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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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DIVINE SENSE

Surely I take no more an earthly food
But eat the fruits and plants of Paradise!
For Thou hast changed my sense's habitude
From mortal pleasure to divine surprise.

Hearing and sight are now an ecstasy,
And all the fragrances of earth disclose
A sweetness matching in intensity
Odour of the crimson marvel of the rose.

In every contact's deep invading thrill,
That lasts as if its source were infinite,
I feel Thy touch; Thy bliss imperishable
Is crowded into that moment of delight.

The body burns with Thy rapture's sacred fire,
Pure, passionate, holy, virgin of desire.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 155)

THE DOCTRINE OF THE MYSTICS

THE VEDA possesses the high spiritual substance of the Upanishads, but lacks their phraseology; it is an inspired knowledge as yet insufficiently equipped with intellectual and philosophical terms. We find a language of poets and illuminates to whom all experience is real, vivid, sensible, even concrete, not yet of thinkers and systematisers to whom the realities of the mind and soul have become abstractions. Yet a system, a doctrine there is; but its structure is supple, its terms are concrete, the cast of its thought is practical and experimental, but in the accomplished type of an old and sure experience, not of one that is crude and uncertain because yet in the making. Here 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. But like all life, like all science that is still vital, it is free from the armoured rigidities of the reasoning intellect; in spite of its established symbols and sacred formulae it is still large, free, flexible, fluid, supple and subtle. It has the movement of life and the large breath of the soul. And while the later philosophies are books of Knowledge and make liberation the one supreme good, the Veda is a Book of Works and the hope for which it spurns our present bonds and littleness is perfection, self-achievement, immortality.

The doctrine of the Mystics recognises an Unknowable, Timeless and Unnameable behind and above all things and not seizable by the studious pursuit of the mind. Impersonally, it is That, the One Existence; to the pursuit of our personality it reveals itself out of the secrecy of things as the God or Deva,—nameless though he has many names, immeasurable and beyond description, though he holds in himself all description of name and knowledge and all measures of form and substance, force and activity.

The Deva or Godhead is both the original cause and the final result. Divine Existent, builder of the worlds, lord and begetter of all things, Male and Female, Being and Consciousness, Father and Mother of the Worlds and their inhabitants, he is also their Son and ours: for he is the Divine Child born into the Worlds who manifests himself in the growth of the creature. He is Rudra and Vishnu, Prajapati and Hiranyagarbha, Surya, Agni, Indra, Vayu, Soma, Brihaspati,—Varuna and Mitra and Bhaga and Aryaman, all the gods. He is the wise, mighty and liberating Son born from our works and our sacrifice, the Hero in our warfare and Seer of our knowledge, the White Steed in the front of our days who gallops towards the upper Ocean.

The soul of man soars as the Bird, the Hansa, past the shining firmaments of physical and mental consciousness, climbs as the traveller and fighter beyond earth of body and heaven of mind by the ascending path of the Truth to find this Godhead waiting for us, leaning down to us from the secrecy of the highest supreme where it is seated in the triple divine Principle and the source of the Beatitude. The Deva is indeed, whether attracting and exalted there or here helpful to us in the person of the greater Gods, always the Friend and Lover of man, the pastoral Master of the Herds

who gives us the sweet milk and the clarified butter from the udder of the shining Cow of the infinitude. He is the source and outpourer of the ambrosial Wine of divine delight and we drink it drawn from the sevenfold waters of existence or pressed out from the luminous plant on the hill of being and uplifted by its raptures we become immortal.

Such are some of the images of this ancient mystic adoration.

The Godhead has built this universe in a complex system of worlds which we find both within us and without, subjectively cognised and objectively sensed. It is a rising tier of earths and heavens; it is a stream of diverse waters; it is a Light of seven rays, or of eight or nine or ten; it is a Hill of many plateaus. The seers often image it in a series of trios; there are three earths and three heavens. More, there is a triple world below,—Heaven, Earth and the intervening mid-region; a triple world between, the shining heavens of the Sun; a triple world above, the supreme and rapturous abodes of the Godhead.

But other principles intervene and make the order of the worlds yet more complex. These principles are psychological; for since all creation is a formation of the Spirit, every external system of worlds must in each of its planes be in material correspondence with some power or rising degree of consciousness of which it is the objective symbol and must house a kindred internal order of things. To understand the Veda we must seize this Vedic parallelism and distinguish the cosmic gradations to which it leads. We rediscover the same system behind the later Puranic symbols and it is thence that we can derive its tabulated series most simply and clearly. For there are seven principles of existence and the seven Puranic worlds correspond to them with sufficient precision, thus:—

<i>Principle</i>	<i>World</i>
1. Pure Existence—Sat	World of the highest truth of being (Satyaloka)
2. Pure Consciousness—Chit	World of infinite Will or conscious force (Tapoloka)
3. Pure Bliss—Ananda	World of creative delight of existence (Janaloka)
4. Knowledge or Truth—Vijnana	World of the Vastness (Maharloka)
5. Mind	World of light (Swar)
6. Life (nervous being)	Worlds of various becoming (Bhuvar)
7. Matter	The material world (Bhur)

Now this system which in the Purana is simple enough, is a good deal more intricate in the Veda. There the three highest worlds are classed together as the triple divine Principle,—for they dwell always together in a Trinity; infinity is their scope, bliss is their foundation. They are supported by the vast regions of the Truth whence a divine Light radiates out towards our mentality in the three heavenly luminous worlds of Swar, the domain of Indra. Below is ranked the triple system in which we live.

We have the same cosmic gradations as in the Puranas but they are differently grouped,—seven worlds in principle, five in practice, three in their general groupings:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| 1. The Supreme Sat-Chit-Ananda | The triple divine worlds |
| 2. The Link-World Supermind | The Truth, Right, Vast, manifested in Swar, with its three luminous heavens |
| 3. The triple lower world | |
| Pure Mind | Heaven (Dyaus, the three heavens) |
| Life-force | The Mid-Region (Antariksha) |
| Matter | Earth (the three earths) |

And as each principle can be modified by the subordinate manifestation of the others within it, each world is divisible into several provinces according to different arrangements and self-orderings of its creative light of consciousness. Into this framework, then, we must place all the complexities of the subtle vision and fertile imagery of the seers down to the hundred cities which are now in the possession of the hostile kings, the Lords of division and evil. But the gods shall break them open and give them for his free possession to the Aryan worshipper!

But where are these worlds and whence are they created? Here we have one of the profoundest ideas of the Vedic sages. Man dwells in the bosom of the Earth-Mother and is aware of this world of mortality only; but there is a superconscient high beyond where the divine worlds are seated in a luminous secrecy; there is a subconscious or inconscient below his surface waking impressions and from that pregnant Night the worlds as he sees them are born. And these other worlds between the luminous upper and the tenebrous lower ocean? They are here. Man draws from the life-world his vital being, from the mind-world his mentality; he is ever in secret communication with them; he can consciously enter into them, be born into them, if he will. Even into the solar worlds of the Truth he can rise, enter the portals of the Superconscient, cross the threshold of the Supreme. The divine doors shall swing open to his increasing soul.

This human ascension is possible because every being really holds in himself all that his outward vision perceives as if external to him. We have subjective faculties hidden in us which correspond to all the tiers and strata of the objective cosmic system and these form for us so many planes of our possible existence. This material life and

our narrowly limited consciousness of the physical world are far from being the sole experience permitted to man,—be he a thousand times the Son of Earth. If maternal Earth bore him and retains him in her arms, yet is Heaven also one of his parents and has a claim on his being. It is open to him to become awake to profounder depths and higher heights within and such awakening is his intended progress. And as he mounts thus to higher and ever higher planes of himself, new worlds open to his life and his vision and become the field of his experience and the home of his spirit. He lives in contact and union with their powers and godheads and remoulds himself in their image. Each ascent is thus a new birth of the soul, and the Veda calls the worlds “births” as well as seats and dwelling-places.

For as the Gods have built the series of the cosmic worlds, even so they labour to build up the same series of ordered states and ascending degrees in man’s consciousness from the mortal condition to the crowning immortality. They raise him from the limited material state of being in which our lowest manhood dwells contented and subject to the Lords of Division, give him a life rich and abundant with the many and rapid shocks and impulsions from the dynamic worlds of Life and Desire where the Gods battle with the demons and raise him yet higher from those troubled rapidities and intensities into the steadfast purity and clarity of the high mental existence. For pure thought and feeling are man’s sky, his heaven; this whole vitalistic existence of emotion, passions, affections of which desire is the pivot, forms for him a mid-world; body and material living are his earth.

But pure thought and pure psychic state are not the highest height of the human ascension. The home of the Gods is an absolute Truth which lives in solar glories beyond mind. Man ascending thither strives no longer as the thinker but is victoriously the seer; he is no longer this mental creature but a divine being. His will, life, thought, emotion, sense, act are all transformed into values of an all-puissant Truth and remain no longer an embarrassed or a helpless tangle of mixed truth and falsehood. He moves lamely no more in our narrow and grudging limits but ranges in the unobstructed Vast; toils and zigzags no longer amid these crookednesses, but follows a swift and conquering straightness; feeds no longer on broken fragments, but is suckled by the teats of Infinity. Therefore he has to break through and out beyond these firmaments of earth and heaven; conquering firm possession of the solar worlds, entering on to his highest Height he has to learn how to dwell in the triple principle of Immortality.

This contrast of the mortality we are and the immortal condition to which we can aspire is the key of the Vedic thought and practice. Veda is the earliest gospel we have of man’s immortality and these ancient stanzas conceal the primitive discipline of its inspired discoverers.

Substance of being, light of consciousness, active force and possessive delight are the constituent principles of existence; but their combination in us may be either limited, divided, hurt, broken and obscure or infinite, enlightened, vast, whole and

unhurt. Limited and divided being is ignorance; it is darkness and weakness, it is grief and pain; in the Vast, in the integral, in the infinite we must seek for the desirable riches of substance, light, force and joy. Limitation is mortality; immortality comes to us as an accomplished self-possession in the infinite and the power to live and move in firm vastnesses. Therefore it is in proportion as he widens and on condition that he increases constantly in substance of his being, brightens an ever loftier flame of will and vaster light of knowledge, advances the boundaries of his consciousness, raises the degrees and enlarges the breadth of his power, force and strength, confirms an intenser beatitude of joy and liberates his soul into immeasurable peace that man becomes capable of immortality.

To widen is to acquire new births. The aspiring material creature becomes the straining vital man; he in turn transmutes himself into the subtle mental and psychical being; this subtle thinker grows into the wide, multiple and cosmic man open on all sides of him to all the multitudinous inflowings of the Truth; the cosmic soul rising in attainment strives as the spiritual man for a higher peace, joy and harmony. These are the five Aryan types, each of them a great people occupying its own province or state of the total human nature. But there is also the absolute Aryan who would conquer and pass beyond these states to the transcendental harmony of them all.

It is the supramental Truth that is the instrument of this great inner transfiguration. That replaces mentality by luminous vision and the eye of the gods, mortal life by breath and force of the infinite existence, obscure and death-possessed substance by the free and immortal conscious-being. The progress of man must be therefore, first, his self-expanding into a puissant vitality capable of sustaining all vibrations of action and experience and a clear mental and psychical purity; secondly, an outgrowing of this human light and power and its transmutation into an infinite Truth and an immortal Will.

Our normal life and consciousness are a dark or at best a starlit Night. Dawn comes by the arising of the Sun of that higher Truth and with Dawn there comes the effective sacrifice. By the sacrifice the Dawn itself and the lost Sun are constantly conquered out of the returning Night and the luminous herds rescued from the darkling cave of the Panis; by the sacrifice the rain of the abundance of heaven is poured out for us and the sevenfold waters of the higher existence descend impetuously upon our earth because the coils of the obscuring Python, the all-enfolding and all-withholding Vritra, have been cloven asunder by the God-Mind's flashing lightnings; in the sacrifice the Soma wine is distilled and uplifts us on the stream of its immortalising ecstasy to the highest heavens.

Our sacrifice is the offering of all our gains and works to the powers of the higher existence. The whole world is a dumb and helpless sacrifice in which the soul is bound as a victim self-offered to unseen Gods. The liberating Word must be found, the illuminating hymn must be framed in the heart and mind of man and his life must be turned into a conscious and voluntary offering in which the soul is no longer the victim, but the master of the sacrifice. By right sacrifice and by the all-creative and

all-expressive Word that shall arise out of his depths as a sublime hymn to the Gods man can achieve all things. He shall conquer his perfection; Nature shall come to him as a willing and longing bride; he shall become her seer and rule her as her King.

