

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LX

No. 6

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

CONTENTS

<i>Sri Aurobindo</i>	
SELF (Poem)	... 421
THE SCIENCE OF CONSCIOUSNESS	... 422
<i>The Mother</i>	
‘NO ERROR CAN PERSIST IN FRONT OF THEE’	... 426
THE POWER OF WORDS	... 427
<i>Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna)</i>	
“SAKUNTALA” AND “SAKUNTALA’S FAREWELL”—CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO	... 429
<i>Priti Das Gupta</i>	
MOMENTS, ETERNAL	... 435
<i>Arun Vaidya</i>	
AN ETERNAL DREAM	... 440
<i>Prabhjot Kulkarni</i>	
WHO AM I (Poem)	... 447
<i>S. V. Bhatt</i>	
PAINTING AS SADHANA: KRISHNALAL BHATT (1905-1990)	... 448
<i>Narad (Richard Eggenberger)</i>	
TEHMI-BEN—NARAD REMEMBERS	... 456
<i>Sitangshu Chakraborty</i>	
LORD AND MOTHER NATURE (Poem)	... 464
<i>Bibha Biswas</i>	
THE BIRTH OF “BATIK WORK”	... 465

<i>Prithwindra Mukherjee</i>		
BANKIMCHANDRA CHATTERJEE	...	468
<i>Chunilal Chowdhury</i>		
A WORLD WITHOUT WAR	...	476
<i>Prema Nandakumar</i>		
DEVOTIONAL POETRY IN TAMIL	...	480
<i>Pujalal</i>		
NAVANIT STORIES	...	490

SELF

He said, "I am egoless, spiritual, free,"
Then swore because his dinner was not ready.
I asked him why. He said, "It is not me,
But the belly's hungry god who gets unsteady."

I asked him why. He said, "It is his play.
I am unmoved within, desireless, pure.
I care not what may happen day by day."
I questioned him, "Are you so very sure?"

He answered, "I can understand your doubt.
But to be free is all. It does not matter
How you may kick and howl and rage and shout,
Making a row over your daily platter.

"To be aware of self is liberty.
Self I have got and, having self, am free."

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 151)

THE SCIENCE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Vedantic Psychology

1

BODY, brain, nervous system are instruments of consciousness, they are not its causes.

Consciousness is its own cause, a producer of objects and images and not their product. We are blinded to this truth because when we think of consciousness, it is of the individual we think.

We look at the world in the way and speak of it in the terms of individual consciousness; but it is of the universal consciousness that the world is a creation.

The individual participates subconsciously and superconsciously in the universal consciousness. But the embodied individual in his physical or waking mind does not so much participate as arrive at participation. He is not directly part of it, but reproduces it by a partial indirect action, and in reproducing selects and varies, combines, discombines, new combines and develops his selections.

In the body his waking mind receives its impressions from the outside world and reacts upon them. Body and nerves are his instrument for the impressions and the reaction; therefore all their apparent instrumentation is nervous, physical, atomically combined, a physiological apparatus for a battery of nervous energy.

Physical, nervous and sensory impressions are the means by which this individual is induced to put himself into waking relations with the physical universe. Physical, nervous and sensory reactions are his means for entering into that relation.

*

He,—but who is he? The mental being in his mentality.

Who is it that feels himself to be separate from the world or things in the universe to be outside his being? Not the Spirit, for the Spirit contains the universe, creates and combines all relations. All personalities act in the one spirit, as our own multiple personalities act in one being. Spiritual being is their continent, they are not its constituents, but its outer results and the diverse representative selves of its consciousness and action.

Not, either, the supramental being. For the supramental being is one with the spirit in its original or basic consciousness, in its idea-consciousness it is ideally comprehensive of cosmic things or, if we must speak in terms of space, commensurate with the universe. The supramental being with one action of his Idea-self can regard universal being as his object of will and knowledge. That attitude is the seed of mind. It can regard it as contained in itself and itself contained in it, and in that way know and govern it. But it can too, like Spirit in its real action know all things by identity

and govern all things by identity. Externality of being does not enter into supramental experience.

Supermind can see mind externalising objects; it can itself take a particular viewpoint fronting objects but it is in itself that it fronts them, as we front our subjective operations in mind. It does not regard them as something outside its own being, as we regard physically objects.

Mind is a delegation from supermind, which primarily regards existence as an object fronting its vision. Mental being also need not regard the universe as quite separate from or outside its own being. Subliminal mentality is capable by extension of a comprehensive relation with cosmic things and of entering into unity with the universe. Mind's starting-point is not a containing universal vision or a knowledge by identity, but an individualised viewpoint from which it sees the universe. Still mind can arrive at a sort of containing vision, a mentalised cosmic consciousness.

What then compels embodied mind to see objects externally and by separation? It is compelled by the fact of physical embodiment. Body is a self-limitation of conscious being by which mind is rigidly bound down to its own tendency of separative individuation.

Body, including all physical formations from the atom upwards, is a device of Nature for the extreme of conscious individuation. Empirically it is immaterial whether it is an image created by consciousness or a real substance of being. For practical purposes we may take it as a substantial formation. In fact body is a knot of conscious being built up by its own energy, instinct with nervous or subnervous life,—because the energy is in dynamic actuality a living energy—cognizing and cognized by subconscious or superficially conscious sense, because the energy is in a certain inherent reality a conscious energy. It is a knot indivisible in reality from universal Consciousness and Force and Substance but in a certain empirical utility of selective action separative rather than separate. Body, not really separate, is limited by subconscious instinct of separation and energetic tendency of separation, but not capable of effecting real separation. All its movements are a practical result of selective experience and selective action which is based on a phenomenon of separate physical being.

Body is separated from other bodies by intervention of universal matter, but both of the separate bodies are one with the indivisible intervening matter, therefore not separate in reality, but indivisibly connected in energy, and one matter in fundamental reality.

Put otherwise, two bodies are images or formations of one indivisible ethereal space, which is in reality one indivisible movement of material energy, life-energy, mind energy.

This inseparable connection and fundamental unity of bodies become of immense importance when we examine the relation of the appearances of consciousness to its reality.

Mind in body has to begin from the separation proper to body. Embodied mind

is bound down in its root-action to a separative view of the universe. This is its waking view; subliminally, whether in subconscious mentality or where it approaches or touches the superconscient being, it is capable of bridging the artificial separation.

Taking this separative basis of waking consciousness for itself and for a reality, the house of imprisoned awareness from which it looks at the world, it is bound to see objects as external to this awareness and this conscious vision. Embodied mind is as if a walled house were to have a thinking soul and spirit (air and ether) and look at things not in itself as things outside through windows (the senses), receive the touches of the outside air (nervous life-impacts) as if other than the air in itself; even its own ether as other than the rest of ether (my soul and other souls). This is the self and not-self of our mentality.

Mind subliminal is able, though not normally habituated, to bridge the gulf between self and not-self; where it approaches the superconscient, this gulf lessens and conscience of oneness grows upon the being.

Body is only the instrument and basis of this extreme separative individuation, not its first cause. Mind itself is a prior cause; but mentality in itself need not be rigidly separative: especially, subliminal mind has a large integrating power. Mind in itself is only the basis of a relatively separative plurality; mind in body increases this relation into a phenomenon of absolutely separative plurality.

From this basis of externalising individuation and separative plurality waking mental consciousness in the physical universe commences its operations.

2

Psychology is the knowledge of consciousness and its operations.

A complete psychology must be a complex of the science of mind, its operations and its relations to life and body with intuitive and experimental knowledge of the nature of mind and its relations to supermind and spirit.

A complete psychology cannot be a pure natural science, but must be a compound of science and metaphysical knowledge.

This necessity arises from the difference between natural or physical sciences and psychology.

A physical science is a knowledge of physical processes which leads inevitably to action and use of physical processes. The scientist may only regard scientific truth and not utility; but he can find only truth of the process of things, not truth of the nature of things. His discoveries bring about inevitably an utility for action; for all truth of process is an utility for action. Even when not the aim of science, process and utility are the soul and body of physical science. Matter itself is only an utility of Spirit or Being or Nature for physical process and action. Material energy is an instrumental dynamis for that utility or else an original dynamis which has no other sense of its operations. We get beyond to a higher sense only when [we] get beyond material

to mental, psychical and spiritual energy, to mind, soul and spirit.

Debateable it is whether if we knew the real essence of Matter and the basic, not only the apparent, relations of mind, soul and spirit to matter and material operations, we could not arrive at an infinitely more potent use of physical process and operations. But in any case these things cannot be discovered by physical science; it has its limits and cannot exceed its limits.

Psychology may begin as a natural science, but it deals already with superphysical and must end in a metaphysical enquiry. If one side of the process it studies and its method of enquiry is physical, the other and more important is non-physical; it is a direct observation of mental operations by mind without any regard to their physiological meaning, support, substratum or instrumentation.

If this is in the first place a study of process and involves an utility for psychological action, yet what it leads to inevitably is not that action but an enquiry into the nature of mental consciousness.

This necessity arises from the immediate perception by mind of something beyond and behind its operations, some energy of hidden consciousness greater than our apparent mentality. To know what that is, we have to resort to a metaphysical enquiry.

Consciousness is itself found to be not essentially a process,—although in mind it appears as a process, but the very nature of self-existent being. Being or the Self of things can only be known by metaphysical—not necessarily intellectual—knowledge.

This self-knowledge has two inseparable aspects, a psychological knowledge of the process of Being, a metaphysical knowledge of its principles and essentiality.

We find that one of these principles of being is energy. Energy is an eternal and inherent power of conscious being. Since all energy is convertible to action, this knowledge also contains a side of psychological and spiritual utility,—eventually perhaps even, since life and body are results of the energy of being and supports of its action, of vital and physical utility.

Two great utilities open before psychology. We may acquire the possibility of a greater being, consciousness and energy. We may open up the possibility and discover the psychical means or process [of] becoming consciously one with our original self-existent Being, with God, the Absolute, the Transcendence. To lead up to these possibilities is the aim of Vedantic psychology.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, pp. 302-07)

‘NO ERROR CAN PERSIST IN FRONT OF THEE’

January 8, 1914

LET us shun the paths that are too easy and ask no effort, the paths which give us the illusion of having reached our goal; let us shun that negligence which opens the door to every downfall, that complacent self-admiration which leads to every abyss. Let us understand that however great may have been our efforts, our struggles, even our victories, compared with the distance yet to be travelled, the one we have already covered is nothing; and that all are equal—infinitesimal grains of dust or identical stars—before Eternity.

But Thou art the conqueror of all obstacles, the Light that illumines all ignorance, the Love that vanquishes all pride. And no error can persist in front of Thee.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, p. 50)

THE POWER OF WORDS

It seems unnecessary to draw your attention to the quantity of useless words that are uttered each day; this evil is well known to all, although very few people think of remedying it.

But there are many other words which are spoken needlessly. That is to say, in the course of the day, we often have the opportunity of expressing a helpful wish by pronouncing one word or another, provided that we know how to put the appropriate thought behind the words.

But too often we lose this opportunity of drawing a beneficial mental atmosphere around the people we know and thus of truly helping them. It would be very useful to remedy this neglect.

To do this, we must refuse to allow our minds to remain in that state of vague and passive imprecision which is almost constant in most people.

To cure ourselves progressively of this somnolence, we can, when pronouncing a word, force ourselves to reflect upon its exact meaning, its true import, in order to make it fully effective.

In this regard, we can say that the active power of words comes from three different causes.

The first two lie in the word itself, which has become a battery of forces. The third lies in the fact of living integrally the deep thought expressed by the word when we pronounce it.

Naturally, if these three causes of effectiveness are combined, the power of the word is considerably enhanced.

1) There are certain words whose resonance in the physical world is the perfect vibratory materialisation of the more subtle vibration produced by the thought in its own domain.

If we examine closely this similarity between the vibrations of thought and sound, we can discover the limited number of root syllables which express the most general ideas, and which are to be found in most spoken languages with an almost identical meaning. (This origin of language should not be confused with the origin of written languages, which are of an altogether different nature and correspond to different needs.)

2) There are other words which have been repeated in certain circumstances for hundreds of years and which are instinct with the mental forces of all those who have pronounced them. They are true batteries of energy.

3) Finally, there are words which assume an immediate value when they are pronounced, as a result of the living thought of the one who pronounces them.

To illustrate what I have just said with an example, here is a very powerful word, for it can combine the qualities of all three categories: it is the Sanskrit word "AUM".

It is used in India to express the divine Immanence. There, it is associated with

every meditation, every contemplation, every yogic practice.

More than any other sound, this sound "AUM" gives rise to a feeling of peace, of serenity, of eternity.

Moreover, this word is instinct with the mental forces which for centuries all those who have used it have accumulated around the idea that it expresses; and, for Hindus especially, it has the true power of bringing one into contact with the divine Essence it evokes.

And as Orientals have a religious mind and the habit of concentration, few pronounce this word without putting into it the conviction that is needed to make it fully effective.

In China, a similar effect is obtained with a word of identical meaning and somewhat similar sound, the word "TAO".

Our western languages are less expressive; in their present form, they are too far removed from the root language which gave birth to them. But we can always animate a word by the power of our living and active thought.

Besides, there are formulas which we could profitably add to all those in common use.

These formulas were used in certain ancient schools of initiation. They served as greetings, and in the mouth of one who knew how to think them, they had a very special power of action.

The disciples, the neophytes who were taking their first steps on the path, were greeted: "May the peace of equilibrium be with you."

All those who by their constant and progressive inner and outer attitude had shown their deep and lasting goodwill, were greeted: "May the highest good be yours."

And in certain instructors manifesting especially high forces, this word was endowed with the power of transmitting true gifts, for example, the gift of healing.

18 June 1912

THE MOTHER

(*Words of Long Ago*, CWM, Vol. 2, pp. 66-68)

“SAKUNTALA” AND “SAKUNTALA’S FAREWELL” CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

(Continued from the issue of May 2007)

Part 2: 1933

Sri Aurobindo—

You must remember that, before “Euthanasia”, you had declared some half a dozen lines of my blank verse to be successful. I have incorporated them in the following longer flight. I anxiously await your estimate.

SAKUNTALA’S FAREWELL

“Thy beauty quivers through my aching sense
Into my soul, O forest, like a fire!
Nor shall my memory fail thy fragile buds [1]
Of poor wild wayside nameless fragrances,
Thin grasses with unrecognised small discs
Of humble colour—they too shall be mine!
For through the widening silence of my thought
The warrior wind, the tall tree’s gorgeous cry,
The chilling slashed monotony of rain,
The frog’s barbaric wail, the sedge’s sigh
Pass like one mystic splendour... O pure spirit,
for

→Love of thy beauty has made even my slumber
The smile of an invisible great light
Upon each limb; but thou hast also taught me
From the profundities of voiceless calm
To wake with an ever simple gay child-heart—
As, when first falls the emerging dawn of silver [2]
Upon thy green wide murmurless wood-gloom,
The solemn meditation of slow night
Breaks into glimmering bird-melody!...”

Sri Aurobindo’s comment:

All is very good except for the following defects

[1] “Nor shall my memory” etc. is rather incoherent: it presupposes other preceding details of the forest’s beauty which are not there.

[2] The 4th line from the end has no rhythm or else an ineffective flat rhythm.

[3] Is it only a fragment of a poem? If so, it is all right—otherwise it sounds scrappy and without a close.

It is very good poetry, however, and there are many fine lines.

26 June 1933

[A further query added at the bottom of the sheet]

I propose to add one line before the first, to prepare for “Nor shall my memory” etc.:

“With branchèd vastnesses of leafy rapture”

(I could have worked in more detail in some way or another, but as many details of the forest occur in the third sentence of the poem, it would have produced a kind of repetitive effect)

and to modify the fourth line from the end as well as the third thus:

“As, when the white emerging dawn first falls
Upon thy large green murmurless wood-gloom.”

Another little change (see → in margin) I have made to relieve somewhat the congestion of “of’s” in the poem. What is your opinion about all these alterations? How to remedy defect [3] in your list I don’t know. I thought there was some subtle consistence in the fragment which might allow it to stand by itself—the harmonisation of the sublime and the simple in Sakuntala’s consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo’s comment:

[1] The line you have added is good but too slight—there is a scrappiness in the building of the thought which diminishes the poetic effect. There should be at least 2 lines “The branched vastnesses of leafy rapture” and another continuing it to prepare the “Nor”—you can hardly do it with less. Your objection does not stand as the later details are incidental to the forest’s moods while here it is the physical features of the forest itself that are being presented.

[2] The second alteration is quite sufficient.

[3] The difficulty is that your last line neither in sense nor rhythm sounds like a close. There ought to be two more lines giving in some massive and monumental way the truth of the soul of the forest.

27 June 1933

Sri Aurobindo—

I am really thankful for your suggestions. My sense of form is not fully developed yet. This morning, after reading your reply, I tried to concentrate on you and throw a hook, as it were, into the subliminal to get the required lines out. I got more lines than you had mentioned, but I don’t suppose you had made any special limitation. May I know your total impression of the poem now? Also, whose blank verse seems to have had a predominating influence on its rhythm and style?

