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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

CONTENTS

<i>Sri Aurobindo</i>	
THE GUEST (Poem)	... 689
SUPERMIND AND HUMANITY	... 690
<i>The Mother</i>	
‘WE MUST SHAKE OFF THE PAST’	... 697
<i>A FUTURE ... WHICH HAS BEGUN</i>	... 698
51. FROM THE CONVERSATION OF 24 JULY 1957	... 698
52. FROM THE CONVERSATION OF 7 AUGUST 1957	... 700
53. FROM THE CONVERSATION OF 21 AUGUST 1957	... 703
54. FROM THE CONVERSATION OF 28 AUGUST 1957	... 705
<i>Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna)</i>	
CORRESPONDENCE ON POETRY	... 707
<i>Hemant Kapoor</i>	
NIRODBARAN: DIVINITY’S COMRADE	... 710
<i>Nirodbaran</i>	
SLEEP OF LIGHT (Poem)	... 717
<i>Chitra Sen</i>	
WASHING OF SRI AUROBINDO’S CLOTHES	... 718
<i>Ram Sehgal</i>	
DR. VENKATASWAMY	... 721
<i>Arabinda Basu</i>	
TOWARDS HARMONY OF CULTURES	... 723
<i>S. V. Bhatt</i>	
PAINTING AS SADHANA: KRISHNALAL BHATT (1905-1990)	... 730
<i>M. S. Srinivasan</i>	
HISTORY OF THE FUTURE	... 737

<i>Narad (Richard Eggenberger)</i>		
NARAD REMEMBERS: THÉMIS—THE POET	...	746
<i>Ranajit Sarkar</i>		
DUTCH PAINTING IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY	...	751
<i>Hemant Kapoor</i>		
REPLY (Poem)	...	756
<i>Priti Das Gupta</i>		
MOMENTS, ETERNAL	...	757
<i>Gopika</i>		
SILENT RENEWAL (Poem)	...	766
<i>Prema Nandakumar</i>		
DEVOTIONAL POETRY IN TAMIL	...	767
<i>Kripa Anuru</i>		
THE STORM AND BEYOND (Poem)	...	775
<i>Gary</i>		
PANCHASSEE-MOUNTAIN	...	776

THE GUEST

I have discovered my deep deathless being:
Masked by my front of mind, immense, serene,
It meets the world with an Immortal's seeing,
A god-spectator of the human scene.

No pain and sorrow of the heart and flesh
Can tread that pure and voiceless sanctuary.
Danger and fear, fate's hounds, slipping their leash
Rend body and nerve,—the timeless Spirit is free.

Awake, God's ray and witness in my breast,
In the undying substance of my soul,
Flamelike, inscrutable the almighty Guest.
Death nearer comes and Destiny takes her toll;

He hears the blows that shatter Nature's house:
Calm sits he, formidable, luminous.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 144)

SUPERMIND AND HUMANITY

WHAT then would be the consequence for humanity of the descent of Supermind into our earthly existence, its consequence for this race born into a world of ignorance and inconscience but capable of an upward evolution of its consciousness and an ascent into the light and power and bliss of a spiritual being and spiritual nature? The descent into the earth-life of so supreme a creative power as the Supermind and its truth-consciousness could not be merely a new feature or factor added to that life or put in its front but without any other importance or only a restricted importance carrying with it no results profoundly affecting the rest of earth-nature. Especially it could not fail to exercise an immense influence on mankind as a whole, even a radical change in the aspect and prospect of its existence here, even if this power had no other capital result on the material world in which it had come down to intervene. One cannot but conclude that the influence, the change made would be far-reaching, even enormous: it would not only establish the Supermind and a supramental race of beings upon the earth, it could bring about an uplifting and transforming change in mind itself and, as an inevitable consequence, in the consciousness of man, the mental being, and would equally bring about a radical and transforming change in the principles and forms of his living, his ways of action and the whole build and tenor of his life. It would certainly open to man the access to the supramental consciousness and the supramental life; for we must suppose that it is by such a transformation that a race of supramental beings would be created, even as the human race itself has arisen by a less radical but still a considerable uplifting and enlargement of consciousness and conversion of the body's instrumentation and its indwelling and evolving mental and spiritual capacities and powers out of a first animal state. But even without any such complete transformation, the truth-principle might so far replace the principle we see here of an original ignorance seeking for knowledge and arriving only at a partial knowledge that the human mind could become a power of light, of knowledge finding itself, not the denizen of a half-way twilight or a servant and helper of the ignorance, a purveyor of mingled truth and error. Mind might even become in man, what it is in its fundamental origin, a subordinate, limited and special action of the Supermind, a sufficiently luminous receptacle of truth, and at least all falsity in its works might cease.

It could at once be objected that this would alter the whole evolutionary order and its balance and leave an incurable gap in its completeness: there would be an unbridged gulf between man and the animal and no way for the evolutionary nusus to journey over it in the progress of the consciousness from animality to divinity; for some kind of divinity would be involved in the suggested metamorphosis. It might be contended that the true process of evolution is to add a new principle, degree or stage to the already existing order and not to make any alteration in any previously established feature. Man came into being but the animal remained the animal and made no progress

towards a half-humanity: all slight modifications of consciousness, capacities or habits in domestic animals produced by the association with man or by his training of them are only slight alterations of the animal intelligence. Still less can the plant move towards animal consciousness or brute Matter become in the slightest degree, even subconsciously or half subconsciously, aware of itself or responsive or reactive. The fundamental distinctions remain and must remain unaltered in the cosmic order. But this objection presumes that the new humanity must be all of one level; there may well be gradations of consciousness in it which would bridge the distance between its least developed elements and the higher animals who, although they cannot pass into a semi-human kind, might still progress towards a higher animal intelligence: for certain experiments show that these are not all entirely unprogressive. These gradations would serve the purpose of the transition quite as well as the least developed humans in the present scale without leaving a gap so wide as to disturb the evolutionary order of the universe. A considerable saltus can, as it is, be observed separating the different orders, Matter and the plant, the plant and the lower animals, one species of animals and another, as well as that always existing and large enough between the highest animal and man. There would therefore be no incurable breach in the evolutionary order, no such distance between human mind and animal mind, between the new type of human being and the old animal level as could not be overleaped or would create an unbridgeable gulf for the most developed animal soul in its passage to the least developed type of the new humanity. A leap, a saltus, there would be, as there is now; but it would not be between animality and divinity, from animal mind to Supermind: it would be between a most highly developed animal mind turning towards human possibilities—for without that the passage from animal to man could not be achieved—and a human mind waking to the possibility, not yet the full achievement, of its own higher yet unattained capacities.

One result of the intervention of Supermind in the earth-nature, the descent of the supreme creative Truth-Power, might well be a change in the law of evolution, its method and its arrangement: a larger element of the principle of evolution through knowledge might enter into the forces of the material universe. This might extend itself from a first beginning in the new creation and produce increasing effects in the order which is now wholly an evolution in the ignorance, and indeed starts from the complete nescience of the Inconscient and proceeds towards what can be regarded even in its highest attainment of knowledge as a lesser ignorance, since it is more a representation than a direct and complete possession of knowledge. If man began to develop the powers and means of a higher knowledge in something like fullness, if the developing animal opened the door of his mentality to beginnings of conscious thought and even a rudimentary reason,—at his highest he is not so irrevocably far from that even now,—if the plant developed its first subconscient reactions and attained to some kind of primary nervous sensitiveness, if Matter, which is a blind form of the Spirit, were to become more alive with the hidden power within it and to offer more

readily the secret sense of things, the occult realities it covers, as for instance, the record of the past it always preserves even in its dumb inconscience or the working of its involved forces and invisible movements revealing veiled powers in material nature to a subtler generalised perception of the new human intelligence, this would be an immense change promising greater changes in the future, but it would mean only an uplifting and not a disturbance of the universal order. Evolution would itself evolve, but it would not be perturbed or founder.

It is difficult for us to conceive in theory or admit as a practical possibility the transformation of the human mentality I have suggested as a change that would naturally take place under the lead of the supramental Truth-consciousness, because our notions about mind are rooted in an experience of human mentality in a world which starts from inconscience and proceeds through a first almost complete nescience and a slowly lessening ignorance towards a high degree but always incomplete scope and imperfect method of only partially equipped knowledge which does not serve fully the needs of a consciousness always pushing towards its own still immeasurably distant absolute. The visible imperfections and limitations of mind in the present stage of its evolution here we take as part of its very nature; but in fact the boundaries in which it is still penned are only temporary limits and measures of its still incomplete evolutionary advance; its defects of methods and means are faults of its immaturity and not proper to the constitution of its being; its achievement, although extraordinary under the hampering conditions of the mental being weighed down by its instrumentation in an earthly body, is far below and not beyond what will be possible to it in its illumined future. For mind is not in its very nature an inventor of errors, a father of lies bound down to a capacity of falsehood, wedded to its own mistakes and the leader of a stumbling life as it too largely is at present owing to our human shortcomings: it is in its origin a principle of light, an instrument put forth from the Supermind and, though set to work within limits and even set to create limits, yet the limits are luminous borders for a special working, voluntary and purposive bounds, a surface of the finite ever extending itself under the eye of infinity. It is this character of Mind that will reveal itself under the touch of Supermind and make human mentality an adjunct and a minor instrumentation of the supramental knowledge. It will even be possible for the mind no longer limited by the intellect to become capable of a sort of mental gnosis, a luminous reproduction of the Truth in a diminished working, extending the power of the Light not only to its own but to lower levels of consciousness in their climb towards self-transcendence. Overmind, Intuition, Illumined Mind and what I have called Higher Mind, these and other levels of a spiritualised and liberated mentality, will be able to reflect in the uplifted human mind and its purified and exalted feeling and force of life and action something of their powers and prepare the ascent of the soul to their own plateaus and peaks of an ascending existence. This is essentially the change which can be contemplated as a result of the new evolutionary order, and it would mean a considerable extension of the evolutionary field itself and will answer

the question as to the result on humanity of the advent of Supermind into the earth-nature.

If mind in its origin from Supermind is itself a power of Supermind, a principle of Light and a power of Light or a force for Knowledge specialised in its action for a subordinate purpose, yet it assumes a different aspect when in the working out of this purpose it separates itself more and more from the supramental light, from the immediate power and supporting illumination of the supramental principle. It is as it departs more and more in this direction from its own highest truth that it becomes a creator or parent of ignorance and is or seems to be the highest power in a world of ignorance; it becomes itself subject to ignorance and seems only to arrive at a partial and imperfect knowledge. The reason of this decline is that it is used by the Supermind principally for the work of differentiation which is necessary if there is to be a creation and a universe. In the Supermind itself, in all its creation there is this differentiating power, the manifestation of the One in the Many and the Many in the One; but the One is never forgotten or lost in its multiplicity which always consciously depends upon and never takes precedence over the eternal oneness. In the mind, on the contrary, the differentiation, the multiplicity does take precedence and the conscious sense of the universal oneness is lost and the separated unit seems to exist for itself and by itself as a sufficient self-conscious integer or in inanimate objects as the inconscient integer.

It should be noted, however, that a world or plane of mind need not be a reign of ignorance where falsity, error or nescience must have a place; it may be only a voluntary self-limitation of knowledge. It could be a world where all possibilities capable of being determined by mind could manifest themselves in the successions of Time and find a true form and field of their action, the expressive figure of themselves, their capacity of self-development, self-realisation of a kind, self-discovery. This is actually what we meet when we follow in psychic experience the line of descent by which the involution takes place which ends in Matter and the creation of the material universe. What we see here is not the planes or worlds of the descent in which mind and life can keep something of their truth and something of the light of the spirit, something of their true and real being; here we see an original inconscience and a struggle of life and mind and spirit to evolve out of the material inconscience and in a resultant ignorance to find themselves and grow towards their full capacity and highest existence. If mind succeeds in that endeavour there is no reason why it should not recover its true character and be once more a principle and power of Light and even in its own way aid in the workings of a true and complete knowledge. At its highest it might pass out of its limitations into the supramental truth and become part and function of the supramental knowledge or at the least serve for a minor work of differentiation in the consensus of that knowledge: in the lower degree below Supermind it might be a mental gnosis, a spiritual or spiritualised perception, feeling, activity, sense which could do the works of knowledge and not of ignorance. Even at a still lower level it

could be an increasingly luminous passage leading from light to light, from truth to truth and no longer a circling in the mazes of half-truth and half-nescience. This would not be possible in a world where untransformed mind or human mind burdened with its hampering disabilities, as it now is, will still be the leader or the evolution's highest achievement, but with Supermind for the leading and dominant power this might well happen, and might even be regarded as one result and an almost inevitable result of its descent into the human world and its touch on the mind of humanity.

How far this would go, whether the whole of humanity would be touched or only a part of it ready for the change, would depend on what was intended or possible in the continued order of the universe. If the old evolutionary principle and order must be preserved, then only a section of the race would pass onward, the rest would keep the old human position, level and function in the ascending order. But even so there must be a passage or bridge between the two levels or orders of being by which the evolution would make its transition from one to the other; the mind would there be capable of contact with and modification by the supramental truth and thus would be the means of the soul's passing on upward: there must be a status of mind capable of receiving and growing in the Light towards Supermind though not reaching it; through that, as even now happens in a lesser degree through a dimmer medium, the lustre of a greater truth would send down its rays for the liberation and uplift of the soul in the ignorance. Supermind is here veiled behind a curtain and, though not organised for its own characteristic action, it is the true cause of all creation here, the power for the growth of truth and knowledge and the ascension of the soul towards the hidden Reality. But in a world where Supermind has made its appearance, it could hardly be a separate factor isolated from the rest, it would inevitably not only create superman but change and uplift man. A total change of the mental principle, such as has been suggested, cannot be ruled out as impossible.

Mind as we know it, as a power of consciousness quite distinct from Supermind, no longer a power devolved from it, connected with it and dependent upon it, but practically divorced from its luminous origin, is marked by several characteristics which we conceive to be the very signs of its nature: but some of these belong to Supermind also and the difference is in the way and scope of their action, not in their stuff or in their principle. The difference is that mind is not a power of whole knowledge and only when it begins to pass beyond itself a power of direct knowledge: it receives rays of the truth but does not live in the sun; it sees as through glasses and its knowledge is coloured by its instruments, it cannot see with the naked eye or look straight at the sun. It is not possible for mind to take its stand in the solar centre or anywhere in the radiant body or even on the shining circumference of the orb of perfect truth and acquire or share in its privilege of infallible or absolute knowledge. It would be only if it had already drawn near to the light of Supermind that it could live anywhere near this sun in the full splendour of its rays, in something of the full and direct blaze of Truth, and the human mind even at its highest is far from that; it can only live at most

in a limited circle, in some narrow beginnings of a pure insight, a direct vision and it would take long for it, even in surpassing itself, to reach to an imitative and fragmentary reflection of a dream of the limited omniscience and omnipotence which is the privilege of a delegated divinity, of the god, of a demiurge. It is a power for creation, but either tentative and uncertain and succeeding by good chance or the favour of circumstance or else, if assured by some force of practical ability or genius, subject to flaw or pent within unescapable limits. Its highest knowledge is often abstract, lacking in a concrete grasp; it has to use expedients and unsure means of arrival, to rely upon reasoning, argumentation and debate, inferences, divinations, set methods of inductive or deductive logic, succeeding only if it is given correct and complete data and even then liable to reach on the same data different results and varying consequences; it has to use means and accept results of a method which is hazardous even when making a claim to certitude and of which there would be no need if it had a direct or a supra-intellectual knowledge. It is not necessary to push the description further; all this is the very nature of our terrestrial ignorance and its shadow hangs on even to the thought and vision of the sage and the seer and can be escaped only if the principle of a truth-conscious supramental knowledge descends and takes up the governance of the earth-nature.

It should be noted however that even at the bottom of the involutory descent, in the blind eclipse of consciousness in Matter, in the very field of the working of the Inconscient there are signs of the labour of an infallible force, the drive of a secret consciousness and its promptings, as if the Inconscient itself were secretly informed or impelled by a Power with a direct and absolute knowledge; its acts of creation are infinitely surer than the workings of our human consciousness at its best or the normal workings of the Life-power. Matter, or rather the Energy in Matter seems to have a more certain knowledge, a more infallible operation of its own and its mechanism once set going can be trusted for the most part to do its work accurately and well. It is so that man is able, taking hold of a material energy, to mechanise it for his own ends and trust it under proper conditions to do for him his work. The self-creating life-power, amazingly abundant in its invention and fantasy, yet seems to be more capable of flaw, aberration and failure; it is as if its greater consciousness carried in it a greater capacity for error. Yet it is sure enough ordinarily in its workings: but as consciousness increases in the forms and operations of life, and most when mind enters in, disturbances also increase as if the increase of consciousness brought with it not only richer possibilities but more possibilities of stumbling, error, flaw and failure. In mind, in man, we seem to reach the height of this antinomy, the greatest, highest, widest reach and achievements of consciousness, the greatest amount of uncertainty, defect, failure and error. This, we may conjecture, may be because in inconscient Nature there is a truth of energy at work which follows infallibly its own law, an energy which can walk blindfold without stumbling because the automatic law of the truth is within it, operating surely without swerving or mistake when there

is no external intervention or interference. But in all normally automatic processes of existence there is this law: even the body has an unexpressed knowledge of its own, a just instinct in its action within certain limits and this when not interfered with by life's desires and mind's errors can work with a certain accuracy and sureness. But Supermind alone has the truth-consciousness in full and, if this comes down and intervenes, mind, life and body too can attain to the full power of the truth in them and their full possibility of perfection. This, no doubt, would not take place at once, but an evolutionary progress towards it could begin and grow with increasing rapidity towards its fullness. All men might not reach that fullness till a later time, but still the human mind could come to stand perfected in the Light and a new humanity take its place as part of the new order.

This is the possibility we have to examine. If it is destined to fulfil itself, if man is not doomed to remain always as a vassal of the Ignorance, the disabilities of the human mind on which we have dwelt are not such as must remain irredeemably in possession and binding for ever. It could develop higher means and instrumentalities, pass over the last borders of the Ignorance into a higher knowledge, grow too strong to be held back by the animal nature. There would be a liberated mind escaping from ignorance into light, aware of its affiliation to Supermind, a natural agent of Supermind and capable of bringing down the supramental influence into the lower reaches of being, a creator in the light, a discoverer in the depths, an illuminant in the darkness, helping perhaps to penetrate even the Inconscient with the rays of a secret Superconscience. There would be a new mental being not only capable of standing enlightened in the radiance of the Supermind but able to climb consciously towards it and into it, training life and body to reflect and hold something of the supramental light, power and bliss, aspiring to release the secret divinity into self-finding and self-fulfilment and self-poise, aspiring towards the ascension to the divine consciousness, able to receive and bear the descent of the divine light and power, fitting itself to be a vessel of the divine Life.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 568-77)

‘WE MUST SHAKE OFF THE PAST’

December 29, 1913

O LORD, grant that this collective convention of the ending year be for us also the occasion to put an end to a whole lot of bonds and attachments, illusions and weaknesses which have no longer any purpose in our lives. At every moment we must shake off the past like falling dust, that it may not soil the virgin path which, at every moment also, is opening before us.

May our mistakes, acknowledged and rectified within us, be no more than vain mirages powerless to bring any consequences and, pressing our foot down firmly upon all that no longer should exist, on all ignorance, all obscurity, all egoism, may we take our flight boldly towards wider horizons and intenser light, a more perfect compassion, a more disinterested love... towards Thee.

I hail Thee, O Lord, Master of our life, and I want to proclaim Thy reign over all the earth.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, p. 42)

A FUTURE ... WHICH HAS BEGUN

(Continued from the issue of August 2006)

51. From the Conversation of 24 July 1957

Sweet Mother, what is the involved supermind?

It is the same as the uninvolved one! It is the same thing when Sri Aurobindo says that if the Divine were not at the centre of everything, He could never manifest in the world; it is the same thing when he says that essentially, in its origin and deepest structure, the creation is divine, the world is divine; and that is why this divinity will be able to manifest one day, become tangible, express itself fully in place of all that veils and deforms it at present. Up to now, all that has manifested of this divinity is the world as we know it; but the manifestation is boundless, and after this mental world as we know it, of which the apex and prototype is man, another reality will manifest, which Sri Aurobindo calls the Supermind, for it is in fact the next step after the mind; so, seen from the world as it is, it will naturally be “supramental”, that is, something above the mind. And he also says that it will truly be the changing of one world into another, for so far the whole creation belonged to what he calls “the lower hemisphere” as we know it, which is governed by Ignorance and based upon the Inconscient, whereas the other one will be a complete reversal, the sudden appearance of something which will belong to quite a different world, and which instead of being based on Ignorance will be based upon Truth. That is why it will truly be a new world. But if the *essence*, the principle of this world were not included in the world as we knew it, there would be no hope of the one being transformed into the other; they would be two worlds so totally different and opposed that there would be no contact between them and that necessarily, as soon as one came out of this world and emerged into the world of Truth, Light and Knowledge, one would become, so to speak, imperceptible, non-existent for a world belonging exclusively to the Ignorance and the Inconscience.

How is it that even when this change has taken place, there will be a connection and this new world will be able to act upon the old one? It is that in its essence and principle the new is already enclosed, involved in the old world. So, in fact, it is there, inside, in its very depths, hidden, invisible, imperceptible, unexpressed, but it is there, in its essence. Still, unless from the supreme heights the supramental consciousness and force and light manifest directly in the world, as it happened a year and a half ago, this Supermind which in *principle* is at the very bedrock of the material world as it is, would never have any possibility of manifesting itself. Its awakening and appearance below will be the response to a touch from above which will bring out the corresponding element hidden in the depths of matter as it is now.... And this is precisely

what is happening at present. But as I told you two weeks ago, this material world as it actually, visibly is, is so powerful, so absolutely real for the ordinary consciousness, that it has engulfed, as it were, this supramental force and consciousness when it manifested, and a long preparation is necessary before its presence can be even glimpsed, felt, perceived in some way or other. And this is the work it is doing now.

How long it will take is difficult to foresee. It will depend a great deal on the goodwill and the receptivity of a certain number of people, for the individual always advances faster than the collectivity, and by its very nature, humanity is destined to manifest the Supermind before the rest of creation.

At the basis of this collaboration there is necessarily the will to change, no longer to be what one is, for things to be no longer what they are. There are several ways of reaching it, and all the methods are good when they succeed! One may be deeply disgusted with what exists and wish ardently to come out of all this and attain something else; one may—and this is a more positive way—one may feel within oneself the touch, the approach of something positively beautiful and true, and willingly drop all the rest so that nothing may burden the journey to this new beauty and truth.

What is indispensable in every case is the *ardent* will for progress, the willing and joyful renunciation of all that hampers the advance: to throw far away from oneself all that prevents one from going forward, and to set out into the unknown with the ardent faith that this is the truth of tomorrow, *inevitable*, which must necessarily come, which nothing, nobody, no bad will, even that of Nature, can prevent from becoming a reality—perhaps of a not too distant future—a reality which is being worked out now and which those who know how to change, how not to be weighed down by old habits, will *surely* have the good fortune not only to see but to realise.