By the hymn of prayer and God-attraction, by the hymn of praise and God-affirmation, by the hymn of God-attainment and self-expression man can house in himself the Gods, build in this gated house of his being the living image of their deity, grow into divine births, form within himself vast and luminous worlds for his soul to inhabit. By the word of the Truth the all-engendering Surya creates; by that rhythm Brahmanaspati evokes the worlds and Twashtri fashions them; finding the all-puissant Word in his intuitive heart, shaping it in his mind the human thinker, the mortal creature can create in himself all the forms, all the states and conditions he desires and, achieving, can conquer for himself all wealth of being, light, strength and enjoyment. He builds up his integral being and aids his gods to destroy the evil armies; the hosts of his spiritual enemies are slain who have divided, torn and afflicted his nature.

The image of this sacrifice is sometimes that of a journey or voyage; for it travels, it ascends; it has a goal—the vastness, the true existence, the light, the felicity—and it is called upon to discover and keep the good, the straight and the happy path to the goal, the arduous, yet joyful road of the Truth. It has to climb, led by the flaming strength of the divine Will, from plateau to plateau as of a mountain, it has to cross as in a ship the waters of existence, traverse its rivers, overcome their deep pits and rapid currents; its aim is to arrive at the far-off ocean of light and infinity.

And this is no easy or peaceful march; it is for long seasons a fierce and relentless battle. Constantly the Aryan man has to labour and to fight and conquer; he must be a tireless toiler and traveller and a stern warrior, he must force open and storm and sack city after city, win kingdom after kingdom, overthrow and tread down ruthlessly enemy after enemy. His whole progress is a warring of Gods and Titans, Gods and Giants, Indra and the Python, Aryan and Dasyu. Aryan adversaries even he has to face in the open field; for old friends and helpers turn into enemies; the kings of Aryan states he would conquer and overpass join themselves to the Dasyus and are leagued against him in supreme battle to prevent his free and utter passing on.

But the Dasyu is the natural enemy. These dividers, plunderers, harmful powers, these Danavas, sons of the Mother of division, are spoken of by the Rishis under many general appellations. There are Rakshasas; there are Eaters and Devourers, Wolves and Tearers; there are hurters and haters; there are dualisers; there are confiners or censurers. But we are given also many specific names. Vritra, the Serpent, is the grand Adversary; for he obstructs with his coils of darkness all possibility of divine existence and divine action. And even when Vritra is slain by the light, fiercer enemies arise out of him. Shushna afflicts us with his impure and ineffective force, Namuchi fights man by his weaknesses, and others too assail, each with his proper evil. Then there are Vala and the Panis, miser traffickers in the sense-life, stealers and concealers

of the higher Light and its illuminations which they can only darken and misuse,—an impious host who are jealous of their store and will not offer sacrifice to the Gods. These and other personalities—they are much more than personifications—of our ignorance, evil, weakness and many limitations make constant war upon man; they encircle him from near or they shoot their arrows at him from afar or even dwell in his gated house in the place of the Gods and with their shapeless stammering mouths and their insufficient breath of force mar his self-expression. They must be expelled, overpowered, slain, thrust down into their nether darkness by the aid of the mighty and helpful deities.

The Vedic deities are names, powers, personalities of the universal Godhead and they represent each some essential puissance of the Divine Being. They manifest the cosmos and are manifest in it. Children of Light, Sons of the Infinite, they recognise in the soul of man their brother and ally and desire to help and increase him by themselves increasing in him so as to possess his world with their light, strength and beauty. The Gods call man to a divine companionship and alliance; they attract and uplift him to their luminous fraternity, invite his aid and offer theirs against the Sons of Darkness and Division. Man in return calls the Gods to his sacrifice, offers to them his swiftesses and his strengths, his clarities and his sweetesses,—milk and butter of the shining Cow, distilled juices of the Plant of Joy, the Horse of the Sacrifice, the cake and the wine, the grain for the God-Mind's radiant coursers. He receives them into his being and their gifts into his life, increases them by the hymn and the wine and forms perfectly—as a smith forges iron, says the Veda—their great and luminous godheads.

All this Vedic imagery is easy to understand when once we have the key, but it must not be mistaken for mere imagery. The Gods are not simply poetical personifications of abstract ideas or of psychological and physical functions of Nature. To the Vedic seers they are living realities; the vicissitudes of the human soul represent a cosmic struggle not merely of principles and tendencies but of the cosmic Powers which support and embody them. These are the Gods and the Demons. On the world-stage and in the individual soul the same real drama with the same personages is enacted.

To what gods shall the sacrifice be offered? Who shall be invoked to manifest and protect in the human being this increasing godhead?

Agni first, for without him the sacrificial flame cannot burn on the altar of the soul. That flame of Agni is the seven-tongued power of the Will, a Force of God instinct with knowledge. This conscious and forceful will is the immortal guest in our mortality, a pure priest and a divine worker, the mediator between earth and heaven. It carries what we offer to the higher Powers and brings back in return their force and light and joy into our humanity.

Indra, the Puissant next, who is the power of pure Existence self-manifested as the Divine Mind. As Agni is one pole of Force instinct with knowledge that sends its

current upward from earth to heaven, so Indra is the other pole of Light instinct with force which descends from heaven to earth. He comes down into our world as the Hero with the shining horses and slays darkness and division with his lightnings, pours down the life-giving heavenly waters, finds in the trace of the hound, Intuition, the lost or hidden illuminations, makes the Sun of Truth mount high in the heaven of our mentality.

Surya, the Sun, is the master of that supreme Truth,—truth of being, truth of knowledge, truth of process and act and movement and functioning. He is therefore the creator or rather the manifester of all things—for creation is outbringing, expression by the Truth and Will—and the father, fosterer, enlightener of our souls. The illuminations we seek are the herds of this Sun who comes to us in the track of the divine Dawn and releases and reveals in us night-hidden world after world up to the highest Beatitude.

Of that beatitude Soma is the representative deity. The wine of his ecstasy is concealed in the growths of earth, in the waters of existence; even here in our physical being are his immortalising juices and they have to be pressed out and offered to all the gods; for in that strength these shall increase and conquer.

Each of these primary deities has others associated with him who fulfil functions that arise from his own. For if the truth of Surya is to be established firmly in our mortal nature, there are previous conditions that are indispensable; a vast purity and clear wideness destructive of all sin and crooked falsehood,—and this is Varuna; a luminous power of love and comprehension leading and forming into harmony all our thoughts, acts and impulses,—this is Mitra; an immortal puissance of clear-discerning aspiration and endeavour,—this is Aryaman; a happy spontaneity of the right enjoyment of all things dispelling the evil dream of sin and error and suffering,—this is Bhaga. These four are powers of the Truth of Surya.

For the whole bliss of Soma to be established perfectly in our nature a happy and enlightened and unmaimed condition of mind, vitality and body are necessary. This condition is given to us by the twin Ashwins; wedded to the daughter of Light, drinkers of honey, bringers of perfect satisfactions, healers of maim and malady they occupy our parts of knowledge and parts of action and prepare our mental, vital and physical being for an easy and victorious ascension.

Indra, the Divine Mind, as the shaper of mental forms has for his assistants, his artisans, the Ribhus, human powers who by the work of sacrifice and their brilliant ascension to the high dwelling-place of the Sun have attained to immortality and help mankind to repeat their achievement. They shape by the mind Indra's horses, the Ashwins' chariot, the weapons of the Gods, all the means of the journey and the battle. But as giver of the Light of truth and as Vritra-slayer Indra is aided by the Maruts, who are powers of will and nervous or vital Force that have attained to the light of thought and the voice of self-expression. They are behind all thought and speech as its impellers and they battle towards the Light, Truth and Bliss of the supreme Consciousness.

There are also female energies; for the Deva is both Male and Female and the gods also are either activating souls or passively executive and methodising energies. Aditi, infinite Mother of the gods, comes first; and there are besides five powers of the Truth-consciousness,—Mahi or Bharati, the vast Word that brings us all things out of the divine source; Ila, the strong primal word of the Truth who gives us its active vision; Saraswati, its streaming current and the word of its inspiration; Sarama, the Intuition, hound of heaven who descends into the cavern of the subconscious and finds there the concealed illuminations; Dakshina, whose function is to discern rightly, dispose the action and the offering and distribute in the sacrifice to each godhead its portion. Each god, too, has his female energy.

All this action and struggle and ascension is supported by Heaven our Father and Earth our Mother, Parents of the Gods, who sustain respectively the purely mental and psychic and the physical consciousness. Their large and free scope is the condition of our achievement. Vayu, Master of life, links them together by the mid-air, the region of vital force. And there are other deities,—Parjanya, giver of the rain of heaven; Dadhikravan, the divine war-horse, a power of Agni; the mystic Dragon of the Foundations; Trita Aptya who on the third plane of existence consummates our triple being; and more besides.

The development of all these godheads is necessary to our perfection. And that perfection must be attained on all our levels,—in the wideness of earth, our physical being and consciousness; in the full force of vital speed and action and enjoyment and nervous vibration, typified as the Horse which must be brought forward to upbear our endeavour; in the perfect gladness of the heart of emotion and a brilliant heat and clarity of the mind throughout our intellectual and psychical being; in the coming of the supramental Light, the Dawn and the Sun and the shining Mother of the herds, to transform all our existence; for so comes to us the possession of the Truth, by the Truth the admirable surge of the Bliss, in the Bliss infinite Consciousness of absolute being.

Three great Gods, origin of the Puranic Trinity, largest puissances of the supreme Godhead, make possible this development and upward evolution; they support in its grand lines and fundamental energies all these complexities of the cosmos. Brahmanaspati is the Creator; by the word, by his cry he creates,—that is to say, he expresses, he brings out all existence and conscious knowledge and movement of life and eventual forms from the darkness of the Inconscient. Rudra, the Violent and Merciful, the Mighty One, presides over the struggle of life to affirm itself; he is the armed, wrathful and beneficent Power of God who lifts forcibly the creation upward, smites all that opposes, scourges all that errs and resists, heals all that is wounded and suffers and complains and submits. Vishnu of the vast pervading motion holds in his triple stride all these worlds; it is he that makes a wide room for the action of Indra in our limited mortality; it is by him and with him that we rise into his highest seats where we find waiting for us the Friend, the Beloved, the Beatific Godhead.

Our earth shaped out of the dark inconscient ocean of existence lifts its high

formations and ascending peaks heavenward; heaven of mind has its own formations, clouds that give out their lightnings and their waters of life; the streams of the clarity and the honey ascend out of the subconscious ocean below and seek the superconscious ocean above; and from above that ocean sends downward its rivers of the light and truth and bliss even into our physical being. Thus in images of physical Nature the Vedic poets sing the hymn of our spiritual ascension.

That ascension has already been effected by the Ancients, the human forefathers, and the spirits of these great Ancestors still assist their offspring; for the new dawns repeat the old and lean forward in light to join the dawns of the future. Kanwa, Kutsa, Atri, Kakshiwan, Gotama, Shunahshepa have become types of certain spiritual victories which tend to be constantly repeated in the experience of humanity. The seven sages, the Angirasas, are waiting still and always, ready to chant the word, to rend the cavern, to find the lost herds, to recover the hidden Sun. Thus the soul is a battlefield full of helpers and hurters, friends and enemies. All this lives, teems, is personal, is conscious, is active. We create for ourselves by the sacrifice and by the word shining seers, heroes to fight for us, children of our works. The Rishis and the Gods find for us our luminous herds; the Ribhus fashion by the mind the chariots of the gods and their horses and their shining weapons. Our life is a horse that neighing and galloping bears us onward and upward; its forces are swift-hooved steeds, the liberated powers of the mind are wide-winging birds; this mental being or this soul is the upsoaring Swan or the Falcon that breaks out from a hundred iron walls and wrests from the jealous guardians of felicity the wine of the Soma. Every shining godward Thought that arises from the secret abysses of the heart is a priest and a creator and chants a divine hymn of luminous realisation and puissant fulfilment. We seek for the shining gold of the Truth; we lust after a heavenly treasure.

The soul of man is a world full of beings, a kingdom in which armies clash to help or hinder a supreme conquest, a house where the gods are our guests and which the demons strive to possess; the fullness of its energies and wideness of its being make a seat of sacrifice spread, arranged and purified for a celestial session.