SAKUNTALA’S FAREWELL

A
 “~~With~~ huge sky-passion sprouting from the earth [1]
 In branchèd vastnesses of leafy rapture,
 Thy beauty quivers through my aching sense
 Into my soul, O Forest, like a fire!
 Nor shall my memory fail thy fragile buds
 Of poor wild wayside nameless fragrances,
 Thin grasses with unrecognised small discs
 Of humble colour—they too shall be mine!
 For through the widening silence of my thought
 The warrior wind, the tall tree’s gorgeous cry,
 The chilling slashed monotony of rain,
 The frog’s barbaric wail, the sedge’s sigh
 Pass like one mystic splendour... O pure Spirit,
 Love for thy beauty has made even my slumber
 The smile of an invisible great light
 Upon each limb; but thou hast also taught me
 From the profundities of voiceless calm
 To wake with an ever simple gay child-heart—
 As, when the white emerging dawn first falls
 Upon thy large green murmurless wood-gloom,
 The solemn meditation of slow night
 Breaks into glimmering bird-melody!...
 I kneel, O Master: all my life is thine! [2]
 My whole self flames and flowers, an eternal
 Wonder impregnate with thy paradise[;] [3]
 Each has d here an
~~Where~~ each hue kindles ~~into~~ ecstasy, [4]
 left
 Each swaying shadow ~~leaves~~ a benison.” [5]

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

[1] A

[2] [*Line shifted to become last line*]

[3] paradise;

[4] Each hue has kindled here an ecstasy,

[5] left

I suggest the alteration of "With" at the beginning into "A"—it becomes then much more poetically effective and more in key with the style of the rest. As for the last 5 lines they will no[t] do as they are; the last two lines in this poem have a weak rhythmic movement, the close is again no close at all—it seems to leave something still to say. I propose to change these two lines which will give a more vigorous turn, without in the least altering the sense. And I propose to turn the first line of the five into the last of the poem—it is a magnificent closing line and leaves nothing more to be said after it.

P.S. I don't know what influence—probably several have coalesced together. Perhaps Keats, Yeats, "Love and Death" and one or two others.

28 June 1933

*

Sri Aurobindo—

I had noticed, and Harin also remarked, a monotony in certain consecutive line-endings in my "Sakuntala's Farewell":

... "To wake with an ever simple gay child-heart;
As, when the white emerging dawn first falls
Upon thy large green murmurless wood-gloom,
The solemn meditation of slow night."

Do you think it is necessary to modify the third line of the above into

"Upon thy murmurless green mazy gloom"

or something better still with a long ending like "murmurless"

"Upon thy green gloom mazy, murmurless"?

In the second change, however, the "s's" clash a little with those of the next line, don't they?

Sri Aurobindo’s comment:

It would be a great pity to sacrifice the perfect and colourful description

“Upon thy large green murmurless wood-gloom”

with its felicitous combination of words for so commonplace and outworn a phrase as “mazy gloom”. Obviously use of these weighted line-endings has to go. I would suggest

As when first falls the white emerging dawn

If the third line is to be altered, it also can only be by a change of order

On thy large wood-gloom green and murmurless,

which would be more rhythmical, but less effective in phrase than the present line.

1 July 1933

[A further question added at the bottom of the page]

The poem opens with 7 lines ending in nouns; then comes one ending in a pronoun, 7 again in nouns, another one in a pronoun, and, if the dawn-line is changed, there will be 6 once more with noun-endings. A verbal and an adjectival ending offers a good relief, especially as towards the close, after another adjectival ending, there is a triplet of noun-terminations, followed by a last pronoun-close. So I would prefer “On thy large wood-gloom green and murmurless” in the interest of the whole, unless you assured me that such a plethora of noun-terminations doesn’t matter, even if they come in a long succession. On the other hand, I wonder if the “and” of the changed line makes any kind of disagreeable effect with the similar sounds in the third line after it:

“The solemn meditation of slow night
Breaks into glimmering bird-melody....
My whole self flames and flowers, an eternal”
etc. etc.

[Sri Aurobindo’s answer written above these 3 quoted lines]

Not at all.

*

Sri Aurobindo,

I don’t as yet feel quite confident of my capacity to write blank verse. Just after

writing “Sakuntala’s Farewell” I had an instinctive sense of the necessary knowledge, but now again I am feeling doubtful. So please help me on to some kind of terra firma by whatever hints it is possible to give and whatever tact possible to impart.

Sri Aurobindo’s reply:

It is not easy. Building of each line, building of the passage, variation of balance, the arrangement of tone and stress and many other things have to be mastered before you can be a possessor of the instrument—unless you are born with a blank-verse genius, but that is rare.

[7 July 1933]

*

[Part of a letter by Sri Aurobindo]

...you achieved what was necessary in your Shakuntala’s Farewell, where each line was a cut gem by itself and there was sufficient variation of movement or at least of rhythmic tone;...

8 July 1933

*

[Part of a letter]

Sri Aurobindo—

It will be, I am sure, very helpful to study your hacking. Such study is necessary when one hasn’t a “natural” turn for a medium but yet feels an impulsion to attempt it until the capacity is evoked. As I wrote before, I thought some kind of capacity [*to write blank verse*] had been kindled, so to speak, at the time I composed “Euthanasia” and “Sakuntala’s Farewell”. But the spark went out somehow or rather got very much dimmed....

19 July 1933

*

(To be concluded)

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

MOMENTS, ETERNAL

(Continued from the issue of May 2007)

The Mother's Close Rapport with Plants, Flowers and Trees

AFTER Her tennis, the Mother would come to the Playground and take a short walk. The children continued playing while She walked around the Playground. On the northern side of the Playground there was a boarding for little boys and girls. A neem tree stood inside next to the wall, a very beautiful neem tree it was indeed. When the flowers bloomed on this tree you couldn't take your eyes off them. Their sweet fragrance filled the whole Playground. The Mother's name for these flowers was 'Spiritual atmosphere'. When the Playground was renovated and a new building erected in its place the boarding had to be torn down and this neem tree uprooted.

I had the privilege of walking alone with the Mother from the very beginning. One day all of a sudden She had told me in the Tennis Ground:

"We will go to the Playground and walk a little."

So we were walking there that day when the Mother suddenly stopped under the neem tree and leaning against the wall She started telling me many stories. The Mother loved this neem tree very much. The flowers of this tree would suffuse the Playground with their spiritual atmosphere. The tree looked unbelievably beautiful as if the Mother's love had increased its life force. Like Krishna who by playing his heart-rending flute under the *Kadamba* tree gave it his love, the Mother too would stand under that neem tree and permeate humanity with this all-pervading spiritual atmosphere. The Mother had named the *Kadamba* flower 'Supramental Sun'. I still remember the *Kadamba* tree in Doctor Patil's courtyard when it was all covered with flowers.

The Mother did not like trees and plants to be cut down or leaves, flowers and fruits plucked without reason. Trees would go and complain to the Mother. The famous Banyan tree in the centre of Auroville came one day to the Mother to express its grief. So the Mother sent a sadhak to Auroville to find out what was wrong with this tree. When the sadhak arrived there he saw an axe had been stuck into the tree. He at once removed it and returned to the Mother to inform Her about it. There are innumerable such stories that reflect this deep friendship between the Mother and trees.

The Mother used to go for walks in a famous park of Paris which had huge ancient trees in it. The Mother meditated under one such tree. One day while She was meditating these trees came to Her to tell Her of their sorrow. It had been decided to chop some of them down. The trees complained to Her in their language. We could never imagine that such things could happen.

On the first day of every month the Mother gave with Her own hands to all the inmates of the Ashram their essential material requirements for the month. Around

two o'clock the Mother would go through Pavitra-da's room, cross the terrace and go to the south-facing room of this block and take Her seat. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had lived in this block at one time. Everyone came in a line and took from the Mother's hands his or her monthly requirements. The first of every month (known as 'Prosperity' day) was a particularly busy day for the Mother. The Mother's day began with a rush of activity right from the morning. As soon as we were informed that the Mother had come back to the Ashram people would rush through different streets as if in a race to see who would climb the staircase and arrive near Her first. How could we leave the Mother sitting alone! Needless to say that no one could keep up with the Mother's pace. She did all Her work with such lightning speed that even machines lagged behind. Even while receiving the blessings from the Mother's hand I would get extremely nervous for fear that the flowers might drop from my hands in the rush.

An amusing incident comes to mind. On one such 'Prosperity' day I was walking to the Ashram in a hurry. I knew that the Mother had already reached because just ahead of me a gentleman was heading for the Ashram with his son. They were walking quite fast and from time to time the father kept urging this little boy to walk faster. Poor boy! He was so tiny that he could not keep pace with his father's stride.

"How can I walk as fast as you? I am a *shishu* (a little boy)."

The father angrily exclaimed:

"You are not a *shishu* but a *poshu* (animal)!"

As soon as I heard this I burst into such uncontrollable laughter that I had to sit down on the footpath. Only when they had moved further away could I start walking again.

The Mother had finished the 'Prosperity' distribution and come out. Lots of roses had bloomed in the pots on the terrace. It was still very hot in the afternoon and the sun was very strong. As soon as the Mother arrived in the passage through Pavitra-da's room She cried out loud:

"Don't pluck them!"

Nolini-da, Amrita-da, Pavitra-da and the others who were present there were taken aback on hearing the Mother's voice. She said:

"These roses came and complained to me that they should not be plucked at odd times."

The poor sadhak who wanted to pluck the roses and offer them to Her was terribly embarrassed.

Similarly when the Mother was in Japan and She would go to pluck carrots or some such vegetables a few among them would cry out:

"Pluck me! Pluck me!"

And those that were not ready would exclaim:

"Don't pluck me!"

Isn't it extraordinary! The Mother has such an intimate rapport with all things. It is through incidents like these that we found out about the Mother's deep kinship

with the world of plants and flowers. We came to know that plants could talk. Even the scientists have not yet been able to prove that plants can communicate. Of course Jagdish Chandra Bose had discovered that there was life in plants and that they could feel pain and sorrow just like us, that plants had consciousness and they felt joy and sadness. He invented an instrument in order to prove this about plants. And that marked a new beginning in the world of science. Jagdish Chandra Bose became a much-admired man among scientists.

So this neem tree was finally not chopped down. Pranab and the other elders knew how much the Mother loved trees. However this tree had to be removed from there so it was finally decided to transplant it by lifting it out of the soil with a crane without causing it too much pain. The tree was finally moved with a lot of patience and effort and it was planted in the Dining Room garden near the gate. Unfortunately the poor tree could not bear the shock of all this transplanting. And it did not survive. We all felt as if we had lost a member of our own family. You readers might feel a little astonished by all this but this is how we learnt from the Mother to love trees.

There is so much research going on today in the world of plants and trees. Deserts have been created in so many countries because too many trees have been cut down. That is why people have at last woken up. It is only now that they have realised what a bond of friendship exists between man and nature. In several countries movements for planting trees have been initiated. Many organisations have been set up to promote this and they even have a tree-planting day every year!

I got diverted into telling you so many things while talking about this neem tree. So let me get back to the real subject. The Mother came and stopped under this neem tree and suddenly said:

“You know at every second everyone is put to a test.”

I was taken aback. A test? I had just completed my studies and come to the Ashram. I felt a huge relief at having finished with school. The moment I heard the word ‘test’ it made me think at once of school and college. I was extremely scared of tests. Even now I dream that I am getting into a room to take a test. Everyone is sitting in his assigned seat and has begun writing the answers. I open the test paper and I am taken aback. What’s this? But this is the history paper and I had come prepared for English! What will I do now? You can’t imagine how terrified I felt. And just then I would wake up and realise it was only a dream.

During Durga-puja I had once gone to my uncle’s house (Patgram Niyogi House). I loved wandering through the fields of the village. Good riddance to books! In the evening, incandescent gas lamps were lit in the outer and inner courtyards. The children went wild with joy but then all of a sudden the thought would cross our minds: “Oh Lord! Our annual exams will start just after the puja!” And in a second our joy would just evaporate! It was really dreadful! What kind of a life was this? There was no running away from exams.

I turned to the Mother and said:

“No, Mother! How can anyone pass? Impossible! Nobody can pass such tests! It is not easy to pass tests every second.”

The Mother laughed:

“There are many who do it. They pass these tests of every moment. Especially in the world outside there are many who do it quite easily.”

I kept looking at the Mother in disbelief. I somehow was not convinced by what She said. I told Her:

“Perhaps, Mother, some can do it in the world outside but here in the Ashram nobody can.”

When I kept repeating this, the Mother replied:

“In the Ashram too there are many who go through these tests at every moment successfully. There are five or six who pass them wonderfully.”

I could not say anything more. I just stood silently leaning against the wall and the whole of life appeared to me like a huge riddle.

Every day at the end of the class the Mother would stretch Her arms and tell me: “Can you lift me up?”

And an impish smile would light up Her face. I would get very nervous being unable to lift Her up.

Then the Mother said:

“Now you sit and just see how I make you stand up.”

So I had to sit down. On the floor, naturally. With just one jerk the Mother raised me up on my feet. And then how She laughed! She looked like a beautiful young girl. I just could not feel at ease and was always a little uncomfortable. I would hear the Mother’s laughter echo within me all day.

A few days later another girl called Minu was allowed to join this class. So we were then two to study with the Mother. And She would recount to us so many stories and tell us so many things. We would just keep staring at Her and fill our eyes to our heart’s content. As soon as the class was over the Mother stretched Her arms in front and said to me:

“Lift me up now.”

And much as I tried to pull Her by the arms I just could not move Her. I would break out in a sweat out of shame and embarrassment. It was just impossible for me to lift Her out of the chair.

The Mother would then laugh a lot, enjoying the spectacle. That open-hearted laughter-filled face of the Mother appears before my eyes even today. Then it was Minu’s turn. She would ask Minu:

“Now let me see if you can pull me out of my chair.”

And Minu would succeed in pulling Her out of the chair with her two arms. And the Mother exclaimed gleefully:

“Ah! You are strong too!”

And putting Her arms on our shoulders She would start walking again. Then

She went into Her room and selected different types of flowers to give us. She would look at our faces for some time and say:

“I would sketch your faces if I had time.”

And She kept standing at the open door and watched us go down the staircase. We would go down a few steps and then turn around to look at Her one more time. She would then wave “*Au revoir*” and close the door.

One day at the end of the Mother’s class when She was walking out into the front room, one of Her attendants started groaning in pain from a headache. Hearing her groan like that in front of the Mother I became a little nervous. The Mother suddenly turned very solemn and looking at us declared:

“Only sincerity touches me.”

We just stiffened with fear hearing these words from the Mother. My God! What power there was in that voice! Who would have said that just a few moments earlier the Mother had been heartily laughing and talking with both of us? How She used to overwhelm us with Her interesting, amusing stories! This change of the Mother’s face from moment to moment would never cease to amaze us but we never managed to understand the mystery.

(To be continued)

PRITI DAS GUPTA

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

One must let things grow just as plants grow in Nature. Every too rigid form or limitation we would seek to impose on them before their time, would hamper their natural development and would sooner or later have to be destroyed.

The Divine in Nature creates nothing final; everything is temporary and at the same time as perfect as it is possible for it to be under the circumstances at the time.

The Mother

(Words of the Mother, CWM, Vol. 15, p. 11)

AN ETERNAL DREAM

MULTIPLICITY of the Oneness is an intriguing spiritual reality. The Indian scriptures have frequently propounded that He is everything and that everything is He. In Oneness, being different is an accentuation of diversity in harmony expressing and seeking delight of many-fold manifestation. In the context of this spiritual truth, it is not so surprising that the Mother's two creations—Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville both have Her dream as the inspirational genesis. It was in 1954 that the Mother openly talked about Sri Aurobindo Ashram as Her dream:

There should be somewhere upon earth a place that no nation could claim as its sole property, a place where all human beings of goodwill, sincere in their aspiration, could live freely as citizens of the world, obeying one single authority, that of the supreme Truth, a place of peace, concord, harmony, where all the fighting instincts of man would be used exclusively to conquer the causes of his sufferings and miseries, to surmount his weakness and ignorance, to triumph over his limitations and incapacities; a place where the needs of the spirit and the care for progress would get precedence over the satisfaction of desires and passions, the seeking for material pleasures and enjoyments.

In this place, children would be able to grow and develop integrally without losing contact with their soul. Education would be given not with a view to passing examinations and getting certificates and posts but for enriching the existing faculties and bringing forth new ones. In this place titles and positions would be supplanted by opportunities to serve and organise. The needs of the body will be provided for equally in the case of each and everyone. In the general organisation intellectual, moral and spiritual superiority will find expression not in the enhancement of the pleasures and powers of life but in the increase of duties and responsibilities.

Artistic beauty in all forms, painting, sculpture, music, literature, will be available equally to all, the opportunity to share in the joys they give being limited solely by each one's capacities and not by social or financial position. For in this ideal place money would be no more the sovereign lord. Individual value will have a greater importance than the value due to material wealth and social position. Work would not be there as the means for gaining one's livelihood, it would be the means whereby to express oneself, develop one's capacities and possibilities, while doing at the same time service to the whole group, which on its side, would provide for each one's subsistence and for the field of his work. In brief, it would be a place where the relations among human beings, usually based almost exclusively upon competition and strife, would be replaced by relations of emulation for doing better, for collaboration, relations of real brotherhood.

