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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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LIBERATION

My mind, my soul grow larger than all Space;
Time founders in that vastness glad and nude:
The body fades, an outline, a dim trace,
A memory in the spirit's solitude.

This universe is a vanishing circumstance
In the glory of a white infinity,
Beautiful and bare for the Immortal's dance,
House-room of my immense felicity.

In the thrilled happy giant void within
Thought lost in light and passion drowned in bliss,
Changing into a stillness hyaline,
Obey the edict of the Eternal's peace.

Life's now the Ineffable's dominion;
Nature is ended and the spirit alone.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 149)

THE PROBLEM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

What Is Consciousness?

1

CONSCIOUSNESS—but what is consciousness? A word only conveniently ticketing a class of natural phenomena or a fundamental reality of existence?

Apparently a phenomenon which has only a small range intervening in an immense mass of things inconscient and without significance, consciousness alone gives a value to the universe. It seems to have taken no part in the creation of the universe; it was not there in the beginning or even during the greater part of the history of the earth; it may not be there at its end. In the middle it plays a great role in the life of animal and man, but its action is crude and ill-developed in the animal, imperfect in the human creature. Its evolution wears the character of an episode in the long history of an inconscient world, a chapter that began some time ago, but one knows not why it intervened at all or how it will end or whether its appearance has any meaning, whether its developing importance has an accidental and meaningless or a purposeful and revelatory character. It may be a freak of creative Chance or it may be or may carry in itself the whole meaning of the world-drama.

In an inconscient universe, in a Nature or the working of an Energy which is fundamentally material, the emergence [of] Consciousness has at first the air of a surprising, a contradictory, an impossible event. For in such a world, in the working of such a Nature or Energy, how could it ever come into existence? Either there is no real consciousness, only an action of Matter or unconscious Energy which takes this inexplicable and deceptive form, or Nature or Energy is not fundamentally inconscient. Consciousness was always a possibility which at a certain stage chanced or was bound to take place, or it was a latent power that has become manifest. Or even it may be all Nature is really conscious and it is we who foist inconscience upon her because we are limited to a certain range and character of consciousness and cannot communicate with her other ranges or even detect their existence.

It has been held by a certain opinion that consciousness in itself does not exist, there are only phenomena of reactions of Matter to Matter or of Energy in Matter to Energy in Matter to which by generalisation we give the name. There is no person who is conscious, thinks, speaks, perceives, wills, acts; it is an organised body in which certain chemical, molecular, cellular, glandular and nerve activities take place and certain material results and reactions of these activities take place in the brain which take the form of these phenomena. It is the body that thinks, perceives, wills, speaks, acts; it is Matter that goes through these operations and becomes aware of them; it may be said that brain-matter makes a record or notation of these actions and this notation is consciousness and this record is memory. There is nothing in the world

except Matter and the operations of Matter.

This theory arose when physical Science concentrated on the operations of Matter, saw only Matter and energy of Matter everywhere; it persists even after that seeing of things has been severely shaken. For now we are driven to see and say that there is no such thing as Matter in itself; what we call Matter is only a mass of phenomena of Energy, events of energy, which our senses regard as objects and our minds classify under the general name of Matter. But we can still hold that all phenomena are phenomena of Energy acting in the forms or sensible events which we call Matter and the phenomena of consciousness are of that character. There is nothing else to it, nothing but the mobile and executive Energy, Nature, Prakriti; there is no soul, no Purusha. Consciousness would still be a general name for a brain-record and notation of these events of material Energy and this will still be the true character of thought, perception, will, speech, act. All these events are separate phenomena which may act and react on each other or group themselves together, but they are not the result or manifestations of any one general force or power of being that we can call Consciousness.

2

Consciousness,—but what is consciousness?

And first of all we have to face the possibility that there is no such thing. For many hold that the word is an unreal generalisation invented to cover a class of material phenomena having their origin in Matter and material in their nature and essence, an operation of Matter on Matter and in Matter. Thoughts are only vibrations of the grey matter of the brain; they are not something other [than] that or capable of existing beyond the material plane; they cannot exist independently of the brain; brain is not their instrument of expression or manifestation; they are [its] instrument made of its substance, dependent on [its] substance, in-existent without it. Mind is an action of Matter, not a separate power or force; there is nothing in it superior to the physicality of the body; it exists by the body and as a part of its activity, lasts along with it, dies with it. Mind is a product of gases, some operation of Nature's chemistry, glandular influences, nervous stimuluses; it is matter and records the operations of Matter.

But why then this appearance of mentality, of consciousness, of a conscious being? That too is only a trick of Matter. They are reflexes and reactions to the contacts of things outside, to other material objects, bodies, movements, forces. Sense and sensation are the reply of the nerves to stimulus of external and material things or to internal stimuli that are still material. To the experience of the body the result of these, recoils, reflexes, reactions, may seem mental, but that cannot alter the fact that they are material products of the workings of Matter.

Well, be it so; but still this mentality creates an awareness of self and things and the movements of self and things, even if both be only a body and so many other

bodies, and it is difficult to describe awareness as an unconscious movement or condition or as the unconscious seeming to be conscious. Evidently we are in face of a general sophism invented by specialists of a limited field of data, the data of unconscious Matter, who are determined to force everything into its characteristic formulas and refuse to admit everything else. We must at least recover the right to see this awareness and its movements as they are or as they present themselves to us and see how far it leads us and whether indeed, even if it occurs in matter and the body, it does not lead us to something other than the body and other than Matter. The materialist contention that consciousness is not a separate power or force or manifestation of energy like electricity or magnetism or steam, but only a name for a particular bundle of brain phenomena, cannot hide the startling fact that unconscious and insentient Matter has become sentient and conscient even if it be only at points, in jets, in small masses.

This awareness has created at least the appearance of a sentient and conscient being who not only becomes relatively aware of self and things, but can study them, discover their nature and process, determine and develop the possibilities of his own consciousness and the possibilities of the world's forces and processes, can will and can create, can ponder and philosophise, can write poetry and create works of art, can use [?] to modify and alter the world around him and make for himself a different life-environment, can look beyond Matter, can tend towards the heights of consciousness not yet developed, can envisage the Superconscient. If the consciousness that can do all this is not a force, a power in itself, it at least looks strangely like it. And we have the right, at least hypothetically, to study it as such a power or force and find out how far that leads us. It may even lead us to the discovery of a Reality greater than the world of Matter or of Energy building up shapes of Matter and movements in Matter. It may take us beyond phenomena and appearances to the truth of things and to something that is the origin of all that seems to be[.]

*

At the other extreme of human mentality we meet a similar and more devastating denial. Consciousness has no real existence; or, so far as it exists at all, it is as a dynamic Power, a creator of illusions. There is nothing sound or real in what it builds; there is nothing true in what it sees; the world it shows us is [an] impossible chimera, a mass of figments and falsehoods. The sole consciousness that is true is the self-awareness of some absolute Silence, a spaceless immobile Infinite, a timeless featureless Eternity. Or, as the materialist sees only a bundle of phenomena material and dependent on Matter or a fortuitous result of material operations, so the Nihilistic Buddhist sees only a bundle of associations, *sanskaras*, which stuck together produce the false appearance of a continuity of concrete phenomena or a stream of momentary perceptions giving the impression of a false self and coherent world, a coherent personality, but if the bundle is dissolved, if the stream ceases to flow, all dissolves

and collapses and shows the empty Nothingness which is the only eternal truth and the sole eternal reality. This superconscient Nothingness has no need of consciousness [for] the greatness of its emptiness or its everlasting peace of unconscious bliss. To return to Nothingness is the only use or meaning of existence.

Here too we seem to be in front of [the] sophism of a specialist seizing the sole salient and striking side, the one prominent aspect of Truth in which he is versed putting aside all the rest as inconsistent or invalid. After all the world exists and is too persistent and effective and solid a phenomenon to be put aside or merely whistled off the field with an airy "It is not";—a mirage is ineffectual and recedes or fades if it is touched, an illusion dissolves if revealed but this is stupendously effective, overwhelmingly persistent and we have to sound all its possibilities before dismissing it as something vain and trifling. World-consciousness may be only one aspect of our being, but it is a big and momentous aspect and it too should be given its full chance of justifying itself before it is ruled out of court. The eternal reality of a pure immobile existence and its self-awareness is also a truth of our being. But it is not impossible that these are two aspects of one Reality and not so incompatible as the metaphysical logician imagines. This is what we propose to do integrally and with a full and exhaustive inquiry before we decide either way. The chances are that so enormous a thing as this world is something more than an astonishing chimera. The chances are that when two such great aspects of existence confront each other, there is a connection somewhere, a reconciliation of their contraries. It is possible that both are aspects, static and dynamic, of some absolute Reality from which both have drawn their own reality and in which they have their true and inevitable place.

*

In any case consciousness is the one thing by which we can consider or decide the question at all. It is the one thing by which we know at all that world exists or can inquire into its truth and its meaning. If consciousness has no reality and no value, then there is nothing by which we can know the truth,—one explanation of things has then as little value as the other, neither can be claimed as the truth. The consciousness by which we affirm the featureless sole Reality can be as fallacious as that by which we affirm our individual self and the universe.

If consciousness is the self-awareness of the eternal Existence, it can only be this self-awareness seeing its own power and the works of its power as a real world. If consciousness is a creation of the evolution, it is also the one thing by which it receives some value, the one thing by which its values can be reckoned, its [. . .], its one central and essential value. It is not by the development of forms that evolution reaches its height, but by the evolution of consciousness. The degree of consciousness is the degree of evolution; the extent to which consciousness has developed its powers, range, height, its fulness of vision and self-vision, is the measure of the evolution's

development of its work and aim, its progress towards its goal, if goal indeed it has and is not the incoherent working out of an accidental Chance. Indeed, if we look at the way in which the Inconscient has devised the world and the sequences by which it has arrived at intelligence, we have some reason [to think] that it is a secret Consciousness which has made this world and under the mask of inconscience has emerged as a slow process of an Ignorance developing Knowledge.

If so, it may well be that it is the self-awareness of the [eternal Existence] that is working out in the formula of inconscient Matter and ignorant Life and half-awakened Mind its own self-manifestation in the material universe.

3

But what is consciousness and what its relation to existence? How and why did it come into being in an inconscient universe, a universe which even if it originated by an inexplicable chance, has assumed the proportions of a huge and complex inexorable mechanism repeating the same processes through the aeons without respite or cessation? By what spiritual or mechanical necessity? by what mechanical chance or accidental process of Energy? To what end or purpose, if any purpose there can be in an inconscient mechanism of brute Necessity or inexplicably organised Chance or any end in a movement which never had any reason for beginning? Does consciousness exist or is it a fortuitous illusion? Who or what is it that becomes conscious in the animal and in the body of the human being?

Three possible solutions. Consciousness has not come into being but was and is always there, a fundamental power of existence, latent or involved or concealed from our mind and sense even in what we call inanimate and unconscious things. It has not come into existence but has emerged from existence; involved it has evolved in the general evolutionary process. Or consciousness is only a phenomenon, a surprising result of certain inconscient processes of Nature, unintentional but actual, unnecessary and accidental or else somehow inevitable as an output of chemical and other physical energies which could not help imposing itself at a certain point of their activity in the natural course of things. It did not exist before that point was reached; when another point has been reached it may go out of existence. Or again the world is a creation of an extra-cosmic or immanent conscious Being personal or impersonal who has either put his consciousness or a consciousness resembling his into his mechanical creation to be an element there or else has infused it from within into the mechanical self-expression in which he has chosen to dwell as its upholder, inspirer, inhabitant.

What is meant by consciousness? what is this phenomenon which seems to have so small a part in the vast inconscient mass of things and is yet the sole element here that can give any value to the universe?

And to come to the heart of the difficulty—is it indeed only a phenomenon, an

appearance that has emerged in the course of the workings of an Energy which was, is and will always remain inconscient? Or is it something fundamental, an inherent reality or a latent character or power of that Energy and bound to emerge at some time once it had begun its workings?

4

It is to a mass of ill-connected and ill-understood phenomena that we give this name of consciousness; when these are at work we say that a man or animal is conscious, when they are suspended we say that he or it is unconscious; where they are absent, as in a tree, we suppose the object, even if it has life, to be inconscient by its very nature, incapable of sensation no less than empty of thought and will. Where life is not, inconscience seems to us a still more self-evident character of the thing or being. Man alone is fully conscious, for he alone is aware of himself, reflective on things, in full possession of mental capacities and their aware and observant use. Mind and consciousness are almost synonymous to our ordinary notions; where consciousness is not mentalised, we find it difficult to recognise its presence, hardly possible to follow its movements; even in the animal we are apt to regard it as reflex movement not aware of itself, undeveloped, primitive.

5

All that exists or can exist in this or any other universe can be rendered into terms of consciousness; there is nothing that cannot be known. This knowing need not be always a mental knowledge. For the greater part of existence is either above or below mind, and mind can know only indirectly what is above or what is below it. But the one true and complete way of knowing is by direct knowledge.

All can be rendered into terms of consciousness because all is either a creation of consciousness or else one of its forms. All exists in an infinite conscious existence and is a part or a form of it. In proportion as one can share directly or indirectly, completely or incompletely in the eternal awareness of this Infinite, or momentarily contact or enter into it, or formulate some superior or inferior power of its consciousness or knowledge, one can know what it knows, in part or whole, by a direct knowing or an indirect coming to knowledge. A conscious, half conscious or subconscious participation in the awareness of the Infinite is the basis of all knowledge.

All things are inhabited by this consciousness, even the things that seem to us inconscient and the consciousness in one form can communicate with or contact the consciousness in another or else penetrate or contain or identify with it. This in one form or another is the true process of all knowledge; the rest is ignorant appearance.

All things are one self; it is the one Knower who knows himself everywhere, from one centre or another in the multiplicity of his play. Otherwise no knowledge would be possible.

The Secret below the Surface

1

All life, all existence is an enigma to the human mind, because the mind is a light which sees only the surfaces of things or at most a little below the surface and is moreover limited by its own circumscribed area of vision. It cannot see what is beyond those limits and yet there are an infinity of things beyond its circle. It cannot see what is above, it cannot see what is within, it cannot see what is below. But what is on the surface is never the truth of things; the surface presents us only with facts not with truths, with phenomena not with realities, with imperfect indications, not with the realisation of things in themselves. The secret, the truth, the reality of things is above, within, below, it is not on their surface.

2

There is a meaning in the universe, an intention in cosmic existence; there is a significance of the individual, his life is a sign and has a purpose.

The true truth of things is not apparent on the surface, it is something hidden. Truth is not obvious, it comes always as a discovery, Life is the working out of a secret, the process and progress of a mystery; we too are not what we seem to be, we have to find and become ourself.

What we seem to be is a thinking human animal. What we are and have to become is God; the secret purpose of our existence here is to find the occult Reality of ourselves and the world, to become Divine.

3

Our existence in the world has a reality which is other than that which strikes our mind and senses on the surface. It contains a secret, a mystery which we have to discover, for through that discovery we must move both to the realisation of our self and spirit and the perfection and fulfilment of our life in Nature.

Our life is not an illusion nor a delirium nor is Nature a Maya, a fabricator of dreams or a dealer in vanities as certain religions would have it nor is one the outcome of a blind Force or the trick [of] a blind self-regulating Chance, the other an unconscious Power as it must be if the materialists' dogma were true. Our life is neither a freak of God nor a freak of Nature; it has a conscious plan although a secret plan, a significance although an occult and mystic significance.

The plan, the significance are secret and mysterious to us because we live on the surface of ourselves and things and are not in touch with either their core or their height or depths. Science on one side, Religion and Philosophy on the other try to

arrive at the hidden Truth, but each touches and only just touches one end of it and refuses to go farther and discover the other end or the link and reconciling relation between these two poles of existence.

It is said in the Veda of Agni, the flame of the creative Will and Force, that he hides his two extremities; only his middle is patent and visible. The head of Agni is occult in some superconscious height, his feet are plunged in the abyss of the material Inconscience. Consciousness emerging in the universe of life and mind is the bridge and link between the two poles. But our human consciousness is a term in the chain which is aware only of itself and sees all the rest in its own terms; it cannot identify itself with the other links and misses their significance and their purpose. It stands on the middle of the bridge looking all around it, but the bridgeheads are to its sight invisible. It cannot see what is there, but only speculate, infer or conjecture.

Science questing with its measuring rod of empirical experiment begins to have a dark glimpse of the Inconscient; it knows the universe as an organised freak that has emerged from the material Inconscience and will go back to its source. Religion and Philosophy rise on the wings of spiritual experience or in a balloon of metaphysical logic into some stratosphere of superconscious Reality, they seem to discover a God or Self or Spirit or Absolute and try to map it with the intellect or to turn it into a dynamic spiritual formula. But they are unable to reconcile these three terms of being; their physical experiments or their spiritual experiences are valid, but each has hold of only one end of the enigma.

Science has discovered Evolution; Religion and Philosophy have discovered something of that which is involved and evolves in this cosmic Existence. But the two discoveries have refused to shed light upon each other; each has shut itself up in its own formulas. This is because each is a creation and activity of Mind, Science of the concretising experimental mind, Philosophy of the abstracting intellectual mind, Religion of the dynamic spiritual mind. But Mind is bound always by its partial formulations of the Truth; Mind grasps formulas or images but is itself grasped by its own creations, it cannot get free from them or go beyond them. But the mind's concepts and formulas are only fragmentary representations of Truth or pointers or abstract schemas and images, not her very self and reality. Either a deeper inner soul-vision or a higher overmental or supramental consciousness is needed to discover Truth in her very face and body.

Then only can both ends of the riddle be firmly seized and connected together, the whole of existence seen in one gaze and life compelled to unmask its fathomless significance[.]

*

A mysterious something involved in Matter, concealed by it, evolving from it but in a material house or figure, striving to reveal itself in life and mind, but concealed by

its forms of life, concealed by its forms of mind, shooting out from them glimpses of itself, glimpses that hint but do not elucidate,—this is what we can see, and we see no more; the rest is speculation and conjecture. Is this something native to Matter, born in it and destined to die in it? Or is it an alien, a temporary visitor? Is Matter itself only a mask of it, a phenomenon of Energy, as it now more and more seems to be? Energy itself is a movement, a force of concealed Consciousness, Consciousness the sign of a hidden spiritual Being. But if so, what possible significance or purpose can there be in this involution, this material self-concealment and self-imprisonment, this slow tormented emergence of the Spirit?