Such are some of the principal images of the Veda and a very brief and insufficient outline of the teaching of the Forefathers. So understood the Rig Veda ceases to be an obscure, confused and barbarous hymnal; it becomes the high-aspiring Song of Humanity; its chants are episodes of the lyrical epic of the soul in its immortal ascension.

This at least; what more there may be in the Veda of ancient science, lost knowledge, old psycho-physical tradition remains yet to be discovered.

SRI AUROBINDO

(The Secret of the Veda, CWSA, Vol. 15, pp. 370-84)

‘THY PRESENCE IN EVERY BEING...’

January 29, 1914

It is Thy Presence in every being, O divine Master of love, that makes it possible for every man, even the most cruel, to be open to pity and even the most vile to respect, almost despite himself, honour and justice. It is Thou who, beyond all conventions and prejudices, illuminest with a special light, divine and pure, all that we are and all that we do, and makest us see clearly the difference between what we actually are and what we could be.

Thou art the impassable barrier set up against the excess of evil, darkness and ill-will; Thou art the living hope in every heart of all possible and future perfections.

To Thee all the fervour of my adoration.

Thou art the gateway within reach of our conception leading to unsuspected and inconceivable splendours, splendours which will be revealed to us progressively.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 60)

SOME EARLY TALKS ON AUROVILLE

March 1968

About Section One of the Auroville Charter: “But to live in Auroville one must be the willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness.”

THIS is the big dispute at the moment about Auroville. In the Charter, I put “Divine Consciousness”, so they say, “It reminds us of God.” I said (*Mother laughs*), “It doesn’t remind *me* of God!”

So some translate it as “the highest consciousness”, others put something else. I agreed with the Russians to put “perfect Consciousness”, but it is an approximation.... And That—which cannot be named and cannot be defined—is the supreme Power. It is the Power that one finds. And the supreme Power is only an aspect: the aspect that concerns creation.

*

10 April 1968

Apropos Auroville: on money and government.

The conflict about money is what might be called a “conflict of ownership”, but the truth is that money belongs to no one. This idea of *possessing* money has warped everything. Money should not be a “possession”: like power it is a means of action which is given to you, but you must use it according to... what we can call the “will of the Giver”, that is, in an impersonal and enlightened way. If you are a good instrument for diffusing and utilising money, then it comes to you, and it comes to you in proportion to your capacity to use it as it is meant to be used. That is the true mechanism.

The true attitude is this: money is a force intended for the work on earth, the work required to prepare the earth to receive and manifest the divine forces, and it—that is, the power of utilising it—must come into the hands of those who have the clearest, most comprehensive and truest vision.

To start with, the first thing (but this is elementary) is not to have the sense of possession—what does it mean, “it is mine”?... Now, I don’t quite understand. Why do people want it to belong to them?—so that they can use it as they like and do what they want with it and handle it according to their own conceptions? That’s how it is. On the other hand, yes, there are people who like to store it up somewhere... but that is a disease. To be sure of always having some, they hoard it.

But if people understood that one should be like a receiving and transmitting station and that the wider the range (just the opposite of personal), the more impersonal, comprehensive and wide it is, the most force it can hold (“force” that is translated

materially: notes and coins). This power to hold is proportional to the capacity to use the money in the best way—"best" in terms of the general progress: the widest vision, the greatest understanding and the most enlightened, exact and true usage, not according to the warped needs of the ego but according to the general need of the earth for its evolution and development. That is to say, the widest vision will have the largest capacity.

Behind all wrong movements, there is a true movement; there is a joy in being able to direct, utilise, organise in such a way that there is a minimum of waste and the maximum of result. It is a very interesting vision to have. And this must be the true side in people who want to accumulate money: it is the capacity to use it on a very large scale. Then, there are those who very much like to have it and spend it; that is something else—they are generous natures, neither regulated nor organised. But the joy of being able to satisfy all *true* needs, all necessities, is good. It is like the joy of changing a sickness into health, a falsehood into truth, a suffering into joy; it is the same thing: to change an artificial and foolish need—which does not correspond to anything natural—into a possibility which becomes something quite natural. So much money is needed to do this or that or the other, so much is needed to arrange this, to repair that, to build this, to organise that—that is good. And I understand that people like to be the channels through which the money goes exactly where it is needed. That must be the true movement in people who like to... translated into foolish egoism, who need to appropriate.

When the need to accumulate and the need to spend (which are both blind and ignorant) are combined, they can lead to a clear vision and a most efficient utilisation. That is good.

Then there comes, slowly and slowly, the possibility of putting it into practice.

But, naturally, the need is for very clear heads and for intermediaries of high integrity (!) to be able to be everywhere at the same time and do all at the same time. Then this famous question of money would be solved.

Money does not belong to anybody. Money is a collective possession which should be used only by those who have an integral, comprehensive and universal vision. I would add something to that: not only integral and comprehensive, but essentially *true* as well; a vision which can tell the difference between a use which is in accord with the universal progress, and a use which could be termed fanciful. But these are details, for even the mistakes, even, from a certain standpoint, the waste, help the general progress: these are lessons learned the hard way.

(*Silence*)

I always remember what X used to say (X was completely opposed to philanthropy); he used to say: Philanthropy perpetuates human misery because without human misery philanthropy would have no more reason to exist!... And you know the great

philanthropist, what was his name?—during Mazarin's time; he founded the Little Sisters of Charity....

Vincent de Paul?

That's it. Mazarin once told him: There have never been so many poor people as since you started taking care of them! (*Mother laughs.*)

(Later)

I have been rethinking what I said about money. That is how life in Auroville should be organised, but I doubt whether people are ready.

That is to say that it is possible so long as they accept the guidance of a sage?

Yes. The first thing that should be accepted and recognised by everyone is that the invisible and higher power—that is, the power which belongs to a plane of consciousness that is mostly veiled, but which is within each; a consciousness which can be called anything, by any name, it does not matter, but which is integral and pure in the sense that it is not false, it is in the Truth—that this power is capable of ordering material things in a way that is truer, happier and better for everyone than any material power. That is the first point. Once people agree on that...

It is not something one can pretend to have; an individual cannot pretend to have it, either he has it or he hasn't, because (*Mother laughs*) in any circumstance of life, if it is a pretension, it will show clearly! On top of that, it does not give you any material power. There again, X once said—he was speaking of the true hierarchy, the hierarchy based on each one's power of consciousness—the individual or individuals who are at the very summit necessarily have the least needs; their material needs become less as their capacity of material vision grows. And that is very true. It is automatic and spontaneous, not the result of an effort: the wider the consciousness, the more it embraces things and realities—the less its material needs, automatically, because they lose all their importance and value. The need for material necessities is reduced to a minimum, which will itself change with the progressive development of Matter.

And that is easily recognisable, isn't it? It is difficult to act the part.

And the second thing is the power of conviction; that is, the highest consciousness, when it is brought into contact with Matter, spontaneously has a greater power of conviction than all the intermediary planes. By mere contact, its power of conviction, that is, its power of transformation, is greater than that of all the intermediary planes. That is a fact. These two facts together make it impossible for any pretension to last long. I am looking at it from the standpoint of a collective organisation.

As soon as you come down from this supreme Height, there is all the play of the various influences (*gesture of mixture and conflict*) and that in itself is a sure sign: even a slight descent—even into the domain of higher mind, higher intelligence—and the whole conflict of influences begins. Only what is right at the very summit and is perfectly pure, has this power of spontaneous conviction. Therefore, whatever one may do instead of that is an approximation and it is not much better than democracy—that is, the system which wants to rule by the greatest number and the lowest level—I mean social democracy, the latest trend.

If there is no representative of the supreme Consciousness—that can happen, can't it?—if there isn't any, there could be instead, it could be tried, government by a few—a small number set between four and eight, something like that, four, seven, eight—who have an *intuitive* intelligence: “intuitive” is more important than intelligence—with an intuition that is manifested intellectually.

This would have its drawbacks from the practical point of view, but it would perhaps be closer to the truth than the lowest level—socialism or communism. Everything in between has proved to be incompetent: theocracy, aristocracy, democracy and plutocracy, all those have been a complete failure. The other one, the socialist or communist government is proving itself a failure as well.

Basically socialism and communism correspond to a kind of absence of government, because they do not have the power to govern others; they are obliged to transfer their power to someone who exercises it, like a Lenin for example, because he was a brain. All this has been tried and proved to be incompetent. The only thing that could be competent is the Truth-Consciousness, which would choose instruments and express itself through a certain number of instruments in the absence of one—“one” is not enough either, “one” would necessarily have to choose a group.

Those who have this consciousness may belong to any social class: it is not a privilege of birth, but the outcome of personal effort and development. In fact, that is an outward sign, the obvious sign of a change from the political point of view—it is no longer a matter of classes and categories nor of birth—all that is obsolete. It is the individuals who have attained a certain higher consciousness who have the right to govern—not others, regardless of their social class.

This would be the true vision.

All those who participate in the experiment should be absolutely convinced that the highest consciousness is the best judge of the most material things. What has ruined India is this idea that the higher consciousness deals with higher things and that lower things do not interest it at all, and that it understands nothing about them! That has been the ruin of India. Well, this error must be completely eradicated. It is the highest consciousness which sees most clearly—most clearly and most truly—what the needs of the most material things must be.

With that, a new type of government could be tried.

31 May 1969

The night before last, I spent more than three hours with Sri Aurobindo and I was showing him all that was about to come down for Auroville. It was quite interesting. There were games, there was art, there was even cooking! But all that was very symbolic. And I was explaining to him as though on a table, in front of a vast landscape. I was explaining to him the principle on which physical exercises and games were going to be organised. It was very clear, very precise, I was giving as though a demonstration, and it was as though I was showing on a smaller scale a miniature representation of what was going to be done. I was moving people and things (*gesture, as though on a chess-board*). But it was very interesting, and he was very interested: he was laying down the broad laws of organisation (I do not know how to explain). There was art and it was beautiful, it was good. And how to make the houses pleasant and pretty, upon what principle of construction. And then even the kitchen; it was so amusing, each one brought forward his invention.... This went on for three hours—three hours of the night, it is a lot! Very interesting.

Yet conditions upon earth seem to be very far from all that...

(*After some hesitation*) No... it was right there, it did not seem to be foreign to earth. It was a harmony: a conscious harmony behind things; a conscious harmony behind the physical exercises and the games; a conscious harmony behind the decoration, the art; a conscious harmony behind the food...

I mean that all this seems to be at the opposite pole of what is now upon earth.

Not...

No?

I saw X today and I was telling him that the whole organisation of the arts and sports, even of food and all the rest, was ready in the subtle physical—ready to come down and embody itself—and I told him, “What is needed is just a handful of earth (*gesture of cupping the hands*), a handful of earth where one could grow the plant.... One must find a handful of earth to let it grow.”

THE MOTHER

(*Words of the Mother-I*, CWM, 2nd Ed., Vol. 13, pp. 269-76)

“FAR FLUTE” CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

(Continued from the issue of March 2008)

[The following letter of Sri Aurobindo refers to a version of “Far Flute” which, unfortunately, cannot be traced.]

Amal

I am afraid your new first verse, at least as it stands, is not altogether satisfactory.

(1) “throbst upon earth’s somnolence”. The preposition is weak and out of place, giving no precisely visioned sense. It will have to be “across” or “amidst”, and then “that throbst” will, very obviously, have to change into “throbbing”.

“Far Flute throbbing across earth’s somnolence” would make a faultless line.

(2) “Such unearthly call” is ungrammatical and cannot stand. On the other hand “fills the melody of thy unearthly call” becomes at once weak and flabby. You must either find something strong and more vivid in place of “fills” or else you must write

“What Yogin’s rapture fills thy melody
With its unearthly call.”

I see no objection to the latter—of course, the call is at once referred back to the rapture, but it seems to me that this gives a more poetic form and a deeper sense.

(3) “What sanctities has thy trance-vigil known” is not so good as what you first wrote. The word “trance” overburdens the line with clattering “t”s and, besides, it repeats awkwardly the “a” of sanct and “has” and comes in with a clipped abruptness after an inordinate number of short and weak syllables,—the whole making a harsh and inconclusive effect. The line gives the impression of a slithering glide with two jumps at the end. Why not keep your original idea of “dream”—“What sanctities has thy dream-vigil known”. That does not alter the fundamental sense, and at the same time the long sound of dream joins the whole line, harmonises it into a purposefully sliding flow and almost suggests the sound of the flute.