The earth is certainly not ready to realise such an ideal, for mankind does not yet possess the necessary knowledge to understand and accept it nor the indispensable conscious force to execute it. That is why I call it a dream.

Yet, this dream is on the way of becoming a reality. That is exactly what we are seeking to do at the Ashram of Sri Aurobindo on a small scale, in proportion to our modest means. The achievement is indeed far from being perfect but it is progressive; little by little we advance towards our goal, which, we hope, one day we shall be able to hold before the world as a practical and effective means of coming out of the present chaos in order to be born into a more true, more harmonious new life.¹

To create a platform for the Truth Consciousness seeking to manifest in the world, first the Ashram was formed. It provided diverse elements of mankind for the march of transformation of collective consciousness and to play the pivotal role as a laboratory of mankind's spiritualisation with the intense practice of Integral Yoga.

Integral Yoga is also the "Purna Yoga"—the Complete Yoga because of its all-encompassing objectives. Sri Aurobindo had asserted that, "By this Yoga we not only seek the Infinite, but we call upon the Infinite to unfold himself in human life."² Sri Aurobindo had cautioned his disciples, "The knowledge of God is not to be gained by weighing the feeble arguments of reason for or against his existence; it is to be gained only by self-transcending and absolute consecration, aspiration and experience. Nor does that experience proceed by anything like rational scientific experiment or rational philosophic thinking."³ He had clearly demarcated the path required for us to follow: "A divine life upon earth, the ideal we have placed before us, can only come about by a spiritual change of our being and a radical and fundamental change, an evolution or revolution of our nature. The embodied being upon earth would have to rise out of the domination over it of its veils of mind, life and body into the full consciousness and possession of its spiritual reality, and its nature also would have to be lifted out of the consciousness and power of consciousness proper to a mental, vital and physical being into the greater consciousness and greater power of being and the larger and freer life of the spirit."⁴ For a better understanding and pursuit of such an all encompassing, unique and pioneering spiritual endeavour, one needs to follow the Sunlit Path charted by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.... However there is a categorical pre-requirement of purity of soul to be the seeker of the Truth:

Yes, there are happy ways near to God's sun;
But few are they who tread the sunlit path;
Only the pure in soul can walk in light.⁵

Sri Aurobindo provided the contextual ideal of human unity and its spiritual relevance is increasingly becoming urgent:

A spiritual religion of humanity is the hope of the future. By this is not meant what is ordinarily called a universal religion, a system, a thing of creed and intellectual belief and dogma and outward rite. Mankind has tried unity by that means; it has failed and deserved to fail, because there can be no universal religious system, one in mental creed and vital form. The inner spirit is indeed one, but more than any other the spiritual life insists on freedom and variation in its self-expression and means of development. A religion of humanity means the growing realisation that there is a secret Spirit, a divine Reality, in which we are all one, that humanity is its highest present vehicle on earth, that the human race and the human being are the means by which it will progressively reveal itself here.... There must be the realisation by the individual that only in the life of his fellow-men is his own life complete. There must be the realisation by the [human] race that only on the free and full life of the individual can its own perfection and permanent happiness be founded...in this direction lies the eventual road. No doubt, if this is only an idea like the rest, it will go the way of all ideas. But if it is at all a truth of our being, then it must be the truth to which all is moving and in it must be found the means of a fundamental, an inner, a complete, a real human unity which would be the one secure base of a unification of human life. A spiritual oneness which would create a psychological oneness not dependent upon any intellectual or outward uniformity and compel a oneness of life not bound up with its mechanical means of unification, but ready always to enrich its secure unity by a free inner variation and a freely varied outer self-expression, this would be the basis for a higher type of human existence.⁶

The Mother was also very emphatic about the importance of human unity for the human race to collectively seek the Supramental Truth and She had categorically expressed in *Bulletin of Physical Education*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, April 1952:

...The most important one [idea] is that the unity of the human race can be achieved neither through uniformity nor through domination and subjection. A synthetic organisation of all nations, each one occupying its own place in accordance with its own genius and the role it has to play in the whole, can alone effect a comprehensive and progressive unification which may have some chance of enduring. And if the synthesis is to be a living thing, the grouping should be done around a central idea as high and wide as possible, and in which all tendencies, even the most contradictory, would find their respective places. That idea is to give man the conditions of life necessary for preparing him to manifest the new force that will create the race of tomorrow.

All urges of rivalry, all struggle for precedence and dominion, should disappear giving place to a will for harmonious organisation, for clear-sighted and effective collaboration....

The Mother founded Auroville on February 28, 1968 as the continuation and expansion of Her objective of the Truth manifestation upon earth and the integral transformation of mankind. Under the endorsement of UNESCO, 121 countries and the States of India participated in its inauguration. Each one of them sent its soil with a young woman and a young man as its representatives to put its soil in an urn in the amphitheatre that is in front of the Matrimandir as a symbol of human unity on a global scale.

Auroville is the attempt towards collective realisation. It is a chosen site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual human unity among all men of goodwill who thirst for progress and aspire to a higher and truer life. It is not for comfort and satisfaction of desires that one comes to Auroville; it is for the growth of consciousness and consecration to the Truth that has to be realised. It is an ideal example of collective workings of designated representatives to manage a centralised shared economy for the progress and to hasten the growth of the collective and individual consciousness aspiring to manifest unity, mutuality and harmony at all levels. It is envisioned that with sincere adherence to these guiding principles, Auroville economics will be conducive in offering to all Aurovilians the joy of work and the space for inner growth according to their innate nature and aspirations for a simple, enriched and beautiful life.

The Darshan Day message of February 21, 2006—The Mother’s Birthday is:

A spirit of its celestial source aware
 Translating heaven into a human shape
 Descended into earth’s imperfect mould...
 She took again her divine unfinished task:
 Survivor of death and the aeonic years,
 Once more with her fathomless heart she fronted Time.⁷

The statement... “Once more with her fathomless heart she fronted Time” ...is at once reassuring and poignant. It is a reminder of the repeated shortcomings of mankind and an assurance that in spite of that the divine does not abandon us! Maybe we could strive a little more and a little harder with sincerity and persistence to be deserving of the Grace and progressively minimise the constant need of it due to our ceaseless negligence and unabated faults. Yes, we all do need to learn from the lessons of the past:

In 1369 B. C., Pharaoh Akhnaton and his Queen Nefertiti built the new capital of Egypt called Amarna in response to their spiritual convictions and ushered in the era of monotheism in a time of deeply entrenched polytheism. They were the daring pioneers of the new religion to dispense with the partially true aspects of polytheism that was preventing the due recognition and acceptance of the

unalloyed Truth—Ra—Sun—Light. *This is what the Supramental Truth Consciousness of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga is focusing on!*

In the centre of this city, a temple was built in reverence to the unalloyed Truth—Ra—Sun—Light, *which is how the Matrimandir at Auroville is envisioned to be!* The following charter of Amarna is so much comparable to Auroville's:

Here is the place which belongs to no prince, to no god.

No one owns it.

Here is a place for all of us...

The earth will find joy in it.

Here the hearts will be happy.

In 1347 B.C. the power shifted to the general Horemheb and he obliterated Amarna with vengeance to wipe out any of its ideals!

As the divine Providence would have it, the representatives of Auroville, with selective extractions and alterations of some texts chose the Mother's Dream expressed in connection with Sri Aurobindo Ashram as the Mother's dream for Auroville:

There should be somewhere upon earth a place that no nation could claim as its own, a place where all human beings of goodwill who have a sincere aspiration could live freely as citizens of the world and obey one single authority, that of the supreme truth; a place of peace, concord and harmony where all the fighting instincts of man would be used exclusively to conquer the causes of his sufferings and miseries, to surmount his weakness and ignorance, to triumph over his limitations and incapacities; a place where the needs of the spirit and the care for progress would get precedence over the satisfaction of desires and passions, the seeking for pleasures and material enjoyments.

In this place, children would be able to grow and develop integrally without losing contact with their souls; education would be given, not for passing examinations or obtaining certificates and posts but for enriching the existing faculties and bringing forth new ones. In this place titles and positions would be replaced by opportunities to serve and organise; the bodily needs of each one would be equally provided for, and intellectual, moral and spiritual superiority would be expressed in the general organisation not by an increase in the pleasures and powers of life but by increased duties and responsibilities.

Beauty in all its artistic forms, painting, sculpture, music, literature, would be equally accessible to all; the ability to share in the joy it brings would be limited only by the capacities of each one and not by social or financial position.

For in this ideal place money would no longer be the sovereign lord; individual worth would have a far greater importance than that of material wealth and social standing. There, work would not be a way to earn one's living but a

way to express oneself and to develop one's capacities and possibilities while being of service to the community as a whole, which, for its own part, would provide for each individual's subsistence and sphere of action.

In short, it would be a place where human relationships, which are normally based almost exclusively upon competition and strife, would be replaced by relations of emulation in doing well, of collaboration, and real brotherhood.⁸

Maybe the first step of unity of humanity begins with the spiritual union of the two creations of the Mother: Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville where the dream of the Mother finds its roots. In 1347 B.C. Akhnaton's ideal was willfully destroyed and his dream city was reduced to rubble by an army general who revived and reverted to the past traditions. One of the four "Matter Forces" as characterised by Sri Aurobindo—Affinity to the Laws of Past (Dragon) prevailed once again! The question remains, would we at this time rise above our petty selves and meet the challenge of the time to be worthy of the "Hour of the God"? Would the silent majority remain silent for ever in the cozy comfort of as is—this time the Eternal Inertia (Rock), one of the four "Matter Forces" as characterised by Sri Aurobindo or would it actively invoke the "Mother of Radiance" and seek transformation of itself and collective consciousness to collaborate and hasten the success of the divine plan? "You say Auroville is a dream. Yes, it is a 'dream' of the Lord and generally these 'dreams' turn out to be true—much more than the human so-called realities."⁹

A human frailty may surface here and there in this grand transformational process, creating its own challenges and delaying the rate of spiritual progress. But the march continues steadily even if slowly, towards the objective of unification of spirit and its realisation in collective endeavours and community dwelling for the harmony to prevail. After all, the direct and indirect participants of Auroville do represent humanity at large, which is even now far from being perfect and still struggling to establish harmony within to manifest it in the collective domain. If humanity were more open to the Divine Consciousness, more willing to adhere to the principles of Integral Yoga, and more ready and willing to follow the light of the Supramental Truth then maybe all the direct and indirect participants as affiliates, associates and well-wishers of Auroville would be better instruments and workers of the Divine. If it were the case then the Auroville work could have progressed faster; and time, talent, and resources deployed would have found a greater level of success in reflecting the manifestation of Bliss, Beauty, and Truth. Auroville is a great reminder that the fault lies not with the circumstances and somewhere outside but within all of us around the world. Auroville is the greatest opportunity for the human spirit to collectively progress and aspire for the divine Truth. It provides an uncommon opportunity to experience that aspiration; and above all, it demonstrates the descent and functioning of the Supreme's light to enable us to work collectively to collaborate and to live collectively in harmony with accentuated individuality. Auroville still remains the vibrant symbol of mankind's

hope and aspiration for the future. All the participants and supporters of Auroville in their respective roles from around the world are the harbingers of the new dawn of our civilisation.

The Mother had emphasised several times that the Matrimandir (literally, Temple of the Mother—the central globe structure with a meditation hall) is the soul of Auroville in the symbolic spiritual sense. Ananda Reddy's interpretation of the Matrimandir foundation stone is very insightful:

What astounds me, thinking philosophically, is that the Mother has given Matrimandir the foundation of AUM, chiselled in hard granite, with her name signed underneath. For no other building has the Mother given AUM for its foundation. In one of her writings, she gave the significance of AUM as “the signature of the Lord”. What does it mean? The scriptures say that from AUM the world was created. We have here a second AUM in Matter, in the foundation of the Matrimandir—which itself is the symbol of the Supramental action of the world. That places the true importance of the Matrimandir not only in the presence of the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's symbols and of the crystal, but deep in its very foundation. It turns Matrimandir literally into the cradle of a New Creation, from Matter upwards, just as the first one had been from the Spirit downwards.¹⁰

The Mother's Christmas message of 1972 is for the world at large but it is so relevant to all those involved with Auroville:

We want to show to the world that man can become a true servitor of the Divine.
Who will collaborate in *all sincerity*?¹¹

ARUN VAIDYA

References

1. *Bulletin of Physical Education*, August, 1954, Vol. VI, No. 3, pp. 113-17, Sri Aurobindo Ashram.
2. CWSA, Vol. 23 (*The Synthesis of Yoga*), p. 57.
3. *A Practical Guide to Integral Yoga*, (Compiled Extracts), Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1973, p. 20.
4. CWSA, Vol. 13 (*Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*), p. 558.
5. CWSA, Vol. 34 (*Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol*), p. 448.
6. CWSA, Vol. 25 (*The Human Cycle*), pp. 577-78.
7. CWSA, Vol. 34 (*Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol*), p. 353
8. *Auroville—Aims and Ideals* (Selections from the writings and conversations of the Mother), Savitri Bhavan, Auroville, September 2005.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
10. *Auroville Today*, No. 143, December 2000, p. 4.
11. CWM, Vol. 15 (*Words of the Mother*), p. 198.

WHO AM I

The teacher wanted me to know, "Who am I?"
To know means to find and dig out that which is new.
What is new in me?
Is it the body that has changed its shape in feet and inches?
Is it my idea and thought that can create a story?
Is it the love and passion to become what I was not before?
A mere desire to be a little different from others in knowledge, vision and perception?
A longing to be known by the world?
Here I am a leader and a king,
I did all that was to be done to know myself.
With ardent love I offered my answer to the teacher.
She smiled with a glint in her eyes only to tell me that I had failed.
Once again she sent me back to my seat to understand, "Who am I?"
I looked at myself in the mirror
Only to see to my surprise dark patches of old nature
Like museum pieces, full of dust and dirt,
That demanded revamp, retouch and refurbish.
Not a simple task, I knew.
Still being a faithful, obedient pupil of the teacher
I took a little time to gather strength and courage
Working hard for days, weeks, months and years with patience and endurance,
Yet did not accomplish my work
So demanding, puzzling and challenging it was,
The teacher came up to me giving a pat, again smiling,
Gently this time admiring the effort and pain I had gone through.
Softly and simply she said, "Go and realise!"
I set forth on the arduous journey,
Once more to fumble and stumble in pain and agony
That kept me yet going; for I understood
 Every fall has a rise
 Every ray has a hope
 And every prism has a spectrum...
Yet could not answer my teacher with satisfying and perfect response.
Who am I?

PRABHJOT KULKARNI

PAINTING AS SADHANA

Krishnalal Bhatt (1905-1990)

(Continued from the issue of May 2007)

19

Krishnalal as an art teacher

Krishnalal had taught at two schools at Ahmedabad after coming back from Baroda in 1927; and after returning from Shantiniketan, in a college for women. But there was not sufficient freedom for him either to impart what he had acquired or to grow in the direction he wanted. That was when he was turned towards Sri Aurobindo and this brought him to the greatest Artist he could aspire for.

In the Ashram, he taught art to many.

Here are some relevant portions from his correspondence about his work of teaching art:

[undated] I have begun the classes.... Should I give them suggestions and make corrections.

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

[3.10.33] Mother: Krishnalal, I find that Champaklal is progressing very much since you are teaching him. He would like to have a lesson every day. Can you do it?

[20.11.33] ...I had not the least intention of offending A or stopping him from the class. Was I wrong in insisting on his bringing some work for execution in the class for he did not bring any since last four classes?

Mother: No, you were not wrong.

[30.12.33] I feel a kind of movement going on in my inner being.... I keep aspiration for the divine Truth to manifest through my art. When such movement is going on I see hazy forms in a variety of colours coming down but it is disturbed by some mental movement.

Sri Aurobindo: Mother is constantly putting you in relation with a world of true harmony and it is that that you feel trying to come down....

[24.5.35] Mother will kindly suggest as to how I shall give A painting lessons.

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

[7.10.35] ...In this way to push their idea of painting—is it good? They were not capable of starting or finishing such a picture. Mother will let me know if such a trial comes from them, should I push it up and help them as I did this time?

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, certainly—it is sure to help them very much.

[10.1.36] Sri Aurobindo: What you write about the expression of beauty through painting and the limitations of the work as yet done here, is quite accurate. The painters here have capacity and disposition, but as yet the work done ranks more as studies and sketches, some well done, some less well than as great or finished art. What they need is not to be easily satisfied because they have put their ideas or imaginations in colour or because they have done some good work, but always to see what has not been yet achieved and train the vision and executive power till they have reached a truly high power of themselves.

[1937-38] Herewith, I send Kamala's drawing book for you to see. I would like to know how you find her work.

Sri Aurobindo: Mother finds that she is doing very good studies.

* * *

[*Two of his students speak about Krishnalal*]

Kiran Mehra on her teacher:

I started learning from “Monsieur” (as I always called him) from 1962 end at the Delafon Studio. Working with him was quite different from working with other teachers. He never taught methodically. He would just give suggestions and leave it to the student to develop the suggestion. He encouraged me a lot to work in this way. He would always say, “Just go on drawing and painting whatever is there in front of you. Your subjects will talk to you.”

He did not have many students as such; probably because he never gave any “practical” instructions taking us “step by step” into the world of Art. And that put off most people. He wanted the things latent in each artist to blossom out by themselves.

