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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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OMNIPRESENCE

He is in me, round me, facing everywhere.
Self-walled in ego to exclude His right,
I stand upon its boundaries and stare
Into the frontiers of the Infinite.

Each finite thing I see is a façade;
From its windows looks at me the Illimitable.
In vain was my prison of separate body made;
His occult presence burns in every cell.

He has become my substance and my breath;
He is my anguish and my ecstasy.
My birth is His eternity's sign, my death
A passage of His immortality.

My dumb abysses are His screened abode;
In my heart's chamber lives the unworshipped God.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 152)

THE SCIENCE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

(Continued from the issue of June 2007)

Vedantic Psychology

3

ALL psychology must result in and every complete statement of psychological truth must have for its frame a double schema of existence into which the facts it deals with must fall, a descending scale and an ascending scale.

The simplest elementary psychology deals with three notes of a limited scale,—the body and physical field and its impacts, the life and body and biological and physiological processes, the mental being and its conscious experience and action. This is a scale of ascension.

*

The nature of the physical field is the first fact; it determines everything else; it gives the impacts which awaken the consciousness, the impressions, images, subjects which are its matter, the starting-point and basis of all its conceptions, the body which is its support, instrument, fulcrum of action, the physical occasion of the sense of self.

Everything appears to be in the body or by the body and either for the body or for the I-sense in the body.

The body seems to be the principal if not the only cause or determinant of individual consciousness.

What is not of the body is of the physical field outside the body.

Whatever in consciousness seems not to be of the physical field, yet appears to be derived from it, to be a resultant, development or deformation from physical experience.

*

The life in the body is the necessary modification of the first fact of material being, without whose intervention consciousness is unable to manifest in any material form. The atom is a form of matter, the stone is a material body, but life in these things is either nil or not developed to the point where manifestation of consciousness becomes possible. Consciousness in the atom and the stone is either latent, non-manifest to us, suppressed, potential or nil.

Life in any degree is not sufficient for the manifestation of mental consciousness. A certain high degree of it or else a certain indispensable kind of organisation is

needed for this third tone of the scale. Plants are living, even in a degree intensely living, they have a nervous organisation, but consciousness is either nil or latent, non-manifest at least to us, suppressed or else of another kind than ours, a submental nervous consciousness and not mentality.

Life supplies certain biological conditions and certain physiological processes which physically underlie the operations of conscious mental being.

Life gives the intermediate dynamic link between mind and body.

Life has two operations which serve the purpose of mentality, a necessary life power in a nervous apparatus and a capacity of instrumental development and modification. Without the power of life in the nervous apparatus consciousness in the body is impossible; without the power of developing modifications it might exist as in the lower animals, but it could not expand as in man.

The nervous apparatus is the initial biological fact necessary to mentality. Life power consists not of the nervous system, which is a physical element, but of a new power or energy of which the system is the vehicle,—the power of nervous communication, nervous charge, nervous discharge. This power is not sufficient to create mentality, for the plant too possesses them, yet does not appear to be a mental being, but it is the first condition of embodied mentality.

A power of biological and physiological development is the secondary, continuative factor necessary to farther evolution of mentality. Once the nervous vital power appears in material body, it shows a biological power of developing a more complex physical instrumentation for a more complex nervous activity. Once it has attained a certain complexity of physical instrumentation, life seems able indefinitely to refine in some subtle way its action of nervous power so as to support a more and more fine and complex action of mentality.

How far this development of mentality can go and how far it is dependent on the physical apparatus and the nervous action is one of the capital questions of psychology.

*

Mental being, power and operation of mental consciousness is the third note of the scale of being.

Mind cannot certainly be said to be constituted of life and body, nervous action and reaction in a physical body. Nervous action does not appear to constitute of itself consciousness, any more than physical impact and consequent atomic disturbance appears of itself to constitute nervous action. As a correspondent or resultant nervous communication, charge and discharge is necessary to manifest life, so a resultant or correspondent conscious action,—sensation, perception, thought, conscious motiving impulsion, desire, intention, will,—are necessary to manifest mind.

Mind may or may not be an exact result, reflection or correspondence of life action in body, life thinking itself out in body, body living and thinking out its

experience in mind, but it is not the same thing as life and body.

Life is a new or second power emerging from or in material energy. Mind is a new or third power emerging from or in the life-energy.

*

But this is only the ascending scale.

Mind is not only awakened by life-action in the body at a certain evolutionary pitch of its operations; mind reacts upon and in certain ways uses, for its own characteristic purpose, modifies by its will to act and increase the life action and the ways of the body.

Mind is not limited in its thoughts by the life and body. There is an action in it which is more than a creative stress of life, an attempt to image supraphysical realities, which we may dismiss as an illusion or a result of abnormal physiological states, but may also follow as first clues to a greater truth and possibly a higher tone or tones of the scale of being.

In that case, mind appears as a larger thing than life and material being. Though apparently an evolution from life and the body, it may have been in reality a prior power, life and body only its occasions and means for self-manifestation on the material plane of being.

At any rate, psychology has to regard the scale not only from the upward point of view of body creating life, life creating mind, but from the downward point of view of mind creating new life in body.

Evidently mind is a greater thing, higher than life and body. In that case, besides the ascending scale of the lower rising to a highest possibility, we must regard a possibility of the descending scale, the highest reality involving itself in the lower conditions of being.

But the question arises whether mind itself is the highest possibility or the highest reality[.]

*

Vedantic psychology explores the idea and intuition of a higher reality than mind.

The intuition can only be verified by psychological experience exceeding the normal action of mind. This experience may lead to constantly ascending intuitions verified by an ascent of experience to some summit of being.

Beyond mind psychological experience finds another power of energy, another note in the scale of being. This we will call the supermind. This supermind lives and acts natively in a domain of experience of which the mind becomes aware by a reflective experience and calls vaguely spirit or spiritual being.

Spirit is found to have three tones of its being. Triune, it makes each successively

a power of its energy, a status of spiritual experience and form of its action. Triune, they are inseparable, but one or other can be so stressed as to appear a leading principle.

But we have to note three essential facts about spirit:—

Spirit is infinite consciousness, even when it dwells upon finite formulations of conscious being.

Awareness of spirit is infinite self-awareness.

All its three essential principles must have this character of infinity.

Infinite self-conscious bliss is the first; infinite self-conscious conscious energy is the second; infinite self-conscious existence the third principle of spirit. Existence, consciousness, bliss are the three tones of infinity, the three basic colours of the Absolute.

*

The ascending scale of being presents then seven notes, matter, life, mind, supermind, bliss self, self of conscious energy, self of primary conscious existence.

But the experience we get as we ascend in the scale leads us to the discovery that what in evolution appears subsequent is prior in reality. Life evolves in matter, but was preexistent to matter, latent, omnipresent, waiting for matter to be ready to be manifest—which it does when the movement of energy reaches a certain intensity.

Mind evolves in embodied life, but was preexistent to matter and life, latent, omnipresent, involved, a hidden cause of action waiting for life and matter to be ready for its manifestation which comes when the movement of energy has reached a greater intensity. So supermind is prior to mind, latent, omnipresent, involved even in matter and life, a hidden cause of action and waits for mind to be ready for its manifestation, and since supermind acts only in spirit spirit too must be there latent, omnipresent, involved, a hidden cause of action. But spirit is not dependent on the evolution of supermind for its manifestation; it can appear to our mentality, to our life-consciousness, even to our physical mind.

The true nature and rationale of this priority appear in the descending scale. There we see the true development of the universe.

Spirit of self-being develops self of conscious energy which supports its self of cosmic bliss, which acts on the finite by supermind, which offers its differentiations to mind, relates them in life, fixes them phenomenally in body of material substance. This is the descending scale by which universe is created or made sensible to embodied soul.

But in the material world, all is first involved in matter and has to find itself by a development from material being and with material being as its support and basis. The evolving process of this self-discovery of the universal existence produces the phenomenon of evolution of higher and greater from lower and lesser principles which we call the ascending scale of being.

This phenomenon baffling now to the reason becomes a self-evident proposition when we observe the descending scale and find involution to have preceded evolution. The phenomenon arises inevitably from the nature of our being.

*

Schema of being has to be formulated from these two points of view, the results, though data of experience, being at first taken as a working hypothesis, subject to verification. We follow actually the ascending scale, but the descending scale has first to be shown, as otherwise the possible explanations of psychological phenomenon which result from this line of experience, would be unintelligible and would have either to be excluded or the whole enquiry restated in altered detail in the end.

All questions of the reality or unreality of the world, its fundamental or ultimate purpose or want of purpose, the destiny of the soul, must be left over till the psychological data have been understood. To proceed otherwise would be to determine them by metaphysical reasoning; but the object before us is to arrive at them by the road of psychology.

The whole psychology of Vedanta depends upon this double scale and without it could have no complete scientific verification. Because it exists experience of consciousness can give a clue to the nature of world existence. Metaphysical reasoning by itself could only give us philosophical opinions, psychological verification makes Vedantic truth a firm guide in life. It gives us a tangible ladder of ascension by which we rise to our highest truth of being[.]

4

The knowledge at which psychology arrives in its largest generalisations, is that there is one absolute and indefinable Reality which we call for psychological purposes the Self one, indivisible and common to all existence which manifests itself with an infinite variety in the universe and that every soul is an individual personality—we will use the word for want of a better—of that Self manifesting itself with a variety not precisely infinite, but indefinite, but in accordance with its individual nature which provides the principle of harmony, regulates the variety, casts it into a certain mould of unity. All existence is one, but with a constantly active principle of variation and individuation. There is a universal nature of things, but man while abiding within the principles of that nature, has also a nature of his own which distinguishes him from the animal and from lower forms of life. There is therefore this general individuality of Man which the totality of mankind represents in its full play of oneness and variety. Within that general individuality there are typical, racial, national, class individualities and each man has his own individual nature, one indeed in its general basis and materials with general human nature and with his type, race, class, nation, but yet possessed of its

own principle of particular individuation. It is this which reigns in his mentality, vital being, physical being and stamps itself upon them, but in itself it is neither mental, vital nor physical, but proceeds from a secret principle superior to all these; mind, life and body are only means and values of his self-expression. So is it with every community, nation or other natural grouping of men.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA, Vol. 12, pp. 307-14)

When we withdraw our gaze from its egoistic preoccupation with limited and fleeting interests and look upon the world with dispassionate and curious eyes that search only for the Truth, our first result is the perception of a boundless energy of infinite existence, infinite movement, infinite activity pouring itself out in limitless Space, in eternal Time, an existence that surpasses infinitely our ego or any ego or any collectivity of egos, in whose balance the grandiose products of aeons are but the dust of a moment and in whose incalculable sum numberless myriads count only as a petty swarm. We instinctively act and feel and weave our life thoughts as if this stupendous world movement were at work around us as centre and for our benefit, for our help or harm, or as if the justification of our egoistic cravings, emotions, ideas, standards were its proper business even as they are our own chief concern. When we begin to see, we perceive that it exists for itself, not for us, has its own gigantic aims, its own complex and boundless idea, its own vast desire or delight that it seeks to fulfil, its own immense and formidable standards which look down as if with an indulgent and ironic smile at the pettiness of ours. And yet let us not swing over to the other extreme and form too positive an idea of our own insignificance. That too would be an act of ignorance and the shutting of our eyes to the great facts of the universe.

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 18. p. 71)

‘WE ARE THINE FOR ALL ETERNITY’

January 9, 1914

LORD, incomprehensible reality, Thou who ever fleest before our conquest, effective though it may be, Thou who shalt always be the Unknown despite all that we shall learn to know of Thee, despite all that we shall ravish from Thy eternal mystery, we would go forward, making a complete and constant effort, combining all the multiple paths leading to Thee, go forward like a rising, indomitable tide, breaking down all obstacles, crossing every barrier, lifting up every veil, scattering all clouds, piercing through all darkness, go forward towards Thee, ever to Thee, in a movement so powerful, so irresistible that a whole multitude may be drawn in our wake, and the earth, conscious of Thy new and eternal Presence, understand at last its true purpose, and live in the harmony and peace of Thy sovereign realisation.

Teach us always more,

Give us more light,

Dispel our ignorance,

Illumine our minds,

Transfigure our hearts,

And give us the Love that never runs dry, and makes Thy sweet law flower in every being.

We are Thine for all Eternity.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, p. 51)

ON THOUGHT

(Talk given to a women's association)

SINCE we want to learn to think better in order to live better, since we want to know how to think in order to recover our place and status in life as feminine counterparts and to become in fact the helpful, inspiring and balancing elements that we are potentially, it seems indispensable to me that we should first of all enquire into what thought is.

Thought.... It is a very vast subject, the vastest of all, perhaps.... Therefore I do not intend to tell you exactly and completely what it is. But by a process of analysis, we shall try to form as precise an idea of it as it is possible for us to do.

It seems to me that we must first of all distinguish two very different kinds, or I might say qualities, of thought: thoughts in us which are the result, the fruit, as it were, of our sensations, and thoughts which, like living beings, come to us—from where? ...most often we do not know—thoughts that we perceive mentally before they express themselves in our outer being as sensations.

If you have observed yourselves even a little, you must have noticed that the contact with what is not yourselves is established first of all through the medium of your senses: sight, hearing, touch, smell, etc. The impact felt in this way, whether slight or violent, pleasant or unpleasant, arouses a feeling in you—like or dislike, attraction or repulsion—which very quickly turns into an idea, an opinion you form about the object, whatever it may be, that has determined the contact.

An example: you go out and as you step out of your house you see that it is raining and at the same time you feel the damp cold seizing you; the sensation is unpleasant, you feel a dislike for the rain and inwardly, almost mechanically, you say to yourself, “This rain is really a nuisance, especially as I have to go out! Not to mention that I am going to get dreadfully dirty; Paris is very dirty in rainy weather, especially now that all the streets have been dug up” (and so on)....

All these and many other similar thoughts about the simple fact that it is raining come to assail your mind; and if nothing else, outwardly or inwardly, comes to attract your attention, for a long while, almost without your noticing it, your brain may produce minute, trivial thoughts about this small, insignificant sensation...

This is how most human lives are spent; this is what human beings most often call *thinking*—a mental activity that is almost mechanical, unreflecting, out of our control, a reflex. All thoughts concerning material life and its many needs are of the same quality.

Here we face the first difficulty to be overcome; if we want to be able to truly think, that is, to receive, formulate and form valid and viable thoughts, we must first of all empty our brain of all this vague and unruly mental agitation. And this is certainly not the easiest part of our task. We are dominated by this irrational cerebral activity,

we do not dominate it.

Only one method is worth recommending: meditation. But as I was telling you last time, there are many ways of meditating; some are very effective, others less so.

Each one should find his own by successive trial and error. However, one thing can be recommended to everyone: reflection, that is to say, concentration, self-observation in solitude and silence, a close and strict analysis of the multitude of insignificant little thoughts which constantly assail us.

During the few moments you devote each day to this preliminary exercise of meditation, avoid, if possible, the complacent contemplation of your sensations, your feelings, your states of mind.

We all have an inexhaustible fund of self-indulgence, and very often we treat all these little inner movements with the greatest respect and give them an importance which they certainly do not have, even relative to our own evolution.

When one has enough self-control to be able to analyse coldly, to dissect these states of mind, to strip them of their brilliant or painful appearance, so as to perceive them as they are in all their childish insignificance, then one can profitably devote oneself to studying them. But this result can only be achieved gradually, after much reflection in a spirit of complete impartiality. I would like to make a short digression here to put you on your guard against a frequent confusion.

I have just said that we always look upon ourselves with great indulgence, and I think in fact that our defects very often appear to us to be full of charm and that we justify all our weaknesses. But to tell the truth, this is because we lack self-confidence. Does this surprise you?... Yes, I repeat, we lack confidence, not in what we are at the present moment, not in our ephemeral and ever-changing outer being—this being always finds favour in our eyes—but we lack confidence in what we can become through effort, we have no faith in the integral and profound transformation which will be the work of our true self, of the eternal, the divine who is in all beings, if we surrender like children to its supremely luminous and far-seeing guidance.

So let us not confuse complacency with confidence—and let us return to our subject.

When you are able by methodical and repeated effort to objectivise and keep at a distance all this flood of incoherent thoughts which assail us, you will notice a new phenomenon.

You will observe within yourself certain thoughts that are stronger and more tenacious than others, thoughts concerning social usages, customs, moral rules and even general laws that govern earth and man.

They are your opinions on these subjects or at least those you profess and by which you try to act.

Look at one of these ideas, the one most familiar to you, look at it very carefully, concentrate, reflect in all sincerity, if possible leaving aside all bias, and ask yourself why you have this opinion on that subject rather than any other.

The answer will almost invariably be the same, or nearly:

Because it is the opinion prevalent in your environment, because it is considered good form to have it and therefore saves you from as many clashes, frictions, criticisms as possible.

Or because this was the opinion of your father or mother, the opinion which moulded your childhood.

Or else because this opinion is the normal outcome of the education, religious or otherwise, you received in your youth. This thought is not your own thought.

For, to be your own thought, it would have to form part of a logical synthesis you had elaborated in the course of your existence, either by observation, experience and deduction, or by deep, abstract meditation and contemplation.

This, then, is our second discovery.

Since we have goodwill and endeavour to be integrally sincere, that is, to make our actions conform to our thoughts, we are now convinced that we act according to mental laws we receive from outside, not after having maturely considered and analysed them, not by deliberately and consciously receiving them, but because unconsciously we are subjected to them through atavism, by our upbringing and education, and above all because we are dominated by a collective suggestion which is so powerful, so overwhelming, that very few succeed in avoiding it altogether.

How far we are from the mental individuality we want to acquire!

We are products determined by all our past history, impelled by the blind and arbitrary will of our contemporaries.

It is a pitiful sight.... But let us not be disheartened; the greater the ailment and the more pressing the remedy, the more energetically we must fight back.

The method will always be the same: to reflect and reflect and reflect.

We must take these ideas one after another and analyse them by appealing to all our common sense, all our reason, our highest sense of equity; we must weigh them in the balance of our acquired knowledge and accumulated experience, and then endeavour to reconcile them with one another, to establish harmony among them. It will often prove very difficult, for we have a regrettable tendency to let the most contradictory ideas dwell side by side in our minds.

We must put all of them in place, bring order into our inner chamber, and we must do this each day just as we tidy the rooms of our house. For I suppose that our mentality deserves at least as much care as our house.

But, once again, for this work to be truly effective, we must strive to maintain in ourselves our highest, quietest, most sincere state of mind so as to make it our own.

Let us be transparent so that the light within us may fully illumine the thoughts we want to observe, analyse, classify. Let us be impartial and courageous so as to rise above our own little preferences and petty personal conveniences. Let us look at the thoughts in themselves, for themselves, without bias.

And little by little, if we persevere in our work of classification, we shall see

order and light take up their abode in our minds. But we should never forget that this order is but confusion compared with the order that we must realise in the future, that this light is but darkness compared with the light that we shall be able to receive after some time.

Life is in perpetual evolution; if we want to have a living mentality, we must progress unceasingly.

Moreover, this is only a preliminary work. We are still very far from true thought, which brings us into relation with the infinite source of knowledge.

These are only exercises for training ourselves gradually to an individualising control of our thoughts. For control of the mental activity is indispensable to one who wants to meditate.

I cannot speak to you in detail today about meditation; I shall only say that in order to be genuine, to serve its full purpose, meditation must be disinterested, impersonal in the integral sense of the word.

Here is a description, taken from an old Hindu text, of a typical meditation:

“The great and magnificent King ascended to the chamber of the Great Collection and, stopping at the threshold, exclaimed with intense emotion:

“‘Away! Advance no further, thoughts of lust! Away! Advance no further, thoughts of bad will! Away! Advance no further, thoughts of hate!’

“And entering the chamber, he sat upon a seat of gold. Then, having rejected all passion, all feeling contrary to righteousness, he attained the first *dhāma*, a state of well-being and joy arising from solitude, a state of reflection and seeking.

“Setting aside reflection and seeking, he attained the second *dhāma*, a state of well-being and joy arising from serenity, a state void of reflection and seeking, a state of quietude and elevation of mind.

“Ceasing to delight in joy, he remained indifferent, conscious, self-controlled, and attained the third *dhāma*, experiencing the inmost contentment proclaimed by the sages, saying, ‘One who, self-controlled, dwells in indifference, experiences an inner well-being.’

“Setting aside this well-being, rejecting pain, dead to both joy and suffering, he attained the state of most pure and perfect self-mastery and serenity which constitute the fourth *dhāma*.

“Then the great and magnificent King left the chamber of the Great Collection and, entering the golden chamber, sat upon a seat of silver. He beheld the world in a thought of love and his love went forth to the four regions in turn; and then with his heart full of love, with a love growing without end or limit, he enfolded the vast world, in its entirety, to its very ends.

“He beheld the world in a thought of pity and his pity went forth to the four regions in turn; and then with his heart full of pity, with a pity growing without end or limit, he enfolded the vast world, in its entirety, to its very ends.

“He beheld the world in a thought of sympathy and his sympathy went forth to

the four regions in turn; and then with his heart full of sympathy, with a sympathy growing without end or limit, he enfolded the vast world, in its entirety, to its very ends.

“He beheld the world in a thought of serenity and his serenity went forth to the four regions in turn; and then with his heart full of serenity, with a serenity growing without end or limit, he enfolded the vast world, in its entirety, to its very ends.”

One who strives in sincere quest for truth, who is ready, if necessary, to sacrifice all he had thought until then to be true, in order to draw ever nearer to the integral truth that can be no other than the progressive knowledge of the whole universe in its infinite progression, enters gradually into relation with great masses of deeper, completer and more luminous thoughts.

After much meditation and contemplation, he comes into direct contact with the great universal current of pure intellectual force, and thenceforth no knowledge can be veiled from him.

From that moment serenity—mental peace—is his portion. In all beliefs, in all human knowledge, in all religious teachings, which sometimes appear so contradictory, he perceives the deep truth which nothing can now conceal from his eyes.

Even errors and ignorance no longer disturb him, for, as an unknown master says:

“He who walks in the Truth is not troubled by any error, for he knows that error is the first effort of life towards truth.”

But to attain this state of perfect serenity is to attain to the summit of thought.