(4) The line about the twilight has a rather taking cadence. “Dayfall” is an invention of your own; I hasten to add that I consider it a permissible invention. But are not “twilight” and “day-fall” very much the same thing?

(5) The next three lines “Ere the cold stars emerge” are among the best you have written; but I think they were there before.¹

1. [See *Mother India*, March 2008, p. 234]

(6) The last two lines are not satisfactory; the original version, of course, was not satisfactory either, it had a rather badly managed double inversion in it and I think you are right in rejecting it. But “fluctuant” is terribly Popish—“fluctuant music” gives quite the artificial eighteenth-century turn—so does “ensoul the ear of sense”. If you could substitute for “fluctuant music” something giving the image of waves and once again “enisle” the soul or the sense, it would be much better. You had a very striking and profoundly suggestive image; it seems a pity to lose it. You could recast these two lines (not as they originally were) so as to do that; otherwise you must find something else. And don’t you feel that this poor “sense”, even ensouled, is finding itself very faint and lonely so far away from its companion rhyme?

(7) In the third verse your new line is again eighteenth-century—a most awkward inversion, which would have done very well in the days of Pope or Johnson but not in 1931. Could you not put “When on his lonely path the charmer’s gone”? The beauty of the last two verses, especially the third, lies in a certain strong, straightforward, subtle and delicate simplicity rising to profundity and grandeur in the last two lines. Don’t spoil it by letting in an artificial line that breaks the tone. By the way, “the charmer” must be kept. To leave him out would create an unpardonable hole.

(8) You ask why “What sanctities has thy ear dreaming known” is not metre. Well, because thy* is too weak here to bear even a suggested accent and the distribution of stress becomes

“What sanctities has thy ear dreaming known”

which makes no imaginable metre. If the last syllable of “sanctities” were strong, or if “ear” were replaced by a sound on which “thy” could lean for strength there would be a metre of a kind but still no rhythm—unless there is a very successful transition to the long sound at the end.

7 April 1931

* Quantity is not an acknowledged element of English prosody, but it is a virtual and important though a free and unfixed element. “-tities has thy” are all short sounds, four of them together. One of them must be made longer and stronger. “Thy” before the vowel of “ear” remains desperately short and weak, put “trance” or “dream” and by the aid of the double consonant it becomes longer and stronger. With “trance-vigil” there is metre, but a poor rhythm; with “dream-vigil” you have both metre and rhythm.

“Sense” does not profit by the later rhyme “intense” because that is still, at the moment of hearing, in the distant future. The only effective way of supporting it would be to introduce a line with an intermediate rhyme to “somnolence” and “sense”. But that would have to be, if at all, after the third line—for later on the sense is too compact to admit of any addition.

[1] I feel dissatisfied with my first suggestion “streams out” in the second line;² it has too sharp and bold a sound for the delicacy of the rest. “trembles” would have been better, because more liquid in sound and restrained in word-force. [What Yogin’s rapture trembles in thy call?]

[Undated]

*

(To be continued)

AMAL KIRAN
K. D. SETHNA

2. [See Mother India, March 2008, p. 235]

The perfect inspiration in the intuitive intellect is the sattwic or luminous inspiration, which is disinterested, self-contained, yet at will noble, rich or vigorous, having its eye only on the right thing to be said and the right way to say it. It does not allow its perfection to be interfered with by emotion or eagerness, but this does not shut it out from ecstasy and exaltation. On the contrary, its delight of self-enjoyment is a purer and more exquisite enthusiasm than that which attends any other inspiration. It commands and uses emotion without enslaving itself to it. There is indeed a sattwic stimulus which is attached to its own luminosity, limpidity and steadiness, and avoids richness, force or emotion of a poignant character even when these are needed and appropriate. The poetry of Matthew Arnold is often though not always of this character. But this is a limited inspiration. Sattwic as well as rajasic poetry may be written from the uninspired intellect, but the sensational mind never gives birth to sattwic poetry.

One thing has to be added. A poet need not be a reflective critic; he need not have the reasoning and analysing intellect and dissect his own poetry. But two things he must have in some measure to be perfect, the intuitive judgment which shows him at a glance whether he has got the best or the second-best idea, the perfect or the imperfect expression and rhythm, and the intuitive reason which shows him without analysis why or wherein it is best or second-best, perfect or imperfect. These four faculties, revelation or prophecy, inspiration, intuitive judgment and intuitive reason, are the perfect equipment of genius doing the works of interpretative & creative knowledge.

Sri Aurobindo

(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 32)

MOMENTS, ETERNAL

(Continued from the issue of April 2008)

The Playground

*When you and I, we played together,
Who my playmate was I did not know.
Without a fear, without a shame,
Life in quiet ease did flow.*

GAURI and I used to exercise with the Mother. On some days after coming back from the Tennis Ground, the Mother would take Gauri and me behind the stage. (In those days the cultural programme of 1st December took place in the Playground itself on a stage that was specially constructed for it.) And then the exercises would begin. We stood on either side of the Mother and stretched Her arms in a kind of drill. We would make Her do all sorts of exercises even while doing them ourselves. You cannot imagine the enthusiasm we put into it. The Mother went on doing everything we told Her, like a little girl. One day something very amusing happened. The Mother called us and said:

“Today let us play a new game. My hands on your hands and your feet on my feet, we will move and dance together.”

And the Mother showed us how. I fell from the sky! How could I ever do this? How could I ever touch the Mother’s Feet with mine? And the more the Mother showed us, the more nervous I became and just stood there transfixed! Then the Mother called Gauri. And both of them began this new game together. I said to myself that if Gauri moved her leg too vigorously then the Mother would surely fall. I felt extremely nervous and told Gauri so as soon as the exercise ended:

“Let us bow down before the Mother. Whatever it be, you have touched the Mother with your feet.”

And we both prostrated ourselves before the Mother. The Mother was very pleased and caressed our heads affectionately as if She were caressing two puppies.

We used to play all kinds of games with the Mother in this way. One day the Mother was sitting on a bench. She asked both of us to come and sit on either side of Her. We rushed towards Her and sat down on the ground at Her Feet. To sit on the same level as the Mother! No, not in this life! She understood. After talking to us about different things the Mother got up and we both bowed down at Her Feet.

And so these exercises with the Mother continued for some time.

One day we collected some tennis-balls. There used to be a wall between the Playground and the Guest House then. A basket was put up on this wall and then the game began. Effortlessly the Mother kept shooting each and every ball into the basket.

And we had to do the same! Nobody managed to shoot all the six balls into the basket. Minnie-di, Milli-di, Gauri, myself, Sutapa, Violette, we all kept practising every day. Violette could put in three or sometimes four balls. The Mother congratulated Violette. Sutapa managed to sometimes get one or two. But the Mother managed to put in all six each and every time. Her attitude and concentration were incredible. She stood immobile and totally one-pointed as She put one ball after another into the basket. I could not help thinking of Arjuna in the *Mahabharata* hitting the target.

*

We also did Marching with the Mother in the Playground for some time: Minnie-di, Milli-di, Gauri, Violette, Vasudha, Kakima (Bina-di, Pranab's Kakima) and I. We were the Mother's '*sātkanya*' (the seven daughters). The Mother used to walk so fast that we could not keep pace with Her. What a funny sight that was! The Mother could not restrain a gentle smile as She hugely enjoyed beating us.

One day an American lady suddenly joined our Marching group without asking the Mother for Her permission. On seeing her, the Mother whispered:

“Today I shall march even faster. Let me see if I can beat her!”

And She broke into quick long strides. All of us had to run to keep alongside Her. I looked back and saw the American lady trailing behind, hopelessly panting. She just could not keep up with the rest of the group. All of us had a good laugh that day seeing this mischievous aspect of the Mother.

After the Marching the Mother would get into the small room and sit on a raised seat. We sat on the floor around Her. Gauri would then give the Mother something to eat. The Mother distributed some of it as prasada to us. That same American lady suddenly turned up in the room! She began talking to the Mother in French. The Mother glanced at us with a fleeting smile, mischief glinting in Her eyes once again, and started speaking to her so fast that this lady could not understand a thing. After some time she left the room. Then the Mother told us with a laugh:

“She doesn't know much French actually. She was just trying to show off.”

We all laughed as well. Trying to show off before the Mother!

*

The Marching went on for a few days. Then some new work came up before the Mother. Things happened one after another after a few days' interval. Now physical activities started in a regular way at the Playground in the evenings. There were also various cultural activities like dance and music in between. The Mother was present in all of these. We just followed Her everywhere. Then there was creative dance. After finishing Her game of tennis at the Tennis Ground She would come to the Playground and sit in a chair in a corner by the wall. The girls would one by one

present the dance they had prepared before the Mother. Anju, Dalu, Jaya, Bela, Leena Dowsett and many other girls showed their dance one after another. Once even Udar presented a dance in front of the Mother! One day Leena Dowsett performed a snake-charmer's dance. She began by playing the flute used to charm the snake. What a sight that was! The Mother watched everyone's dance most attentively and seriously but sometimes we could not control our laughter. The whole atmosphere of the Playground was such in those times that everyone felt childhood had returned into their lives.

Let me tell you something about Priti. Our Priti danced in front of the Mother when she was a little girl. When she was hardly six or seven she put up a play with her friends and presented it to the Mother who watched it with great interest. Right from the beginning Priti had a most natural, spontaneous rapport with Her. Today that same Priti has become a well-known artist.... All her paintings reflect a new idea and style. It was from Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* that she found the inspiration to paint....

*

The Mother inaugurated the *Malkhamb*, *Asana* and the weightlifting activities by cutting the ribbon. I still remember that day. I noticed Bhavatarini standing in the midst of all the boys. An iron rod was placed under her chin and effortlessly Bhavatarini managed to bend it with the strength of her neck. I saw that no boy was able to repeat this feat after her. It was amazing how effortlessly Bhavatarini accomplished this and she put the rod back on the ground with the greatest humility. How old must she have been then? A mere young girl! But so simple, natural and generous indeed! I at once remembered the character of Shanti from *Anandamath*. How effortlessly Shanti too had taken up the bow and the arrow. After stringing the bow she put it at the feet of Satyanand in all simplicity. Only four persons succeeded in stringing the bow and passing the test. It was not at all easy to string this bow. Satyanand was baffled, awe-struck, stunned. I had read this description of Shanti's strength many years ago. Today Bhavatarini was standing before me as Shanti. Bravo, Tarini!

*

In 1949, the Mother did a sketch of all of us who had practised Marching with Her. She called one of us each day and within no time She would finish the pencil-sketch. We just stood and watched Her in speechless awe. Minnie-di, Milli-di, Gauri, Violette, Kakima, Vasudha and I were all sketched by the Mother in a minute! Had we not witnessed this we would never have believed that it was possible to sketch a face in such fine detail in such a short time. The Mother has done sketches of a number of

sadhaks and sadhikas. All of them along with other paintings and drawings of the Mother were later published in a book.

*

One day the Mother was sitting in a chair, Her face turned towards the west. We were all seated near Her. All of a sudden She began looking at everyone's hands. She read each hand and said different things. As soon as She saw mine She exclaimed:

“Not a working hand at all!”

And She dropped it. What could I do? I knew that I was not the working type. And all of you too would accept this as true. In the Ashram documentary all of you surely remember me typing on the monotype very slowly at an ant's pace. In fact it was a dictionary that I was typing and so, you understand, I had to do it very attentively and slowly. Anyway... The Mother went on looking at me and smiling gently said:

“Sit and write poems, that's all.”

And She stretched out Her right hand towards me, saying:

“Here, look, this is what is called a working hand!”

The Mother's hand had an amazing form. Like a perfect rectangle! Her fingers were like the buds of the *champa*, incredibly lovely! I bent over to look at the Mother's hand. She had one line on Her palm that went right from the wrist to the little finger. I had never seen such a line before. So I asked the Mother:

“What does this line signify, Mother?”

She replied:

“Only those with occult power have this line.”

The Mother's palm was so soft as if made of cotton. We all felt Her hand one after the other while She smiled on.

(To be concluded)

PRITI DAS GUPTA

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

THE AUROVILLE INAUGURATION

(On this very earth)

ALREADY from July 1967, I was, by the Mother's wish, in charge of the work of Auroville and I was directly engaged in the ongoing construction of what was meant to be a hotel, but which became first a maternity clinic, and finally, a residential building. It was the first area of work in Auroville. "Promesse" was the name Mother had given this community. It was to be a promise.