Two lines of enquiry seem to give, though imperfectly and in opposition, a positive base for a reply to the question and the riddle,—the experiments of the scientist and the experience of the mystic.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, pp. 277-89)

Consciousness is not, to my experience, a phenomenon dependent on the reactions of personality to the forces of Nature and amounting to no more than a seeing or interpretation of these reactions. If that were so, then when the personality becomes silent and immobile and gives no reactions, as there would be no seeing or interpretative action, there would therefore be no consciousness. That contradicts some of the fundamental experiences of yoga, e.g., a silent and immobile consciousness infinitely spread out, not dependent on the personality but impersonal and universal, not seeing and interpreting contacts but motionlessly self-aware, not dependent on the reactions, but persistent in itself even when no reactions take place. The subjective personality itself is only a formation of consciousness which is a power inherent, not in the activity of the temporary manifested personality, but in the being, the Self or Purusha.

Consciousness is a reality inherent in existence. It is there even when it is not active on the surface, but silent and immobile; it is there even when it is invisible on the surface, not reacting on outward things or sensible to them, but withdrawn and either active or inactive within; it is there even when it seems to us to be quite absent and the being to our view unconscious and inanimate.

Consciousness is not only power of awareness of self and things, it is or has also a dynamic and creative energy. It can determine its own reactions or abstain from reactions; it can not only answer to forces, but create or put out from itself forces. Consciousness is Chit but also Chit Shakti.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 22, pp. 233-34)

‘...IT WILL BE DONE...’

January 5, 1914

FOR a long while I have been sitting with this note-book before me, unable to make up my mind to write, so much is all within me mediocre, worthless, insipid, hopelessly commonplace. Not a single thought in my head, not a single feeling in my heart, a complete indifference to everything and an insurmountable dullness.

How can such a state be of any use?

I am a veritable zero in the world.

But all this is not at all important. And provided Thy work is accomplished, Thy manifestation takes place and the earth becomes more and more Thy harmonious and fruitful kingdom, it matters little whether I accomplish this Work or not.

And as it is certain that It will be done, I should have no reason to worry even if I felt like it. From the depths to the outermost surface, all this, my being, is only a handful of dust; it is but natural that it should be scattered on the winds and leave no trace behind....

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, p. 47)

RECOLLECTIONS FROM LONG AGO

(Extracts from the Mother's Conversations)

(Continued from the issue of February 2007)

81. Buffalo Bill

There is a kind of extension of the physical senses. Red Indians, for example, possess a sense of hearing and smell with a far greater range than our own — and dogs! I knew an Indian — he was my friend when I was eight or ten years old. He had come with Buffalo Bill, at the time of the Hippodrome — it was a long time ago, I was eight years old — and he would put his ear to the ground and was so clever that he knew how far away... according to the intensity of the vibration, he knew how far away someone's footsteps were. After that, the children would immediately say, "I wish I knew how to do that!"

And then you try. That is how you prepare yourself. You think you are playing but you are preparing yourself for later on.

(27 February 1962)

82. A Rich Lady

I knew people who were very rich and had never had the chance to come into contact with those who had nothing or hadn't enough, and for them it was something unthinkable. I knew a lady (I knew many) who lived in a very fine apartment with many servants and all possible comfort — she had always lived thus and had never known any but easy circumstances — and one day I spoke to her about someone, a person of great worth and merit but who had nothing, hadn't enough to eat — and I asked her to help that person, not with money for he would not have accepted it, but with some work or by inviting him to pass some time with her (for she had a philosophical mind and could have helped intellectually). So I told her: "You know, he doesn't always eat his fill." I saw that she did not understand. I said: "Well, yes, he does not always have enough money to buy food — buy bread and what he needs to eat." — "But surely there is always bread and food in the kitchen!" *(Laughter)* She said that so spontaneously!

(17 February 1954)

83. Golden Pencil

I knew someone who had come to India with a great aspiration and after a very long effort towards knowledge and even towards Yoga. That was long long ago. At

that time, people used to put on watch-chains and trinkets. This gentleman had a golden pencil which his grandmother had given him to which he was attached as the most precious thing in the world. It was fixed to his chain. When he landed at one of these ports — at Pondicherry or perhaps elsewhere in India or at Colombo, I believe it was at Colombo — they used to get into small boats and the boats took you ashore. And so this gentleman had to jump from the gangway of the ship into the boat. He missed his step, somehow got back his balance, but he made a sudden movement and the little gold pencil dropped into the sea and went straight down into the depths. He was at first very much aggrieved, but he told himself: “Why, that is the effect of India: I am freed from my attachments....” It is for very sincere people that the thing takes such a form.

(15 July 1953)

84. Preferences

...in one country people prefer one thing and in another, another; and then, in the society in which one is born, there are certain customs and an ideal of happiness, and in another society there are other customs and another ideal of happiness — and that’s all.

If one speaks to Europeans, for example, they will say there is nothing more beautiful than Europe. I knew Frenchmen — not one but hundreds — who used to say that there were no women in the world more beautiful than French women! And I knew a Negro who had been entirely educated in France and who, when asked which women were the most beautiful, said, “There is no woman more beautiful than a Negress.” That was quite natural, wasn’t it? Well, that’s how it is. There is no house more beautiful than the one you are used to living in — the houses of the country you live in, where you are born — and for the landscape it is the same thing, for food the same thing, for habits it’s the same thing. And provided that this goes on fairly harmoniously, without any very violent knocks, you are perfectly satisfied.

That is the usual mentality.

(8 February 1956)

85. “I Formed a Mahatma”

I don’t know if you have ever heard of Madame David-Neel who went to Tibet and has written books on Tibet, and who was a Buddhist; and Buddhists — Buddhists of the strictest tradition — do not believe in the Divine, do not believe in his Eternity and do not believe in gods who are truly divine, but they know admirably how to use the mental domain; and Buddhist discipline makes you a good master of the mental

instrument and mental domain.

We used to discuss many things and once she told me: “Listen, I made an experiment.” (She had studied a bit of theosophy also.) She said: “I formed a *mahatma*; with my thought I formed a *mahatma*.” And she knew (this has been proved) that at a given moment mental formations acquire a personal life independent of the fashioner — though they are linked with him — but independent, in the sense that they can have their own will. And so she told me: “Just imagine, I had made my *mahatma* so well that he became a personality independent of me and constantly came to trouble me! He used to come, scold me for one thing, give me advice for another, and he wanted to direct my life; and I could not succeed in getting rid of him. It was extremely difficult, and I didn’t know what to do!”

So I asked her how she had tried. She told me how. She said, “He troubles me a lot, my *mahatma* is very troublesome. He does not leave me in peace. He disturbs my meditations, he hinders me from working; and yet I know quite well that it is I who created him, and I can’t get rid of him!” Then I said, “That’s because you don’t have the ‘trick’....” (*Mother laughs*) And I explained to her what she should do. And the next day — I used to see her almost every day in those days, you see — the next day she came and told me, “Ah, I am freed from my *mahatma*!” (*Laughter*) She had not *cut* the connection because that’s of no use. One must know how to *reabsorb* one’s creation, that is the only way. To swallow up again one’s formations.

(11 August 1954)

86. *Indifference to Praise*

When Mme. David-Neel — I have spoken to you about her, haven’t I? Mme. David-Neel who is a militant Buddhist and a great Buddhistic luminary — when she came to India she went to meet some of those great sages or gurus — I shan’t give you the names, but she went to one who looked at her and asked her... for they were speaking of yoga and personal effort and all that... he looked at her and asked her, “Are you indifferent to criticism?” Then she answered him with the classical expression, “Does one care about a dog’s barking?” But she added to me when telling me the story, very wittily: “Fortunately he did not ask me whether I was indifferent to compliments, because *that* is much more difficult!”

(30 November 1957)

87. *Attachment to Action*

...once, very long ago, when I was still in Paris and used to see Mme. David-Neel almost every day, she, you see, was full of her own idea and told me, “You

should not think of an action, it means attachment for the action; when you want to do something, it means that you are still tied to the things of this world.” Then I told her, “No, there is nothing easier. You have only to imagine *everything* that has been done before and all that will be done later and all that is happening now, and you will then realise that your action is a breath, like this, one second in eternity, and you can no longer be attached to it.” At that time I didn’t know the text of the Gita. I had not read it completely yet, you see... (*some words inaudible here*)... not this verse which I translate in my own way: “And detached from all fruit of action, act.” It is not like this, but still that’s what it means. This I did not know, but I said exactly what is said in the Gita.

But it is not because you believe in your action that you ought to act; you act because you must act, that’s all.

(30 November 1955)

88. “*The Propagandist Spirit*”

This habit of wanting to compel others to think as you do, has always seemed very strange to me; this is what I call “the propagandist spirit”, and it goes very far. You can go one step further and want people to do what you do, feel as you feel, and then it becomes a frightful uniformity.

In Japan I met Tolstoy’s son who was going round the world for “the good of mankind’s great unity”. And his solution was very simple: everybody ought to speak the same language, lead the same life, dress in the same way, eat the same things.... And I am not joking, those were his very words. I met him in Tokyo; he said: “But everybody would be happy, all would understand one another, nobody would quarrel if everyone did the same thing.” There was no way of making him understand that it was not very reasonable! He had set out to travel all over the world for that, and when people asked him his name he would say “Tolstoy” — now, Tolstoy, you know... People said, “Oh!” — some people didn’t know that Tolstoy was dead — and they thought: “Oh! what luck, we are going to hear something remarkable” — and then he came out with that!

(4 April 1956)

89. *Human Unity*

I met in Japan one of the sons of Tolstoy; he was going round the world preaching human unity. He had caught this from his father and was going everywhere in the world preaching human unity. I met him at some friends’ place and asked him, “How are you going to realise this human unity?” Do you know what reply he gave

me? “Oh! It is very simple — if everybody spoke the same language, if everybody dressed in the same manner, if everybody lived in the same manner, the whole world would be united!” Then I told him, “That would be a poor world not worth living in.” He did not understand me!

(5 April 1951)

90. *Conformity*

...one asks one's friends and those around one to be not what they are but what one would like them to be — one can form an ideal for oneself and want to apply it to everybody, but... This reminds me of Tolstoy's son whom I met in Japan and who was going round the world in the hope of bringing about unity among men. His intentions were excellent, but his way of doing it seemed less happy! He said with an imperturbable seriousness that if everybody spoke the same language, if everybody dressed in the same way, ate in the same way and behaved in the same way, that would inevitably bring about unity! And when asked how he planned to realise this he said it would be enough to go from land to land preaching a new but universal language, a new but universal dress, and new but universal habits. That was all.... And that was what he intended to do!

(*Laughing*) Well, everyone in his own little field is like that. He has an ideal, a conception of what is true and beautiful and noble, and even divine, and this conception of his he wants to impose on others.

(13 March 1957)

91. *The Epidemic*

Take the case of an epidemic. Many years ago we had a cholera epidemic here — it was bad — but the chief medical officer of the hospital was an energetic man: he decided to vaccinate everybody. When he discharged the vaccinated men, he would tell them, “Now you are vaccinated and nothing will happen to you, but if you were not vaccinated you would be sure to die!” He told them this with great authority. Generally such an epidemic lasts a long time and it is difficult to check it, but in some fifteen days, I think, this doctor succeeded in checking it; in any case, it was done miraculously fast. But he knew very well that the best effect of his vaccination was the confidence it gave to people.

(14 March 1951)

92. The Grace and the Flowering of New Capacities

I had a case like this in France, a long time ago, of a young, very young girl who had never had any education so to say, any instruction; she was an Opera dancer, a very good one, and had been put to study there at the age of eight, as they are always put, that is, as a child; and she had learnt to dance instead of learning history, geography, mathematics and the rest. She almost did not know how to express herself, and her intelligence, though evident, was untrained. Well, she was attracted like that and felt an imperious need to seek the Divine, to consecrate herself to Him. And she began to dance in His honour at first, like the juggler of Notre Dame; and she truly danced most remarkably. And then, suddenly, she wanted to express what she was feeling: she began writing letters which were wonderfully poetic; she said surprising things and in a still more surprising way; page followed page, and she wrote all with an extraordinary facility.

It happened that, due to certain circumstances, she had some difficulties, there was something in her nature which pulled her back towards the old nature she had given up — which made her practical and materialistic, made her see things externally. And immediately she became incapable of putting two words together, she could not write a line without making numberless spelling mistakes.

When she was in the state of inspiration she wrote without a mistake, like a great writer; and as soon as she came out of that state and fell back into her down-to-earth consciousness — the needs of life, the necessities of each minute, etc. — everything disappeared, she could not even write a single line without making mistakes and it was totally unrefined stuff.

So you see, this proves that if one attains the true consciousness, there is no longer any problem to solve. What you have to be, you become. What you have to know, you know. And what you have to do, you have the power to do. And it naturally follows that all those so-called difficulties immediately vanish.

In the case I am speaking about, what pulled her down was not something in herself, it was in another person. And unfortunately that's what happens most often: one takes on in life the burden of certain responsibilities and they prevent him from advancing.

That's my story.

(7 December 1955)

93. Rains

I went to Pau in the South of France at a time when it never rains there — that is, people who could remember from their very infancy had never seen a drop of water — it rained in torrents.

I went to South Algeria, naturally it was dry and there was torrid heat — it began to rain! (*Laughter*)

And then here the same thing happened, and they said that it had been seen only once before... I don't know anymore... something like two hundred years ago. They remembered this, and that someone had come and it had rained, and they had taken it as an absolutely auspicious sign, you see, that it was the sign of an exceptional destiny. They have ideas here about auspicious and inauspicious hours, and auspicious events and inauspicious events. Well, when someone arrives at a time when it does not rain and the rain falls, it seems to be a very auspicious event.

Therefore things are as one looks at them.

(30 November 1955)

94. *Value of a Thing*

I knew some poets who used to say, "It is my enemies' hatred which makes me value the affection of my friends...." And it is the almost inevitable likelihood of misfortune which gives all its savour to happiness, and so on. And they value repose only in contrast with the daily agitation, silence only because of the usual noise, and some of them even tell you, "Oh! it is because there are illnesses that good health is cherished." It goes so far that a thing is valued only when it is lost.

(30 January 1957)

95. *Becoming Calm*

There is a Chinese sage who advises you to lie down upon events as one floats on one's back upon the sea, imagining the immensity of the ocean and that you let yourself go floating upon this... upon the waves, you see, like something contemplating the skies and letting itself be carried away. In Chinese they call this *Wu Wei*. When you can do this all your troubles are gone. I knew an Irishman who used to lie flat on his back and look outside, as much as possible on an evening when stars were in the sky, he looked, contemplated the sky and imagined that he was floating in that immensity of countless luminous points.

And immediately all troubles are calmed.

There are many ways. But sincerely, you have only to... have the sense of relativity between your little person and the importance you give to the things which concern you, and the universal immensity; this is enough. Naturally, there is another way, it is to free oneself from the earth consciousness and rise into a higher

consciousness where these terrestrial things take their true place — which is quite small, you see.

(30 November 1955)

96. *Eating Meat*

Do you want me to tell you a story? I knew a lady, a young Swedish woman, who was doing sadhana; and she was by habit a vegetarian, from both choice and habit. One day she was invited by some friends who gave her chicken for dinner. She did not want to make a fuss, she ate the chicken. But afterwards, during the night suddenly she found herself in a basket with her head between two pieces of wicker-work, shaken, shaken, shaken, and feeling wretched, miserable; and then, after that she found herself head down, feet in the air, and being shaken, shaken, shaken. (*Laughter*) She felt perfectly miserable; and then all of a sudden, somebody began pulling out things from her body, and that hurt her terribly, and then someone came along with a knife and chopped off her head; and then she woke up. She told me all this; she said she had never had such a frightful nightmare, that she had not thought of anything before going to sleep, that it was just the consciousness of the poor chicken that had entered her, and that she had experienced in her dream all the anguish the poor chicken had suffered when it was carried to the market, sold, its feathers plucked and its neck cut! (*Laughter*)

That's what happens! That is to say, in a greater or lesser proportion you swallow along with the meat a little of the consciousness of the animal you eat. It is not very serious, but it is not always very pleasant. And obviously it does not help you in being on the side of man rather than of the beast!

(23 June 1954)

97. *Scrupulousness*

There are some scrupulous people who set problems to themselves and find it very difficult to solve them, because they state the problem wrongly. I knew a young woman who was a theosophist and was trying to practise; she told me, "We are taught that the divine Will must prevail in all that we do, but in the morning when I have my breakfast, how can I know whether God wants me to put two lumps of sugar in my coffee or only one?" ...And it was quite touching, you know, and I had some trouble explaining to her that the spirit in which she drank her coffee, the attitude she had towards her food, was much more important than the number of lumps of sugar she put into it.

It is the same with all the little things one does at every moment.

(30 January 1957)

98. First Contact with the Gita

Those who understand the Gita in this way, tell you that — they don't understand much further than that — they tell you, "Why do you want to try and change the world? The world will always be what it is and remain what it is, you have only to step back, to detach yourself, to watch it as a witness watches something which doesn't concern him — and leave it alone." That was my first contact with the Gita in Paris. I met an Indian who was a great Gita enthusiast and a very great lover of silence. He used to say, "When I go to my disciples, if they are in the right state I don't need to speak. So we observe silence together, and in the silence something is realised. But when they are not in a good enough state for this, I speak a little, just a little, to try to put them in the right state. And when they are in a worse state still, they ask questions!"

(4 April 1956)

99. You Can't Change Things

I heard this when I was in France; there are people who explain the Gita, saying there is no flame without smoke — which is not true. And starting from that they say, "Life is like that and you can't change it, it's like that. All you can do is to pass over to the side of the Purusha, become the governing force instead of being the force that is governed." That's all. But, as Sri Aurobindo says at the end, it is the theory of the Gita, it's not the whole truth; it is only a partial way of seeing things — useful, practical, convenient, but not wholly true.