He never let us copy. “Do from Nature”—that was his motto, an echo from his teacher, Nandalal Bose. Identify yourself with your subject.

He never interfered while we worked. He would come and stand next to me and watch while I worked and let me go on without a word. Only after I had finished would he give his views and opinions—commend or criticise, as the case would be.

To teach me portrait painting, he himself would become the model. He has given me many sittings and I have sketched and painted him in many poses and from many angles.

*

Sunayana Panda on working with Krishnalal:

In March 1982 Krishnalal asked me to help him to finish the Golconde mural. As I had been his student he knew that I had a basic understanding of painting and that he could guide me. Ideally he had wanted many artists to work together on the mural, but somehow this was not practically possible. After working on it for one year he realised that it was not going to be so easy for him to do everything alone. He was already in his late seventies and his eyes were quite weak, so he could not work for long stretches. Having started this project of so huge a proportion, he had to now complete it, in whatever way possible.

We know that there is no such thing as chance, but the way things happened, it was clearly one of those instances when the Mother gets her work done in her own inscrutable ways. On the same day, at the same time, both Krishnalal and I were on our way to see Ravindra-ji. I wanted him to give me some work other than what I had been doing and Krishnalal wanted to request him to give him a full-time worker for the Art Gallery who could also be an assistant to him for this specific work. We met at the entrance of the Ashram Main Building and realised that we had both found what we were looking for. Ravindra-ji agreed to both our requests and I started work the following week.

At first I thought that I was going to work with him but I soon realised that I was going to learn from him. It was like going back to school because every day there was a new lesson to learn, a new aspect of painting that I had to master. More important than that was all that I heard from him about the early days of the Ashram and how the Mother guided the sadhaks in their inner work.

Just being in his presence was enough to learn how to serve the Mother. On the first day when I went to work at the Art Gallery he took me to the place where there was a message of the Mother which was framed and kept on a table. It said "On the physical plane it is in Beauty that the Divine expresses Himself."

"Before you start working here," he told me, "I must initiate you." Pointing to the framed message he asked me to think over the meaning of that sentence.

"It means...." I started saying, but he cut me short and asked me to think about the real meaning for an entire day. I thought for a whole day about this idea and turned it round and round in my mind. The next day I told him what I had understood.

"I think it means that every time we see beauty we are actually looking at the Divine, or at least at one of his faces."

He seemed pleased with that. He said, "I am happy that you found that answer. We always think that the Divine is hidden from us and that we can only see him if we are spiritually very advanced. The truth is we can see him whenever we want to see him because he is making himself visible at every moment. If you look for Beauty you will find the Divine in the physical world." The initiation was over and after this he took me to that part of the Art Gallery which was the studio.

We worked for two hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon every day. Very often he painted only in the morning so that his eyes would not be strained. I sat on the floor and painted the flowers while he stood and did the portraits. My work was also to prepare the colours for him. I had to mix a little water with all the main colours and keep them in small jars before he started working. The acrylic paints had come from Holland and if they were not mixed with water regularly they tended to dry up in the heat of Pondicherry. I also had to clean the palettes and brushes when we had finished working.

It often struck me that this is how the Old Masters of Europe worked. They did the main work while their apprentices did all the minor details and helped the artist in general. When I would go to get a bowl of clean water or wash his brushes I always felt that I was the apprentice of a Master, and was participating in the very important work of helping him finish his masterpiece.

The great paintings of European Art were often ordered and commissioned by royalty. In our story too there was a queen. Every two or three months Krishnalal would invite Mona who was in charge of Golconde to come and see our progress. A couple of days before Mona's visit we would start tidying the already very tidy studio. As we hurried to put away the odd art book or the unused brushes we would whisper "Mona is coming, Mona is coming!" It was as if we were saying "The queen is coming, the queen is coming!" Mona, of course, was always happy to see that some parts of the painting were more complete than before. Of all her visits the one which we remembered the most was when she saw that we had put a bunch of daffodils right at the centre of the bottom part of the painting. She at once exclaimed: "Krishnalal, I am so glad so see the daffodils which represent my beloved England. I have to thank you for including them in this beautiful painting."

Watching him paint was a joy. He was so deeply concentrated that nothing could distract him. The Art Gallery was a building whose entire roof was made of asbestos sheets and the sides were made of large glass panes. In the afternoon the whole studio became a furnace. Krishnalal would be covered in sweat but he would be working very carefully on his portraits because they had to resemble the people he wanted to portray. Whenever I was going to start a new flower he would ask me to go and observe it in nature. It was common for him to come back from the Ashram and say, "Go and see the pot of 'New Creation' near the Samadhi" or, "Have you noticed the 'Boldness' near the reading room?" After working with him for two years I understood that he had a "third eye" and that was his power of observation. In a glance he saw much more than what a common man could see and this is what made his paintings so alive.

Sometimes in the afternoons, when we used to finish working early, we would sit and talk about the Mother. One afternoon when he was about to paint the figure of the Mother on the mural I said that the position in which he had drawn her sitting seemed a bit strange to me. Krishnalal then explained to me that in the 1930s the Mother used to sit on a low chair and give blessings. Apparently she used to sit in that

position, with only one foot visible so that people could touch it and do their pranams. Sometimes he would tell me what the Mother had said about art. He would often mention that the Mother had more than once said that the artist's hand could develop a consciousness of its own, independent of the general consciousness of the artist, just as musicians have a special consciousness in their hands. Somehow, in conversation or in thought, the Mother was always there.

One morning, he came to paint a little later than usual, after finishing some other work. I had already started my own work and the whole studio was in a mess. All the brushes were scattered here and there, the little pots in which we kept the colours were not arranged on the table, some were on the floor. He looked at me questioningly, as if to say, "What is all this?"

"I have heard," I said, "that Raphael, the great artist, lived in utter disorder. In fact, I have read that all the Old Masters were messy." I thought I had given a very valid justification for my not having put things in their place. I thought he would mull over my unusual announcement. But he did not even pause for a second.

"Yes," he said calmly, "it may be true. But if you are trying to say that because they lived in disorder that is why they were great artists then you are totally wrong. A lot of people in the world live in disorder but they are not all artists. Raphael was indeed a great artist but he did not have the good fortune you and I have of knowing what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have said about human nature. So, instead of following the examples of the Old Masters' disorderly lives, let us concentrate on what the Mother has said about always seeking beauty and harmony around us. Our aim is to go beyond creating a great painting; our aim is to make all the different parts of our being as perfect as possible. And now, you will please put back all the paint jars that we are not using."

That afternoon, as we sat at our little table, we spoke about the Old Masters. Krishnalal then told me that artists, whatever may be their field, open their vital being to many different influences. "The artist lives in his vital, and that is the danger," he said, "because when he opens himself, sometimes a lot of negative forces enter into his being. Most people are not conscious enough to take only the higher things. That is why many great artists used to lead lives where often there were excesses." Around April 1984 we started putting the final touches to the mural, after which all the panels were dismantled and taken to Golconde. After they were installed on the wall, we had to once again touch them up. When the work was over, a coat of special varnish was applied. This turned out to be a most unfortunate decision. Even though the colours were of very good quality, and could withstand changes in temperature, the varnish was not meant to be applied on a work of art. It was the kind of varnish which was then the latest product for finishing the polish on furniture. Being in a partially covered area, a part of the mural is exposed to sunlight and splashes of water in case of rain. In the last twenty years the varnish has started cracking all over but even more on the exposed side of the picture, and as it flakes off it pulls out bits of the paint along with

it. Efforts are now being made to stop this deterioration.

When the mural was completed, Krishnalal heaved a sigh of relief, as we had managed to come to the end in spite of many obstacles. It had taken much longer than he had expected, but at least he had realised a long-cherished dream. Something which had been planned in the mid-40s was completed in the mid-80s, all because he had not given up hope. He believed that a work that had been given to him by the Mother had to be completed, even if it took him several decades.

(Reproduced from *The Golden Chain*, May 2005, pp. 29-32)

* * *

Krishnalal on how to appreciate the Golconde mural:

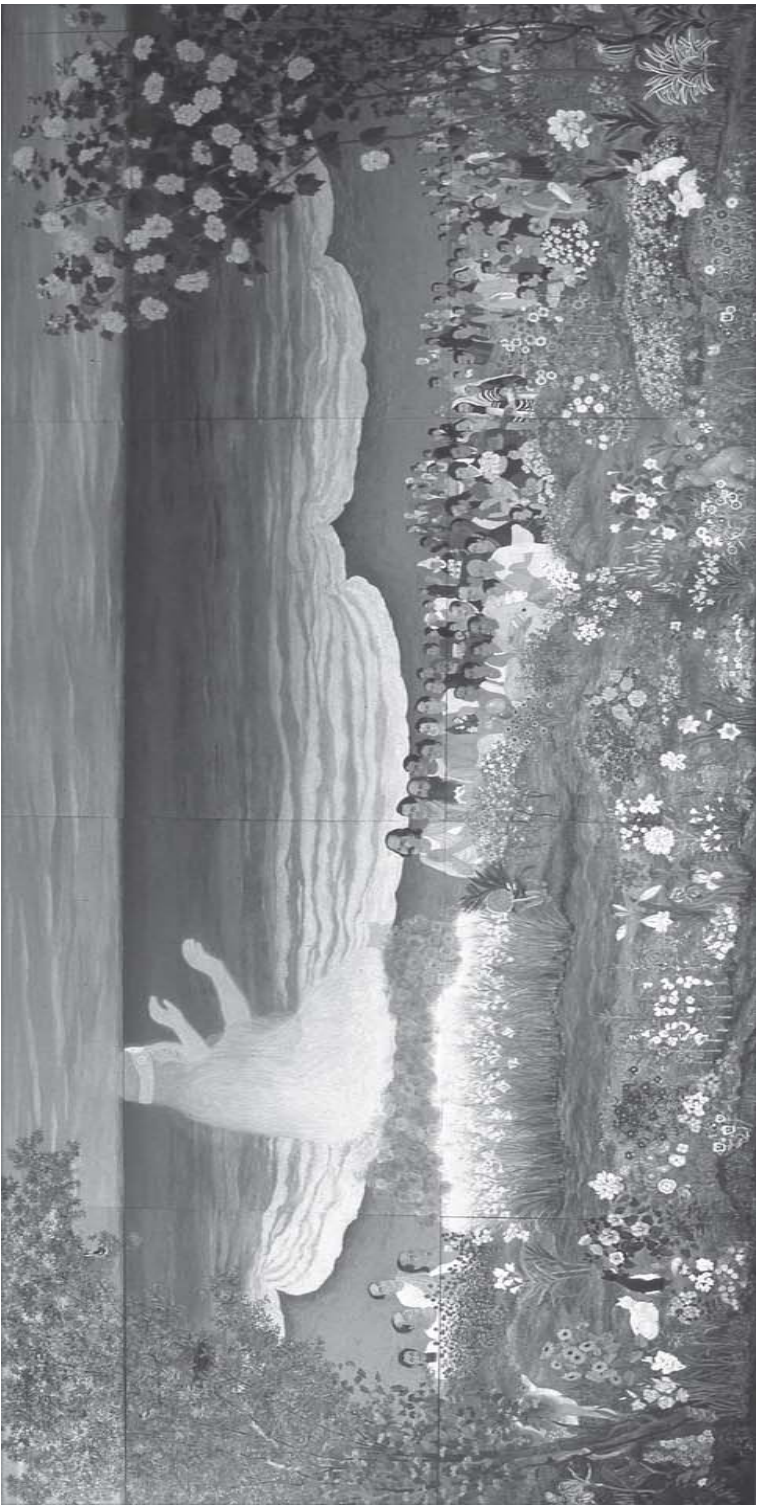
Now that the big mural has been installed at Golconde, several persons come to me and praise it. But what most of them appreciate is the size of the picture and the many portraits in it. These points are so very superficial that, in a sense, it pains me. Hence I feel it proper to say something on how best to see the picture.

This painting depicts The Mother's vision which She had wanted to have done and placed at Golconde. It has not at all been done to show the portrait of this person or that person. The picture must be seen as a whole, from top to bottom and from side to side. The main thing, of course, is The Mother's figure. Look how large it is! Vast as Her Consciousness. Her head is touching the sky which is aglow with the New Light which Sri Aurobindo brought down on earth. She is seated in front of the sea which symbolises vastness. Her face is half veiled just as Her real and true personality was hidden from the ordinary sight and understanding. Some parts of Her body which are visible radiate an aura which is so subtle! Her hands are raised to bless all which is a fact so well known to all of us.

It is the presence of such a Supreme personality and Her Blessings that attract and draw humans from all parts of the world to Her. These people (some of whom seem to be known to us) represent some of those who were in Her personal service and were happy to offer to Her whatever they had.

Was it only the human beings who were attracted to Her? Look at the whole world of Nature, the birds, animals, plants, flowers. They are all turned towards Her; see their trust and faith in Her. Does one not feel a happy eagerness in them too? What is that vast sea doing? Have you marked the seat of The Mother? The roses and the tuberose, what do they signify? There are the two plants and the two creepers at either end of the picture. Their significances are also known to us. They are in full bloom. Why?

If one understands all these things with one's heart one will not go on asking questions. But, on the other hand, one will be absorbed in the atmosphere of the New Light and of calm happiness. One will meditate rather than ask questions, unnecessary questions.



I have done this picture—it is my joy. But not because I have done a “Big painting”, but because I have been able to fulfil a wish of The Mother, at least, to some extent because I feel that it is not done so well and is not as perfect as it should be and for this I am a bit sorry. The colours used are the acrylic paints which are very good for a painting like this but they were quite new to me so I had to adjust myself to them and to develop a new technique. The colours dry very fast, even more so in our studio which is very hot. At the beginning there was no big easel for this large painting and so I had to spread the separate boards on the floor and paint on them. Quite a new experience for me to work flat on the floor. But it was done somehow and now the picture is up at Golconde and The Mother’s vision has been expressed and it is there for all to see.

(To be continued)

S. V. BHATT

All artistic work in order to be perfect must indeed have in the very act of creation the guidance of an inner power of discrimination constantly selecting and rejecting in accordance with a principle of truth and beauty which remains always faithful to a harmony, a proportion, an intimate relation of the form to the idea; there is at the same time an exact fidelity of the idea to the spirit, nature and inner body of the thing of beauty which has been revealed to the soul and the mind, its svarūpa and svabhāva. Therefore this discriminating inner sense rejects all that is foreign, superfluous, otiose, all that is a mere diversion distractive and deformative, excessive or defective, while it selects and finds sovereignly all that can bring out the full truth, the utter beauty, the inmost power. But this discrimination is not that of the critical intellect, nor is the harmony, proportion, relation it observes that which can be fixed by any set law of the critical reason; it exists in the very nature and truth of the thing itself, the creation itself, in its secret inner law of beauty and harmony which can be seized by vision, not by intellectual analysis. The discrimination which works in the creator is therefore not an intellectual self-criticism or an obedience to rules imposed on him from outside by any intellectual canons, but itself creative, intuitive, a part of the vision, involved in and inseparable from the act of creation. It comes as part of that influx of power and light from above which by its divine enthusiasm lifts the faculties into their intense suprarational working. When it fails, when it is betrayed by the lower executive instruments rational or infrarational,—and this happens when these cease to be passive and insist on obtruding their own demands or vagaries,—the work is flawed and a subsequent act of self-criticism becomes necessary.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Human Cycle, CWSA, Vol. 25, pp. 140-41)

TEHMI-BEN—NARAD REMEMBERS

(Continued from the issue of January 2007)

Her Visions and Experiences

THOUGH Tehmi would say that she had very few experiences she spoke to me many times of two that were so powerful they were inscribed in her consciousness as on a perpetual tablet of Divine Grace. She actually was blessed with many other visions, some of which she recounted to me during her last two years and others that were recently found in one of her old diaries.

Here is the experience of Tehmi's first Darshan of Mother and Sri Aurobindo which she shared with me in 2004.

Tehmi: "When I had my first Darshan of Mother and Sri Aurobindo we went and sat in the courtyard group by group. Each group had to wait until their turn came. There were not so many of us. The courtyard was rocking! Then I came to the threshold of the room and something caught me before I even stepped in. His eyes pierced into me and I forgot everything after that."

— — —

Narad: "When you first met Sri Aurobindo were you in your teens?"

Tehmi: "Past my teens."

N: "Sri Aurobindo put his hand on your head?"

Tehmi: "No, they were already in that room."

N: "Tell me again about Sri Aurobindo's leg being gold."

Tehmi: "I entered the room and Sri Aurobindo extended his leg toward me so that I could kiss his foot. The leg was golden from the knee down, perhaps a little above the knee. It was as though he was in the usual place (the alcove) but as though half in and half out. Mother used to sit perfectly still and I looked at Her as if asking permission to touch His feet. I knelt down and kissed His foot. You understand it was in vision. It must have been a complete breakdown after that because I don't remember anything."

Tehmi: "I had 18 Darshans of Sri Aurobindo."