My life had undergone a sudden transplantation. From the quiet of my home, from the long hours of meditation, from the work of translating the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother into Italian, from the correspondence with the disciples of Mother and Sri Aurobindo spread over Italy and Spanish speaking regions, I found myself suddenly thrown back into my old work on a construction site. My vital being bounced back and, in a certain sense, and within certain limits, I became once again, for the sake of the work to be done, what I had been formerly: authoritative, accustomed to being obeyed, intolerant of mistakes, imposing my will without giving in, sometimes harsh, sometimes gentle.

That is how it was till the work began for the foundation ceremony of Auroville. There I found my true consciousness again, the yogic consciousness. I worked with a greater inner calm and greater intensity, fully conscious of the importance of the work. The one thing that troubled me was a boil on the right foot and a sense of constant tiredness. When, in the evening, I returned home around 10 o'clock, after a bath during which flowed rivers of red sand, the colour of the soil of Auroville, I sat down for dinner, I ended up falling asleep with my head on my folded arm. At 4 o'clock in the morning, I would walk down to the Ashram for a brief meditation, to offer to the Divine the work of the day that was beginning; I would then return home and have breakfast—biscuits and very strong coffee. Immediately after that, I would get into my car to go to Auroville.

When, towards 5 o'clock I came to the straight road that led to the place of work, my eyes caught the light of the work site. The work went on 24 hours, with 8-hour shifts. We had taken on rent about seventy 'petromax' lamps, each one as bright as a 500 watt bulb.

It was the month of February and at that time of the morning the freshness was delightful. The work began on the 1st of February 1968 and had to be completed by the 26th, because the foundation ceremony had been fixed for the morning of the 28th. Without going into the technical details, I will just say that the work which was completed in 25 days would normally have required 6 months for skilled workers working 8 hours a day.

The work involved the construction of an amphitheatre with a diameter of 150 metres, and around it, space for 10,000 persons sitting on mats, on the ground, and

stands and steps for 2,000 persons. Towards the south-east of the centre of the amphitheatre, rose a mound of about 6 metres high on which was an urn which would contain the earth from all the countries of the world. And there had to be adequate sanitary arrangements as well as provision for drinking water.

I was told on 31st January that the ceremony for the foundation of Auroville would be held on the 28th of February and that the work should be over 2 days earlier. I immediately went to the Mother, carrying in my hand a kind of sketch which was the only documentation provided, and I told Her that the next morning I would be on the site to begin the work, but that I could not guarantee that the work would be completed by the date already fixed. She looked into my eyes and said, "Begin the work, and do not worry about anything else."

It was like the Biblical story of the loaves and fishes. I chalked out the work on site, distributed it to the different groups, nominated the leaders of the groups, raised my eyes to heaven and said, "Mother, it is now up to you." In reality, I was only the instrument, She was the one who used it. I understood then from where came the tremendous strength which pervaded me, and the reason for the ease with which all the obstacles could be overcome.

Difficulties there were, and numerous, but all of them were resolved as if by a magic charm. There were sabotages, attempts at strikes, discussions with the Municipal authorities of the neighbouring village, with the owners of the land, with the transporters; there was delay in the arrival of consignments of the materials for the construction, etc. But on the 25th of February, that is 3 days before the scheduled date of the ceremony, everything was ready, including 8 km of road, 1.5 km of water pipes, and a parking space for 300 cars.

The construction of the stands had been planned with wood in mind, for reasons of economy, and the material was to be procured from the forest region of Kerala, with the contractor promising to deliver the goods within one week of placing the order. I waited 10 days, and then saw that the wood still did not come. I stopped waiting, and began the construction in brick. On the 25th February, at the end of the work, the cement that held the bricks together was still fresh!

Something interesting happened that is worth narrating.

When I first came to the place of work, I found myself in front of an Indian landscape stretching till the horizon, without a trace of any habitation, and only a solitary Banyan tree providing some shade. I had heard a mason who knew a bit of English say that it was a sacred tree; but given the fact that in India almost all things are sacred, I thought that I would not be offending the tree, and sat down in its shade. In the succeeding days the workers began to hang their water bottles, bags and small pots and bundles from the branches of the tree. Then, one day, during one of my meetings with the Mother I was told that the spirit of the Banyan tree had come to the Mother and had complained to Her about the pain that was being inflicted on it. This was to be remedied immediately.

The next morning I made a close inspection and saw that, unfortunately, the poor Banyan tree had cause for complaint: a large number of nails had been driven into the trunk of the tree on which to hang the workers' victuals. I had the nails removed, the wounds attended to, and I explicitly prohibited everyone from coming close to the trunk of the tree. Enjoy the shade, and that was all. I believe the Banyan was satisfied, because no sooner would I sit in its shade than all the small and great worries, the pressure of the work, all lost their force and nearly disappeared. A great peace descended upon me.

...

The morning of 28th February came, and as usual, at 5 o'clock, I was on the site, to ascertain that the work of watering of the roads had been carried out properly throughout the night, to lessen the inevitable dust that would be raised by the traffic on a non-asphalted road during this very dry time of the year. Everything was in order, and I had nothing to do but wait for the first vehicles to come. I did not have to wait long. At about 6, a long column of buses began to arrive, emptying itself of the first batch of people, only to go back in order to fetch more people. Very soon arrived the first cars and more buses. I do not know who made the calculation, but someone spoke of 20,000 persons, that is, 7,000 more than we had planned for.

A wave of terror invaded me when I saw the stands as if taken by assault, and occupied even by those who were not meant to be there, and what was meant for one person was now occupied by bunches of humanity who were in the lightly constructed raised area with palm leaf covering to shelter those sitting on the flight of steps from the strong rays of the sun. The thought of the still-wet cement, unable to support this excessive load, made me attempt to restrain this assault by shouting out instructions that must have seemed incoherent, because the people looked at me blankly, without making the least effort to come down from the places they were occupying. I understood that it was impossible to check the tide. I calmed down, raised my eyes to heaven and addressed to the Mother a brief prayer, "Mother, the moment has come to perform a miracle. See to it that all holds together, and that on this most important day for Humanity, no incident mars the occasion. Amen." And the miracle did occur. Not one brick moved, not one support gave way. The doctor at the medical centre spoke to me of only one case of stomach ache. Each and every service functioned to perfection.

Around 9, as if surging from the sky, the Mother's voice resounded in the air, transmitted by telephone cable directly to the loud speakers placed all around the amphitheatre.

Greetings from Auroville to all men of good will.

Are invited to Auroville all those who thirst for progress and aspire to a higher and truer life.

Instantly, all was saturated with the presence of the Mother. It was a presence so tangible, so powerful, so direct that a wave of emotion took hold of all who were present. I have seen many Darshans, have been to see the Mother hundreds of times, but a force so intense, so prodigious, I had never felt, not even when, kneeling at Her feet, I placed my head on Her knees. It was beyond doubt that She was there, permeating with Her consciousness the human beings, the animals, the very soil which we felt was receptive.

All around were eyes moist with tears, mine included.

These words were followed by the reading of the Charter of Auroville:

Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole.

But to live in Auroville one must be the willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness.

Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress, and a youth that never ages.

Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future.

Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly spring towards future realisations.

Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual human unity.

These words were followed by the most absolute silence. It seemed that all hearts were immersed in the grandeur of these words.

Suddenly, from one part of the amphitheatre one saw arrive two youths, brother and sister, Vijay and Kiran, beautiful and pure like two young gods, carrying the white banner with the Mother's symbol and the earth from the Samadhi of Sri Aurobindo, to pour it first in the urn prepared to receive the soil from all the countries of the world. Italy was represented by Bruno Petris and Elena Bellotti. The soil came from Sienna and had been sent by Professor Giulio Cogni.

The procession went on for several hours, at the end of which, Nolini, the oldest and most venerable disciple—he had been imprisoned with Sri Aurobindo in the Alipore jail before 1910—closed and sealed the urn. Thus ended the ceremony.

In the afternoon, I saw the Mother, and found Her silent and strongly indrawn. She caressed my head, gave me some flowers and said, "I knew you would do it."

I have been in the Ashram for 16 years, and even today, when I am asked which is the highest level that my consciousness has experienced, I will not hesitate and will reply, "The day of the Foundation of Auroville."

NATA

(Translation by Paolo Legnaghi *et al.* from Nata's Italian book *Su Questo Stesso Terreno*, published by Edizioni Mediterranee, Rome, 1979, pp. 119-25)

UDAR, ONE OF MOTHER'S CHILDREN

(Continued from the issue of April 2008)

How involved he was with the physical education can be understood when we know that it was his idea to get the very first batch of gymnastic apparatus, such as the parallel bars, vaulting box, pommel horse and uneven bars from England. Later he got some of these copied here in Harpagon.

The Golden Chain

*

We have known Udar as small kids—waiting to hear his order to begin the long jump, high jump and hop, step and jump. His voice still rings and lingers in our ears even to this day. That's the power of our childhood at the Ashram and he was a part of our growing up.

Ramraj

*

He was an engineer and so we fully utilised his talent manufacturing our equipment and various instruments.

Pranab
(I Remember)

*

Another important work which Udar-da undertook and which very few now know about is the organisation of the Physical Education. He and Pranab-da worked together to set up a whole system which today looks so perfect. Udar-da's job was planning and organisation. He made the competition schedules and noted down the results, then worked out the points and positions. By the end of the day the results would be on the notice board.

The Golden Chain

*

Mother started the whole department of physical education because, she said, "The time has come for our force to enter the physical field."

Mother always said "our" force. Mother gave importance to sport because she felt it encourages one's own effort to progress. She gave importance to competition,

but she didn't want that you should beat somebody else, but that you should beat yourself: "Try to do better today."

Udar

*

Another side of Udar's work was in the organisation of the Physical Education Department. When this Department was started by the Mother, Pranab was named by her as Director and he asked Udar, with Mother's full support, to organise the new venture. So the whole of the Physical Education Department was organised by Udar and managed by him and his group for several years. It was then also that he set up the Sportsground with the Swimming Pool etc.

Lata

*

Udar was the captain of Blue Group and led the group in the daily and special March Past. Up to 1959 he was everything in physical education in the Ashram.... I must say that because of him physical education in the Ashram is what it is today.

Pranab

(I Remember)

*

Udar planned, organised and conducted our various activities. He worked out the details and some of his methods are being continued even today.

Pranab

(I Remember)

*

Tennis Ground

Udar joined me when we got the Tennis Ground in 1948 and were extending our programme. We were at that time an inseparable pair. Both of us were guided by Mother.

Pranab

(I Remember)

*

The first athletic competitions were held in the Tennis Ground and the running races on the Cours Chabrol. Udar was always present organising everything and holding the finishing rope or at the start or the take off for the jumps.

Lata

*

The Playground was adjacent to the Dortoir and we used to play games and have running races etc. under the guidance of Purani-ji. Then started sea-bathing. That is where I had my first contact with Udar. He used to bring a tube and teach us how to float on water. It was a great feeling, the first experience of keeping afloat, as I did not know swimming. I remember that I could keep afloat the longest.

Lata

*

Among other activities, Udar organised the Tennis and Table Tennis Tournaments, keeping Mother informed about the results. He also organised the Athletic tournaments where Mother used to hold the tape at the finish. The earlier sports events were held at the Tennis Ground and Playground. The races were along the Cours Chabrol which is now Goubert Avenue (Beach Road) with the finish at the main gate of the Tennis Ground. The throwing and jump events were held at the Tennis Ground where earlier they were held at the Playground. He organised Table Tennis at Nanteuil, Fenêtres and other Tables.

Wilfy

*

Udar had a special skill in organisation. He drew up programmes for Table Tennis and Tennis. He also drew up plans for athletics. He took part in some items and excelled in shot put.

Wilfy

*

Amiyo once mentioned to the Mother that they played Table Tennis in their house in Calcutta. Could they have a Table Tennis table at their place so that they could play in the evenings? Mother answered that she too used to play Table Tennis and was quite good at it. Yes, they could have a table where all could play. She talked to Udar about it. With Udar, to hear was to obey. Working non-stop he got a very good table made in a day or two and installed it in Nanteuil.

Every evening Mother, dressed in a beautiful, embroidered sari, went there to play Table Tennis. Chinmayee accompanied her but would sit outside and design Mother's veils. Minou and some other girls watched Mother's game. One day Mother asked them if they would like to play. They answered that they would like it very much but they had never played before. Mother asked Amiyo to teach them and eventually they even played with Mother.