(15 February 1956)

100. Dangerous Revolutionaries

I heard someone who had, however, realised precisely this kind of identification with the Purusha and radiated a very remarkable atmosphere; but he called dangerous revolutionaries all those who wanted to change something in the earth-Nature, all who wanted things on earth to change — wanted, for example, that suffering might be abolished or ultimately the necessity of death might be done away with, that there might be an evolution, a luminous progress requiring no destruction: "Ah! those who think like that are dangerous revolutionaries. If need be, they should be put in prison!"

(15 February 1956)

101. Orthodoxy

...I have heard two versions (but as I said, one was broad-minded and the other extremely orthodox) about the end of Sita; one said that Sita chose to be swallowed up in the earth to prove her innocence, whilst the very orthodox version said that it was just because she was not innocent that she was swallowed up! (*Laughter*)

...

...I heard the Ramayana from a man called Pandit, and he was the son of a pandit and had come to Paris to study Law. But he had remained orthodox, as orthodox as one could be, it was tremendous! And he had with him a Ramayana translated into English, with pictures, and he showed it to me. And he told me the story. And then, when he came to the end he told me that. So I said: "What do you mean?" He told me: "You understand, for an Indian, if a woman has lived even for a few hours in another man's house, she is impure...." Oh! it is terrible... So, it was because she was impure that she was swallowed up.... I remember, he was quite short. He was from a Bombay family — not Bombay proper but from that side. He was a Gujarati. I believe he spoke Gujarati.

And then the other version, I heard that from... that man was called Shastri. He was another pandit. He was in Japan. There we are, then.

(21 October 1953)

*

* *

TRANSLATION OF A POEM BY MALHERBE CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

Sri Aurobindo—

I have written this not to rival Arjava's translation from Malherbe but to frame my version of two lines which I believe closer to the French felicity. Malherbe's

“Et, rose, elle a vécu ce que vivent les roses,
L'espace d'un matin.”

Arjava has rendered very finely in his own way:

“A rose, hers was the roses' span of living
Which one brief morn consumes.”

But I wanted to be reminiscent of the peculiar flavour of the original. I should like to know if that has been caught and also your opinion of the whole poem. I have had to face a twofold difficulty—to translate adequately and at the same time to be as different from Arjava as possible.

Shall thy distress, du Perrier, be unceasing,
And all sad utterance flow
Out of a father's heart of love increasing
Thy unforgettable woe?

The ill-fortune of thy daughter sunk in her tomb
By the common fall of clay—
Roves there thy helpless thought a maze of gloom
Which grants no backward way?

I, knowing the full charm her childhood bore,
Strive not to bring relief
Like some incautious friend who hurts thee more,
Belittling thy great grief.

Within a world which cruellest doom imposes
On shapes most beautiful born—
A rose, she has but lived the life of roses,
The space of one brief morn. ...

Death's tyranny exceeds all yokes severe:
 We cry to her in vain!
Ever the pitiless one goes with shut ear,
 And leaves us to our pain.

The poor in hovels roofed by flimsy straw
 Obey her summonings,¹
Nor watchmen of a palace overawe
 Her trespass on their kings.¹
 rebellious
Not by impatience nor unruly² moan
 Our miseries find true close;
To will the thing God wills—this³ knowledge alone
 Shall bring our heart repose.

1. Should these "s"'s be dropped?
2. rebellious? "offended"?
3. "that"?

[Amal]

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

I am afraid the translation is not successful. The first two stanzas are a failure especially the second which is without life. The third is very good; the first two lines of the fourth also. Those about the rose are correct and elegant but do not give the emotion of the original. For the rest there is nothing much to be said: it is well written, but sounds like any dozen other poems which say the same thing—you have not got in the peculiar quality of the original which gives it so high a place as a poem. These things have to be written very well or not at all; especially one must avoid the impression of a poetic obvious philosophising. Arjava's rendering like the original succeeds very well—it has an almost Shakespearean turn,—yours, I am afraid, is too Baconic.

4 April 1936

*

[*Arjava's translation and Sri Aurobindo's reply*]

ALL MEN DIE

Must be thy grief, Duperrier, unending,
 Or what the sad mind enfold,

The uttered thoughts a father's love is sending,
 Be a tale that is never told?

By our mortal lot thy daughter tombward driven—
 Is such exceeding pain
 A labyrinth from whence thy thoughts grief-riven
 Find not their way again?

I being most mindful of her girlhood's charm,
 To assuage thy sufferings
 Have tried not, like a friend who'd cause thee harm,
 To gauge them but slight things.

Seen in a world which to fairest shapes is giving
 Still the most heavy of dooms,
 A rose, hers was the roses' span of living
 Which one brief morn consumes.

Born to that realm where comeliest things are meeting
 Still the most sorrowful dooms, | (1)
 She matched the rose—with loveliness as fleeting
 Which one swift morn consumes.

Death shows a harshness no other sway imposes:
 Vain to implore her ears,
 For these the cruel goddess straightway closes
 And leaves us to our tears.

The cottager whose roof the wheat-straw yielded
 Her stern decree awaits;
 And from her power not even kings are shielded
 By the watch at their palace gates.

Impatient murmurs, or embittered turning
 Against her, deem not best;
 Save willing the thing God wills, no other learning
 Shall bring us to our rest.

(1) Alternative form of the above stanza

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

(1) No the first form is better.

It is an admirable translation with a grave beauty and distinction of language and rhythm, rendering closely the movement and tone of thought and emotion of the original poem.

21 March 1936

* * *

[*The original poem in French*]

CONSOLATION À MONSIEUR DU PÉRIER SUR LA MORT DE SA FILLE

Ta douleur, du Périer, sera donc éternelle,
 Et les tristes discours
 Que te met en l'esprit l'amitié paternelle
 L'augmenteront toujours ?

Le malheur de ta fille au tombeau descendue
 Par un commun trépas,
 Est-ce quelque dédale où ta raison perdue
 Ne se retrouve pas ?

Je sais de quels appas son enfance était pleine
 Et n'ai pas entrepris,
 Injurieux ami, de soulager ta peine
 Avecque son mépris.

Mais elle était du monde où les plus belles choses
 Ont le pire destin,
 Et, rose, elle a vécu ce que vivent les roses,
 L'espace d'un matin. . .

La mort a des rigueurs à nulle autre pareilles :
 On a beau la prier,
 La cruelle qu'elle est se bouche les oreilles
 Et nous laisse crier.

Le pauvre en sa cabane où le chaume le couvre
 Est sujet à ses lois ;

Et la garde qui veille aux barrières du Louvre
N'en défend point nos rois.

De murmurer contre elle et perdre patience
Il est mal à propos ;
Vouloir ce que Dieu veut est la seule science
Qui nous met en repos.

François de Malherbe
(1555-1628)

* * *

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

Lakshmi

(Sri Aurobindo's translation of Dilip Kumar Roy's Bengali poem)

*At the mobile passion of thy tread the cold snows faint and fail,
Hued by thy magic touches shimmering glow the horizons pale.
The heavens thrill with thy appeal, earth's grey moods break and die;
In nectarous sound thou lav'st men's hearts with thy voice of Eternity.
All that was bowed and rapt lifting clasped hands out of pain and night,
How hast thou filled with murmuring ecstasy, made proud and bright!
Thou hast chosen the grateful earth for thy own in her hour of anguish and strife,
Surprised by thy rapid feet of joy, O Beloved of the Master of Life.*

(Translations, CWSA, Vol. 5, p. 561)

PAINTING AS SADHANA

Krishnalal Bhatt (1905-1990)

(Continued from the issue of January 2007)

16

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

1939

13 Feb 39: Mother,

Harivadan, my brother, asked for a copy of "Conversations with Mother" some time back which you kindly gave him. He writes to me now that he wants to come and stay here for about a month and a half during his May vacation. He asks for your kind permission.

Mother: Yes, he can come.

Blessings.

[Undated]: [end] Will you kindly let me know whether Jwalanti can teach Sanjiban also?

Mother: Yes, she can teach you both together.

[On 13th May, Krishnalal and Sanjiban went to Madras. They returned on the 16th.]

16-5-39: [end]...in mind. [Here, in pencil "(about Harivadan)"]

I had to be very strict internally against this attitude of his, because it seemed that he showed some vital cunning which was fatiguing me and Jayantilal. And I found it necessary to part from him as soon as possible. I had some faith which kept up my resolution that he can go alone to Bombay, so disregarding all his apparent weaknesses I sent him off.

May I ask you what you think about my attitude and his safe travelling?

Mother: You did all right. What you felt was quite correct and the attitude you took was the best to bring to him a prompt recovery.

Love and blessings.

Mother's chit: 3-8-39.

Krishnalal

I would like to have on a card the drawing of the palm tree in the courtyard of the Meditation House. Can you do it?

Blessings.

Mother's chit: 4.8.39.

Krishnalal,

The palms are both *very good*.

My love and blessings.

6-10-39: [end] ...to take because she is... [rest is torn]

[Here, in pencil "(about Kanta's English lessons)"]

May I ask you if there is any objection?

Mother: It is better not to do it for several reasons.

My love and blessings.

19-Oct-39: Mother,

I want white cards for sketching work. Shall I ask from prosperity?

Mother: Yes

Blessings

1940

[On 24 February, Champaklal gave Sri Aurobindo a book with some pictures by Krishnalal's brother, Harivadan who had passed away in Ahmedabad on 22 December 1939, of severe burns. Seeing a photograph of him in which his head was bandaged as a result of a lathi charge during the Non-cooperation Movement:]

Sri Aurobindo: He looks as if he was suffering. He was predestined to die as he did. ...His past Karma required some such experience. ...Not Karma in the ordinary sense. It is his psychic being, his soul, that had to pass through such an experience in order to exhaust some Karma left over.

[Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, pp. 478-79]

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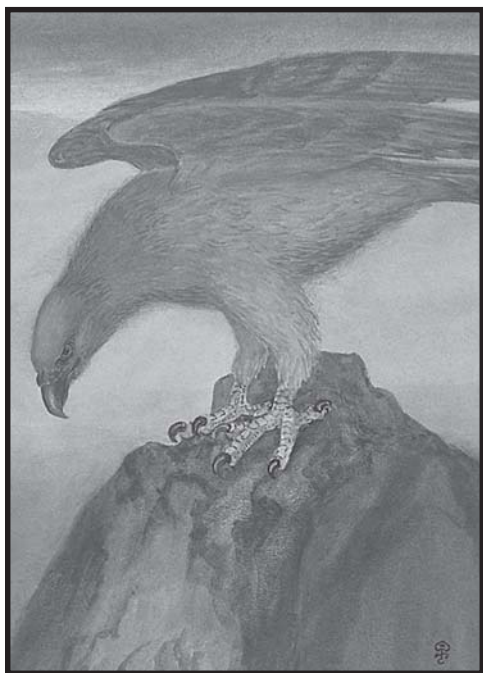
[20 August 1940. Krishnalal had drawn a horse. Satyendra remarked that the horse had checked the German onslaught. In the Indian tradition the vahana or vehicle of kalki, the last Avatar, is said to be the horse.]

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, Krishnalal is very apposite and has some power of intuition. Just when the Germans began their attack, he painted an eagle, as if swooping down on its prey, and then there was the monkey picture representing the refugees. The picture of the goat represented the English waiting for the attack and now the horse. He has a remarkable gift in drawing animals.

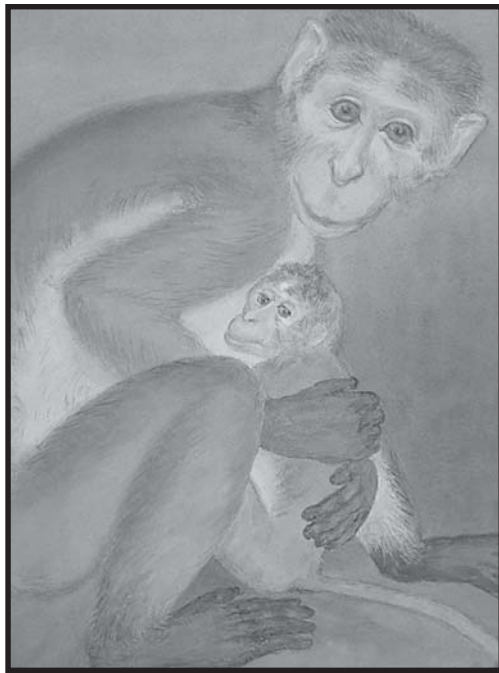
[Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 2, p. 859]

(To be continued)

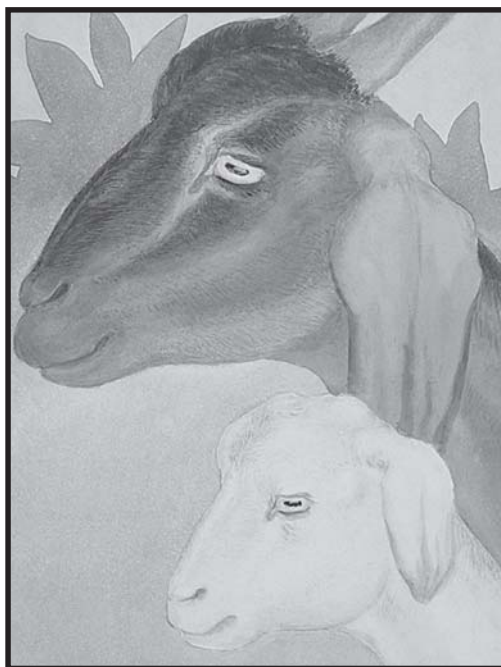
S. V. BHATT



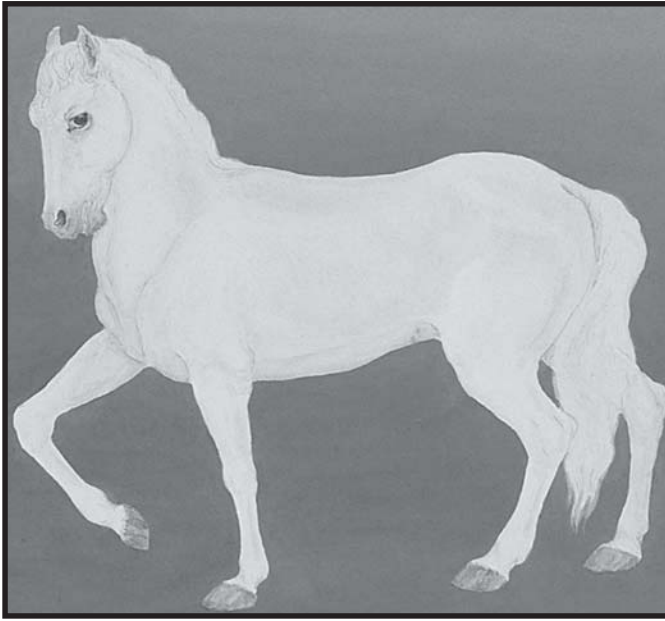
Swooping down: the Attack



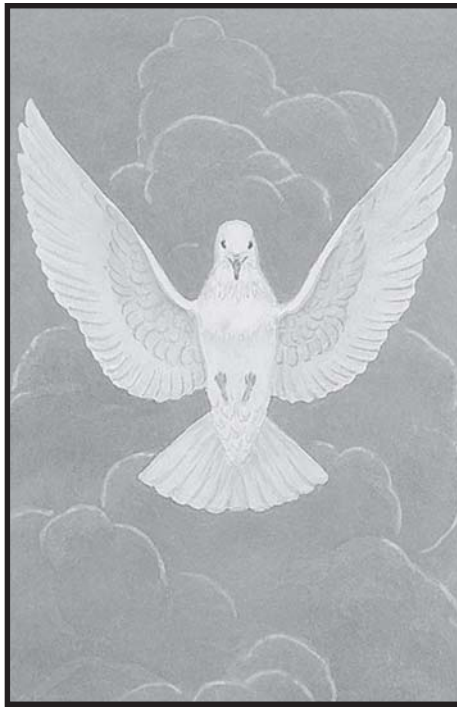
Huddled Together: The Refugees



Awaiting the onslaught: Helplessness



Victorious Power



Descent of Peace (1945)

I SIT BY THE SEA

(1)

I sit by the sea
and
see
images
of
Thee
spread all over me
....each wave gifts the magic
to Know and Be....

(2)

I sit by the sea side
to watch
the rising Sun and the smiling moon
....He blesses me
to
play the
mystic
tune....

PRIYA M. VAIDYA

MOMENTS, ETERNAL

(Continued from the issue of January 2007)

The Mother in Her Mahalakshmi Aspect

*Come! O Queen in golden garb, conch and lotus holding bright,
Come! Ma Lakshmi, take thy seat and fill this dwelling with thy light.*

THE first Lakshmi-puja, like the Durga-puja, took place in the Ashram in 1944. This first Lakshmi-puja was most significant. For this puja too, the Meditation Hall and the staircase were decorated with all kinds of flowers. There was an abundance of *Harmony* flowers. All the walls were covered with these lace-like flowers. One couldn't take one's eyes off from the two halls. These were my favourite flowers in childhood as I was always greatly attracted to their delicate beauty. It was only after coming to the Ashram that I found out that the Mother had called this flower 'Harmony'. These pink, white and red flowers would fill my heart with joy.

When I was a child I used to leave for school very early in order to pluck these flowers along my way. The garden in the S.D.O's house was fenced with these flower-vines. This property was beyond that well-known tank called the Naveen Sen tank. Sitting in a boat on this tank Naveen Sen had written his famous book *Amar Jeevan*. He had come to Feni as the S.D.O. and got this tank excavated and deepened. Its surroundings were most beautiful. On one side stood two houses: the munsif's and a tribunal. On the other side were the S.D.O's house and another tribunal in front. There were all kinds of tall trees and flowers on this property. We felt we were in a dream-world here. Big *Patience* trees lined the boundary wall. Early in the morning the girls from the neighbourhood used to go and collect flowers from under these trees beside the Treasury house that was guarded by the police. Gathering these flowers required indeed infinite patience and so I was surprised when I learnt on coming to the Ashram that the Mother had named this flower 'Patience'. The neighbourhood girls made garlands of *Patience* and offered some to Lord Sri Ram and left some in Babaji Gambhirnath's puja-room. I used to make garlands for my father's deity. We knew that this deity was Sri Aurobindo but we did not know then who he actually was.