Without hoping to reach that point at once, we can strive to acquire an individual thought that is both original and as equitable as possible. Thus we shall have become minds of some consequence, with the right to bring to society the precious contribution of their highest intuitions.

I have several times spoken to you this evening of thought as a living and active being. This calls for an explanation. At our next meeting, I shall give you what I might call the chemical or inner structure of thought, its composition, how it is formed, how it lives, acts and transforms.

And now allow me, before concluding, to express a wish.

I would like us to make the resolution to raise ourselves each day, in all sincerity and goodwill, in an ardent aspiration towards the Sun of Truth, towards the Supreme Light, the source and intellectual life of the universe, so that it may pervade us entirely and illumine with its great brilliance our minds and hearts, all our thoughts and our actions.

Then we shall acquire the right and the privilege of following the counsel of the great initiate of the past, who tells us:

“With your hearts overflowing with compassion, go forth into this world torn by pain, be instructors, and wherever the darkness of ignorance rules, there light a torch.”

15 December 1911

APPENDIX

[These notes, found among the Mother's manuscripts, seem to relate to the typical meditation described on pp. 506-07.]

LOVE: For the Being, because he is the Being independent of all contingencies and individuals.

PITY: One no longer feels suffering for oneself, but only for others.

SYMPATHY: To suffer with the world, to share suffering (to suffer with).

SERENITY: Perfect knowledge of the state in which all suffering disappears (individual experience).

*
* *

LOVE: For the being in his entirety without distinction of good or evil, light or darkness.

PITY: For all weakness and all bad will.

SYMPATHY: Towards effort, encouragement, collaboration.

SERENITY: Hope in the ending of suffering (knowing one's individual experience, one logically infers that it can be generalised and become the experience of all).

*
* *

LOVE: Without distinction of past, present or future.

PITY: For the life of pain.

SYMPATHY: Understanding of everything, even of evil.

SERENITY: Certitude of the final victory.

*
* *

Three active attitudes, one passive attitude; three external relationships with the all, one inner relationship. A state to be maintained throughout the whole meditation: Serenity in love, sympathy and pity.

THE MOTHER

(*Words of Long Ago*, CWM, Vol. 2, pp. 22–30)

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

(Continued from the issue of June 2007)

Part 3: 1949

[The following matter was printed in the January 1972 issue of Mother India.]

“SAKUNTALA” A POEM FROM SRI AUROBINDO’S MANUSCRIPTS AND ITS CURIOUS HISTORY

(We are publishing for the first time, in its proper context of correspondence, a poem sent as Sri Aurobindo’s to Mother India for the Special Number of August 15, 1949. Subsequently Sri Aurobindo said that it could not be published as his. And we are not publishing it now as an entirely original piece by him. But it would be a pity to suppress altogether a composition of 45 beautiful lines in which Sri Aurobindo’s hand has certainly been at work, even if it is not the sole worker. The letter which accompanies the lines and the two that were exchanged soon after make an interesting account of a literary incident both curious and significant. One of the letters is Sri Aurobindo’s own, hitherto unpublished. At the end we give another poem—a disciple’s—written 16 years before 1949¹ and connected with the still earlier event that had served as the starting-point of Sri Aurobindo’s lines.² It will be seen to provide a further reason why these lines should not be withheld from publication; for Sri Aurobindo was under the impression that it resembled them very closely. More than three-fourths of it differs completely from them and from the old longer treatment of the same theme, which was set aside.)

*

Amal,

Here is the long-awaited poem of Sri Aurobindo—“Sakuntala”—for the special number of *Mother India*. We thought of adding a note to it indicating when it was written. But the Master does not remember all that. So the poem goes as it is.

Sri Aurobindo has thoroughly revised the poem and added some new lines here and there. Isn’t it a marvellous thing!

Ranju

Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 29 July 1949

[1. See Mother India, June 2007.]

[2. See Mother India, May 2007.]

SAKUNTALA

O last of many lovely forest moons,
And you, lost playmates, winged dawn-worshippers,
Singers of the hieroglyphics of the light,
Blooms touched by the sun's scouts, and lotuses
That gleam like faery footsteps on the lake,
You too! O antlered heads raised high to greet
My aimless wanderings with your wild brown stare!
Your thought brings me the nectar of swift tears
For happy yesterdays that can dawn no more.
Oft have I lingered near you in your home
Beneath the stir of faint high-tossing leaves.
A glory of sirishas overhead,
I awaited the slow dusk and grew aware
Of each calm moment like a friendly eye
Regarding me out of the deepening night.
But now I go for ever from your gaze.
Thy beauty passes through my aching sense
Into my soul, O forest; thou hast held me
A loving prisoner in thy ample shade;
But now I shall exceed thee; I shall hold
Thy myriad secrets in my opulent thoughts;
Nor shall my memory fail you, fragile buds
Of poor wild wayside nameless fragrances,
Thin grasses with unrecognised small discs
Of humble colour, you too shall be mine!
Nothing of you shall I forget, though far
Taken from all. A hero passion's will
Draws me from all this wealth of natural joy
To dense rich pleasure-peopled hours of ease
And spacious royalty and sceptred love.
But even there shall your companionship
Be close to my heart's voiceless memory,
And bring back to the yearning inner eye
This forest dream of bright and lovely things.
Nature's free innocent loveliness shall dwell
Like a religion native in my breast
Transforming the splendour of those unborn nights
Into a virginal dream. My wordless prayer
Shall count great moments of identity

With the deep Mother’s heart in whom you live,
On an everlasting rosary of moon-dawns,
And you move with me, a charm within a charm,
A tranquil incense in love’s burning flame,
A hidden treasure in the wealthy years,
All the old joy in the new life survive.

Sri Aurobindo,

I have received “Sakuntala”. But how am I to print it as it is? There has been a capital confusion. What you worked upon was not your own poem but mine!

Years and years ago I made a first attempt at blank verse. It was a failure. You called it Tennyson and water. But it contained a few good lines. These bodily and some others which you have greatly improved upon are now in the poem you have sent me—together with some lines that are entirely your own, though perhaps born out of some hint in my verses.

I wrote:

Lost playmates, birds and quiet lotuses
And antlered heads that met her, half-amazed
Yet buoyant, mid the patient, heavy trees
Beneath whose leaves she had often stretched herself
And, spite of deepening darkness, grown aware
Of each calm moment as a friendly eye.

You have transfigured these lines—and there is enough of transfiguration to make your version stand as an independent passage, but the penultimate line in it would be called plagiarism. Transfigured into originality is also my passage:

...how could
I know that he whose sceptred will was law
And royally with pleasure peopled his
Vast hours of wealth could be like me who never
Had seen a world beyond these avenues
Of verdant shadows and tranquillities.

But look now at these lines from my poem:

...No longer shall my feet explore
These haunts; but blessed sorrow! now that I
Must soon relinquish their companionship,
Thy beauty passes through my aching sense

Into my soul, O forest; thou hast held me
 A willing prisoner in thy ample shades;
 But henceforth I exceed thee, for I hold
 Thy myriad secrets in my sweet, dim thoughts!
 Nor shall my memory fail you, fragile buds
 Of poor wild wayside nameless fragrances,
 Thin grasses with unrecognised small discs
 Of humble colour, you too shall be mine!

In your version the best lines are almost *verbatim* the same as here and I have used them in a poem I made later and showed you. It was called “Sakuntala’s Farewell”. It won your approval and I have published it in *The Secret Splendour*. You must be having with you a copy of my book.

The last fifteen lines of your “Sakuntala” seem to be entirely your own, except perhaps the line,

Like a religion native in my breast,

wakes up a semi-remembrance in me of something I have written somewhere.

What do you advise me to do? Your transfiguration of my attempt can be printed. But the four lines, from “Nor shall my memory fail you” to “you too shall be mine”, are already in print in my book in as good as the same form and will be condemned in your poem as pure and sheer plagiarism! So too the phrase:

Thy beauty passes through my aching sense
 Into my soul, O forest,

which reappears in my “Sakuntala’s Farewell”. Now that you have taken so much trouble and created such a beautiful piece, I feel rotten about keeping it out of the Special Number. But if these lines stand, what else can I do? If you can drop them and fill whatever gap is made I shall be very happy to include the poem. The four complete lines can, of course, be easily dropped, as also the line about the forest’s beauty passing into the soul. What you have to do is to take the line,

Into my soul, O forest; thou hast held me,

and replace the first three words. You have also perhaps to see whether the “you” in the line “Nothing of you shall I forget...” harmonises with the “thou” here.

Kindly send me your instructions.

Bombay, 31 July 1949

Sri Aurobindo’s reply:

My version of Sakuntala’s farewell had, since it was written, lain neglected, written on two sides on a small piece of paper, unsigned by me and with no indication of its origin. Nolini found it, thought it a beautiful poem and wanted to publish it in one of our journals. I myself had no recollection of the poem or the history of its origin and no one recollected your poem on the subject in *The Secret Splendour*. Under the circumstances I made some alterations in it in order to remove all weaknesses and defects and allowed Nolini to send it to *Mother India*. Now that I know from you all about the matter, it is obvious that the poem cannot be published as mine. You need have no scruples about it; my version has its beauty and is even perfect in its own way but it is not such a masterpiece that it must be published at any cost. Besides, although it is not Tennyson and water, for I have wrung out all the water, still Tennyson is its spiritual author; it has the metrical fashion and rhythm of Tennyson and a certain character in the basis of the style which is his, even though both you and I have put in in the lines which are your own and those which are my own more poetic strength than Tennyson ever had, but especially the development of the subject is in his manner. Two poems of this kind are hardly justifiable especially when they resemble each other so closely;¹ besides, the common lines which are the best are yours and I would have to alter them entirely and I don’t think I will be able to manage it without more trouble than I am disposed to take. So there let it rest.

3 August 1949

* * *

SAKUNTALA’S FAREWELL

A huge sky-passion sprouting from the earth
 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,

1. As pointed out in the Boxnote, what Sri Aurobindo’s version resembles closely in several thematic details is not the poem published in *The Secret Splendour* but the original over which he worked and which had never got into print when he wrote his letter.

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
 On thy large wood-gloom green and murmurless,
 The solemn meditation of slow night
 Breaks into glimmering bird-melody!...
 My whole self flames and flowers, an eternal
 Wonder impregnate with thy paradise;
 Each hue has kindled here an ecstasy,
 Each swaying shadow left a benison.
 I kneel, O Master: all my life is thine!

(1933)

(Concluded)

AMAL KIRAN
 (K. D. SETHNA)

Goethe's paeon on Shakuntala

*Wouldst thou the young year's blossoms and the fruits of its decline,
 And all by which the soul is charmed, enraptured, feasted, fed?
 Wouldst thou the earth and heaven itself in one sole name combine?
 I name thee, O Shakuntala, and all at once is said.*

(Eastwich's translation of Goethe's paeon on *Shakuntala*)

PAINTING AS SADHANA

Krishnalal Bhatt (1905-1990)

(Continued from the issue of June 2007)

20

My Mota-kaka

KRISHNALAL-JI, or just Krishnalal as I refer to him now when I speak of him as one of the artists of the Ashram, is “Mota-kaka” to me. In Gujarati, “*Mota*” means elder and not “fat” as it does in Bengali. He was my father’s eldest brother and normally, in Gujarati families, the eldest uncle is known as “Mota-kaka” or “Bapu-kaka”.

Mota-kaka was instrumental in bringing me, along with my parents, to The Mother and Sri Aurobindo. He himself had come here in 1933 and settled at Their Feet from his very first visit. My father, Vasudev, adored and worshipped his eldest brother, “Bhai”, from childhood. And, when Krishnalal left the family, even though he missed him a lot, he could not do anything to remedy the situation then, as he was too young to go against his family’s refusal to accept Krishnalal’s decision, and later, by 1942, was totally immersed in Gandhi-ji’s Quit India movement.

It was only in 1948, after Independence, that Vasudev could think of visiting his “Bhai” whom he had not seen since 1940. So, in February 1948, he and his family were given permission through Krishnalal to come to the Ashram for a Darshan visit. I was only 11 months old at that time. Naturally, I do not remember anything of that first visit—except what has been recounted to me by my parents and other elders of the Ashram.

This first visit was the turning point in my father’s life. He came here primarily to visit a loved brother and also to see a new place. Though he had read some works of Sri Aurobindo as a student, it had not touched any deeper chord in his being. As he went up the stairs for Darshan on the 21st February 1948, he was gawking (as we see tourists doing even today) and observing the faces of the people in the queue coming back from the Darshan. “There was such an ineffable peace and an indescribable expression stamped on each returning face,” he recounted to me, “that I was mystified. I wondered what was the source and cause of it. As I entered the upstairs Meditation Hall, I stood on tiptoe and tried to look around the people in front of me to find this cause.”

When Vasudev reached the Source, he was bowled over and “that ineffable expression was stamped forever on my face, too!” And thus, after annual visits in 1949 and 1950, we came to settle here permanently in November 1950.

And now began my acquaintance with Mota-kaka. My name till then was

Mamata, but there was already another Mamata residing in the Ashram (for the old-timers' information—Dhrubajyoti's daughter). In those days, people in the Ashram knew each other by their first names, surnames were not used. To avoid confusion, there was an unwritten convention that no name should be duplicated. It was Mota-kaka who decided that my name should be changed. "Call her Samata (equanimity) now, as you have come to do sadhana and let go of attachment (*mamata*)," he told my parents. Thus it was Samata who remained, though Mamata had come here.

This change of name must have taken place some time in early 1951, because in the Register at the School, next to the date of my school admission—20.12.1950—under "Name" Mother has written "Krishnalal's niece".

All through the childhood years, the impression of Mota-kaka on my young mind was always of a Great Personage, inspiring awe, to whom one looked up for advice and guidance and never dared to disregard that advice. This could have been because of my mother who always gave him that kind of traditional respect where the younger sister-in-law could never sit down when the "Jyestha" was present in the room.

I remember one of my birthday parties. I may have been around eight or nine years of age, very innocent and callow. Among the invitees were my age-group friends as well as my elders—my father, Mota-kaka, Ambu-bhai Purani, Vishnu-bhai, Pujalal, Ambelal Mehta. As was the custom then, in the Ashram, the children came first bringing small presents thoughtfully chosen by their mothers. There was a piece of silk cloth to be stitched into a dress, a box of biscuits, a packet of brightly coloured ribbons—cute and small objects which a little girl would love to use. My friends had "group" so they ate first and went away, then the elders were served. They too enjoyed all the goodies my mother had prepared.

Then started the fireworks and, I think, it was Mota-kaka who set them off. Very casually, he picked up the dress-piece and told the others, "Look how nice this colour looks on me. I think I will take it to the tailor and get a shirt made from it." I went red in the face from anger, how dare anybody touch my gifts! But this was Mota-kaka and how could one say or even think anything against him! The others picked up the cue and soon all of them (including Purani-ji and Pujalal-ji!) were picking up one item and then another saying this suited him or that this box of biscuits tempted him too much to leave behind. I was too young to understand this mild ragging and thought that they really would walk away with my gifts. I put up with the teasing for a while, entreating my mother to stop them. She tried to tell me that it was only a huge joke played by all of them and that they would not take anything away. But it would not have been me, if I could understand or accept that. Finally, I got so upset that I literally, physically, pushed each one out of the house and bolted the door from inside to make sure that they did not return.

As I grew up, I did not have much daily contact with Mota-kaka. Only "events" connected with the Great Personage remain in my memory.

Every Prosperity Day, he would offer to the Mother a flower painting which would first be exhibited in Purani-ji's room from 2 to 3.30 in the afternoon. Along with others, I too would go to see the painting and admire the vivid rendering of the flower depicted, though I was too shy and considered too young to express my admiration.

Sometimes, there would be a letter from our family in Ahmedabad. As a very responsible head of the family, he would come to our house and read it out to us and then leave after partaking of some snacks with us.

After The Studio was officially started at Delafon in 1963 all this letter-reading was shifted there. As also birthday meetings—his and mine.

I remember how he would be sitting in his usual chair near the entrance dressed in a white dhoti and shirt. He would look up as I entered and call out sweetly, “Bonne Fête! Bonne Fête!” After the greetings were over there would be the presentation ceremony—a little sketch or a small miniature-sized painting. Then, there would be sweets to share, sweets made at home with a lot of care and love by my mother. I would offer whatever I had brought in a tiffin box. My father would eat his share very dutifully, without any comments or words of appreciation. Not so Mota-kaka. The artist in him would come in front here also. He would first observe it from all sides, take delight in its shape and colour and appreciate all the good points. Then he would take a small bite and enjoy its taste and flavour—that was the sweet-maker's son in him—and finally give his verdict about the success of the sweet. I would feel so happy that he had appreciated the sweet and given it Pass Marks!

In January 1965, by chance it happened that my parents had to go to Ahmedabad—my mother to attend her brother's wedding and my father to organise an exhibition of Mota-kaka's paintings. Up to then, whenever my mother went out of station, I would stay with my father. This time both of them had to go, so what was to be done for me? I was eighteen years old and I felt confident that I could stay alone, but my parents were not so sure about this arrangement. So, the next and only relative, Mota-kaka, was asked to help out. Would he be agreeable to be *in loco parentis* to an eighteen-year-old girl? Poor dear, he was in a fix! A person who had been habituated for the last 32 years to live alone without any familial entanglements and responsibilities, would he be up to it? Finally, it was decided that for the daytime I could be on my own in my house, and only at night I would go to sleep at his place. The Mother was informed accordingly and She gave Her approval.

Everything was working out well, as per plan, with me staying at home, taking my meals in the Dining Hall, and even trying out my hand at some sort of elementary cooking, and at night, after “group”, meditation and dinner, to Mota-kaka for the night. But the ghastly night of the 11th February 1965 intervened.

It was a Meditation day—a Sunday, I think. Before the meditation, I used to stroll on the street in front of the Playground with some of my friends, as did many others. As we crossed and re-crossed the Nehru Street at the eastern end, we saw the

market corner on Mission Street aflame with the anti-Hindi riots. We looked and wondered what it was all about; but I was also afraid, though I did not dare express my fear.

At 7.45 p.m., after concentration, everybody went into the Playground for meditation. And it was at this time that the riots spread to the Ashram side, the burning of the Ashram post office first and then the attack on the Ashram Main Building. But by then our young boys had been called to the Guest House and issued lathis to go out and fight the rioters. There was Bor-da (Tejen-da), standing at the wicket door between the Playground and Guest House, calling to the boys, “*Esho, esho, mayer jonye rokto debe, bolidan korbe* (Come on, come on, you have to give your blood for The Mother; you have to sacrifice yourself for Her).”

I was scared, really scared. My parents were not here, I could not run for reassurance to them. Mota-kaka was present in the Playground, but in the dark where to find him? I did not know where he usually sat. And, even if I could locate him, he would surely scold me for being frightened. That’s what I thought! But what a surprise awaited me.

Late in the night, as soon as we were allowed to move around in the Playground, I suddenly saw in the dark, the very familiar figure of Mota-kaka weaving through the people in my direction. I also started moving towards him and when we met, what gentle warmth enveloped me! Very softly, he said “Are you all right, Samata? Don’t be frightened. We are all together here and The Mother is there to look after all of us.” I heaved a great sigh of relief, but still I could not overcome my inhibitions and cling to him as I would have done to my mother.

The next day, late in the morning, when permission was given to go out in the streets, he took me home to check that our house was safe because he knew I was worried about it. Then, from the 12th to the 19th February, everybody was accommodated for the night in the Ashram Main Building or the Playground. Since my mother had returned by then, Mota-kaka, I think, must have been most relieved to be rid of his parenting responsibility!

It must have been in the late 60’s. Mota-kaka was taking homeopathic treatment from Sudhir-da (Mona-da’s father). I do not recollect exactly what his health problem was—it may have been the eczema around his right ankle that he had suffered from for years or it may have been something else. The first time I came to know anything about it was when I saw him go around the whole day with a handkerchief wrapped around his right middle finger. I asked him what the matter was. He answered casually that he had hurt his finger slightly. A few days later, the handkerchief was still in place, so I asked my father about it this time. He explained to me how the homeopathic medicine works by getting rid of the body’s poisons and that for Mota-kaka the poison was draining out through a septic point on the finger. By then the whole finger (and he had the long fingers of an artist) from the tip to the base was as if covered by a glove of pus and swollen to double its normal size and constantly throbbing with

pain. Sudhir-da would look at the finger everyday and say, “Oh good, good, the poisons are coming out. Let them come out.” So Mota-kaka quietly, uncomplainingly, put up with the pain, because his doctor said it was good for him. And it took a full six months for the finger to heal completely.

Just imagining what pain he must have suffered, makes me shudder even now. The smallest boil near the nails is so painful, and a “gloveful” of pain! ... Since then I had always been scared of homeopathy, though now I have overcome that apprehension.

But could an artist sit without doing any painting or drawing for that long a period? Of course not. The right hand was in complete disuse. So what did he do? He simply started using his left hand, and eventually managed to write and even draw almost as well as with the right hand!

Again, it must have been in the late 60's that he underwent a cataract operation of both eyes. At that time, the Ashram did not have the facilities it now has for eye-treatment. But Krishnalal had the good fortune of being operated on by Dr. Jayavir Agarwal of Madras, who was a good friend and admirer of his. On both occasions Dr. Agarwal personally came to Pondicherry and took him to his clinic in Madras for the operation, took care of him in his own home and brought him back after ten days or so.

Naturally, during the recovery period, Mota-kaka had to stop his painting activities, but afterwards he could no more do the fine work he did earlier. Interestingly, though, his largest work of art—the mural painting at Golconde—was done between 1978 and 1984.

During the 70's, his health started deteriorating. He contracted T.B. and was admitted to JIPMER Hospital. Of course, T.B. treatment is now far more advanced than in the 1940's, when his wife, my Kanta-kaki, contracted it and died of it, and so, unlike her, he recovered completely though it did leave him physically weak.

In the following years, most probably after the completion of the Golconde mural, he started having some cardiac problems, suffered a minor heart attack and was hospitalised several times. During this period, I remember telling my friends that Mota-kaka has been continuously in and out of the Nursing Home. We could see that he was physically weakening but the indomitable spirit that he was, refused any sort of help or support, even from his dearest brother. Whoever asked him how he was, would get the same answer, “Oh, I am fine! Do you see anything wrong with me?” My father was rather concerned about this and complained to me that Bhai would not even allow him to hold his hand when he was feeling weak or even when he stumbled while walking.