People sleep, they forget, they take life easy—they forget, forget all the time.... But if we could remember... that we are at an exceptional hour, a *unique* time, that we have this immense good fortune, this invaluable privilege of being present at the birth of a new world, we could easily get rid of everything that impedes and hinders our progress.

So, the most important thing, it seems, is to remember this fact; even when one doesn't have the tangible experience, to have the certainty of it and faith in it; to remember always, to recall it constantly, to go to sleep with this idea, to wake up with this perception; to do all that one does with this great truth as the background, as a constant support, this great truth that we are witnessing the birth of a new world.

We can participate in it, we can become this new world. And truly, when one has such a marvellous opportunity, one should be ready to give up everything for its sake.

52. From the Conversation of 7 August 1957

Sri Aurobindo has written: "The descent of the Supermind will bring to one who receives it and is fulfilled in the truth-consciousness all the possibilities of the divine life. It will take up not only the whole characteristic experience which we recognise already as constituting the spiritual life but also all which we now exclude from that category...."

The Supramental Manifestation, *SABCL, Vol. 16, p. 47*

So, what are you asking? What is excluded?
 What do we exclude!... It depends on the person.
 But what are you asking, really?

I don't see what we are excluding.

Ah! that's sensible. Here we profess we are excluding nothing. That's precisely the reason. We have taken up all human activities, whatever they may be, including those that are considered the least spiritual. But I must say it is very difficult to change their nature! But still, we are trying, we put all possible goodwill into it.

It is also said that the descent will make the change easier.

[“A divine life on earth need not be a thing apart and exclusive having nothing to do with the common earthly existence: it will take up human being and human life, transform what can be transformed, spiritualise whatever can be spiritualised, cast its influence on the rest and effectuate either a radical or an uplifting change, bring about a deeper communion between the universal and the individual, invade the ideal with the spiritual truth of which it is a luminous shadow and help to uplift into or towards a greater and higher existence.... It is obvious that if the Supermind is there and an order of supramental being is established as the leading principle in earth-nature, as mind is now the leading principle, but with a sureness, a complete government of the earthly existence, a capacity of transformation of all upon their level and within their natural boundaries of which the mind in its imperfection was not capable, an immense change of human life, even if it did not extend to transformation would be inevitable.” *The Supramental Manifestation, SABCL, Vol. 16, pp. 47-49*]

There are two points which resist strongly—all that has to do with politics and all that has to do with money. These are the two points on which it is most difficult to change the human attitude.

In principle we have said that we have nothing to do with politics, and it is true that we have nothing to do with politics as it is practised at present. But it is quite obvious that if politics is taken in its true spirit, that is, as the organisation of human

masses and all the details of government and regulation of the collective life, and relations with other collectivities—that is, with other nations, other countries—it must necessarily enter into the supramental transformation, for so long as national life and the relations between nations remain what they are, it is quite impossible to live a supramental life on earth. So it will just have to change; we shall have to deal with that too.

As for financial matters, that is, finding a means of exchange and production which is simple—“simple”, well, which should be simple, simpler than the primitive system of exchange in which people had to give one thing to get another—something which could in principle be world-wide, universal; this is also altogether indispensable for the simplification of life. Now, with human nature, just the very opposite is happening! The situation is such that it has become almost—intolerable. It has become almost impossible to have the least relation with other countries, and that much-vaunted means of exchange which should have been a simplification has become such a complication that we shall soon reach a deadlock—we are very, very close to being unable to do anything, to being tied up in everything. If one wants the smallest thing from another country, one has to follow such complicated and laborious procedures that in the end one will stay in one’s own little corner and be satisfied with the potatoes one can grow in one’s garden, without hoping to know anything at all about what is going on and happening elsewhere.

Well, these two points are the most resistant. In the human consciousness this is most subject to the forces of ignorance, inconstancy and, I must say, quite generally, ill-will. This is what most refuses all progress and all advance towards the truth; and unfortunately, in every human individual this is also the point of resistance, the point that remains narrowly stupid and refuses to understand anything it is not used to. There it is truly a heroic act to want to take up these things and transform them. Well, we are trying this also, and unless it is done, it will be impossible to change the conditions of the earth.

It is relatively—very relatively—easier to change economic and social conditions than political and financial ones. There are certain general, global ideas from the economic and social point of view which are accessible to human thought: certain liberations, a certain widening, a certain collective organisation, which do not seem absolutely senseless and unrealisable; but as soon as you touch on the other two questions, which are however of capital importance, especially the political question, it is quite otherwise.... For, one might imagine a life which would get rid of all financial complications—although, without playing on words, it would be a veritable impoverishment. In what financial possibilities and processes bring, there is a very considerable wealth of possibilities, for if they were used in the right way and in the true spirit, that would simplify all human relations and undertakings to a very great extent and make possible a complexity of life which would be very difficult under other conditions. But I don’t know why—except that the worst usually precedes the

best—instead of taking the way of simplification, men have followed the way of complication to such a point that, in spite of the aeroplanes which carry you from one end of the world to the other in two days, in spite of all the modern inventions which try to make life so “small”, so “close” that we could go round the world not in eighty days now but in a very few days, in spite of all that, the complications of exchange, for instance, are so great that many people can’t get away from home—I mean from the country they live in—because they have no means of going to another one and if they ask for the money they need to live in another country they are told, “Is it very important for you to go? You could perhaps wait a little, because it is very difficult for us at the moment....” I am not joking, it is quite serious, this does happen. That means we are becoming more and more the prisoners of the place where we are born, while all the scientific trends are towards such a great proximity between countries that we could very easily belong to the universe or, at any rate, to the whole world.

There. This is the situation. It has grown considerably worse since the last war; it grows worse year by year, and one finds oneself in such a ridiculous situation that, unfortunately, as one is at the end of one’s resources, to simplify what has been made so complicated, there is an idea in the earth-atmosphere—an idea which might be called preposterous, but unhappily it is much worse than preposterous, it is catastrophic—the idea that if there were a great upheaval, perhaps it would be better afterwards.... One is so jammed between prohibitions, impossibilities, interdictions, rules, the complications of every second, that one feels stifled and really gets the admirable idea that if everything were demolished perhaps it would be better afterwards!... It is in the air. And all the governments have put themselves in such impossible conditions; they have become so tied up that it seems to them they will have to break everything to be able to move forward.... (*Silence*) This is unfortunately a little more than a possibility, it is a *very* serious threat. And it is not quite certain that life will not be made still more impossible because one feels incapable of emerging from the chaos—the chaos of complications—in which humanity has put itself. It is like the shadow—but unfortunately a very active shadow—of the new hope which has sprung up in the human consciousness, a hope and a need for something more harmonious; and the need becomes so much more acute as life, as it is at present organised, becomes more and more contrary to it. The two opposites are facing each other with such intensity that one can expect something like an explosion....

(*Silence*)

This is the condition of the earth, and it is not very bright. But for us one possibility remains—I have spoken about it to you several times already—even if, outside, things are deteriorating completely and the catastrophe cannot possibly be avoided, there remains for us, I mean those for whom the supramental life is not a vain dream, those who have faith in its reality and the aspiration to realise it—I don’t necessarily mean

those who have gathered here in Pondicherry, in the Ashram, but those who have as a link between them the knowledge Sri Aurobindo has given and the will to live according to that knowledge—there remains for them the possibility of intensifying their aspiration, their will, their effort, to gather their energies together and shorten the time for the realisation. There remains for them the possibility of working this miracle—individually and to a small extent collectively—of conquering space, duration, the time needed for this realisation; of replacing time by intensity of effort and going fast enough and far enough in the realisation to liberate themselves from the consequences of the present condition of the world; of making such a concentration of force, strength, light, truth, that by this very realisation they can be above these consequences and secure against them, enjoy the protection bestowed by the Light and Truth, by Purity—the divine Purity through the inner transformation—and that the storm may pass over the world without being able to destroy this great hope of the near future; that the tempest may not sweep away this beginning of realisation.

Instead of falling asleep in an easy quietude and letting things happen according to their own rhythm, if one strains to the utmost one's will, ardour, aspiration and springs up into the light, then one can hold one's head higher; one can have, in a higher region of consciousness, enough room to live, to breathe, to grow and develop above the passing cyclone.

This is possible. In a very small way, this was already done during the last war, when Sri Aurobindo was here. It can be done again. But one must want it and each one must do his own work as sincerely and completely as he can.

(CWM 9: 166-71)

53. From the Conversation of 21 August 1957

Mother, for quite some time there has been a feeling that the general consciousness in our activities has fallen, especially since the Ashram has grown so large. What is the reason for it and how can we put it right?

Are you referring to all the activities of the Ashram or only to sports?... All the activities of the Ashram?

I don't know very many, Mother: in the ones I see.

(After a long silence) It is something rather complicated. I shall try to explain it.

For a very long time the Ashram was only a gathering of individuals, each one representing something, but as an individual and without any collective organisation. They were like separate pawns on a chess-board—united only in appearance—or

rather by the purely superficial fact of living together in the same place and having a few habits in common—not even very many, only a few. Each one progressed—or didn't progress—according to his own capacity and with a minimum of relations with others. So, in accordance with the value of the individuals constituting this odd assemblage, one could say that there was a general value, but a very nebulous one, with no collective reality. This lasted a very long time—very long. And it is only quite recently that the need for a collective reality began to appear—which is not necessarily limited to the Ashram but embraces all who have declared themselves—I don't mean materially but in their consciousness—to be disciples of Sri Aurobindo and have tried to live his teaching. Among all of them, and more strongly since the manifestation of the supramental Consciousness and Force, there has awakened the necessity for a true communal life, which would not be based only on purely material circumstances but would represent a deeper truth, and be the beginning of what Sri Aurobindo calls a supramental or gnostic community.... He has said, of course, that, for this, the individuals constituting this collectivity should themselves have this supramental consciousness; but even without attaining an individual perfection—even while very far from it—there was at the same time an inner effort to create this “collective individuality”, so to speak. The need for a real union, a deeper bond has been felt and the effort has been directed towards that realisation.

This has caused some... disturbance, for the tendency was formerly so individualistic that certain habits have been upset, I don't mean materially, for things are not very different from what they were, but in a somewhat deeper consciousness. *And above all*—that is the point I want to emphasise—this has created a certain inner interdependence which has naturally lowered the individual level—a little—except for those who had already attained an inner realisation strong enough to be able to resist this movement of what I might call “levelling”. And this is what gives the impression that the general level has fallen, which is not correct. The general level is on a higher plane than it formerly was, but the individual level has dropped in many cases, and individuals who were capable of one realisation or another have felt, without understanding why, weighed down by a load they did not have to carry before, which is the result of this interdependence. It is just a temporary effect which, on the other hand, will lead to an improvement, a very tangible general progress.

Of course, if each individual was conscious, if instead of yielding to this kind of levelling effect, he resisted it in order to transform, transmute, uplift the elements, influences, currents he receives from the group, then the *whole* would rise up into a higher consciousness far ahead of where it was before.

This is what I was aiming at—without explaining the thing to you in detail—when I spoke to you of a more and more urgent need to make an effort, and I intended, in fact, to explain to you one day that the effort you could make individually, instead of being for only an individual progress, will spread, so to say, or have very important collective results. But I said nothing because for months I wanted to prepare the

individual consciousness to admit, I might say, even perhaps to recognise, this necessity for a collective individuality. This is what must be explained now. There is no other reason for this kind of apparent fall which, in fact, is not one. It is the spiral movement of progress which makes it necessary to move away from a certain realisation in order to make it not only vaster but also higher. If every one collaborates consciously and with goodwill, it will go much faster.

It was an imperative necessity if one wanted this Ashram life to be viable. Everything that does not progress necessarily declines and perishes, and for the Ashram to last it had to make progress in its consciousness and become a living entity. There.

We are rather far away in the spiral from the line of realisation we had some years ago, but we shall come back to it on a higher level.

So that is the answer.

There may appear to be movements which seem to contradict what I have just told you, but that... it is always like that, for every time one wants to realise something, the first difficulty one meets is the opposition of all that was inactive before and now rises up to resist. All that does not want to accept this change naturally wakes up and revolts. But that is of no importance. It is the same thing as in the individual being: when you want to progress, the difficulty you want to conquer immediately increases tenfold in importance and intensity in your consciousness. There is but to persevere, that's all. It will pass.

(CWM 9: 173-75)

54. From the Conversation of 28 August 1957

Mother, Sri Aurobindo says here: "Whether the whole of humanity would be touched [by the Supramental influence] or only a part of it ready for the change would depend on what was intended or possible in the continued order of the universe."

The Supramental Manifestation, *SABCL*, Vol. 16, p. 56

What is meant by "what was intended or possible"? The two things are different. So far you have said that if humanity changes, if it wants to participate in the new birth...

It is the same thing. But when you look at an object on a certain plane, you see it horizontally, and when you look at the same object from another plane, you see it vertically. (*Mother shows the cover and the back of her book.*) So, if one looks from above, one says "intended"; if one looks from below, one says "possible".... But it is absolutely the same thing, only the point of view is different.

But in that case, it is not our incapacity or lack of will to change that makes any difference.

We have already said this many a time. If you remain in a consciousness which functions mentally, even if it is the highest mind, you have the notion of an absolute determinism of cause and effect and feel that things are what they are because they are what they are and cannot be otherwise.

It is only when you come out of the mental consciousness completely and enter a higher perception of things—which you may call spiritual or divine—that you suddenly find yourself in a state of *perfect* freedom where *everything* is possible.

(*Silence*)

Those who have contacted that state or lived in it, even if only for a moment, try to describe it as a feeling of an absolute Will in action, which immediately gives to the human mentality the feeling of being arbitrary. And because of that distortion there arises the idea—which I might call traditional—of a supreme and arbitrary God, which is something most *unacceptable* to every enlightened mind. I suppose that this experience badly expressed is at the origin of this notion. And in fact it is incorrect to express it as an absolute Will: it is very, very, very different. It is something else altogether. For, what man understands by “Will” is a decision that is taken and carried out. We are obliged to use the word “will”, but in its truth the Will acting in the universe is neither a choice nor a decision that is taken. What seems to me the closest expression is “vision”. Things are because they are *seen*. But of course “seen”, not seen as we see with these eyes. (*Mother touches her eyes...*) All the same, it is the nearest thing. It is a vision—a vision unfolding itself.

The universe becomes objective as it is progressively seen.

And that is why Sri Aurobindo has said “intended or possible”. It is neither one nor the other. All that can be said is a distortion.

(*Silence*)

Objectivisation—universal objectivisation—is something like a projection in space and time, like a living image of what *is* from all eternity. And as the image is gradually projected on the screen of time and space, it becomes objective:

The Supreme contemplating His own Image.

(CWM 9: 176-77)

(*To be continued*)

CORRESPONDENCE ON POETRY

Sri Aurobindo—

There's one question I have been wanting to ask you but I have hesitated and refrained lest you should think it improper. The answer, however, cannot fail to be enlightening: so at last I make bold to put the matter to you. Premanand has several times remarked: "How is it that though Sri Aurobindo has very many good things to say about your poems he so rarely uses words like 'exceedingly fine' about them?" The only reply I have been able to make is: "I don't know why, but surely Sri Aurobindo has his reasons for not doing so." Is it possible to let me understand what subtle shortcoming somewhere still in my work I must set right? I should like very much to please you more but how am I to do it unless you explain to me where exactly I fall short. I do my best to write exceedingly well or to produce magnificent work: take, for instance, a poem like "Gnosis" or yesterday's "Agni Jatavedas": you can feel that, though the highest planes have not been drawn upon throughout and in each line, I have tried poetically to rise to the top of my bent—but I quite understand that that need not mean I have really achieved the finest poetry. I sincerely hope, however, that you will give me some advice and help me to improve myself. I am sure Premanand's remark was not designed to provoke competition on my part; he said the other day that he was convinced you did not apply the same standard to everybody's work and so your comments must not be taken comparatively—but I feel that this way of looking at things is often correct yet to accept it absolutely and as universally applicable is likely to give one undue consolation and blind one to one's own defects as one can see definitely that several other people are not at all inferior to oneself. All the same, the spirit of competition must be absolutely avoided and what I am attempting to do is not to rise superior to others but to rise superior to myself as I am.

Amal, 15-5-37.

Sri Aurobindo's reply:

You all attach too much importance to the exact letter of my remarks of the kind as if it were a giving of marks. I have been obliged to renounce the use of the word "good" or even "very good" because it depressed Nirod—though I would be very much satisfied myself if I could always write poetry certified to be very good. I write "very fine" against work which is not improvable, so why ask me for suggestions for improving the unimprovable? As for rising superior to yourself that is another matter—one always hopes to do better than one has yet done, but that means not an avoidance of defects—I always point out ruthlessly anything defective in your work—but to rise higher, wider, deeper, etc., etc. in the consciousness. Incidentally, even if my remarks are taken to be of mark-giving value, what shall I do in future if I have exhausted all adverbs? How shall I mark your self-exceeding if I have already certified your work

as exceeding? I shall have to fall back on roars “Oh, damned fine, damned damned damned fine!”

* * *

[Amal’s poem “Agni Jatavedas”; extracts from his questions put to Sri Aurobindo and from Sri Aurobindo’s replies; an explanatory comment inserted by Amal; these have been taken from pages 134-36 of *The Secret Splendour—Collected Poems.*]

How do you find this poem? Is it very surrealistic?

AGNIJATAVEDAS

(In the Rigveda, Agni, called “Jatavedas” or “Knower of births”, is the divine Fire visioned in various occult forms as the secret urge of our evolution towards the perfect splendour that is the Spirit.)

O smile of heaven locked in a seed of light—
 O music burning through the heart’s dumb rock—
 O beast of beauty with the golden beard—
 O lust-consumer in the virgin’s bed—
 Come with thy myriad eyes that face all truth,
 Thy myriad arms equal to each desire!
 Shatter or save, but fill this gap of gloom:
 Rise from below and call thy far wealth down—
 A straining supplicant of naked silver,
 A jar of dream, a crystal emptiness
 Draining through a mighty mouth above the mind
 Some ageless alchemy of liquid sun.
 Or bind us like a python-sleep of snow
 Whose glory grips the flesh and leaves it numb
 For soul to gather its forgotten fire,
 A purple power no eagle’s wing-waft knew,
 A soar that makes time-towers a lonely fret
 And all a futile victory the stars!
 Work thy strange will, but load our gaze no more
 With unexplorable freedoms of black air,
 An infinite rapture veiled by infinite pain...
 Lightning of Truth, God’s lava passion—come!

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

Very fine poetry throughout, not exactly 'surrealistic', at least not in the current sense, but occult in its vision and sequences. I have marked the most powerful lines.

*

Originally the last line stood:

Lightning of Truth, God's lava—come, O come!

Sri Aurobindo criticised its ending as too romantic in turn for the kind of mystic inspiration expressed. Then the present form of the line, with its second part strengthened in significance and the conclusion made terse in its emotion, was found.

Into what category of blank verse does this poem fall? Has it any epic quality?

Sri Aurobindo's reply:

'Agni Jatavedas' is a sort of violent sublime—ultra-Aeschylean perhaps. There are sometimes epic or almost epic lines, but the whole or most of it has not the epic ring. There is one epic line—

An infinite rapture veiled by infinite pain.

Perhaps the first three lines are near the epic—there may be one or two others.

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

[N.B.: Sri Aurobindo's answer to Amal's letter was printed in *CWSA*, Vol. 27, page 625.]

NIRODBARAN: DIVINITY'S COMRADE

[This article was originally written for Nirodbaran's centennial *festschrift*. Here it is reprinted with a postscript, which gives a short account of his life after his hundredth birthday until his passing.]

“Life is easy for one who is impudent as a crow, malicious, boastful, presumptuous and corrupt.

Life is hard for the modest one who seeks purity, who is detached, unassuming and whose judgement is correct.”

WHEN I read these verses of the Dhammapada, I couldn't help thinking of Nirodbaran. Nirodbaran is a Buddhist by birth and his life is redolent of the moral healthiness, which so characterises the Buddhist religion. The *homo psychicus* and the *homo intellectualis* are the two established types of spiritual seekers. In recent times Champaklal and Nolini Kanta have typified them. Does Nirodbaran fit in either of these categories? The answer is in the negative. Not of an inborn devotional temperament like Champaklal or of an extraordinary mental capacity like Nolini Kanta, Nirodbaran's original nature can be said to be hardly conducive to the spiritual endeavour. An anglicised rationality, a heart acutely aware of the vicissitudes of modern life and a temperament lukewarm to the spiritual stimulus—this was Nirodbaran's initial outlay in the wager of spirituality. Yet Nirodbaran has succeeded in arriving where many a better qualified *adhara* has failed.

The secret of his spiritual development lies in his strong will. Nirodbaran is a worshipper of the spiritual power but not in the way of the Tantriks. He is a *homo politicus*. For this type of a man, “it is a truth of the divine Will which he feels present and working within him or guiding him by a Light or a Voice or a Force or a divine Person or Presence. In the end by this way one arrives at a consciousness in which one feels the Force or Presence acting within and moving or governing all the actions and the personal will is entirely surrendered or identified with that greater Truth-Will, Truth-Power or Truth-Presence.”¹ For Nirodbaran it is the divine Person of Sri Aurobindo who is the mover of his will.

In his thirties, Nirodbaran chose to come to Sri Aurobindo Ashram and dedicate himself to the pursuit of yoga. After one and a half years of stay in the Ashram he wrote to Sri Aurobindo, “It is exactly 1 1/2 years since I have been here. Unfortunately I cannot detect any sign of progress, everything is status quo, so to say.” To this Sri Aurobindo replied, “You have had some experiences which are signs of a future possibility. To have more within the first 1 1/2 years, it would be necessary to have the complete attitude of the sadhak and give up that of the man of the world. It is only

1. *The Life Divine*.

then progress can be rapid from the beginning.”

Nirodbaran set his will to become a sadhak. He saw that many in the Ashram were writing poetry as part of their sadhana. He decided to try his hand at it. What started as eccentric innovations became in the end a full-bodied oeuvre of mystic verse. Gone was the worldling, the spiritual aspirant was born. On 10.5.1937 Nirodbaran wrote in one of his poems,

We lose yet gain our spirit's hidden gold
By cruel sacrifice of earthly ties;
Even if life bleeds, it shall receive the mould
Of the supreme's fire-touch and heavenward rise.

And again, a few days later on 18.5.1937 he writes,

Your gaudy sails of beauty, O life of earth
No more attract me, their inconstancy
Is like the fleeting breath of human birth:
A flicker and the aftermath of agony!

With this inner conversion came spiritual experiences. In one of his interviews with the Mother, she asked him to formulate his aspiration. Sensing that Nirod was still a neophyte in yogic matters and hardly a philosopher, the Mother reformulated her question. She simply asked him what it was that he wanted most. Nirod's reply was that what he wanted most was Ananda. The Mother smiled and said Ananda was very difficult to bring down. “However,” she said, “there is no harm in asking for it.”

That afternoon when Nirod went for his work he looked at the blue sky overhead. What happened next was beyond his conscious expectation. A sudden downpour of Ananda came like a cascade upon him, concrete and overpowering. Wave after wave of sheer delight enveloped him. Not knowing how to contain it Nirod sat down to write poetry and no sooner had he done so that the experience came to an end.