Soon there were more and more people, young and old, who wanted to take up the game. Udar made some more tables and placed them in Fenêtres, in the hall downstairs, and in Michel House (the house on the corner opposite Laljibhai's). In order to improve the standard of the players, Udar organised Inter-Table competitions. All the paper work was done in his office in Harpagon. The matches were played in the evenings after the Playground activities, or in the mornings on Sundays.

Minou

*

In the beginning Udar was fully connected with PED. Apart from making sports equipment etc. he also had to arrange for Tennis tournaments and to make out schedules for other matches, make out groupings for Athletic Competitions.

Pranab

(I Remember)

*

Mother used to talk of tennis and she liked to play it. So because of that I had these two tennis courts built. I don't say I built them myself. I knew it was a specialised job so I asked an expert from the Concrete Association of India to do the first court. Manoranjan Ganguli watched them and built the second court.

Udar

*

Sportsground

Young people had gone there for an outing and they thought this could be a nice ground for football. They told Mother about it and she gave her consent. Thus the Sportsground came into existence.

Lilou

*

Jalad and Kameshwar had spent several years looking for suitable land to grow fodder for the Ashram dairy. This piece of land measuring 4 acres was bought for Rs. 4,000.

One evening Mother asked Jalad during groundnut distribution, “Jalad, children are asking me for more place to play. Can you spare from the fodder land?”

He replied spontaneously, “Mother it is all yours. Why are you asking me?” Mother was pleased and gave him an extra helping of groundnuts.

Gopal D.

*

He (Udar) laid the cinder track and produced our football ground of beautiful lawn from a fodder land of our dairy. Even the plan for our swimming pool complex was made by him.

Pranab
(I Remember)

*

Udar worked out the whole layout and made the cinder running tracks, long jump and high jump runs, shot put and hammer rings etc. according to the Olympic specifications after obtaining the same from the International Olympic Committee. The swimming pool was done by Louis Allen with Udar helping him.

Lilou

*

The groups were made according to capacity so that made the timetable very complicated and a lot of work was involved in it. All this was done at night after the group activities with the help of some students.

Lilou

*

When the Mother began to give much attention to physical education in the Ashram, it was Udar who manufactured the Table Tennis tables; the dumb-bells, barbells and other apparatus for bodybuilding, weightlifting and gymnastics; the discus, javelin, shots, hammer and even the spiked running shoes required for athletics—all in the all-purpose Harpagon Workshop! Even the running tracks and the swimming pool in the Sportsground were constructed under his direct supervision. During the athletics season in the early fifties, the entire organisational work was carried out in his office

in Harpagon. It was a most familiar sight in the athletics season to see Udar in the Sportsground, always hovering near the Mother, maintaining a meticulous record of the performance of each participant (and there used to be some six hundred of them!)—and this after his eight-hour stint of supervising the work in each and every department under his care.

Aniruddha

*

Whenever there were competitions of athletics or gymnastics, Udar used to write the results and he had his team of workers who used to calculate the marks (records) and the average and the same evening put on the notice board the results. We used to do this at night.

Lata

*

Udar had made all the sports equipment, right from the athletic tracks to the gymnastic apparatus.

Lata

*

This work, programming of the Sports, was stopped when Mother asked Udar to help Laljibhai for the Sugar Factory. Udar said he could not manage both, that and the Sports programming. Mother told him that now he had organised the Sports, the younger ones could continue doing it and he could now fully help with the Sugar Factory.

Lilou

*

Swimming Pool

When we were building the swimming pool at the Sportsground I wanted to have our own independent supply of water from a tube well so as not to depend on the town supply. Now I know that sinking a tube well is a risk. There are narrow underground streams and if the well hits one of these then it will give a regular and constant supply of water. But if one misses it by even a few feet then the water supply is intermittent and can fail in summer. So we had to hit the right spot and for this I remembered what Sri Aurobindo had said and I asked the Mother to come and choose the spot for us. So Mother came to the place, meditated a while and then put her foot

on a spot, which we marked at once. We went ahead and hit the bore well at the exact spot and now we get ample water all the time.

Udar

(To be continued)

P. AND G.

[A correction: Udar's name was Laurence Marshal Pinto and not as given in the December 2007 issue.]

There is no stage of the sadhana in which works are impossible, no passage in the path where there is no foothold and action has to be renounced as incompatible with concentration on the Divine. The foothold is there always; the foothold is the reliance on the Divine, the opening of the being, the will, the energies to the Divine, the surrender to the Divine. All work done in that spirit can be made a means for the sadhana. It may be necessary for an individual here and there to plunge into meditation for a time and suspend work for that time or make it subordinate; but that can only be an individual case and a temporary retirement. Moreover, a complete cessation of work and entire withdrawal into oneself is seldom advisable; it may encourage a too one-sided and visionary condition in which one lives in a sort of mid-world of purely subjective experiences without a firm hold on either external reality or on the highest Reality and without the right use of the subjective experience to create a firm link and then a unification between the highest Reality and the external realisation in life.

Work can be of two kinds—the work that is a field of experience used for the sadhana, for a progressive harmonisation and transformation of the being and its activities, and work that is a realised expression of the Divine. But the time for the latter can be only when the Realisation has been fully brought down into the earth-consciousness; till then all work must be a field of endeavour and a school of experience.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL. Vol. 23, p. 531)

THE FIRE OF PURIFICATION

ALL our scriptures refer to the fire of purification. What is this fire? Is it physical? Is it subtle? Is it only an image and a symbol for some other force that purifies the being of man, when he takes to the practice of yoga?

I refer to two verses from the Bhagavad Gita:

Chapter two, verse 58:

यदा संहरते चायं कूर्मोऽङ्गानीव सर्वशः ।
इन्द्रियाणीन्द्रियार्थेभ्यस्तस्य प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठा ॥

Chapter four, verse 19:

यस्य सर्वे समारम्भाः कामसङ्कल्पवर्जिताः ।
ज्ञानाग्निदग्धकर्माणं तमाहु पण्डितं बुधाः ॥

Based on these verses, I will share with the reader some thoughts that suggest themselves.

The first verse states that when a man withdraws his senses from sense objects, instead of indulging and enjoying them, he can eventually attain a state of consciousness which can be established in wisdom. The graphic metaphor used is that of a tortoise that pulls its limbs into its shell so as to protect itself against the danger that looms in front of it. The simile is beautiful and very apt. For the yogi, sense-objects are to be treated with great circumspection and even avoided assiduously at least in the beginning, until such time as they cease to trap him in their cloying meshes. The solution is to restrain the senses from running wildly after sense objects.

The second verse refers to the purificatory fire of knowledge burning away the dross of past karmas, when all actions born of desire are given up. Wisdom then dawns on him who renounces desire.

Two questions spring up immediately in the mind of the uninitiated. First, the senses—are they really our enemies? When they are the source of so much pleasure and happiness to common man, how can they be our enemies? Secondly, what is this fire that burns away impurities and how is this achieved? Is this fire real or metaphorical? If it is real, why do we not feel it?

Before proceeding to look at the details, let us restate some basic principles as envisaged by Sri Aurobindo.

The Supreme Reality is bi-polar, in a manner of speaking. The entire manifestation is encompassed between the Superconscient and the Inconscient. The Superconscient is the upper pole of existence, which is the seed-state of Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. It is so condensed that it can be seen as a superconscient state of sleep, because it is inward-looking, beyond all cosmic manifestation, transcendental. At the other end of

the spectrum is the opposite pole of the Inconscient, also a state of utter sleep of Consciousness. It is the stronghold of Ignorance, Darkness and Death.

The Superconscient is Sat-Chit-Ananda. Sat is Existence and Chit is Consciousness. The Superconscient is condensed consciousness, *Chid-ghana*. The Inconscient is a state of densified substance. Consciousness ranges and operates fully between the two poles. So does Substance. Between the two poles, the laws of dilution or subtilisation and condensation or densification operate evenly, depending upon the descent or the ascent. Consciousness, from the upper pole of the Superconscient diminishes itself until in the Inconscient, it seems to reach its diametrically opposite pole, the absence of all self-awareness. But Substance, from a state of maximum density in the Inconscient, rises slowly, becoming subtler and subtler, until at the peak, it becomes the subtlest Ether of the Superconscient. Everything in between these two extremes obeys the laws of densification and subtilisation. Matter, in which consciousness seems to have gone to sleep, is yet full of a hidden Force, which man has discovered and harnessed for his own practical purposes. We must remember that these are realities beyond the normal ken of mental knowledge and hence the language we use is necessarily limited and distorts the truth.

Just as water has three states—solid, liquid and gaseous—going from the gross to the subtle, similarly all substance has the grossest state, but gradually rising in the scale of existence, becomes subtler. But however subtle it becomes and goes beyond the range of the senses, it continues to be real, not illusory. In fact, spiritual experience asserts that the subtler the substance, the more real it is. The experience of Nirvana confirms that the gross matter we see and experience through the senses is really not what we think it is. It can even be experienced as totally false, without any reality at all. This experience is so powerful that it has spawned the philosophies of the Mayavada.

Here, we may give some interesting details of the various serially arranged planes of consciousness. Many traditions speak of seven planes of consciousness; some others refer to five planes and in a graduated scale of density, picturesquely describe them as ether, air, fire, water and earth. Mother has referred once to twelve planes of consciousness. It is quite possible that these planes actually form a seamless continuum without any clear defining boundaries between themselves. Sri Aurobindo has identified four planes between the Mind and the Supermind—the Higher Mind, the Illumined Mind, the Intuitive Mind and the Overmind. These planes exist in the impersonal, cosmic sphere. But they exist in the individual being also and can be experienced in the subliminal or the Intraconscient. When one is stationed on any one plane, one is not generally conscious of the other planes, being completely oblivious to them. This is very evident in sessions of hypnosis. When a man is hypnotised, he is in an interiorised condition but can speak of events in that plane, but when brought back to the normal waking consciousness, he generally remembers nothing of what he experienced or even spoke of in the interiorised state. But the yogin can build

bridges between these planes and can be aware of several planes simultaneously. He would then have a waking Samadhi.

It is interesting to note that the Superconscient is the seed state for the Involutionary downward movement and the Inconscient is the seed state of the Evolutionary upward ascent, corresponding to the gradual efflorescence of Consciousness. This is what Sri Aurobindo describes in *The Mother* (SABCL, Vol. 25, p. 23):

...and this mounting and descending hierarchy of planes of consciousness that like a double ladder lapse into the nescience of Matter and climb back again through the flowering of life and soul and mind into the infinity of the Spirit.

What has all this got to do with Fire, which is really the topic of our essay? Fire, in the physical world is very real as all victims who have suffered burns will willingly testify. But is it the same fire that purifies the being of a sadhak, when he engages in yogic practices? The purification of human nature takes place in the subtle body first and its effects spill over to the outer nature and body. Therefore the fire that purifies must also be the subtle counterpart of the physical fire. Fire too obeys the laws of rarification as we ascend the scale of consciousness. Fire has many forms, but the principle is the same for all of them. Fire, heat, electricity, light are the various forms of the same principle. The subtler forms of fire are not any the less real; rather they could be termed more real, though less discernible to our senses. How is this fire produced in the process of sadhana?

Let us look at the way the senses function. All living creatures experience the world through the senses. Some creatures have two senses, some have more and man has all the five senses. But do the senses report the world accurately to our consciousness, or is there a distortion, a disfigurement? We know now that the senses do not represent the world as it is to us. We do not see light outside the VIBGYOR range; we do not see X-rays, we do not see gamma rays, ultraviolet or infrared rays. We can even be colour-blind! We do not hear the low decibel sounds that dogs can discern easily; we are also deaf to the high-pitched squeals that bats use as sonar to guide themselves. Even our tongue has taste buds that will only sense some taste.

Our senses, it is clear, do not allow us to see the world as it really is. What we get through the senses are *manas*-generated false images that do not correspond to the external world. This distortion is even more pronounced when it comes to the psychological field. Our senses are therefore the traps that bind us to the enmeshing and glittering sense-objects of the world. Besides, by luring us with their short-time bribes, they lead us astray and create attachment, desire and passion. The five senses are our friends and aids in our first infant attempts to understand and experience the external world. But they become our enemies when we want to understand and realise the inner worlds and subtler realities. The pleasures and enjoyments of the physical world are transitory, passing and quickly turn to dust. Obviously we need to surpass

their influence and escape from their clutches. How can this be achieved? By becoming tortoise-like and pulling our senses inwards, restraining them, reining them in. This is done by denying them their food and starving them. This is the meaning of *Pratyahara*—the restraining of the senses. There are of course many other methods of achieving the same result.