Christmas Day, 1989. There were the usual celebrations at the Theatre. Krishnalal also went there and joined the queue for the gifts. Around 7 p.m., we came back from the Theatre in the Ashram bus. I was in the bus with my mother and Mota-kaka was on his own among the other Ashram members. The bus stopped at the corner of the

Embroidery Department and we all got down. My mother asked me, “Don’t you think something is wrong with Mota-kaka? He looks rather lost and doesn’t seem to get his bearings.” We went up to him and asked him, rather hesitatingly, if we could help him get home. To our utter surprise he accepted the offer as, he said, he could not figure out in which direction his house was. So we went together, on the pavement. When we reached the godown gate of Counouma’s house he stopped there, leaning on the gate, saying that we had reached his house. Evidently, he was completely disoriented. We explained that we still had to go a little further, and led him up to the gate of his building. By then he seemed to be more focused, for, with a little embarrassed smile, he told us that now he would find his way upstairs to his room. I was doubtful and wanted to accompany him right up to the door of his room. But he was adamant and we had to leave him at the main gate. Little did we realise then that this was the beginning of the end.

The next morning I went to The Studio to ask about his health. Oh! He was fine. Nothing wrong with him. My father, who was sitting next to Mota-kaka, looked at me rather curiously because he did not know anything at all about the previous evening as Mota-kaka had not mentioned anything to him. I told my father about it later when Mota-kaka was not present. He was also worried, but there was nothing we could do about it.

Ten days later, on Friday, the 5th of January 1990, Mota-kaka suffered a massive heart attack around 10.30 in the morning.

The previous evening around six, he had gone to the Ashram as usual. After pranam at the Samadhi, he was on his way to Ambu’s place at Nanteuil where he would take a glass of Bournvita before going on to Corner House for dinner. But he could not make it on his own till there. Suddenly he felt very weak and stood clinging to the wall of the Playground. Somebody was passing by and Mota-kaka asked him to help him reach Nanteuil. The gentleman obliged and helped him up to there. Ambu took one look at him and made him lie down immediately and called for the doctor.

Dr. Dutta reached around 7.30 p.m. After a brief examination he advised him to get admitted to the Nursing Home. He was taken there by car, given medication and put to bed.

The next morning he woke up around eight and as he was feeling better he was allowed to have a bath. After that he was feeling hungry, so asked if he could have an omelet with toast. He ate this breakfast happily and then lay down to rest.

The heart attack struck him just a little later. It was a massive one and he had to be sedated immediately as he was in extreme pain. My father was sent for. He went to the Nursing Home immediately and met the doctor. Dr. Dutta told him that medically they were doing everything, but Mota-kaka’s condition was such that our prayers would help him the most at that juncture.

So my father came away. After his lunch, around noon, he came to inform me

about all this. It was such a rude shock when very baldly, without any preamble, my father told me, “Samata, Mota-kaka has suffered a massive heart attack and the doctor says that now only prayers will help.”

“But, but..., shouldn’t you or someone from the family be near him?” I stammered.

“No, he is unconscious now and we cannot do anything for him except pray, so why stay there?”

I kept quiet and he went away. I told my mother about Mota-kaka. She was also upset and agreed with me that someone should be near him in case he would want to say something when he came out his unconsciousness. I quickly finished lunch and rushed to the Nursing Home. I reached there around 12.50 p.m. I approached his bed in the emergency room and found him as if asleep quietly, hooked up to all sorts of gadgets and machines—oxygen mask around his nose, saline drip in the arm and other monitors showing his heart rate and blood pressure minute by minute. Dr. Salila was there checking all the medical parameters. She explained to me all that they had done up to then and showing me the blood pressure indicator, told me to keep an eye on the figures there because the blood pressure seemed to be dropping. I felt uneasy about that and I asked her if I should send for my father immediately. She said it was still not too bad although he was in a very critical condition.

Then she went away and I sat down near his head thinking it would be a long vigil. But it was not so. I found that the blood pressure was dropping rather alarmingly. The lower (diastolic) figure was dipping even more, it had touched 70 and was soon nearing 65. I thought surely this was not a good sign at all. I called Dr. Salila to the bedside and asked her opinion as to what I should do—should I call my father. She left the decision to me. Finally, at 1.50 p.m., when the B.P. had touched 60, I told them to fetch my father.

But my father could not reach in time. At 2.10 p.m. exactly, Mota-kaka breathed his last very quietly. There was a long exhalation and all the monitors showed straight lines. After a few seconds, he drew a small breath, like a soft sigh and then everything sank into the eternal silence. He had never opened his eyes since 10.30 a.m.

Five minutes later, my father entered. All I could do was to point towards the bed. I could not speak at all. The stillness of death was palpable in the room and he guessed at once what had happened. Yet the heart could not accept the finality.

“Bhai? Is he gone?” He asked me hoping that I would contradict him.

“Yes, just five minutes ago,” I whispered.

My father was upset. I could not help telling him then that he ought to have stayed near his brother, for then, perhaps, he could have held him back from slipping away so fast. “But I thought he still had a lot of work to do, so he wouldn’t go now,” he said regretfully.

As Mota-kaka lay in his room on that evening of 5th January, 1990, he looked so gloriously handsome—not an old fragile man of over eighty-four, but young and beautiful like a sun-god. Even today, seventeen years later, I can clearly see that beautiful face and feel again that sense of romance that it aroused in me at that time.

Samata

A personal tribute*

All that denies must be torn out and slain
And crushed the many longings for whose sake
We lose the One for whom our lives were made.

Sri Aurobindo (*Savitri*)

This he copied out in bold, unornamented letters, almost one inch high, on an 8 × 12 inch white piece of art-board. Under this firm resolve, the Mother wrote “Blessings” and put Her signature.

He kept the card beside Her photograph and Sri Aurobindo’s in the book-shelf on his table.

And there stands against it, even today [6 January 1990], a peacock feather symbolising Victory. It was the shape of this feather that inspired the signature he used to put on his paintings: Victory to the Divine Mother!

In August 1933, he once and for all left the family he was born in, to join for ever the Mother’s eternal, all-inclusive Family.

On 5th January this year [1990], he suffered a massive heart-attack. For an eighty-four year old body, weakened by numerous illnesses, it cannot have been a light affair, but his face betrayed no struggle, only showed his usual serene detachment. Then, as was his wont, he did not allow the presence of others to distract him from the ONE for whom our lives are made. Quietly he slipped away.

As he lay on the cot in his room on Epiphany Day, one could see that his body had grown young, as do the bodies of all children of the Mother at that stage of transition. But, in addition, he seemed to be soaring upward, his limbs redolent of the young upward-rising figure of Joy he had once painted. Out of a great uplifting Fire, the figure ascends the skies of God. The painting carries the inscription, penned in November 1956, in the Mother’s hand:

* Krishnalal-kaka and Pujalal-kaka agreed to be our guardians when my brother and I were admitted to the School here in November 1952. My father, Vamanrao, and his brothers ‘grew’ up in the same *akhada* in Sarangpur, Ahmedabad, as Krishnalal-kaka and his brothers. Pujalal-kaka, appointed by Ambu-bhai (Dada-ji to me and hundreds of others), was the first instructor of this *akhada*.

Without care for time, without fear for space, surging out purified from the flames of the ordeal, we shall fly without stop towards the realisation of our goal, the supramental victory.

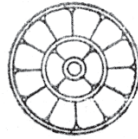
Sunjoy*

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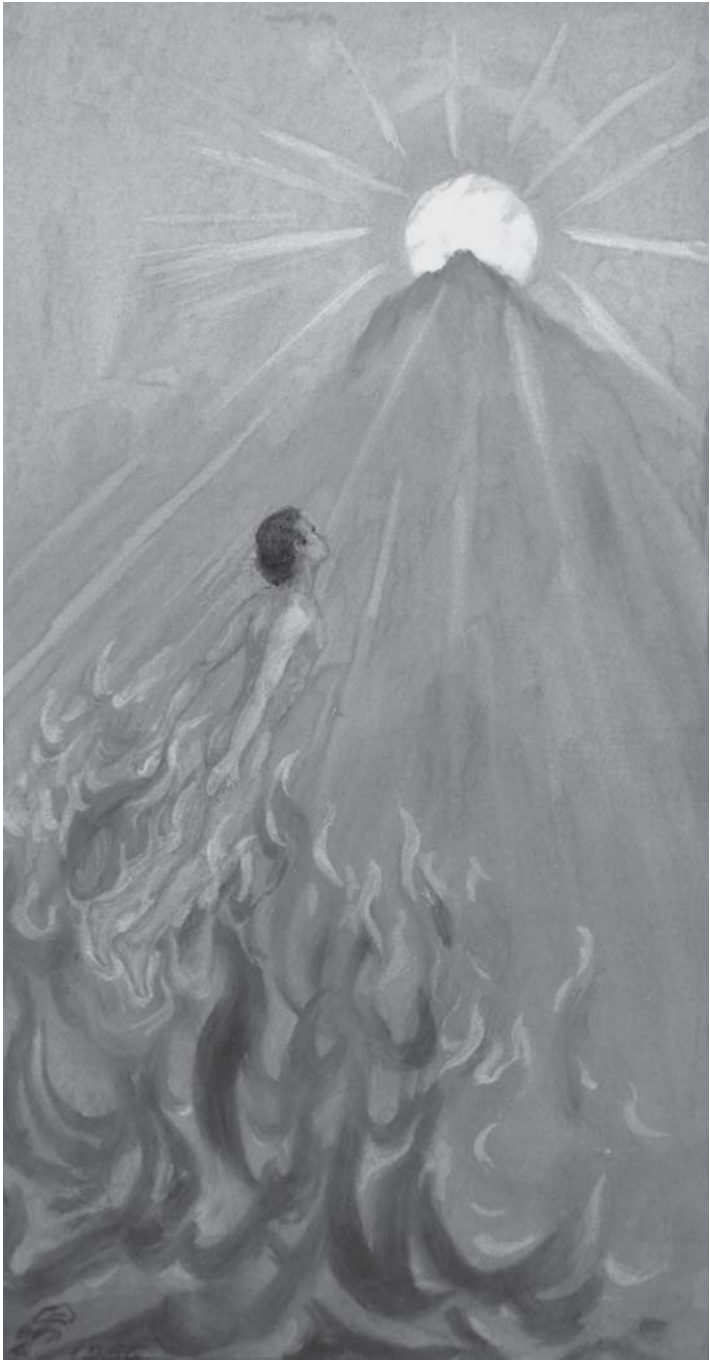
S. V. BHATT

* This piece was published in *Mother India*, April 1990, as a special personal concession to me by its Editor.



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SUPRAMENTAL VICTORY
Painting by Krishnalal

THE STORY OF GOLCONDE

(Continued from the issue of May 2007)

2

Golconde—the maintenance team

MANI-BEN, one of Mona's first helpers recalls:

In those days Golconde was the only place for visitors to stay. Some used to get annoyed having to follow the strict regulations of the building. So, one day Mona asked the Mother to give her an interview so that she could read out all the regulations one by one. For every regulation the Mother said, "Yes, it is all right. Yes, they should follow it. What's wrong with it? It is correct." So, all the regulations were approved by the Mother. The visitors were provided with a book of rules to guide them in the use of the fixtures and furniture of the building.

Here is an excerpt from a letter of Sri Aurobindo (dated February 25, 1945):

As regards Golconde and its rules—they are not imposed elsewhere—there is a reason for them and they are not imposed for nothing. In Golconde Mother has worked out her own idea through Raymond, Sammer and others. First, Mother believes in beauty as a part of spirituality and divine living; secondly, she believes that physical things have the Divine Consciousness underlying them as much as living things; and thirdly that they have an individuality of their own and ought to be properly treated, used in the right way, not misused or improperly handled or hurt or neglected so that they perish soon and lose their full beauty or value; she feels the consciousness in them and is so much in sympathy with them that what in other hands may be spoilt or wasted in a short time lasts with her for years or decades. It is on this basis that she planned the Golconde. First, she wanted a high architectural beauty, and in this she succeeded—architects and people with architectural knowledge have admired it with enthusiasm as a remarkable achievement; one spoke of it as the finest building of its kind he had seen, with no equal in all Europe or America; and a French architect, pupil of a great master, said it executed superbly the idea which his master had been seeking for but failed to realise; but also she wanted all the objects in it, the rooms, the fittings, the furniture to be individually artistic and to form a harmonious whole. This, too, was done with great care. Moreover, each thing was arranged to have

its own use, for each thing there was a place, and there should be no mixing up, or confused or wrong use. But all this had to be kept up and carried out in practice; for it was easy for people living there to create a complete confusion and misuse and to bring everything to disorder and ruination in a short time. That was why the rules were made and for no other purpose. The Mother hoped that if right people were accommodated there or others trained to a less rough and ready living than is common, her idea could be preserved and the wasting of all the labour and expense avoided. ...Mona has taken the responsibility of the house and of keeping things right as much as possible. That was why she interfered in the hand-bag affair—it was as much a tragedy for the table as for the doctor, for it got scratched and spoiled by the hand-bag—and tried to keep both the bag and shaving utensils in the places that had been assigned for them. If I had been in the doctor's place, I would have been grateful to her for her care and solicitude instead of being upset by what ought to have been for him trifles, although, because of her responsibility, they had for her their importance. Anyhow, this is the rationale for the rules and they do not seem to me to be meaningless regulation and discipline....

And Mona carried out her responsibility admirably. She took care of all things and protected them with the zeal and courage of a lioness guarding her cubs.

The Mother seems to have said once:

Mona's birthday is on the eleventh. She was born on the eleventh day of the eleventh month of 1911. Eleven—that is the number of progress... She is someone who truly loves to do things well, and wants to do them well and whatever she does, she does lovingly and very well." (*Mother India*, July, 2004)

Mona trained a group of young girls who were her helpers, namely Mani-ben of the present Marbling Department, Kusum-ben of Senteur, Kusum-ben of the Press Bindery, Kumud, Mridula and some others, in the art of doing things meticulously. Kusum-ben of the Press Bindery was the first person to work as assistant to Mona. Mona always appreciated her as a very hardworking person. After finishing school, Pushpa, (Mani-ben's younger sister) worked in Golconde. From the end of March 1969 till 1974, she was working there as Mona's assistant.

Mani-ben says:

Whenever the Mother wanted to get something done accurately, properly She used to give that work to Mona.

When Sri Aurobindo's Room was renovated in 1948, Udar was in charge of that work. Once Udar's work was over, Mona, with her team of Golconde girls, was put in charge of cleaning and re-arranging the room. On the last day

when we were polishing the floor the Mother came with biscuits on a tray. She said, “You all have your hands full of polish, how can I give you biscuits?” Lallu-bhai, who was working with us, said, “Put it directly in our mouths.” We happily opened our mouth wide and the Mother put in each one’s mouth one biscuit. What a wonderful experience it was!

Once the Mother asked Mona to collect all the flowers which were given significance and also to find out their botanical names. She had asked Jayantilal and Krishnalal to paint these flowers, on postcard-size papers, whenever Mona would give such flowers for painting. Mona could not go around to different places so she asked me to do that. I was very lucky to share this work with Mona. I had to go and collect the flowers and give them to Jayantilal and Krishnalal. Everybody knew that the Mother had asked Mona to do this work, so everybody was very co-operative. I had to go to Parichand-da to get the botanical and the common names. Lakshmibai, who was looking after some gardens in different houses, also told me to collect any flower needed from there. Mona used to take these painted flower-cards with their significances and botanical names to the Mother. When there were new flowers, the Mother used to give their significances. That is how the first book of flowers and their significances came out. This work started in the beginning of 1951 when the Mother had called the six young girls, Tara, Parul, Gauri, Chum, Jhumur and Bubu to her every evening. Did She use these cards to teach them?—I do not know.

Mani-ben continues her reminiscences:

I remember in the afternoons after the servants left, Mona and I cleaning the toilet bowls which had yellow marks due to water stagnation. We two would also do some gardening when necessary.

When the regular Playground groups were formed, Mother used to encourage even the ladies to join the group. When I went to ask the Mother if I could join the group, She asked me, “Have you got the time?” I was quite disappointed and told the Mother, “Yes, Mother, my work is over by 5 p.m. and the Playground groups start at 5.30 p.m.” Then She told me that I could join the Playground group activities. But by 1958 I had to leave the group, as there was so much work the whole day and I was getting tired by the evening. I wrote to the Mother that I would like to leave the group. The Mother said, “Yes, you leave the group and rest in the evening.”

Mani-ben continues:

On the night of 14th August 1947, when the Ashram was attacked, Kusum-ben, (Kumud’s sister) and I were preparing tea at Golconde to help the volunteers

who were guarding the Ashram area and other places at night. The cakes which were prepared for the next day's celebration, were given along with tea at night. The celebration could not take place due to this attack on the Ashram and over and above came the news that Mulashankar (one of Sri Aurobindo's attendants) was killed that night.

In the account of her work in Golconde given by Kusum-ben, who had joined Golconde in 1944, we get a glimpse of the attitude towards work and the experience of fulfilment through work:

I was working at Golconde. My work started early in the morning, just after the Mother's Balcony Darshan—that is, at 6.30 a.m. From the Darshan I went straight to Golconde. It was a delight to be in the service of the Divine at that hour. The being was drenched with something that the Mother had poured out at the Darshan, which left it in a state where speech disappears and thought is silent.

Fortunately, my work demanded no speech and I did not have to forgo that succulent silence.

My responsibility was to mark the laundry given by the inmates, indicating the room number. This work was beautifully organised. The inmates were supposed to leave their laundry outside their room, neatly bundled. A maid would make the rounds of every corridor to pick up the bundles and she would leave them in room 1W8—that means First Floor, West Wing, Room No. 8, the place reserved for numbering the laundry.

I would undo the bundles one by one, check which items were numbered and which were not, and then add the number when needed. Oh, how I enjoyed it! It took about an hour. This hour was full of that rich silence, what had been given by the Mother still unfolding, nothing disturbing the inner intensity.

That task over, I went for breakfast. My house was very near. The Mother was so full of care for each of us, and She would see to these facilities whenever it was possible for Her.

The intense absorption would slowly thin and fade as one met the world.

I would be back in half an hour. By now, the maid had taken her second and last round, collecting laundry bundles and leaving them in 1W8. I restarted the same process—the work was the same, the joy the same, but not the silence. The day had started, there was sound and stir, a coming and going, a different throb of life. This brought another taste of His multiple Presence. But something in me was reluctant to come out of that sense of floating in the ocean...even though walking barefoot on the sand may also be delightful. It had to be done, and I did it.

My next step was to go to the Laundry Room in the basement, to supervise the servants who were washing the clothes there. They too started early in the

morning. While I had been doing my first stint of marking, Mani-ben had been with them; soon afterwards she would be relieved by Mona; and when I had finished my second period of marking, I would relieve Mona.

It was a joy to step into the Laundry. It was well-designed, always neat, clean and well-maintained. All the washing was done by hand, and the jobs were distributed: there were soapers, washers, rinsers. On sloping cement benches the servants sat scrubbing the already-soaped clothes. Soaping was done by one worker and supplied to 4 scrubbers, each one of them with their own seat and four basins for rinsing—first in hot water in one basin, and then three times in cold water.

By 11.30 a.m. all the items were washed, dried, folded, sorted and ready to be placed in their respective places—for example, dusters for different purposes had their own distinct corner. Inmates' clothes were taken to the inmates' rooms. This distribution was done in the afternoon.

What was very interesting here for our growth was to observe and to learn by adding or subtracting. Three of us went to do the same work, keeping externally the same pattern—yet each handled the labour and the labourers in entirely different ways. All the ways were nice, but bore different fruits. If we could egolessly combine the best of each, we would make a marvellous whole! Work teaches so much. An awareness grows, we think for ourselves, ponder, wonder, pause—we retain or reject. Dormant capacities wake up, understanding widens, we head towards greater perfection.

The hallmark of Golconde was perfection. An outer perfection was envisaged there, and to a great extent achieved. The opportunity to work there, with this aim, gifted me with many occasions that revealed new reaches of perfection, unknown till then, and I feel ever grateful. As the outer becomes part of the inner, and the inner reflects itself on the outer, we see that both go hand in hand so that we can move towards Perfection in all ways of life, according to the Will of our Master.

It was the Mother who had established all this organisation, and assigned each one of us our places in it, for the furtherance of our own individual inner and outer development, and Her own Work of bringing a new Realisation into the earth-life.

When the Russian Olympic Gymnasts visited the Ashram for a few days in 1956 the Mother asked Mona to give them dinner in Golconde on the last day of their stay. The Mother wanted chicken served to them. Mani-ben recounts:

Mona told the Mother that there is no facility for that in Golconde. The Mother told Mona, "What are your difficulties, tell me." The Mother asked Pradyot-da to make arrangements for proper lights. Mona called her old cook who was very

good. The cooking was done at Mona's house. The Mother sent plates, bowls, and cutlery to Mona for that dinner. We cleaned them. Tehmi, Sutapa and Neel helped us to arrange the tables. Gautam Chawla served the visitors.

The Mother told Mona, "My work in Russia depends on this dinner."

The Russians were very happy.

The next day, the Mother told Mona, "It was successful."

We reproduce here a portion of the Quarterly Report that appeared in the *Bulletin of Physical Education* in August 1956, about the visit of the Soviet Gymnasts:

In 1956 a team of Soviet Olympic Gymnasts visited the Ashram on the 2nd and 3rd April. The team was on a goodwill tour under the aegis of the Rajkumari Sports Coaching Scheme ... they were received with bouquets of flowers at Golconde by our Director of Physical Education together with a number of our own gymnasts. They spent two days in the Ashram and gave a public demonstration in our Sports Ground to the Mother, all our Ashram members and a large audience of the public....

The demonstrations commenced with a March Past of the visiting Gymnasts and their introduction by their leader. Then the Mother's message to them was read out by our Director of Physical Education and they replied to this. These messages are as follows:

The Mother's message:

We salute you, brothers, already so far on the way to the physical perfection for which we all aspire here. Be welcome in the Ashram amongst us. We feel sure that today one step more is taken towards the unity of the great human family.