A beginning had been made. However temporarily, life's barriers had given way to something from the other sphere. The course of future sadhana very usually depends on the nature of the first opening. For Nirod it is delight, which has been the motive power of his sadhana. Not the path of internal debate and discrimination, *vichara* and *viveka*, but a joyous acceptance of the powers and potentialities of his nature. It is not that knowledge has not come to him, it is rather a knowledge born from the heart's intuition, which is seldom couched in mental terms.

As time passed Nirod's intimacy with his Guru grew. His correspondence with Sri Aurobindo is an extraordinary record of authentic spirituality in the modern age. Behind Nirod's insouciance was a sincere will, grappling with the forces that come into play during the course of sadhana. The touchstone of a higher consciousness is

its ability to adapt itself to an inferior mentality. Nowhere we see this truth exemplified as in Nirod's correspondence with Sri Aurobindo. The Master met Nirod as man to man and their relation admitted of an equality even in inequality. All subjects under the sun were grist to their mill. For the famous declaration, "All Life is Yoga" is true not only in the sense that all life is a subconscious Yoga of Nature but also and more luminously true in the sense that the conscious Yoga in man can and should become outwardly conterminous with life itself.²

Dilip Kumar Roy, himself a close disciple and a recipient of numerous letters from Sri Aurobindo remarks, "To Nirod he would constantly assume a tone he never once assumed with me... like a comrade whom he almost invited to give him as much as he got." When Nirod asked Sri Aurobindo the reason for this special grace he was told to find the reason within himself. From the beginning philosophy was not Nirod's cup of tea. Many an epithet—"blockhead", 'ass', 'wooden headed', 'logical baby' etc.—were applied by the Master to Nirod in the course of their written exchanges through which Sri Aurobindo tried to logicise and intellectualise him. It is difficult to suppress laughter when we see the Master lord it over Nirod and yet secretly we can't help admire his courage in asking those questions.

In the course of time Nirod was asked to take up medical work in the Ashram. Another sadhak, one Ramchandra, a homoeopath, was his competitor in this line. Nirod was a hard-boiled allopath and was naturally boggled by the many successes of this gentleman. Among the many exchanges that he had with Sri Aurobindo, the relative merits of the two systems of medicine were discussed threadbare. What should be the attitude of the sadhak as a doctor? Sri Aurobindo explained this to Nirod as follows:

Immense energy, enthusiasm, vital force, 100 miles an hour determination to succeed and a 2000 horsepower confidence, "I will do it"—vital absolutely convinced of the Force, mind constantly finding reasons for belief in it (not as you and others do equally or more, admitting reasons against); rapid intuitions getting there in spite of any errors of speculation, decision of mind and will accompanied by a mobile and plastic observing mind suiting itself to the circumstances and overcoming them—that's the secret of a powerful instrumentalism—at least in a rajasic man. A sattwic fellow would do it also but on other lines. You—ahem!

Nirod couldn't help asking, "You have said, 'A sattwic fellow would do it also but on other lines.' Will you tell us how?" Sri Aurobindo replied, "I would prefer to wait till I have the said sattwic man in my hand. The sattwic man would have less vital rush, more balance, harmony, even working out of the Force. He might do less surprising things or rather give them a less surprising appearance, but possibly he would be more quietly sure."

2. *The Synthesis of Yoga.*

In 1938 Sri Aurobindo broke his thighbone in an accident. Nirod being a doctor, was one of the sadhaks selected by the Mother to attend on Sri Aurobindo. Thus began a new chapter in Nirod's life. Physical proximity to Sri Aurobindo was an undreamed of privilege in those days. Circumstances had conspired to grant Nirod that privilege. He tells us that Sri Aurobindo appeared to him as the very embodiment of Shiva, the Lord of tapasya. For twelve years a charmed circle of disciples would gather around Sri Aurobindo and draw him out on various topics. Serious discussions were interspersed with lighthearted banter. Through the record kept by Purani and Nirod we get to know something of the astounding complexity of Sri Aurobindo's personality.

One day after Sri Aurobindo had been bathed, Nirod was sitting on the floor by the side of his bed with eyes closed. Meditation came upon him as he plunged inwards and lost touch with the outer world. When the Mother came Sri Aurobindo had to rouse Nirod from his trance. Later Sri Aurobindo remarked that a psychic glow had come around Nirod's face. This gives us a glimpse into his inner life.

Even after Sri Aurobindo's fracture had healed, the group of disciples who attended on him were permitted to gather around him and attend to his needs. In the forties Sri Aurobindo's eyesight deteriorated. The Mother then appointed Nirod as Sri Aurobindo's amanuensis. Apart from many important letters, a considerable portion of *Savitri* was dictated to him. His clear handwriting and a minimum of spelling mistakes evoke admiration.

Then in 1950 Sri Aurobindo withdrew from the physical scene. Life would never be the same again for Nirod. His life's anchor was lost. Sometime before passing Sri Aurobindo had pronounced, "Nirod is no doctor to me; he has come to serve me." Mother—the very embodiment of grace, tried to fill the vacuum caused by Sri Aurobindo's departure in the lives of many sadhaks who formed Sri Aurobindo's intimate circle and Nirod was no exception. With gloomy forebodings Nirod asked the Mother regarding his future. "Why?" she said, "You will continue sleeping in Sri Aurobindo's room. As to work you have a lot to do. You will work with Nolini on Sri Aurobindo's manuscripts." This had the effect of sweeping away the clouds of gloom. As Nirod discovered that Sri Aurobindo's relinquishing of the physical sheath had in no way diminished his spiritual presence, the pain of physical separation grew more bearable. Nirod thought of publishing his correspondence with Sri Aurobindo and asked for the Mother's sanction. In the beginning she hesitated but on his replying that there was a lot of material of general interest, she consented. Humanity will remain ever grateful to Nirodbaran for this. It is not difficult for us, children of a materialistic age, to identify with Nirod in his many questions to the Master. In his replies to his disciple, Sri Aurobindo adapts spirituality to the modern age. New forms of spiritual discourse were created; the old forms revived. The entire exchange is laced with an exquisite humour. The old spirituality was based upon *vairagya*, disillusionment. The new spirituality is based upon *samata*, equality. And not merely the negative *samata*

of endurance, indifference and submission, but a positive *samata* of *rasa* and *priti*, the mind's pleasure in every kind of *rasa*.

On his 51st birthday the Mother greeted him with *Bonne Fête* and then spoke in French, “*Quel âge avez-vous?*” Nirod-da replied, “*51 ans passés, Douce Mère.*” Then the Mother said, “*Vous êtes encore enfant.*” Nirod-da is now in his 100th year yet the Mother's words still ring true. He is still a child. The Mother once had a vision in which, she saw Nirod-da and Sri Aurobindo as little children merrily playing with each other. What proof then is required of the special intimacy that the Master had with Nirod-da.

When the Centre of Education was formed, Nirod-da was given the responsibility of teaching French, English and Bengali. His many students are testimony to his exacting ways. After Mother's passing Nirod-da along with Nolini-da and Champaklal-ji became the Ashram's bulwark against the invasion by the hostiles. Nirod-da attended on Nolini-da before the latter passed away. During this period Nolini-da's consciousness ascended to rare spiritual heights. This period also saw a growing intimacy between Nirod-da and Nolini-da. Perhaps Nolini-da was handing the baton to his younger *gurubhai*. When Nirod-da recounted Nolini-da's Ashram life, the Playground was packed to the last man. Nirod-da has confided to me that before his speech, for a whole day he felt Nolini-da's concrete presence and a pressure above the head.

Any account of Nirod-da would not be complete without mention of his 'family'. This comprises of his mother, sister and her children. Nirod-da coached his nieces and nephews in French as that language was one of the mediums of instruction in the Ashram School and the children were completely unfamiliar with it when they came to Pondicherry. His niece, Dolly has looked after him for many years now. His extreme patience with her extroverted ways is for me a lesson in compassion. Another close companion is Sudha. She was one of his students and Nirod-da had personally requested the Mother to allow her to assist him in his literary work. She is his confidante and helper. Nirod-da's reliance on her is complete.

I must dwell also on Nirod-da's relation with Arabinda Basu, otherwise Arindam-da. Arindam-da is definitely a most high-minded sadhak of the Ashram. It would be tempting to describe their relation as friendship. However, the occult chemistry that exists between them goes far beyond any human friendship. They are a study in contrast. Nirod-da has followed the way of *prakriti*, content to participate in the power and delight of the Divine. “The Self,” he once said to me half seriously, “is a blessed nuisance.” Arindam-da on the other hand is a philosopher. His way is through the Purusha—the Self and Being of the Divine are his natural prerogatives. The two yogis are perfect complements of each other.

Sri Aurobindo Ashram has seen many a stalwart sadhak. Nirod-da has outlived them all. He has portrayed many of these sadhaks in his essays. These include Nolini, Amrita, Pavitra, Champaklal, his friends Kalyan and Pradyot, Pujalal, Sunil, André—

the Mother's son, Dr. Indrasen, Bula, Sahana and Nishikanta. Nirod-da's portrayal creates the atmosphere of an intimate direct contact, a characteristic of his nature. We feel we are getting a first-person account without any inflation or deflation. English is not the only language in which Nirod-da has expressed himself. Apart from poetry and prose in English, he has written numerous songs and other assorted writings in Bengali. I give here the English rendition of one of the most popular ones, which is suffused with a mystic mood. The translation is by Arabinda Basu.

I Chant Thy Name

The honey of a Name pours all over the universe,
 On that Name, a cosmic *veena* plays endless melodies.
 You do not know that Name,
 Its vibrations you have not heard,
 Nor have you faith in its Splendour,—
 It is a jewel of Light.
 The name is a refuge that protects,
 It pervades the whole world.
 I hear that name in the secret heart of Heaven,
 It dwells in the deep still waters of the Unconscious,
 In the nectar of that Lotus Name
 Lie Adoration and Freedom.
 Life and Death are woven
 In the same tune in its rhythm.
 Ah! To chant its mantra
 In grief and pain and great joy,—
 I repeat in all I do
 That honeyed Name—Aurobindo.

All his life Nirod-da has been a sportsman. In a long and arduous yoga, the body has to be maintained in good health. For the body is the *adhara*, the objective basis on which all else can repose. Moreover the sportsman's spirit of camaraderie lends a higher value even to mundane life. Even now Nirod-da retains his enthusiasm for tennis, cricket and football and makes it a point to see the finals of any major sporting event on television at his friend Wilfy's place.

Over the years Nirod-da has become the connecting link with the Master's consciousness for many. He has also become a point of reference for Aurobindonians of all hues. Always unassuming, he nevertheless wields a tangential authority. Many a youngster has benefited from his guidance. He brings to my mind what Churchill once wrote about his political colleague Lloyd George. Churchill writes, "He had the 'seeing eye.' He had that deep original instinct which peers through the surfaces of words and things—the vision that sees dimly but surely the other side of the brick

dearest is gone. Is life worthwhile without his smile?" Amal-da and Nirod-da had been "fellow-drunkards of the overhasty wine of mystic poetry."

His body was kept for darshan till 4 p.m. on the 18th. Hundreds, perhaps more than a thousand from the Ashram, Auroville and outside paid their last respects to Nirod-da. Then he was taken to Cazanove, our Ashram garden where in a coffin with Sri Aurobindo's symbol on top, he was laid to rest.

HEMANT KAPOOR

SLEEP OF LIGHT

My life is veiled in a sleep of light,
A hush that nothing breaks;
The world before my inward sight
Into pure beauty wakes.

Life that is deep and wonder-vast,
Lost in a breath of sound;
The bubbling shadows have been cast
From its heart's timeless round.

In its lulled silver stream now shines
A lustrous smile of God
Whose brilliantly curved outlines,
Flashing on the memory-trod

Caverns of slumbering earth, there bring
A glow of the Infinite,
While my soul's diamond voices wing
Into a heaven of light.

NIRODBARAN

(*Sun-Blossoms*, Sri Aurobindo Circle, 1947, p. 46)

WASHING OF SRI AUROBINDO'S CLOTHES

CLOTHES used personally by Sri Aurobindo or in his service were taken care of by different people who washed, ironed, and when needed, mended them. Sri Aurobindo's clothes were washed by Champaklal, Moti-ben, Anjali, Bibha and later by Nalina for a few days. These clothes were ironed by Nalina and Anjali. There were many ladies who were given the work of mending the clothes when needed.

When we look at the photographs of Sri Aurobindo, we notice that in his early days till his stay in Baroda, he used to wear Western clothes. When in Bengal we find him in dhoti, punjabi, and chaddar or shawl. In a few pictures taken in Pondicherry before 1950, he is either wearing a dhoti, one side of which is wrapped over his upper body, or he is wearing a dhoti with a chaddar.

Sri Aurobindo's clothes

The earliest record of washing Sri Aurobindo's clothes is in *Champaklal Speaks*, p. 48. Champaklal records there:

One day I said to Mother: "Mother, I would like to wash my father's dhoti." She smiled and said that she would ask Sri Aurobindo. The next day when I went to Sri Aurobindo he looked at me and said: "You want to wash my dhoti?"

Champaklal: "Yes."

Sri Aurobindo: "Are you ready?"

I looked at him in surprise and wondered why he asked that.

Sri Aurobindo: "You know, people will mock at you, laugh at you, joke about you. Are you ready for all that?" When he saw that I was eager to do this work in spite of such possibilities, he looked at me affectionately and smiled. He said so because the Ashram atmosphere was like that at that time. But very soon Mother changed it entirely.

This incident took place during the early days of his stay in the Ashram.

Moti-ben takes over the washing

Later, this work was given to Moti-ben, Champaklal's aunt. She arrived in Pondicherry in 1926. She recounts in her reminiscences (*Mother India*, Feb. 1995) the following:

I had the privilege of washing Sri Aurobindo's clothes twice a day and this way I got his darshan also twice a day. I went to Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's bathrooms in the morning to collect the clothes for washing and in the evening took back the cleaned clothes.... I went to Sri Aurobindo's room in the evening

to keep his dhoti there. Initially I used to place it outside his room. Later on, the Mother permitted me to place it inside. Those days Sri Aurobindo kept walking up and down in his room. As soon as I opened the door he would switch on the light and I would place his dhoti inside.

At Moti-ben's residence on the first floor of the present Ashram Post Office building, all arrangements were made for washing of clothes. She used to wash and iron Sri Aurobindo's dhoti. After drying the dhoti, Moti-ben would finely crease it. This was done by a specially made small wooden structure. In Bengal, Babus of that time, always had their dhotis similarly creased.

Moti-ben recounts:

...After his accident, I had to wash heaps of clothes every day.

Once, she had used up all of the monthly stock of her soap. She asked Mother for more. Sri Aurobindo wrote to her in Gujarati that clothes get spoilt very soon if too much soap is used!

Washing of sheets, curtains, etc.

When the Second World War started, supplies of many items which came from foreign countries stopped. One of the items was washing soap for Ashramites. Pavitra-da guided Jatindra-da, who was looking after the Bakery, to make bars of washing soap needed for Ashram work. The Mother and the other Ashramites were very satisfied with the results of this soap.

From then on items like bed-sheets, bed-covers, curtains etc. received from the Mother's or Sri Aurobindo's rooms were washed in the building, which became the new Laundry of the Ashram—"Blanchisserie". Mulshankar brought these to the Laundry and also took the washed ones back to the Ashram. These were personally washed and ironed by Jatindra-da. Jatindra-da used to sweat profusely, so when ironing these pieces he used a small table-fan offered for this purpose by a devotee. While attending to these items he never spoke, he even tied a cloth around his mouth to avoid any spit falling on these special articles.

Washing of Sri Aurobindo's clothes as narrated by Bibha who was given this work by the Mother in 1941

Sri Aurobindo's clothes were washed in "Dutta House" (14, Rue de la Marine), in the evening at 6 p.m. by Anjali and Bibha. The Mother's clothes were washed in the morning hours. Clothes washed on the ground floor were dried on the first floor. There was a big, long hall, open on all sides, with doors or windows. In this hall there was a long table used for drying the linen.

Linens used by Sri Aurobindo, except his dhoti, were washed by Anjali and Bibha. Liquid soap was used for washing and there was a good supply of water too. We shall mention here how many of the clothes had to be washed in a special way as most of them were being used for a long time.

There were two very good quality silk chaddars with maroon borders. These were rather worn out, but Sri Aurobindo preferred to use them. Many of his bed-sheets and pillow covers were darned. Nirmala did this job. These were darned so skilfully that they looked like beautiful embroidered ones.

Cleaning of such items was difficult. When washing such old pieces, the item would first be spread out on a towel. Together with the towel it would first be dipped in water and an adequate amount of liquid soap was added. Both the towel and the piece would be taken out and dipped repeatedly in clean water till there was no trace of soap left. The whole process was done in such a way that the strain of the washing was borne by the towel. Thus the actual piece would be saved from further wear and tear.

Cleaned items after washing were taken to the first floor for drying. Clothes were never squeezed for drying. Both the towel and the item were placed spread out on the long table. Another towel would be placed on top of the previous one and then by gentle pressure of the palm over the whole area, water would be absorbed till the item was dry.

These were taken to Nalina's house where they would be ironed. A neat bundle was made of these clothes and it would be handed over to Champaklal.

*

We recount a beautiful incident. One napkin, which was used for wiping a table in Sri Aurobindo's room, was so worn out that it was difficult, even with all the precautions taken, to wash it any more. The ladies who were washing the clothes were afraid that the threads may give way any day, and thus the piece may get torn. Anjali reported to Champaklal the condition of the napkin. Next time they received a new one. It seems that Sri Aurobindo remarked to this effect: "Champaklal, how could you reject so easily something which has served you faithfully for so many years?"

CHITRA SEN

DR. VENKATASWAMY

[Dr. Venkataswamy of Aravind Eye Hospitals passed away at Madurai on 7 July 2006.]

THERE is a clear distinction between a successful man and a great one. Success as defined in the worldly ways is recognised by the possession of wealth, power, through an extravagant lifestyle and a big-size ego. A successful man carries his success on his sleeve to ensure that everyone recognises him as such.

On the other hand, a great person pays no attention to any of the above-mentioned pillars on which success is installed and worshipped. Perhaps he does not even know what success means. He is busy working. Especially, if he has embarked on a spiritual journey, for to him, work is just a means of expression and not an end in itself.

Hence, it is easier to speak about a successful man. You have just to present his credentials by stating his deeds, his outer-life activities and an inventory of his material possessions.

But when you need to speak about great persons, you tend to stumble and even stammer. Much of what they think and do is not so obvious or visible. These persons run deep. Thus you will always fall short of the appropriate and adequate words to portray their journey through life.

“Doctor”, as I have always addressed him over the last 56 years, by this definition is a great person. I have known him since I was 12. As I was growing up, he was gradually growing in stature. Subconsciously, he had become one of my role models. I wished I could be like him: always peaceful, patient, not subject to anger and egoless.

For many years, he stayed with us whenever he came to the Ashram. His simplicity was breathtaking: simple in attitude, in behaviour and in speech. He made no fuss about food or about anything else. He was almost invisible in our house. Hence we never saw him as a house-guest.

He developed a deep faith in the Mother and Sri Aurobindo which gave him the confidence to undertake a gigantic task. No wonder then, all his hospitals are named after the Lord.

In the beginning, I don't think he believed he would be able to execute his large vision. He retired from the Government hospital at the age of 58. At this age, a normal person does not take up fresh challenges. Moreover, he told us, he did not have too much money either. That did not deter him. I think his learning came from the Mother who once said, “Whatever you may want to do in life, one thing is absolutely indispensable and at the basis of everything, the capacity of concentrating the attention. If you are able to gather together the rays of attention and consciousness on one point and can maintain this concentration with a persistent will, nothing can resist it.”

He decided to embark on this journey—a vision that would give sight to thousands of poor people at no cost.

Once he had shown me the letters he had written to various international

organisations seeking assistance or equipment to carry out cataract operations out of vans. His tone of sincerity and conviction brought him the mobile vans from England. I have seen some of the camps that he held on Sundays in the various districts of Madurai. The TVS group let him use their sponsored schools for the patients to rest a while after the surgery.

He did it step by step, as if he had the whole plan worked out. What I found remarkable, being in Marketing and Communication for over 38 years, was his unique achievement of transferring the best practices from one industry and applying the same principles in a totally different field. What he learned from the world-famous McDonald model and the manner in which he applied it in the domain of eye care has made his achievement a case study at the Harvard University. Dr. C. K. Prahlad, the management guru, has written about it in his recent book. Nobody else has been able to achieve this feat—from hamburgers to eye care—from one part of the body to another. Quite remarkable.

What is even more remarkable is that he never took short cuts, never compromised or relented on his principles.

His leadership was not the result of power. It came by example, and that is why he had such a faithful following of dedicated workers.

As a person, he never displayed any excessive emotion. He was really a man of few words. But once in a while, his gentle query, a comment or a gesture would convey his affection and caring. Some three months ago, my wife Manju and I went to visit him in the hospital in Madurai. In a soft, feeble voice, he said, “Thanks for coming to see me.” From his sickbed, he would tell his sister Dr. Natchiar what to give us for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

On the second day, he asked me, “You go so often to Singapore. What is the fare?” I looked at Natchiar, astonished. She smiled and showed me an e-mail which said that “Doctor” had been awarded the Asia Pacific Award for excellence in hospital management. It also said that he should receive it in person. I think he wanted to go—not to bring glory for himself but for the hospital.

I admired all his sterling qualities. He was dedicated to a worthy cause. While Aravind Eye Hospital gained international recognition and admiration, “Doctor’s” life-style, his humility, his lack of ego, his graciousness and affection remained completely intact and well-protected. He was detached regarding the results and continued his relentless pursuit of excellence. He said to the attending doctors out of his oxygen mask, “We need to make Aravind Eye Hospital global, and I need 3 years to do it.”

Dr. Abdul Kalam, at the inauguration of the hospital at Pondicherry on 21 February 2002, said, “Dr. V. is a Karmayogi.”

I think he was more than that. He was a fine example of a disciple of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother who followed their teachings with total dedication and sincerity.

I consider myself to be most fortunate for having him cross my path.

RAM SEHGAL

TOWARDS HARMONY OF CULTURES

...all problems of existence are essentially problems of harmony.¹

Sri Aurobindo

*How rich an estate man lies fallow here!
If this were tilled, a golden crop would spring...²*

Ramprasad Sen, 18th century Bengali mystic and poet.

Translated by Sri Aurobindo

THERE IS NO unanimity of views regarding the concept of culture. It means different things to different people. A. L. Kroeber and Clyde Klukhohn in their book *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* have mentioned 164 definitions of culture. “Learned behaviour”, “ideas in the mind”, “a logical construct”, “a statistical fiction”, “a psychic defense mechanism”, are some of the concepts of culture they have cited. They themselves, like other anthropologists, prefer to define culture as “an abstraction from behaviour”. I do not propose to examine these concepts and definitions of culture except to say that some of them have a grain of truth. Behaviour, especially learned behaviour, is certainly an ingredient of culture. No doubt there is instinctive behaviour but to control it by reason, by ideas in the mind, and not to continue to conduct oneself in a crude and gross manner is one of the things a cultured man is expected to do. E. B. Tylor in his *Primitive Culture* wrote: “Culture is that complete whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, custom or any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.” And later in his book *Anthropology* he spoke of the mental gulf that divides the lowest savage from the highest ape. Culture, whatever concept we may have of it, is something which man alone possesses.