— — —

[*From her 1953 diary inscribed by Mother:*]

à Thémis avec mes bénédictions
bonne année

(Mother's signature)

17.1.53

[*Tehmi did not use the diary for day-to-day notations. Rather she seems to have used it as a notebook, starting from the last page, to jot down some of her old experiences. The only exception is a note on February 21.:*]

Mother said to me: “They (referring to most people) are like that (lazy, not concentrated, not working hard, etc.), but we cannot be (like that). We are different, because it is (we have it) in our blood, and we have a long programme before us.”

I have noted it under February 21, but now cannot remember the day when She said it.

— — —

Some notes of old experiences

(For the glory of Their Grace)

April 1946:

Before or after my first Darshan of the 24th. (I do not remember exactly)—

In the Ashram courtyard in the evening meditation, two beautiful visions on two different days—

1) I saw a column of golden-white light ascending through and above me. It climbed up to some height and parted, and then on both sides there came down a shower of white flowers (jasmine?—not sure). It was very beautiful, very steady and peaceful and enduring—the recollection is still fresh and vivid in my memory.

2) I saw a big circle or ring of light, silvery and bright, up in the sky, revolving slowly, horizontally, [*drawing*] and rays of the same light streaming down from the moving ring, something like this: [*drawing—a circle with rays coming down*]. Most beautiful—endured for quite some time. [Mother was on the terrace of Dyuman's room, giving meditation. Perhaps it had some association with the moon—but don't remember if a moon was there.]

— — —

24th April: First Darshan

While waiting outside in the courtyard and while going up the steps, strong vibrations were rocking me (as if the whole place was shaking). I hardly remember entering the hall or how I went through it ...it must have been mechanically. The moment I entered (or on the threshold) two “eyes” or “rays” (I don’t know) caught me; I seemed to be in a very, very long hall—all around was quite dark—and from far within two rays of light (very long), golden-silvery white, came straight to me and rested upon my heart. It was later, not at the moment of happening, that I could consciously formulate the experience even to myself. (I did not seem to “see” Sri Aurobindo or Mother, nor knew which way we went out—it seemed a long, long corridor. I was in a daze.)

— — —

In the first months here: April to June (first week)1946

1. Repeatedly this same vision: the shining sea, bright glimmering waters in the sunlight—sometimes with the sun above, sometimes sun “felt” or known above but not seen.

—

2. Dream: swimming through waters to Mother standing above on some high place or rock.

—

3. The sea rising in a slow quiet flood around the “cottages” of an Ashram. Apprehension. Assurance: Mother and Sri Aurobindo are there. Nothing to fear.

— — —

The gold-Mohur tree (“realisation” tree) completely in flower, covered with its red-gold blossoms. (This vision repeats often, in any season.)

— — —

A tree with leaves shiny like diamonds.

— — —

During meditation in my Golconde room:

I saw the cells of the body as small round transparent globes, and Sri Krishna poised with his flute (in the traditional dance pose) in each globe—a brief vision.

— — —

Yards and yards of soft white lovely cloth being unfolded (from where?) and spread around me.

— — —

In the meditation hall while waiting for Mother to come down for Pranam:

Vision: High above the place where Mother sits, poised in the air on a chair of gold, Mahalaxmi in a robe of shining gold (I call her Mahalaxmi spontaneously, instinctively, but do not know why.) Her face is turned to the right and I see the beautiful, delicate, profile. Then slowly she turns her head and I see it is Mother's face.

— — —

Vision: I put my head on Mother's lap, kneeling at Her feet. I am there for some time, when slowly within Mother I see shining a great, *very bright light, like a brilliant sun. My heart throbs with the strength of the brilliance and the power. [The sensation still comes back on recollecting this, so powerful it was.]

(The note in the bracket was made long ago. There is no recollection now).

—

Following this* Mother gives me a red lotus, saying, "Keep this always under your head." (Dream-vision)

— — —

Almost constant "darshan" of Mother in dreams, during the first months of '46 and in 1947 and '48.

— — —

I forgot this in its place:

15th April 1946 (First Darshan of Mother on staircase top—seated in a brilliant blue sari—Her smile—an immediate recognition inside spontaneously pronounced within as "This is She". Very clear. Some "reminiscence" of ancient Egypt.

— — —

In 1947 (or 1948)?:

Huge "Immortality" flowers (purple), (as big each as 3 1/2 feet in diameter), piled up in one corner of the playground.

— — —

Two huge dragons (brilliant? not sure now) turning round in the playground at extreme speed. Everyone runs out of the way to the sides.

— — —

A strange dark large room of Mother's upstairs (somewhere beside Pavitra's office room, perhaps?)—no proper location: Several tigers heavily chained—controlled and watched by Champaklal and C[.] who are in charge of them.

— — —

Majestic white lion sitting in my room on top of the bibliothèque.

— — —

Saw a Tiger sitting quietly like Mona's "Beau" ("Lion shall lie down with the lamb"?)

— — —

A tall figure with long hair (Christ-like—or was it Sri Aurobindo, I could not tell) walking over the sea, followed by a huge crowd of hundreds—coming towards the shore.

— — —

Mother leading a very great number of dancers. Fast music and dance—extremely swift movements but rhythmic, musical. Behind Mother K[.].

(Seen in '48, I think)

— — —

Mother singing in a very powerful voice in a very big building like a Cathedral.

— — —

Sri Aurobindo speaking to a hall of about 1000 people.—(perhaps on Education, as I thought?)

— — —

Very strange new flowers: "unnaturally" large: some were named "Love unto Death" others "Sun-flash".

— — —

Most beautiful lake in lovely cool green surroundings.

— — —

A big lovely green fish; transformed into a fish from a snake.

— — —

Rising moon.

— — —

Blue light filling playground.

— — —

In Mother's "Prayer Class" upstairs (Aug. 47?) during meditation: A white lotus on my lap.

— — —

A few times a big light like a lit-up chandelier hanging from the roof of the head (inside)—shining like the sun.

— — —

Flames

in front

white flames in the forehead.

in the heart.

Suddenly when taking my bath: within the heart saw a large cubical room with a big fire burning in the middle.

— — —

In the Playground during meditation (this was in the mid 50s): Saw and "felt" a Yagna going on in the heart: ॐ was being chanted with power and the flames of the sacrifice ascending.

— — —

In the Playground Meditation—195-?

Suddenly flames started coming out from the top of the head. The experience remained constantly for four or five days, no matter what I was doing. (Charupada seemed to notice something one day and made a pertinent remark.)

— — —

Saw a very deep well in the heart (I was lying awake on the ledge in my Golconde room). Saw the moon far above and also deep down below.—(1947)

— — —

Was in a train—flying in the compartment.

— — —

4 of us: 1 takes a carriage and starts off; then 2 & 3 suddenly realising take a car to make up; then I suddenly begin to fly and swiftly go over their heads and farther.

— — —

Early vision: May 1943 in Bhopal:

Lying on terrace on 1st floor. About 4 a.m. in the morning. I open my eyes and

see standing on the gold pinnacle-spire of the old palace, above the third terrace (4th floor), a figure draped completely in white. As her eyes meet mine (a vivid contact, startling), she at once gathers her robe about her and starts coming down—but descending as in spirals. She comes to our floor and goes into our room. My cousin puts a chair in her way to test her “reality” (that is, lest it be a ghost). She knocks against the chair.

[Told Mother this vision and asked if it was She (I was reading Mother’s “Conversations” without the least idea who “Mother” was). Mother smiled as though saying ‘Yes’.]

— — —

Dec. 47 Dream-Vision in Bombay—when troubled about deciding to go to the Ashram leaving those who had expected me to look after them:

Krishna standing on the roof of our house. I see him through the open sky-light. Two birds (white doves) chased by a cat come fluttering to me for shelter. I try to shield them, holding them for a while, but they soon flutter again and fly up through the sky-light. The cat jumps up the steps after them, and is close on them. I look up and say, “Krishna, you had better look after them now.” He looks at me and smiles, then laughs loudly, saying, “So you think you were looking after them all this time?” (A little ironic too!) It was a clear (unasked for?) answer to my problem.

[*Bharati says that Tehmi told her family, “God will give you another Tehmi”, and her sister-in-law’s name was Tehmi!*]

— — —

Great wall or mountain: Running through a pass to Mother.

— — —

1949—March. Illness:

Saw my “being” rising far into the sky—then two clouds came and started carrying it away—I cried to Mother and was brought back into my body—immediately.

— — —

Bet. 29 March and April 6, 1949:

Perhaps after (or during) illness:

I was lying quietly, praying for Grace and for purity and transformation of nature... I saw myself very tiny, about 4 or 5 inches long, lying on something very white in the palm of the Mother or the “lap of Divine Grace” (as I called it in the vision).

Something almost imperceptible seemed to be done to me, and a minute or so later, I saw lying beside my body (4-inch body) a tiny worm, about two-and-a-half

inches long or so, exactly the size of the body without the limbs. And again I saw my body, quite transparent now. (I concluded intuitively that the worm had been removed from the body.)

[Some years later I heard Mother telling Nolini—in the corridor upstairs—“Is there anybody here in whom, if I made an incision, I would not find a worm?”]

— — —

Often, on waking up a very bright light—brighter than the sun, perhaps, seen for a few moments.

— — —

At “Mānsarovar”—Most beautiful, pure atmosphere—it *felt* cool, white, snow-pure, with a strange ineffable, indescribable feel of purity—Vast white mountains—feeling of being on the world’s top.

— — —

Mother sprinkling water.

— — —

Mother showed me (in a dream) a big album of “Ashram” pictures—all coloured—(made by Her?—not sure)—each had a scene below and Mother in different poises in the sky overhead. [Told R. and V. to try these pictures]

— — —

July or August 1950

Saw (in dream) Sri Aurobindo being carried down in a large round-backed chair, through narrow winding spiral staircase, down, down.

[Was very upset—thought my consciousness must be very bad. Didn’t tell anyone. Understood it only after Dec. 5, 1950.]

— — —

Same period: Saw Sri Aurobindo with Yama. Don’t remember. (Upset again.) Understood after Dec. 5.

— — —

Dream. I was sitting in a straight-backed chair. A snake, long, golden, climbed up behind and right up the back and stretched itself straight above my head, straight and immobile like a stick. I sat very still, (not to disturb it.) [*Here Tehmi has a sketch showing herself sitting on the chair and the serpent rising straight up against her back, between it and the chair back. Then, in brackets, she writes*]

[D. who knew much about Yogic visions said it could be the Kundalini]

— — —

Talking of Kundalini—have often felt it rising.

— — —

Many 1947 and 1948 experiences woven into my early poems.—Vivid experience of One in all, all in One—many others.

— — —

NARAD (RICHARD EGGENBERGER)

—————

LORD AND MOTHER NATURE

Forces like waves come and recede,
 Touching the shores of my being.
 The eternal in me stands unperturbed
 Watching silently the world-play.

*

Gentle breeze blows
 Across the mountains
 Caressing my hair—
 There is a mighty Mother in Nature
 In the core of her bosom
 Is seated the Lord,
 In her lap she moulds and re-moulds her children
 To create a perfect form like the Lord.

SITANGSHU CHAKRABORTTY

THE BIRTH OF “BATIK WORK”

It was the 9th of August in 1969 when this section of ‘BATIK WORK’ was born. It was on the same day in the year 1941 that I had come to Pondicherry. What an incredible gift on the anniversary day of my arrival! It is this gift of the Mother that is keeping me on the move even today and I believe that it will continue to do so till the last day of my life. Only the Mother could bestow such a gift! Nobody else can.

Truly speaking, Batik is a sort of hobby. There is a word in Bengali which is spelt in English as ‘batik’; it means a sort of habitual activity developed by a person out of obsession. I do remember how, on the basis of this Bengali meaning, Pranab used to tease me saying that I must have developed a ‘batik’ to do ‘Batik’!

This department has taken birth in a truly miraculous way. Jayantilal-da’s sister, Manju, who was from Shantiniketan, had come to Pondicherry on her way back to her native place. She had brought with her a handful of samples of Batik designs done on cloth. I met her at my elder brother, Sanjiban-da’s residence. These pieces attracted me so much that I was extremely keen to learn how it was done. But I could not get any occasion to learn. However, things changed miraculously by the grace of the Mother.

Moti-ben, the wife of one of Ambu’s friends, had come from Africa with her daughters. They stayed for about three weeks in the room just below my apartments. They used to have their meals with me and in the course of various discussions they came to know about my interest in Batik. Two of the daughters knew the technique and they agreed to show it to me. Immediately things were arranged and we did Batik design on two handkerchiefs. That is all the practical training I had to start doing Batik on my own! Then a lady from Jamshedpur came to Pondicherry for Darshan. When she heard about my interest in Batik she agreed to make a Batik tablecloth in my presence. But accidentally the colouring part was not done properly and most of the dyes faded during the washing and remained in the basin as residue! After a couple of days I collected those dyes and made three handkerchiefs and they all came out perfectly well. My birthday was approaching. So I waited to present them to the Mother. The day came at last and my wish was fulfilled. The Mother clasped the three handkerchiefs tightly in her hand and was silent for a while. She then asked Ambu and Vasudha-ben if it was I who had made them. She seemed to be very happy with them. I was hoping that some good luck would be there behind that gesture and I was right! The very next day, Amrita-da came with a blessings packet for me from the Mother and told me that the Mother wanted me to continue doing Batik. I immediately started the work. It is interesting that without any conscious plan, I had kept the stove that had to be used for the work on the very spot where the Mother had sat when she had come to see my new home here. Nolini-da came to open the department: he unfolded

a piece of cloth on which the Mother had put her signature specially for the occasion of the opening of the department. The name chosen by her was “BATIK WORK” to differentiate the place from that of Millie’s (Art House). All the ingredients had to be bought. With the Mother’s blessings the sale of the materials was good and satisfactory.

Looking back at those golden days of the past, I still remember the faces of some devotees whose service to the department was of great help. Madhusudan is one of those who worked here for some time and helped to organise the department. Another person had come from Shilong. He would use his own brush which was of a special type. He made many human figures in Batik. The sale increased quite a bit after his coming. Another person, Chandranath, worked here for about three months, and he too did many human figures. A Tamil lady, Jaya, had worked here for some time but she has gone away to France. A very young girl, Lakshmi, from a nearby village worked here for about five years. She was a great help. She is working in Auroville at present. She had a special flair for doing Batik. Nowadays she comes only on Sundays and works specially on sarees. Once a Spanish artist also came and worked here for a few months. Among others, the work done by Bhakta, a name given to a foreigner by the Mother, has special significance. Bhakta was asked to do in Batik a picture of Ganesh traced out from a calendar. He was nearly at the end of his work when something astonishing happened. At that time, the floor of my room was being redone and that work was also nearing completion. One night, I was suddenly awakened by a noise coming from behind the wooden shutters on the top portion of the door. I peeped in and saw five mice. The mice fled through the window immediately. I switched on the light and looked at Ganesh. To my surprise I found that Bhakta had forgotten to draw a mouse beside the Lord! The next day, when Bhakta came he narrated that the previous night he had been awakened by something licking his fingers. He sprang up, only to find that it was a mouse! Dorothy, Bhakta’s wife, who was in the next room had also seen the mouse which had tried to enter her mosquito-net! I told Bhakta that he had made a major mistake for which those mice had come. Bhakta examined the design closely and cried out, “Bibha-di! I have forgotten to draw the mouse!” The piece had still to be dipped in black and the portrait was finally completed with a black mouse beside the Lord. The living image of this Ganesh is still there on the walls of the sales area—for, it is not for sale.

Every month, whatever money we used to get through the sale was sent to the Mother in a wooden box. Kumud who was in charge of this, said that the Mother would place the box on her lap leaving all her other work. The money was then taken out, but the box was never returned empty. She used to put something or the other in the box.

Now, though I have grown old, this golden past is still living in my memory. I remember a night when I was colouring a dress and was feeling tired and drowsy. It was nearly 11 o’clock. All of a sudden, I felt a shadow passing behind me. All my tiredness vanished. I became totally alert. I stood for a while with that cloth in my

hand and then continued to work past midnight with no trace or memory of the fatigue.

As the department grew in size, I felt the need for more space. The Mother gladly granted us a loan and the necessary job was done. She said that the money could be returned to her gradually, depending on the sale of the goods. Many people including school-children came to help in setting up the new premises. Aditi, who is working regularly here, came around that time. Some older people have also come forward to work here. Lata is one among those whose name needs special mention. She applies wax on six or seven handkerchiefs or a full dress piece within two to three hours. She does free hand waxing. She is fully involved with the department and really seems to care for it. This part of her self-giving appeals to me most. She brings with her a few of her artist-friends who are also expert workers. Among them Paulo is very efficient. He is an artist and fond of working on human figures. Prabha and Antony also come once a week. All of them are Italians.

When I had gone abroad for some time, Chitra Sen looked after this department. At present she is too busy, otherwise she would also have joined us, for even now she comes off and on whenever she can. My heartfelt gratitude remains for Hasmukhbhai and Pulak who used to send us dyes, one from Ahmedabad and the other from Calcutta. At present Paulo, the Italian gentleman arranges for these.

Now, with a sigh of relief I am in a position to say that even in my absence, the department will continue to run with its own initial force, set forth by the Mother in 1969. After all, it was the Mother’s decision to start this work, not ours. It has to go on.

BIBHA BISWAS

(Translated by Sumita Dhar from the original Bengali)

BEAUTY

Artistic taste is pleased with beautiful things and is itself beautiful.