Reply by the gymnasts:

Dear Friends, on behalf of the delegation allow me to give you hearty greetings. We thank you for the kind welcome which was given to us here. It was with a feeling of great joy that we accepted the invitation to the Ashram. We have heard about it and we have read about it. We have learnt that great attention is paid here to physical education and sports. And, yesterday we witnessed your display and we have seen that in this place there are very many young gifted people who are so healthy. We hope that our visit will contribute to the development of Gymnastics and we wish you success in it. Long live the friendship between our peoples!

The Mother presented the team with fruits. She also sent to each of the ladies of

the team one white handloom saree. Some Ashram ladies showed them how to wear it. When this team visited the Mother before leaving, all the ladies came wearing the saree.

(To be continued)

CHITRA SEN

As for the feeling from within, it depends on being able to go inside. Sometimes it comes of itself with the deepening of the consciousness by bhakti or otherwise, sometimes it comes by practice—a sort of referring the matter and listening for the answer—listening is, of course, a metaphor but it is difficult to express it otherwise—it doesn't mean that the answer comes necessarily in the shape of words, spoken or unspoken, though it does sometimes or for some; it can take any shape. The main difficulty for many is to be sure of the right answer. For that it is necessary to be able to contact the consciousness of the Guru inwardly—that comes best by bhakti. Otherwise, the attempt to get the feeling from within by practice may become a delicate and ticklish job. Obstacles: (1) normal habit of relying on outward means for everything; (2) ego, substituting its suggestions for the right answer; (3) mental activity; (4) intruder nuisances. I think you need not be eager for this, but rely on the growth of the inner consciousness. The above is only by way of general explanation.

*

Openness in work means the same thing as openness in the consciousness. The same Force that works in your consciousness in meditation and clears away the cloud and confusion whenever you open to it, can also take up your action and not only make you aware of the defects in it but keep you conscious of what is to be done and guide your mind and hands to do it. If you open to it in your work, you will begin to feel this guidance more and more until behind all your activities you will be aware of the Force of the Mother.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 694)

SOVIET GYMNASTS

(1)

As you know, sometime back—quite a few years now—we had a group of Soviet Gymnasts in our midst. And what a pleasant, perfect performance they gave! Their hammer-and-sickle floating against the wind, the first time they stepped in unison on our sports ground, marching to the tune of the Russian national anthem, surely you must be still remembering that beautiful spectacle. Some of their tricks and techniques we have bodily taken over. A good many of you received training at the hands of these experts. They have been heavily filmed and photographed in action and these pictures you must have seen more than once.

I draw your attention to the date on which the group went to the Mother and received Her blessings. Numerically, it is significant—three-four-five-six, that is April 3, 1956 (a day before Sri Aurobindo came to Pondicherry in 1910). We have heard a lot about these numbers—one-two-three-four (February 1, 1934), two-three-four-five (March 2, 1945) and now this three-four-five-six, while ahead of us lies four-five-six-seven (May 4, 1967). Last in this series we have five-six-seven-eight, the Mother's centenary, to go no further. These dates in their sequence are significant in that they indicate or represent some occult phenomena, some happenings in the inner world, each marking a step forward in the manifestation of the New World of the Supramental.

To come back. Among the characteristics of the Soviet Gymnasts, also the major lessons that one can learn from them, are: first, difficult and complicated body movements. Such control of the body is indeed hard to acquire. It calls for physical strength and stamina, also a considerable capacity and plasticity of the limbs—the nerves and muscles. Secondly, difficult exercises are done in an extremely easy and simple manner. In fact, these are performed so effortlessly that it might seem there is nothing much in these and that any one could do the same—till one tries. Then one knows what stiff and rigorous discipline lies behind this apparent effortless. Thirdly, these difficult exercises are done not only effortlessly but gracefully—the movements are rhythmic and harmonious, pleasing to the eye. Teamwork, group-efficiency, is yet another of their characteristics. Not only solo performances, but combined movements of many persons in perfect balance, a unified cadence and orchestral pattern. Fifthly, and the point deserves particular mention, in the sphere of physical culture (as in other spheres too) the Russians make no difference between men and women. They believe that men and women can and ought to do the same exercises together, that it is pure superstition, nothing but outmoded convention to think otherwise—that women are unfit for and unworthy of such activity. Well, we have seen how expert and capable these Soviet girls can be. Today the whole world has heard with wonder and admiration about not only astronaut Gagarin but about

Valentina too.

A commonplace argument often put up against women doing physical exercises is that as a result they are likely to lose their grace and their femininity. Is that really so? To me it has always seemed that, thanks to these exercises, our body—women's body included—acquires a new poise and proportion. Or do tenderness and charm disappear, as some fear? Of course, those who admire the beauty of a willowy, weeping kind, the faery frailty of the sickly maid, well, they are a class apart. You have seen Valentina's photograph. To me she did not seem to lack charm and grace. Far from it. The fact is, we very often try, in vain, to hide our bodily defects and debilities under an elaborate toilet and stylish wear. But it is only a strict physical regimen or regular exercise that can cure these defects and bring out the true grace and light of the body beautiful. In reality, charm, grace or delightfulness, name how you will, these do not depend so much on physical factors and formation. The source is elsewhere, it is really a reflection or shadow that is derived from the ease and clarity of the vital Force in us and if, somehow, we can add to that the soul's ease and clarity, then only do we have genuine beauty, beauty from within.

It is as if the Russians have discovered a new dimension of the body. Psychologists today speak of 'depth' psychology. According to them, at the back of our mind, there lies another hidden and profounder mental world—the unconscious or subconscious. Spiritualists and yogis speak of still another unknown and invisible world, above and beyond the mind. Somewhat in the same way the Soviet gymnasts are telling us and, more than that, showing us, that there is no limit, or almost none, to the capacities of our body. At any rate, we can go a good deal further than the limits usually set for it. We think that just as plant life is conditioned by the earth, by its surface and atmosphere, it is the same with the life of men and animals too. We live and move within the temperature and the pressure of the air around us; when we go beyond these (either above or below), our ability to bear the altered conditions are extremely limited—or so we think.

But in one sense, even in the ordinary way of living, men can and do put up with a lot of inconvenience and suffering. Of course, it might be said that this is entirely due to compulsion, that there is nothing else one could do, except endure. Even in the midst of intense pain and torture people have been known to live. On battlefields men have survived the worst calamities, even the loss of limbs. According to popular wisdom life is uncertain and quickly over, *nalinī-dalagata jalavat taralam, jīvanam atīśayacapalam*, but this is not a literal truth. Just as life can end all of a sudden so also it can stay on and withstand apparently impossible conditions. But this, it may be said again, is due to compulsion, it is not a healthy or a natural condition of our being. It is indeed painful, and what men really wish for is to come out of it—into a world of natural freedom. The new physical culture that the Russians are now following is meant to open up the hidden resources of the body. This they are doing with the help of knowledge, practice and endless, eager experiment. Rooted in the earth, one with

the physical universe, the capacities of our body are daily and fast increasing. Even leaving the earth surface for the wide open spaces one day men may (in a light, weightless condition) find a new normalcy. Where shall we draw the limit of achievement?

(2)

The round of sports and athletics over, the Soviet gymnasts expressed a desire to know more about us. That is, about the aims and ideals of the Ashram, the spiritual disciplines we follow and their rationale. You know, officially and in the world's eye the Soviet Union is atheistic and follows a materialist philosophy of life. God, soul, the beyond or the higher worlds, in these things the new Russians of today have no faith, none. Their entire stress or *śraddhā* is on this world, this life, on the physical-vital-mental being whom they call Man.

It was arranged that I should talk to the gymnasts. Following civilised traditions, this was to be a post-prandial session; that is, the conversation was to follow a rather sumptuous dinner. Food before philosophy, as they say. But, no. The Soviet gymnasts were strict dietitians, extremely cautious and restrained in their food habit. When finally we met there were ten or twelve of them, three or four girls and the rest young men. Only the leader seemed slightly elderly. Their knowledge of English was almost nil. Russian was all they knew. When they used to train the Ashram children funny situations would arise—for they had to express themselves mainly, sometimes vainly, through wordless hints and gestures. Anyway, one of the girls knew English fairly well and she acted as interpreter. Of her more later.

We met at a conference as it were in the Golconde. I started by reading out a brief passage from the *Words of the Mother*. It contained a statement of our ideal or objective—the goal of transformation, the coming race, a new consciousness and realisation. But the Soviet leader was a bit of a blunt atheist, or at least that was the role he had chosen to play. And in due course he raised the usual objection.

“In times like ours,” he said, “what we need is health and wealth. All our activities and education must be conducive to these normal aims. After all, men have to live. First, therefore, the care of the body, time enough for the soul afterwards. First this world, then the rest.”

“Why not a little division of labour?” I told the group. “You keep to your social reform or revolution, if you please. Your physical culture and your secular pursuits. Spare us from these. Why not leave us to go ahead with another kind of aim and work? After all, we do not mind your doing what you like to do. It is only fair that you should allow us to go our own way. Isn't this the ideal of co-existence?”

But then, the ideal of co-existence finds little favour with the radical communists. Their one aim is to destroy or convert—that is, brainwash—the opposition. Somewhat in that spirit the Soviet leader continued his criticism. “But if you tempt people away

from their normal social duties," he said, "and if by degrees people are drawn towards the soul and the beyond and all that, wouldn't that prove to be ruinous for the race and did not something like this actually take place in the history of the Indian people?" "*Mā bhaiḥ*, fear not," I assured him. "Only a few turn to this Path. After all, out of millions and millions how many—or how few—come this way?"

But they counteracted my remark by saying that though we might be few in number our influence might spread, quite out of proportion to our number—which, by the way, is true. They now raised another doubt or objection—that the kind of education given to the children in the Ashram, forcing a doctrine on their young, unsuspecting minds, what was it but a kind of indoctrination?

"No, sir," I replied. "For one thing, we never ask, much less force anyone to come here, we offer no rewards or temptations. On the contrary, we make it quite clear that the Path chosen here, the training and the education are indeed hard. Sharp as the razor's edge, our sages have called it. So, one should choose carefully. And out of those who still insist on joining us, only a few are permitted. Of course the children know little or nothing, but the parents who bring them here do. At least they have been told. It is, however, true that there are some children who are conscious and know fairly well what they are doing and why they are here. After staying here and seeing things for themselves many of them make up their minds to stay on, they refuse to go elsewhere. Also, ours is not a medieval monastery, a life-long entombment, so that once you get in you can never get out. Here anyone can leave any time. One has full freedom in the matter. In other words, the very first principle of foundation of our life and teaching in the Ashram is freedom and individuality. No one is cajoled or persuaded to follow the spiritual aim or spiritual path. If one wants to know anything, one knows it freely, of oneself; if one wants to understand anything, one does it in freedom. Every moment you are free, you can step in any direction you like, provided you are prepared for the consequence. In fact, we have few or no compulsory codes or taboos here, except such as are absolutely necessary to keep group-life together for any length of time. 'Discover your own rule or law of being for yourself,' that is our primary instruction. Where is compulsion in all this? As for the atmosphere, the 'climate of opinion', wherever men live, in whatever age, society or country—even in your Soviet State—one has to 'belong'. The common man, or citizen, cannot help breathing in the atmosphere of his age or milieu. But here, and only here, we warn everyone, we tell them, well ahead, to be conscious of all that's happening around and within, we tell them to watch, understand and scrutinise what it is that they are taking in. This is not indoctrination but its exact opposite.

"In all this where does spiritual discipline come in? What is at all its necessity? First and foremost comes the care of the body, then only other considerations. That is what one may naturally think. But it is wrong to think that for spirituality outward comfort and affluence are a *sine qua non*. Those who want bodily comfort are apt to remain content with that, all their efforts are confined to finding the means of such

enjoyment or euphoria. But the spiritual seeker even in the midst of suffering and discomfort will move towards the spirit. In fact, he uses his very adversity for spiritual ends. The true seeker longs for the spirit in the midst of comfort and discomfort alike, while those who do not want the higher life, do not want that, quite apart from being comfortable or otherwise. In spite of what many think, material factors do not determine these things. The Mother once said something to this effect. In order to relieve the disciples from all thoughts of earning their livelihood she had planned an external order of untroubled living, so that the aspirants might find the time and the opportunity to dedicate themselves completely to spiritual living and realisation. In practice she, however, found that this does not always work."

"All right," said the Soviet guests. "But supposing while you are engaged in your own spiritual growth and culture, for want of the good life, the rest of the human race goes to the dogs—what then?"

To this the answer is, and was: "The majority of men are obviously busy with the pursuit of worldly ends and creature comforts. This has been so always and the indifference or withdrawal of a few aspirants will not matter much. As to the human race ending up in smoke, we would say that the race is not going to be snuffed out so easily. It has never been like that. What wars and devastations down the ages, upheavals and revolutions! Millions dead and dying and yet the race is still going strong. Not only that, it is evolving, progressing. In spite of everything the standards of civilisation are going up. Even you admit progress—of some kind. Perhaps you will say, but all this is a gift of the reason or the intellect. We will say it is a gift of the soul, or the soul and its bearer, the intellect, together. If this soul were not, man could not, would not survive. It is because of this active, immortal spark within him that he lives and shall continue to live, and progress towards perfection. Don't worry. No amount of outward loss or danger can wipe him out. Man will disappear only when the soul in him withdraws or is extinguished."

Of course, to present-day Russians ideas like these are illusions or delusions, which they treat with a sceptic smile.

In the end they raised a rather funny question. "Here we find a very pleasing sight," they began. "We mean the groups of little children and your love and affection and solicitude for them. It's very rare and very touchng. You like children so much and yet we are told you do not like to be parents of children. We don't understand this."

"Do you understand self-restraint?" I asked them. "We are told that you don't drink, don't even smoke. Why?"

"Because the effect of drinking and smoking on the body, especially the body of an athlete, is harmful. That's why," they replied.

"Exactly so," said I. "When you've progressed a little further, you too will arrive at our conclusion."

At this they all laughed, perhaps somewhat incredulously.

But it is indeed so: all those who wish to acquire a special power, benefit or perfection, who set out to acquire a new capacity—in our case nothing short of a transformation of the body, life and mind—for them such self-imposed restraint is a “must”. And so I say again: *mā bhaih*, fear not. The world will not come this way all at once or immediately, and the world will not collapse because of our unwillingness to add to its population. As for the future who can tell? Who can say that the time-worn biological process shall remain, for all time, the only means of birth and manifestation? Today, ignoring the weight and other limitations of the body, ignoring the laws of Newtonian physics, we travel, with what ease, across distances and the silence of infinite spaces. As in the physical field so in the field of life who can say that new rules will not emerge? Sri Aurobindo has openly hinted at such a possibility.

Our society is based on blood or parental relations. But the Russians themselves have tried to set up another set of relationship—social instead of parental. Taking the children away from their parents they are rearing them in socialised creches, schools or kindergartens. To them the parents are but secondary instruments. The child belongs to the State, to the service of the almighty State. The average parents have neither the ability nor the resources such as the State possesses. Now, if instead of the secular State we think of a spiritual group, or use the word ‘God’, a new and altogether different possibility opens up. Not the link of biology but the closeness of the spirit within is all, the same in all, a relationship in terms of Reality or the Divine. How deep and intimately satisfying such a relationship, based on Truth, can be—I think our Soviet gymnasts had a glimpse of that truth here in the Ashram. And they naturally wondered.

(3)

Earlier I spoke of the lady interpreter in the Soviet group. Impersonal and neutral, she would translate, as clearly as possible, their words or the official view. In all this she never expressed any personal opinion. Yet I had a feeling that she did not fully share the official views or conclusions. Now and then she seemed to hesitate. Somewhere, she seemed to feel, life held other values, another dimension. In her conduct and conversation we found her extremely amiable. As she was leaving she told us that this time she had come as part of an official delegation, but one day she hoped to come on her own and alone. I have a feeling that she did come again, with another member of the group.

I believe that those who come to the Ashram and receive the direct touch of the Mother, they do not come suddenly or by accident. It is not just a has-been, a fact that might as well not have been. Some deep inner necessity brings them here, to the Mother. It is, you might say, the push of the deity within, though they might not know anything about it and it does not matter if outwardly they are sceptical or atheistic.

Unknown to themselves, they surely have some opening somewhere—it is that which brings them here.

Either individually or as representatives of the Russian people it was such a Call, some future fulfilment that had prompted the group to come here—such an idea may be more than idle imagination. Or is it the coming truth, the coming event that has cast its shadow before?

NOLINI KANTA GUPTA

(*Reminiscences*, pp. 97-105)

I had a strong desire to eat one or two things—it was uncontrollable. The mind was actively working as to how to satisfy the desire. Finally I wrote: “Mother, today I am feeling somewhat greedy. Do you know what it is about? Eggs, lobster and tin-sardine. Terribly greedy, Mother. Either remove this desire or give me permission to eat and protection at the same time.” Next day, the reply came from Sri Aurobindo:

Certainly not! You can eat up your desire—that is the only fish or flesh that can be given to you! It is simply an old samskara rising from the subconscious—these things have never to be indulged, they rise in order to be dismissed.

Satire, enlivened with laughter! But, strangely enough, I noticed that just after writing my letter, my desire had vanished and in its place reigned a pure joy and contentment. I got the first taste of joy that comes when one abstains from indulging a desire. I had read somewhere some lines written by Nolini to the same effect. They now glowed intensely in my mind: “When you grant me a vital desire I am not pleased, your granting shows that the vital is still unprepared to forego its food. But when you withhold from me an earthly satisfaction, a secret ease and joy flow into me, by this sign I feel I am ready for the Delight that is yours.”

Sahana

(From *At the Feet of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo*, p. 21)

THE SAMADHI

(The Samadhi of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is a place where there is Peace at all times and an abiding and constant atmosphere of belonging, contentment, confidence, calm and a Presence—it is a place of joy and love. At different times of the day and night, different moods are felt. The Samadhi gives us a deep-rooted loving feeling of belonging.

This short write-up, a small history, served as an introductory note to an exhibition of photographs of the Samadhi,—of the varied designs in the flower arrangement,—held at the Ashram Exhibition House in February 2007.)

Sri Aurobindo's body was laid to rest on 9th December 1950 at about 4.00 p.m. and the top slab was sealed with waterproof material and some flowers were offered on the top.

The next day, 10th December 1950, early in the morning a number of Ashramites came and arranged flowers on the Samadhi. At that time the flower room was inside the Ashram (now Pujalal's room). Later, the flower room was shifted. As per the Mother's instruction, one agarbatti (incense stick) was kept burning throughout the day and night and I was given the work of purchasing agarbattis from the market. About a year or so later, when our Cottage Industries started preparing agarbattis and offered them for the Samadhi, the purchasing from the market was stopped. Volunteers were given the work to take care of the Samadhi and to see that the place around the Samadhi was kept clean and one agarbatti was always kept burning. Everyday, fresh flowers were arranged on the Samadhi.

I was working in Enterprise (Manoranjan's department) at that time and I was given time to work near the Samadhi for a few hours in the morning, and at noon and also at night. Ashramites and devotees would visit the Samadhi and do pranam from early morning, i.e. 4.30 a.m., when the Ashram gate opened up to 11.00 p.m., the time when the Ashram gate was closed. Three persons were allowed to stay at night for duty near the Samadhi. The first person, (I do not remember his name now, was on duty from 10 p.m. to midnight. Next, it was Dayabhai's duty—from midnight to 2.00 a.m.; and my duty was from 2.00 a.m. to 4.00 a.m. At 4.00 a.m. some Ashramites used to come to arrange flowers on the Samadhi—even now some do so. Our duty was to keep awake near the Samadhi and see that the agarbatti was kept burning continuously. This night duty continued only for about a month because Bula-da, who used to stay inside the Ashram premises, spoke to the Mother and took upon himself the responsibility of our work. So our night duty was discontinued.

During the daytime, especially in the mornings, people would bring flowers for the Samadhi, and do pranam. Many sadhaks used to come to the Samadhi for pranam

before going for their work, or before going for Balcony Darshan of the Mother early in the morning. This was a routine.

Sometime in late January 1951, we found that some who were coming to the Samadhi were bringing agarbattis; also, some coins were found placed on the Samadhi along with the flowers. This I reported to the Mother. She said, "If people are offering coins, you better arrange to keep a small box on one corner of the Samadhi, so that they may put the money in the box rather than putting it in the flower decoration. In the meantime I shall ask Udar to prepare a small brass box in Harpagon and fix it near the Samadhi." The Mother also told me to inform all those on duty to tell the persons who wanted to offer money, that they should put it in the box and not on the Samadhi flowers. I got a small marble box with a loose lid from Kameshwar Rao and kept it as a temporary measure on the north-east corner of Samadhi. This is how the offering box started. About 4 or 5 days later one brass box (6'' \times 3'' \times 2 1/2'') was fixed near the Samadhi. This was on 27.1.51. The Mother gave me both the keys of the offering box and told me, "You will open the box everyday and bring the offerings to me on the next day in the morning when you come for pranam." I said, "Yes, Mother."

In those days, the money was in Rupee-anna-pai denominations. I would collect the money at night and write the amount in a notebook, and offer it to the Mother the next morning. She would write "Blessings" in the notebook.

After some days someone brought a coconut and broke it in front of the Samadhi. Immediately I reported it to the Mother. She told me to stop that saying, "I don't want religious activities here. You inform Reception Service." I immediately went down and stopped that person and told him not to repeat it, then informed the Reception Service of the Mother's words.

In the same way, after a few days, someone brought camphor and started burning it in front of the Samadhi. It was brought to the Mother's notice. The Mother said, "I don't want any fire here. Stop it. Only one agarbatti should burn day and night." I told the person and stopped it and informed the Reception Service. Since then both these things have been stopped for good.

From the beginning, for some years (1950 to 1966), we used to paint the Samadhi with 'Snowcem', especially just before Darshan days and whenever it was required. The suggestion to fix marble stones was approved by the Mother in the year 1967 and it was done.

In 1966, a bigger offering box was needed, which the Mother sanctioned and it was made in Harpagon and fitted on 1.8.66. I was wondering what to do with the old small one. This was referred to the Mother and on 2.8.66 She sent word through Amrita-da, saying, "Ask him (Gangaram) to keep it as a souvenir."