Cormorant-like diving birds used to swim in the middle of the tank and from time to time plunge into the water looking, probably, for fish. We would stand in a group on one side of the tank and cry aloud to the birds:

"Dive again, dive again!"

And we felt as if the birds were obeying us as they dived into the water. And we would clap in delight. And then the girls wore these flowers in their hair, some around their buns, some along their plaits. And as soon as the huge dog of that house began barking we would run off in a flash. On days when the dog was not on the leash we

did not venture in that direction. We would go to school past the tribunal on the other side of the tank.

As we filed past the tribunal on our way to school, a well-known lawyer of Feni used to stand in the verandah. On seeing us he always exclaimed:

“*Rows of maids with earrings dancing...*” And then suddenly shout:

“Eh! Why aren’t you wearing earrings?”

We would flee in fright. And then from a distance we completed the verse:

“*With flowers freshly-plucked enchanting!*” And then disappear altogether...

This gentleman was endowed with a huge belly. So one day, I came up with a trick to teach him a lesson. I told the girls:

“Look, as soon as we spot this man, I’ll ask: ‘Who goes there?’ And you will reply: ‘Me, big Belly.’ Then I’ll ask: ‘Who is behind?’ And you’ll loudly answer: ‘Me, Chandrakant.’” (This gentleman’s name was Chandrakant-babu.)

So a few days later when we took that path again to go to school we spotted Chandrakant-babu standing on the verandah as usual. As if he were waiting for us. Immediately I asked:

“Who goes there?”

My friends replied:

“Me, big Belly.”

“Who is behind?” I enquired.

And then I too joined my screaming friends:

“Me, Chandrakant-babu.”

The man blurted out:

“Catch these girls, catch them!”

But we darted off in a wink. Running away on Sher Shah’s Grand Trunk Road laughing breathlessly as we arrived at school!

Let me recount one more amusing incident. The guard of the Treasury house next to the *Patience* trees would click his feet together as soon as he saw us. Then he lowered his gun to the ground and asked:

“Who goes there?”

Very scared we would all respond with one voice:

“A friend!”

The guard would start laughing. The girls then asked:

“What is he saying? What is the guard saying?”

Our knowledge of English was limited to “a cat sat on a mat” at that time, so, naturally, to be able to say “friend” made us terribly proud. It is from my elder brother, Saroj, that I had picked up this word.

Oh, there are so many amusing things that come flooding in!

Despite my fear of dogs I still used to take that path to school. As if the *Harmony* flowers were beckoning us. I had never imagined that I would see this same flower here in the Ashram. And so when I saw the Meditation Hall and the staircase decorated

with *Harmony*, I was filled with delight. As if a divine beauty were calling out to us.

The making of *alpana* would start right from the afternoon. Bibha, Gauri, Minnie-di, Milli-di did this so beautifully. In Bengal on Lakshmi-puja day especially, the women covered the floors of their house, the puja-area, all the rooms and even the courtyard, with their exquisite *alpana*. Every house in every locality was adorned with *alpana* in order to welcome Ma Lakshmi. How could we invite her to stay in a place that had the slightest ugliness?

Sri Aurobindo has written in *The Mother*:

...But all that is ugly and mean and base, all that is poor and sordid and squalid, all that is brutal and coarse repels her advent. Where love and beauty are not or are reluctant to be born, she does not come....

We had heard from our elders right from our childhood never to close the door loudly because Ma Lakshmi would be displeased. Our things were to be properly kept, neatly washed or cleaned. Otherwise Lakshmi would leave the house and go away. We always had to be measured and harmonious in our actions, thoughts and feelings, true worshippers of beauty, otherwise Ma Lakshmi would not stay.

What sort of goddess was she, I used to wonder in amazement. How quickly she gets offended! It was only when I read Sri Aurobindo's description of Mahalakshmi in *The Mother* that I understood how much truth there was in what the elders said. My mother and grandmother and all the elderly ladies of the neighbourhood always instructed: "Don't laugh loudly, especially at night, don't walk with long, noisy strides. Do everything with beauty and measure." Their nagging advice used to irritate me very much then. Now I feel: amazing! How did they know and understand the hold Mahalakshmi had over us?

Ranga-didima [maternal grandmother], mother's jethima [elder aunt], was in charge of the provisions for the enormous Niyogi household. She herself stocked the rice, pulses, vegetables, spices, etc. required for the family. She would meticulously clean the pulses and cereals herself and store them properly. Though very young then, I used to help Ranga-didima. I enjoyed listening to her. While cleaning pulses or spices nothing that had fallen on the floor was thrown but put back into the canisters carefully. I was quite astonished:

"Why are you picking this up? The canisters are full to the brim already!"

She always replied with a laugh:

"Do not waste even a single grain! Mahalakshmi doesn't allow it. She abhors any sort of waste."

These elderly ladies remembered the Mother quite unknowingly in different ways as they lived their lives. Probably this too is the Mother's divine Grace.

Ranga-didima came to the Ashram two or three times. She even had the Mother's darshan in Her room. She was very keen on getting the Mother's *charanamrita* and so

I told Nolini-da about it. As soon as Nolini-da told the Mother about it She touched some water with Her Feet and sent it to her. Naturally Ranga-didima was thrilled and with all her devotion drank this blessed *charanamrita* and shared it with all of us. In this way a long-cherished desire of mine too got fulfilled. Once when this didima was coming away after the Mother's darshan, the Mother gestured to her to come back. She held her by the arms and looked into her eyes for a long time. Then She gave her flower-blessing a second time. This was to be Ranga-didima's last darshan of the Mother. About a year after leaving Pondicherry she passed away. Probably that was why the Mother had called her back to give her a second flower-blessing. She had worshipped Ma Lakshmi all her life. How people follow the Mother's guidance without even knowing it! And thus it was at Ma Lakshmi's feet that she finally found refuge! It is amazing how these ladies of those times, right from their childhood, were so detached from the world even though they respected all the rites and rituals of a Hindu family. She had understood at the very first glimpse of the Mother during the darshan that She was Mother Aditi herself. The Mother had heard the call.

The same thing happened in the life of my Mejo-mashima [second maternal aunt]. In 1972 she came with the 'Pathmandir' group and went to the Mother's room for Her darshan and blessing. Everyone slowly filed past the Mother in a line. When our mashima (Naresh-da's mother) got up to leave after the Mother's darshan, the Mother bent down slightly and held her hand and pressed it gently. It was quite an unexpected sight as the Mother had practically ceased all activity then. That is why this little gesture from the Mother was for her a sublime gift. How many times has she recounted with tear-filled, happy eyes this gesture of the Mother's compassion!

I am always wonder-struck by the devotion, faith and love that these women had for the Mother although they had taken up the worldly life from their infancy itself. Their worship was not in vain as the Mother remained always very close to them in Her form of Ma Lakshmi. They always tried to incarnate Her in all their life's activities by doing everything with beauty and grace.

Here is Sri Aurobindo's description of this aspect of Mahalakshmi in his book *The Mother*:

Harmony and beauty of the mind and soul, harmony and beauty of the thoughts and feelings, harmony and beauty in every outward act and movement, harmony and beauty of the life and surroundings, this is the demand of Mahalakshmi....

If she finds herself in men's hearts surrounded with selfishness and hatred and jealousy and malignance and envy and strife, if treachery and greed and ingrati-tude are mixed in the sacred chalice, if grossness of passion and unrefined desire degrade devotion, in such hearts the gracious and beautiful Goddess will not linger.

Here the question of knowledge, wealth or riches does not arise at all. In

Mahalakshmi's vision even a very rich man might appear terribly destitute just as an extremely poor person might be in Mahalakshmi's eyes very beautiful and rich provided inwardly he is generous and large-hearted.

Lakshmi-puja was celebrated with a lot of festivity in my mama's [uncle's] house (Pattagram Niyogi House). Each and every room of this huge house and the inner courtyard were decorated with *alpana* and what exquisite *alpanas*! Marvellous really! All of us, mashimas [aunts], mamimas[aunts] and we little ones participated in this. The ingredients were rice powder and *sindoor*. The little ones used to dot the flower-*alpanas* with red *sindoor* on directions from the elders. Sometimes we were fortunate enough to be allowed to draw the Feet of Ma Lakshmi. One year on such a Lakshmi-puja day I was very excitedly making the Feet of Ma Lakshmi when suddenly mamima came rushing in:

"Pushpo, you can't do this. You are in a period of impurity. Move away, move away."

I fell from the sky. I was making Ma Lakshmi's feet. How could impurity come into that?

Mamima continued:

"You are in a period of impurity. You cannot participate in any puja-work."

Leaving the bowl of rice-paste I ran out.

What joy and what excitement! In front of the room reserved for 'deliveries' a big crowd had gathered. Rangadadababu, Dadababu [grandfathers], everyone had come to see the birth of our brother. This brother was Manoj.

Let me return to the main story then.

In 1944 on the occasion of the first Lakshmi-puja, the Mother came down in the evening to bless us. Milli-di, Bibha, Minnie-di and Gauri had beautifully drawn Ma Lakshmi's feet right from the bottom of the staircase up to the Mother's chair. Then Milli-di lit some earthen lamps and covered these with a terracotta shade that had a hole in the middle. All the electric lights were switched off. In the soft muted light of the oil-lamps, the Meditation Hall had a marvellous, celestial glow. The Mother came down the staircase wearing a gorgeous, green Benarasi silk sari. Seeing the Mother in the midst of all those vines of *Harmony* my heart sang in delight!

The Mother had come down in Her aspect of Mahalakshmi. The Mother stepped on the *alpana*-drawn feet of Lakshmi and slowly came and sat in the chair. On seeing the Mother in this form, my mind flashed back to the time of my childhood when in radiant joy Ma Lakshmi's feet were drawn out in *alpana*. It was beyond my wildest imagination then that one day I would have a vision of Ma Lakshmi Herself to my heart's content!

Had I ever imagined that one day Mother Mahalakshmi Herself would step on the *alpana*-drawn feet of Ma Lakshmi? Sri Aurobindo has written:

Magnetic is the touch of her hands and their occult and delicate influence refines

mind and life and body and where she presses her feet course miraculous streams of an entrancing Ananda.

The memory of that divine moment still makes my heart dance. That is why the first Lakshmi-puja of 1944 was so significant for me. After 1944 on every Lakshmi-puja the Mother would come down but Her walking over the *alpana*-drawn feet of Ma Lakshmi happened only the first time. The Mother revealed Herself in Her aspect of Mahalakshmi: what an incredible event that was on this beautiful earth of ours! And we were its blessed witnesses!

(To be continued)

PRITI DAS GUPTA

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

YOUR TRUTH FLASHES IN THE MIND

Your truth flashes in the mind,
 We call it intuition;
 Your emotion gushes from the heart—
 Our soul's loving supplication.
 Your presence surrounds on every side,
 We feel your love, our hearts are stout,
 The wall of separation crumbles,
 Your benign touch we cannot doubt.

At a moment marvellous, our petty selves,
 Like unto dry leaves, fall;
 The world is charged with the One,
 The sacred "OM" is heard a grandiose call,
 Then, in bliss, we lose the ego's identity,
 And merge in the vast of your Infinity.

ARUN KUMAR SEN

A NOTE ON “BANDE MATARAM”

[Portion of a letter]

APROPOS Priti-di’s translated piece in the November issue of *M.I.* where there is a discussion of “Bande Mataram” (not “Vande” incidentally in Bankim and Sri Aurobindo), here is something of interest I have written:

What does it mean to say, “Bow to the Mother”? Anticipating that it would intrigue the readers of *Ananda Math* when it was serialised in *Banga Darshan* from Chaitra 1287 B.S., Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay had his protagonist Mahendra to pose this puzzle. Just before the remarkable passage in chapter 10 about “Mother as-she-was, Mother as-she-has-become and Mother as-she-will-be”, Mahendra is astonished hearing the song “Bande Mataram” and asks the sanyasi Bhavananda, “What Mother?... That is the country, it is not the Mother.” Bhavananda replies that the only mother the *Santans* (children) know is the motherland because, he quotes, *janani janmabhumiśca svargadapi gariyasi*. Here is the passage in Sri Aurobindo’s translation (1909):

Bhavananda replied, “We recognise no other Mother. Mother and Motherland is more than heaven itself.”

Addressing an audience in the Grand Square of the National School, Amraoti, Berar on 29th January 1908, Sri Aurobindo mentioned that Bankim Chandra was aware that the mantric power of the song would be lost on his contemporaries. Actually, Haraprasad Shastri, Rajkrishna Mukhopadhyay, and other Sanskritists strongly criticised his use of the grammatically incorrect formation “*mata rang*” when it was first published in *Banga Darshan*.

Why was the song placed within quotation marks and with this malformation? Thereby hangs a tale that has been pieced together with painstaking research by Shri Kishanchand Bhakat, assistant teacher of mathematics in the M. N. Academy High School, Lalgola, in the district of Murshidabad.

Lt. Col. Duffin, a British officer who had misbehaved with Bankim Chandra in Berhampore, Murshidabad District, had to tender an apology in open court on 12th January 1874. Apprehending revengeful attacks, Bankim Chandra took shelter with Raja Jogindranarain Roy in Lalgola. The guru of the raja’s family was Pandit Kalibrahma Bhattacharya who practised tantrik sadhana. Shri Kishanchand Bhakat had obtained an excerpt of seven *slokas* from a book in the family of Kalibrahma Bhattacharya whose rhythm, sense and even some words bear an uncanny resemblance to Bankim Chandra’s song. It seems that Bankim Chandra took the first few lines of his immortal “Bande Mataram” up to *ripudalabarining* from here, reproducing these lines within quotation marks in the first edition of the novel in *Banga Darshan* (Chaitra

1287, pp. 555-556), and retaining the ungrammatical spelling “mata *rang*”. *Banga Darshan* began publication edited by Bankim Chandra from Berhampore at this time. In the face of the criticisms, in later editions he removed the quotation marks and changed the spelling to the proper Sanskrit “*mataram*”, wiping out all trace of the borrowing. In his lecture at Amraoti, Sri Aurobindo said, “the mantra had been revealed to Bankim Chandra probably by a Sannyasi under whose teaching he was.”

In the tenth chapter of *Anand Math* there is an elaborate description of an opulent building with a dazzling image of four-armed Vishnu with two huge demons lying beheaded before him; Lakshmi garlanded with lotuses on the left with hair unbound, as though terrified; on the right Sarasvati with book and musical instrument, surrounded with incarnate *raga-raginis*; and, on his lap, one lovelier than either goddess, more opulent and more majestic: the Mother.

Now, the dynastic deity of the Lalgola Raja family was Vishnu and the image was worshipped inside the palace. Nearby is the ruin of an ancient Buddhist vihar where the Buddhist goddess Kalkali was worshipped. The stream that flows by is named after her and is mentioned in the novel. Chapter 5 describes this “great monastery engirt with ruined masses of stones. Archaeologists would tell us that this was formerly a monastic retreat of the Buddhists and afterwards became a Hindu monastery.” This is where Kalyani first sees the noble, fair, white-haired, white-bearded, white-robed ascetic. Kalibrahma Bhattacharya was the inspiration for this figure. To the north of the palace, through what was then a dense forest, lies the confluence of Kalkali, Padma and Bhairav rivers known as “*Sati-maar sthaan*”. Here, under a massive banyan tree, groups of Bir and Shri sects of violent Tantriks used to meet to be tutored by Kalibrahma in opposing British rule to free the shackled Mother.

There is still an image of Kali in the Lalgola palace temple that is unique. Its four hands are bereft of any weapon. The two lower hands are folded in front (*karabaddha*), the palm of one covered by that of the other, just as a prisoner’s hands are shackled. From behind, the image is shackled to the wall with numerous iron chains. She is black, of terrifying mien, naked, a serpent between her feet, and Shiva a supine corpse before her. This represented to Bankim Chandra what Bharat Mata, Mother India, had become:

The Brahmacharin said, “Look on the Mother as she now is.”

Mahendra said in fear, “It is Kali.”

“Yes, Kali enveloped in darkness, full of blackness and gloom. She is stripped of all, therefore naked. Today the whole country is a burial ground, therefore is the Mother garlanded with skulls. Her own God she tramples under her feet. Alas my Mother!”

Significantly, on either side of this unusual Kali we find Lakshmi, Sarasvati, Kartik and Ganesh, who are never represented with this goddess but invariably

accompany Durga. It is in this Jagadhatri-turned-Kali that Bankim envisioned *Mother as she will be* and that is why he wrote, “*tvam hi durga dashapraharana dharini*, Thou, indeed, art Durga, ten-armed, weapon-wielding”. It is this temple that is the source of Bankim Chandra’s ‘Monastery of Bliss’.

A legend goes that in this Kali temple Bankim witnessed a very old tantrik offering a red hibiscus to the goddess, shouting “*Jaya ma danujadalani, bande bandini matarang*” (Victory to the foe-crushing Mother; salutations to the shackled Mother!). It is no mere coincidence that if *bandini* is dropped from this tantrik’s exclamation we get exactly Bankim Chandra’s “*bande matarang*”. As Bankim Chandra repeatedly refers to “Maghi purnima” in the novel, Shri Bhakat proposes that this may have occurred on the full-moon night of Magh, 1280 B.S. (Jan-Feb 1874) when the death anniversary of Rao Ramshankar Roy used to be observed in the Lalgola Raj family. On this anniversary, sadhus from Benares used to arrive at this Kali temple. This occasion occurred very soon after the court case in Berhampore and Bankim Chandra’s taking shelter in Lalgola.