*

Artistic sensibility: a powerful aid to fight ugliness.

*

Artistic works: all work at the service of beauty.

The Mother

(Words of the Mother, CWM , Vol. 15, p. 232)

BANKIMCHANDRA CHATTERJEE

(1838-94)

(Continued from the issue of May 2007)

II

ANUSHILANA: INTEGRAL PEDAGOGY OF BANKIMCHANDRA

1. Physical Education

It requires adequate physical training to be able to defend oneself. How can one who cannot defend himself, expect to pursue his *dharma* (the “right duty”)? If one cannot assert one’s position against the adversaries, compromises and concessions may become necessary, making one drift away from the right path. It is, of course, the duty of the king to protect all his subjects. But in circumstances when the king is incapable of doing so, all those who are weak and unable to defend themselves become victims of malefactors. Hence it is as important to defend oneself, just as it is important to defend one’s own family, one’s neighbours, and one’s friends. He who fails to do it is indeed impious. Self-defence and the defence of others is an essential duty taught by all the religions (*dharma*); and it is in the name of *dharma* that great souls have sacrificed everything. Equally important is the defence of the Motherland. There are individuals who pounce on others in their own society to rob them; so are there societies that strip weaker societies to enrich themselves and fight for supremacy. Therefore, the defence of the Motherland is far too important a duty to be neglected. That is why in the ancient Greek cities every citizen was mobilised to defend the State. In 1793, every adult citizen in France took to arms to save the Fatherland, defying a coalition of other nations. In ancient India, it was the warrior classes who defended others, but when their strength decreased and they were defeated, everybody was helpless. Had India learnt to defend herself from other races, this country would not have fallen so low.

It is obvious that fighting against brute strength demands physical strength. But what is even better, is physical training. Exercises are necessary first of all to develop physical strength and to strengthen the muscles. In this country, we had the Indian style of wrestling and native gymnastics. We abandoned everything in the name of adopting English ways. This is a classic illustration of our mental confusion. If the Queen (Victoria) prevents us from the use of weapons, she deprives us inevitably of our duty to defend her Kingdom. It is easily possible to rectify this kind of error, says Bankimchandra with a touch of his characteristic humour. In addition to the handling of weapons, we must practise other physical exercises such as riding, long distance walking, swimming. It is necessary, especially for life, to be able to endure cold, heat,

hunger, thirst, fatigue,—everything. It is necessary to be able to dig the earth, to construct huts, to carry burdens on the back (sometimes one's own victuals for about ten days). And like a soldier who knows how to sharpen his sword before plunging into action, it is necessary to learn how to make of the body a very sharp weapon which can achieve everything. This can be done with the help of exercises, right practices, proper food habits and a rigorous control of the senses (*indriya samyama*). Without this mastery, the body cannot reach its fullness. A control of the organs of perceptions and of actions is the method. This mastery is a direct fruit of the psychic practice. This proves how interdependent body and mind are.

2. Mental Education

It is not exclusively in establishments dedicated to academic instruction that mental education is to be imparted. In India, women in their homes—who often lived without much academic training—possessed the secret of this education. The storytellers who recounted the legends and mythological exploits of the heroes of the Indian tradition also possessed its secret. For example, they always transmitted certain great values such as hospitality, courage, generosity, etc. whereas the academic schooling forgot all about the true fundamental values for a pragmatic and beneficial activism. With English education, one succeeded in excelling as writers, speakers, logicians. In European countries such a training helped industrial and economic growth, leading to egocentric or militarist cleverness, often monstrous in their capacity to exploit others. It pushed the individual towards an exclusively scientific specialisation, ignoring the finer values; while those who pursued literary studies exclusively ignored the scientific subtleties. But this is only a shaky, one-dimensional formation, creating human creatures by half. A warrior specialising in martial arts remained ignorant of the political sciences (or the other way round), completely incompetent from the point of view of *dharma* according to the Hindu religious conception. It is a deplorable waste to learn by heart, without thinking, without assimilating the ethical content and without any capacity of establishing a link between these theories and the secrets of right action. It merely produced a frame of mind that generated only beings resembling carriers of bagfuls of knowledge. Just as it is impossible to develop other faculties without a sufficient baggage of knowledge, they are incapable of conceiving the Divine and adoring Him without this indispensable knowledge. All acts of sacrifice resolve in knowledge, proclaims the *Gita*: “Learn that [knowledge] by worshipping the feet of the teacher, by questioning and by service; the men of knowledge who have *seen* (not those who know merely by the intellect) the true principles of things, will instruct thee in knowledge. Possessing that knowledge thou shalt not fall again into the mind's ignorance(...); for by this, thou shalt see all existences, without exception in the Self, then in Me.” (IV.34-35)¹

1. The passages from the *Gita* are adapted from Sri Aurobindo's translation.

Considering this knowledge—the one of a total identification with all creatures ('phenomenal world') and with the Divine—as the summit of the spiritual quest according to the *Gita*, Bankimchandra recommends the three classical paths:

(a) surrender (*pranipat* or *bhakti*): made of a self-consecration as the best offering one is capable of, in a confident and joyous attitude, establishing with the Divine a relationship of affection, of love, of passions purified by a preliminary asceticism; we shall examine this path more in detail, in the category of activist education;

(b) the questioning or 'studious application' (*pariprashna* or *jnana*): Bankimchandra describes the path of knowledge as an ascending scale of approach to Reality:

(i) knowledge of the phenomenal world to be acquired by studying sciences that Auguste Comte recommended, notably mathematics, astronomy, physics and chemistry—knowledge in which the Western scientific personalities established themselves as masters;

(ii) self-knowledge should come from the study of biology and sociology—sciences in which the masters are also of Western origin;

(iii) the knowledge of the Divine should come mainly from the Hindu writings—the *Upanishads*, the *darshana* (schools of philosophy), the *Puranas* (mythology), history and especially the *Gita*. After the full blossoming of the cognitive and emotional faculties, as soon as people turn towards these, there will dawn the real knowledge worthy of the *Gita*'s teachings that Bankimchandra recognised as the sum total of all the gospels that mankind has produced as guidance to a true religious life. Religion, according to Bankimchandra, is what sustains man, feeds him, brings to him a total satisfaction, reveals to him the way to the Supreme; its outcome is called Deliverance (*mukti*). Inspired by a traditional distinction, Bankimchandra indicates the paths to Deliverance:

—to unite, to identify with the Divine and embrace Nature in accordance with the Divine (*nirmana mukti*);

—at the summit of an asceticism (*anushilan*), to arrive at a psychological purification beyond all perceptions of joy and pain, of good and evil, of pleasure and strife, freeing the seeker of all attachments to the phenomenal and living life in this very body, a constant inner identification, while the surface personality prompted by the deeper self continues to act, to like, to learn (*jivan-mukti*). The master Satyananda in Bankimchandra's novel "*Abbey of Joy*" (*Anandamath*) specifies that the cognitive nature of Hindu religion insisted, first of all, on two complementary aspects of the quest: the question of the material and phenomenal world developed around the central point of the perennial Religion (*sanatana dharma*); this indispensable questioning leading to the central knowledge had been, in recent times, neglected at the detriment of the eternal religion.

(c) The service (*seva*) or dedicated action (*karma*): this activist approach emerged out of a psychological purification; without this, no knowledge is perfect. According to Krishna, cites Bankimchandra, he who is liberated by action, by the knowledge of

yoga, is the master of himself; his acts can no more bind him. He offers all his acts to the Divine and dissipates all doubt by the knowledge of the divine principles.

3. Activist Education

Bankimchandra studies with the greatest care the development of the emotional faculties—devotion, affection and charity (the noblest of feelings)—as well as the sublimation of lust, anger and passion (the animal feelings). First of all, on the individual plane, devotion to the parents, devotion between spouses, then, devotion to the king and his associates, on the social level, as long as the king protects his subjects; otherwise, he deserves no devotion and it is the duty of the subjects to demand of him a just government, because a king's despotism results in social curses. Then, more than the king, the thought-masters of a society—as the real leaders of the society, as real kings—deserve the greatest devotion. Bankimchandra evokes here the example of Keshab Chunder Sen: born in a caste lower than the Brahmins, this great soul was endowed with all virtues of the best Brahmin and deserved the devotion of all Brahmins. Even a Shudra endowed with the virtues of a Brahmin—that is to say, faithful to *dharma*, perfected in his knowledge, detached from everything, instructor of the people—commands all our devotion for the same reason as a Brahmin. Bankimchandra mentions with conviction the passages of the *Mahabharata*, the great Epic of India, the Episode of the Forest (chapter 180 of the sequence according to Ajagar; chapter 215 of the sequence of Markandeya): an individual born a Brahmin undergoes decay owing to his behaviour which is incompatible with his birth, as well as the elevation of a subject born a Shudra owing to his clinging to the virtues of a Brahmin have to be accepted as it is. Fourthly, Bankimchandra recommends devotion to a society endowed with all possible virtues of an individual: the society brings us up, censors, maintains, and protects us. The society is our king, our instructor. But above all, it is the Divine who is the object of our highest devotion: when all our faculties turn towards the Divine and converge in him, that precisely is the state known as devotion. Since the object of all our faculties is the Divine—the infinite One, infinite Knowledge, infinite Law, infinite Beauty, infinite Strength—can these faculties, aiming at infinity, ever admit any limit? The true harmony of the faculties resides in the state one attains under the ascendancy of devotion. Mentioning the *Chandogya Upanishad*, Bankimchandra defines *svaraj* ('mastery on oneself' or 'the one that is delighted') as the beatitude of someone who loses himself in the One, who participates in the game of the One, who considers the One as playmate. Bankimchandra upholds the *Gita* as the first treatise on the principle of devotion (*bhakti*). He traces this principle to Shandilya, the Seer of antiquity who professed in the same *Upanishad*: "Silent, scattered in this world like all action, all passion, all perfume, all flavour (...), that is the Supreme, my soul has the inside of the heart." (*Chandogya*, III. 14) This passage recalls that someone who has once placed his confidence in It, cannot any more sink back into doubt.

Farther in this *Upanishad*, the Wise Uddalaka, eager to give to his son Shvetaketu the knowledge that can lead him to the understanding of everything, asks him:

“Bring a banyan-fruit(...)”

“Here it is, reverend Sir.”

“Split it.”

“It is split, Sir.”

“What do you see in it?”

“These fine-appearing kernels, Sir.”

“Now split one of them.”

“It is split, Sir.”

“What do you see in it?”

“Nothing at all, Sir.”

He said unto him: “This very fineness (subtle essence) my dear, which you cannot see, even from this very fineness, my dear, grows the so-great banyan tree.

“Believe, my dear! What that subtle essence is, is a state-of-having-that-as-its-nature, that is this universe; that is the Real, that is the Soul (*Atman*), That thou art (*tattvamasi*) you are this, Shvetaketu.” (*Chandogya*, VI. 12, translated by Franklin Edgerton)

In his commentary on the *Gita*, concerning the verse IV.41 (“He who has destroyed all doubt by knowledge and by Yoga has given up all works and is in possession of the Self is not bound by his works...”), B. G. Tilak observes that the father is happy not only to reveal to his son this knowledge with his mental and theoretical confidence but also by a transmission of this confidence up to the heart and into action. It is a question of confidence in an elusive reality by inference and by perception, but acceptable all the same, coming as it does from someone who saw by his experience and his observation of the phenomenon of a banyan growing out of a seed, its core apparently filled with nothing. This method, consisting of confining knowledge in a mould of confidence and affection (components of devotion), seems to be approved by the *Gita*: “But among all yogins, one who has his soul united in me in a deep faith, is, in my eyes, the perfect yogin.” This faith, according to Tilak—as he describes in *Gita-rahasya* (pp. 569-76)—existed since ages in Indian tradition and has been classified as worship (*upasana*) or devotion (*bhakti*), as described in the Aphorisms of Shandilya; Love, beyond all mutations, must not be selfish. Krishna confirms: “Four kinds of virtuous men love and adore Me (...) Those in distress; those seeking for good in the world; the seekers after knowledge; and those who have Knowledge.... Of these the knower, who is ever in constant union with the Divine, whose devotion is all concentrated on Him, is the best. I am supremely dear to the knower, and he is dear to Me. Noble are all these without exception, but I hold the

knower as verily Myself; for he, the soul in union, accepts Me as the highest goal.” (*Bhagavad Gita*, VII. 16-18) On the authority of the *Bhagavata-Purana* (VII. 5. 23), Tilak enumerates the nine possible attitudes of the Devotee: (a) listening to the praises of the Lord; (b) praising the Lord; (c) thinking about the Lord; (d) serving the Lord; (e) worshipping Him; (f) prostrating before Him; (g) being His slave; (h) loving Him; (i) offering oneself to the Lord without limits. These attitudes presuppose the acceptance of the dual principle: the worshipper, the finite being in quest of the Infinite, in its aspect definable by its attributes on one hand; and the Lord, object of the worship, on the other. It is an approach to condition the reflexes, while worshipping the unqualified and abstract Absolute, with the help of concrete associations by the mind fixed on the search of the True (*satyasamkalpa*). (*Chandogya Upanishad*, III.14) In the way a professor of geometry draws a figure on the board to represent mentally the notion of the straight line (“in itself eternal, infinite, one-dimensional, or even imperceptible”) having for only attribute its length, likewise, Tilak explains before the affectivity of spiritual seekers, how essential it is to evoke names and shapes so that the heart recognises the Unmanifest. The fixing of a figuration is only a pretext, a preparation and a springboard to leap better from the concrete towards the abstract Absolute. “Greater is the difficulty (anguish of nature),” says Krishna, “for those whose consciousness is attached to the unmanifest, for the attainment of the unmanifest by the embodied souls is arduous and painful indeed. But those who, giving up all their actions to Me and wholly devoted to Me, worship meditating on Me with an unswerving Yoga, those who fix all their consciousness on Me (...), speedily I deliver them out of the sea of death-bound existence. On Me repose all thy mind and lodge all thy understanding in Me; doubt not that thou shalt dwell in Me above this (mortal existence). If, however thou art not able to keep the consciousness fixed steadily in Me, then by the practice of Yoga seek after me.... If thou art unable even to seek by practice, then be it thy aim to do My work; doing all actions for My sake, verily thou shalt attain perfection. But if this too thou art unable to do, taking refuge in My Yoga, then do thou renounce all fruit of action with the self controlled. Better indeed is knowledge than practice; than knowledge meditation is better; than meditation, renunciation of the fruit of action; on renunciation follows peace immediately. Bearing ill-will to none, and having friendship and compassion for all beings, free from egoism and I-ness and my-ness, even-minded in pain and pleasure and forgiving, the Yogin who is ever content, self-controlled and firm-willed and whose mind and reason are given up to Me, he, my devotee, is dear to Me.” (*Bhagavad Gita*, XII. 5-14) Upholding with conviction the superiority of this message of action without claiming the fruits of it, Bankimchandra dreamed of a synthesis between this extreme attitude recommended on one hand by Indian spirituality, and European industrialisation and science on the other, coming close to divinise human life. This stride closely preceded the vision of the Life Divine as elaborated by Sri Aurobindo.

In Bankimchandra’s scheme, love or affection for oneself, for one’s kin, for the

Motherland and for all creatures, is a part of this same vision of disinterested action. Citing an excerpt from Herbert Spencer, Bankimchandra underlined the necessity of self-defence as the very condition of defending the creation, as an intention of the Divine. Accepted as a divine mission, the defence of the Motherland can become, therefore, an element of spiritual action. If individuals, animals or societies stop defending themselves, it would lead to their extinction. Self-defence becomes, thus, more important than considerations to defend others. Someone who has reached a perfect equality attaches as much importance to others as to himself. In the name of this equality, no one must sacrifice a vital minimum in order to help his near ones. But the abnegation of oneself is compulsory in the case when others' existence depends on oneself. Everybody has to take care of: (a) his family and his near relatives; (b) his Motherland; (c) his employer; (d) his dependants. These are the major cases that justify the sacrifice of one's own interests and even of one's own life. But philanthropy must not necessarily exclude love for oneself, as long as one accepts all this as the creation and the dwelling of the same Divine. In a more simplified formula, Bankimchandra summarised his conception of affection: (i) when in the balance there is, on one hand one's own interest and, on the other, that of several individuals, it is necessary to give preference to the latter; (ii) where there is, on one hand, one's own interest and, on the other, a greater interest for someone else, it is necessary to prefer the latter also; (iii) where one's own interest is superior to that of another, it is necessary to privilege the former, once one has the certainty that it cannot be otherwise; (iv) where one's own interest is as important as that of another, it is again this last one that must have priority.