In 1970, there was a proposal by three sadhaks (K, M, P) that the offering box be made in silver, for which they would bear the expenses. The Mother approved of the idea on 24.2.70. A silver box was prepared in Madras by AP and brought to Pondicherry. When I took it to the Mother, She was happy to see it and She exclaimed, "Oh! So

big!" I said, "Yes, Mother." She opened the box, looked inside and then closed it, giving both the keys to me along with Her Blessings. This box was installed at the Samadhi and it continues to be there.

When the Mother left Her body on 17.11.73, as per the instructions given by Her to Pranab-da, Her body was laid to rest in the second (top) chamber of the Samadhi and sealed with waterproof material. Also, the flower decorations on the Samadhi continued.

After some years, again it became necessary to have a still bigger offering box. The silver box touched and blessed by the Mother was kept as it was, and it continues to be there even now. A new one, this time in stainless steel, was prepared and placed at the corner of the pillar in line with the previous one.

The flower decorations on the Samadhi used to be done early in the morning, from 4.00 a.m. to 5.30 a.m. and this still continues. However, it was found that the flowers did not remain fresh till the evening. Hence, in 1984, it was suggested by Nirod-da, that the flowers be changed at mid-day, using fresh flowers for the Samadhi decorations and this is what is being done even today.

GANGARAM

It is the invocation of the people who are celebrating Sri Aurobindo's centenary which makes his presence more active and effective. But for those who are always with him, this hardly makes any difference.

The same phenomenon occurs when people concentrate on him at the Samadhi: he is always there, but in response to their call his presence becomes more active.

7 January 1972

The Mother

(Words of the Mother, CWM, Vol. 17, p. 372)

MOMENTS, ETERNAL

(Continued from the issue of June 2007)

Birthdays

*Birthdays come year after year
to whisper softly in our ear:
know this life to be ever new
As at break of morn
Each new day is born,
Lit up with a joy forever true.*

ON our birthday we are immersed in a sea of infinite joy without even our knowing it. No sooner have we met, that friends and acquaintances happily greet us on our birthday with ‘*Bonne Fête*’. What an extraordinary atmosphere is created on this day as we are led to recharge ourselves for taking our life forward through the coming year. One feels such eagerness, enthusiasm and joy on one’s birthday. One feels: ‘My soul is ageless, eternal. Eternity is my birthright.’ On this day our soul bows to the Mother in a movement of total faith and devotion with the resolve to walk on the path of life with renewed energy.

In the outside world too this day brings every year a special happiness and love into our lives. Many of the Mother’s children who live far away come rushing back to the Ashram even today in order to offer their pranam on this special occasion. They go to Sri Aurobindo’s room to meditate and as they bow to the Mother and the Master a prayer for progress rises in their heart and a marvellous divine glow lights up the face before they return to their everyday lives.

We would start making gowns, salwar-kameezes, handkerchiefs, etc. right from the beginning of the year. In between work, especially on Sundays, we would all be busy with embroidery. So little time and so much to offer to the Mother! The Mother looked at all these offerings with a lot of interest. Smriti used to offer a lot of hand-painted handkerchiefs to the Mother on each birthday. On one birthday Smriti did not get enough time to prepare them. When she went to the Mother the Mother asked her: “Haven’t you made anything for me?”

Smriti was both terribly surprised and embarrassed. From that time she never went to the Mother empty-handed. And even today she never fails to make as many handkerchiefs as she can in order to offer them to Her. The Mother must certainly be still appreciating these handkerchiefs from the subtle world and blessing Smriti with Her infinite love. Sumedha, Sudha, Kokila, Nirata and several other young girls from the School used to offer all kinds of embroidered things to the Mother, all exquisitely beautiful. The girls remained busy through the year with this.

The Mother too gave us all kinds of gifts on our birthday. We received books of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. The younger ones received bags full of toffees. The Mother would fill up the bags with the same number of toffees as the years the person had completed. The children were so thrilled really!

You must have all seen this photo of the Mother: She is sitting and on Her lap She has placed a tray of flowers over an exquisitely embroidered cloth. She is waiting for the birthday people. Her eyes are looking very far away, towards the skies. When you look at this picture you feel that the Mother is praying for Her children's well-being. What a marvellous picture it is indeed!

On every person's birthday the Mother would personally bless him or her with Her special birthday blessings. Along with flowers we all received from Her a personalised envelope and a card inside. The Mother wrote the person's name very carefully on the envelope and a few words on the card. The Mother used to keep a notebook which had the birth-dates of all the people. All the birthday people were given the opportunity of going up to Her for pranam. Everyone waited with bated breath for this happy moment. On waking up the first thought used to be, and still is today, 'Ah! Today is my birthday!' A mysterious joy coursed through the mind and heart. On this day we felt love for each and every thing: love and affection for one and all would flow out from the inmost heart!

*How my heart has bloomed today,
In warm embrace with the world at play,
Ah, what's this feeling at break of light?
Whose face to touch my eyes delight?*

We would inwardly bow down to the Mother and launch a new year on our birthday.

Be it young or old, the Mother filled each one with Her inexhaustible Love. Why did the Mother give such importance and significance to the birthday? She told Mona many things about this:

Yes, it is truly a special day in one's life. It is one of those days in the year when the Supreme descends into us—or when we are face to face with the Eternal—one of those days when our soul comes in contact with the Eternal and, if we remain a little conscious, we can feel His Presence within us. If we make a little effort on this day, we accomplish the work of many lives as in a lightning flash. That is why I give so much importance to the birthday, because what one gains in one day is truly something incomparable.

This is truly an opportunity in life. One is so open and so receptive that one can assimilate all that is given. I can do many things, that is why it is important.

The birthday celebration was equally joyous in the Playground too. All the groups would greet the person on his birthday with a loud *Bonne Fête* (Happy birthday) as the person, whether from the group of smaller children or from the group of grown-ups, stood before them. And immediately after this the birthday person would respond with *Victoire à la Douce Mère* (Victory to Sweet Mother)!

This custom was continued by the captains of the different groups very beautifully. It was lovely to hear the little children sweetly exclaim *Victoire à la Douce Mère*.

The grown-ups were one step ahead. They enjoyed singing all kinds of amusing songs on the birthday person, Udar Pinto and an elderly sadhak in particular. *He is a jolly good fellow* sounded beautiful in Udar's voice and I can still hear the strains of that song...

Once there was a lot of hullabaloo in the Playground on Dyuman-da's birthday, even though he was not a member of any sports group. A few people lifted him on their shoulders and took him around the Playground singing songs. And the Mother watched this childlike behaviour of the grown-ups, smiling and amused.

On Nolini-da's birthday everyone would exclaim *Bonne Fête à Nolini-da* and there was a certain esteem in their greeting. Normally the birthday person used to respond to this greeting with *Victoire à la Douce Mère* but Nolini-da responded with *À la Douce Mère, Victoire!* It was very moving to hear Nolini-da utter *À la Douce Mère, Victoire*. The entire Playground resounded with this cry repeated by all the group members together: *À la Douce Mère, Victoire*.

Ah, so many incidents come flooding into the mind...

On Pranab's birthday there used to be a lot of excitement in the Playground. The Mother personally celebrated his birthday in a very special way.

In his hometown, little Pranab's birthday used to be a very simple affair. His mother, Prafullamayī-di, would fast on his birthday and pray for her son. Little Pranab was served a bowl of rice-milk dessert which he ate with great relish.

In our days this is how birthdays were celebrated back home. All the mothers spent the day in deep prayer for their son's well-being. There was absolutely no ostentation or excitement.

In the Ashram a birthday took on quite another meaning. On this day each one received from the Mother a big bouquet of different flowers and some books of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

When that same little Pranab grew up and came to the Ashram, the Mother began celebrating his birthday in a special way from the very beginning. A wave of joy would unfurl over the Playground. On the Mother's instructions, a special physical demonstration was organised by the boys and girls of the different groups. The Mother watched this demonstration along with Pranab. Before starting, the groups would stand in the Playground in their assigned spots. The Mother stood in the centre and called out *Bonne Fête* four times in the four directions. Then everyone repeated *Bonne Fête* after Her, all together. The whole atmosphere at that time was indescribable.

The Mother would start collecting gifts for Pranab on his birthday right from the beginning of the year: seven or eight boxes of different clothes, shoes, socks, toiletries, perfumes and colognes, etc. Half a dozen people would go to fetch these boxes. She would offer him two boxes full of chocolate. He received two birthday cards from Her with the instructions that one could be shown to those who wanted to see it while the other was strictly for him. She also gave him a beautiful envelope filled with money. And the amount of money increased with each birthday. I still am amazed when I think of all those times.

Pranab was very fond of red. That is why the Mother would wear a red dress on his birthday. A new salwar-kameez was lovingly stitched by Minu, Bela, Jayi and others for the Mother at Her tailoring department under Vasudha's directions. A red kameez with zari flowers was made for the Mother out of a Benarasi silk sari.

Vasudha, myself and the boys who used to play tennis with the Mother waited for Her at the Tennis-court. And then we would hear the horn! The Mother's car gently entered the ground. We would all stand in rapt attention. And then as soon as Amiyo opened the door the Mother would come out smiling and stride ahead. It is impossible to describe the Mother's beauty then. How marvellous She looked!

The Mother explained to Pranab the significance of the birthday:

There are some special days in the year when an individual can take a leap on the path of progress by making use of such a day like a spring-board. The birthday is one such day.

Even today the birthday brings to us the Mother's invaluable love and Her blessings.

(To be continued)

PRITI DAS GUPTA

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

BANKIMCHANDRA CHATTERJEE

(1838-94)

(Continued from the issue of June 2007)

II

ANUSHILANA: INTEGRAL PEDAGOGY OF BANKIMCHANDRA

4. Aesthetic Education

BANKIMCHANDRA regretted that most of the principal religions of the world did not attach sufficient importance to this aspect of individual development. That did not at all mean, Bankimchandra warns us, that the founders of these religions were indifferent to its utility. The use of flowers, sandalwood, garlands, incense, oil lamps, dances, songs and instrumental music in the Hindu rituals, had for goal to intensify devotion and through these, to bring about a blossoming of the aesthetic sensibilities. With the ancient Greeks and even the European Catholics of the Middle Ages, according to Bankimchandra, the religious cult came with a blossoming of the aesthetic self around the notion of the Sacred just as in India: painting, sculpture, architecture, music, all forms of fine arts participated in it. In an English article Bankimchandra published in *The Statesman* on 28 October 1882, he pointed out:

The real explanation consists in equally true relations of the subjective ideal with the objective Reality. By instinct, man is a poet and an artist. The passionate overflow of the heart for the ideal in beauty, in strength and in purity, must find an expression in the realm of the Real. That is the source of all poetry and all art. In a precisely similar way, the ideal of the Divine in man evokes from it a shape, and this shape expresses itself in a picture. The existence of idols is as justifiable as that of the tragedies, *Hamlet* or *Prometheus*. The religious worship of the idols is as justifiable as the intellectual cult of *Hamlet* or *Prometheus*. The homage that we owe to the ideal of the human expressed in art, is admiration; the homage that we owe to the ideal of the Divine expressed in idolatry is adoration.

Really speaking, for Bankimchandra, the aesthetic implications of the worship of a picture (or of a statue) must not leave anybody indifferent. Himself a poet, he considered poetry to be the worthiest form of the favourable aesthetic blossoming. Starting from the spontaneous appeal of the beauty of Nature outside, we can rise progressively through the enjoyment of the fine arts, of the inner and abstract beauty, towards the Divine who is all beauty. The final goal of our aesthetic self, as well as the final goal of our other faculties is to keep all our psychic being attached to the Divine. This is

what the *Gita* calls surrendering to Krishna. It is this, the permanent happiness. It is this, also, the psychological purification.

Bankimchandra constantly kept present in his mind the intimate relationship between a spiritual life and the pedagogy that leads towards it. Pushing a logical realism to the extreme, he did not exclude, either, any global consideration for the place of evil, apparently represented by the unconscious thrusts of anger, lust, passion and especially, violence. Talking of the four major phases of individual life recognised by the traditional pedagogy of India—the student life (based on exclusive continence); the life of the family man (who reserves his seminal energy exclusively for procreation); the retreat in the forest (preferably, at about fifty); and the life of a monk detached from all worldly preoccupations (dedicated to the unique quest of the Absolute)—Bankimchandra, faithful to this same tradition, did not forget either the three temperaments (*guna*), or the four fundamental pursuits (*purushartha*). He classified temperaments based on a psychological observation of the human personality:

(a) Under the predominance of *sattva* (“state of poise, knowledge and contentment”), coming from the substance *being* of the Divine. According to the *Gita* “*sattva*, by virtue of its stainless purity,... is the giver of illumination and well-being; it binds by attachment to happiness and by attachment to knowledge.” (XIV.6) Elsewhere, the *Gita* explains it as “...Fearlessness, purity of nature, steadfastness in the Yoga of knowledge, charity, self-control and sacrifice, study of the Scriptures, askesis, and straightforwardness; non-violence, truthfulness, absence of wrath, renunciation, peace, aversion to fault-finding, compassion for all beings, freedom from covetousness, gentleness, modesty, and steadiness; vigour, forgiveness, patience, purity, absence of envy and pride, these (...) are the endowments of him who is born with the *daivik* (divine) nature.” (XIV.1-3)

(b) Under the predominance of *rajas* (“state of action, effort and passion”); the *Gita* defines it as: “Greed, kinesis, initiative of action, unrest and craving of desire, these come forth (...) when there is an increase of *rajas*.” (XIV.12)

(c) Under the predominance of *tamas* (“state of ignorance and inertia”), as described by the *Gita*: “Obscurity, inertia, negligence and delusion, these come forth (...) when there is an increase of *tamas*.” (XIV.13)

The types under predominance of *sattva* are considered Brahmins, according to Bankimchandra; their preoccupations revolve around knowledge. Those simultaneously propelled by *sattva* and *rajas* are Kshatriyas, warrior-like. Those with the nature of *rajas* are Vaishyas, engaged in industry and trade. Those, finally, under the predominance of *tamas*, are Shudras, attached to the earth, taking care of agriculture and ready to serve others. In Bankimchandra’s conception, these temperaments can by no means result from birth, but, quite on the contrary, are due to the individual psychosomatic constitution itself. Thus, when the *Gita* prefers one’s own law of works, *svadharma*, to an alien law: “death in one’s own law of being is better, perilous is it to follow an alien law” (III.35), contrary to the current beliefs, Bankimchandra means

by *svadharma* the task that the individual accepts as his own, according to his native temperament, and not something imposed by his birth and his caste. Thus, we have seen, instead of accepting the fortuitous occurrence of one's birth in a caste to be an insurmountable and fatal state, Bankimchandra leaves every individual the choice of belonging exclusively to a determined social environment according to his individual competence and vocation: some are destined to play the role of protectors and instructors; others, to play those of administrators; some others, of market makers; and others yet, of workers and servants. This is what the *Gita* affirms: "The fourfold order was created by Me according to the divisions of quality and active function. Know Me for the doer of this who am yet the imperishable non-doer." (IV.13) Well-informed about these temperaments in their universality, Bankimchandra concludes gladly that this classification was applicable to all societies of the world, accepting all, regardless of the country and the religion they belong to,—as children of the same Father, the Divine.

*

As for the four fundamental pursuits (*purushartha*)—*dharma* ("that which one can grasp, that which maintains things together", the Law, the norm, the rule of conduct and life, the duty); *artha* (significance, economics, political science); *kama* (desire, enjoyment); and *moksha* (spiritual deliverance, liberation)—Bankimchandra gives them a legitimacy, on condition of respecting Krishna's advice in the *Gita*: "Having brought all the senses under control, he must sit firm in Yoga, wholly given up to Me; for in him whose senses are mastered, the intelligence is firmly established in its seat. In him whose mind dwells on the objects of senses with absorbing interest, attachment to them is formed; from attachment arises desire; from desire anger comes forth. Anger leads to bewilderment, from bewilderment comes loss of memory; by loss of memory the intelligence is destroyed; and by the destruction of intelligence he perishes." (II.61-63) Laying stress on the supreme felicity—as described in the *Gita*—attained by someone "moving among the objects of sense with the senses free from attraction and repulsion and under the control of the Self," (II.64) Bankimchandra suggests Kant's ethical gymnastics that consisted in "subjugating the instincts and the appetites of our physical system so that we can remain their masters in all (and each of) the circumstances, morally hazardous."¹ He believed that the pursuit of one of these objectives or incentives of life could lead to their decline.

Fond of a more subtle look, Bankimchandra never encouraged the complete eradication of the animal feelings such as lust, anger and passions: he thought that their elimination would mean the destruction of the eternal law (*sanātana dharma*) itself. The Hindu Scriptures tried to master them and to reconcile them with the spiritual

1. Bankimchandra Chatterjee, *Rachanavali*, "Metaphysics of Ethics", 1785, translated by Sempile; cf. p. 742.

quest, using them as a motivating energy. All enjoyment beyond the limits prescribed by the Scriptures for health and for procreation would tell on the social harmony and would adversely effect a balanced blossoming of the individual faculties. From that point of view, the discriminating mastery of the organs is in conformity with the eternal law. In the same way, anger is at the very heart of one's personal and social defence. The institution of coercion or censorship—well elaborated down the centuries by India's political doctrines—is based on a legitimate social anger. Its disappearance would abolish the state-controlled laws and “the strongest would devour the weakest as do fishes.”² Living in the 4th century B.C., Kautilya affirms in his famous treatise on Political Science that the regime of fishes lasts as long as there is no order in the State.³ Eight centuries later, Kamandaka in his *Political Digest* affirms that in the absence of a punitive authority, the State sinks to the destructive logic of fishes, when numerous mutual animosities prevail.⁴ The State, by its will to put an end to a malefactor's machinations turns to the defence of the weak. If, by a cold reason, one wanted to put an end to it, all action would lose its force, its speed and its intensity. Anger brought about by the impatience to defend someone, according to Bankimchandra, gets transformed into punitive law. In Bankimchandra's analysis, lust is generated by a legitimate will to earn a livelihood for oneself and for those who depend on him. All societies encourage this measured will in different forms. Beyond measure, it becomes lust and can be classified as a fundamental sin. All these unconscious reactions, as long as they are under control, remain favourable to the spiritual quest. They are inadmissible when they are excessive. Intense by nature, they require the greatest individual attention; mastery over them, therefore, forms part of self-culture (*anushilan*).

Judging from Krishna's answer in the *Gita* in response to Arjuna's Hamlet-like hesitation in choosing between right action and inactivity, Bankimchandra examines the question of the place of violence in society. Although Krishna defends, as does Manu (X. 63), the virtue of causing no harm to any life (*ahimsa*),—echoed somewhat in the Judeo-Christian as well as the Buddhist Commandment of “Thou shalt not kill”,—does not Krishna himself impel his favourite disciple Arjuna to undertake the fratricidal battle as the ideal field chosen for a right action? According to Bankimchandra, this commandment does not imply by itself a total abstention from harming any life. The fundamental law of life requires, at every instant, a permanent aggression on life. Does not the water that we drink contain in it thousands and thousands of microscopic lives? Many other thousands we destroy again with our breath and further thousands at every step that we take. However vegetarian we may become, with every leaf of our spinach and every bite of aubergine, we cannot stop from absorbing some thousands more of them. Turning to all those who find an excuse (of committing it

2. *Mahabharata* LXVII.16-17; *Manu samhita* VII. 20; *Ramayana* ('Ayodhya' 31).

3. *Arthashastra*, I.4.

4. *Niti-shastra*, II.40.

unawares), Bankimchandra adds that there are other forms of aggression that we practise consciously, while defending ourselves: against scorpions, snakes and tigers that, on their side, do not spare us. Anyone looking for a fight with me, with an obvious hostility, has to be done away with at the very first occasion; otherwise, it is he who will eliminate me. The brigand who is ready to deprive me of my belongings, can he be spared injury in my attempt to defend myself?

How can a judge, having once pronounced the verdict on an assassin's crime, stop the latter from being hanged? Legally, the convict has to be executed. Out of duty, the executioner, who is in charge of it, cannot avoid it either. Diogenes seems to have insulted Alexander by calling him a "super-brigand"; brigand he was as well as the great conqueror of all countries and all times: the depredations and the massacres that he perpetrated belonged spontaneously to the legitimacy of a warrior's duties. Hence Bankimchandra believed that all violence committed within the reach of *dharma* is an indispensable duty for any individual or group. To give an example of this virtue, Krishna in the Epic narrated to Arjuna the hunter's story: anxious to rid a forest fawn of a predator's constant threat, the hunter had just killed the latter, when flowers started raining from heaven congratulating the virtuous hunter, welcoming him immediately to Paradise. But Bankimchandra cannot hide his worry concerning the systematic legitimacy of violence committed in the name of duty: how to console victims of the crusades and the inquisitions? And of Saint-Bartholomew? His doubt resembled that of Arjuna's, who was asked to kill the members of his family, cousins, past allies, childhood mates, tutors. More so, since Krishna had taught him that at the most a lie could be acceptable for political reasons but never any aggression to life. Among the virtues strongly recommended by the Scriptures—charity, austerity, devotion, veracity, non-violence—it is the last one that Krishna placed above everything else, even above veracity. To demonstrate the universality of Krishna's message, Bankimchandra questioned all ethical traditions, especially Western, in order to determine if any one of them would consider a liar more dangerous than or even equal to an assassin. But as a matter of principle, without having to refer to a comparative scale, no one must commit an act unbearable from the point of view of Law (*dharma*): neither a murder, nor a lie. But again, compelled by circumstances, if one has the faintest choice between the two, Bankimchandra would rather prefer to have resort to the last one, faithful to Krishna, the divine incarnation.