Matthew Arnold defined culture as the pursuit of perfection. The means of the pursuit were “getting to know on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world, and through this knowledge turning a stream of truth and free thought upon our stock notions and habits which we now follow staunchly but mechanically vainly imagining that there is a virtue in following them staunchly which makes up for the mischief of following them mechanically. And the culture we recommend—is above all, an inward operation...” I have made use of this rather long citation because I shall have occasion to discuss later many of the things Arnold has mentioned here.

Man, who alone among all living creatures possesses culture, is a mental being. He is capable of reflective thinking, of looking at and examining his ideas and motives,

1. *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 18, p. 2.

2. *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, SABCL, Vol. 14, p. 71.

of entertaining ideals and devising ways of realising them. All these are functions of consciousness. It is needless to say that it is not being suggested that all men are equally intelligent, equally sensitive, equally determined. At the same time, it cannot be denied that it is possible to improve one's understanding, refine one's feeling, make one's will stronger. To actualise possibilities inherent in human nature is culture in its basic sense.

I find the root meaning of the word culture, cultivation, very useful in determining its concept. Culture is not found ready-made; rather it is the result of labour and effort. It is cultivation not of the soil, nor the manipulation of the lower organisms. It is the cultivation of man's faculties, capabilities and hidden qualities. For most people culture means, as in Tylor's definition quoted above, knowledge, arts and customs, habits, etc. which is true enough; civility, urbanity, good manners are parts of culture too. But it should be noted that some people are naturally civil and courteous, many are not only not so but are gross and uncouth in their conduct and speech. Yes, but it is open to them to "cultivate" civility etc.

"A cultivated man" is a significant phrase. But such a man is not only one who has good manners, refined speech and civil conduct. Cultivation of mind must go deeper to deserve the name of culture. Good manners etc. are the outward expression of culture, not its soul. To my mind, consciousness is the key to the understanding of everything that pertains to and concerns man. In Vedanta, the acme of Indian spiritual thought, *cit*, Consciousness is the ultimate and fundamental Reality. It is not responding to stimulus from outside nor merely interpreting physical and mental events and functions. It is a self-evident, self-aware Reality immobile and infinitely spread out and the basis and source and sustaining power of human personality and of everything in the world. It is well known that personality changes, improves or becomes worse or, to make matters more complicated, progresses in certain respects and regresses in others. This happens because consciousness in man changes and this is reflected in the differences in personality.

I am, however, for the purpose of the essay, taking consciousness as we find it on the human level and not as *a* or *the* metaphysical reality. Human consciousness is multi-level and not a unilevel thing. Man is at once a physical, a vital and a mental being. Admittedly, he is distinguished from other animals by his mind. But he has a body, a vital force functioning in his physical frame and a mind which can become in many a self-reflective light and also capable of leading his vitality and physical existence. As the Upanishad puts it: "Man is the mental being, the leader of vitality and the body." This is however a description of the ideal man. The majority of men do not lead their vitality and physicality by their mentality but are led by them.

There are people who like primarily to fulfil their physical and vital needs and desires. They can be described as barbarians for they live in the physical consciousness. Physical strength is the sign of manhood and pursuit of knowledge is a peculiarity and weakness. The barbarian is led more by instinct than by reason. He however is

not a being who belonged to the past only. There are barbarians in all societies, in every age and clime, even in the more advanced civilisations. An advanced civilisation may not be highly or truly cultured. A society may have all the appurtenances of a comfortable, even luxurious life, the most developed technology and means of fulfilling all conceivable pleasures. But it may not be evolved in the qualities of mind. If culture is an inward operation (Arnold), then such a society is not cultured though civilised.

The contemporary world is an example of high civilisation and low culture. The advance of science and technology and the available means of quick travel and communication have made possible the spread of knowledge and ideas. But it has created a “consumer economy” mentality. Possession of things and gadgets, opulence, one-upmanship are the hallmark of the modern civilisation. It has produced a new brand of barbarians. They are the new Philistines. The Philistine identifies himself with the vital and mental consciousness. The vital is the seat of desire and its characteristic drive is for possession, excitement and sensation. The Philistine, thanks to modern science and technology, is literate and reads books but thrives on newspapers and magazines, has heard or perhaps has even read Whitman and Melville, but has no idea of what their merit is as a poet or a novelist. He mouths other people’s opinions and echoes their views on art, literature, society and hardly ever thinks for himself. It could well be said, “He does not act but only reacts.”

There are many people in any cultural environment who live on the level of the mind, for disinterested knowledge, creation and appreciation of beauty and selfless service of their fellows. It is not that they neglect, nor do they have to, the satisfaction of the vital needs or health and strength of the body. In fact a man who can strike a fine balance between these three levels or sides of his personality and life may properly be deemed more cultured than others whose developments are lopsided. The ideal of culture must be total and whole.

The idea of total and harmonious culture raises a most important question. Is there in man a principle of harmony? The mind, even at its very best, is certainly not an instrument of achieving harmony between the different parts or aspects of man’s personality. I said above that man is the mental being who is the leader of the vital and the body. True enough, but yet it is obvious that the leadership of the mind is not effective. We must look for something else in him which can effectuate a harmony of the various aspects of his personality. There is a person behind the external personality—the triple nature of mind, vital and body—which is a spiritual reality. This is the soul in him, a portion of God, the limited and evolving divine element in him. It is in the soul that the key to harmony can be found.

But the soul, an evolving entity, has the mind as its best and highest power. Mind or reason, however, is incapable of achieving harmony between the warring aspects of his personality. He needs to evolve further, to elevate himself to a higher level of consciousness—a consciousness which has inherent in it integral and comprehensive knowledge and enlightened and infallible will.

I have till now spoken about the culture of an individual human being and nothing about harmony of cultures. The reason is culture is not something impersonal. A culture of a people is what the people make it. "There are three powers", writes Sri Aurobindo, "that we must grasp in order to judge the life-value of a culture. There is, first, the power of its original conception of life; there is, next, the power of the forms, types and rhythms it has given to life; there is, last, the inspiration, the vigour, the force of vital execution of its motives manifested in the actual lives of men and of the community that flourished under its influence."³ Conflict of cultures is certainly a deplorable thing. But it seems to me that the conflict is not so much between cultures as between people who create and belong to different cultural environments. If they can become really cultured they would be able to appreciate world-views and systems of values other than their own. Intellectual, moral and religious bigotry would give place to mutual understanding and appreciation. Religion has been a divisive force and the cause of conflicts between different nations of humanity. This is because the externals of religion are considered more important—dogmas, rituals, cults—than the inner essence of religion which is discovery of the spirit in man and his relation with the supreme Spirit. That, however, is not a sufficient guard against conflict of cultures. Spirituality comprehensive and forceful must be the guiding light and leading power of both individual and collective life. All life must become the fertile soil in which total and harmonious culture can flourish, and wholeness is not only an ideal cherished by a cultured person but an inherent characteristic of the mature spiritual soul.

A culture worth the name must embrace all sides of human existence and life and render possible the all-round development of man's potentialities. Sri Aurobindo's concept of culture can be an illuminating guide here. "The culture of a people", he writes, "may be roughly described as the expression of a consciousness of life which formulates itself in three aspects. There is a side of thought, of ideal, of upward will and the soul's aspiration; there is a side of creative self-expression and appreciative aesthesis, intelligence and imagination, and there is a side of practical and outward formulation."⁴ In this not so rough description of culture, "a consciousness of life" is the important part. The aspects of thought, ideal, upward will and the soul's aspiration signify philosophy, ethics, religion and spirituality; there is creation and appreciation of beauty in literature and visual and auditory arts, and there are too economics, politics and social organisation. One or another aspect of these elements of culture is emphasised in a certain civilisation though no community can be without any of them in some measure. The culture of the ancient Greeks was predominantly rational and aesthetic, that of the pioneering Jews ethical and social, of the Far East also social and aesthetic, in medieval Europe we see a splendid example of religious faith as the basis and driving force of life. The civilisation of the modern Western world is economic

3. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

and commercial and a disconcerting example of inordinate desire for sensation, excitement and enjoyment.

This character of Western civilisation is an expression of the Western “sense” of “consciousness” of the world. The Western idea is that an unconscious force has manifested as the material universe. Paradoxically the unconscious has given birth to Life and Mind which cannot be considered as unconscious. Many explanations have been given of this paradox. But I am not concerned with them now. What is true is that the materialistic conception of the world has caused the tendency “to drink life to the lees”. Admittedly there is high philanthropic idealism in Western culture. But when all is said and done there is no abiding value of these ideals—disinterested pursuit of knowledge, goodness and beauty. This attitude to human existence and life in the world is admirably expressed in the magnificent prose poem of Bertrand Russell, *A Freeman’s Worship*. There is no denying the fact that the feverish rush after pleasure creates tension, unbalance and neuroses.

In India, the foundation of the many-faceted culture was spiritual. The spiritual culture harmonised the Eternal and the temporal, the sacred and the secular and did not therefore ignore the other aspects of culture mentioned above. It did not neglect the mind and the body for it recognised from the beginning that the Spirit works through the physical and mental instruments for its self-expression in the world. Ancient India’s contribution to intuitive philosophy, logic, spiritual psychology, the sciences of mathematics, astronomy, chemistry and medicine, literature, drama and dance, poetry and painting and sculpture is a marvel. The perception of the primacy of the Spirit was reflected in the social organisation, and in economic and political systems and in its morality and ethics, too.

It will betray lack of understanding and appreciation if the sterling qualities of Western civilisation and culture are ignored. Its vitality, vivacity, creativity are commendable qualities worthy of emulation by cultures not so dynamic and unprogressive as the cultures of South East Asia have been for roughly speaking the last couple of centuries. Christianity has to some extent ethicised and humanised the people of the Western world who have extended a hand of help and assistance to the more unfortunate sections of the peoples of Asia and Africa, and this despite the economic exploitation and political domination of them by the more prosperous and powerful nations of the West. Nevertheless, it is true that the culture of the West is rational and materialistic and that it does not draw its inspiration and sustaining power from spiritual sources. At the same time it must be said that the Asian and African peoples will do well to weave the values of Western culture—its vitality and humanitarianism—into the fabric of their respective cultures even as the Western world will gain immensely if it can give up its strong materialistic bias and driving vital desires. Certainly its vitality and dynamism will be exhausted if it does not turn to spirituality. There is nothing wrong with enjoying but surely it is essential that our tastes should be refined and that we should learn to enjoy the things of the mind and the spirit.

People of one culture criticise and condemn some aspects of other cultures because they see them only superficially and do not take into account the geography, climate, and other physical aspects of the areas where those cultures develop and flourish. They understand little or nothing of the different psychology of other people and therefore of the cultures which are expressions of their respective “senses” or “consciousness” of life. This ignorance and lack of understanding give birth to intolerance which is one of the basic reasons of conflict of cultures. Tolerance of other people’s ways of thinking, feeling and acting is one of the essential ingredients of the harmony of cultures. But tolerance is not simply to tolerate. It must be based on wide understanding and sympathetic appreciation of other ways of living.

To have sympathetic understanding and even appreciation of other cultures does not involve any need to adopt other ways of thought etc. But there must be acceptance of the fact that human nature is extremely varied and should not be and cannot be moulded in the same cast. It is also necessary to know that culture is a human phenomenon and therefore no culture can be perfect in all respects. One may feel most strongly the inequities of the Inquisition. But that is no reason why he should not be able to appreciate the deep devotional love of St. John of the Cross for Christ who was the very breath of his existence and his wonderful poetry. One may deplore medieval Christianity’s consistent putting of barriers against progress of the knowledge of the world and its persecution of leaders of science, but it would be only poorness of spirit that would prevent him from appreciating the great system of thought of St. Thomas Aquinas. A Westerner or a person from the Middle East feels scorn for Hinduism because it allows worship of various gods and goddesses—but not of God, be it noted—in symbolic images. Only ignorance of the Hindu standpoint in this matter causes the unintelligent attitude. But he will prove himself very insensitive if he fails to admire the magnificent metaphysics of Shankara or the devotional songs of the Alwar saints and of Mirabai, the cave paintings of Ajanta, the sculpture of Ellora, the architecture of the temples, or the poetry of Kalidasa. It is understandable that many people are incensed by the following to the letter the traditional laws in Islamic countries. But if the devotional mysticism of Sufism, or the grandeur of the thought of Ibn Arabi or the intricate elegance of Islamic architecture fails to impress them, then one may only conclude that their minds are closed to intellectual and aesthetic illumination.

I have said that tolerance of other ways of thinking, feeling, acting and living should be based on understanding of other cultures. At least there should be a sincere attempt to understand, even if one cannot have a sympathetic appreciation of another culture. Indeed such an attempt is itself a sign of culture. Tolerance also needs acknowledgment that one’s own culture may lack something which other cultures have. This is more difficult to do than to try to understand the foundations of other cultures and their philosophies, religions etc. based upon them. But to have genuine humility and the healthy scepticism about the perfection of one’s own culture are

signs of a cultured temperament. These qualities need to be cultivated.

I have said above that the dogmatic religions are great obstacles in the way of harmony of cultures. As Sri Aurobindo has said, religion mixed with the human ego is a dangerous thing. History bears ample witness to this fact. Yet, spirituality breaks down the walls set up by dogmatic religions which make cult, creed and institution the more important elements of religion. Even in recent times followers of Islam in Bangladesh, formerly East Pakistan, have acknowledged that they learned the essence of *namāz* from a great Hindu mystic and yogi, whose name was Ram Thakur. He did not undermine the faith of the Muslims in their own religion but awakened them to its essential truth. There have been Christian and Muslim disciples of Hindu gurus and Hindu devotees of Muslim sufis. These gurus and sufis were men who had great spiritual experiences which gave them insight into the truths of other systems of faith. That is why under the umbrella of their living and forceful spirituality followers of different religions could meet.

The aim of all civilised people should be to achieve harmony of cultures. That cannot be accomplished by domination of any one culture. Though such domination is not practically possible, even the idea must not be entertained. The ideal is a common world-culture in which national cultures should not be fused and merged into cultures with different principles and temperaments. Instead each culture should evolve to the full potentiality of its power. A culture would or could benefit to that end by constructive contact and fruitful exchange with other cultures. And it would benefit them by giving them its gains and achievements.

For harmony of religions we need to be humble and understanding, have broad minds and spirits, have respect for our fellow beings and above all, be lovers of humanity.

ARABINDA BASU

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PAINTING AS SADHANA

Krishnalal Bhatt (1905-1990)

(Continued from the issue of July 2006)

11

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

1935

3/1/35: Mother,

Herewith I send four portrait studies which I did recently. The portrait [*of*] Shivji I did before he went away, and gave it to him. He left it here and I have to send it to him.

Anu's portrait I have tried in pastel colours. Other two portraits are of Champaklal and Mohanlal.

I request Mother to let me know how far each of them is successful and what are the defects. I would like to have suggestions and instructions which may be helpful in other such studies which I intend to do.

Sri Aurobindo: As yet it is not successful. There are some mistakes in the building of the faces, but that is not of so much importance. It is the expression that is not satisfactory—you have not yet been able to bring out what is best in your subjects—it is something from the lower vital that comes out so that they do not look really like themselves. It is the expression of a mood and not of the man.

4/1/35: Mother,

I have done a design of peacock which I intend to present to Anu on her birthday if Mother has no objection.

Sri Aurobindo: You can do if you like.

[Undated] [*end*] ...the idea I may have to do the outline drawing of the design about four times bigger than the original. The blue of the design can be worked with white or silver thread and gold colour with gold thread on a light blue or green colour cloth.

Sri Aurobindo: No, Mother does not want a curtain behind her seat.

[Sketched in the margin is Mother's Darshan seat; behind it a curtain with a peacock drawn just above the line of the head of the seat.]

25/Jan/35: [*end*] ...herewith. The papers are in rolls of 25 yds each. May I request Mother for the sanction of half roll of each?

Mother: Yes.

K: If Mother sanctions I think of writing to Jagmohan at Bombay, who can send the roll of paper with some person who may be coming for Darshan in February.

In that case Mother will kindly inform Amrita to give the necessary amount.

Mother: You can ask him.

[*Later K added at the bottom right, in red pencil, "8Rs 2as" underlining it twice.*]

28/1/35: Mother,

The picture that I gave you today is done in the tempera style. Generally I do pictures by giving washes of colours. Instead of that in this picture I put layer after layer of colours mixed with white colour. This tempera style is similar to that of Rajput and Mogul paintings.

What does this picture signify?

Sri Aurobindo: The red lotus signifies the presence of the Divine on the Earth. The sun is the symbol of the Supermind.

5/2/35: Mother,

Since some days I feel strain on the nerves. After sleep I find a little ache in the body. Sometimes I get the sleep rather late due to the nervous strain in the head. The headache is more or less constant. I have not been able to trace any reason for it.

I try to remain quiet but sometimes to try means more strain in the head. I do not read and do not exert for concentration also, though sometimes it automatically begins and I feel relieved for that much time.

Mother will kindly explain me what is it due to?

Sri Aurobindo: It must be due to inner contradictions straining the nervous system and the physical mind.

5/2/35: -Mother,

On the occasion of the mid-night Pranam I gave a design done on an everite piece. I did it only for the temporary use. I intended to do a new design at the interval of some days, and leave it with Mother or at any place where Mother may decide. If Mother approves of this idea Mother may send back the everite piece.

Sri Aurobindo: Very well.

8/2/35: [*end*] ...especially brushes and colours which are likely to be destroyed by insects.

In addition, I use fly-tox on the back of the picture of the Cows in the Reception Hall. But henceforward I will be economical in the use of fly-tox.

Mother will kindly let me know whether I can get it once a month or not?

Mother: Yes, you can have it once a month. In the Fly-Tox notice they advise never to leave Fly-Tox in the pump as it evaporates very quickly from there.

18-Mar-'35: Mother,

In my painting activity I have observed that after doing some pictures there comes an interval when I do not feel to do any painting, there is no inspiration and sometimes I feel dryness (forgetfulness of myself being an artist) momentarily. But once that interval is over the joy of painting returns and I get inspired mostly from within and from outside also. I am not being able to trace any reason for such intervals.

Mother will let me know the possible reasons.

Sri Aurobindo: It is very common with artists, poets and all creators. The usual reason is that the vital gets fatigued and needs some time to recuperate itself and get back the creative effort.

K: In this interval I think I have to deal more with the impulses of vital nature and to keep balance in them. Can it be that because I have to remain concentrated on the movements of the vital nature I cannot concentrate on the painting work? This is my construction. Mother will kindly guide me with her light.

Sri Aurobindo: It is more likely that the vital, fatigued of the effort, begins to have movements of other kinds which you have then to control.

K: This time I feel another thing also, but it is very vague and I am not sure about it. I feel that now I should go to deeper or higher sources for the inspiration, and that the sources from which I generally did my pictures, now do not appeal to me much. Am I correct in having this feeling? Or what is the right thing behind this feeling?

Sri Aurobindo: It is correct. There is a movement to get at deeper and higher sources.

28.3.35: Mother,

Herewith is a letter for Mother from Kanta (my wife). She requests Mother for copies of Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's photographs with signature and blessings.

Sri Aurobindo: We give these new photographs only to the members of the Ashram.

6.4.35: [end] ...Jayantilal for the copy of the messages. Mother will kindly let me know if he can be given permission or if he should apply for it directly.

Sri Aurobindo: He can have the permission.

[*Pencilled here* "(N. L. Bose wanting to have a copy of Messages through Jayantilal)"]

19-5-35: [end] ...for the permission in the Ashram to stay for some months. Mother will kindly let me know if he can be given permission.

Sri Aurobindo: What is his exact idea in wanting to come here? To practise Yoga? [*"Jayantilal" is pencilled at the top of the letter.*]

Mother [*on white chit paper*]: 24-5-35.

Krishnalal,

Would you have any objection to giving some painting lessons to Anusuya (the daughter of Duraiswami) during her stay here? She is very eager to learn.

With blessings always.

24/May/35: [end] ...Mother will kindly suggest as to how shall I give her painting lessons.

Sri Aurobindo: She can do what you give her at home and show you. But it is better if from time to time you show her how things are to be done.

[*Pencilled here* “(Drawing lessons to Anusuya Doraiswamy)”]

29.5.35: [end] ...him in answer he wrote to me the accompanying letter.

Sri Aurobindo: He can come for darshan and we will see.

[*Pencilled here* “(Jayantilal wanting to stay in Ashram for some time)”]

4.6.'35: Mother,

Herewith is a letter from Kanta (my wife) to Mother. She is asking for the permission for darshan in August.

Sri Aurobindo: Are you [*sure*] she does not want to come with the hope of living near you?

4.6.'35: Mother,

I have started a drawing for a painting. I have done the pencil outline of the main female figure. I would like to show it to Mother and take suggestions if Mother can spare some time.

Sri Aurobindo: Mother will see when she can call you.

5.6.'35: Mother,

I have made it clear to Kanta that here there is not that same old relation. And whenever she asked about the Ashram life I wrote clearly about it and also that all those who stay here are to stay according to Mother's guidance and to serve them—Mother and Sri Aurobindo. And so I am sure that she knows about the requirements of the Ashram life.

Sri Aurobindo: She can come for darshan but it must be understood that she must not ask to stay here.

Mother: 13.6.35.

Krishnalal,

It struck me, this morning, that the cause of your emaciation might be worms.

Do you not think it would be better to consult Nirod on the matter?

With my blessings.

[Undated]: Mother,

Since last three days my whole body aches, especially after the sleep in the morning and noon. For the whole day I feel I want to lie down. While sleeping I get dreams but I feel as if I am not asleep. What attitude should I keep in this?

Sri Aurobindo: It is probably only a temporary resistance in the physical. The best

attitude is not to be anxious, to open quietly to the Yoga force and let it pass.

17.6.35: Mother,

I take Nergine everyday in the noon and in the evening with curd and milk respectively. Since then I find that my appetite is increasing, and gradually I increase the quantity of food. As yet the weakness is the same, perhaps it has increased after taking a dose of purgative (with the tablet for worms).

Nirod is to give me cod-liver oil which I will try and see if I recoup in health and energy. As for nervous strain I find that it is lessened. As long as the inner quietness is maintained there is no strain. But I am not able to keep it for all the time and once lost there is nervous strain in even trying to be quiet. What should be my general attitude to remain relieved from the strain?

Sri Aurobindo: To sleep well (not resisting sleep) is one thing. Inner quiet is of course the most important.

K: Mother will also suggest if there is anything to be done for the health.

Sri Aurobindo: You must tell when the Nergine is finished so that Mother [*can*] give you more. With that and the cod-liver oil, if it agrees with your constitution, the health ought to get stronger.

K: May I put my suggestion before Mother whether I can prepare and take tea in the afternoon? I may take it only if Mother does not see any objection in my taking it.

Sri Aurobindo: Tea does not give strength—it only stimulates for a time.

18/6/35: [*end*] ...Can Mother allow me to take something with the bread? When tea is not good, Mother may give permission for milk, or else what She may think suitable.

Sri Aurobindo: Mother thinks it would be best if you take plantains with the bread and drink some lemon and water. Mother is giving a chit.

