present with gifts suitable to their station and needs. Next, he ordered the building of wells, ponds, canals, roads, rest-houses, hospitals, etc. all over the kingdom and these would be for everyone. He repealed all unjust taxes and scrutinised the works and management of every department making amendments or introducing changes which he felt would make them efficient as well as beneficial to the people. At the end of the day a happy Dewan bowed respectfully and sent him home with due ceremony.

Praveen’s government of one day transfigured the life of everyone in the kingdom.

Similarly, if our potent human existence of one swift hour is to leave any lasting mark, it must be Praveen, but by no means Bholaram, who should be our model.

PUJALAL

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

The ideal of human life is to establish over the whole being the control of a clear, strong and rational mind and a right and rational will, to master the emotional, vital and physical being, create a harmony of the whole and develop the capacities whatever they are and fulfil them in life. In the terms of Hindu thought, it is to enthrone the rule of the purified and sattwic buddhi, follow the dharma, fulfilling one’s own svadharma and doing the work proper to one’s capacities, and satisfy kāma and artha under the control of the buddhi and the dharma.

* * *

The object of the divine life, on the other hand, is to realise one’s highest self or to realise God and to put the whole being into harmony with the truth of the highest self or the law of the divine nature, to find one’s own divine capacities great or small and fulfil them in life as a sacrifice to the highest or as a true instrument of the divine Shakti.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 24, pp.1656-57)

দুর্গা-স্তোত্র

মাতঃ দুর্গে! সিংহবাহিনি সর্ববশক্তিদায়িনি মাতঃ শিবপ্রিয়ে! তোমার শত্ৰুশক্ত্যাত আমরা বঙ্গদেশের যুবকগণ তোমার মন্দিরে আসীন, প্রার্থনা করিতেছি, — শুন, মাতঃ, উর বঙ্গদেশে, প্রকাশ হও ॥

মাতঃ দুর্গে! যুগে যুগে মানবশরীরে অবতীর্ণ হইয়া জন্মে জন্মে তোমারই কার্য্য করিয়া তোমার আনন্দধামে ফিরিয়া যাই। এইবারও জন্মিয়া তোমারই কার্য্যে ব্রতী আমরা, শুন, মাতঃ, উর বঙ্গদেশে, সহায় হও ॥

মাতঃ দুর্গে! সিংহবাহিনি, ত্রিশূলধারিণি, বস্ম-আবৃত-সুন্দর-শরীরে মাতঃ জয়দায়িনি! তোমার প্রতীক্ষায় ভারত রহিয়াছে, তোমার সেই মঙ্গলময়ী মূর্ত্তি দেখিতে উৎসুক। শুন, মাতঃ, উর বঙ্গদেশে, প্রকাশ হও ॥

শ্রীঅরবিন্দ

HYMN TO DURGA

MOTHER DURGA! Rider on the lion, giver of all strength, Mother, beloved of Siva! We, born from thy parts of Power, we the youth of India, are seated here in thy temple. Listen, O Mother, descend upon earth, make thyself manifest in this land of India.

MOTHER DURGA! From age to age, in life after life, we come down into the human body, do thy work and return to the Home of Delight. Now too we are born, dedicated to thy work. Listen, O Mother, descend upon earth, come to our help.

MOTHER DURGA! Rider on the lion, trident in hand, thy body of beauty armour-clad, Mother, giver of victory, India awaits thee, eager to see the gracious form of thine. Listen, O Mother, descend upon earth, make thyself manifest in this land of India.

Sri Aurobindo

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

With Compliments from Well-wishers