The fundamental question remains: that of decimating the kin in the name of a just war. In order to persuade Arjuna to undertake the task, Krishna explains that his own stand in favour of this war is not a solitary position: among others initiated to this moral faith, he mentions Bhishma, the infallible ancestor of the clan; he mentions Yudhishtira, Arjuna's eldest brother and unconditional personification of Truth; he mentions Vidura, Arjuna's uncle and the very symbol of piety; and, finally, he mentions Kunti, Arjuna's mother (and Krishna's paternal aunt), an embodiment of feminine virtues. In their name, Krishna proclaimed: "A straightforward man utters truth only;

truth is his absolute duty. But where truth can become falsehood and falsehood truth, without hesitation one has to prefer the latter. In the context of marriage, erotic games, possible loss of one's life and one's belongings, protecting a Brahmin, one can, with impunity, utter a lie." Therefore, he who encourages a conduct favourable to the practice of *dharma*, serves truth. Everything beyond its pale is falsehood. No falsehood can be compatible with the eternal Law. Bankimchandra left a flexible choice apropos of ethical injunctions, because no injunction can claim to compass all numerous and unforeseeable circumstances of earthly existence. In such cases, the seeker of the right attitude must rely on his intuition and inference. At times, before such embarrassments, the sages prefer to maintain absolute silence. But, warned Bankimchandra, such a silence can often lead to aberrant atrocities. If, for example, by telling a lie it is possible to get rid of an awkward situation, he agreed to adopt it: then, in the given context, this becomes automatically a truth. Bankimchandra summarised these observations thus: (a) Whatever is approved by *dharma*, is the only truth; what goes against *dharma*, is falsehood. (b) Whatever is beneficial for all is *dharma*. (c) Therefore, whatever is beneficial for all, is true; the very opposite is falsehood. (d) Such a truth is at all times universal and valid under all circumstances.

There is an astonishing convergence between this way of understanding Krishna's teaching—as established by Bankimchandra, and that established by the great Tilak on the same problem.⁵ More subtle, more deep, the version elaborated by Sri Aurobindo will give full reason to both of these predecessors.⁶ Let us add to this analysis a necessary and sufficient sentence pronounced by Gandhi, unconditional apostle of non-violence: "One who remains a passive spectator is truly and legally an active participant in a crime."⁷ This is but an acceptance of Rabindranath's own message:

May Thy contempt consume like a mere blade of grass
One who commits injustice and one who tolerates it.

*

Genuinely concerned about the degeneration of the Indian people, Bankimchandra proposed two immediate objectives, thanks to which a first step for the elite could be taken in the sense of putting an end to this miserable state of things in India and to raise a nation up to its promised spiritual stature. These two proposed objectives can be summarised thus: (a) To practise the religion of auto-perfection (*anushilan*) based on Krishna's teaching, Himself being the human incarnation (*avatar*) of the Absolute as described by the Vedanta; and (b) Love of the Motherland as a concrete demon-

5. Tilak, *Gita rahasya*, pp. 42-62.

6. Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita*, SABCL, Vol. 13, pp. 96, 103, 572.

7. Mahadev Desai, *The Epic of Travancore*, p. 94.

stration of the divine energy, creatrix of the universe, known variously, according to the aspect of her interventions to relieve suffering, under the names of Durga (the Protector), Kali (the pitiless destroyer of evil), Lakshmi (Mother of harmony and of riches), Saraswati (giver of Knowledge, Mother of the arts).

The Divine Mother herself appeared before Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836-1886) in the most concrete way and she encouraged his disciple, Vivekananda, an ardent promoter of Vedanta, to establish a cult of the Indian people representing the innumerable mouths of the same Divine absolute, starving children of the very beloved Divine Mother. Like a lightning flash, Vivekananda gave to Bankimchandra's educational project an extremely tangible shape; he arose before India with his religion of love and service to the thousands of these human creatures, reduced to an utter and multiple misery. Vivekananda's social relief brought together two of Bankimchandra's objectives. "We need strength, more strength and strength ever more!" exclaimed Vivekananda to trigger off the energising waves and scattered his young admirers to the four corners of India to raise, like wild boars, a nation stagnating in misery. "And the Upanishads are the great mine of strength. Therein lies strength enough to invigorate the whole world; the whole world can be vivified, made strong, energised through them. They will call with trumpet voice upon the weak, the miserable, and the down-trodden of all races, all creeds, and all sects, to stand on their feet and be free. Freedom, physical freedom, mental freedom, and spiritual freedom are the watchwords of the Upanishads. Aye, this is the one Scripture in the world that does not talk of salvation, but of freedom."⁸ Accepting Krishna as the supreme God of love, Vivekananda writes thus of the *Gita*: "Than the *Gita* no better commentary on the Vedas has been written or can be written. The essence of the Shrutis [revealed Writings] or of the Upanishads, is hard to be understood, seeing that there are so many commentators, each one trying to interpret in his own way. Then the Lord Himself comes (...) to show us the meaning of them, as the preacher of the *Gita*, and today India wants nothing better, the world wants nothing better than that method of interpretation."⁹

Belonging to the lineage of the honest visionaries who, since Rammohun looked forward to shaking by strokes and jolts the slumbering Indian people, and with Vivekananda as a definite influence, Sri Aurobindo brought about the most perfect and most efficient political revolution. But, digging farther—and one has not finished digging as yet—this revolution is placed beyond the *Zweckrational* quests (economic, social, moral, educational and welfare), on an extremely audacious ontological and spiritual plane. Simultaneously allying metaphysical contemplation and poetico-mystical experience to a pragmatic activism entirely inspired by his own strength of soul, he keeps, in the manner of his above-mentioned predecessors, the Absolute of the Upanishads as the essence of universal Nature and the complex individual being.

8. *Collected Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. III, p. 238.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 261.

He describes the Nation as an “immanent Godhead”; quite like Bankimchandra and Vivekananda (or even Sri Ramakrishna), he keeps the *Puranas* (mythology) and the *Tantras* (cults of the divine energy, Mother of the universe: Bhavani, Durga, Kali among other aspects) and proclaims India as the concrete manifestation of that Shakti. A man of the spirit, he fixes the collective quest of spiritual Deliverance (*moksha*) as a necessary aim. But moved and preoccupied by the sight of a sinking nation, an agonising people, Sri Aurobindo chose India’s political independence (*swaraj*) as the first and immediate objective, although apparently not so very indispensable for the Deliverance (*moksha*)—an ontological project that, for the first time, and in a revolutionary way, comprehends a political project as an integral part of a spiritual seeking. Furthering Bankimchandra’s scheme of auto-perfection (*anushilan*), he invites spiritual seekers to accept the outcome of his extremist political project as a springboard in the quest of the Absolute. This insertion of *swaraj* (political liberation) in the project of *moksha* (spiritual deliverance) became plausible thanks to the teaching of the *Gita*, notably as elaborated by Bankimchandra and as popularised through the socio-political works of Vivekananda. It is not therefore any Machiavellian mind that diverted religion for the profit of political goals, as very often the pro-British analysts were tempted to demonstrate—but, on the contrary, a succession of patriotic leaders, fundamentally religious or spiritual in their heart and life, chose political action as a penultimate stage leading to the final achievement of the *Gita*’s activist religion. At the core of their action loomed the concern for a spiritual progress of humanity; beyond all nationalism, in each of them, predominated an internationalist perspective, human, after all, and more than human—a perspective, once more, which Sri Aurobindo would elaborate, detailing the most advanced of its implications, to the extent of defining, during World War I, the components of a world organisation: this, at least a full decade before the first crystallisation of the League of the Nations.

(Concluded)

PRITHWINDRA MUKHERJEE

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In the Bengali year 1175 the province of Bengal had not become subject to British administration. The English were then the revenue officials of Bengal. They collected the taxes due to the treasury, but up to that time they had not taken upon themselves the burden of protecting the life and property of the Bengali people. The burden they had accepted was to take the country's money; the responsibility of protecting life and property lay upon that despicable traitor and disgrace to humanity, Mirzafar. Mirzafar was incapable of protecting even himself; it was not likely that he would or could protect the people of Bengal. Mirzafar took opium and slept; the English raked in the rupees and wrote despatches; as for the people of Bengal they wept and went to destruction.

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee

(From Sri Aurobindo's translation of Bankim's original, *Anandamath*,
The Translations, SABCL, Vol. 8, p. 331)

REMEMBERING AMAR SINGH

I

It is difficult to chronicle the life of a multifaceted personality dedicated to spiritual life. Sardar Amar Singh lived a long and fruitful life till the age of 97. He combined in him many roles and handled them well with effortless ease. He was a family man of rare dedication. Yet, his role as a loving spouse and father was no barrier to the unstinted affection he showered upon all those who happened to cross his path in life. He had humble origins and rose to great heights and distinction. He rubbed shoulders with the high and mighty and yet retained his modesty and childlike innocence. He was a successful administrator and at an early stage of his career at the tribal district of Mayurbhanj, was even considered a “terror” to agitators. He was an equally accomplished educationist, institution builder, editor, actor and medical practitioner.

The story of Amar Singh’s life has been recorded at many places. Usha, his daughter, drew my attention to some of the landmarks of his spiritual career. His first Darshan of the Mother was in 1963 and led him to a life of selfless service to the Divine. He occupied many coveted positions. He was the President, Sri Aurobindo Sanskruti Sansad, Bhubaneswar in 1970; represented Sri Aurobindo Society; became a trustee of Sri Aurobindo Progress Trust, registered on 21.2.1994; was a member of Sri Aurobindo Action Committee in 1971; was Secretary, Orissa State Auroville Committee; was instrumental in getting Rs.11.00 lakhs from the Orissa Government for Bharat Nivas, Auroville; and was Secretary of the Institute of Integral Education, Bhubaneswar. He was also closely associated with many educational and spiritual organisations such as the Ramakrishna Mission, DAV Schools, Swami Vivekananda Youth Circle and the Homoeopathy Board, Government of Orissa. Amar Singh was also a keen sportsman. He played table tennis and cricket. As Usha-didi recalls, “He was the captain for tennis in his College and played with the English Principal of the Ravenshaw College. When in Bolangir, he worked as the A.D.C. to the Maharaja and played tennis with the royals.”

Amar Singh will be remembered for other achievements as well. A keen lover of humanity, he believed in offering free medical service to the ordinary people. At his residence, on 39 Udyan Marg, his day was incomplete without the treatment of the needy with the help of homoeopathy. He was responsible for the opening of the Homoeopathy College and hospital at Bhubaneswar.

II

Amar Singh’s rare distinction in life did not lie in his social and humanitarian achievements, important as they were. His uniqueness as a rare soul lay in the fact that he allowed himself, especially his psychic being, to offer complete surrender to

the Divine. He had a rare combination in his personality: the rational and the intuitive. While he retained a judicious balance throughout, in the key decisions of his life, he allowed the primacy of the divine guidance. To the ordinary eye, such actions may go against the grain of the conventional sense of propriety and wisdom. But such thoughts never deterred or troubled Amar Singh. His first meeting with the Mother was a classic example and is significant enough to bear narration. This is how Meera, his daughter has recorded the experience (slightly edited by me):

He was out on official duty at Bangalore from where he took a day off to visit Pondicherry to see the Mother—this was in 1967. On arrival at the Ashram, he was asked to wait, while Prapatti-ji went up to find out if a meeting was possible. He was advised by Prapatti-ji that according to Champaklal a meeting would not be possible, but may be arranged the next day. That is when Sardar Amar Singh, as fearless as he is known to be, shouted out: “Who is Champaklal? I have come all the way to see MY MOTHER—let me see who can stop me from seeing Her”—and so he pushed everyone aside and went straight towards the Mother’s room, where She was engrossed in her study. As he entered She looked up and gave him one of Her charismatic smiles—that was it—that was his relationship with the Mother.

Once he accepted the Mother wholeheartedly, Amar Singh treated Her as his sole beacon in life. Nothing was important to him than to offer himself entirely for Her works and endeavours.

The most important ideal Amar Singh followed was of course Auroville. He spoke widely in support of the city of dawn and raised funds from far and wide. However, his best contribution was the journal *Oriya Aurovilian* that he started.

Although a newcomer to the field of literature and editing, Amar Singh took up the challenge and blossomed into a wonderful creative writer.

Amar Singh taught us that our life on earth is a precious one that had to be spent fruitfully. He showed us by his example that achievements of the external kind are insignificant compared to a life of spiritual progress and perfection.

To remember this Truth and live according to this Ideal is the fittest tribute we can pay to the memory of Sardar Amar Singh.

SACHIDANANDA MOHANTY

A TIRELESS SERVANT TAKES A PAUSE: AN AUROVILIAN TRIBUTE TO AMAR SINGH

(During the early years of Auroville, some friends of Auroville and devotees of the Mother from Orissa requested from the Mother a name for a magazine they wanted to publish. The Mother gave the name “The Oriya Aurovilian”. The magazine, which is still being published every quarter, with a section in English and another in Oriya, was edited for over 25 years by Amar Singh, a respected IAS (Indian Administrative Service) officer. Recently, he died at the age of 97.)

A SPARKLING star has departed... leaving behind shining memories of his bright spirit and enthusiasm at 90 plus!

The report of Amar Singh's last days and hours prove amply that he had grown unusually conscious of his inner being... of the intimations from his soul, and took a conscious leave, like a great yogi. A few hours before departing, when he said that he was “seeing a big hall with many people sitting” and that he and his wife were going to a “place where there are 2000 people”, he was probably referring to the Matrimandir Chamber and Auroville! That means that his soul has already decided its future field of birth, experience and action... the service of what he always regarded as “the City of Dawn”.

Even though I never happened to meet him, his letters and occasional articles were palpable enough to feel his gusto for life, his creativity, his spirit of goodwill, love and selfless service, his longings for a better and greater and more beautiful world, fulfilling the evolutionary vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Over the last 6-7 years, he wrote many letters to me and each time I received a letter I would marvel at his store of energy and active interest in life! He would inquire about the developments and happenings in Auroville and ask questions. On most occasions, he would also enclose a cheque of his offering to the Land Fund. When we started a specific fund-raising campaign some 3 years ago, he not only co-operated by publishing our appeal in *The Oriya Aurovilian* which resulted in many new people donating to the cause of Auroville land safeguarding but also sent addresses of potential donors whom we could contact. Similarly, he would also ask for addresses for his communications which, I understand, would mostly consist of requests for articles!

In his own articles and editorials in *The Oriya Aurovilian*, he would discuss the burning issues of society and highlight in his own way how the vision of Auroville or the vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother show the way out. He would also ask for articles on Auroville. About a year ago, it was his request for an article on “Matrimandir's relevance to the world” that led me to write one on the topic and, in the process, give shape to my own understanding. He had the spirit of ‘eternal youth’ spoken of in the Charter of Auroville.

What must be the fount of this youthfulness and hope and enthusiasm? What must be the source of his unbending will? It was the ardour of his innate spirit, his deeper soul which made him the lover and dreamer and seeker of a new creation which, as the following quote from Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine* reveals, is "more full and fruitful... greater and happier constant miracle."

The delight of the Spirit is ever new, the forms of beauty it takes innumerable, its godhead ever young and the taste of delight, *rasa*, of the Infinite eternal and inexhaustible. The gnostic manifestation of life would be more full and fruitful and its interest more vivid than the creative interest of the Ignorance; it would be a greater and happier constant miracle.

Sri Aurobindo
(*The Life Divine*)

Amar Singh's letterhead and the envelopes that brought his letters were also shining with life and light! On a white A4 size paper, there is on the top-left the Mother's symbol in bright red; underneath it, a motto in dark blue, "**For Universal Unity**", followed by his name, degree (I.A.S. - Retd.) and then his designation "Chief Editor". On the top-right, his address, phone number and also his personal e-mail ID! Towards the bottom of the page, you will find an orange horizontal line to mark the end of the page, and below it, what must be his side-work and interest, "CONSULTANT: Homeopathic Medicine (Free)". The title of the letterhead "The Oriya Aurovilian" appears in the top-middle of the page in dark blue, and above it, in orange and in capitals, what must be his favourite maxim "THE BEST GIFT IS THE GIFT OF LOVE"! People who like to gift things to friends and relatives will do well to remember these words! In the context of Auroville's village work too, we will do well to remember this. Among all the 'gifts' and favours and services we offer to our immediate neighbouring villages with hope to secure their goodwill and co-operation in our expedition, the best gift we could and should offer is "the gift of love".

Two months ago, I received from Hrushikesh Acharya, the co-coordinator of *The Oriya Aurovilian* what may be Amar Singh's last article on Auroville. The title was "Why Auroville?" and I was asked to vet it. With his natural simplicity and spontaneity, he weaves here his ideas of an ideal Auroville! Let me quote a few passages:

Here your conception of one world and one family will be realised. You will live here as a citizen of the world. You will live in great freedom. In fact, all here will live tied up with the bonds of fraternity and solidarity.... You will share your cake, and share the problems of each other with glee. Goodwill, collaboration and aspiration for the Truth consciousness will dominate the life here. You will realise the Divine by the development of your inner world.... All help will be

given by the community to enable you to overcome your difficulties and obstacles.... The community will only think about the welfare of the inhabitants, and work to see that there is no feud or quarrel or violence to disrupt the quiet of the place.... Falsehood, or any other vice, will gradually recede from the life of the inmates. They will live in peace and harmony.... Work will be undertaken with a view to move towards perfection.

This will stop wars. There will be no need to use a bomb or police force, to control crimes, terrorism, violence, fundamentalism. They will be a story of the past. The fighting instinct of man will be used exclusively to conquer the causes of his suffering and misery....

...Don't you think, with all I have noted above, there is an imperative need to hasten the build up of Auroville, with the Matrimandir located in the centre of the city? A new age will then begin, which we may call the golden age, when only peace and harmony will reign; it will be Satya Yuga.

Matrimandir is the heart of the city and it has vast evolutionary significance for the progress of civilisation. The establishment of Auroville has been heavenly decreed. So if Auroville now is working at a slow pace, momentum is bound to gather within a few years more, to work towards the realisation of the vision of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.... We have only to join the volunteers and help the ball rolling. It is an exciting and rewarding work..."

In one of his letters in late 2003, Amar Singh gave me the report of his meeting with the President of India Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam. It appears that one of his relatives had sent his book *My Divine Treasure* to the President. The President not only went through the book but was gracious and appreciative enough to invite him to the Rashtrapati Bhawan (Presidential Palace)! Towards the end of the meeting, which was also attended by a few other invitees, he told the President what I wrote him back as "numerous fellow-countrymen would love to say". "*You are, Mr. President, the best president of India...you are believing in spirituality and in the economic development of the country; your conduct in public is simply remarkable; everyone loves you; what else you want; god bless you, and give you health and longevity.*"

Earlier, he gave to the President a copy of Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine* to which the President remarked, "Read *Savitri*. It is a better book. I am reading it and enjoying its content." The President also told him what he liked from his book.

About a year and a half ago, Amar Singh wrote to me:

You will be a glad to know that *My Divine Treasure* was a hit. In collaboration with the Rabindranath Tagore Library Foundation, Sahitya Academy of Orissa has purchased 300 copies for distribution to different libraries operating in their orbit. The sale proceeds went to the development fund of *The Oriya Aurovilian*.

Earlier in the same letter, he wrote,

My dear Aryadeep,

I am collecting articles for my new book—WISDOM—wisdom of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, for its application to solve the problems facing the world today. Will you help me in this sacred task in the service of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo? You have been working for the progress of Auroville since a long time now. Will you tell me, why the complete plan of the Mother to [have?] 50,000 persons is not laid out, what is the problem? Why this delay? I understand, only about 2,000 Aurovilians are there in position, and there is a long way to go to fulfil the vision and the dream of the Mother. Do you think, the project is only a dream and it cannot have its fruition? Is the plan a misfit for the present world of materialism? Is Auroville acceptable to the future humanity, and will the coming generation take to this life of living in Auroville without the payment of wages for the labour the inmates put in. What is your experience?

I will enshrine your answer in my book. Kindly don't take long to send in your precious note. I am in a hurry at 97.

Yes, that is Amar Singh! A dreamer and a tireless servant of what he dreamed! Auroville was his dream and his concern. He saw in it what the Mother saw: a way out to a new India and new world. So, this was his last wish, his last message: Auroville, up! Let Auroville rise equal to the Mother's vision of a unique universal township!

May Amar Singh's shining example inspire and guide us. May *The Oriya Aurovilian*, which is the oldest periodical bearing Auroville's name, and which he edited and published for nearly three decades, continue to spread the fragrance of Auroville's, spirit in Orissa and in the world.

ARYADEEP

The Karmayogin knows that the power given to him will be adapted to the fruit decreed, the divine thought behind the work equated with the work he has to do, the will in him,—which will not be wish or desire, but an impersonal drive of conscious power directed towards an aim not his own,—subtly regulated in its energy and direction by the divine wisdom. The result may be success, as the ordinary mind understands it, or it may seem to that mind to be defeat and failure; but to him it is always the success intended, not by him, but by the all-wise manipulator of action and result, because he does not seek for victory, but only for the fulfilment of the divine will and wisdom which works out its ends through apparent failure as well as and often with greater force than through apparent triumph.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Essays on the Gita*, CWSA, Vol. 19, p. 180)

THE SENIOR SADHAK

It was his obsession with flowers that resulted in a fall and made him land in the Ashram Nursing Home nearly two years back. The old bones took time to set, then other complications followed. At last he came back home to the familiar surroundings.

This afternoon after three days of adjustments in the room, he came out for the first time. Wearing a white Pajama and a white shirt with a stick in his hand for the first time for support, he stepped out of his house to go to the Ashram. He took a deep long breath, looked at the yellow delicate ‘Imagination’ flowers and reminded himself: no more plucking flowers from the roadside trees—the cause of his fall. He turned the corner and stepped on the François Martin Street, and the first glimpse of the Ashram building—two blocks away, overwhelmed him. It was for Her that he had come in the early thirties, it was She who looked after him from his youth to this day—an old man now—that’s what the doctors said after his fall: he should not jump to catch the branches, he was no more young, his blood pressure was high and he was old. “Maybe, but not in spirit, not even now,” he mumbled to himself and walked slowly towards the Ashram—his heart’s every beat vibrating with joy for Her, his every breath aspiring with gratefulness for Her.

Oh! The François Martin Street was always close to his heart as the final abode of the Lord was in the building on François Martin. Blessed is the road with His presence and His abounding grace. How the trees have grown! They were much shorter and thinner when he had last seen them! In two years they had grown to such a stature, with green foliage and flowers of different colours, their ardent aspiration, their mute way of conveying their participation in this unique Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Oh! If only humans could grow so beautifully! He looked up at the tree full of flowers and just as he was remembering his fall here, a flower dropped in front of him. His face glowed with happiness. He picked up the flower and walked slowly towards the Ashram. He met X who greeted him happily at his recovery and with a penetrating look inquired about the flower—“Again?”