21.6.35: Mother,

I had a dream on Wednesday night. In it I saw Mother sitting for Pranam ceremony, a great many people had gathered for darshan and Pranam. When pranam began first there came two cats, most probably one female and the other male, for pranam. Mother gave them blessings and flowers which they took in their mouths and went away quietly. After that when others were doing pranam I also did pranam and Mother put both her hands on my head and back and kept them for a long time. I felt so happy that I began to cry. Then She gave me two flowers.

After that dream on the next day—Thursday—morning when I did pranam and took flower the Mother had actually given me two flowers. (On that day the flowers were “Right attitude in the material”—a small red flower with 5 petals). What can be the significance of the dream?

Sri Aurobindo: Right attitude in action. Mother was moved to give the two flowers, one for spiritual life, the other for your work.

It was simply a blessing and bestowal of two powers. Cats represent vital tendencies, here shown to be converted.

K: And if there is any connection between giving two flowers in the dream and in pranam, what is its significance?

Sri Aurobindo: It was to confirm on the physical what was done in the vital plane in the dream.

27-6.35: Mother,

Nergine is finished. It will last only for to-morrow.

It seems my health is improving. I feel more energetic also. Though the body does not seem to gain.

I take cod-liver oil also twice a day. Up till now I find it is suitable to me.

Mother: As you take cod-liver oil, it may not be necessary to continue Nergine, at least for the moment.

I myself have noticed that your health is improving.

29.6.35: Mother,

Herewith is an album of pictures by a friend of mine, who has sent it to me. We studied painting together at Baroda and so as a friend he sent this copy of his picture album. Mother will see it and will oblige me by letting me know Her impression of it.

Mother: I am sending you back the pictures. I find them good; some of them are quite pretty.

K: I have to see Mother on Monday. On that day may I bring the painting (mounted on the big drawing-board) the outline of which I showed to Mother? Only finishing is to be done which I will do after showing it to Mother.

Mother: Yes, you can bring your picture on Monday.

[Krishnalal's wife Kanta had arrived that morning; the album by Somalal Shah must have come with her.]

4-7-35: Mother,

On the day of interview I told Mother that I want to study human figure from life. I had a talk with Sanjiban about that study; he is also anxious to study it. So we have the idea that we can begin it together if Mother thinks it proper. If Mother allows there remains the question of a separate room for the purpose. Kindly Mother will suggest Her idea about the whole thing.

Sri Aurobindo: When a new building is done, Mother will see about it; she has already thought about it. For the present nothing can be done. But your room is one with the best light in it—so you should manage till then.

15-7-35: *[torn]* ...with I send some portrait studies which *[torn]* ...cently. In these ones I have mainly tried *[torn]*... the facial features.

Sri Aurobindo: They are very good studies.

K: [*torn*] ...and Sanjiban are eager to start the studies [*torn*] ...human figure, but for that to get somebody [*torn*] ...seems difficult. I will be much obliged to have instructions on these studies from Mother for the right method of starting the drawing, developing the features, finishing in details and bringing out the personality of the sitter.

Sri Aurobindo: For that each one must find his own technique. Only for you what you must find is a way to express the psychic instead of the vital. At present it is the vital you bring out. The psychic is the eternal character, the vital brings out only transient movements.

15 July '35: Mother,

Yesterday I received a letter from Jayantilal Parekh in which he informs me that he is rejoining Kala-Bhavan Santiniketan and that he will try to be steady there with Nandalal Bose. He writes about one Ajit Chakraborty, a professor at Santiniketan. As he writes Ajit is a devotee of Sri Aurobindo and perhaps Mother knows him. Ajit wants the permission to allow him to get a copy of the messages allowed to outsiders. This professor is known to Prithising (*sic*) also.

Sri Aurobindo: We will wait till Prithvisingh comes.

22/7/35: [*end*] ...are removed.

But it seems there are many more [*'insects', see next para*] over the body which are not visible. I have taken bath with H.P. lotion, and have bought carbolic soap to take bath.

Can these insects be the reason of my emaciation? Mother will oblige me by giving necessary instructions.

Sri Aurobindo: You should go to Nirod and get from the dispensary the proper medicine for this.

24-7-'35: Mother,

Sometimes, when I come for Pranam before Mother I find that something intervenes between Her blessings and myself. At that time I am either in ordinary consciousness or the physical mind becomes active or some other condition is there which does not allow me to keep internally in Mother's touch. Even though I may be in meditative mood just before going to Her, that condition comes. This condition is not regular but at times it happens.

What is it that happens and why does it happen?

Sri Aurobindo: It happens to many and from one of two causes—either something in the physical that is not willing rises up when there is the need of the act of submission, or else forces of suggestion in the atmosphere come across. With a little persistence one can get over both these causes which are largely mechanical in their nature.

(*To be continued*)

S. V. BHATT

HISTORY OF THE FUTURE

(Continued from the issue of July 2006)

(Higher Ranges of Consciousness: The Triple Transformation—
The Subjective Age—The Reign of Intuition)

Higher Ranges of Consciousness: The Triple Transformation

IN a very general way we may say that in the future we will see the flowering of new faculties with a much greater power of knowledge, feeling and action than the ones we possess at present.

We may broadly classify the faculties of our consciousness into four categories. The instinct and sensations of the body-consciousness; emotional, dynamic and pragmatic faculties of the vital consciousness; the perceptive, ethical and aesthetic faculties of the mind-consciousness; and intuitive faculties of the spiritual consciousness. But these faculties exist or operate at many levels or dimensions of our being with corresponding variations in their range and power.

The first and the lowest level is our surface conscious mentality which is more or less enclosed or tied to our body consciousness. At this level the faculties of our consciousness are severely limited and conditioned by grossness of our physical ego and the divisive consciousness of the mental ego expressing itself through the heavily externalised, rigidly analytical and earthly intellect. This is the consciousness in which the major part of humanity lives at present. The limitation of the present mental consciousness we have discussed earlier applies fully to this level of our consciousness. Here, the faculties of our consciousness are at the lowest level of light, power, harmony or integration.

But this is not all we are. Behind the externalised surface consciousness there is a deeper and vaster subliminal consciousness with an inner or subtle Physical, inner Vital and inner Mental consciousness. Here the faculties of our consciousness acquire a vaster range and power, become much more powerful, luminous, creative and intuitive. This is because the subliminal is less circumscribed by the heaviness and grossness of our body-consciousness, and the knot of ego, though very much there, is less tight (and more loose) than in our surface consciousness. So the subliminal can easily burst out of the body-consciousness and expand into the universal. The subliminal mind and vital are not limited and confined to the externalised analytical intellect or the emotions of our surface being. So they are much more intuitive than the surface being, with a greater capacity for knowledge, feeling and action. And finally, the faculties of the subliminal consciousness are much more integrated and harmonised than that of the surface. This subliminal is the source of all human greatness and genius. It is the source of inspiration behind all those great and eminent men and

women who have gone beyond the average human mass and made important contributions to human progress in thought and action and leadership, especially in the secular life of humanity like for example in politics, culture or science.

But the subliminal is only an extension of the surface consciousness with greater powers. When it emerges in the human being, it can considerably enhance the powers of consciousness but cannot transform it. This is because the subliminal is not free from ego and desire. It may have a freer or a more powerful and magnified or a more refined ego and desire but is not entirely free from them. But no lasting and essential transformation of the human being is possible without a radical freedom from these two central knots of bondage. The other important factor to be noted is that the subliminal has its luminous as well as dark regions. So, in the future, when the subliminal begins to manifest in the human consciousness in a large and widespread scale, it has its positive benefits as well as its grave dangers. If the luminous regions of the subliminal can do much for bringing to humanity a greater goodness than the surface consciousness, its dark regions can bring into play a much greater evil than the surface consciousness is capable of doing. While the luminous regions of the subliminal can create an Einstein or a Gandhi, its dark regions can create a Hitler!

So, if the evolving humanity of the future opens itself to the luminous regions of the subliminal, it will lead to a better humanity with greater powers than the present. It may lead to a psychic science and technology with a more simple and direct power of Mind over Matter than that of the present predominantly physical science and technology with its clumsy and complicated material instruments.

The subliminal is also the source of all occult and parapsychological phenomena like extrasensory perception, telepathy, clairvoyance and telekinesis. For the subliminal can see, feel or sense the supraphysical forces and things behind the visible material facts, which the ordinary mind confined within the surface consciousness cannot see. It has also a more conscious and direct contact with the universal mind of which our individual minds are receiving centres. So those who live in or in contact with their subliminal consciousness can sense the thought and feeling in other minds. So the awakening of the subliminal may also lead to a greater awareness of our inner connectedness, or in other words, the psychological interdependence and interaction of our mind and life. This may lead to a great progress in psychology which in turn could bring about a psychological equivalent to the IT revolution.

But on the other hand, if the humanity opens to dark regions of the subliminal, then it will lead to a ruthless reign of the Titan and the Devil over the earth, ending in the destruction of the present human civilisation. This danger can be averted only if the awakening of the subliminal is accompanied or followed by the awakening of the spiritual dimension in man and the powers of the subliminal are put entirely at the service of the spiritual.

So the subliminal is not the highest potentiality or power of our being. Behind and above the subliminal lies a vast range of the spiritual consciousness. But the

spiritual is not a single white monotone of peace and bliss as some spiritual traditions imagine it to be. As Jesus Christ said, "There are many mansions in my Father's Kingdom." The "Father's Kingdom" is the spiritual realm, the parent of our being, which contains many landmarks, levels, ranges, worlds, "mansions".

The first major spiritual mansion or landmark within the individual is what is called "Psychic being" in Sri Aurobindo's integral psychology. Behind the subliminal, in the deepest and innermost core of our being lies the true spiritual centre of our individuality. It is this true self in us which is probably the truth behind the "soul" of religions. This psychic being is the source of all higher aspirations in man for truth, beauty, goodness, harmony, love and unity.

We must note here, in our spiritual perspective, the real source of all moral and aesthetic aspiration for the truth and right, goodness and beauty is not the ethical and aesthetic being in the mind but the spiritual self beyond the mind. The ethical and aesthetic being and their moral notions, conscience, and sensitivities are partial, diminished or very often, faulty reflections and constructions of the deeper and truer perceptions and aspiration of the psychic being in man. The ethical and aesthetic being in the mind, like the other emotional or intellectual faculties are instruments constructed by the more or less ignorant mind for expressing the evolving soul in man. They become true and perfect only to the extent to which they are under the influence of the psychic being or the spiritual self.

The psychic being is the source of sainthood; it is the part of our being or consciousness which creates the Saint or that type of spiritual personality with a deep and pure love for God and man and all creation. But, apart from this spiritual result, the psychic being has also some important pragmatic implications for the secular life of humanity. It is the source of the highest harmony and integration in the human being. Only the psychic being, when it comes forward and takes full and conscious control of our life, can bring about a complete and perfect integration of our physical, vital and mental being and all its faculties and create a harmonious whole of our being and life.

However, our spiritual potentialities are not limited to the psychic being. There are also many levels of spiritual mind beyond the rational mind. If the psychic being is the source of the saint, the spiritual mind is the source of the seer and the sage. The spiritual mind is in direct contact with the Cosmic Mind of the Spirit. The human mind, when it is able to open itself or rise to the spiritual mind, can merge into or identify with the cosmic mind and participate in its universal knowledge, power and vastness. In the spiritual mind, the deepest, highest and the universal truth of self and the world are revealed to the human mind in various levels of direct insight, inner vision or intuition.

And beyond the spiritual mind lies what Sri Aurobindo calls the "Supermind" which is the creative source of the universe. In the Supermind the infinite and eternal Truth of life is revealed in its very source without any veils, even the luminous veil of

the spiritual mind. If the spiritual mind can be viewed as living in a sort of stratosphere near the creative Sun of Truth, receiving its rays and channelising them into the earth through the intuitive mind, the Supermind is that very Sun. To realise the Supermind, the ascending human soul has to raise beyond the spiritual stratosphere of the mind and enter into the blazing core of the supreme Sun of Truth. According to Sri Aurobindo, until now very few spiritual personalities have realised the Supermind. Most of the spiritual figures of the past lived either in their psychic being or in the spiritual mind.

The three higher ranges of consciousness we have outlined, the Psychic, Spiritual Mind and the Supermind, indicate three stages of spiritual transformation of the individual. This triple transformation will transform the body, life, mind and soul of the individual into a free and perfect instrument of the infinite and eternal Divine for the progressive manifestation of the divine Will in the Universe. According to Sri Aurobindo, this integral transformation of human nature as a whole, and not merely the spiritual liberation of the soul, is the evolutionary destiny of the individual.

In the future, all these higher ranges of consciousness beyond the ordinary mind, from the subliminal to the Supermind, will manifest progressively, more and more, in the human consciousness and life and in every activity of human life. This will not be, as in the past, confined to a few intellectual, literary, artistic or spiritual élites. Even the masses and the so-called “ordinary man in the street” will be illumined from within. As Sri Aurobindo points out, “Even the multitude shall hear the Voice /And turn to commune with the Spirit within”¹ and “common natures feel the wide uplift”.² Until now, the inner development of the masses was effected either subconsciously through the slow aeonic evolutionary process of Nature through the ordinary experiences of life, or more consciously and swiftly through a process of outer mental, moral and religious education imparted through an intermediary élite. In the future, the spirit within may act more directly and consciously on the mass-mind, through a process of inner illumination leading to a widespread inner awakening in all the levels and sections of human society.

Thus, when these higher ranges of consciousness begin to manifest more and more in humanity, it will herald a new cycle of human evolution in which, as Sri Aurobindo points out, “The Superconscious grow on earth”.³ We will discuss this transitional period from a mental to a supramental humanity in our next article. However, we may briefly discuss some of the important motifs which are likely to govern this transitional phase of human evolution.

The Subjective Age

The transitional phase from the present to the future is likely to be mediated or governed by two factors: subjectivism and intuition.

The history of the past (and the present) was (and is) governed predominantly by what we may call objectivism or the objective view of the world. To understand,

master and enjoy the objective world which we can see, touch and feel was the main occupation of the men and women of the past. Except for a few spiritually inclined individuals and communities which tried to explore the inner subjective world of the self and the knower, most of the creative energies of the past were directed towards the objective world of the known. And the result is the funny paradox of our present age: we send space probes all over the cosmos to get to know the nature of the sun, moon and Mars but we know very little of our own self.

This objectivism is one of the major causes behind the many aberrations and defects of our present society and its values. For example, in the mind and its works, like science and philosophy, we tend to explain everything including inner realities, in terms of the external, visible or material circumstances and we ignore or deny the invisible, supraphysical, psychological and spiritual forces and principles hidden and acting behind the outer phenomena. In life and society, we give greater importance and higher value to external appearance, position, status, power, wealth, achievement or success and much less importance to inner achievements in the moral, psychological, aesthetic or spiritual realms. In ethics and religion, we tend to judge people and institutions by the goodness and nobility of the outer act, behaviour and achievement and ignore the purity, goodness, selflessness and the quality of the inner motive, feeling and realisation behind the outer act. This is because we lack the true and complete knowledge of our subjective self.

In the future when the deeper and higher ranges of consciousness manifest, there will be an increasing inner awakening to the knowledge of our subjective being, its inner realities and their influence on the outer life. This will bring about a reversal in the values. In science, philosophy, and other domains of knowledge, there will be an increasing emphasis on understanding the occult, psychological and spiritual principles (and forces) of the self and world, not only in psychology, but also in other fields of world-knowledge like sociology, politics and economics. In life and society there will be a greater emphasis on qualities like self-knowledge, self-mastery, integration of the personality, character, integrity, sensitivity to higher values for leadership positions. More and more people will value inner well-being or inner satisfaction and fulfilment as something much more precious than power, wealth, success or achievement in the outer life. In ethics and religion, there will be a greater awareness and sensitivity to the purity and quality of the inner motive, feeling, state of consciousness and the realisation. There will be a more or less similar awakening in other fields like literature or art. In a nutshell, the human consciousness and life as a whole will turn inward. And with this inward turn there will be a shift in the governing faculty of human consciousness from Reason to Intuition.

The Reign of Intuition

This shift from Reason to Intuition will be a logical and inevitable future change. The objective age of the past was governed by the externalised intellectual Reason trying to understand the external world with its analytical, outward-looking gaze. The subjective age of the future requires a corresponding faculty which can comprehend the inner world with a deeper, more holistic, inner light. It requires “in-tuition”, illumination from within. For the inner world of the psyche and Spirit will be something too complex, fluid, rapid and unpredictable for the rigid analytical reason to understand or manage.

This brings us to the rather esoteric subject: nature and forms of intuition. The dictionary meaning of intuition is “power of understanding things (e.g. situation or feeling) without the need for conscious reasoning or study” or in other words, some form of spontaneous knowledge or the ability to arrive at right conclusions without the need for rational analysis. This is undoubtedly one of the characteristics of intuition. But this popular conception of intuition is utterly inadequate to describe the true and higher intuition which will replace Reason and lead the future evolution of humanity. For many infrarational instincts and impulses confirm to the dictionary meaning of intuition. But the true intuition is something suprarational. And also, this popular or dictionary meaning of intuition is not something which belongs to the future. This aspect of intuition is more or less manifest in all human beings who have achieved or created something in their thought, life or action. Most of the thinkers, scientists, innovators, leaders who have made significant contributions to human progress were propelled by a conscious or subconscious intuition in their thought, feeling or dynamic faculties of will and action. This intuition comes either from a long experience of the surface consciousness in a particular field of thought or action or else it manifests as a flash from the subconscious or subliminal regions, which is later given a form in thought and life by the conscious mind at the surface.

As the human consciousness awakens more and more to its subliminal regions in the future, there will be a greater and more widespread intuitive awareness in the human mind than in the past or present. But the intuitions of the surface, subconscious or subliminal cannot lead humanity safely to its spiritual destiny. We have already indicated the reasons. All the regions of human consciousness—the surface, subconscious and the subliminal—below the spiritual are a mixture of truth and falsehood, light and darkness under the influence of ego and desire and subject to the dualities of the mind. The intuitions of these infra-spiritual regions may provide temporary and utilitarian solutions to mundane or technical problems. But they cannot solve the deeper, psychological, spiritual and existential problems of life. For a lasting solution to human problems and the fulfilment of the human destiny we need a higher spiritual intuition which can liberate the human consciousness from ego and desire; see, feel and live in the indivisible wholeness and unity of life; and resolve all the

inner and outer dualities and conflicts of life in a higher synthesis. Such an intuition exists only in the spiritual ranges of our consciousness.

But the spiritual intuition is of a different nature from the intuitions of the surface or subliminal consciousness. There are different ranges, types and forms of spiritual intuition depending on the level or the part of the spiritual continent from which it comes. However we may identify some common characteristics. Some of these characteristics, for example, direct insight, may be similar to that of the intuitions at the lower levels of our being but at the higher spiritual level, they are deeper, more intense and penetrating. There are many others which the lower intuition does not possess.

The first characteristic of spiritual intuition is that it is the truth-finder. The idea or the intuitions of the surface or subliminal consciousness can be falsified because, as we have said already, they are part of the belt of Ignorance, and a mixture of truth and falsehood. But spiritual intuition is the faculty of that part of our being which is more or less in direct contact with or under the influence of the deepest truth of things. So spiritual intuition gives pure perceptions of truth. But the extent, comprehensiveness and integrality of truth-perceptions may vary depending on the level of spiritual consciousness.

The second characteristic which is common to all intuition, lower and higher, is direct insight and inner illumination. The literal sense of the word “in-tuition”, which gives the sense of illumination, teaching or learning from within gives a much better understanding of this important quality of intuition than the dictionary definition. The knowledge of the externalised rational intellect is a laborious acquisition from without. The process of rational knowledge assumes, and gives the impression or the sense, that knowledge is out there in the external world, in the not-self, and it has to be acquired from without by the strenuous process of observation, classification, analysis, deduction—the classical process of the scientific method. The process of intuition may also go through this process of reason, but much more rapidly and swiftly, or it may dispense with some stages of the process, and the final act of knowledge, the conclusion, insight or discovery, comes not as an acquisition from without but as a spontaneous revelation from within, as if the truth of things, even that of the external world is within us in our own consciousness or self. But it is not perhaps “as if”. Indian seers perceived a supreme and eternal consciousness as the creative source of the individual and the universe. The deepest and essential truth of things, even the things of the external world, is a vibrant spiritual Idea in the eternal consciousness of the Divine. In the deepest and innermost core of our being, our consciousness is aware of itself as a part of and one with the eternal consciousness and therefore, knows the truth of things by an inner act of knowledge. So as an Indian Tantric text says, “knowledge is structured in consciousness”. All knowledge is within us in our own consciousness. The spiritual intuition reveals the knowledge that is within us.

The third quality of higher intuition is its concreteness, almost sensuous and

experiential concreteness. The mental and rational knowledge comes as an abstract idea or concept in the thinking mind. But the spiritual intuition not only knows, but can also see, feel, touch and hear the truth. For example the higher ideal and values of philosophy, like truth, beauty, goodness, love, harmony or unity, which are abstractions to the mind, become experiential realities of consciousness, felt as concretely as we feel our body or the external world with our senses. This happens integrally only at the highest levels of spiritual mind and in the supramental consciousness beyond it. In the lower levels of intuition, one particular faculty may become prominent.

There is a level of intuition just beyond the rational mind, in which truth is revealed through a luminous and direct insight in thought. There is a higher level in which we can see the truth through inner vision and the deeper realities of life are revealed in living and luminous symbols. The hidden and invisible behind the visible and outer appearance becomes visible to the inner vision of the seer. There is a still higher level in which the truth becomes audible to an inner "hearing" of the inspired poet. For, as we have said earlier, according to Indian spiritual conception, the truth of things is a vibrant and creative Idea in the consciousness of the Divine. It is at once Light and Sound, light of knowledge and a vibration of energy, which together make the content of truth. In other words we may say the truth has a light-aspect which reveals its body and a sound aspect which reveals its inner vibration. While the inner vision reveals the light-body of truth, inner hearing reveals the sound-body of truth in inspired poetry. This is the reason why in the ancient Indian tradition, the Vedas, the scripture of the Hindus, which was revered as a supreme spiritual revelation, is considered as something "heard", *śruti*.

At the higher levels of spiritual consciousness intuition becomes "global". The truth is revealed in its global dimensions. The truth of each thing is known not only in its individual nature but also in its relation or "connectedness" with other things and with the global whole. The past, present and future are revealed in a map of indivisible time-vision. The present actualities, emerging possibilities of the immediate future and the eventualities of the long-term future are known in a single glance.

The other important feature of spiritual intuition is harmony of faculties. At the higher levels of intuition the faculties of thought, feeling, will, vision and action become a single indivisible whole. But even in the lower levels in which a particular faculty like thought or vision may dominate, there is no conflict between the different faculties. The subordinate faculties spontaneously and effortlessly follow the dominant faculty and the dominant faculty has sufficient light and force to persuade the subordinate faculties and create in them a free and willing obedience to its idea and vision.