Sri Aurobindo, who turned Bankim Chandra’s composition into the mantra of the revolutionary freedom movement, told his audience in Amraoti:

“...the *mantra* was not an invention, but a revivification of the old *mantra* which had become extinct, so to speak, by the treachery of one Navakishan.”¹

Who this Navakishan was remains a mystery and is well worth researching. In his “Bhawani Mandir” Sri Aurobindo repeats many ideas of Bankim Chandra’s song.²

In the course of the lecture, Sri Aurobindo expressed his pleasure that the song was being repeatedly sung as a national anthem, but not like a European one. Rather, it was one “replete with a mighty power, a sacred mantra revealed to us by the author of *Ananda Math*, an inspired rishi.” He recalled Bankim Chandra’s prophecy that one day all of India would resound with the singing of the song, and explained that its meaning was not understood in its own time because then there was no patriotism except in making India the shadow of Western countries “which dazzled us with their glory and opulence. These so-called patriots might have been the well-wishers of India, but not men who loved her. One who loved his mother never looked to her defects, never disregarded her as an ignorant, superstitious, degraded and decrepit woman.”

What do we see in independent India? The same scorn for our heritage; the blind adoption of an extrinsic political system in which patriotism and spirituality have no place; the frenzied imitation of Western philistinism while laughing to scorn the noble faith that, for millennia, has sustained us. Completely forgetting what Sri Aurobindo said in that lecture: “As with the individual, so with the nation there were

1. *Bande Mataram*, Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, Vol. 1, p. 666.

2. See “Bhawani Mandir”, *ibid.* pp. 61-74.

three bodies or *koshas*, the *sthula*, *sukshma* and *karana shariras*”, we trumpet that the Indian lives by bread alone, swearing by “neighbour’s envy, owner’s pride” and “ye dil maange more”.

In his lecture, Sri Aurobindo cleared up the hidden meaning of the song, concluding by exhorting the spellbound audience to love the motherland and sacrifice all for her salvation. This is precisely the spirit absent today that we need to cultivate assiduously.

PRADIP BHATTACHARYA

[For a more detailed treatment of this and a related topic, readers may look up the author’s two articles—“The inspiration of Bankimchandra’s *Ananda Math*” in the June 2003 issue of *Mother India* and “The Problem of Janani Janmabhumscha in *Ananda Math*” in the December 2003 issue of *Mother India*. —Ed.]

Rishi Bankim Chandra

...The Rishi is different from the saint. His life may not have been distinguished by superior holiness nor his character by an ideal beauty. He is not great by what he was himself but by what he has expressed. A great and vivifying message had to be given to a nation or to humanity; and God has chosen this mouth on which to shape the words of the message. A momentous vision has to be revealed; and it is his eyes which the Almighty first unseals. The message which he has received, the vision which has been vouchsafed to him, he declares to the world with all the strength that is in him, and in one supreme moment of inspiration expresses it in words which have merely to be uttered to stir men’s inmost natures, clarify their minds, seize their hearts and impel them to things which would have been impossible to them in their ordinary moments. Those words are the mantra which he was born to reveal and of that mantra he is the seer.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Bande Mataram*, CWSA, Vol. 6, pp. 315-16)

TWO PIECES

(These two pieces, written quite some time back, are from Tehmi's old papers.)

(1)

Communion

Look, Love, how all the pureness gathers
Below the shining stars of white;
'Tis the consecration of our star-thoughts
Into one delight.

Alone, apart, we make within us
The word that hungers for release;
Though you from all your deepest passion,
And I from my peace.

But when the spirit-comfort comes,
Tongued with a Pentecostal flame,
We'll know we two in loneliness,
Built words which are same.

Nov. 1938

Amal's note: Very appealing and well-put. But who was this poet-lover of yours in 1938?

Tehmi's reply: Honestly, no one. I think I fell in love with the Divine too early! These "love poems" as you would call them are all Browningsque—"dramatic dialogues" in lyrical form!

(2)

My First Acquaintance with Browning—An Imaginary Encounter

It was about two weeks ago that I met Mr. Browning for the first time. But before our introduction I had heard a bit about him from our teacher, who had praised him highly. However, as none of us believes seriously what she says, (for the poets are her friends

and she swallows all their ethereal nonsense, you see,) I had my doubts and reserved my opinion. I wanted to see for myself.

When I went to see him, Mr. Browning was talking about music. He seemed to have just finished an extemporisation and was all drunk with its beauty. His speech was gorgeous and inspired, he was evidently deeply moved. Yet, it was the language of a keenly intellectual man, a scholar and an artist. The images he used revealed his special knowledge not only of music but of architecture also. As a matter of fact, my vocabulary was hardly up to it all. For a moment I failed to follow the trend of his thought,—for indeed he thought in the most original way and at lightning speed and connected the most remote things—but soon I made out that he was yearning in music for the same permanency that architecture seems to have.

He spoke like a true poet, but interspersed his eloquence with intimate homely colloquialisms. He described passionately the effect of his music on the earth, told me how the heavens yearned down in all their splendour towards the newly transformed and perfected world he had helped to create. His splendid passion swept me off my feet for a minute or two, I must confess.

Then he spoke about the other arts, and argued, indeed a little unsatisfactorily to me, about the relative merits of music, painting and poetry in capturing and expressing the soul. His bias for music is quite comprehensible, but I would not applaud his dim understanding of painting and poetry in this musician-mood of his. But this temporary intoxication with music in so great a poet showed me at least his gift of identifying himself freely, large-heartedly with other men. And what an imagination! In his ecstasy he suddenly flashed forth some of the finest lines I have ever heard:

But here is the finger of God, a flash of the will that can,
 Existent beyond all laws, that made them, and lo! they are!
 And I know not if save in this, such gift be allowed to man,
 That out of three sounds he frame, not a fourth sound, but a star.

Then, as though taken aback by his own brilliance, he dropped to almost common prose for a while—till once again the thought of God moved him to a profound expression of faith and aspiration. What a man! It was then that I really saw his soul, the real Mr. Browning, felt his deep love for God, his unquestioning surrender to the “ineffable Name”, his trust in the ultimate Goodness, his certainty about the perfection that is to come. He was a man after my own heart.

Obviously he is an idealist and an optimist. Failure does not daunt him, his soul rises in a constant heavenward aspiration. He understands—not by the mere intellect but by a profound intuition (for truly God has “whispered him in the ear”) the meaning of sorrow and suffering, of discords and battles in life. He seems to accept fully, for he knows that finally “All’s right with the world” and “God’s in his heaven.” I suddenly remembered his own description of himself as

One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,
 Never doubted clouds would break,
 Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph,
 Held, we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
 Sleep to wake.

A heroic heart, a nobility of mind, he certainly revealed—healthy, upright, energetic, strong with an inner strength—a lover of all goodness and beauty, stately in bearing, austere, an aristocrat of the soul—one who walked with firm and rhythmic pace the paths of the sun, believer in God and Truth and Love.

It is something to have met such a man at least once in one's lifetime.

TEHMI

'On Browning'

His inventiveness of form and range and variety of subject are prodigious; he turns to every quarter of the world, seizes on every human situation, seems to be trying to exhaust a study of all possible human personalities and minds and characters and turn his eye on every age and period of history and many countries and all possible scenes and extract from them their meaning and their interest for the satisfaction of his universal curiosity and his living and inexhaustible interest in the vividness and abundance of the life of earth and man. He has an equal interest in the human mind and its turns of thinking of all kinds and its human aims, ambitions, seekings and wants to pursue it everywhere in its ramifications, in its starts of individuality, peaks, windings, even all manner of borrowings of thought and feeling, nothing human is foreign to his research and pursuit, all enters into this prodigious embrace. This gives to his poetry a range and unceasing interest and richness of attraction which surpasses immeasurably all that his contemporaries can give us in wideness of the call of life, even though in them the poetic height to which they draw us may be greater than his. In his mass of creation he can be regarded as the most remarkable in invention and wideness, if not the most significant builder and narrator of the drama of human life in his time.

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Future Poetry*, CWSA, Vol. 26, p. 156)

WORK

Teach me, my God and King,
In all things Thee to see,
And what I do in anything
To do it as for Thee.
A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine;
Who sweeps a room as for Thy laws
Makes that and the action fine.

(*Elixir*—Unknown)

I PONDERED over the idea of writing on this old-old subject. There were “ayes” and “nays”—the “ayes” won this time around. Much has been written and said on this subject by the Mother, Sri Aurobindo, Nolini-da and many others. The idea behind this enormous effort was to instill, impress on each one of us here (Ashram) the importance of “Work”. It could even be said “work is essential on our way”. The work need not be all physical. It could be intellectual, artistic, etc. But in all, the worker’s attitude and aim are all-important (that is, who comes first—self or God?).

I will start by quoting our Master (a letter that seems to me to be an advice, a warning and plain statement of fact). This was back in 1932 to a young aspirant who wanted to join the Ashram. The message conveyed holds good to the present day, to all aspirants and whoever else has two ears with something in between, and is sharp and clear as it was on the day it was given over 70 years ago.

...this is not an Ashram like others—the members are not sannyasis; nor is the object the same; it is not ‘moksha’ that is the aim of yoga here. What is being done here is a preparation for a work—a work which will be founded on yogic con-sciousness... Meanwhile every member here is therefore expected to do some work as preparation, work often of the most ordinary and uninteresting kind and they do not spend their time in meditation and speaking about religion or spiritual things....

(Sri Aurobindo’s letter to Anilbaran Roy, which he had to transmit to Yogananda—the new aspirant.)

The type of work hardly matters. All and any work can be a “preparation”—but work is essential. Any work is good for anyone. With the work the needed strength is given. The attitude is all that matters—an attitude of work has to be an offering, constant and complete, to the best of one’s ability. Work is the opportunity given by the Mother to overcome one’s shortcomings, physical, vital and mental. All gains are of the inner kind. No material gains are promised nor even contemplated in this grand

scheme (by this last—the material gains—no giver nor taker can assume such roles—they have no place, they should not exist). The work and its accomplishment, and not the doer, come first. Some difficulties and buffetings can be expected. They come more from one's need and are most often one's own creation.

“Hard work spot-lights the character of people. Some turn up their sleeves, some turn up their noses and some don't turn up at all.”

Sam Ewing

I would add to the above: Some roll up their sleeves and soon let them down, and some put up their fists too (to fight verbally if not physically).

So far, so good—one understands what one is in for and pledges him/herself to this life and its endeavour to the end, to the best of one's capacity. But the onward journey is not so smooth. Only pledges cannot pave the way. Pledge by itself is quite nebulous, apt to be easily blown away. To be of any value, it has to be mixed with a few more elements, like sincerity, will, perseverance and effort with a dash of “Help from above”, (call it Grace).

All this is easily said, but not so easily done. The evidence is all around us. Maybe we can step back (out of ourselves) for a while and take a look at:

The Problem:

(1) The pledge is very personal, so are all the other elements—except the last—mentioned above: Grace.

Success or failure too are very personal, but they affect everybody (to a lesser or greater degree).

(2) The effort has to be one's own. Others cannot achieve it for you. They can only look or goad, curse and/or sympathise or applaud.

(3) The effect or result, one way or the other, *can* benefit others who are *trying*.

(4) If one fails, no use blaming others. This only serves to push one further from the ‘pledge’.

(5) The help or Grace can only be perceived and received as and when one moves forward—though they are always near at hand! Hindsight is often clearer than sight.

(6) One short giant effort with an attitude of “Let's have done with it” doesn't seem to work. A slow steady push seems to be more sure.

(7) The ‘end’ or ‘arrival’—if thought out and planned—is not there when one ‘has arrived’. There is more ahead. This may be a discouraging thought, so add one more element—“Joy of the Journey”. Then journey is part of the end.

The rule seems to be—“If you give you cannot lose. If you hold back, you stand to lose.”

Finally the following may help one not to get bogged down:

- 1) Remember the pledge often—that is your altar.
- 2) YOU judge yourself (distance travelled and the “Why” of the stumbles. A self-examination with both eyes focussed on oneself).
- 3) Not to judge others nor compare with others. Two of the most unwise (stupid) of activities—often, too often, indulged in.

If the comparing and judging helped drag one upward it would be o.k. But... it is very difficult and could be discouraging. More often these exercises tend to bring or drag all to a “downward equality”. (All our so-called Democracies are doing that now.) Best to keep to one’s own way—have a dream in your head, a heart to achieve it and the strength to push it further ahead.

Many Works and Workers

I quote again from the Master’s letter (the same one as at the outset): “...work often of the *most ordinary and uninteresting kind*.... Meanwhile *every member* here is therefore expected to do some work as preparation,...” (The italics are mine).

So, the work can be of many types, from the purely physical to the mental or creative, etc. It could be mechanical (most work is) and routine. But all work is a *preparation* and a *must* for *all*. As such one could conclude:

- (1) All and any work could serve the purpose of “preparation”.
- (2) There is no small or big, trivial or important work. All and any given work can and should serve the above need. One need not, and should not be choosy about the type of work.
- (3) First work then the worker or rather his approach to the work is more important than the material result. His attitude and aim or what the work does to his innards is what matters—whether it cleanses or mucks them up is solely of the individual’s making.
- (4) Difficulties of a physical, mental or vital nature will surely crop up. The last (vital) especially, proliferate well in the interaction with neighbours and co-workers. But they (the difficulties) are rungs in a ladder built by oneself, meant for one’s own use, meant to be used for the ‘climb upwards’. You avoid one and it reappears later, or you miss the step and land with a heavy thud.
- (5) All workers* are equal. Some are more capable and are given more responsibility. But none is without a responsibility. Some take on more. They may have some rights—but “work’s right” over them takes precedence (over those rights of the workers).

* By “worker”, I mean all workers; be he of local origin or from the other side of the world, be he dirt poor or filthy rich; and I would not exclude the paid worker.

(6) I may add one more point, a sore one. All say “I have come to serve the Mother.” It could be very true! Then, more often than not they add: “But...” This makes the first statement sound a bit hollow and untrue.

I commented on the statement no. 6 as “hollow”, for it at once leads one to think (if one does not shut out one’s mind, eyes and ears to preen oneself to a self-satisfied, sanctified state) and ask oneself:

- 1) Am I limiting the Mother’s Presence into certain areas or categories of work (according to one’s mental bias)?
- 2) Does Her vision of things, men (i.e. workers) and the work, vary according to the nature of the work, the distance of the location and the material returns?
- 3) Does a prolonged stint at the same work stultify or benumb one’s aspiration?
- 4) What has a co-worker’s or friend’s comments, mostly unwanted, got to do with the work, its nature and its fulfilment—as long as there is a sincere endeavour in the doing?

All these and many more questions of the kind may have to be answered by oneself, as they are apt to or should rise up from *within* each one of us, the doer. There need not be any debate on whose answer is right or whose the better—for you must know—the subject is old, the answers too as old, needing only to be looked up, read and put into practice! But dare we to prove oneself wrong or to conclude that “I” am below par, and then take the bitter or scalding remedy?

Not that I have even a forlorn expectation to do any more than them (my elders, my gurus). It is just that I felt it bears repeating or just re-echoing their call for work.

And just by the way: “We seek the Lord, not because He is lost, but because we are lost.”—Someone pointed this out to me—in case I was harbouring some idea that I was helping the Lord out.

The universe is an endless masquerade:
 For nothing here is utterly what it seems,
 It is a dream-fact vision of a truth
 Which but for the dream would not be wholly true,
 A phenomenon stands out significant
 Against dim backgrounds of eternity;
 We accept its face and pass by all it means;
 A part is seen, we take it for the whole.

Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*,
 (Book I Canto IV, p. 61)

SAGA OF A SPIRITUAL SEEKER

HE arrived almost out of the blue one summer afternoon clutching in his hand a bunch of tuberose which he had nursed very carefully in a small steel bucket of water all through the long train journey from Calcutta. I say “almost” because quite sometime back I had received a postcard from him expressing his desire to visit the Ashram. After that there had been complete silence from his end, not even an acknowledgement of my reply, until this moment. He said that he wanted to live in the Ashram. There was a look of desperate longing on his face. I told him that he would have to send his prayer to the Mother, everything depended on Her.

The year was 1956. My aunt had died the previous year. Her room was still vacant. For the moment I put him up there and went to inform Amrita-da who was in charge of providing accommodation to the Ashramites and the visitors to the Ashram.

I had known Kanupriyo in Calcutta when he was a first-year student in the City College. He was the youngest brother of the famous Bengali writer, Nripendrkrishna Chattopadhyay who was our very intimate family friend. When my aunt came to know that Nripendrkrishna was looking for a lodging for his brothers, she arranged for them to stay in our house and attend college. Thus Kanupriyo and his elder brother Badal came to live with us. His shy but affectionate nature soon won over the entire household.

I had just turned nine then and he became my favourite Kanu-da who took me along to the Deshbandhu Park where he sometimes played cricket with his college friends.

Time’s juggernaut moved on and the scenario changed. Kanupriyo left college and, as I heard later, got a job as an assistant director looking after film scenarios. I too came away to Pondicherry and was fortunate enough to be accepted by the Divine Mother. And now this dramatic meeting after thirteen long years of total silence!

Next morning I took Kanupriyo to Udar-da who got the Mother’s permission to let him work in the newly launched Honesty Engineers and Contractors as an assistant to Suhas-da, the chief accountant. The experience he gained there proved to be very useful when later he worked with me in Honesty Book House and maintained the accounts for twenty-one years. Meanwhile, Medhananda roped him in to work part time in the new building of Sri Aurobindo Library on Rue Saint Martin.

Kanupriyo’s knowledge of Bengali literature and his genuine love for it, especially the works of Rabindranath Tagore, soon came to be well known in the Ashram and he was asked to teach Bengali in our Centre of Education where a good Bengali teacher was very much needed.

Thus Kanupriyo’s sincere prayers were answered. The Mother took him in as a full-fledged inmate of the Ashram.

The next forty-nine years witnessed Kanupriyo’s spiritual journey. He led a very disciplined life and tried his utmost to follow all the instructions given by the Mother

and Sri Aurobindo as a guide to his sadhana. He used to copy out neatly small passages from Their works and stick them on the walls of his room as a constant reminder of what he was expected to do here. Let us hear what he himself has to say about this practice of his (the free English rendering is mine):

There was a time when I had made it a habit to write down Mother's words in pencil on the four walls of my room—so that whether sitting or lying down or moving about, I would never fail to see them.