We shall now look at some of the laws of physics. The laws that operate in the physical world are also subject to the process of densification and subtilisation. The law of gravitation obtains in the physical world, but it is also valid in the field of sadhana, constantly pulling down the consciousness of the sadhak and forcing him to descend to the lower levels of his being. The laws of attraction and repulsion are not only magnetic in nature, but they are also psychological. Similarly the laws of compression and expansion also operate in the subtle fields. The law that allows a refrigerator to work, by expanding a gas to absorb the environmental heat and then compressing it to throw off the heat thus absorbed earlier, works also in the same way psychologically. [Ammonia gas is gaseous at room temperature. When condensed by a compressor, it is liquefied and discharges heat into the open. When allowed to be vapourised again, it absorbs the heat of the interior.]

When we pull in our senses, restraining them, not allowing them to run after sense-objects, we are psychologically contracting our consciousness, thereby causing heat to be produced. This heat is in the subtle state, not easily discernible by our physical senses. But with sufficient purification being achieved, even this heat can be experienced and seen. A minor Upanishad states that just as iron ore is purified by heating it, so too is our consciousness purified by the fire of tapasya. Concentration is also a contraction and produces internal subtle heat and therefore is a powerful yogic technique of purification.

It is interesting to note that the physical body of man is constantly using energy, taking in and releasing energy or heat. But Nature has provided a built-in thermostat that maintains the body temperature at a constant level. Sometimes, of course, when the mechanism fails, there is either hyperthermia or hypothermia, the temperature rising or falling to dangerous levels, causing death. It is even known that this safeguard fails completely sometimes and there occurs the very rare phenomenon of “spontaneous combustion”, reducing a human being to a flaming fire-torch, leaving behind a small mound of ashes within minutes. Unbelievable as it may sound, there was a recent newspaper report of a man in China, whose armpits used to burst into flames spontaneously.

It is also known that in certain cases of the uprising of Kundalini, when the right balance is not struck between the Ida and the Pingala, extreme heat can cause tremendous difficulties. Gopikrishna, whose fate it was to suffer this experience of heat has written about it in his books and he even wrote to Sri Aurobindo for guidance. In spite of his immense experience in the spiritual field, Sri Aurobindo referred him to some other adept in the Kundalini Yoga, pointing out that he would not give advice

except to those who were following his own Integral Yoga. Yet, he did send him his silent help, which seemed to have worked, since he recovered fairly soon after that.

As Sri Aurobindo has pointed out, everything in Yoga is dangerous except the coming of the Psychic Being to the frontal consciousness. That is why in the traditional paths of Raja Yoga, so much stress is laid on the preliminary steps—*yama* and *niyama*—in order to prepare a proper base and purify the system, before venturing into the deeper waters of the Infinite. Even *yama* and *niyama* have ten detailed steps which are considered so essential for the complete preparation of the spiritual life.

In the Integral Yoga, the traditional methods are not considered essential. Safeguards are obtained by total surrender, complete faith and trust in the Divine. Rejection of all wrong and base movements is to be rigorously practised. Particular stress is also always laid on the emergence of the Psychic Being into the outward consciousness, at which point, the path becomes safe, happy and sunlit.

R. RANGANATH

Truth is an infinitely complex reality and he has the best chance of arriving nearest to it who most recognises but is not daunted by its infinite complexity. We must look at the whole thought-tangle, fact, emotion, idea, truth beyond idea, conclusion, contradiction, modification, ideal, practice, possibility, impossibility (which must be yet attempted,) and keeping the soul calm and the eye clear in this mighty flux and gurge of the world, seek everywhere for some word of harmony, not forgetting immediate in ultimate truth, nor ultimate in immediate, but giving each its due place and portion in the Infinite Purpose. Some minds, like Plato, like Vivekananda, feel more than others this mighty complexity and give voice to it. They pour out thought in torrents or in rich and majestic streams. They are not logically careful of consistency, they cannot build up any coherent, yet comprehensive systems, but they quicken men's minds and liberate them from religious, philosophic and scientific dogma and tradition. They leave the world not surer, but freer than when they entered it.

Sri Aurobindo

(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, pp. 12-13)

HOW I RETURNED TO THE MOTHER

I WAS 25 in 1966. I used to live a very pleasant life with Edoardo, a playwright, in Rome. I had read Vivekananda and others, but the decisive turning point came when a friend of ours, the writer Piero Scanziani, came back from a trip to India. He was also my godfather and in this case he really proved to be that. He gave us an article he had written about India in which there was a photograph of the Mother. I was absolutely fascinated. I am told that I was extremely impressed. Of course, it was Her, but I did not know.

Piero told us about his journey and suggested we read *Sri Aurobindo or The Adventure of Consciousness* by Satprem. We bought the book and I read it... nearly to the end. I did not have time to finish it as I lost my sight. I had realised I could see through only one eye when I saw the Indian Ambassador in Italy giving a thank you speech on TV to the Italians for what they had contributed on the occasion of terrible floods, I think. Another sign from India!

My sight was slowly covered by a veil and then I was blind. Later the Mother said that this facilitated my inner sight. For various reasons this blindness lasted ten months. During these months my whole being tended with growing ardour towards one unique goal: Mother. This aspiration radiated in me more and more, as compelling as a sun... and it still continues.

When I was asked what I wanted to do when I recovered my sight, I answered without hesitation: "I want to go to the Mother in Pondicherry."

This was absolutely unexpected at that moment, it came as a bit of a shock: to go to India... towards what?

Edoardo took a photo of me and sent it to the Mother through Nata. Later he came with me to Pondicherry. I say "came with me" because he insisted to everyone that he was there just to accompany me! He was rather diffident, and, you shall see, he was not wrong!

So, I met Nata of the resplendent heart. I met Maggi who smiles a secret felicity. I met other people with special smiles. I discovered Pondicherry, at that time still calm, especially the white part: no motorcycles, the rickshaws were pedalled, there were no big street lamps along the seaside, the fishermen had no motorboats. My exterior senses were captured by bougainvilleas and new unknown highly-scented flowers that filled the courtyards, by the cry of the omnipresent crows, by the slow pedalling of the rickshaw driver across the park to go to the Ashram.

There all changes. The senses are deepened, turned inside out, spread to integrality. There, at the Samadhi, one is only one's own truth, the little that we are and that which can open to the contact of what is there and which completely revolutionises existence and the world.

Nata took me to the Mother. (I have always called Her *Mère*, in French. It's a fluid word I like, powerful and delightful, like the sea, *mer* in French, the same sound.

I had a French education and always wrote to Her in French. Later I worked in the Ashram school, in French.)

The first encounter. So many years have passed, the mind can make mistakes, forget, get mixed up, deform some details that are consequently hardly important. What remains in our inner memory, the memory of the soul, the memory forever, is that which we shall carry through the lives. So I remember being immersed into a dense, solar atmosphere of powerful joy.

Kneeling in front of Her I had come back to Her. I was at home as She held me in Her hands and in Her eyes but above all as She held me in that substance of compact light in which at last I felt comfortable. As I went out I turned to look at Her again and I remember that She had turned Her head slightly and was watching me. (I wondered later with my little mind what was She looking at? Perhaps, I thought, She is asking Herself, "And what am I going to do with this one?")

After that I could not speak. When one went to see Her one was completely taken into what one should always be.

Not wanting to go back to the hotel at once, I stopped with Edoardo in the park designed by Pavitra and lay down on the grass. I felt like a fish that has at last been put back into water. I did not want to leave.

Edoardo, a well-known writer, intelligent and adorable, charming with his Italian moustache and wit, had a very interesting and successful life, he had found love and was happy: what more could he ask for? So, he was there "just to accompany me". But when he saw my attitude, when he heard Nata, when he heard all the people we met, he decided that after all he would like to see the Mother. He went with Nata.

Oh, Mother, the great man came out crying. Nata, deeply moved, said that they were psychic tears. Oh, Mother, seductress of souls!

The next year I went to the Ashram for two months. Then, for seven months. Then, "forever". Edoardo joined me. The great adventure started for us as for so many others. Adventures are enticing, but also difficult, dangerous, otherwise they would not be adventures. I was led by the love I had for the Mother: all I wanted was to give myself to Her more and more, not by any yogic capacity but simply because I loved Her. And so I opened up to Her, to Sri Aurobindo, to the feeling of an almighty force coming into me, and... to a new world.

On January 1st 1969 we felt a new consciousness in our atmosphere, something that was intermediate, suave, smiling. I would like to close this story with a sentence of the Mother in answer to a letter I wrote to Her a year later. I give herewith the translation of my letter that was written in French.

Mother, in the centre of my being there is a powerful sun, a wonderful world that spreads out and becomes more and more concrete. There one can find a calm immensity of joy, light and love, active and creative forces, and a silent and intense, very intense, a crackling of multiple explosions of thousands of

tiny golden points at an incredible speed. Above all, it's so pleasant there.

When the consciousness is there and one looks towards the exterior life, it's funny, one asks oneself how on earth can it manage to live, the rhythm seems so slow and weak, quite dead.

Once, I had an even greater joy: it was as if I was saying to myself "oh, it's so nice to be here", when suddenly I was told "but here, it's the earth—everything is like this".

There, like a promise. As if the source and the possibility of transformation is there and from there all the rest will gradually be invaded by that energy.

Is it so, Mother?

And what exactly is that world I find in the centre of myself?

With love and gratitude and joy I belong to You.

Felicity


Mother's answer:

It's the Divine world of tomorrow, that which we are destined to realise.

Love and blessings.

The Mother

*C'est le monde Divin de demain
celui que nous sommes destinés à
rechercher
lentement et béniédiction.*



FELICITY

SRI AUROBINDO AND THE MOTHER ON MOUNT EVEREST

IN the spring of 1990, I guided members of the Royal Geographic Society of Britain on a trek into the Kanchenjunga Sanctuary in Sikkim. Kanchenjunga is the jewel of the Indian Himalayas and the third highest peak in the world. It is surely one of the most magnificent massifs, so much so that it is a part of folklore. This eight-day trek is exquisitely beautiful and has an almost ethereal quality with its amalgam of pretty birds, dazzling butterflies, blooming flowers, and innumerable species of orchids. We wandered through dense forests and alpine meadows, along quaint and mystical trails above the treeline, overtaking grazing woolly yaks and bypassing a gem-like turquoise blue lake with sporadic scenes of spectacularly shaped snow-capped peaks. A special treat was the ascent through magnolia and rhododendron forests, studded with a colourful array of bright flowers—a literal Garden of Eden. The trail culminated in the glacial belt of Kanchenjunga, at the foot of this towering majestic giant. This uninhabited remote terrain was a veritable no-man’s-land of magical proportions, where the instinct to explore was as strong as the cautious call to beat a hasty retreat to safety. This trek was of special interest, as my counterpart from Britain was a person called Stephen Venables, who had made mountaineering history in 1988 by being the first Briton to climb Mt. Everest without oxygen and that too, pioneering the difficult East Face route. Another significant detail was that he climbed solo from the South Col to the summit.

After the Sikkim-Kanchenjunga trek, Stephen held a lecture-cum-slide show on his Everest Expedition. It left a deep impact on me, for this was an adventure of miraculous dimensions. The inconceivable heights that human physical endurance can attain and how will power and self-belief go a long way in accomplishing the impossible, triggered my imagination. Earlier he had presented me with his book, *Everest: Kangshung Face*, which gave a wonderful and vivid description of his mesmerising adventure. To endure intense pain, extreme exhaustion and overcome gripping soporific lethargy at high altitudes is a daunting challenge to any adventurer. Prior to the expedition Stephen asked himself, “When we are at a high altitude driven by ambition, would our oxygen-starved brain be capable of remembering the lessons? Would we notice the warning signs of the high-altitude killer, cerebral oedema? If the weather broke out, would we escape?” It is for this reason that climbers respect the mountains and approach them with a certain measure of trepidity and humility, aware that at any given instance, Nature’s fury can pulverise them. To a certain extent mountaineers can weigh chances of survival and have the option of descending to safety. However, there is a grave threat to life and limb due to avalanches, hidden crevasses, falling blocks of ice and rock, blizzards etc. Further, thrombosis, cerebral oedema, hypothermia, third-degree frostbite and acute mountain sickness can be fatal. In recent times, there have been several instances in which ambition had driven

climbers to take more risks than traditional mountaineering safety standards allow. Fame and the bravado of summiting a high peak are always a motivation, but I think it is the sense of adventure and achievement that spurs a mountaineer to conquer, irrespective of the hazards and uncertainties of high-altitude climbing. When the legendary mountaineer, Mallory, was asked why he wanted to risk climbing Mt. Everest, he replied, "Because it is there." There is always risk to life on any attempt of an 8000-metre peak. At any moment Stephen could have easily alleviated himself by forfeiting the assault, but that he did not, spoke of an adventure of Herculean proportions. Perhaps men heroically fending for their country during a war or a revolution would compare with such an endeavour.