And finally comes the very core of spiritual and intuitive knowledge: Knowledge by Identity. The rational knowledge of the mind is a knowledge by division. In mental knowledge, there is a clear separation between the knower and the known. In spiritual intuition, this division disappears and there is a blending or fusion of the consciousness of the knower with that of the known. The knower knows by becoming one with the

object of knowledge. Here also there are two levels of identity: identity with the outer nature of the object and identity with the innermost and the essential truth, soul or nature of the object as it is conceived in the creative consciousness of the Divine. For example we can identify with a tree and know the tree as it knows itself. For, there is a consciousness in the tree and by identifying our consciousness with that of the tree, we can know the tree as it knows, lives or feels itself. The higher level of identification happens when we can identify with the divine Idea which determines the essential nature of the tree and know the tree as the divine consciousness conceived it in its creative vision. In this higher identification we know the highest and deepest truth, law, process and purpose of, not just that particular tree, but also the universal “treeness” in the totality of physical Nature.

These are the main features of spiritual intuition. In Supermind which is the creative source of the world, all these powers of intuition reach their highest perfection and integrality in an absolute identification with the infinite and eternal Truth.

All these faculties and powers of intuition we have discussed so far will manifest progressively in the human consciousness as it marches forward towards its future spiritual destiny, creating a New Humanity.

(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. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 34, p. 709.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 710.
3. *Ibid.*, Vol. 33, p. 330.

NARAD REMEMBERS

THÉMIS—THE POET

On Poetry

THE name, Thémis, was chosen by Mother as the name She wished Tehmi to use for her poetry. Thémis is the Greek goddess of justice and law. Tehmi's poetry, including many poems written before she came to the Ashram, was given high praise by Sri Aurobindo.

Here are Sri Aurobindo's words.

The poems are remarkable, especially the later ones. They have power of revelatory image and phrase and of expressing spiritual experience. Also, her later poems are very remarkably built, the thought is worked out in a perfect beginning, middle and end in a way which is not very common. Many poems contain a beautiful lyrical quality.

The early poems too are very powerful expressions of the kind of experience she had and as poetry hardly inferior to the later ones. There are many remarkable lines and stanzas though they are not as well-built as the later ones.

And this is Amal's tribute:

You are a very fine poet. You have a genuine gift spontaneously sustained over years and some of your pieces are of absolutely first-rate quality. And this quality is not only exquisiteness: there is a distinct vein of what must be called greatness—that is to say, the thought, the vision, the emotion have both weight and depth and are carried to us on a rhythmic tone bringing a touch of some infinite which suggests a beyond to all that can be uttered. Often your expression is, as you have put it in your letter to me, "quiet"—but nobody can mistake your quietness for absence of the stately, the wide-ranged, the deep-plunging. No doubt, your style is mainly lyrical and not ostensibly epic, nor are you markedly dynamic as a rule, but there can be not only lyrical largeness coupled with intensity but also a lyricism quietly commanding as well as intense and such lyricism can, in addition, keep mostly its exquisiteness in front without ceasing to offer its own greatness.

Rarely are we given a glimpse into a poet's inspiration and how the muse comes to us. This unpublished letter (unfortunately torn off because Tehmi did not allow anything about herself or her family to remain in her letters and shredded all things of

a personal nature from her correspondence) of Tehmi to the Mother is so profound in its humility and expressed so beautifully that our souls cannot be but lifted by it.

I have chosen about 50 poems, and arranged them almost in chronological order, going backwards.

The first, “Feb. 21st—night” records the “experience” of the Darshan night and was written two days later all at once. I had sent it to be read to my Lord, and the next day line on line of poetry came whirling through my head; this went on for about two or three days, and the third night I sat up and wrote all the five poems that follow—dated Feb. 48.

The 3 Jan. ’48 poems came almost all together when I was reading the first chapters of the *Synthesis*.

The ’47 poems were written here last year and then also I used to feel a direct contact with my Lord.

The April ’46 poems were written after my first Darshan, as though from straight dictation.

The other ’46 poems have some sort of semi-conscious contact with Him also. I don’t know what to say about the earlier ones; but when I read them He seems to be already there!

Last year I had sent some of these poems to my Lord and He said some encouraging words, which have given me courage to lay these pieces before You. Will my Lord have them read and say something about them? It is over long periods of time that a poem comes to me now, and I lose and weep for the beautiful touch of my Lord which it always brings with it. Why has He forsaken me?

Mother darling, some of the poems are addressed to You. Won’t You read them sometime?

Ever in deep love and gratitude
Your child

*

[The first poem that Tehmi refers to in her letter is appended here.]

21st February—Night

The far voices of the earth die:
And in the vast lone hush of Being, Thou
Foldest Thy love around my cry

The worlds dissolve to darkness now,
And in the gaps of emptiness we fly
Beyond the farthest star-hill’s brow

Aeons of memoried night unroll
 Their cycles of chained Karmic griefs and mirths
 Across the winging of my soul;

Thou bearest me past myriad births,
 Fire-wheels of deaths and destiny's control,
 To silent fashionings of new earths

A white day dawns upon the deep,
 The frozen rocks of Space divide and free
 The warm gold mystery they keep.

O power-winged Love, Thou bearest me
 O'er storm-black gulfs and endless mires of sleep,
 To sunlit havens of purity.

*

Tehmi and I talked about poetry for hours on end during her last two years. Although she insisted that her memory was completely gone she would recall poems in their entirety if I prompted her with a phrase or two.

July 13, 2004

Narad: Is poetry an art like music and painting, something that has to be studied, practised and refined, or is it a divine influx that blows through the being?

Tehmi: The latter. True poetry should be like that. It should come like that, flowing through. One need not study the metres. Things can come in different metres but it should come naturally, there should not be any forcing. It comes and one knows but doesn't force it to come. It is a looking back when one looks at the structure, rhythm, etc. (such as anapaests, dactyls, spondees). Genuine poetry has to come like that (*gesture, naturally*). I don't remember any of the lines of my poetry. It [*poetry*] should come in connection with something higher and truer. When the soul is in contact with a higher source it comes like that, there should be no forcing. All should come by the contact with a higher source.

N: Indians writing in English have brought something new to English poetry.

Tehmi: Yes, but it is not appreciated. It is not accepted by the English as proper English poetry. It brings in quite a different touch.

N: How does English poetry written by Indians differ. Can you characterise?

Tehmi: English-English has a different kind of crispness. Indian English is more mellow, another music comes through.

N: Harin has that touch.

Tehmi: Yes, he has that touch and his sister too. (Sarojini Naidu)

July 11, 2004

Tehmi: (On *Savitri*) It is another power. You can't place it side by side with Milton or any other.

N: It takes you out of yourself.

Tehmi: I think that anything you read from it... Another vibration. (After I read from Book Eleven, Tehmi said: "What an inheritance we have.")

N: How did Mother give you the new copy of *Savitri*?

Tehmi: She went and brought out a new copy. It was the 1954 edition. I told Her, "Mother I already have a copy." (I had the two-volume edition signed by Mother and I still have it here.) But Mother said, "No, no, it will be very useful to you."

N: Did you teach *Savitri* in your classes?

Tehmi: We just chose what to read.

Tehmi: (On A.E.) In English anthologies we hardly find him.

N: Strange, isn't it?

Tehmi: He is so good.

N: Tehmi, how do you understand the word 'choired' in the line from *Savitri* (quoting from memory):

"Choired in calm seas she heard the immortal word."

Can you shed any light on this? Amal said he'd be damned if he could figure it out!

Tehmi: Sung as by a choir, I suppose.

N: How do you understand the word 'acclaimed' in the line, "Acclaimed their portion of ephemeral joy"?

Tehmi: Put their claim to. That is the first and simplest meaning. Put their claim to.

N: And the line,

"Earth's grain that needs the sap of pleasure and tears."

What is 'earth's grain'?

Tehmi: 'Grain' in the sense of earth's composition, the soil of which it is composed, the mixture of which it is made.

N: Years ago Sri Aurobindo wrote on one level and as his yoga progressed He wrote from a higher and higher level each time, revising former passages from the higher plane of consciousness He had attained.

Tehmi: If you have a feel for it [*writing or receiving poetry*] you can make out that it is from a higher source.

N: I asked Amal what to do when a line comes naturally and still you feel it could be better but don't want to use the mind to tamper with it. He said simply,

“Appeal.” Then he said, “If you wait patiently an answer will always come.” When you wrote, did you feel that it came from different levels?

Tehmi: I don’t remember anything. It used to come quite naturally at any time. Consciously I put a stop to it.

N: So there are lovers of poetry (who may not be poets) who can distinguish the touch of ‘Overhead’ poetry?

Tehmi: Oh yes! You don’t need labels for that!

N: (Quoting another line from *Savitri*)

“Trapped in the gin of earthly destiny.”

Tehmi: A gin is a trap.

N: (Again quoting from *Savitri*)

“As one watching over men left blind”.

Tehmi: It is very interesting because it is the image of Dyumatsena. It is also the symbolism of man.

*

N: And Harindranath Chattopadhyaya?

Tehmi: His is really good lyrical poetry. Also his sister, Sarojini Naidu wrote very fine lyrical poetry.

N: And Arjava?

Tehmi: Arjava’s is of a different kind, a little occult. Occult imagery, not easily understood.

N: Some of his poems are outstanding.

Tehmi: Oh, yes, beautiful.

Tehmi: (In reference to the poetry of Amal and Nirodbaran, but in general, all poetry.) Poetry must come absolutely naturally, otherwise it is not worth it. That is how it was when I wrote. But then I obviously stopped writing because I felt it was a waste of time, and then it stopped coming.

N: What do you feel about the poetry of Dante Gabriel Rossetti?

Tehmi: A very small output but good. *The Blessed Damozel* is fine. (Then she began to quote lines from the poem.)

(To be continued)

NARAD (RICHARD EGGENBERGER)

DUTCH PAINTING IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

(Continued from the issue of July 2006)

THEN comes Vermeer. He has enriched the “World-Reflection” approach in an extraordinary way. He has mainly painted scenes from everyday life, but his commonplace progressively gained in purity and reached the Eternal. The subject matter of pictures which were done by him as a mature artist, was not formed in human imagination. He has drawn what he has seen. But thanks to the deep clarity of his vision and the perfection of his technique, the subject of his pictures and its elements are not a mechanical imitation of reality. We get in Vermeer the artistic presentation of material things, that means, as if seen from the heart.

Vermeer’s way of seeing could be called a detailed observation of the whole. He sees in a particular manner, with his own independent judgment. While exploring the outermost form, his vision reaches a point where we no more find any separation any more between the outer and the inner existence. The picture of the physical reveals the profounder reality. In spite of representing the particular, it is universal. But this is not an abstract generalisation; in the total expression of the physical, the visible and the concealed, the explicit and the inexpressible have merged into one identity. The outer image has become the embodiment of the inner spirit.

History had almost forgotten Vermeer without whom we cannot think of Dutch art of the seventeenth century. He who is considered today as one of the greatest figures of Western art was practically unknown during his lifetime. It is only in the nineteenth century that artists and art-lovers discovered him and became aware of his speciality and greatness.

Johannes Vermeer was born in 1632 at Delft. He was so closely connected with the city of his birth that people refer to him as “Vermeer of Delft”. Hardly any fact about his life is known: under whom did he learn to paint? Which other artist of his time did he come in contact with? Answers to all such questions remain incomplete to his biographers. The small number of pictures done by him could be one of the reasons of losing Vermeer in oblivion. Only about thirty-five paintings have been found.

Vermeer came to be known as an artist most probably at the age of eighteen or twenty. The clients of Delft in those days wanted legendary and historical pictures. In the earlier part of his life, Vermeer too had painted subjects from the legends of Greece and Rome, and from the Bible. These bear proof of a high quality of skill in art and yet, we see that his later paintings which express more fully his greatness do not resemble much these earlier pictures.

There is no real answer to the question—why, in 1656, he suddenly left aside biblical and legendary themes and started painting scenes of the city and common life. But two recognised artists from another city had come then to Delft and worked

there for a few years. They used to paint pictures of the domestic life of the people, common people, and scenes of the city. One was Jan Steen and the other, Pieter de Hoogh. Both of them are ranked very high in Dutch art. There is a thematic and technical resemblance between the work done by these two artists and the pictures of Vermeer belonging to this new phase. Their ideals in painting had most probably prompted Vermeer to follow a new line of creation.

Within five years Vermeer discovered his own inherent capacity of observation. An entirely new element entered his art. The composition of the picture, the use of colour and the range of view—everything was perfected. At the touch of his brush, things appeared in the total truth of their own reality. It is his fine brush-work which blends all the hues—blue and yellow are his favourite colours, it unifies them, makes them vibrate in such a way that object and theme reveal their innate mystery.

There are two city-scenes done by Vermeer: one shows a house on the side of a street, the other is a portrayal of his own town of Delft. The subject matter is not new, what is new is the expression of the artist's personal genius. When I first saw this "View of Delft", many years ago, I was overcome with a kind of charmed wonder. I have seen it many times after that, but the intensity of that wonder has never become any less, on the contrary it has always increased—like all great work of art, it has opened each time a new meaning to me: the depth of the appreciation has never diminished.

The city is on the other bank of the canal—the artist is looking at it from the bank on this side. A portion of the bank seen here is covered with red and yellow sand; here two women on the waterside stand facing each other, talking. A little away from them there are a few more people. On both sides of the canal, a few boats are floating on the water. Bathed in a soothing light, the city in brick and wood rises on the other bank, silent and still. More than half the top of the canvas is taken up by the sky, where dark green clouds have gathered, reflected in the canal water. The city scene in the foreground looks also dull in the shade. Towards the lower part of the canvas, above the city, thinner clouds appear behind the dark ones and in the spaces between them a clear sky is seen. The sun is not in sight but somewhere outside the canvas: from between the clouds it is lighting up the red tiles of the house-tops and the church spires.

I am incapable of describing in words the diversity of colour and form used for the city: the bricks of the solid wall, the roof-tiles, the stones of the old bridge and, here and there a few church-steeple peeping out into the sky—all this has become a sentence in the picture-language of the artist and that language has found here the pulsation of a new rhythm.

While looking at this piece, the spectator goes back three hundred years and finds himself as if standing on the sands of the bank, looking at the dull, motionless, green water which reflects a subdued light over every mossy stone of the bridge on the opposite bank. The spectator is not dreaming. Everything is of this world. They

are even more tangible than objects in our everyday life. He is aware that in the prayer-hall of the Church in the background, men and women are praying. Near the jetties—in many huge storehouses, goods are being brought in, exchanges are going on. One of these days, these very boats now at a standstill, will be plying from one town to another, distributing their merchandise. The spectator sees then with his mind's eye the interior of the houses—scenes of happiness and sorrow, union and discord, and all types of daily chores as well which keep people busy. He will understand that in every house there is a human world, physically alive.

The other canvases by Vermeer are pictures of living people—men of the very same city; he knows them well, he is himself one of them. He looks at them with a heart full of deep sympathy. In the light of his vision the ordinary becomes extraordinary. He fixes just those moments in a common man's life when all his hopes and anxieties, his many desires and imaginations become intense and more concrete.

There was at the Hague museum in 1966 an exhibition of Vermeer's paintings. The organisers had managed to bring most of his work together, pictures from collections which were scattered in different countries of the world. Out of his 35 or 36 paintings 23 were displayed. Never before had such a comprehensive exhibition of his paintings taken place. I had the opportunity to see that exhibition. While looking at the pictures, I thought, "Who knew there was so much wonder hidden in the brick-tiled houses of Delft?" Here were common men and women, but each quite unique. Such extraordinary moments come into our lives also but, left to ourselves, we do not usually take note of them. Unless an artist shows it to us, we cannot see.

Standing beside a table, a young woman is reading a letter. A very small portion of the room is visible. The light is coming from the front, but the source is not seen. It is entering through the glass panes of the window, as is evident by the play of light and shade on the canvas. The young woman is in a blue coat—because of the lighting the colour of the front portion is paler. The reflection of this blue is seen on the white wall and on the cushion of the chairs. On the wall is hung a map, rather hazy, brown in colour. No other shade has been used on this map. A trace of that blue light has touched the cheeks and the shoulders of the woman. Her eyes are fixed on the letter held in both her hands. We are seeing her from the right side; her lips are slightly parted. At first glance, we would think her to be quite detached, but, gradually we start sensing in her a certain tension. Is it a suppressed anxiety? Why that anxiety? A strand of pearls is lying on the table. She found no time to put it on! Was she expecting a letter? It must have reached before she could wear it. She did not have the patience to open it in a leisurely way, after putting on the necklace. What message could the letter have brought? The bulge near the waist in the blue coat suggests that she may be pregnant. What has her husband written? Does the map on the wall mean that he is somewhere far away? Or, is the letter from someone else, not her husband, and has brought some terrible news for her?

Many questions crowd into the mind of the spectator but are left unanswered, just as in real life such information remains unknown. But, for that reason, the enjoyment does not diminish in any way. At the most, it may give rise to a sense of artistic dissatisfaction in the mind of the viewer. He remains perplexed in the light and shade of this mystery.

Vermeer has painted the household—pictures of individuals who hailed from a more or less wealthy and secure class of society. At that time there were some homeless and poverty-stricken people: Frans Hals has done portraits of a few of these. Men and women working in the household have of course found a place in canvases done by Vermeer. We notice the predominance of female characters in his pictures of the household: sixteen pictures of society women accompanied sometimes by a handmaiden; in seven of them we see one or more than one man with the women; only in three or four of them do we see menfolk alone. Heroes and heroines in Vermeer's paintings are all young men and women. His leading figures are never seen doing any hard work or a common man's job. Theirs is an easy-going life. The pictures show people who are well off: some of the women are dressing up or learning music; some are busy lace-making; a few others are writing or reading a letter. A man and a woman, wine glass in hand, are sometimes seen absorbed in love-talk. There is only one famous painting of a lone servant-girl. In a small room, almost devoid of any furniture, a young woman is pouring milk from a jug into an earthen pot kept on the table. What attracts the spectator most is the extreme care with which the milk is being poured: as if apart from pouring milk, there is nothing else to be done in the world. The only movement in the picture is the flowing milk, everything else is static. Two strong hands hold the jug: the right hand on top grasps the handle and the left hand bears the whole weight of the jug from below. Daylight is streaming through the window lighting up the white headscarf and the rounded forehead of the maid. The subject is rather ordinary but the artistic balance and the expression achieved is most unusual in Dutch art.

Household scenes by contemporary artists often include a baby or a dog in order to extend the view into the real home-life of the residents. But Vermeer has not chosen 'wideness'; he has concentrated on intensity. His vision is centred around that one aim—whatever there is of wideness helps to enhance that purpose.

I would like to speak here of another painting: "The Girl with a Pearl Earring". This picture is unique and stands quite apart in the whole work of Vermeer. What an extraordinary presence! Many people have been charmed by this piece. There is a liquid brightness in the eyes of the young woman, lips slightly parted, head tilted just a little to one side, she looks at the spectator. We see her left profile in a portrait showing till only a little below her shoulders. What appeals most strongly to the viewer is her simple candour and untainted purity. The shining skin of her cheek is smooth, the stains of life have not touched her. Her face is as spotless as the pearl in her earring. The background is black and it looks as if she is emerging out of that infinite

darkness. Her headscarf is blue and yellow—Vermeer’s favourite colours—with one long fold hanging like a plait on her back.

The girl in this picture comes from a common family. Vermeer’s brush has revealed the immaculate Eternal hidden behind the sinful veil of the restless life of man. The skill of the artist is so perfect here that someone has said, “The earring on the right side—not visible in the picture—cannot be as beautiful as the one on the left.” This painted ornament is so faultless that there could be no second to it in the world.

Rembrandt’s vast, all-encompassing energy is not there in Vermeer. For, Rembrandt has seen in what way the face, the eyes, the complexion, even the wrinkles on the skin and the posture of the body and limbs express the equanimity or the violence in the heart, the aspiration and the faith, or the unruly insistence of impulses that lie hidden in one’s nature. His subjects are heroes and heroines of the vast drama of life. No mystery of the human nature is unknown to him. His eye delves into the very depths of man and reverts back to the surface forms of the senses. But the outer appearance changes because of the struggle between light and darkness within oneself. Thus the “World-Reflection” of Rembrandt gives us the picture of that altered physical reality.

Vermeer does not go deep in search of the light and darkness of the inner man. With a clear eye he observes and waits for that particular moment when in the life of men and women an extraordinary beauty reveals itself in simple, familiar surroundings. He had to wait for such moments, that is why perhaps, he could not paint many pictures. The beautiful instant seen by him becomes fixed. Before and after that, there could have been excitement, joy, sorrow or struggle, but the moment seized in the picture is beyond the flow of Time. He sees with precision, in close nearness and his hand gives a form to that sight. Vermeer’s is a restricted world, but he has drawn to perfection the life and surroundings of a few people who lived within its limits.

Rembrandt and Vermeer have each a very different artistic temperament. The divergence becomes evident in the use of light in their pictures. In Rembrandt’s work, the contrast between light and shade is strong. A light more vivid than the light of day imparts a profundity and a mysteriousness to his paintings. Vermeer uses the daylight of Holland, something which is never too bright. There the contrast between light and shade is subdued. In his pictures light and shade combine in a simple and gradual manner. Rembrandt is a powerful dramatist of the human play in life. Vermeer’s pictures seem to be like a quiet, measured sonnet.

Apart from Frans Hals, Rembrandt and Vermeer, there were in seventeenth century Holland many talented painters who specialised in varied fields of art. But, without these three stalwarts never could Dutch painting have occupied, it would seem, such an important and glorious position in the world of art. In later times, in the form, the style, the philosophy and the technique of painting many changes have taken place and many more are bound to come still. But, in the midst of all the

developments in the thinking and the nature of art, we feel that this golden age of Dutch painting will remain a wonder for ever.

(*Concluded*)

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)

REPLY

How many times, pray tell me, must I die
 Ere you admit me to eternal Life?
 How many times to fall face-flat from high
 Ere I transcend forever pain and strife?

My sacred claim on you must I forgo
 For this subtle-woven net of desire?
 My struggle grim began long, long ago—
 Yet still refuses to die this lower fire!

You say, “With time the nether flames will subside,
 My love e’er answers, ‘Yes!’ to your soul’s cry,
 In my eternal peace you shall abide—
 To your plaintive question this is my reply,

‘Struggle awhile if struggle indeed you must,
 But more than that, always approach in trust.’ ”

HEMANT KAPOOR

MOMENTS, ETERNAL

(Continued from the issue of July 2006)

HERE are the significances of the red and white lotus:

Red lotus: *Symbol of the manifestation of the Supreme upon earth.*

White lotus: *Symbol of the Divine Consciousness.*

The Mother had given these significances on 2nd February 1930 on the occasion of Champaklal-ji's birthday.

Let me tell you now about an extraordinary incident connected with the red and white lotus.

It was Champaklal-ji's birthday on 2nd February, 1940. He felt a strong wish to give something to the Mother on this day. Champaklal-ji was a good artist and so he thought about painting the red and white lotus. And quite amazingly he found a pair of white and red lotus just at that time. Although he wanted to finish the paintings in one sitting, due to a lot of work he could not do so. He would paint a little everyday. In any case, when the paintings were done he was satisfied with them and on his birthday he took his painted lotuses to the Mother.

No sooner had the Mother seen the paintings that She exclaimed:

“Very beautiful! Very beautiful indeed!”

The Mother wanted to give back these painted lotuses to Champaklal-ji so She told him:

“These two paintings are for you, Champaklal. They're most beautiful! Keep them with you.”