About love for the Motherland, Bankimchandra accepts society as a field of realisation for spiritual pursuits. Without society no individual good can really occur. The destruction of a society is equivalent to the destruction of a man's spirituality. Hence, concludes Bankimchandra, the defence of the Motherland is more imperious than one's own defence. By this same reasoning, considering the domestic life to be a part even of the life of the Motherland, Bankimchandra counsels, without ambiguity, to sacrifice the former one in the name of the Motherland. Just as the service for oneself and that for one's family can be considered to be a divine mission, it is equally logical to accept the service for the Motherland to be inseparable from this sacred task. Are not all these three services, after all, a service for the good of the world? Truly speaking, Bankimchandra sees no contradiction between these four forms of love: for oneself, for one's kin, for one's Motherland and for the world. If one must defend oneself against an oppressor, one can assume this role very well without ridding his heart of all affection even for this latter. It does not mean, however, that he accepts all blows in the name of a universal love and an equanimity facing everybody. Consequently, myself being as important as others, I shall not harm anybody, neither individually, nor collectively. Just as I shall try to make myself useful to my own society, I shall not divert myself from the opportunities of making myself useful to

other societies, according to my possibilities. I shall not harm, either, any society, intending to make a third society profit by it and, less again my own society. On the other hand, I shall not let anybody promote the interests of his own society by damaging mine. Such is the true universal vision, according to Bankimchandra: a synthesis between the love for the world and for the Motherland. This love for the Motherland must by no means look like the patriotism as practised by the European nations—he lays a particular stress on it—because their patriotism is a deeply savage crime. Their objective is to get richer while making the other peoples bleed white. “May God prevent India from this sort of patriotism!” he exclaimed honestly.

In Bankimchandra’s scheme of education as an inseparable chapter of spiritual practice in India, after devotion and affection, comes the question of developing charity. By charity, he means “the personalised affection for someone suffering.” Just as affection is a part of devotion, charity is a part of affection. Only someone who can identify himself with the phenomenal world and identify it with himself, can be charitable towards all. Bound intimately to charity, he practises the virtue of giving—a word that assumed in time, from Bankimchandra’s point of view, a very narrow meaning, whereas originally it carried rather the notion of sacrifice or renunciation capable of offering everything that one possesses in order to relieve a needy person, up to self-immolation for a noble cause. All hardship, all suffering that it means for someone who practises this charity or for those who are involved in it, is finally turned it into an intense joy of selfless achievement, as long as charity comes from this predisposition for a disinterested action, as recommended by the *Gita*: action inspired by a consciousness of the right duty and not by any ulterior motive of gains in this life or beyond. The Divine being everywhere and in all, charity can only be a gesture of returning to God what belongs to God: “sacrifice everything to the Divine: that is the extreme fulfilment of humanity.”

(To be concluded)

PRITHWINDRA MUKHERJEE

Q: Will it do any harm to my sadhana if I attempt stories or a novel?

Sri Aurobindo: You can try, if you like. The difficulty is that the subject matter of a novel belongs mostly to the outer consciousness, so that a lowering or externalising can easily come. This apart from the difficulty of keeping the inner poise when putting the mind into outer work. If you could get your established peace within, then it would be possible to do any work without disturbing or lowering the consciousness.

21 August 1934

(*Letters on Poetry and Art*, CWSA, Vol. 27, p. 725)

A WORLD WITHOUT WAR

WORLD Peace! Has there ever been a durable peace in the world during the long history of humanity? Naturally, the answer straightaway is in the negative. Leave aside the events of the distant past; even recently, during the first half of the twentieth century, we have witnessed two devastating world wars. And even while the horrible pictures of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are fresh and vivid in our memory, the shadow of a third one has constantly been hovering over this or that part of the world. However, it will perhaps not be unworthy or out of place at the present juncture to look at the subject more deeply.

A little meditative introspection reveals that a pure and profound love with its harmonising will is at work in the marrow of existence. And this power is responsible for keeping the world-play going. But for it, the world would perhaps have been shattered into fragments under the disintegrating shocks and destructive blows which have been inflicted on it ever since the beginning of history.

In fact, dispute and discord are in the very texture of terrestrial nature. It is as if the whole earth and air are vibrant with the pulsation of this force. Starting from the subhuman type it has extended its sway up to the level of today's civilised man. But, indeed, there is variation, at least in appearance, in the mode of its germination. The kind of quarrels amongst wild animals, barbarous tribes and even the conflicts between hawkers in the street, can in no way be compared with the attitudes and actions between two or more disputing persons or parties, clans or countries. But at times eruptions take place and molten lava comes up from the caverns of the disputants' hearts and a dark, destructive and poisonous vapour covers the sky. The basic nature of all is exposed and the same picture is found within the small and the great, the learned and the illiterate.

Now the question is: since war is no longer a biological necessity as in the animal, nor is it an unpredictable natural calamity like earthquakes or volcanic eruptions, is such a turn of events inevitable? Cannot the picture be changed into a happy and delightful one with a durable basis? Seen from a particular angle of vision it appears that probably it cannot be done. Why not? The exponents of the theory of "Struggle for Existence" may try to explain it away by definitive reasoning. But that is beyond our present scope of exploration. What we can do here is to point out an existence of negative facts.

Why is the history of humanity strewn with records of warfare? Even mythology speaks of war among the gods and the asuras. However, the effort for peace and brotherhood has been continuing from time immemorial. The message of compassion and non-violence of the Buddha, the tireless and extensive practice and preaching of the Emperor Asoka and the teaching and self-sacrifice of Christ for the cause of universal love and amity could not bring about the end of war. So the natural tendency is to conclude that struggle and conflict are inseparable adjuncts of life, and that a

state of peaceful living is perhaps not possible.

But the question arises: what then of the long-cherished ideal of a golden age and the ultimate purpose of Love which secretly works within each object and in all things? There is that spark of soul which burns deep within and shows with its unflinching light the way towards sympathy, synthesis and harmony—that eternal and original delight of being which emerged by breaking the walls of separation set up by ego and ignorance, preference and partiality, and which gives full recognition and response to the prophetic words, “...the realisation of human unity through the awakening in all and the manifestation by all of the inner Divinity which is One.” (The Mother, *Words of Long Ago*, CWM, Vol. 2, p. 47)

No doubt, the possibility of this emergence depends greatly on spiritual effort, practice and perseverance. To come in contact with one’s real self, one has to penetrate, as it were, the crude regions of one’s nature which harbour wrath and fury, jealousy and hatred and above all, the motives of falsehood, hypocrisy and selfishness. Still, it is also an undeniable fact that the urge towards this penetration and perfection is an immensely powerful and eternally active phenomenon in human nature, not only in the individual, but in the collectivity as well. And once this is realised, men and nations can no longer remain puppets in the hands of wayward forces but must strive to regain their essential, spiritual status. For, we are not only what we appear to be, but we are also, in essence and potentiality, what we ought to be, individually and collectively. We need to become truly ourselves. The following lines from Rabindranath Tagore may help us understand the concept a little better:

What is it in man that asserts its immortality in spite of the obvious fact of death? It is not his physical body or his mental organisation. It is that deeper unity, that ultimate mystery in man, which from the centre of his world radiates towards its circumference; which is in his body, yet transcends his body; which is in his mind, yet grows beyond his mind; which, through the things belonging to him, expresses something that is not in them; which, occupying his present, overflows its banks of the past and the future. It is the personality of man conscious of its inexhaustible abundance.

(*Personality*, 1st edition, p. 38)

Let us listen to the words of the Upanishad:

बृहच्च तदिव्यमचिन्त्यरूपं सूक्ष्माच्च तत्सूक्ष्मतरं विभाति ।
दूरात्सुदूरे तदिहान्तिके च चश्यत्स्वैव निहितं गुहायाम् ॥७॥

Vast is That, divine, its form unthinkable; it shines out subtler than the subtle: very far and farther than farness, it is here close to us, for those who have vision

it is even here in this world; it is here, hidden in the secret heart.

(*Mundaka*, chapter 3, section 1, verse 7,
Sri Aurobindo, *Kena and Other Upanishads*, CWSA, Vol. 18, p. 143)

These quotations give us an idea of the deeper truth. But to have an idea and the actual attainment of the Truth are two different things. While we can get the former with the help of our mind, the latter requires an altogether different means of approach. Let us listen to the voice of aspiration for this fulfilment:

...when you break my earth and release the energies; when you turn my pride into power in your hands and my ignorance into light, my narrowness into wideness, my selfishness into a true gathering together of forces in one centre, my greed into a capacity of untiring search after the truth for the attainment of its substances, my egoism into the true and conscious instrumental centre, my mind into a channel for you to descend, my heart into your hearth of pure fire and flame, my life into a pure and translucent substance for your handling, my body into a conscious vessel for holding what of you is meant for me; then, O Mother of Radiances, my aim in life now and hereafter will be fulfilled in the true and right and vast way. Aspiration wakes in me! Achieve in me all that I flame for!

(*The Mother of Radiances**)

Let us not fail to appreciate that this aspiration is not confined to any individual being. It is pronounced on behalf of the whole of mankind and of manifested nature which strives to reach its goal, to achieve its fulfilment. It is the call of the flute of the divine flute-player and a tongue of flame of the mystic fire.

By now the two aspects of existence are clear to us; one, division, conflict, hatred, war and death; the other, love, peace, harmony, co-operation and life. But we have not found any definite answer as to whether war will remain as a permanent factor, and if so, which side will dominate in the long run: love, light and creation or doom, darkness and destruction. At the present juncture of human history the question is of immense importance and deserves a clear-sighted treatment. It seems that the entire issue rests on the goodwill and efficient handling of the world situation by the leaders and guardians of the world's liberty, peace, security and safety. As for ourselves, we can do nothing better than simply quote excerpts from prophetic and mystic souls.

In connection with the extremely disharmonious condition of the world, Sri Aurobindo says,

* The short piece "Hymn to the Mother of Radiances" was published in the book *The Hour of God*, and subsequently included in SABCL, Vol. 17. It was later found that the piece was written not by Sri Aurobindo but by Amrita.

War and violent revolution can be eliminated, if we will, though not without immense difficulty, but on the condition that we get rid of the inner causes of war and the constantly accumulating Karma of successful injustice of which violent revolutions are the natural reactions. Otherwise, there can be only at best a fallacious period of artificial peace. What was in the past will be sown still in the present and continue to return on us in the future.

(Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, CWSA, Vol. 25, pp. 601-02)

But let us not be disappointed at that. The means of remedy and the words of hope are there.

A cosmos or universe is always a harmony, otherwise it could not exist, it would fly to pieces. But as there are musical harmonies which are built out of discords partly or even predominantly, so this universe (the material) is disharmonious in its separate elements—the individual elements are at discord with each other to a large extent; it is only owing to the sustaining Divine Will behind that the whole is still a harmony to those who look at it with the cosmic vision. But it is a harmony in evolution in progress—that is, all is combined to strive towards a goal which is not yet reached, and the object of our Yoga is to hasten the arrival to this goal. When it is reached, there will be a harmony of harmonies substituted for the present harmony built up on discords.

(Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 23, pp.1082-83)

But so long as the condition remains unattained, what should be our attitude towards the universal upheavals of sudden and upsetting circumstances? Here is Sri Aurobindo's answer to that:

There is a higher secret Will transcendent behind the play and will of the cosmic forces—a play which is always a mixture of things favourable and things adverse—and it is that Will which one must wait upon and have faith in; but you must not expect to be able always to understand its workings.

(Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 579)

CHUNILAL CHOWDHURY

DEVOTIONAL POETRY IN TAMIL

(Continued from the issue of May 2007)

15. Honeyed Sweetness

THE honey-sweet devotional poesy of Manickavachakar has been a great inspiration for Tamil writers for a millennium and more. There has been no uniform opinion about his date. Did he come after the three great Nayanmars, Tirujnanasambandar, Tirunavukkarasar and Sundarar? Or was he electrifying the Tamil countryside with his poesy much earlier? As with almost all the devotional poets of earlier times, hagiology takes over and its recordation never offers a dull moment. Leading Shaivite scholars like Maraimalai Adikal and K. Vellaivaranar have discussed the problem. The conclusion seems to point to a later date for Manickavachakar.

Unlike the Nayanmars whose life stories have been recounted by Sekkizhar, Manickavachakar's life has to be reconstructed from references in the various Puranas that speak of Shiva's sixty-three "divine plays" (*tiruvilaiyadal*). The earliest on this subject is *Tiravalavudaiyar Tiruvilaiyadal Puranam* by Perumpatrapuliyur Nambi of Sellinagar. The last of them is, perhaps, Mahavidwan Minakshisundaram Pillai's *Tiruperundurai Puranam*. There is thus no lack of material though one is never sure of history and facts when dealing with such works. But does it matter? Manickavachakar happens to be one of the brilliant illuminations of the Bhakti Movement and that is all we need to know.

Manickavachakar's life as it has come down to us may be briefly recounted here. He was born in Tiruvathavur near Madurai in a household of learned Brahmins. Manickavachakar's intellectual brilliance brought him an invitation from the Pandyan king Arimardhana to be a minister in the court. A very able administrator, Manickavachakar was generally referred to as Thennavan Brahmarayan.

Once King Arimardhana wished to purchase a new company of horses. He sent Manickavachakar with plenty of money to the seashore to purchase imported horses. On the way he was deeply attracted by the temple at Tiruperundurai. He wished to tarry there for some time and sent his assistants back to Madurai. Having taken his bath, Manickavachakar went round the temple. He found a teacher holding classes to a set of students beneath the shade of a wild-lime tree. Recognising the teacher to be Shiva, Manickavachakar bowed to him in deep emotion and was purified by the crystalline glance of infinite grace from the Teacher. Placing his foot on Manickavachakar's crown, Shiva gave him initiation in the five-syllabled mantra, Na-ma-shi-va-ya.

Uttering the mantra brought on a transformation in the young man. One is reminded of Sri Aurobindo's description in this connection:

As when the mantra sinks in Yoga's ear,
 Its message enters stirring the blind brain
 And keeps in the dim ignorant cells its sound;
 The hearer understands a form of words
 And, musing on the index thought it holds,
 He strives to read it with the labouring mind,
 But finds bright hints, not the embodied truth:
 Then, falling silent in himself to know
 He meets the deeper listening of his soul:
 The Word repeats itself in rhythmic strains:
 Thought, vision, feeling, sense, the body's self
 Are seized unalterably and he endures
 An ecstasy and an immortal change...¹

The "immortal change" in Manickavachakar was obvious. While he began singing hymns which were extremely sweet, his mind was turned away from all secular concerns. Since the teacher also vanished from the scene along with his disciples, Manickavachakar felt forlorn and decided to stay on in Tiruperundurai. The funds given by Arimardhana were spent by him in feeding the devotees of Shiva.

News reached the Pandyan king that Manickavachakar was spending lavishly and had done nothing about buying new horses. He sent a royal command for Manickavachakar to return immediately with the promised horses. The young man found himself in an impossible situation and rushed to the sanctum of the temple and prayed for deliverance. There came a voice from the beyond that Manickavachakar should make a promise immediately regarding the delivery of horses at the appropriate time. He did so, but when the promised time passed in vain, the king had Manickavachakar brought back to Madurai by force and imprisoned him. All that the devotee could do now was pray to the Lord.

Suddenly, as if from nowhere, a set of horse riders appeared led by a handsome young man. The stranger went to the king and gave away the horses as having been ordered by Manickavachakar. The hymnologist was freed by a happy Arimardhana who presented the stranger with an expensive garment. The horse rider received it with the edge of his whip and placed it on his crown. The king was incensed at the slight but Manickavachakar assured him that the leader was after all from a foreign clime and was following his native custom in regard to etiquette. The leader then left with the other riders and Manickavachakar went home with the gifts presented by the king who was delighted with the thoroughbreds that had now come to his stables.

Chaos broke out that night in Madurai city. All the new horses that had entered the royal stables that day became jackals. Howling, biting and killing the other horses

1. *Savitri*, Book IV, canto iii, p. 375.

in the stables, they spread out to all parts of the city and kept up a ruckus. The king was aghast and imprisoned Manickavachakar for having tricked him in this manner. For, the king did not know that the stranger was Shiva himself, the riders were his demonic hordes and the horses were jackals from a nearby forest. Shiva now put the Vaigai in full spate to teach the king a lesson. The king ordered each family to send a representative to help strengthen the banks of the river Vaigai.

Shiva now put on the appearance of a farm worker and went to an old lady who made a living by selling an eatable called 'pittu'. As she had none to send to represent her family she requested this 'worker' to help strengthen the bunds of the Vaigai. Finding the old lady's representative idling away, the overseer complained to the king. The king rushed to the place where the worker was dancing gaily and lashed his back. Immediately the king felt the sting of a lash on his own back and all those present on the banks of the Vaigai also felt the painful lash. The Pandyan king realised his folly and set Manickavachakar free. The hymnologist spent the rest of his life going around Tamil Nadu and singing in praise of various shrines of Shiva.

Manickavachakar's two works, *Tiruvachakam* and *Tirukkovaiyar* form the Eighth Book of the Shaivite canon, *Panniru Tirumurai*. *Tiruvachakam* charmed G.U. Pope no end and he translated the work into English. Four longish prayers followed by forty-seven decads contain 639 verses in all. Several emotional stances based on pure devotion are presented in *Tiruvachakam* which begins with 'Shiva Puranam'. Though titled a 'Puranam', the poem has only 95 lines and forms an overture to the rest of the prayers in the work.