“Oh, no, it fell on the footpath and I picked it up to place it on the Samadhi.”

“No more, Dada; the rules have changed.”

He looked surprised but then nodded—surely things have to change. The word ‘change’ kept on repeating in his mind. The roads had changed, they were cobbled and cleaner, the two-wheelers were much more numerous. People had money now...oh, in those bygone days, one could not even think of having a cycle. “Yes, change,” he repeated again, “the houses now had a brighter look, they were repaired and painted more frequently....” A two-wheeler passed by, another, then another... he stopped counting. Everybody was busy except he. He had nothing to do. But was it really so? There was still so much to be done—in the inner self, the inner change that is the Yoga, and that has no end. He tried to cross to the Ashram pavement, hesitated. The traffic from both the sides made him jittery. Years ago, even to possess a cycle was a

dream. But when the dreams became realities they no more remained mystic and tempting, they became utilities. A boy from 'red group' came up to him and helped him to cross the road. "Thank you, my dear," he said. And he thought to himself, "People are so kind and helpful in our Ashram. It is as if I am his grandfather."

"Don't you recognise me, Dadu?" the boy asked. "I am Y's son," the boy said smiling.

"Oh! My God! but you were in 'green group'—how come?"

"Yes," the sadhak recollected, "I have been away for two years, it seemed just the other day!"

But the well-built body of the young boy reminded him that the time gap was enough to transform a boy into an adolescent, yes, time was relative. Maybe it is the mind which creates the relativity. He walked tottering to the footpath, the strength had not returned fully. He had not planned to sit in the Ashram, just place the flower on the Samadhi and go back home. That boy who was only a casual acquaintance told him that he would take him back home. Can any one say who arranges these chance meetings. He himself did not know that he would require help to cross the road. But She knew and arranged the chance meeting with the boy. But why was the boy not in 'group' at this hour? He had fallen down and hurt himself while playing, so had been sent to the dispensary for treatment and the Doctor had told him to go home—that's how he had met Dadu. So everything gets arranged for us by an all-caring Hand, isn't it, so that even a fall has a hidden meaning!

He was greeted enthusiastically at the Ashram gate. Oh, how wonderful to see the usual familiar faces. Near the Samadhi, he was told not to place any flower on the Samadhi. The old temper rushed up: how dare this new fellow instruct him not to place flowers, he who had been here since the thirties? The ego speaking. But he checked himself in time and nodded his head in assent and immersed his changed self in the peaceful atmosphere. He touched the flower to the Samadhi and holding the hand of the new man walked up to the Ashram gate. What was the new man saying?

"Dada, I feel hesitant to stop senior sadhaks like you from offering flowers at the Samadhi at odd hours. Only up to eight in the morning is one allowed—that is the rule now. I am only doing my duty."

The sadhak replied with a beatific smile on his face, his voice calm, "Why, it is a good rule. The Samadhi looks so ethereal with the flower arrangement undisturbed: neat and artistic decorations done by sadhikas with love and devotion for Them. Why disturb it? I am taking back my flower after touching it to the Samadhi. I have the feeling of the olden times when we used to receive flowers from Her."

"You senior sadhaks are really blessed to have Her celestial touch."

This time the expression 'senior sadhaks' struck him. "In those days we had only sadhaks, no seniors or juniors. That is another change!"

The 'red group' boy was waiting for him at the gate and accompanied him up to his house; he did not speak at all. Immersed in his inner happiness he tried to find its

cause. Yes, at last for once he had checked his rising temper and shut his ego up. That was a victory indeed. He would be on his guard now, had to change his nature.

The next day, he was found in eternal sleep on his bed—with a flower held with two hands on his chest, his face shining with the inner happiness of a Victor, the peace in his heart reflecting on his face.

KRISHNA CHAKRAVARTI

None of the present achievements of humanity, however great they are, can be for us an ideal to follow. The wide world is there as a field of experiment for human ideals.

Our purpose is quite different and if our chances of success are small just now, we are sure that we are working to prepare the future.

I know that from the external point of view we are below many of the present achievements in this world, but our aim is not a perfection in accordance with the human standards. We are endeavouring for something else which belongs to the future.

The Ashram has been founded and is meant to be the cradle of the new world.

The inspiration is from above, the guiding force is from above, the creative power is from above, at work for the descent of the new realisation.

It is only by its shortcomings, its deficiencies and its failures that the Ashram belongs to the present world.

None of the present achievements of humanity have the power to pull the Ashram out of its difficulties.

It is only a total conversion of all its members and an integral opening to the descending Light of Truth that can help it to realise itself.

The task, no doubt, is a formidable one, but we received the command to accomplish it and we are upon earth for that purpose alone.

We shall continue up to the end with an unfailing trust in the Will and the Help of the Supreme.

The door is open and will always remain open to all those who decide to give their life for that purpose.

13 June 1964

The Mother

(CWM, Vol. 13, pp. 109-10)

DEVOTIONAL POETRY IN TAMIL

(Continued from the issue of June 2007)

16. The Lady of Karaikal

FIXING the date of devotional hymnologists in the earlier millennium has always been a problem. But this has hardly had any impact on traditional beliefs and placement in the Vaishnava and Shaivite canon. The hymns of the Lady of Karaikal (Karaikal Ammaiyar) have been located in the eleventh book of *Panniru Tirumurai*. She is a unique personality, like Andal. And if Andal is seen as an icon of beauty in our temples, Karaikal Ammaiyar is seen as a skeleton-like figure. And thereby hangs a moving tale.

Karaikal has been known as a very religious area since ancient times. Though in the last two hundred years Islam and Christianity have also built their own places of worship like the Mastan Syed Dawood Dargah and Our Lady Angel's Church, the place continues to be famous for its temples dedicated to Shiva. Prime among them is the temple at nearby Tirunallar where the presiding deity is Darbaranyeshwara. More recently in 1929, Karaikal was sanctified by the temple built for Karaikal Ammaiyar by a devotee, Malayaperumal Pillai.

The legend of Karaikal Ammaiyar is deeply moving. Danadattan was a rich and pious merchant of Karaikal. He had an only female child whom he named Punitavati and brought her up with great love. She absorbed the devotional atmosphere of her parental home. As a child she loved building toy temples and reciting Shiva's name. She grew up into a lovely young maiden and was married to Paramadattan. The young couple lived happily in Karaikal where Paramadattan was engaged in trade.

One day two merchants from a neighbouring land presented him with two mangoes. Paramadattan sent the mangoes to Punitavati saying he would have them for lunch. Meanwhile a devotee of Shiva came and asked her for food. Happy that she had the good fortune of feeding a devotee of Shiva, she served him one of the mangoes. The devotee was satisfied, blessed Punitavati and went his way.

Paramadattan came home for lunch. Punitavati served him as usual and in the end placed the second mango in his plate. Paramadattan found it sweet and asked her for the other one also. Not knowing what to do and afraid of his temper, Punitavati went to the prayer room and invoked Lord Shiva. Immediately a mango from nowhere landed on her palm. She served it to her husband. He found it extremely sweet and realised that this was no pair for the one he had eaten. He said: "Well, I don't think there is a fruit as sweet as this in all the three worlds. Are you sure this was the one given by the merchants?"

Being the very image of sincerity, Punitavati recounted what had happened. She had fed a wandering devotee of Shiva with one of the mangoes and had got this second

one by the grace of Shiva. How could a trader used to the hucksterings of the marketplace believe in such a miracle? "The Lord gave you the mango? Indeed! Then prove it! Get me another miracle-mango!" A testing time for Punitavati who now began praying to Lord Shiva and true to his nature, the Lord did not fail his devotee. Even as Paramadattan looked on, a fresh, ripe, uncut mango appeared on Punitavati's lotus-like palm. She went to Paramadattan with love and placed it in his hands. But the moment the fruit came in contact with Paramadattan's hand, it vanished. Frightened that Punitavati was a supernormal person whom he should not approach anymore, he left home immediately.

It was nothing new for a merchant to go away for years while seeking business abroad. Punitavati remained patiently at home, performing her worship of Shiva and leading an austere life. Meanwhile, Paramadattan had prospered and settled down in Madurai. He married again and had a daughter whom he named Punitavati. When his Karaikal relations came to know of this, they took Punitavati to him. On seeing her, he prostrated himself at her feet. Taken aback, Punitavati sought to restrain him but he said that from now on she was for him a goddess and he could not think of approaching her in any other manner.

Punitavati understood that she was henceforth rid of the touch of human relationships. This too was the Lord's play to make her live in Siva consciousness from now onwards. But she did not want to carry around her beautiful body which could prove an impediment in her chosen life of devotion. She prayed to the Lord to transform her into a ghoul so that she could remain undisturbed in a crematorium, absorbed in Shiva-consciousness. The Lord granted her wish and this is how we see her among the sixty-three Nayanmars, a mere skeleton, with cymbals in her hands singing about the sublime dance of Shiva. Henceforth she came to be known as Karaikal Ammaiyar. Her verses often describe the *terribilita* of the Lord's dance witnessed by her in the inscapes of her soul. She is usually placed around 4th century A.D.

It is said that in her life of yoga, she walked to Mount Kailas. Reaching the mountain, she realised that the entire place was holy, and she would not walk up to its crest. She is said to have gone up the mountain using her hands and head, careful that her feet did not touch the earth. Goddess Parvati was astonished at the depth of Karaikal Ammaiyar's devotion and humility. Shiva was pleased and asked her to name a boon. Birthlessness, of course; if she were to be born, she should be allowed to have a constant darshan of the Lord's dance. Shiva granted her wish and this is how she is said to be always at the feet of Shiva in the temple of Tiruvalangadu.

We need not reject this legend as mere hagiology. It may well be a symbolistic portrayal of Karaikal Ammaiyar's practice of Kundalini Yoga. When the coiled Power reached the thousand-petalled lotus in her head, she must have had the vision of Kameshwara Shiva and Mahatripura Sundari pouring powers into her from the nectar-vessel. It is a symbol which has been made familiar to us by Sri Aurobindo in the yoga of Savitri:

A mighty movement rocked the inner space
 As if a world were shaken and found its soul:
 Out of the Inconscient's soulless mindless night
 A flaming Serpent rose released from sleep.
 It rose billowing its coils and stood erect
 And climbing mightily, stormily on its way
 It touched her centres with its flaming mouth;
 As if a fiery kiss had broken their sleep,
 They bloomed and laughed surcharged with light and bliss.
 Then at the crown it joined the Eternal's space.¹

With the downpouring of the divine powers, the ghoulish-body was immersed in the yoga of divine love and Karaikal Ammaiyar began singing hymns. Her works are *Tiruvallangattu Mootha Tirupathikam*, 1 & 2; *Tiru Irattai Mani Malai* and *Arpuda Tiruvanthathi*. We are told that she indited her hymns in the crematorium of Tiruvallangadu. Not only is she an inspiration who can recreate for the uninitiated the marvellous sights seen by her, but she is also a wonderful Tamil poetess. It was Karaikal Ammaiyar who began the practice of singing decads (*pathikam*), a practice followed by most of the devotional poets in Tamil. To underline this, her two decads are called “*moortha*” (ancient). Her descriptions can at times unnerve us as the very first one of *Tiruvallangattu Mootha Tirupathikam 1* where she describes herself:

Dried breasts; bulging nerves,
 Sunken eyes; oral cavities grown hollow,
 Russet-hued gum try to hold two rows of teeth;
 While two white teeth stick out; long ankles;
 Such the ghoulis woman screaming
 In the dry forest; that is Tiruvallangadu
 Where my Lord, with tresses flying
 In the directions eight, his body cool,
 Dances carrying the fire.²

Karaikal Ammaiyar's choice of the cremation ground for her residence, in the forest of banyan trees, was natural because Shiva is associated with the area. Perhaps one can gain a clue from the *Mahabharata*. During their exiled days in the forests, there was a confrontation between the Pandavas and a Yaksha. Sahadeva, Nakula, Arjuna and Bhima are impatient with the Yaksha's questions, do not answer him and die when they drink the waters of the charmed lake. Only Yudhishtira comes forward

1. *Savitri*, Book VII, canto v, p. 528.

2. Translations from the hymns of Karaikal Ammaiyar are by Prema Nandakumar.

to answer. The “Yaksha-prashna” is a popular section in the epic and the Yaksha’s questions receive pithy, irrefutable answers. Here are some of them:

What is best for farmers? Rains.
 What is faster than the wind? Mind.
 Which has greater mass than the grass? Worry.
 What is nectar? The milk of the cow.
 Where does fame rest? In charity.

The last four questions:

Who is happy? He who owes no debt.
 What is the greatest wonder? Those who think of themselves as immortal
 even after watching death daily.
 Which is the right path? One chalked out by the elders.
 What is the daily act? Creating the seasons through the positing of day and
 night on earth.

Karaikal Ammaiyar watches this wondrous happening in the crematorium. People bring in the dead but none thinks of his own end. She then meditates upon the life-spirit that will not yield to physical death and is all wonderment. She meditates upon the wondrous Lord who has created this wonder. *Arpuda Tiruvanthathi* (The Song of Wonder) is born.

The impulsion that has created these verses is simply told. This physical body of ours is impermanent. The Divine Consciousness is Eternal. That is the Flood of Supreme Shiva Consciousness. Which is the eternal truth. To live in this flood of Shiva Consciousness is the real life. All else is illusion. But one needs a boat to sail the floods. That boat is love. The love projected by Karaikal Ammaiyar in her verses adds strength to our will-power, measures the worlds, exults in self-giving, deathless, stainless, goes beyond the mind and pours back as a stream of nectar. To the devotee who has traversed the hard way to the Divine, the Lord asks: “What is it you desire?” Pat comes the answer: Love, which she has in abundance:

Lord of immortals whose throat gleams blue!
 After my birth, ever since I began to lisp in words
 I have loved and hailed your blessed feet.
 When are you going to put an end to my misery?³

Whatever hurdle is placed on this path of divine love, the devotee does not stumble.

Love is not love that alteration finds! The Lord may do his best to keep me from loving him. He may be dancing with a garland of bones mid crematorium fire. But Ammaiyar's love will not change its hue! For, this love is not something newly found. It has been there with her through the past births and will continue thus in the future as well:

I will be the Lord's servitor in each of my births.
My love is only for him. I will not serve anyone
Except him who wears the crescent on his matted hair.
Do reign over us all the time."⁴

When the heart is thus set firmly on its course, riding the boat of love in the waters of Shiva consciousness, life is surcharged with a rare sweetness:

My Lord is sweet to me; I hold the Supreme
As my sweet fixed treasure; I have taken him
As my Chief. Even as I thought of him as my Lord
I was all happiness; Is there anything impossible for me?⁵

It is an exciting drama that is taking place in the inscapes of Karaikal Ammaiyar's soul, as she sits still in meditation in the crematorium. The director of this divine drama where aspiration leads to an answering gesture from the Divine concluding in ecstasy is Shiva himself. In the ecstatic at-one-ment, the dancer and the dance coalesce into a complete whole and the cosmic form rises before the devotee:

He is the one who knows; He is the Announcer;
He is the Intelligence that understands; He is
The reality that we perceive; He is the sun, the earth,
And ether; all is only He.⁶

How to understand him or recognise him? *Nāyam ātmā pravacanena labhyah*, says the Upanishad. The Supreme cannot be known by verbal expositions. But does it matter for the aspirant? His aim is the Supreme and such is the love the Lord bears for the devotee that he comes to him in the figure or word that the devotee can understand.

The ignorant are free to speak of what they have learnt
From tomes. He whose throat is deep blue is supreme.

4. Verse 3.

5. Verse 10.

6. Verse 20. This verse signifies the *ashta-murti* concept of Shiva, as seen in the philosophy of Shaiva Siddhanta.

To those who perform any type of tapasya to vision him
He comes in the form desired by the tapasvin.⁷

This verse is typical of the generosity of understanding the devotional hymnologists have had even when they remained constant in evoking a particular deity as the Supreme. For Karaikal Ammaiyar Shiva was the Lord. Yet, she is not prepared to thrust this belief down the throat of others who may not concur with her. It is enough she has faith in Shiva as the Supreme Lord. And how is a Lord Supreme, if he cannot take any form that he wants? *Sivajnana Siddhiar Supakkam*, a Shaiva Siddhanta scripture says:

Who is the Deity that you own? Know, it is but the Lord who is concorporate with His consort that visits you assuming the form of your Deity.⁸

Nammalwar, one of the Alvars who profess Vishnu as the Supreme also speaks an identical language:

Each gains the form of his Lord
In accordance with his intelligent understanding;
The Lord of each is Whole; each gains his Lord
In the pathway he has chosen.⁹

The *Arpuda Tiruvanthathi* gives us also the cosmic form of Shiva which can be easily envisaged by us, if we follow the contours of Karaikal Ammaiyar's verse which has images drawn from dawn to dusk:

His form shines as the russet morn;
The holy ash rivals the mid-day sun;
The orange of dusk is his matted hair;
And like the deep night shines his throat.¹⁰

Dawn, mid-day, dusk, night. The eminent critic of Thevaram hymns, K.V. Jagannathan says that this verse is an example of how the Ammaiyar saw the Lord as Time. For her each moment in time was spent in meditating upon the Lord who was also out of Time. And all the sights that came to her ken reminded her of Shiva. She had surrendered herself totally to the Lord in this manner. After such surrender, from

7. Verse 33.

8. Translated by T. N. Ramachandran.

9. *Tiruvaimozhi*, 1-1-5.

10. Verse 65.

whence can fear attack a devotee? What greater gift can there be than fearlessness? Karaikal Ammaiyar exults on gaining this freedom from fear which includes the fear of death. Death, be not proud anymore!

We have won victory over Death; we are free
From the fires of appalling hell; we have cut off
Good and bad karmas; all by reaching the lotus feet
Of the Lord whose fiery arrow scorched the Cities Three.¹¹

All the great poets who have achieved Realisation have sung of this victory over Death by sheer faith in the Supreme. Tirujnanasambandhar the Nayanar says that he has no fear of Yama any more, in the decad, “*Nammarkkum Kudi Allom*”. Subramania Bharati exults that he is able to kick away Death in a trice. One finds such a firm statement in the words of Savitri:

O Death, I have triumphed over thee within;
I quiver no more with the assault of grief;
A mighty calmness seated deep within
Has occupied my body and my sense:
It takes the world’s grief and transmutes to strength,
It makes the world’s joy one with the joy of God.
My love eternal sits throned on God’s calm;
For Love must soar beyond the very heavens
And find its secret sense ineffable...¹²

No wonder the *Arpuda Tiruvanthathi* is held in great affection by the world of devotion. The wondrous poem is a poem of divine love, a poem of shoreless Ananda, a poem that instils courage in us to face even Death, a nectarean armour in every way. Incidentally, this is the first poem in Tamil devotional literature to add a “*phala-sruti*” saying that by reciting it one gains an increased love for the Divine and the Ananda that comes of resting in Shiva Consciousness.

Of the other works of Karaikal Ammaiyar, *Tiruvalangattu Mootha Tirupathikam I* is a photographic reproduction of an awesome cremation ground where sits the dried ghost of the poetess watching the *terribilita* of the Lord’s dance. She describes how a she-ghoul makes collyrium out of a burning brand from a pyre and paints its eyelids. Everywhere corpses are burning and ghouls keep jumping around. The nuts of the *Sirisha* tree rattle while the barn-owl and other night-birds keep hooting. Foxes prowl around to eat the rice thrown into the pit for raising the funeral fire. Here Shiva dances

11. Verse 81.

12. *Savitri*, Book X, canto iii, p. 633.

with one foot weaving in the air, stirring the heaven above.

Is it a cremation ground with its populace that is being described by the hymnologist or is she describing the everyday world of human passions that always end in death and sorrow?

A ghoul gobbled up the fat from a corpse,
Decorated herself with a necklace of white skulls;
She named her child Kali and brought her up
In a grand manner; she cleaned the dust on her body
And suckled her and went away. Not seeing her return
The child wept herself to sleep. This is the crematorium
Of Tiruvalangadu where my Lord chooses to dance.¹³

Karaikal Ammaiyar's poem indicates the peerless democracy of the cremation ground, where the rich and the poor, the old and the young, the good and bad get the same treatment. With equal-terror-striking images comes *Tiruvalangattu Mootha Tirupathikam* 2, always pointing to the glorious Dancer who takes a variety of steps in rhythm, amid all the cacophony and confusions of the dreadful place. The crescent gleaming on his matted crown and his waist bound with a serpent, Shiva twirls around with divine abandon.

Tiru Irattai Mani Malai (The Garland of Double Gems) has twenty verses with two prosodic variations (*kattalai kalithurai* and *venpa*) alternating like two gems. Cast in the autobiographic mode of a spiritual diary, the poem says that even when sorrows converge on us, we must hold on to the Divine and sing the Lord's praises. Those who realise that all things happen according to the dictat of the Lord and praise him will be released from rebirth.

He is not indifferent to the sorrows
Of the devotees who worship him as their Lord;
He is Shiva who has matted tresses that are red;
Decorating the tresses is the garland of *Konrai*;
That is full of buzzing bees; in the hollow
Of the garland the snakes keep hissing.¹⁴

Violence is not too far away in the lives of Shaivite Nayanmars. It was yet another expression of the yoga of divine love. Some of the legends are indeed difficult to proceed with for love for the divine is generally seen as a sweet, pleasant experience, except for that found in bridal mysticism. In the extreme moments of devotion, the Nayanmars are prepared to do anything: Iyarpagai parts from his dear wife, Manak-

13. Verse 5.

14. Verse 3.

kanjarar shears away the beautiful tresses of his daughter on her wedding day and Kalikkambar cuts off his wife's hand as she is not sincere in her devotion to Shiva. It may be called rajasic bhakti, of course. However, the poetry of Nayanmars is singularly sweet, full of wonderment at the splendid dance of Shiva, and is tuned to Ananda consciousness almost all the time. Karaikal Ammaiyar is the sole exception. While her own personal life was free of any violence, her hymns constantly evoke petrifying scenarios. *Tiru Irattai Mani Malai* avoids such imagery associated with the crematorium even when rejecting mortal life in strong terms:

My heart! Give up considering wife and children
As a support. Hold on to the feet of the Lord
As your life-line; the Lord whose matted tresses
Remain dry in spite of the stream in it; he is
Our father who is like a fire that never grows dull;
The Lord of immortals who is the immanent universal.¹⁵

The poem's concluding verses have enchanting *nindā stuti* imbedded in them. Is it not surprising that one who is forever dancing in the cremation ground could yet handle the bow expertly and burn down the three forts of the Asuras? It is said the Lord can be approached through love. Is it possible with Shiva? There is always a swaying snake on his body. It certainly discourages one from going near the Lord. And then there is a huge garland of human skulls that dangles from Shiva's throat. Surely not an inviting ornament! How does one go near a person who is riding a bull? Poor Shiva, could he not get any other mount than this Nandi bull? There was a time when he was hailed by everyone for having devoured the Halahala poison. Such a person can get anything he wants. And yet Shiva has to do with a bull for a mount and a snake for a girdle!