Champaklal-ji did not say anything. Neither did he take the two paintings from the Mother's hands.

The Mother repeated:

“Here, Champaklal, take these two paintings. I am giving them to you.”

Then Champaklal-ji replied:

“Mother, I painted these for you.”

The Mother understood Champaklal-ji's feelings as She burst into a charmingly beautiful laughter. Then as if in a most secretive way She very sweetly told him:

“Champaklal, I will take these two paintings to Sri Aurobindo and I shall ask Him to write something over them.”

“You will take these paintings to Sri Aurobindo?” Champaklal-ji asked. “If you do, then please request Sri Aurobindo to write their significances over them. That would be wonderful. Mother, Sri Aurobindo will write over the white lotus and you will write over the red lotus.”

The Mother took the two paintings to Sri Aurobindo. Champaklal-ji was in the room at that time. The Mother showed the two paintings to Sri Aurobindo and said:

“See, how beautiful they are! Today is Champaklal’s birthday. He has painted these for me. If you can write the significance of the flower then I can give them to Champaklal. Champaklal would very much like you to write over the white lotus and me to write over the red lotus.”

Sri Aurobindo smiled a sweet, gentle smile. Then saying a soft “umm...” he wrote:

Aditi
The Divine Mother

He wrote under the red lotus:

To Champaklal
With blessings
Sri Aurobindo
2.2.40

After writing this Sri Aurobindo looked at Champaklal and gently smiled. An indescribable, marvellous smile.

The Mother wrote over the red lotus:

The Avatar
Sri Aurobindo

Then under the white lotus She wrote:

To Champaklal
With blessings to my dear child
Mother
2.2.40

The Mother asked Champaklal not to show these two paintings of lotuses to anyone.

Many years later blocks were prepared from these two paintings for printing at our Press. The Mother distributed this painting to all of us on an important occasion. And that is how we came to know about the significance of the red and white lotus.

I can picture before my eyes Sri Aurobindo writing

Aditi
The Divine Mother

and the Mother watching this being written. Then the Mother writing

The Avatar
Sri Aurobindo

and Sri Aurobindo watching the Mother writing this.

What an unbelievable event that must have been in the earth's history at that moment! We will probably understand its full import only later. 2nd February 1940 will be written down in golden letters on the pages of earth's history. In that auspicious moment the Lord Himself revealed the Divine Mother Aditi and Aditi Herself revealed the Lord to us humans. Sri Aurobindo announced in writing that She was Mother Aditi and the Mother announced in writing that He was the Lord and Avatar. What an incredible coincidence occurred on the earth! The two unveiled each other's actual truth to ignorant beings like us. What an unimaginable, inconceivable divine Grace! These totally unexpected showers of Grace have been our lot uninterruptedly in our lives. And Champaklal-ji was the witness of this moment eternal, Champaklal-ji, the consecrated servitor of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Not the gods but a son of this resplendent earth was the witness of this divine revelation.

It is here from the Mother that we understood the deeper significance of this tradition of offering different flowers during the Puja for different forms of the Mother. That is why I wrote at length about the significance of flowers.

Let me now tell you about the *dashami* puja (the tenth and final day).

On the Vijayadashami day before taking Mother Durga for immersion, all the *mamimas* and *mashimas* and several others from the village would bow down before the Mother and then put a sweet in everybody's mouth saying repeatedly:

“Mother, do come back.”

Their prayer was vibrant with sincerity: “Mother, do come back.”

Mother Durga was then taken for immersion. Ganesha and Kartik too were carried in the procession. I ran behind Ganesha. We little ones were very fond of this god, Gajanana. The Mother has told us that god Ganesha's face looks indeed like an elephant's. The Mother loved Ganesha very much. There are a lot of images of gods and goddesses in the Mother's room. The biggest number is that of Ganesha. The Mother used to talk with them. The statues of Ganesha and Narayana are together next to the Mother. The Mother said that in every image of a god or a goddess there is their Presence and one can experience it. The Mother had images of gods and goddesses in different types of material, ivory, wood, etc. And in each of these images their Presence can be felt. As soon as the Mother held a statue that particular god or goddess would descend into it. The Mother once told Satprem [Conversation of 29 April 1961]:

People have given me statuettes of various gods, little things in metal, wood or ivory; and as soon as I take one in my hand, the god is there. I have a Ganesh (I have been given several) and if I take it in my hand and look at it for a moment,

he's there. I have a little one by my bedside where I work, eat, and meditate. And then there is a Narayana which comes from the Himalayas, from Badrinath. I use them both as paperweights for my handkerchiefs! (My handkerchiefs are kept on a little table next to my bed, and I keep Ganapati and Narayana on top of them.) And no one touches them but me—I pick them up, take a fresh handkerchief, and put them back again. Once I blended some nail polish myself and before applying it, I put some on Ganapati's forehead and stomach and fingertips! We are on the best of terms, very friendly. So to me, you see, all this is very true.

Narayana came first. I put him there and told him to stay and be happy. A while later, I was given a very nice Ganapati; so I asked Narayana—I didn't ask his permission, I told him, "Don't be angry, you know, but I'm going to give you a companion; I like you both very much, there's no preference; the other is much better looking, but you, you are Narayana!" I flattered him, I told him pleasant things, and he was perfectly happy.

The four-year-old son of one of my maternal cousins always went around holding Ganesha in his arms. He would bathe him, chat with him, worship him with flowers. He had collected all kinds of Ganeshas, big and small, in his house and created an entire family as it were. Once he came to Pondicherry and as soon as he arrived he decided that he had to have a statue of Ganesha. Finally we bought him a big statue of Ganesha. He would spend the whole day talking to him about all sorts of things and worshipping him. Then before leaving Pondicherry he brought a statuette of Ganesha and offered it to me.

"Pishi, offer flowers to my god Ganesha everyday."

I have kept this statuette near the Mother's Feet.

We little ones knew that Mother Parvati was god Ganesha's mother. Ganesha was the Divine Mother's first child and a most loved one too. Ganesha is the Giver of *siddhi* (realisation). He especially controls worldly wealth and money. All worldly realisations are in his control. There are innumerable stories about Ganesha. One of these stories is very well-known but I still feel like telling it to you.

The Supreme Mother told Ganesha and Kartik:

"Let me see, who can go round the universe and return to me first."

Kartik at once mounted his peacock and set off.

Ganesha sat on his vehicle, the mouse, and circled around his mother and stood respectfully in front of her.

When Kartik returned completely exhausted from his trip around the universe, he noticed Ganesha still standing in front of their mother. So, naturally Ganesha had not gone around the universe.

But their mother said:

"Ganesha went around me because he feels I am the universe, I am his whole world. Going around me is like going around the universe."

Tell me, which mother would not love a darling son like him?

Here let me tell you about an extraordinary incident. Those who have come to the Ashram must have certainly seen a Ganesha temple very close to the Ashram main-building. There are crowds of devotees who go to worship him there. There was hardly any place for the devotees to go around the deity. One day Ganesha himself turned up near the Mother and told Her:

“There is not enough space in my temple for devotees to circumambulate. Please give me some extra space so that everyone can comfortably go around the sanctum. Please help me, Mother.”

The Mother sent someone to find out. And indeed the temple lacked sufficient space for a proper circumambulation. So the Mother gave some extra land by breaking down the wall of the adjacent property which belonged to the Ashram in order to make the circumambulatory space adequate. And so in this way gods and goddesses would come to the Mother and tell Her about their various difficulties.

I feel as though I am writing a story from the Mahabharata. In our small, ordinary lives we had the privilege of witnessing so many different marvellous forms of the Mother! And now during the Puja we can have the Mother Herself in Her Durga aspect right here upon the earth.

Now let me return to the main story.

So during the first Durga-puja in this new environment I felt very lonely. Everyone was unknown to me. Suddenly Ila-di came to me and held me affectionately:

“Why don’t you go with Chitra to Golconde and bring some grass from there?”

Ila-di was very fond of me and had understood that I was feeling lonely. The memories of the Pujas in Bengal were haunting me.

Tapati and I arrived here in 1941 during the August Darshan. In those days the Mother used to come every evening and stand on the staircase, just above where the large photograph of the Mother stands today in the Meditation Hall. A meditation would take place then and the disciples and devotees would meditate sitting below, facing the Mother. I sat next to Ila-di. As soon as the Mother arrived on the staircase, Ila-di signalled to me to go and sit on the step of the staircase the Mother was standing on. Faithfully following her instruction, I went and fearlessly sat down at the Mother’s Feet like a puppy. I was totally new and did not know anything about the customs or rules of the place. But as Ila-di had asked me I went and sat down near the Mother’s Feet. What was amazing is that the Mother looked at me in a very friendly way as if She had known me for ever. And I kept sitting there at Her Feet in total trust like a puppy. She made me feel as if that was indeed my assigned place. I was so very young then. The little girl sat there under Her intense love and confidence. What peace I felt that day! And during the whole time that I was in the Ashram on that visit I would go and sit at the Mother’s Feet for the evening meditation. That became my place and that day my life took another turn.

Sujata, Chitra, Suprabha and I went to Golconde to pluck some grass. Then I sat

down again to watch the Puja-decorations. Now they began making the *alpana* (painted decorations with rice paste on the floor). This was Bibha's idea so Bibha requested Milli-di to take the Mother's permission for doing the *alpana*. Milli-di went up to the Mother and got Her permission. The next day was Durga-puja. Bula-da also was very happy and stood there to watch the *alpana* being done. He remarked:

“This is how they make the *alpana* in Shantiniketan.”

Champaklal-ji too was delighted and returned again and again to see the work proceeding. Bibha, Minnie-di, Milli-di started right from the afternoon. They also decorated beautifully the Mother's chair. Bibha had been used to doing *alpana* in her house for all the Pujas when she was in Bengal. Bibha's father and elder brother, Sanjiban-da, were real artists and the sisters also had inherited this artistic and literary trait.

And so it was natural that on this first Puja, Bibha felt like taking up the *alpana*-work. And she even got the permission to do it so very easily, as if this entire Durga-puja work was meant for them. And so from 1944 onwards the Mother started coming down every year to give us Puja-blessings. The staircase that the Mother used and the two halls were also tastefully decorated with flowers, garlands and vines. The Mother's chair was decorated with a Benarasi silk sari and this is done with the same dedication and skill even today by Shakuntala, Krishna and others. The Mother's chair was placed exactly where the large photo of the Mother stands today. Every year the Mother would bless us on the Mahaashtami and the Vijayadashami day with flowers. On Mahaashtami the Mother wore a red Benarasi sari with golden zari flowers. It was extraordinary to see our lovely, impressive Mother come down the staircase like a radiant flaming fire. All the sadhaks of the Ashram were delighted to see this new aspect of the Mother on the occasion of the Puja as well as the very festive air but probably they were also a little surprised. It was beyond anyone's imagination that such an event would take place in the Ashram. The joy of the Puja came down into that still, sober atmosphere of the Ashram of those days.

Durga-puja became in the history of the Ashram the harbinger of a great change. The Mother revealed Herself to the whole world.

Mahaashtami and Vijayadashami are a marvellous synthesis of power and beauty and the Mother assumes an unusual form on these days. On Mahaashtami the Mother battles fiercely with the Asuras. The animal sacrifice on this day is symbolic of the offering of one's lower nature at the Mother's Feet: laying one's egoism, pettiness, baseness at the Mother's Feet is the inner meaning of Durga-puja.

Sri Aurobindo prays on behalf of all of us:

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.

On Vijayadashami the back and the sides of the Mother's chair were decorated very tastefully and this continues to be done thus even to this day. The flower that is offered on this day has been called Victory by the Mother. The Mother wore a golden Benarasi sari with zari flowers. When the Mother came down the steps we would watch Her mesmerised. Through the darshan of this glorious, dignified aspect of the Mother, poised yet compassionate, beautiful and royal we felt blessed! How many-sided the Mother was! When She came down the staircase you felt as if She was saying:

I am Durga, goddess of the proud and strong.

I remember Mohendra's darshan of goddess Durga in *Anandamath*:

The ascetic said "Come by this way," and began to ascend another underground passage. Suddenly the rays of the morning sun shone in their eyes and from every side the sweet-voiced family of birds shrilled in song. In a wide temple built in stone of marble they saw a beautifully fashioned image of the Ten-armed Goddess made in gold, laughing and radiant in the light of the early sun. The ascetic saluted the image and said, "This is the Mother as she shall be.... Behold her, with the regions for her arms,...wielder of manifold weapons, trampler-down of her foes, with the lion-heart for the steed of her riding; on her right Lakshmi as Prosperity, on her left Speech, giver of learning and science, Kartikeya with her as Strength, Ganesh as Success. Come, let us both bow down to the Mother."...

The two men bowed down with awe and love; and when they rose, Mohendra asked in a broken voice, "When shall I see this image of the Mother?"

"When all the Mother's sons," replied the Brahmacharin, "learn to call the Mother by that name, on that day the Mother will be gracious to us."

The Mother has come down to our dust-soiled earth in this age and time. She is gracious now. The Mother is now all Her children's life-breath.

The Mother has called Vijayadashami the Victory day. On this day the Mother's battle with the asuras ends and as Durga, the slayer of asuras, She destroys the asuras. We have been listening to this story right from our childhood. That is why the *dashami* day is called Vijayadashami. But we had not the slightest idea how very true all this was. The Mother has Herself said that during the Durga-puja She destroys the asuras. This battle with the asuras has been going on since time immemorial.

Mother Durga! Giver of force and love and knowledge, terrible art thou in thy own self of might, Mother beautiful and fierce. In the battle of life, in India's battle, we are warriors commissioned by thee; Mother, give to our heart and mind, a titan's strength, a titan's energy, to our soul and intelligence a god's character and knowledge.

The Mother told Mona about an extraordinary incident:

...It is something that happened here not long ago. There were a man, a lady and two children who had come to see me. It was a family and the woman was full of devotion. It was N who had brought this family. Then a strange thing happened... For me it was not an uncommon thing because...each time I was coming down to give my blessings on the days of Puja, there was always someone with me. Either Durga, or Lakshmi, there was always someone on these days. And when I need them, I call them. But on that day, as I was waiting for the family—I had seen other people already,—when they came in I felt a strong presence of Durga. I was not ready for this intrusion of Durga at that moment because each time these gods come, I know it beforehand. But this time I was not prepared and I told myself: “What is this intrusion? Durga has come and she entered within me, like that (*gesture*) from above, like a mantle.” Like that...and to my surprise, I saw her talking with this lady who was in front of me. This man, the lady and the children were with N, in front of me. And they remained there for a few moments. And then I understood why Durga had come. This lady was a worshipper of Durga and it was she who had called Durga... Then I told myself: “Yes, it was an exceptional lady who could bring Durga with her, even when I didn’t know it. It was very interesting, because I was there, and Durga was within me and, maybe, she was seeing Durga.”

I came to know that later, when N came back; he told me that the lady who had been there was a great worshipper of Durga. She had also some experiences; for example, when she was working, Durga came to help her and she remained from time to time under the protection of Durga, and her life was moulded by the influence of Durga. “Today when she was there before You,” N said, “she saw Durga and it was Durga who was speaking with her, that’s what she felt, Mother.”

Then the Mother turned to Mona and asked:

And do you know who Durga is? The relation between us is that of the father and the child. Not quite, because between the father and the child, the relation is not so supple, so full of joy, it is a little restrained, whilst between myself and Durga it is a more intimate relation; she is like my daughter, my little daughter, and it is more like that... (*hands interlocked in a gesture of intimate union*) I mean, ...more complete, plastic, and something from beyond that that we cannot find here. A true, complete relation, in a perfect understanding. It is so sweet, so full of love, intimate and, at the same time, infinitely vast and spontaneous.

Every year the Mother manifests herself as Durga in Bengal, in India and in the whole world to battle with the asuras during these few days of the Puja and come out victorious. This is not just an ancient tale. The Mother Herself told us this story of the battle with the asuras in an evening class in the Playground. What excitement we had felt that day! The Mother Herself telling us about Her own battles!

The Mother told us in the class:

You know the story of Durga, don't you? Durga who every year has to destroy her asura; and always she is compelled to begin again. It goes on in this way till the end of the reign allotted to the titans. When they will be banished from this world, it will not be thus any longer. But till then, that is as long as they are useful for intensifying the aspiration, clarifying the consciousness, for putting to the test the sincerity of people, they will be there. The day the test will not be needed, the day the sincerity will be pure and self-existent they will disappear. Then that day, Durga will no longer need to begin her battle over again every year.

*

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

*

A day shall come when not a single asura will remain. That day is not so far.

(To be continued)

PRITI DAS GUPTA

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

SILENT RENEWAL

A leaf lies motionless, fallen from a tree,
barely touching earth's warm-red bosom.
Its parched greenless cells yearn in flames of prayer
to rediscover a newer tomorrow.
Its dying veins still alive in woody fragrances,
invisible Breath swinging to spirit silence,
watching shadows in hushed quietude.
And straining to give voice to a song that sings
of a whirlpool of dreams longing to break free,
back to the green and gold of an ever-green tree
swaying under brooding skies of undying love.

*

Waves of gold from worlds afar
in streaming laughter come pouring down,
quenching with colour every pore that thirsts
and flowing warmth into its linely skin.
And from the core of this new substance light,
a voice floats in remembering a tender song
that soothes the soul with a hope beyond.

*

O soul, cleave not to the clinging past,
redolent with memories of flower and spring.
Let go as the waters embrace you whole,
intact the memory of your path ahead,
offer yourself up to the flow of Time,
trusting That which survives death and decay,
ceaselessly preparing this
silent renewal.

GOPIKA

DEVOTIONAL POETRY IN TAMIL

(Continued from the issue of July 2006)

7. The Builder

In the world of devotional poesy in Tamil, nothing can be taken for granted, nor can we take for granted the personality of the poet. He is not always the self-absorbed ecstatic and he can come to this race of god's servitors from any caste or class or profession. In this area where temple worship and love of the *archa* (idol) *vigraha* of the Supreme have a vital role to play, one of the Alwars made a sterling name for himself as a great builder as well.

Tirumangai Alwar (8th century A.D.) was not only a great builder but was also a great traveller. In the Alwar world, his prolificity is hailed as "Peria Tirumoli" (The Huge Hymnal Garland) for he has contributed 1253 verses to the *Nalayira Divya Prabandham*. Often his hymns are innovative as well. Apart from all this, he is famous as a great romantic who won his life's companion, Kumudavalli, through sheer persistence. Born in the war-like Kallar caste as the son of the chieftain of Tiruvali, Tirumangai grew up to be a strong young man. Ability to wield the sword well and a turn for romance were all the thoughts that formed in the mind of the young man. Then he fell in love with Kumudavalli. She was ready to accept him, but she wanted him to prove himself as a true servitor of the Lord. Her request was simple. He should feed one thousand devotees of Narayana for one year, and throughout this period he must attire himself with the marks of a devout Vaishnava that would proclaim his service to the Lord. Kumudavalli was as shrewd as she was beautiful. She knew very well that if thrown in the *sat-sang* of Vaishnavas for one whole year, her lover would be definitely transformed into a lifetime devotee of the Lord. And that the self-discipline of wearing external marks would in course of time seep into the psyche of the young man and he would indeed become a servitor of Narayana. The young man accepted the challenge. And the feeding began.

But Tirumangai was only the son of a small-time chieftain with not much wealth on hand to pour into charitable activities. All the same, love for the divine proved stronger than worldly pulls and the young man went ahead with his agreement and soon depleted his treasury. The year came to an end but not his zeal to feed the poor Vaishnavas. He became a Robin Hood of Tamil Nadu, a rare highway robber who took money from the sickeningly rich to nourish the poor. How long could this continue? It was time for the young man to marry and settle down. Often the Bhakti Movement presents a supra-reality in a very convincing manner and we have in Tirumangai's life a fondly-cherished legend when he came face to face with the Lord.

Accompanied by Lakshmi dressed as his rich bride, Narayana began a sojourn through one of the dense forests in Tirumangai's control. Soon the young couple were

set upon by Tirumangai and his trusted followers. The divine couple had to give away everything but the toe ring of the Lord could not be removed. Even as Tirumangai bent at the feet of the bridegroom to use his teeth to force the toe ring off, a transformation came upon him. From whence these lotus-like feet? No mortal could possess such perfection in limbs! As he raised his eyes, he found that he was face to face with the Supreme. In that profound moment of mystic recognition, the romance-driven young man became the god-lover for all time:

Then in a figure of divinity
 The Maker shall recast us and impose
 A plan of godhead on the mortal's mould
 Lifting our finite minds to his infinite,
 Touching the moment with eternity.¹

Tirumangai's legend-rich life takes us to scores of places that he visited in the Indian subcontinent and to the many temples that he built and the fort-wall of the Srirangam temple.² Tradition also speaks of his immense love for the hymns of Nammalwar and how he used to bring the image of the latter from the distant Alwar Tirunagari (in Tirunelveli District) to Srirangam and recite the thousand verses of *Tiruvaimoli*. This tradition was further strengthened when Nathamuni (10th century) made arrangements for singing the hymns of all the Alvars in the Srirangam temple, a custom that continues to this day in an annual twenty-day festival in December-January.

Of the six works of Tirumangai that have been included in the Srivaishnavite scripture, *Nalayira Divya Prabandham*, *Peria Tirumoli* is the longest and contains 1084 verses. The devout believe that the opening verse marks the exact moment of transformation of the romantic hero engaged in merrily robbing the rich into a self-lost singer of Tamil verses that emit a vibgyor radiance:

Born in this sorrow-causing body
 I joined myself with mere matter;
 Running after lovely damsels for ephemeral joys,
 I followed them ever. Experiencing nothing
 But pain, I turned to search for that grace
 Which would grant me higher knowledge
 Leading to the state beyond; and I found
 The name, "Narayana".³

Legends assure us that Tirumangai was devoted wholly to Kumudavalli. The self-criticism of being a slave of the flesh is a poetical device typical of the Bhakti poets to present a contrastive picture as if to underline the transformative power of

the “divine touch”. *Peria Tirumoli* is more. It is also the record of an anabasis that takes us to some of the great spots of pilgrimage. The religious adventure begins with Tirupiridhi which is now understood to be a spot somewhere beyond Badarikashrama, probably in Tibet. From the decad on the holy place we know that it was at the centre of the Himalayan range where wild elephants and tigers moved around as waterfalls roar down. The place is rich with the perfume of flowers. Even heavenly denizens love to come to this space to worship the Lord, for the space is a favourite of Mother Nature:

O heart! Draw close to Piridhi
 Where resides our noble Lord.
 He chases away the ills of devotees
 Who have realised the value of reciting
 His thousand names. No sin touches them.
 Here innocent bees get frightened
 At the sheer red of the Ashoka blooms
 Mistaking them for the flames of a fire.⁴

Tirumangai’s pilgrim trail leads us to Badarikashrama, Shalagrama and Naimisharanya. Suddenly we find ourselves south of the Vindhyas to worship Narasimha at Ahobilam and from thence to the temple of Tirupati Venkateshwara. Puranic mythology holds hands with a heart passionately in love with the Divine as Tirumangai carries here for a while. It is time now to worship in neighbouring temples like Tiruvellore, Tirunirmalai and Mahabalipuram. All these temples were apparently at the height of their glory a millennium ago. Many have lost their sheen today due to foreign invasions that pushed other religions to the forefront by the might of their sword. Yet one can, for instance, go to Parameshwara Vinnagaram⁵ built by the Pallava king Parameshwara Varman and try to go back in a time-capsule if only to watch in the mind’s eye Tirumangai Alwar with Kumudavalli at his side, sing with joy:

This place is where the Lord came
 As Narasimha and cleft the chest
 Of Hiranya, killing him.
 This is Parameshwara Vinnagaram
 Built by the cultured Pallava king.
 A righteous ruler under the white umbrella,
 He is chief of Kanchipuram
 That looks glorious with high-rise buildings.⁶

From here Tirumangai moves to Tirukoilur and other pilgrim centres. His own birthplace is naturally special to him. Probably he is reminded of the early days of

youthful love, rash promises and hard-earned success and so he turns to bridal mysticism transforming his signature into the feminine gender. When dealing with Tirumangai's poems in this genre, devotees fondly refer to him as Parakala Nayaki.⁷ A typical verse sends the bee as a messenger to the Lord:

O tiny bee with dots and stripes!
 You stamp the blossom and spread wings.
 Accompanied by your beloved
 You drink the honey even as the flowers open.
 The Lord who holds the handsome bow
 Lives in Tiruvali where the famed brahmins
 Perform fire sacrifices in a proper manner.
 Do kindly inform him of my condition.⁸

Of the dozens of temples he visited for worship, Tirunaraiyur seems to have drawn a good deal from his heart, as he has sung two decads on Naraiyur Nambi. Do not tarry, never postpone your visit to this holy place! Surrender unto the Lord, for earthly life is quite, quite fleeting!