For ever acclaim Namashivaya!
Hail the feet of our Lord!
Acclaim joyously of the Lord
Who never withdraws from my heart
Even for a moment! Acclaim joyously
The gem-like teacher of Tiruperundurai!
He is the very image of the Vedas
Who immerses my heart in sweetness.²

By referring first to the Panchakshara, Na-ma-shi-va-ya, Manickavachakar underlines the importance of the Name of the Lord in spiritual life. Followers of Savitri's yoga know of the crucial importance the Name has for the sadhaka to advance in his spiritual journey which is set upon by evil forces quite often:

As if in a long endless tossing street
One driven mid a trampling hurrying crowd

2. *Siva Puranam*, ll. 1-4. All translations from Manickavachakar are by Prema Nandakumar.

Hour after hour she trod without release,
 Holding by her will the senseless meute at bay;
 Out of the dreadful press she dragged her will
 And fixed her thought upon the saviour Name...³

Manickavachakar says he is saluting the Lord “by His grace”, for even a devotional heart is the gift of the Lord. The Lord is all-pervading while the devotee stands tired having taken birth repeatedly in the evolutionary advance:

As grass, herb, worm, tree,
 A variety of animals, as bird, as snake,
 As stone, as human being, ghosts, demons,
 Asuras, sages, gods ... in this world
 I have taken births innumerable and am tired.
 My Lord! Today I envisioned thy golden feet
 And feel a soul Released, having recognised
 The sound of Om reverberating in my heart.⁴

Manickavachakar is all gratitude to the Lord for having transformed his body which is verily made up of despicable matter into a sweet instrument. It must be used to praise the Lord who dances in Tillai (Chidambaram). ‘Shiva Puranam’ is followed by ‘Keerti Tiruvakaval’ (Poem in Praise of His Fame) and touches upon a few of the ‘plays’ of the Lord who is intent upon destroying the ignorance in the heart of the devotee.

Shiva had come as a boar to strive with Arjuna; as a fisherman he had retrieved the lost Vedas; coming as a teacher he had taught earnest disciples at places like Nandambadi, Uttarakosamangai, Tiruperundurair, Tiruppattamangai and Tiruvarur. While concluding, Manickavachakar equates Kailas with Chidambaram. ‘Tiruvandapakuti’ (On the Supreme Universe) verbalises the awe of the devotee as he recognises the cosmic form of the Lord as also his subtle presence within:

Look upon the unequalled Lord!
 Watch him wear the Boar’s tusk!
 Recognise him garmented in tiger’s hide.
 I think of him, smeared with the holy ash,
 And am unable to contain myself.
 He is a wonder lutanist, the lute’s music,
 The lover of the music too.

3. *Savitri*, Book VII, canto iii, p. 49.

4. *Siva Puranam*, ll. 26-34.

He exists, of this be sure.
He is the Supreme, the Ancient.

The fourth poem in this opening set is 'Potri Tiruvakaval' (Poem of Praise). The 225 lines of this poem speaks of the compassion of the Lord for having come down to the earth and the need for meditating upon the divine to overcome worldly sorrows. The best way to remember the divine is to praise him and offer our thoughts, actions and works to him. About 130 lines help in such vocalised meditation:

Owner of all! My soul! I praise you.
I am your lowly servitor! I praise you.
My Lord! O Atom! I praise you.
Shiva, my Chief, I praise you.
O Ideal! Good Thought! I praise you.

Manickavachakar follows this prologue with 'Tiruchathakam' (The Divine Hundred). Ten decads deal with as many ways in which the Lord had overwhelmed his devotee. Commentators speak of this as a strange combination of devotion and non-attachment. The eminent Shaivite scholar, Ratna Navaratnam writes:

He (Manickavachakar) offers ten bouquets of love in these ten decads. The bard's poesy articulates every small detail of his quest and his grand conquest. The tones of disgust and pathos, reverence and wonder ebb and flow, as the mighty lover depicts his subtlest reactions to a variety of contacts with the world, and we pant and halt at his relentless pursuit after the unifying principle of love. If we do not understand it, it is not because we are ignorant of the underlying philosophy, but that we are blind to the vision of love.⁵

So the ascent in consciousness begins with an intense aspiration accompanied by a rejection of material possessions. Reaching out to gain true knowledge, help is sought from the received scriptures. Manickavachakar reveals a firm conviction that in his search for at-one-ment with the Divine, he would not be tempted even by the promise of residence in heavens. Once the devotee's being is immersed in Shiva consciousness, what else can give a greater fulfilment?

Ocean of nectar, grand mountain, one who has
A form like a forest of red lotuses,
Self-illumed Lord, you have taken possession
Of my mind. You have ordered

5. *Tiruvachakam: The Hindu Testament of Love* (1963), p. 90.

My eyes twain to gaze upon thy feet.
 My worship has been for you alone.
 You have made use of my speech to praise
 Thee. What a wonder-process that
 You have entered me! I had no knowledge
 Of controlling my sense organs
 And using them to worship thee.
 All this is your doing.⁶

As we proceed with the verses we recognise the importance of cleansing the mind and heart of all undesirable thoughts and cravings, the need to meditate upon the dancer of Tillai, to consecrate one's body, mind and soul to the worship of Shiva, and the good that comes by associating oneself with other devotees. 'Neethal Vinappam' is a cry from the depths of the devotee's heart for being accepted by the Lord. He is weak, fear-ridden, helpless; only the Lord is his refuge. A very striking image is created by Manickavachakar to get this idea through to us:

Supreme Lord! You have taken me
 In equal terms with your ancient devotees.
 Do not reject me because I am unworthy.
 After all you wear two extremes like the moon
 And the vicious snake on your crown.
 The fear of birth like a five-hooded snake
 Is frightening me through my five senses.
 My mind is like a rat afraid of fighting this snake
 And hides itself by gazing within. Guard me!⁷

The matin song 'Tiruvempavai' has twenty verses in which a group of aspirant girls wake up one another at dawn in the month of Margazhi (December-January) and sing of Shiva. Manickavachakar uses work associated with women in everyday life and adroitly links the activities to the prayers in praise of Shiva. The game of *ammanai* in which girls throw up three balls made of wood and try catching them ('Tiruvammanai'); the act of pounding herbs to make scented powder to be used for bathing ('Tiruporchunnam'); a game of singing to the tunes of the Padaka instrument ('Tiru Tellenam'); a dance in which one group asks a question and another group formats an answer ('Tiru chazhal'); culling flowers ('Tirupoovali'); the jumping-in-step game ('Tiru Unthi'); the game of tapping shoulders and dancing ('Tiru tolnokkam') and moving in the swing ('Tiru Ponnusal'). This was certainly a brilliant way of popu-

6. Verse 30.

7. Verse 139.

larising thoughts of the divine by making use of images already in currency. The verses continue to be popular and reveal how there can be a million approaches to attain Shiva consciousness.

Manickavachakar also makes use of the beautiful concept of using birds as messengers. The *kuyil* (Indian nightingale) is asked by him to sing tunefully and attract the Lord to the devotee:

O blue-sheened *kuyil*!
 The Lord resides in Uttarakosamangai
 In the temple with high spires,
 Where resides creeper-like Uma.
 He is ruling for the world's good.
 Do sing and make him come here.⁸

There is a matin song too. In verse after verse, Manickavachakar is almost in tears at recognising the maternal love the Lord has for the devotees. Nay more. The Lord has greater love for a devotee than a mother has for her child. In the decad on "I have caught You" ('Piditha Pathu'), he sings:

You have shown greater compassion to me
 Than a mother who remembers to feed her babe
 With milk at the appropriate time. You have
 Melted my body, illumined the spaces within me,
 Showered the honey of Ananda on me
 Accompanying me wherever I go. My precious
 Lord Shiva! I have followed you
 And caught you firmly in my grip.
 How can you escape me now?⁹

The divine exploits of Shiva are but referred to occasionally in *Tiruvachakam*. The verses recreate in us an atmosphere of utter sweetness and Ananda most of the time, a condition in which Manickavachakar obviously remained lost most of the time. Perhaps that is the reason why the word 'then' (honey) recurs in the verses very often.

The two verses titled '*Tirupadai Ezhuchi*' ('Taking up Arms') present a remarkable image, making the vision of Shiva a reality within our experience:

Lord Shiva raises the sword of knowledge.
 Beat the drum of reciting His names!

8. Verse 350.

9. Verse 544.

He is the leader who rides a huge bull.
 Hold for him the white umbrella
 Of discrimination. Come fast to wear
 The armour of Holy Ash. We will attain
 The supreme consciousness,
 And escape the net of illusion.

Servitors! Step forward in the front.
 Devotees! Go in orderly formation.
 Competent Yogis! Rise upwards
 In this massive formation. O Siddhas
 Skilled and strong, bring up the rear.
 Ours is the state of eternal bliss
 Where no sorrow taints our existence.¹⁰

While the *Tiruvachakam* is an amazing mansion of bhakti twanging the various chords that make up an aspirant's journey on the path of mysticism, *Tirukkovaiyar* is a direct descendant of the Aham aesthesis of Sangam literature. Also known as *Tiruchitrabalakkovaiyar*, we are told that Shiva himself wrote down the verses as Manickavachakar indited them in a mood of self-lost ananda. This sustained poem of bridal mysticism contains 400 verses and has a remarkable commentary by Perasiriyar which has helped in explaining many of them to future generations. All the 400 verses are in praise of Shiva in Tillai (Chidambaram), though there are occasional references to other great pilgrim centres like Madurai, Sirkazhi and Kutralam.

'*Kovai*' means 'stringing together'. Here the poem strings together the many facets of love between a young man and a maiden. Associated with them in the telling are the friend of the hero, the friend of the maiden and the maiden's foster-mother. The presiding personality invoked by the characters in a *Kovai* poem is usually a king or a chieftain. In *Tirukkovaiyar* the presiding king is Shiva himself. The poem is certainly a tour de force in walking the razor's edge of erotic poesy and compelling such romantic matter to lend itself to the nuances of devotional ecstasy. A careful distillation would reveal the significance of the Dance of Shiva and unveil the Lord himself as he is visualised in Shaiva Siddhanta philosophy. The opening verse itself gives us some idea of the manner in which the work has been structured. The context is the moment of the hero looking at the heroine and expressing his appreciation of her lovely form:

In the land of the Lord of Tillai
 A creeper has appeared having as limbs

10. Verses 615-16.

The lovely lotus, the blue lily,
 The colourful 'kumizh' blossom,
 'Kongu' buds and 'kandal' flowers.
 It steps gently as a swan
 And appears as the victory flag of Cupid.
 What wonder this!¹¹

Though the meaning seems to be apparent, the reference is actually to the "land of the Lord of Tillai" and hence the symbolism points to the aspirant's first sight of his guru. The guru is compared to flowers as they, like the guru, raise the aspirant's consciousness by widening his perception of nature. A mere sight of such lovely flowers makes the common man react with great joy. In the same way, the sight of one's guru also brings supernal joy. Here is one come at last who would be removing the ignorance that fills one's being! Shiva consciousness has made a human being into a realised soul, a guru just as the environs of Tillai have made the place beautiful with a variety of blossoms.

Each one of the verses in *Tirukkovaiyar* thus draws our attention to either the greatness of Tillai or the image of the divine Dancer. Here is the confidante of the heroine informing the hero of a trysting place:

The Supreme Illumination above
 Is the Lord of Tillai; as it is his hill,
 The sun shies away from it, making it dark,
 Where the blooms of the gamboge tree
 Appear as stars. Crystal rocks glisten there.
 It appears as if the moon in the sky
 Has relocated here to expose its loveliness.¹²

There is a subdued ecstasy in the framing of the words and description of the trysting place signifying the state of consciousness when the Ananda of meeting the Lord envelops the aspirant. The references to some of the legends concerning Shiva found in *Tirukkovaiyar* make the verses doubly interesting. When the heroine feels sad about having to leave her natal place, the hero assures her that his place of residence is close to hers:

Tender creeper of a damsel who lives
 In the dark mountain of the Lord
 Who skinned the elephant that came
 Like a mountain! Don't you worry.

11. Verse 1.

12. Verse 116.

From our dwelling mountain the light
 Will stream towards the shades in your place
 And make it glow brilliant as if in a white dress.¹³

Such is the rainbow-hued brilliance of devotion in the Tamil of Manickavachakar that one is simply lost in the waves of astonishment and bliss at his imaginative exuberance along with a firm commitment to faith in the Supreme. The very image of humility, he wonders at the power that had drawn him from material life to the illumined way. Then he concludes that it was the Divine that had chosen him and that was his good fortune:

Am I the one who performed tapasya?
 Yet I have the good fortune to exclaim:
 Shi-va-ya-na-ma. My Lord Shiva,
 Sweet like honey and nectar, has on his own
 Come to reside in my heart
 And granted me grace. He has seen to it
 That I have no more any desire
 For this flesh-controlled life on earth.¹⁴

Apparently the Divine chooses us before we choose the Divine!

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

13. Verse 15. When the egoistic sages in Daruka forest became angry with Shiva for having disturbed the chaste thoughts of their wives, they performed a terrible fire sacrifice out of which several killers like a tiger and an elephant rushed out on Shiva. He put an end to them all.

14. Verse 555.

NAVANIT STORIES

THE GUIDANCE OF A GURU

TEDD-SAHIB was an American millionaire. He liked to read books about India. In one of the books he read that milk and ghee improve one's mind and increase longevity, so much so that within a month of its use one's physical condition is transformed.

Americans love adventures and experiments and Tedd-sahib plunged straight away into it. One day; two days; four days passed. A week went by. Tedd-sahib began to grow weaker and weaker! Doubts scurried about in his head. Another week went by. Instead of increasing in strength and health, his mind and body grew weaker and sicker. Frustration and anger took over and he began to scream, "Charlatans! Swindlers! Lying rascals! Barbarians!"

Around that time a Sannyasi from India arrived in his city. Someone arranged a lecture in the Town Hall. Tedd-sahib's mind was made up. "I shall expose these fellows in public; a good opportunity has come by." He went to the Hall, and the moment the Sannyasi uttered, "Ladies and gentlemen!" a loud thunder reverberated in the Hall: "Don't you dare say another word! We don't need fraudulent Indians here! Liars! You speak lies; you print lies; you spread lies."

The meeting was stunned. So was the Sannyasi; somehow he managed to regain his composure and said, "Sir, would you be so kind as to pause and allow me to complete my talk? May I attend to your difficulty afterwards?" Under the pressure of the audience Tedd-sahib relented and sat down. But he didn't hear a single word of what the Sannyasi spoke. His mind was filled with his woes and continued to boil with anger.

The speech was over; grumbling and mumbling Tedd-sahib rushed up to the dais. "You damned Indians, how you can lie and bluff! Here, see what your book says: 'Use of milk and ghee improves the mind, makes the body healthy, and adds to one's life.' See that? Now hear this. Trusting these words I experimented for a whole month and what was the result? Just the reverse! Tell me, if this is not charlatanism what is it? Sheer falsehood!"

"But sir, could you tell me how you used milk and ghee? What precisely did you do?"

"Oh, I went in on a grand scale. You can come and see my garden, there still are two huge tubs lying there. One I filled to the brim with milk and one with ghee. I poured huge mugs of milk on my body and laid layers of ghee all over myself every single day for a whole month, religiously, for hours! But with what result? Instead of gaining weight and strength my body became a bag of bones, instead of health and vitality, debility and depression! My life-span is shortened by ten years instead of being lengthened! How can we trust you Indians?"

"Arre, Tedd-sahib! Is this the way to make use of milk and ghee? You could

have inquired of someone who knew what the writer meant, and obtained the right directions. To rush into practice on the basis of such a misunderstanding is certainly not a wise thing, especially in such matters! A knower, a guide, a guru, has to be approached, his directions understood and followed under his supervision, if the goal is to be achieved. You see, milk and ghee are not to be poured and plastered over one's body but imbibed in right quantities, in a systematic way; how else can the right results be obtained? Anyway, would you permit me to guide you in this matter, please? At the end of the month, you can compare the result with what the book claims, and if I fail you will have every right to curse and condemn us Indians. What do you say?"

Tedd-*sahib* agreed and the Sannyasi stayed in his house for a month. He cooked a large variety of dishes using milk in all its forms, using ghee as prescribed, and fed them to Tedd-*sahib*. The transformation began; his body gained in weight and strength, his mind in satisfaction and cheerfulness. At the end of the month, overjoyed by the result, Tedd-*sahib* published his experience under the title, "A guru's guidance".

PUJALAL

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

You have always believed in Guruvada: I would ask you then to put your faith in the Guru and the guidance and rely on the Ishwara for the fulfilment, to have faith in my abiding love and affection, in the affection and divine goodwill and loving kindness of the Mother, stand firm against all attacks and go forward perseveringly towards the spiritual Goal and the all-fulfilling and all-satisfying touch of the All-Blissful, the Ishwara.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 124)

The Gita ranks first among the world's scriptures. The knowledge that has been briefly explained in the Gita is the highest and most secret knowledge. The law of right living, dharma, propounded in the Gita includes within its scope and is the basis of all other law of right living. The way of works shown in the Gita is the eternal path for the world's march to the heights.

Sri Aurobindo

(English translation of the opening words of Sri Aurobindo's Bengali writing *Gitar Bhumika*)

With Compliments from Well-wishers

*Endure and you will triumph. Victory goes
to the most enduring.*

*And with the Grace and divine love
nothing is impossible.*

My force and love are with you.

At the end of the struggle there is Victory.

7 January 1966

The Mother

(Words of the Mother, CWM, Vol. 14, p. 165)

With Compliments from B.