How can we ask for anything from this Lord who is not able to get some good things for himself or for his wife?

If the devotees who revel in serving him
Ask him for something someday,
Would he give the gift? He did not get
A gift for Uma with lips red as *kovai* fruit,
Like his own white bull that is peerless,
But takes her with him on the mount.
O good Lord!¹⁶

Throughout, Karaikal Ammaiyar is carrying on a monologue with her heart,

15. Verse 13.

16. Verse 19.

revealing her Shiva consciousness. The conclusion is sombre:

Even those who have led good lives
Are placed on the funeral pyre of dry wood,
Once they die; before that happens,
My heart! Listen with joy to the glory
Of the Lord who bathes in ghee
And drank the poison that rose
From the immense ocean.¹⁷

Karaikal Ammaiyar remains a role model for housewives and devotees for all time. She lived to teach us how to face a crisis in one's life by holding on firmly to the Lord and never giving weight to worldly successes and joys. As G. Vanmikanathan has summarised her advent succinctly:

Karaikal Ammaiyar was an ideal wife, an ideal devotee of God. Love of the Lord was her equipment, love was her craving, love was her life, and love was her boon.¹⁸

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

17. Verse 20.

18. *Peria Puranam* (1985), p. 540.

First aspire and pray to the Mother for quiet in the mind, purity, calm and peace, an awakened consciousness, intensity of devotion, strength and spiritual capacity to face all inner and outer difficulties and go through to the end of the yoga. If the consciousness awakens and there is devotion and intensity of aspiration, it will be possible for the mind, provided it learns quietude and peace, to grow in knowledge.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 23, pp. 640-41)

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

Towards Perfect Health—A Compilation. Published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Dept., Pondicherry. Price: Rs. 75. Pages: 159.

THE importance of the human body is an unquestionable fact. This is the most exterior, perceptible and palpable part of human personality which houses its subtle components like vital desires and emotions, and mental ideas and thoughts as also the soul's yearning and aspirations. Without this solid form man cannot perform his terrestrial duties and cannot express his feelings and aspirations. It is true: "*Dharmārtha kāma mokshānām, śarīram mūlamuttamam*" and also "*śarīramādyam khalu dharma sādhanam*". It is therefore in the fitness of things that the body's health be taken care of to keep it as fit, strong and capable as possible.

It is heartening to note that today's man is very conscious of his health. For his aid there are available to him a great deal of scientific information on the body, many sophisticated instruments to help diagnose and treat the ailments and a variety of powerful drugs to cure the diseases. Yet, perfect health eludes him and the Elysium of his figment recedes far off from him. In spite of the great advancement in medical science and its allied disciplines like Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering we are not yet able to gain perfect health. While many new and mysterious diseases ambush us, old and chronic ones are never cured fully and keep surfacing again. Therefore, disease, deformation, decay and death remain till date the fate of the poor body. What's the reason?

As the present book under review, *Towards Perfect Health*, indirectly suggests, the reason is that the approach of modern medical science towards the body is unidimensional. It treats the body divorced from the other components of the human being such as emotion, feeling, impulse and desire of the vital, thoughts and ideas of the mind and the aspiration and will of the soul, whereas in reality, they are interfused in each other and interacting on each other all the time. Medical science does accept that the human body is a very complex and mysterious creation but it has not yet found the key to access its core.

The present book in the balance is a pointer to a new dimension as also a new destiny of the body, perfect and free from disease, decay and death, a divine body indeed, which was never before envisaged in the annals of history of any civilisation on earth. This book opens a new vista, unveils a new horizon and depicts a potential immortality locked in the cells of the human body. After traversing from the first page to the last, it is no wonder if the reader exclaims: "Divine immortality is the birthright of the body."

This is a work of compilation on the theme of total and perfect health, from the writings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo who are the protagonists of a divine life and the founders of a new revolutionary psychological discipline for the growth of

consciousness called Integral Yoga which embraces in its ambit all aspects of human life including the body and seeks total transformation of earthly life into life divine. It may be mentioned here that no system of yoga, no science, no branch of knowledge has ever aimed before at this kind of high ideal.

These selections throw ample light on all the facets of the body—its inertia, limitations and resistance, its vulnerability to disease, decay and death, and lastly, its certain destiny to become a divine instrument for the material expression of the Supreme Truth and divine life of earth.

Sri Aurobindo says:

If a total transformation of the being is our aim, a transformation of the body must be an indispensable part of it; without that no full divine life on earth is possible. (CWSA, Vol. 13, p. 540)

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A day will come when "...Matter shall reveal the Spirit's face." (*Savitri*, p. 709)

Since this compilation was first conceptualised as an exhibition and later it was decided to make a handy volume as rightly suggested by many visitors, it may not be exhaustive containing the alpha and the omega on the body and its health. It is handy indeed and supplies enough material to ponder and practise for every one.

The contents of the book, as the title suggests, are not just health tips. These selections from the great masters go far beyond the shores of sheer physical health and enter into the deeper realms of yogic discipline. In fact, it is a book of "yoga of the body".

The book has been divided into 8 sections as given below:

Introduction; The Adventure; True Maternity; The Causes; The Ways (comprising 8 methods); The Secret; The Secret of Pain and Suffering; The Transition.

In the 'Introduction', we come to know the basic tenets of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga. Sri Aurobindo himself introduces the aim of his Yoga: "A divine perfection of the human being is our aim."

A great dream indeed!

"How dare he think of changing an earthy midge into an angel of heaven? Has he found the alchemy?" might well be the question a new reader will ask. Yes, he has gained access to the great secret agenda of God of 'heavenising' the earth through the operation of evolution under the captaincy of His executive power, Nature. He shares the divine mystery with us:

The animal is a living laboratory in which Nature has, it is said, worked out man. Man himself may well be a thinking and living laboratory in whom and with whose conscious co-operation she wills to work out the superman, the god.

(SABCL, Vol. 18, pp. 3-4)

Of course, difficulties of limitations will be innumerable in the unimaginable adventure, from impenetrable darkness to a glorious starlight, from a caterpillar to a butterfly, but the Master alchemist has found the key to this mysterious process of change. He explains:

To discover the eternal Sachchidananda, this essential self of our being within us, and live in it is the stable basis, to make its true nature evident and creative of a divine way of living in our instruments, supermind, mind, life and body, the active principle of a spiritual perfection. (CWSA, Vol. 24, pp. 624-25)

Then we come to the next section, 'The Adventure'. Of course it is the greatest one.

The greater and greater awakening of consciousness and its climb to a higher and higher level and a wider extent of its vision and action is the condition of our progress towards that supreme and total perfection which is the aim of our existence. It is the condition also of the total perfection of the body.

(SABCL, Vol. 16, p. 15)

It is an adventure of Consciousness, in inner regions, which Sri Aurobindo himself undertook for his whole life taking high terrains, sailing deep gulfs, soaring in the unknown spaces, charting, scaling new deeps and heights of *terra incognita*, "where none have gone!" to "knock at the keyless gate."

He is a spiritual Columbus who embarked on the adventurous journey to the unknown on a rudderless boat in search of a new world for the suffering humanity with a song on his lips inviting all of us:

With wind and the weather beating round me
Up to the hill and the moorland I go
Who will come with me? Who will climb with me?
Wade through the brook and tramp through the snow?
(SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 39)

The next section, 'True Maternity', explains that in order to undertake this adventure preparation of the soul must begin in the womb of the mother, before the birth, by conscious parents. The Mother says:

It is possible to call a soul, but one must be at least a little conscious oneself, and must want to do what one does in the best conditions. This is very rare, but it is possible. (CWM, Vol. 8, p. 200)

An ample light has been thrown on the causes of illness and bad health. The main

cause is resistance of the body and its lack of plasticity. As the Mother points out:

Matter is changing in order to prepare itself for the new manifestation, but the human body is not plastic enough and offers resistance; this is why the number of incomprehensible disorders and even diseases is increasing and becoming a problem for medical science. (CWM, Vol. 16, p. 423)

This resistance creates disharmony and disequilibrium in the body which opens the gate for the disease to come in. Disharmony in the being, therefore, is the main cause of illness. Fear, anxiety, depression, break in the nervous envelope; fatigue, wrong thinking may be other reasons, because they first disturb the harmony of the body, due to which the body loses the force which repels the attack of the disease.

The book suggests a few psycho-spiritual tips among many ways to fight the illness. The first condition is not to want it, the Mother advises. Not to worry, not to be afraid: the true attitude being to infuse Consciousness into the cells, purity; to have the will to conquer; to call the light—these are some of the methods to be tried where personal effort can be a great help. But the best and the easiest is to call the Mother and pray sincerely, “Cure me, O Mother!”

Does medicine cure the illness? According to Sri Aurobindo sometimes it hits, sometimes it misses. The misses are left out of account, the hits treasured up, reckoned and systematised into a science.

The Mother sums up:

In every case, it is the Force that cures.

Medicines have little effect; it is the faith in medicines that cures....

The body only has trust in material methods and that is why you have to give it medicines—but medicines have an effect only if the Force acts through them. (CWM, Vol. 15, p. 158)

The last word of the Mother on cure is:

Only the Divine can heal. It is in *Him alone* that one must seek help and support, it is in *Him alone* that one must put all one's hope. (CWM, Vol. 16, p. 182)

Among other methods, the role of physical culture has been the most important, simply because it not only keeps our body in perfect health, but also becomes a marvellous instrument for the expression of the spirit, when the supramental truth manifests in the body.

The Mother says:

Physical culture is the best way of developing the consciousness of the body,

and the more the body is conscious, the more it is capable of receiving the divine forces that are at work to transform it and give birth to the new race.

(CWM, Vol. 12, p. 283)

It is the physical education that teaches the cells to be conscious.

Physical Education is much emphasised in the Ashram and must take primary importance all over the world because, the Mother explains:

The world is preparing for a new creation, let us help through physical education, by making our bodies stronger, more receptive and more plastic, on the way to physical transformation. (CWM, Vol. 12, pp. 278-79)

But why is there suffering at all? It has a secret *raison d'être* which Sri Aurobindo reveals as follows:

All disease is a means towards some new joy of health, all evil & pain a tuning of Nature for some more intense bliss & good, all death an opening on widest immortality. Why and how this should be so, is God's secret which only the soul purified of egoism can penetrate. (CWSA, Vol. 12, pp. 438-39)

“Pain is the signature of Ignorance”; “Pain is the hand of Nature sculpturing men to greatness: an inspired labour chisels”; “Pain is the touch of our Mother teaching us how to bear and grow in rapture”—these are some of the mantras—like spotlights which show the path leading to a divine life in a divine body.

At last, once the body gains perfect health:

As an instrument the body would acquire a fullness of capacity, a totality of fitness for all uses which the inhabitant would demand of it far beyond anything now possible. Even it could become a revealing vessel of a supreme beauty and bliss,— casting the beauty of the light of the spirit suffusing and radiating from it as a lamp reflects and diffuses the luminosity of its indwelling flame, carrying in itself the beatitude of the spirit, its joy of the seeing mind, its joy of life and spiritual happiness, the joy of Matter released into a spiritual consciousness and thrilled with a constant ecstasy. This would be the total perfection of the spiritualised body. (CWSA, Vol. 13, p. 534)

Then we shall transit to the other side leaving our human shore, in the land of supernal light, knowledge, force and love, where

A divine force shall flow through tissue and cell
And take the charge of breath and speech and act

And all the thoughts shall be a glow of suns
And every feeling a celestial thrill.

(*Savitri*, p. 710)

And “A mightier race shall inhabit the mortal’s world” replacing the humanity and “the Superman shall reign as king of life.”

The reading of the whole book is like an expedition from disease to a divine force. The mantras of the twin masters are like capsules of health filling your veins with fresh energy. The perfect health is bound to come. Naturally!

D. P. Gupta

From the Vedas to Sri Aurobindo by C. K. Ramanatha Chetty. Booklinks Corporation, Narayanaguda, Hyderabad 500 029. 2006. Rs. 150. viii + 88 pages.

The canard that the Vedic hymns were the exuberant verbalisation of the powers of nature has been effectively silenced. It is obvious that most of the hymns express an adoration of nature but it has also been understood that the hymns have a spiritual text beneath their surface descriptions. Sri Aurobindo’s study of the doctrine of these mystics demolished the divisive arguments of western scholars who had seen the Upanishads as a new trend that formed the basis of Indian philosophy. He said: “Here [in the Vedas] we have the ancient psychological science and the art of spiritual living of which the Upanishads are the philosophical outcome and modification and Vedanta, Sankhya and Yoga the late intellectual result and logical dogma.” C. K. Ramanatha Chetty has studied the Aurobindonian view with profit and has presented a simplified (but not simplistic) history of the Vedic stream in Indian thought.

Aspirant students of Indian culture approach their English texts with great eagerness to know about themselves but find it difficult to pass the linguistic hurdle, having grown strangers to Sanskrit and even their own mother tongue. Terms like *prasthanatrayi*, *bheda-bheda* and *tirobhava* cannot be understood by merely looking at the Sanskrit dictionary. To such readers, Sri Chetty’s book is most welcome. Immersed in Aurobindonian literature and holding on fast to India’s great tradition, he is definitely an ideal guide for our times.

After explaining the manner in which the ideas and experiences in the Vedas have been flowing through the Upanishads and Brahmasutras and the Gita, the author takes us to the six Darsanas and the philosophical systems of Advaita, Bhedabheda, Dvaitadvaita, Visishtadvaita, Dvaita and Shuddhadvaita. Coming directly in this tradition is Sri Aurobindo’s theory of the Life Divine, says the author and rightly points out the major difference between the earlier pathways and Sri Aurobindo’s approach.

Individual salvation will not help this earth, and the insights of the Vedic rishis can yet help man attempt a transformation of life on earth into a life divine by transforming the matter-imprisoned man into the luminous being moving free in the spaces of the spirit. Sri Aurobindo has admirably indicated the battle within man as he presses towards the spirit's freedom in the concise poem, 'A Tree':

A tree beside the sandy river-beach
Holds up its topmost boughs
Like fingers towards the skies they cannot reach,
Earth-bound, heaven-amorous.

This is the soul of man. Body and brain
Hungry for earth our heavenly flight detain.

Sri Chetty says that fully aware of the many isms that stalked the intellectual discourse of his time, Sri Aurobindo yet steered clear of them all to posit his philosophy which bridged the gulf between Matter and Spirit. An introduction to Sri Aurobindo's view of Sat, Chit and Ananda follows with a demonstration of the two hemispheres and how we are trembling on the edge of mind to gain the overmind and thus attain a total consciousness. Mr. Chetty's employment of mathematical imagery to explain the two hemispheres ought to enthuse the younger generation. But then, why should there be an involution and then this almost impossible adventure to evolve so very, very slowly? It is the Lord's Leela, is Mr. Chetty's adroit answer, "and cannot be understood with our limited mental capacity but one can certainly perceive the Truth when he reaches higher levels of Consciousness."

It leaves us then with a search for icons to help us in the upward climb. *From the Vedas to Sri Aurobindo* concludes with a brief account of the collaborative yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as the inspirational guides for this exploration of consciousness and for the descent of the Supramental Consciousness. There is an attempt at dramatisation of the causes leading to the imprisonment of Sri Aurobindo in the Alipore Bomb Case. Somehow I can never visualise Krishna as being frustrated with anyone, human or divine! In any case, Sri Aurobindo made no 'announcement' on 24th November, 1926. The note on Sri Aurobindo and Tantra given as an appendix is somewhat inchoate and the quotation from the Mother is not as it was stated by her. These drawbacks can be rectified in the next edition. For the present, Ramanatha Chetty has done well to wrestle with a difficult and vast subject and record his adventure in consciousness with Sri Aurobindo's message as his guide. This makes the book a good addition to Aurobindonian literature.

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

NAVANIT STORIES

IN COW'S GHEE

POPATLAL SETH—a businessman with a turnover in millions, ever-increasing treasure-houses and possessions, extensive properties including a 500-acre colony for his employees.

A man full of love—all of it fixed, concentrated, dedicated to Wealth; come what may, that Deity was not to suffer the slightest difficulty. He cared more for Her than his own self. This utter, selfless bhakti had swallowed up his youth and adult life, and the debilities of age were now beginning to harass him. His eyes had begun to sink in, his skin to fold and lose tone, his limbs to weaken, the back to ache, the worries of the head to affect his digestion. The Seth sighed and grumbled and moaned: “Oh...! Ah...! Ooh...!” More in the day than in the night... more in the night than in the day... more in the day than in the night....

His neighbours, acquaintances, friends, relatives began to visit him, and each suggested one doctor or another. Said one, “Our Maneklal doctor is foreign-returned, you know. His medicine is elixir, sheer magic....” And another, “*Arre*, that may be so, but how does it matter whether he has been to England or never left our country? Experience, one needs experience. You may not know our Prataprai doctor perhaps, but it is a fact that he has got rid of all sorts of chronic illnesses. And that too, generally with one single dose! One dose and immediate effect, no need to wait and suffer until the medicine works, you know.” Popatlal Seth groaned, “Yes, I have heard of him. But his fees are exorbitant, don’t you know? I can’t afford such high fees!” Then someone who had been to the state capital spoke up: “I can’t see why people are mad after foreign medicines. None of them can compare with our Ayurveda. Our great rishis and yogis have systematised these medicines; you think those foreigners can stand up to them? Forget this foreign stuff, Popatlal Seth, listen to me. Get yourself treated by Vaidya Jatashankar of our capital. All you need to do is to write a small postcard and the work is done!”

Popatlal was overjoyed at this. “*Wah*, my dear sir, well spoken! Yes, yes, I have no faith in these costly foreign medicines. Those fellows are out to loot our money. They just add some colouring agent and fill up a bottle; and these fools empty out their money-bags and go sooner to their graves! One can’t praise enough our native medicines, sir!” Then he called out to his son, “Chaman! Chaman! Where is this boy? Here, go and get me a piece of paper.” The boy brought the paper and the old man dictated the long list of his ailments and anxieties.

“Did you write down all that, Chaman?”

“Yes father. Anything else?”

“Yes, now write at the bottom: Honourable Jatashankar-bhai, Ayurveda is a wonderful thing and you are a generous, benevolent man! Could you please suggest something that is easily found in everyone’s house, something one doesn’t need to go hunting for?”

The letter is posted immediately. The next day it reaches the hands of Vaidyaraj Jatashankar. He smiles more and more broadly as he reads through it. "What a niggardly fellow! Miser among misers, he hopes to regain perfect health at no expense. That long-eared fellow ought to know that one can gain nothing without spending money. Still, I will suggest a remedy. I know he will not put it in practice but that is not my problem, is it?" And so the Vaidyaraj writes down his prescription: "... number each of *Badaam* (almond), *pista* (pistachio nut), *akharoat* (walnut), *keshar* (saffron), *kasturi* (a fragrant substance produced by a species of deer in its belly-button) to be crushed with whole sugar into a soft pulpy mixture which is to be taken with cow's ghee every morning."

Jatashankar's letter has arrived. Popatlal is overjoyed as he tells everyone who visits him, "You can see how our native vaidyas are gods of Medicine. Just listen to his prescription, '...in cow's ghee'. You see my Seth, what a simple remedy! Not at all complicated, just 'in cow's ghee'. *Wah*, no praise for you is enough, my dear Jatashankar! Were it not for such as you the name of Ayurveda would have been erased from human memory! Chaman, my son, go and fetch me that brass box and place this letter carefully in it. It is priceless advice. We must preserve it most carefully." The letter is stored safely.

Every morning, as soon as he woke up, Popatlal would call out for his son, "Chaman, my dear, go fetch me that box." When it was in his hands he would open it as if his most precious treasure chest. Taking the letter in his hands he would read with a mounting joy in his heart, "...in cow's ghee." What an elixir, a real *panchākshari mantra*: "in cow's ghee." He would touch the letter to his eyes, place it on his head, rub it on his stomach, kiss it with great reverence, and finally place it back in its box. This became a daily ritual. The *japa* of his *mantra* resounded ceaselessly in his brain. Before long delirium set in and death was imminent; but even in his last breath the man uttered, "...in cow's ghee."

Thus the well-known Popatlal Seth passed away, leaving in every house, an undying tale. "In cow's ghee!" People never tired of recalling the story: What was in the prescription stayed unutilised in it; Popatlal's niggardly eyes read the whole letter but immediately blanked out the main ingredients of the medication, only inscribed in his brain was the cheapest of them all, cow's ghee. And even that, he never ordered at all!

But have mere words, parroted as Popatlal did, ever achieved anything?

Any knowledge, even the simplest advice, has to be put in practice, deliberately and persistently. Else, it remains in the air and, in a gust of Fate, we are carried away like Popatlal....

PUJALAL

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

The Gita is as if the bottomless sea, the source of a myriad gems. One may spend a whole life-time fathoming its depths and still not touch the bottom or gauge how deep it is. One may search for a hundred years and still find it difficult to gather even a hundredth part of the riches contained in this endless store of gems. And yet, if one can recover one or two of these gems, the poor man may become rich, the deep thinker acquire wisdom, the hater of God become a devotee, the mighty and powerful hero of action come back to his field of work fully equipped and ready for achieving his life's purpose.

Sri Aurobindo

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

With Compliments from Well-wishers

*The things we cannot realise today we shall
be able to realise tomorrow. The only necessity
is to endure.*

20 August 1954

The Mother

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

With Compliments from B.