When watery eyes roll around
 Caked with dirt, damsels who speak
 In tones sweeter than music will say:
 "Hence, be off with you." Before this happens,
 O mind! Get ready to go to Naraiyur
 Where resides the Lord who created
 The sky and the mountains, who is hailed
 By the Vedas and is the Sacrifice.⁹

It is best to draw close to the Divine when one is still young and capable of engaging oneself in the service of the Divine. While all the verses in *Peria Tirumoli* have been recited and sung with ecstasy, there are a few that have become part of our consciousness. One of them brings out the pure love of Rama which transcended class, caste and gender:

You never considered them as poor,
 An enemy or belonging to a low caste;
 You had such kindness towards Guha.
 "This doe-eyed Sita is your friend;
 My brother Lakshmana is brother to you."
 Nay, more. "You are my dear comrade"
 You had said. These words have entered

My ears and touched my heart. O Lord
 Whose heart is as vast as the ocean!
 Lord of grove-rich Srirangam!
 I have drawn close to thy feet.¹⁰

Tirukurundandakam (twenty verses) and *Tirunedundandakam* (thirty verses) are ecstatic outpourings in the silence of Tirumangai's mind when he remembers his many travels and marvels at the manner in which the Lord's glory defies all description. A series of brilliant images—yet we are where we are!

He is my treasure, verily a pillar of coral,
 The refuge of those who meditate
 With sincerity, one who destroyed Kamsa,
 The power that rules over the universe.
 Praising the Lord and saluting him,
 I have recognised what is Ananda to me.
 I am a servitor and shall not leave him.¹¹

These two verse clusters may be taken as two staffs (*danda*) to lean upon while undertaking a spiritual journey. Indeed, can there be a better support than the Lord's Name? A list of the pilgrim centres where the Lord resides is made ready and we have packed our bags to start!

Lord of Neerakam! Atop the Tirupati hill!
 In the temple of Nilathingalthundam! In
 Prosperous Urakam at Kanchi! In water rich Vehka!
 In the hearts of those who meditate!
 In famous Karakam and Karvanam! Divine Thief!
 You are in Perakam on the southern bank
 Of Cauvery! Ever in my heart without moving!
 My Lord! I seek thy blessed feet.¹²

The success of the Alvars in the age that followed the Sangam period was not a little due to their adroit use of poetic conceits set up by the ancient Tamils. Tirumangai Alvar instituted a literary revolution when he used the conceit known as "*madaloorthal*" (Riding a Palm). According to the ancients, when a man found that his love was not returned by the lady, he took a vow to ride a horse fashioned from a palmyra stem and publicly keep announcing his intent till he succeeded. It is of course a rare kind of blackmail or non-violent resistance. When applied by the Jivatman, it brings out the helplessness of god-love:

The *madal* is, on the one hand, a frantic appeal to God to come down from His transcendental Kingdom and Height to accept the purest flower of love-offering (*kamapushpa*) even though the love is coming from a being unfitted in every sense to receive such a Grace; and on the other hand, it is what the individual soul cannot but do.¹³

Of course, ‘*madal*’ also means a letter, a message. Tirumangai has used this conceit for two poems, *Peria Tirumadal* and *Siriya Tirumadal*. Tirumangai as Parakala Nayaki is making a last stand: Attain the Lord or annihilate oneself! Who can gauge the depths of a devotee’s heart where a million sparks flash and clash? K. C. Varadachari notes this extreme position in which Tirumangai finds himself:

The *madal* however is a threat to God, for its intention seems to be to show to the world that God is not the *śaranāgata-rakshaka*, the saviour of the refugee, nor is He *sulabha*, easily accessible, a threat which is fortunately never treated by God as not worth taking notice of. God’s assurance to the soul that loves Him alone and to whom the soul has totally dedicated itself, is of greatest spiritual value to the soul, and it is on this truth of God’s Word that the *madal* revolves.¹⁴

Peria Tirumadal has this to say: of the four purusharthas (aims of life), no one seems to know moksha since that state is attained only after death. Material wealth and power are fleeting; and heavenly joy is also limited to our good deeds, *ksheena punye martyalokam visanti*.¹⁵

Tirumangai feels that of all the experiences of man on earth, the love for God—bhāgavat kāma—alone seems to be the purushartha that rewards us here, for in this path the way and the goal are the same. Even in desiring the Divine, the approach of the beloved marks the apex experience:

But the highest and the greatest relation is that which starts from none of the ordinary religious motives, but is rather of the very essence of Yoga, springs from the very nature of love itself; it is the passion of the Lover and the Beloved. Wherever there is the desire of the soul for its utter union with God, this form of the divine yearning makes its way even into religions which seem to do without it and give it no place in their ordinary system. Here the one thing asked for is love, the one thing feared is the loss of love, the one sorrow is the sorrow of separation of love; for all other things either do not exist for the lover or come in only as incidents or as results and not as objects or conditions of love.¹⁶

Tirumangai’s poem avers that such total consecration had been practised by Uma, Sita, Vegavati, Ulupi and even Usha and Vasavadutta! So Parakala Nayaki will dare the scandal-mongering by worldly-minded persons. The *Siriya Tirumadal* concludes

with yet another fond listing of twenty-five famous pilgrim centres!

Even if the townspeople criticise me
 And ask me to stop riding the palm-horse,
 I shall not. To gain Him
 Who broke the tusk of the huge elephant
 And saved another elephant from danger,
 To gain the handsome Lord with lotus eyes
 Who wears honey-dripping Tulsi garlands,
 I shall repeat *ad nauseam* his thousand names
 To gain my end.

An endless aspiration is then needed, but one must not forget that the success of this aspiration comes only when there is an answering grace. The grace never fails, of course. It is a firm belief in the Vaishnava world that the Lord is as eager to gain the aspirant as the latter is passionately desirous of the Lord. Rama's sending Hanuman to Lanka to search for Sita is often cited in this context. Tirumangai's *Tiruvelukutrirukai* underlines the grace of the reality which in reality needs no cause to descend: it is *nirhetuka!* Surrender is the key and the brief poem of Tirumangai is such a statement of surrender.

Adventurous in life and literature, Tirumangai has attempted here a *chitra kavi*, a classical Indian poetic device of creating a poem in the form of a picture. A brilliant verbal *tour de force*, *Tiruvelukutrirukai* is a "*Ratha-bandha*" in which the letters are arranged in such a way as to limn a chariot.¹⁷ An added conceit is the use of numbers from one to seven repeatedly as a trellis to hold the thoughts:

Lord worshipped by Brahmins
 Who sustain the Fires three,
 Four scriptures and five sacrifices;
 Known to the sattvic devotees
 Who reject rajas and tamas,
 Have self-control and draw within
 The five sense perceptions;
 Beyond the comprehension of Shiva
 With three eyes, four shoulders,
 Five-headed serpents and Ganga stream;
 You lifted the seven worlds up by the tusk;
 You are the end of Rasa...

For Tirumangai, Narayana was a personal experience but he knew that he could never convey to others this glory as it appeared to him. And yet this experience made

him understand the universal presence of the Divine. If so, each devotee could experience for himself the Divine! While all the poems of Tirumangai are of a piece, *Tirunedundandakam* presents a sharp focus. Visiting many temples and worshipping the divine, Tirumangai marvels at the universal presence of the Lord. As nature and as the god-idea, the One has taken hold of the devotees and bound him with chords of love. Like Dante's vision in *Paradiso*, in Tirumangai's poem all manifestations merge as an indescribable splendid One:

Methought a godly figure thine:
 I saw your triple form
 In its diverse manifestations
 As water, fire, air, sky
 Here on earth; the apocalypse
 In many religions.
 At that moment I saw a figure
 All golden; another a flame;
 Yet another as the vast ocean.
 These figures three merged
 As one Dark Cloud. And that was
 The sight of my Lord's feet.¹⁸

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

Notes and References

1. *Savitri*, Book I, canto iv.
2. One of the seven concentric ring-ways of Srirangam is even today known as Alinaadan Tiruveedhi, in honour of Tirumangai.
3. *Peria Tirumoli*, I-1-i. All translations from Tirumangai Alwar are by Prema Nandakumar.
4. *Ibid.*, II-2-ix.
5. Originally a resting place or math for pilgrims going to Benaras, the building was transformed into a three-storeyed temple by Parameshwara Varman in the 7th century. The Lord, Vaikunta Perumal, is seen in the sitting posture on the ground floor, as resting on the first floor and standing on the second floor. The entire wall space of the inner cloister encircling the sanctum is filled with figurines describing the birth of Parameshwara Varman (also known as Nandivarman II), the events leading to his being anointed king, the *ashwamedha yajna* as performed by the Pallava royalty. The entire temple has been restored by the Archaeological Survey of India.
6. *Peria Tirumoli*, II-9-vi.
7. Parakala the Beloved Damsel. Parakala is one of the names of Tirumangai.
8. *Peria Tirumoli*, III-6-i.
9. *Ibid.*, VI-4-i.
10. *Ibid.*, V-8-1.
11. *Tirukurundandakam*, 1.
12. *Tirunedundandakam*, 8.

13. K. C. Varadachari, *Alwars of South India* (1966), p. 118.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 120.

15. *The Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter IX, verse 21:

“Having enjoyed the varied felicities of heaven for long, they come back to the world of human beings when their asset of meritorious deeds is exhausted. Thus, being desire-ridden, the followers of the Vedic sacrificial rites stagnate in Samsara, the repetitive state of going and returning.” Translated by Swami Tapasyananda.

16. Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Part III, chapter 3.

17. A painting depicting the poem as a chariot may be seen on the inner wall of Sarangapani Temple, Kumbakonam. The poem was composed in praise of Lord Aravamudha, the presiding deity of the temple.

18. Verse 2.

THE STORM AND BEYOND

The heart is swayed by a storm of passions,
 No respite has it from rebel emotions;
 Battered and beaten by the pettiness of life,
 It seeks an escape from this endless strife.

All doors seem closed, and darkness prevails,
 The heart faints and falls, it fails.
 A saviour hand appears holding up a light
 For the soul to see and continue the fight.

The clouds retreat, revealing another sky.
 In a burst from within, a hymn soars high.
 A ray from the unseen touches the earth,
 And all undergoes a transfiguring birth.

An eternal light now fills the air,
 A silence descends,—there rises a prayer.
 A light in the heart, roseate, glows.
 A silence ascends,—adoration overflows.

PANCHASSEE-MOUNTAIN

(Continued from the issue of July 2006)

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

(8) Panchassee Yoga... Nature-as-the-Mother meditation

Today, O Dawn, awake for us for the journey to the vast bliss... extend (thy riches) for a vast state of enjoyment, confirm in us a wealth of varied brightness... full of inspired knowledge... in us mortals, O human and divine.

(Sri Aurobindo, The Secret of the Veda)

Each ascent is thus a new birth of the soul, and the Veda calls the worlds “births” as well as seats and dwelling places.

(Sri Aurobindo, The Secret of the Veda)

A SIGH comes along with the breath: can't we stay here forever?

There is a jungle path back to Panchassee village from this lake that does not retrace the stone-stepped trail along the peaks. This jungle trail is up and down through forest, but is only a buffalo track. There is, however, a sense of the sacred on this return journey, for She seems to have come along: the memory of Her stays close by and fills the jungle as She filled the atmosphere at the lake.

I don't know what to think about Her coming. Perhaps there is a layer overlapping my Nature-experience with something from an ancient past without mental details. And my physical consciousness must be very primal in composition, for I DO recognise Her company.

Ever so often the jungle opens at a cliff-side crossing and the most spectacular view invades our senses. It is as if She jumps inside through the cliff opening: my visual perception integrates Her closeness into something quite pleasantly personal. It feels like I have the company of someone whom I can sense.

On one of these open cliff-side viewing points, it occurs to me that in Her company an attempt at meditation could be made, as obviously for thousands of years this is one reason sadhus and devotees have visited this Mountain-mother. So I sat and leaned back against the mountainside and in front of a hazy late-afternoon horizon-infinity, three metres back from the vertical drop.

But at last she shall yield him up; she is the lower tinder, the mental being is the upper tinder; by the pressure of the upper on the lower the flame of Agni shall be born. But it is by pressure, by a sort of churning that he is born. Therefore he is called the Son of Force.

(Sri Aurobindo, The Secret of the Veda)

We settle down together, the rock is warm. My breath observations do eventually allow me to sink beneath this physical breathing activity again. But here the environmental influences feel different. Perhaps due to the Nature-experience now, a largeness and energy has replaced the lake-feeling of depths and enclosure.

But the warmth is first acknowledged again: who can describe how sunlight feels? There are psychological feelings and sense-influenced feelings in the physical warmth of the moment. Perhaps that combined warmth is the framework for the natural observation of the breath pattern, like a psychological pilgrimage to the place where they meet, to the place of their “churning”. The holiness attributed to places where two rivers or streams meet is everywhere in the Himalayas. While at first it appears that the churning is associated with the physical action of breathing in and out, eventually the observation stays at the point where they meet.

The psychological parallels to the outer and physical experience of breathing require words for the ancient dual-meanings coined in English by Sri Aurobindo. In fact it is quite simple to accomplish a meditative perception of the breath process, maybe because it had just happened physically during the trekking on this trail. The breaths come and the breaths go, on top of a warmth that I feel to be touching inside and outside at the same time.

In the above translation, the mental being is the “upper tinder”. But what I see in myself at this moment is an opening in the vital; perhaps the mind gets involved as the witness even when the experience is in the vital and the physical. Or perhaps the witness on each of our layers of personality can be described as the mental aspect of that layer.

Beneath the mind the breaths pass to and fro, and beneath the breaths their observation settles in the heart centre, where perhaps the tinders as well as the churning meet in the same moment, the moment the breaths meet.

Thus in images of physical Nature the Vedic poets sing the hymn of our spiritual ascension.

(Sri Aurobindo, Hymns to the Mystic Fire)

After a short time I rise and leave the cliff-side opening and enter again the forest on the buffalo trail. On the ascents and descents it is quite clear that in the rainy season the path is really a stream, and that right now in the dry season we follow most of the time monsoon stream beds. The forest is very, very thick and perhaps that is why I feel enclosed as well as free physically, to be walking inside as well as outside in the jungle. Pheasants are regularly surprised by my heavy footfalls and pierce the quiet with their cry and wild flapping of wings as they immediately disappear down the forested slopes.

This dual experience of forest sensation reminds me of a recent visit to a nearby forest shrine, called Forest-Kali. Deep inside that forest an amazing collection of

buildings and symbols and places for worship appeared. I followed the lodge family into the temple building lying in deep jungle, looking around surprised at these developments half an hour away from the nearest road. Once inside, as I approached the area of the shrine, a force slowly concentrated in my mind with each step nearer. At the inner sanctum of this Kali-shrine there was no image or stone or anything, only an open space beneath a cloth canopy. As I stood in front of this force-field the mind was concentrated dramatically, and I then dumbly followed the family outside, not knowing what else to do.

As the distance from the shrine increased, so the force that seized the mind gradually let go, until outside the building, there was only the memory of that force holding the mind. Immediately my physical mind suggested that all of it was an imagination. So while the others continued with the visiting of smaller outer shrines, I turned to retrace my steps and verify if my imagination was involved. As soon as I again approached the “seat” of this divine Female, Her force seized my mind. This time I stood and peered into the open holy space in front of my view, when She seemed to completely enclose my mental faculties. The priest sitting by Her side looked to me to have lost his mental faculties long ago, so absent was his presence.

I stood there for a few moments looking closely at the details that filled Her sacred space, but there was nothing physical to associate with the experience. However, the manner in which two square red and yellow cloths were thrown over something at the centre of this small one metre holy area, was experienced in the senses. The two squares of red and yellow cloth fell in a way that seemed to possess an essential feminine-something. These are the elements of a distant and very primal past that must have now somehow come forward. But now I was satisfied that She was not a figment of my imagination, and I inwardly waved goodbye as Her pressure eased with my exit.

Is this concentration in the Forest-Kali temple related to the aspiration of the trees and plants for sunlight?

The image of this [psychological] sacrifice is sometimes that of a journey or a voyage; for it travels, it ascends; it has a goal—the vastness, the true existence, the light, the felicity—and is called upon to discover and keep the good, the straight and the happy path to the goal....

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

Next on the return trail to Panchassee were white and red ribbons, and flower offerings around a little spring issuing water from under a rock in the mountainside. This is the Spring-mother, the primal Mother-of-life as a water-source. There are a number of abandoned grassland homesteads that we walk through *en route*. The tiny spring is near one of these huge abandoned properties that return to being the open grasslands they probably originally were. It is the village people who continue to

worship an original Vedic nature symbol for the divine Mother-of-All, leaving strips of red and white cloth by this water-source in adoration.

It is these same village people who late one afternoon came for a short visit to the Panchassee inn where I was staying. Their child antagonisingly tugged at my neck-wrap that I refused to give him until his father said, “He is a living god-symbol, you bow to him.” The young boy then bowed to me with his head touching the floor in front of everyone.

Perhaps similarly, the brothers and all males in this Himalayan region during the autumn nine-day divine-Female celebration, bow down before each sister and she blesses him by placing vermilion between the eyebrows, then a gift of flowers in the hair. In Kathmandu there is a special temple for those who do not have sisters for this divine-Femalehood celebration.

And that perfection must be attained on all our levels—in the wideness of earth, our physical being and consciousness; in the full force of vital speed and action and enjoyment..., in the perfect gladness of the heart of emotion and a brilliant heat and clarity of the mind...

(Sri Aurobindo, The Secret of the Veda)

It is a most peculiar experience to watch these mountain people laugh throughout the day at everything. They seem to have a culture of making jokes about anything that happens in the normal activities of a mountain village, and at night they sing. I can only imagine that the way they work is the reason for their happiness: they have a complete mountainside of grains to plant and harvest every year.

When the second hour of the return pilgrimage has passed, we stop in the centre of an abandoned homestead with a large number of now-overgrown terraced fields, to rest and drink some water. The view is wonderful, and we sit on a ledge under a sacred pair of trees, one of which is a wild cherry. The afternoon shadows begin to appear in the trees further along the mountainside in front where we can see the path wind its way on the last stage of this return journey. The colours of everything this divine Mountain-mother-day are deep and soft and vast. As we rest, the view composes the valleys that stretch to the horizon, into a beauty that is red: red is the colour of the divine Female in nature, as well as the colour of fire in sunset.

Beginning the last section of the trail, with the village visible as tiny colours dotting the distant ridge, we re-enter the forest. She comes along.

(To be continued)

GARY

Corrections

The June 2006 issue of the journal carried some Sanskrit text, where, unfortunately certain errors had crept in. We reproduce here the Devanagari text as it should have been printed.

Page 418:

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

(सवितुः परस्य वररूपज्योतिर्ध्यायिनास्माकम् इह जीवयात्रासु सत्यप्रकाशलाभः प्रतिपादितः)

ज्योतिषः स्तुत्या ज्योतिष्मतः स्तुतिराक्षिप्यते सत्यैकस्वरूपत्वेऽपि ज्योतिर्ज्योतिष्मतोः (शक्तिशक्तयोः)
उभयरूपत्वग्रहणात्,
इह नः श्रीभगवदुपदिष्ट-श्रीमातृसाधनानुगुण्येनेयं च गायत्री ग्रहणक्षमा भवति॥

तथा च,

तत्सवितुरित्यस्य मन्त्रस्य
परः श्रीअरविन्दः ऋषिः
गायत्री छन्दः
परं ज्योतिरम्बा देवता॥

Page 420:

पवित्रं तत् परं ज्योतिः सत्यं तदमृतं वपुः।
इह सर्वाङ्गमस्माकमाक्रामज्ज्वलयेदपि॥

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The February 2006 issue of the journal carried a photograph of the Mother, and below it a quotation attributed to Sri Aurobindo.

The quotation is actually from the Mother's prayer of July 16, 1914 from her *Prayers and Meditations*.

দুর্গা-স্তোত্র

মাতঃ দুর্গে! তোমার সন্তান আমরা, তোমার প্রসাদে, তোমার প্রভাবে, মহৎ কার্যের মহৎ ভাবের উপযুক্ত হই। বিনাশ কর ক্ষুদ্রতা, বিনাশ কর স্বার্থ, বিনাশ কর ভয় ॥

মাতঃ দুর্গে! কালীরূপিণি, নৃমুণ্ডমালিনি দিগম্বরী, কৃপাণপাণি দেবি অসুর-বিনাশিনি! ত্রুর নিনাদে অন্তঃস্থ রিপু বিনাশ কর। একটিও যেন আমাদের ভিতরে জীবিত না থাকে, বিমল নির্মল যেন হই, এই প্রার্থনা, মাতঃ, প্রকাশ হও ॥

মাতঃ দুর্গে! স্বার্থে ভয়ে ক্ষুদ্রাশয়তায় স্রিয়মাণ ভারত। আমাদের মহৎ কর, মহৎপ্রয়াসী কর, উদারচেতা কর, সত্যসঙ্কল্প কর। আর অল্লাশী, নিশেচষ্ট, অলস, ভয়ভীত যেন না হই ॥

শ্রীঅরবিন্দ

HYMN TO DURGA

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.

MOTHER DURGA! Thou art Kali, naked, garlanded with human heads, sword in hand, thou slayest the Asura. Goddess, do thou slay with thy pitiless cry the enemies who dwell within us, may none remain alive there, not one. May we become pure and spotless, this is our prayer, O Mother, make thyself manifest.

MOTHER DURGA! India lies low in selfishness and fearfulness and littleness. Make us great, make our efforts great, our hearts vast, make us true to our resolve. May we no longer desire the small, void of energy, given to laziness, stricken with fear.

Sri Aurobindo

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

With Compliments from Well-wishers