After that I started copying out Mother's messages or passages from her writings in the pages of my notebook. Some of my friends made fun of me. But what could I do? Writing them down was as indispensable to me as breathing. I think I had inked Mother's *Prayers and Meditations* three times. I had copied out Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* too.

Whenever I got a message from the Mother, I used to note it down greedily on a piece of paper and keep it in my pocket as a constant companion. In quiet, solitary moments I would sit down under a tree and read the message. The joy it gave me is beyond my power to express.

Often I had felt that if only I could write down these precious words of the Mother with the blood taken from my heart instead of mere blue ink—how much more appropriate that would have been.

Kanupriyo was born on 24th November 1925. He spent his early years in Joynagar and then in Shantipur, both small towns in West Bengal, where he had his schooling. Having done all his studies in the Bengali medium Kanupriyo was not quite at home with the English language. To make up for this deficiency he started to pick out Darshan messages of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo or short passages from Their works and translate them into Bengali, often elaborating upon the central theme for his own better comprehension. Some of these writings, composed in sensitive poetic prose, found their way into various Bengali magazines either published by the Ashram or brought out by the various Sri Aurobindo Centres connected with the Ashram. Soon these writings became very popular with many Bengali readers who benefited much from them. Later they were published as handy booklets.

He was very reticent about himself, so it was difficult to gather much regarding his professional life in Calcutta or what had led him to come to the Ashram. It is possible that he had heard about the Ashram from his elder brother, Nripendra-krishna, who was involved in the freedom movement for a while, or it may be that Nripendrakrishna's close friend, the much loved and respected Nolinikanto Sarkar, was instrumental in inspiring Kanupriyo to choose the path of sadhana. It seems that he had contracted tuberculosis and had spent sometime in a sanatorium in Madhupur, undergoing treatment. However, when he joined the Ashram he had recovered fully and, in spite of having one damaged lung, mostly enjoyed very good health.

In spite of being in the film line Kanupriyo had not been able to shed his characteristic shyness. But that did not prevent him from having many, many genuine friends and admirers, both men and women, who were drawn to him by his innate goodness and warmth and spontaneous helpfulness. His proficiency in and passion for the Bengali language attracted many foreigners to learn Bengali from him, mainly to study the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore. Two French ladies in particular became so proficient that they translated many of Tagore's poems into French and had them published in book form.

Kanupriyo was a true nature lover. He was happiest when he could come into close contact with plants and trees. Whenever an opportunity presented itself he seized it eagerly to spend some time in the Glorialand, the Lake Estate or other farms and gardens of the Ashram where he would go for long solitary walks to commune with Mother Nature or to sit unmoving in quiet meditation. He notes in his diary: "K. and I went to the Lake Estate last Tuesday in the morning... I like to renew my acquaintance with the plants and trees there. But for that I need to be by myself. The joy that I have when I am alone with the trees, I can never get when another person is accompanying me. I cannot then caress all the trees nor talk to them... I saw two mango trees, proud with their first few blossoms. There was a gigantic 'Jamboon' tree, giving signs of early flowering... From this height the lotus pond in Caderland with its spread of flowers looks so beautiful! Under a spreading neem tree they have made a comfortable stone seat. From there one has a clear view of the water of the lake, sparkling in the morning sun. I sat there for a long while totally lost in this beauty..." "Yesterday with some of my friends I went to Gloria. We reached the farm at 10-30 in the morning and returned at 7-15 in the evening. In the afternoon I got an opportunity to get away from the others and sit for a long time all alone in the shade of a banana grove. I felt a hitherto unknown sensation in the depth of my heart. It was as if I had become one with all the plants and trees, the birds, the sky, the distant horizon, even the busy insects and the crawling worms at my feet..."

He had green fingers too: plants always thrived when he looked after them. I suppose that because he loved them so much they too responded in their turn. In his entry dated 12.11. 2000 he notes: "I feel that nothing gives one such pure joy as what gardening does. I wish I had a small piece of land where I could plant a few trees and make the place come alive with flowers and fruits and humming bees and song birds! In the courtyard of Wilfy's house next door there was an 'Adoration' tree. It died and the place became weed ridden. I cleaned it up and planted there two branches of hibiscus—one red and one white. Next I planted a red oleander. All of them are growing happily. One day the oleander will grow very tall and be covered with flowers. Perhaps I won't be there to see it, nor will anybody know who had planted that red oleander."

Kanupriyo had two other passions, of completely divergent nature, 'each from the other heaven-high, hell-deep removed'. They were cricket and Rabindra-sangeet. It is difficult to say which one had precedence. Unfailingly he heard on the radio or

watched on TV each and every cricket match that was broadcast. He maintained his personal score card and was a sure source of the latest information to the cricket enthusiasts of the Ashram, both young and old.

As for Rabindra-sangeet, his collection of audio cassettes and CDs of the most famous exponents of Rabindra-sangeet, had to be seen to be believed. His hours of rest were filled with the sweet, haunting melodies of Tagore's immortal songs.

But the most precious moments of his life came early in the morning when he sat on his eastern verandah, alone with Mother. This statement needs a short explanation. Kanupriyo maintained a regular diary—what may be termed a spiritual diary. In it he poured out all his longings, his aspirations. Once again let us hear his own words:

What can I tell you about myself, O Mother? You are within me—You are aware of each movement of my being.

Every morning after my bath I sit quietly for a while on the eastern verandah outside my room and think of You. It gives me such an immense joy! A new day dawns, I too regain myself in a new manner, know myself in a newer way, make another effort to take one more step on the path that You have chalked out for me...

As You are within me in the same way You are in the core of the cosmos. My inmost soul is the same as that of the creation. I experience this oneness only in those moments when I am able silently to embrace all within myself...

No more separateness, no more differentiation, no more remaining a prisoner in the dungeon of my ego by keeping myself aloof from the rest of the universe!...

The life that pulsates in me is the same that pulsates in the whole universe surrounding me. For me it is a golden opportunity to feel the presence of the Divine in everything, however faintly it may be. The whole sense of being alive is to learn the lessons of Life. Life will become beautiful, the whole world will be inevitably beautiful, if only I can see the Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram in everything...

...To remain immersed within myself, to remain totally dedicated to my indwelling Deity that is what is a must. In the evening of my life I have at last realised that I should remain constantly united with the Divine and quietly do my work...

What is more beautiful than humility? To live humbly on the breast of Mother Earth! To be silent, to be quiet!...

The more we advance towards our goal the more we have to remain in-drawn, immersed in our true self... Peace...Peace...Peace...Always to cling to a deep, all-pervading Peace—this is the true mantra for living ...the key of life...the only support.

In recognition of his work for disseminating the messages of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and for his contribution in enriching the Bengali literature, Kanupriyo received some awards, including large sums of cash, from Sri Aurobindo Bhavan and other organisations. Invariably, as it is only proper for a true child of the Mother, he offered everything to the Ashram as a sign of his gratitude, keeping absolutely nothing for himself.

Kanupriyo passed away on the first of August 2005 at about 7-30 in the morning. I happened to see the last entry in his diary. It was dated 1.8.2005. I cannot resist the temptation of quoting it here in full:

At the first light of dawn quickly I get ready to meet You in perfect solitude...only to pour out my heartfelt gratitude to You. How fortunate I am that You have let me live in such a beautiful place—a veritable Heaven on earth...

These few auspicious moments in the morning give me a golden opportunity to be able to sit silently gazing at Your face, looking into Your eyes... How can I express what a great wealth it is to me? What have I learnt in this life? Only this: under the blue sky You alone are the Truth, the sole Truth.

ANIRUDDHA SIRCAR

From the *Dhammapada*

One holds dear a man who acts rightly, possesses intuition, who is righteous and knows the Truth, who fulfils his duty.

One who aspires to the ineffable Peace, one whose mind is awakened, whose thoughts are not entangled in the net of desire, that one is said to be "bound upstream" (towards perfection).

Just as, after a long absence, a man returning safely home is received by his kinsmen and friends who welcome him, even so it is with one who acts rightly; when he passes from this world to the other, his own good actions welcome him like a kinsman.

(In *Questions and Answers 1929-1931*, CWM, Vol. 3, p. 256)

PLEASE BE WITH ME FOREVER

Please be with me forever
Forever at my side.
Till I have gained the knowledge
And the love that you abide.

Please give me grace and courage
And the strength to follow through
On a life filled with wisdom,
Which will lead me close to you.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother,
The greatest gift of all
And your constant love and kindness
To make sure I don't fall.

I will follow on my path to you
Until the very end;
And just knowing you are with me
All my faults I'll mend.

I am grateful for all I have
And all that you have done.
Please be with me forever,
With a love compared to none.

MARY "ANGEL" FINN

DEVOTIONAL POETRY IN TAMIL

(Continued from the issue of January 2007)

12. Ripeness is All

IN the presence of Tirunavukkarasar (6th century A.D.), we learn that the devotional poets were not merely lost in the yoga of divine love. They were also karma yogins. Tirunavukkarasar took upon himself the self-imposed task of keeping the temple environs clean so that the devotees who came to worship could do so in a pleasant atmosphere. His consecrated icon is always distinguished by the hoe in his hands symbolising service. He called upon others to emulate his example:

My heart! If you wish to gain Realisation
Come daily to the temple of my Lord.
At pre-dawn time sweep the place,
And wipe it clean; string garlands
Of fresh blossoms, sing the Lord's praise.
Bow with your head before the sanctum,
Dance in self-lost ecstasy! All hail Shankara!
Victory to our Lord! The Supreme who sports
The flood on his red matted hair! The deity
Of Arur! Thus call out in devotion!¹

Born in a pious Shaiva farming family of Tiruvamoor, he was named Marulneekkiyar (Remover of Bewilderment). His elder sister Tilakavati was deeply devoted to Shiva. When her betrothed died, she decided not to get married. As he grew up, Tirunavukkarasar was drawn to Jainism. This was a shock to his sister, but he went ahead with his decision and entered a Jain monastery in Pataliputra. Such was his brilliance in mastering Jain scriptures that he became famous as the acharya, Dharmasena.

It was only in his middle age when he fell seriously ill with a wasting sickness that Tirunavukkarasar remembered his sister, left Pataliputra and reached Tiruvatikai in Tamil land. Tilakavati prayed to Shiva and applied the Holy Ash on his body and asked him to go to the temple and engage himself in soulful prayers. Tirunavukkarasar's decad to the Lord of the place is justly famous and opens his contribution to the Shaivite canon, *Panniru Tirumurai* which forms Book IV, Book V and Book VI:

My Lord who resides in Veerattanam
On the banks of Gedilam river!
Why don't you chase away this colic

That tortures me as Yama!
 The evils of my past, I know not.
 You have accepted me; I shall serve
 You day and night. Do relieve me
 Of this pain that tortures my innards.
 I can bear it no more. I am your servitor!²

As honeyed Tamil poesy tuned to musical modes streamed forth, the Supreme rejoiced and let it be heard: “As you sing in sweet Tamil, may you be known as Navukkarasu (King of Speech).” From now on Tirunavukkarasar, who was cured of his colic, was engaged in the ministry of spreading Shaivism all over the land by travelling far and wide.

The Jains were not happy. The Pallava king of Kanchipuram, Mahendravarman (7th century A.D.) was at that time a follower of Jainism. When the Jain leaders complained that Tirunavukkarasar’s popularity was undermining their religion, he ordered the arrest of the hymnodist. The poet gave expression to his fearlessness in a verse which is verily a ‘red badge of courage’:

We are not subject to any.
 Nor do we fear the God of Death.
 We shan’t suffer in infernos;
 No falsity strains our hearts.
 We shan’t be betrayed; no illness
 Afflicts us; we are slaves to none.
 Always Ananda for us; never sadness.
 We have made ourselves bondsmen
 Of Shankara who is a subject to no one,
 And sports the ear-drop of white shell.³

Tirunavukkarasar remained true to his faith and did not lose courage as the king tortured him in various ways. The devotee was placed in a boiling lime-kiln, but the heat inside had no effect on the devotee who was lost in Shiva-consciousness and was singing:

The shade of my Lord Shiva’s feet
 Is cool like the lute twanging in tune,
 Like the moonlight in the evening,
 The southern breeze blowing soft,
 The outburst of spring’s colours
 And the pond of sweet-scented blossoms
 Covered by humming bees.⁴

He was then administered poison, but this too proved ineffective as Tirunavukkarasar notes in the decad on the Nanipalli temple, a lesson for us all who live in an atmosphere saturated with poisons of every kind!

Without fail repeat the Panchakshara
 In the morning and in the evening;
 Worship Hara daily, and salute him
 With overflowing devotion. He saves.
 When the sramanas gave me milk pudding
 Mixed with poison, my Lord at Nanipalli
 Transformed it into nectarean food!⁵

When he survived these terrible ordeals, the guards goaded an elephant to trample him down. But the elephant saluted him and remained quiet. Finally, the king had Tirunavukkarasar bound to a huge rock and dropped him in the ocean. But is there a power to injure the true devotee of Shiva? Here was the poet singing with divine nonchalance, repeating the sacred five syllables, Na-ma-shi-va-ya”:

Shiva is the Lord of Vedas that are recited;
 He is verily a Flame; my helper as my heart
 Holds on to his golden feet and prays.
 When I was bound to a stone and dropped in the sea,
 I was saved by the Five-syllabled Namashivaya.⁶

The mantric ‘Namashivaya’ forms the ornament for the tongue, burns up all our past sins, saves us from all kinds of fear, and is literally a boat that takes us to safety. The Supreme indicated by the sacred syllables guards all living beings.

I saw the devotees of Shiva who had released
 Themselves from earthly attachments, recite
 The Sacred Syllables; Envisioning His anklets
 I ran therein to see his glorious form;
 That very moment ‘Namashivaya’ chose me.⁷

‘He who chooses the infinite has been chosen by the infinite’! Mahendravarman could see that a new age had begun. Promptly he renounced Jainism and became a Shaivite. As for Tirunavukkarasar, his long life henceforth was spent in traversing the Tamil land and singing about the various temples dedicated to Shiva.

Since Sekkizhar has given a detailed account of Tirunavukkarasar’s pilgrimages, we are able to follow the poet after his ordeals, as he began his travels from Tirupadipuliyur. Though he is supposed to have indited thousands of decads, only

392 are now extant and of course, they form a huge treasury. Again, he must have travelled to hundreds of temples but only 125 have been recorded. The ageing saint met the young Tirujnanasambandhar at Sirgazhi. It is said that when Tirunavukkarasar prostrated before the prodigy, Tirujnanasambandhar lifted him up with his hands and called him "Appare" (O father!). From now onwards, devotees loved calling him Appar, a fitting sobriquet to a person who had paternal love for the Sirgazhi boy.

During one of his travels, Tirunavukkarasar came to the holy place, Tingalur. He was astonished that a well-to-do Brahmin, Apputhi Adikal, had constructed numerous wells, charity homes and groves in the name of Tirunavukkarasar. Mystified he sought an audience with the gentleman. Expressing his joy at the generosity of Apputhi to help the poor and the marginalised, he wished to know why he had emblazoned the name of a stranger instead of his own on the plaques. Apputhi was incensed:

"You mean to say Tirunavukkarasar is the name of a stranger? Do you know it is he who has converted our king and brought him to the Shaivite fold? It is well that you are wearing the symbols of a Shaiva devotee. From where have you come? Who are you?"

Tirunavukkarasar revealed that he was indeed the person who had been saved from Jainism by Shiva and brought back to the religion that saves. Apputhi and his family were overjoyed and requested the singer to bless his house by having food. Tirunavukkarasar agreed. Hagiology has a very moving anecdote in this context. Apputhi's son went to the garden to pluck a banana leaf for serving food. He was bitten by a snake and died. Apputhi decided not to bring it to the notice of his guest as he may go away hungry. When Tirunavukkarasar sat down to eat his food, he asked for the little fellow. "He will be of no use here," said Apputhi. Sensing something wrong, Tirunavukkarasar commanded Apputhi to come out with the truth. He then had the body brought to the temple and began to pray to Shiva. Since this decad caused a miracle, it is known as the "Arputha Tirupathikam" (Miracle Decad). The decad enumerates in rising numbers the glory of Shiva: Shiva is the one who is in the thoughts of the devotees, his feet twain indicate Para and Aparā knowledge, He has three eyes and four faces, the snake that is his ornament has five hoods, his son's faces are six, he is the creator of music with seven notes, he has eight qualities, his mane has nine strands, Ravana who was crushed by Shiva had ten heads and so on. It is a heartwarming play of words, but the beauty of the ten verses lies in the power they exuded to bring back to life Apputhi's son.

Tirujnanasambandhar and Tirunavukkarasar travelled together to many holy spots and hagiology lists several miracles performed by them. In Tiruveezhimizalai, their hymns wrested from Shiva the gift of a daily allowance of gold coins to save the people of the area from a severe drought. When they came to Tirumaraikkadu (Vedaranyam), the temple doors were closed. They were told that the Vedas had once

come to worship here and had closed the doors when going back. For a long time, no one had been able to open them. Tirujnanasambandar now requested his elderly companion to sing prayers for their opening so they could have darshan of the deity in the sanctum. A series of ten ineluctable verses were uttered by the latter but the doors remained closed. Deeply pained, Tirunavukkarasar sang:

My Lord of Maraikkadu, surrounded
 By Punnai trees showering blossoms!
 With your toe you had pressed down
 The demon! You have no compassion!
 Come quick and get these doors open!⁸

The doors swung open and the two sterling devotees worshipped Vedaranyanatha with great joy. Then Tirunavukkarasar requested the young poet to pray to the Lord to close the doors, so that their verses could be recited whenever the doors were opened or closed. And so it came to be. Now our ageing saint went to Pazhayarai where he was shocked to find the temple of Shiva converted into a Jain residence. He went on a hunger strike. Shiva appeared in a dream to the local king and commanded him to rectify the grievous desecration. In fact, hagiology speaks of many instances when Shiva was a close presence to Tirunavukkarasar and was his companion during his lonely travels.

Desiring to reach Kailas, Tirunavukkarasar began to walk towards the Himalayas from South India. His route took him to several holy places like Mylapore, Tiruvalankadu, Srikalahasti and Benaras. But he grew increasingly weak and soon could walk no more. He fell down in a swoon near the Manasarovar lake. Shiva came in the guise of a sage to him and helped him back to consciousness. When the sage told him that it is impossible to attain Shiva's abode in the physical, Tirunavukkarasar demurred and would not go back to his home country. The sage disappeared and a voice then spoke to him: "Singer of celestial tunes! Bathe in the lake here, get back to Tiruvaiyaru and gain the vision of Holy Kailas!" Accordingly he bathed in the lake repeating the sacred Five Syllables. On getting up, he found he was in Tiruvaiyaru, on the banks of Kaveri! Wherever he turned he saw a divine ambience and all men and women appeared as Shiva and Shakti! How did this happen? The well-known Shaiva Siddhantin, T. N. Ramachandran explains it even thus:

This body which has a blaze about it is called the *Pranavasarira*. It is this body which a Shiva-yogi eventually acquires from Siva, if he so desires. When it walks, it will not leave footprints. It can reach any place at will. If it comes into contact with someone, the latter will not even feel it. It is with such a divine body that our Saint was blessed.⁹

As he looked at the sanctum, Tirunavukkarasar found the presiding deities, Panchanadeesa and his consort Dharmasamvardhini. Was he in Tiruvaiyaru or was he in Kailas in his Pranavasarira? He burst out:

Shiva wears the crescent moon
 And is ever seen with Parvati:
 Devotees go in to worship them
 Carrying pure water and flowers
 And singing prayers; when I entered
 Aiyaru without leaving any footprints,
 I saw the royal elephant come
 Along with His beloved consort;
 I saw the Lord's holy feet
 I saw what is not seen by others.¹⁰

In his last days Tirunavukkarasar resided in Tirupugalur and engaged himself in keeping the premises of the temple clean, and worshipping Agnipureeswara and Chulikamba, the divine couple presiding over the place. Legends narrate how wherever he worked, there appeared gold nuggets and gems. But the Grand Old Man of hymnologists never distinguished them from the mud which he was digging and the weeds he was pulling out. In his last days he had no thought other than that of Shiva's guardian feet, as the Tirupugalur decads reveal to us:

He is russet-hued; wears the white
 Holy thread; holds the deer in hand;
 Feet bound with anklets, he appears
 To the true devotees, not to others,
 The Tirupugalur Lord with matted locks.¹¹

One need not be awed by the sheer volume of limpid poesy that has been gifted by Tirunavukkarasar. After all, what we need to sustain ourselves are a few drops of nectar and there is plenty of it flowing to us and pulling us up to a more practical view of our existence. For instance, why worry that this earthly life is full of care, pain and death? There are ample compensations too once we take human birth. How else can we enjoy the image of Shiva, the Lord engaged in the dance of creation? Sri Aurobindo has given us a yogi's meditative vision:

A face on the cold dire mountain peaks
 Grand and still; its lines white and austere
 Match with the unmeasured snowy streaks
 Cutting heaven, implacable and sheer.

Above it a mountain of matted hair
 Aeon-coiled on that deathless and lone head
 In its solitude hug of lifeless air
 Round, above illimitably spread.¹²

Tirunavukkarasar presents the vision of a devotee engaged in the yoga of love that scans the image and enjoys every portion as one of honeyed delight. One needs to be born on earth to perform the yoga of loving worship offered to a personal god!

We do need to be born as humans
 In this wide world to look upon
 Nataraja, the brows bent like a bow,
 The sweet smile on the lovely lips
 Red like kovai fruit, the cool tresses,
 Milky-white Holy Ash smeared
 All over the coral-red form,
 The golden foot raised as if to assure
 Nectarean life. Ah, the Divine form!¹³

In his poetic outpourings that are full of wonderment at the Lord's compassion for his devotees, Tirunavukkarasar has rarely used bridal mysticism, though this genre is very important for the yoga of love. He is almost always the servant of the Lord, following the *dāsya bhāva*. There is a marvellous verse in a decad addressed to Shiva at Tiruvarur which takes us to the regions of a lover's union. While the rest of the decad speaks of the devotee's worshipful heart, the seventh verse turns to bridal mysticism:

She heard the Lord's name at first:
 And then about his personality;
 Later, of his residence in Aroor;
 Leaving all, she became mad after Him.
 She left her mother and father at once,
 And bid goodbye to traditional ways.
 Self-lost, She lost her name too.
 The maid offered herself
 At the feet of the Lord.¹⁴

This is a masterly image of the steady manner in which the human soul comes to recognise the existence of the Supreme, seeks to realise him through personal search within the spaces of one's self, and becomes one with the Divine through an act of total self-surrender, a scene that we encounter often in bhakti poetry. Sri Aurobindo

has portrayed this process which becomes “blissfully personal” in bhakti yoga:

That which in the end contains, takes up or unifies them all, is the relation of lover and beloved, because that is the most intense and blissful of all and carries up all the rest into its heights and yet exceeds them. He is the teacher and guide and leads us to knowledge; at every step of the developing inner light and vision, we feel his touch like that of the artist moulding our clay of mind, his voice revealing the truth and its word, the thought he gives us to which we respond, the flashing of his spears of lightning which chase the darkness of our ignorance ... We cease to think and see for ourselves, but think only what he wills to think for us and see only what he sees for us. And then the teacher is fulfilled in the lover; he lays hands on all our mental being to embrace and possess, to enjoy and use it.¹⁵

Tirunavukkarasar’s love for Tirujnanasambandhar has been well documented. He has also praised the devotional services of other Nayanmars like Apputhi, Amarneeti, Kanampullar, Naminandhi, Kannappar, Sengatchozhar and Sakkiyar. A master of the Tamil phrase in all its poetic glory, his hymns have an immediacy of utterance even today, though we are divided from him by several centuries. Inlaid with philosophy, yet they remain very popular.

Right perception of Reality, mutability of the world’s nature, service to Shiva and his servitors, the fourfold path of *carya*, *kriya*, *yoga* and *jnana*, the performance of the quotidian rites, the tattvas, the mystic pentad, grace and the bliss of release are some of the themes on which our Saint has eloquently decanted.¹⁶

While most of the decads have ten verses each, some contain eleven verses. Interestingly enough, the last verse usually refers to the manner in which Ravana’s pride was humbled by Shiva. Apparently Tirunavukkarasar wants us to remember the manner in which Ravana redeemed himself. When he began to uproot Mount Kailas, Shiva pressed it down with his toe. Caught beneath it, Ravana was being crushed to death when he is supposed to have played the veena (some say a veena made from his blood vessels which he pulled out for using as strings of the instrument) and praised Shiva. Pleased, Shiva released him from certain death and assured him of his guardianship in future. Which of us is free of pride? And yet, if we can put this evil quality aside and pray to the Lord, surely we will be saved! Remember the way Ravana was punished and redeemed too! Though almost always the poet ignores the other characters in the *Ramayana* legend, here is one which projects Rama too:

The red-eyed Lord held the bow, went with his army
 And built the bridge; going across
 With the help of those who sought refuge
 He engaged in severe battles and destroyed
 The fighter-demon causing his crowns to roll on dust.
 Our Lord crushed Ravana with his toe
 And then granted him grace. Today the Lord
 Has entered sea-girt Valampuram.
 Ships ply here, and the city has highrise mansions.¹⁷

We must learn to weep like Ravana, and be prepared to throw away our pride to the winds. Tirunavukkarasar's verses are full of experiential wisdom, and he apparently realised that there is more of Ravana in us than Rama. Our egos control our actions and we are often unable to distinguish between the good and the bad, the divine and the undivine. Often we even consider ourselves cleverer and greater than the divine and so have to be reminded often to give up ego. What better example than Ravana in this context, "the violent kinetic Ego"?

The Nayanar's experience of the universal divine comes through in many charming verses. If the Lord is everywhere, how do we recognise Him? Pat comes an answer from the Grand Old Man:

He dwells in the mind, on the crown, in speech;
 He is found in the group of devotees
 Who sing his praises with electrical ease; he is
 The Lord of the immortals above;
 He is beyond the seven universes; yet is he here
 In the golden groves; in konrai blooms;
 He is in the mountain in the fire, in the wind;
 He is their soul, dwells on the top of Kailas;
 He is the Lord of Kalaththi; he is within me.¹⁸

Oh yes, the Lord is everywhere and yet nowhere! Such is the divine tangle in which devotees dwell happily, not willing to untie the knot that binds them forever to the Supreme:

You are not of earth, nor of heaven, nor the circumference;
 You are not mountain, nor sea, nor wind;
 Not numbers, letters nor fire;
 Not night, nor day, nor anything else;
 You are no woman, nor man, nor sexless;
 Nor aught else. Yet you are the Supreme.

For the good, you are the indwelling universal, never evil;
Lord of Otriyur whom one cannot comprehend!¹⁹

How does one study or analyse such creative artistes of the life divine? Revered
Appar, our salutations to thee!

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

Notes and References

1. Book IV, Decad 1, verse 1. All translations from Tirunavukkarasar are by Prema Nandakumar.
2. Book IV, Decad 1, verse 1.
3. Book VI, Decad 98, verse 1.
4. Book IV, Decad 90, verse 1.
5. Book IV, Decad 70, verse 5.
6. Book IV, Decad 11, verse 1.
7. *Ibid.*, verse 7.
8. Book V, Decad 10, verse 11.
9. *Tirumurai the Sixth* (1995), p. 41.
10. Book IV, Decad 3, verse 1.
11. Book IV, Decad 16, verse 1.
12. 'Shiva: The Inconscient Creator'.
13. Book IV, Decad 81, verse 4.
14. Book VI, Decad 25, verse 7.
15. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Part Three, chapter viii.
16. T. N. Ramachandran, *Tirumurai the Sixth*, p. 44.
17. Book VI, Decad 58, verse 10.
18. Book VI, Decad 8, verse 5.
19. Book VI, Decad 45, verse 9.

Love is one of the great universal forces; it exists by itself and its movement is free and independent of the objects in which and through which it manifests. It manifests wherever it finds a possibility for manifestation, wherever there is receptivity, wherever there is some opening for it. What you call love and think of as a personal or individual thing is only your capacity to receive and manifest this universal force.

The Mother

(Questions and Answers 1929-1931, CWM, Vol. 3, p. 69)

WORK GIVEN TO NOREN SINGH

THE Nahar family had been visiting the Ashram since 1933. Prithwi Singh Nahar became an Ashramite in 1938. One by one, his daughters and sons also joined the Ashram community. Once, in 1939, Noren Singh came for a visit during his college vacation. He was then 19 years old. After about a month, his father told him that the Mother, in a letter to him, had mentioned that She would be happy if Noren Singh stayed here. Prithwi Singh wanted to know his son's reaction to this comment by the Mother. "Oh, if the Mother has written this, what more do I have to say?" With the Mother's permission, Noren Singh went back to Calcutta to wind up his moorings there.

He came back and became a member of the Ashram. When he received his monthly requirements from the Ashram "Prosperity", he asked the Mother, as he was getting all he needed from the Ashram, whether he should offer his own clothes, which he had brought with him, to the "Prosperity". The Mother, in answer, told him to keep his clothes, etc. and use them himself. "Your clothes are of good quality material, and I will not be able to give you that."

His first assignment was supervision of work in Golconde which was then under construction. He supervised the cutting and bending of the iron rods for the concreting work.

The next work given to him was in the Bakery. The duration of the work there was of five to six hours daily. In the meantime, Pavitra-da started teaching him how to take care of the Mother's collection of stamps. He worked at a table in a small area adjacent to Pavitra-da's office. As the Mother would sometimes come to Pavitra-da's office, he would then get the opportunity of having a glimpse of Her.

Once he expressed his wish to the Mother to do some gardening. A few days later, the Mother called him to a window in Pavitra-da's office and pointed out the small plot of land behind the office in the inner courtyard of the Ashram building. "Will this do?" She asked. "Surely, Mother!" was his spontaneous response.

The person in charge of the garden then was Jyotin-da who was keen on trying to cultivate paddy there. He did not know exactly what type of soil was needed: he put sandy soil. Noren Singh used to carry 50-60 cans of water from the well there. As expected, only a handful of paddy could be harvested!

After that experiment, they tried growing vegetables. Seeds of a special type of beans were given by the French Government in Pondicherry. The Mother liked them very much—they were very soft and butter-like. The Mother was fond of artichokes and asparagus. Artichokes did not grow so well in this garden but they succeeded in growing some asparagus. The Mother was fond of tomatoes. Once when the tomato crop was extremely good, the Mother distributed these to many inmates.

The Mother used to come to the Balcony to give Darshan quite early in the morning. Noren Singh would harvest and clean the vegetables and keep them in a bowl in the corridor upstairs for the Mother to see after she came back from the Balcony. These were offered to the Mother. Then Noren Singh would take them to Dutta who cooked for the Mother.

He also helped Mrityunjoy who used to wash fruits for the Mother.

He worked for some time in the Ashram Press, in the printing section.

He was appointed as a 'life-saver' [life-guard during the swimming sessions] when Ashramites went sea-bathing. He was also a swimming instructor and captain for the younger children. Naturally, he participated in most of the physical education activities.

One day, the Mother told him, "Why not give more time now for the stamps?" He curtailed some of his activities in order to do this work.

CHITRA SEN

(With information from Noren Singh)

The greatness of spiritual truth is not in numbers. I knew the head of a new religion, the son of its founder, and heard him say once that such and such a religion took so many hundreds of years to be built up, and such another so many hundreds of years, but they within fifty years had already over four million followers. "And so you see", he added, "what a great religion is ours!" Religions may reckon their greatness by the number of their believers, but Truth would still be Truth if it had not even a single follower. The average man is drawn towards those who make great pretensions; he does not go where Truth is quietly manifesting. Those who make great pretensions need to proclaim loudly and to advertise; for otherwise they would not attract great numbers of people. The work that is done with no care for what people think of it is not so well known, does not so easily draw multitudes. But Truth requires no advertisement; it does not hide itself but it does not proclaim itself either. It is content to manifest, regardless of results, not seeking approbation or shunning disapprobation, not attracted or troubled by the world's acceptance or denial.

When you come to the Yoga, you must be ready to have all your mental buildings and all your vital scaffoldings shattered to pieces. You must be prepared to be suspended in the air with nothing to support you except your faith. You will have to forget your past self and its clings altogether, to pluck it out of your consciousness and be born anew, free from every kind of bondage. Think not of what you were, but of what you aspire to be; be altogether in what you want to realise. Turn from your dead past and look straight towards the future. Your religion, country, family lie there; it is the DIVINE.

The Mother

(Questions and Answers 1929-1931, CWM, Vol. 3, pp. 83-84)

THE VAGABOND

I feel like a droplet forgotten in space
Looking for a friend, a familiar face,

Having come a long way to find a new home
But now lost in the ripples, the tide, the foam.

I feel I'm a spark carelessly thrown
In the gloom,... lifeless,... alone.

I feel like a pebble beside the river
Lying very still, expectations a-quiver.

I feel like a paper boat, fragile and frail
Tormented and beaten in a stupendous gale.

I lie like a grain in a desert of sand
I know not my name, my origin, my land.

I roam like a vagabond unknown to fame
Travelling the earth without reason or aim.

I look at the sky and feel its vastness
'Why am I so petty, plunged in darkness?'

I look at the mighty waves of the ocean
'Am I a being fallen, forsaken?'

I look toward heaven and ask the creator:
'Am I a puppet, a slave without stature?'

*

Thus perplexed and sad I stand helplessly—
Yet 'tis questions that come, answering me:

“Have you noticed the spark reflecting my light?
The pebble adorned by swaying sunlight?”

The care of a boy who without a blink
Follows the paper boat—does he let it sink?

The droplet's freedom, its joy of unity?
The grain's cohesion, its tranquillity?

Thy vagabond nature—to what does it cling?
To which mortal being? To which earthly thing?

Thy thirst for knowledge and wide experience
Leads thee to me and the bliss-filled silence.”

SURUCHI VERMA

On Poetry

Poetry is the deification of reality.

Edith Sitwell

A poet ought not to pick nature's pocket. Let him borrow, and so borrow as to repay by the very act of borrowing. Examine nature accurately, but write from recollection, and trust more to the imagination than the memory.

Samual Taylor Coleridge

I was working on the proof of one of my poems all the morning, and took out a comma. In the afternoon I put it back again.

Oscar Wilde

A BRUSH WITH THE SOUL OF INDIA: BRINGING VISITORS TO AUROVILLE AND PONDICHERRY

While others look upon their country as an inert piece of matter—a few meadows and fields, forests and hills and rivers—I look upon my country as the Mother. I adore Her, I worship Her as the Mother.

Sri Aurobindo

OCCASIONALLY, I lead groups to India. And when I do, I make sure to bring them to Auroville and to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry.

As an FWE Board member I have had the privilege to participate in funding a number of projects at Auroville and also some projects connected with the Pondicherry Ashram. Participating in the FWE's effort to direct money as a divine force in order to move forward the evolution of consciousness has been uplifting and inspiring. And every time I visit the Pondicherry area I feel touched and moved to see new transformations that the financial force has helped to create. One of the joys in leading trips is also to view Auroville and the Ashram through the eyes of visitors, almost all of whom have never visited India and have never even heard of Sri Aurobindo or Mother before this long journey to a strange land on the far side of the earth.

As most of us know, to understand something essential of Sri Aurobindo one should have some knowledge and appreciation of India and the scope and sense of its great heritage. And I hope that, whether you have visited India or not, some of you may find this brief synopsis of our travels, interwoven with Sri Aurobindo's words, to be of interest and give some small glimpse of the incredible tapestry of which Sri Aurobindo and Mother are an integral part. Certainly the journey through greater India gave the trip-participants a more profound sense of the great experiment that is unfolding in Auroville and Pondicherry. And, just as surely, the visit to Auroville and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram enriched and deepened their view and understanding of India.

There were ten members in our group, ranging in age from fifty-two to eighty. Among the members were two Shiite Moslems from Iran, two Jewish people, one of them an Israeli born in Baghdad now living in France, and two atheists, one of them British. We were a diverse group. Designed to experience a wide variety of the noblest and most beautiful expressions that the soul of India offers, our three-week itinerary started in the state of Kerala, which is remarkable for a number of reasons, including its great beauty, the fact that it can boast of 98% literacy, and is home to one of the only truly matrilineal groups in the world. In Kerala we explored the city of Cochin, took a boat through the backwater country, and experienced the beauty of the tea and cardamom plantations up among the peaks of the Western Ghats. One can see also in Kerala remarkable examples of India as the nurturing mother of the world's spiritual traditions. There is a mosque that was built while Mohammed was still alive, a Jewish

group that traces its roots back 2,600 years to the time of Solomon, and a Christian group that still chants in Aramaic, the language of Jesus, and traces its origins back to the Apostle Thomas, the direct disciple of Jesus. All religious groups have lived mostly in peace throughout Kerala's long history.

From Kerala we went to the town of Tiruvannamalai ("Tiru") in Tamil Nadu, where we stayed at Sri Ramanasramam, a quiet, traditional-style ashram, where the food is served on banana leaves on the floor and the Vedas are regularly recited. Of Sri Ramana Maharshi, the sage around whom the ashram grew, M. P. Pandit says:

He was a direct Descent of the Divine consciousness with a special mission: to give the direct route to the Self, Atman, to a humanity bewildered by the profusion of pathways and philosophies staring before it. He came to open a new horizon, build a direct route to the central Truth of existence, establish a free access in the manner of the Vedic Rishis each of whom founded a new way of Realisation. He embodied the inmost truth of the Self and chose to live amidst common humanity: he did not walk out of reach of the humbler folk.

Interestingly, we had our first taste of Auroville at Sri Ramanasramam. Since a delayed arrival at Tiru had forced us to miss dinner, we went to the new grocery next to the ashram to get supplies for a late picnic in our rooms. Despite the late hour the grocery was full of shoppers enthusiastically buying newly baked, whole grain breads from Auroville. We had fortunately managed to arrive on delivery day, and both our group and the local community appreciated this nourishing Auroville creation. I suspect that we also experienced the influence and inspiration of Auroville in an energetic reforestation project occurring on the ancient sacred mountain, Arunachala, at the foot of which Sri Ramanasramam is nestled.

After a sojourn at Auroville and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, an experience which will be elaborated upon below, we visited the remarkable stone sculptures of Mamallapuram and then flew north to Agra. In Agra we visited Fatehpur Sikri, briefly the capital city of the first great Moghul emperor, Akbar. Akbar made a sincere attempt to unite the world's religions, and iconography from several major religions can be found in this exquisite example of Islamic architecture. Sri Aurobindo writes:

The buildings of Fatehpur Sikri... give form to a nobility, power and beauty which lay hold upon but do not wallow on the earth.... [Fatehpur Sikri's architecture] lays stress on the sensuous... but uplifts it to a certain immaterial charm, rises often from the earth without quite leaving it into the magical beauty of the middle world and in the religious mood touches with a devout hand the skirts of the Divine.

We also saw the magnificent Agra Fort. And there was the small matter of the

Taj Mahal, which Sri Aurobindo calls, “the eternal dream of a love that survives death.”

Our final experience was of Ajanta and Ellora, vast Buddhist cave complexes and one Hindu temple exquisitely carved out of granite cliffs over a period of a thousand years. While illustrating the best that Indian art offers to the world, Sri Aurobindo says of a sculpture of Buddha at Ajanta that it “achieves the expression of the infinite in a finite image... embod[ies] the illimitable calm of Nirvana in a human form and visage.” He also says of a painting at Ajanta of a mother and child gazing at the Buddha, “...the motive of the soul-moment the painting interprets is the dedication of the awakening mind of the child, the coming younger humanity, to that in which already the soul of the mother had learned to find and fix its spiritual joy. The eyes, brows, lips, face, poise of the head of the woman are filled with this spiritual emotion which is a continued memory and possession of the psychical release, the steady settled calm of the heart’s experience filled with an ineffable tenderness, the familiar depths which are yet moved with the wonder and always farther appeal of something that is infinite...”

We spent four nights in the inspiring, forested beauty of Auroville, visiting the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Pondicherry for one day of that time. Of course, each member of the group had a different experience of these manifestations of the consciousness of Sri Aurobindo and Mother. One member, who owns a ranch in Wyoming and loves unspoiled land, donated money to the Land Fund. Another member, who had been a high school science teacher, donated money toward the science programme in the school we visited. The members who are socially conscious appreciated the nobility and difficulty of the unfolding social experiment. Some people were moved by the philosophy or the beauty of the architecture and the high quality artisanship and crafts. All appreciated the sense of dedication, thoughtfulness, and ability in evidence and also felt that this was an important experience for them of an essence of India.

I appreciated seeing Auroville through the eyes of the members and inwardly compared their experience to mine. When I first bicycled out to Auroville in 1978, I was greeted by the suspicious stares of the half-naked Westerners working on what looked like a building for some surreal science fiction movie in a Martian landscape. Now beautiful vegetation abounds and the elegantly-designed Auroville Visitors Centre showed my group an informative, professional video and provided an excellent and much-appreciated channel for the group’s shopping energy. Matrimandir now glowed, surrounded by emerging beautiful gardens, and, despite pouring rain, many of the members of the group were drawn to climb to the urn containing soil from countries around the earth.

An impressive lunch at the solar kitchen allowed us the time to pepper our guide with questions. We visited a school for Tamil children that has been experimenting with new approaches to education. We were told there that the government of Tamil Nadu is going to apply the school’s education model to 3,000 public schools. We

were fascinated by a nursery for the reforestation group. The reforestation effort too has evolved. There is a great emphasis now on renewing the indigenous trees and saving the herbal lore of the region. Databases have been created to preserve all the traditional medicinal uses for the plants as well as mapping the locations of now-rare species of trees in the region so that they can be saved and propagated. As a pilot project, the same group has offered its services to a public school suffering from low morale, collaborating with the children in planting trees around their school. They thereby teach the children reforestation skills, beautify the area, and create a base to educate the local population about reforestation. Finally, we met with coordinators of the Tsunami relief effort that is still extremely active and in which Auroville has played and continues to play a leadership role in organising development and redevelopment in surrounding communities. It was heartening to see Auroville more and more taking its place as a positive, transformative leader in the region.

In Pondicherry, we visited the Ashram School and had a somewhat too brief experience of the special atmosphere of the Samadhi of Sri Aurobindo and Mother. But we had long, fascinating conversations with people associated with the Ashram and the Ashram School. We also visited the paper factory and were fortunate to be able to take a leisurely tour of Golconde. Perhaps more than any other place, Golconde, with its simplicity, elegant beauty, and illuminated principles of design, impressed and touched the group members who were the least receptive with a direct, physical experience of the refined and profound manifesting vision that is Sri Aurobindo and Mother's. Not one of the group left the Pondicherry area a disciple, but I think all left with a sense of respect for the vision and the work.

I will close with an observation from another American, Mark Twain. Oddly enough, Sri Aurobindo was once invited to see Mark Twain lecture. While Twain was on a speaking tour of India, Sri Aurobindo's employer at the time, the Gaekwad of Baroda, invited Twain to visit Baroda and lecture. Sri Aurobindo was sent an invitation to the lecture, but I suppose, unfortunately, that he didn't attend. Mark Twain's writings on India, a country he truly loved, are some of my favourite descriptions of India. And I close with a quote from him that I think Sri Aurobindo would have appreciated.

Nothing has been left undone, either by man or nature, to make India the most extraordinary country that the Sun visits on his round. Nothing seems to have been forgotten, nothing overlooked.

JOHN SCHLORHOLTZ

Book Extract

HITLER AND HIS GOD

GIVEN the abundance of ‘spurious’ literature about Hitler, Nazism and the Order of the Death’s Head, there would be no point to make if this presentation of new material, from however unfamiliar an angle, did not contribute to the elucidation of some fundamental questions which consensus history has not been able to answer. Respect for the historical facts is elementary. The new generation of German historians tackles facts which up to now were taboo, although essential for the understanding of Hitler and his revolutionary movement. Many of these newly evaluated facts are connected with the birth of National Socialism, others with the psychological involvement of the Germans with their Führer, the Reich and the war, and with the puzzling personality of that Führer which made National Socialism and the war possible. [...]

The four asuras

“When we say that Hitler is possessed by a vital power, it is a statement of fact, not a moral judgement. His being possessed is clear from what he does and the way he does it”, said Sri Aurobindo¹ in January 1939. He confirmed this repeatedly: “One can say that Hitler is not a devil but that he is possessed by one”.² As mentioned before, Sri Aurobindo followed the events in the world closely. The Mother will even say that the war interrupted their yogic work completely, as the global situation was so critical that they could not afford to turn away from it even for a moment.

One finds indications of Sri Aurobindo’s growing concern with Nazism in his correspondence with Nirodbaran, covering the middle 1930s. The run-up to the war and its initial stages were a daily subject of discussion with the small group of disciples gathered around him after he had broken his right thigh. He will even install a loudspeaker connected with an outside radio in his room to hear the BBC-news directly for himself. “I have not seen any other person who has followed the Asura with such an extraordinary fidelity”, he said about Hitler after his invasion of France. “He never considers the possibilities. Possibilities don’t matter. This is how he goes against all the generals... All through he has been guided by inspiration and he has gone ahead depending on luck... He has a most original mind because it is not his own mind.”³

Hitler was, according to the Mother, “very conscious of being the instrument”

1. It should be remembered that Sri Aurobindo’s words, quoted from the *Talks with Sri Aurobindo* and *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, are reported speech, although with great care noted down within hours after they were spoken.

2. Nirodbaran: *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, pp. 190, 575.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 817, 806.

of the asura. We read in a letter to her son André written in October 1938, after the fate of Czechoslovakia was sealed at Munich: “Speaking of recent events, you ask me whether it was ‘a dangerous bluff’ or whether we ‘narrowly escaped disaster’. To assume both at the same time would be nearer to the truth. Hitler was certainly bluffing ... Tactics and diplomacy were used, but on the other hand, behind every human will there are forces in action whose origin is not human and which move consciously towards certain goals. The play of these forces is very complex and generally eludes the human consciousness. But for the sake of explanation and easy understanding, they can be divided into two main opposing tendencies: those that work for the fulfilment of the Divine Work upon earth and those that are opposed to this fulfilment ... Hitler is a choice instrument of these anti-divine forces which want violence, upheavals and war, for they know that all this delays and hinders the action of the divine forces. That is why disaster was very close although no human government consciously wanted it.”⁴

In one of the Mother’s recorded talks to the children of the Ashram school, she said in 1951: “Hitler communicated with a being which he considered to be the Supreme. This being came and gave him advice, it told him everything he had to do. Hitler used to retire into solitude and remain there as long as necessary to come into contact with his ‘guide’ and receive from him the inspirations which afterwards he carried out very faithfully. This being, which Hitler took for the Supreme, was quite simply an *asura*, the one who is called ‘the Lord of Falsehood’ in occultism, and who has proclaimed himself ‘the Lord of the Nations’. His appearance was resplendent, he could mislead anybody except those who had the real occult knowledge and could see what was there behind the appearance. He would have deceived anybody, he was really splendid.

“He generally appeared to Hitler wearing a silver cuirass and helmet; it was as if fire irradiated from his head, and there was an aura of dazzling light around him... He told Hitler everything he wanted him to do; he played with him like with a little monkey or a mouse. He had clearly decided to make Hitler commit all possible excesses till the day he would break his neck—which was what happened... Hitler was a very good medium. He had great mediumistic capacities but he lacked intelligence and discernment. That being could tell him anything whatsoever and he would swallow it all. It was he who pushed Hitler onward little by little. And he was doing this for fun, he did not take it at all seriously. For such beings humans are tiny things with which they play as cats play with mice, till they eat them up.”⁵

“In his youth, [Hitler] was considered an amusing crank and nobody took any notice of him”, said Sri Aurobindo. “It is the vital possession that gives him his size and greatness. Without this vital power he would be a crudely amiable fellow with

4. *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life*: 2, p. 157.

5. *La Mère: Entretiens 1950-51*, pp. 207-08.

some hobbies and eccentricities. It is in this kind of person, whose psychic is underdeveloped and weak, that possession is possible. There is nothing in the being that can resist the Power. In his latest photographs [in January 1939] I find that he is becoming more and more criminal and going down very fast.” It was also in those days that Sri Aurobindo remarked: “It seems strange that the destiny of the whole world should depend on one man and yet it is so, for everybody looks up to him. From one point of view there never was a time when humanity came down so low as it has now. It looks as if a small number of violent men are the arbiters of humanity and the rest of the world is ready to bow down before one man.”⁶

“Hitler was quite simply a human being, and as a human being he was very soft, very sentimental,” said the Mother. “He had the conscience of a simple workman, some said of a shoemaker—in any case of a simple workman or a schoolmaster, something of that kind. But he was possessed... He was a medium, a very good medium. Besides, *it was during spiritist séances that the possession took hold of him.* It was at such times [of possession] that he was seized by those fits which were said to be epileptic. They were not epileptic: they were crises of possession... When he wanted to know something from that being, he went to his villa [on the Obersalzberg] to meditate. There he really made an intense appeal to what he called his god, his supreme god, who was the ‘Lord of the Nations’... Of course [that being] did not appear physically. Hitler was a medium, he ‘saw’, he had a certain power of clairvoyance. And it was at such times that he had his fits... The people in his entourage knew that.”⁷

Rumours of Hitler’s perplexing crises seeped through to the public and were the reason why his opponents called him *Teppichfresser*, the carpet chewer. The best known example of this phenomenon is the last chapter of Hermann Rauschnig’s talks with Hitler, quoted in the previous chapter. The authenticity of Hitler’s crises is still disputed. There are, however, many reports of his states of utter rage, especially in conferences with his generals, when he shrieked, his face became purple and foam appeared in the corners of his mouth; therefore the disposition was certainly present.

Ambassador François-Poncet also mentions that Hitler’s entourage talked about crises he was subject to “which went from excesses of a devastating rage to the plaintive whimperings of a wounded animal... What is sure is that he was not normal; he was a morbid man, near to being demented, a personage from Dostoyevsky, one of the ‘possessed’.”⁸ And there is the following passage in Shirer’s *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* about the days of Hitler’s meeting with Chamberlain, when the Führer was “in a highly nervous state”: “He seemed to be, as I noted in my diary that evening, on the edge of a nervous breakdown. ‘*Teppichfresser!*’ muttered my German companion, an editor who secretly despised the Nazis. And he explained that Hitler

6. Nirodbaran: *Op. cit.*, pp. 194, 85.

7. La Mère: *Entretiens 1953*, pp. 429-30 (emphasis added).

8. André François-Poncet: *Souvenirs d’une ambassade à Berlin*, p. 352.

had been in such a maniacal mood over the Czechs the last few days that on more than one occasion he had lost control of himself completely, hurling himself to the floor and chewing the edge of the carpet. Hence the term ‘carpet eater’. The evening before, while talking with some of the party hacks at [Hotel] Dreesen, I had heard the expression applied to the Führer—in whispers, of course.”⁹

“To be a successful instrument for the Asuric forces is easy, because they take all the movements of your lower nature and make use of them, so that you have no spiritual effort to make.” (Sri Aurobindo¹⁰) There is always somebody to receive the influence [of the demonic forces] and who then immediately thinks that he is a very superior being. For this gives people the feeling that they are really, exceptionally remarkable... This happens to ambitious people, especially to ambitious people who want power, who want to dominate others, who want to be great masters, great instructors, who want to perform miracles and acquire extraordinary powers.” (The Mother¹¹) Not only can opening to such a possession result in the soul’s ruin, it usually also has a devastating physical effect—as shown by the stooping, slouching and trembling Hitler during the last days in the Berlin bunker.

“Hitler opened himself to forces which carried him onward, forces of dark and destructive power. When he still thought that he had free choice of his decisions, he had already for a long time surrendered to an influence which one might call, on good grounds and not only metaphorically, demonic magic. And instead of a man who in his upward climb freed himself step by step from the remnants of a dark past, one saw a being that became more and more possessed, at every step more tightly bound, enslaved, incapacitated, the prey of powers who had him in their grip and did not let go of him anymore... He chose the easier way, let himself go down and entrusted himself to the forces which carried him in his fall.” (Hermann Rauschnig¹²)

“Hitler is a sort of mystic”, said Sri Aurobindo. “Hitler is a new type, an infra-rational mystic, representing the dark counterpart of what we are striving to arrive at: a supra-rational mysticism... He is a mystic, only a mystic of the wrong kind! He goes into solitude for his messages and waits till they come.”¹³ This was the reason why Hitler asserted time and time again that “true knowledge was not to be sought in the examination of intellectual matters”,¹⁴ and that he insisted on unconditional *faith* in his leadership, for which the knowledge was given to him by a hidden but very powerful and irrefutable source. Most of what is stated here in occult terms was sensed, as we have seen, by perceptive contemporaries who lacked an adequate vocabulary to formulate their perceptions. They called Hitler a shaman, a being of light, a miracle

9. William Shirer: *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, p. 391.

10. Sri Aurobindo: *On Himself*, p. 393.

11. La Mère: *Entretiens 1954*, pp. 283-4, passim.

12. Hermann Rauschnig: *Gespräche mit Hitler*, pp. 202-03.

13. Nirodbaran: *Op. cit.*, pp. 84, 957, 919.

14. Ralph Reuth: *Hitler*, p. 183.

man, a superman, a messiah endowed with the powers to accomplish his world-saving mission. This was how his magic influence and his oratorical and ‘mesmeric’ powers were explained.

GEORGES VAN VREKHEM

(With thanks to the author for permission to reproduce a portion—pp. 562-68—of the chapter “The Lord of the Nations” from his recently published book, Hitler and His God.)

*It is by being sincere, courageous, enduring
and honest that you can best serve your
country, make it one and great in the world.*

October 1948

The Mother

(Words of the Mother, CWM, Vol. 13, p. 360)

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