Prior to the expedition, Stephen had stayed in Mumbai with his friends Harish and Geeta Kapadia. Harish is a well-known mountaineer and has authored many books on the Himalayas. About his departure from Mumbai, Stephen wrote, "After ten days in Bombay, I was sad to leave but I now felt much calmer and stronger. Geeta lit a candle for me in the family shrine and her two sons, Nawang and Sonam, each gave me a small packet of dried flower petals. The flowers came from an ashram in Pondicherry, which they visited each winter, and were to protect me. If possible I should leave them on the summit..." (Page 33)

Let us now descend to the Everest Kanchung Face story which occurred in the spring of 1988. Stephen was the only Briton in an Anglo-American party of four people. The others were the expedition leader Robert Anderson, Ed Webster and Paul Teare. Before they embarked on their extraordinary journey, they wondered if they would return alive. The Kangshung Face is one of the buttresses on the East Face of Mt. Everest and has to be accessed from Tibet. In 1921, George Mallory took one look and left it to "other men less wise". The Kanchung Face is probably the most difficult route on Everest. This is an adventure initially of remarkable skill—creating a new route to the South Col (8000m) through unclimbed vertical walls of rock and ice. From the South Col they would take the oft-trod Hillary-Tenzing route to the summit (8848m). It would require tenacity and endurance to cover the last 1000 metres to the summit without oxygen. It was one of the most ambitious and hazardous expeditions ever to climb Everest—a new route up a difficult technical face, no oxygen, a small team and all done in alpine style. One particular feature of the alpine style of climbing is that it is done without the help of porters from the Advanced Base Camp onwards. This requires a lot of stamina and strength as all the supplies including food and equipment to the higher camps have to be carried by the members themselves for which they have to make several trips to the Advanced Base Camp. The chances of success were poor and luck would play a key factor. The climbers did not even know if there was a feasible route. There were great technical difficulties and route-finding was complex and one had to reconcile oneself to inherent dangers. Earlier, the team had been building themselves for the climb, alternating neurotically between fear and hope. At one point Stephen was convinced the whole project was suicidal when he

learnt from Robert that several leading American climbers had turned down invitations to join the expedition. If all went well and they reached South Col, would they be fortunate enough to get fair weather to enable them reach to the summit? Even if all fell in place they did not know if they could do the final assault without oxygen. The risks of high-altitude climbing without oxygen and back-up teams were enormous. In 1986, thirteen people died on K2, the world's second highest peak. Hillary and Tenzing's summit climb in 1953 was possible only due to a large support team ferrying supplies and oxygen to the highest camps thus conserving their energy and keeping them relatively fresh for the oxygen-assisted final assault from South Col. These days, the ascent of Everest is an annual event, but almost all are oxygen-aided, with high-altitude porters to help set up the higher camps and by far easier routes. Even so, fatalities are a common occurrence.

To reach the Advanced Base Camp (5450m) they had to trek from the road head for about 25 days, the slow pace was primarily due to poor weather. The Advanced Base Camp was on a medial moraine in the centre of a glacier and the surroundings were huge and terrifying. They could now see the whole route leading to the South Col. Several avalanches thunderously crashed around them and one even reached the Advanced Base Camp, stopping short of doing any damage. The Buttress was about a 45-minute trek from here. They had acclimatised themselves well over the past few weeks. The most technical part of the climb started from the base of the Buttress. At the foot of the Buttress, gigantic turquoise ice towers hung out about 1000 metres above. These ice towers were threatening as at any time there could be a fall of huge ice-blocks (some as big as a large house). During the climb there would always be two persons in the lead who would fix the ropes for the others to follow. The following day they would swap the lead so that the hard work was shared amongst the quartet. They would work their way up the Buttress, day by day, extending the safety line of rope and abseiling back down to the safety of the Advanced Base Camp each night, until they had fixed the rope up the route to the higher (and easier) slopes over 1000 metres above. It took them about five days to find a route to Camp 1 (6450m) climbing perilous vertical walls of rock and ice, weaving their way up, avoiding avalanche-prone areas. There was always the danger of fragile ice towers and rocks falling off due to the intense rays of the sun loosening the ice. The mountain scenery was breathtaking though, and the higher they went the better and wilder it became.

From Camp 1 they had to make a reconnoiter to set up Camp 2. Everywhere above there seemed to be overhanging walls of ice, a great complex of ravines and cliffs. Paul had a narrow escape when a falling melon-sized rock missed his face by inches. He was momentarily terrified. They encountered several difficult vertical faces. At 6600 metres they encountered a 20-metre high overhanging ice wall that steeped from 90 to 100 degrees, which Ed skilfully climbed and set up the rope. There was another 65-metre high ice wall to climb before they reached the top of the Buttress. They had now reached the upper snow slopes, which would be their path to the South

Col (Camp 3). Because of its technical difficulties, complex route finding and objective dangers, the Buttress was the most difficult part of the climb. At this importune moment a massive crevasse—a deep vertical crack in a glacier—appeared, 15 metres wide and 30 metres deep, extending across the whole face of the Buttress. It almost sabotaged their expedition, as there was no way to skirt the crevasse. After much deliberation they decided to create a Tyrolean Traverse—a bridge formed by a rope across the crevasse. Ed christened it ‘the jaws of doom’. It was their only ray of hope. On 14th April Ed and Robert stayed at Camp 1 from where they set up the Tyrolean Traverse. It involved Ed and Robert descending into the base of the crevasse. After reaching the base of the crevasse there was a hideous cracking noise and Ed, fearing the worst, ran in terror barely managing to escape gigantic ice-blocks crashing down with hundreds of tons of ice. It was quite nerve-wracking. Ed managed to collect himself and then with Robert climbed up the overhanging wall on the far side, reaching the other side of the glacier. They then anchored their ropes and the rope bridge was created. It was the highest of its kind and the gateway to Camp 2 and the higher reaches of Everest. Then followed the cumbersome recurrence of returning to the Advanced Base Camp to ferry food, gas, stoves, tents, equipment and personal gear for Camp 1. Though the route had been charted and the fixed ropes put in place, the ascent to stock the camp always tugged at their endurance as they had to carry about 20 kilos each.

After stocking Camp 1 they crossed the bridge and now were on the upper snow slopes at about 7000 metres. Due to the fresh snow conditions they had to wallow, for the snow was so soft that the legs sank into them. This took a lot of energy as at times one could sink up to the thighs or waist and to pull oneself out took tons of energy especially since oxygen was almost a third of normal. Stephen had to take two full breaths to each step and rested every ten steps. Infinite patience was required and he tried to avoid looking too far ahead. Mind you, they had not yet reached South Col at 8000 metres, let alone prepare for the final ascent from South Col to the summit. Due to bad weather and a difficult terrain it took them 15 days to establish Camp 2 (7450m) from Camp 1. However due to inclement weather at Camp 2 they had to descend to Advanced Base Camp. On 9 May the weather cleared and with the aid of the fixed ropes they returned to Camp 2, albeit the climb was very laborious due to a fresh layer of snow. Even after a long and tiresome climb there was work to do—pitching the tents, cooking, melting snow for a few hours till past midnight to ensure that every climber got the recommended five litres a day. Often they were so tired that not enough snow was melted to get their full quota of drinking water. Dehydration is the scourge of high-altitude climbers. It thickens the blood, already viscous with the concentration of red blood cells necessary to survive at such high altitudes, and this affects the blood circulation to the remote parts, particularly the toes. Also at high altitudes a vegetarian diet induces better health: protein is absorbed more efficiently from flour, pulses, milk powder and cheese than from meat. But on several occasions

their body had insufficient proteins as they were too tired to cook enough at these higher altitudes.

On 10th May they wallowed in soft snow from Camp 2 to South Col for eleven exhausting hours. It had taken them eleven exhausting hours to do a climb of 500 metres, which they had hoped to do in four hours. The weight of their loads and the depth of the snow, following the previous day's exhausting fourteen-hour activity, had delayed their arrival at South Col by several hours. The South Col is a desolate plateau of rock and ice. It is the world's most notoriously bleak campsite. The wind was cruel, whipping snow against the face and taking the breath away. Talking was impossible and shouting was of no use. Everything was swept away by the wind. Their minds were numbed, their bodies battered and they wandered in a daze. They struggled to pitch their tents and any further delay would have meant death due to the wind chill factor. They had to keep rocks in the tents to prevent being blown off South Col. Screaming winds have been known to hurl a mountaineer across the face of Everest. Due to the altitude, the lack of oxygen, the strong gusts of wind, the freezing cold (-20° Celsius) and fatigue they could not sleep well. By now Ed and Stephen had serious headaches. South Col and above is referred to as the death zone; with every moment the brain deteriorates due to the lack of oxygen. It is for this reason that mountaineers prefer a quick assault to the summit from here and rapidly descend below South Col. On any big Himalayan climb speed is paramount. They had arrived at South Col exhausted, several hours late and were compelled to make the regrettable decision of delaying the summit assault by a day. The team wanted to recoup its energies for a day and make the summit bid late in the evening on 11 May.

Next morning, 11 May, Paul had a severe headache—suspected cerebral oedema. Mountaineering ethics dictate that someone should escort a sick person down to safety. But in his hour of disappointment, Paul magnanimously insisted that he would descend alone to avoid depriving another team member his cherished dream to summit Everest.

The final summit assault from the South Col needs to start late evening so that one person could reach the summit the next day by 2 p.m., allowing time to descend back to South Col by sunset. Any attempt without oxygen is so exhausting that the climber needs to be light and so tent or food for an emergency camp was ruled out.

Before departure on 11 May the tents had to be tied safe and made secure as they need to be standing when the climbers returned. By 10 p.m. Robert had all his clothing on for the summit attempt, but he still had to make the huge physical and mental effort to sit up and fit crampons to his boots, taking almost an hour to be finally ready. They had planned for a 10 p.m. departure but only succeeded to depart for the summit at 11 p.m. Stephen was feeling strong and took over the lead and soon was alone, way ahead of the rest. He was determined to reach the top irrespective of the grave risks. It was dark and he was not sure that he had taken the correct way, but was later reassured by some equipment left by a previous expedition. At sunrise he had a close spectacular view of some of the famous peaks. Soon after, he felt a crippling lethargy

seep in and the power drained from his legs and his mind grew drowsy. Oblivious of time, he collapsed often on his ice axe. Feeling suffocated he sucked in huge amounts of air to replenish his oxygen-starved lungs. Each step during the summit climb required a concentration of energy followed by a rest after every few steps. He longed to sleep but there was the danger that he may never wake up. The biggest problem was staying awake. Later, he was compelled to sleep for an hour, losing precious time, but he gained some rest. All the power and determination seemed to have been drained out and for the first time since leaving the South Col, he thought he might not reach the summit. He persevered, knowing that he would not get another chance. Hours passed of which he has few memories. Even to take a photo required a huge effort and it was beyond his will. Soon after, Stephen states:

It was at this stage that an imaginary old man first appeared. I never identified him, but this alter ego was to accompany me on and off for the rest of that day, sometimes comforting me and advising me, sometimes seeking my support. I do not know what he looked like—few of the hallucinations that day were visual—but at moments I was acutely aware of the presence of this other older person. As I reached up to the rocks I told myself that the old man would approve: the solidity and security of rock would appeal to his sense of tradition. In fact the rocks were quite loose and, balancing up on scratching crampon points, I had to concentrate hard, aware that a fall would be serious. But I also had to hurry, tiptoeing precariously, gasping furiously, desperate to reach a ledge and sit down before my legs gave out. The old man had to rest, I had to get to that ledge... (p. 158)

Clouds were brewing and there was a fear of losing control. The biggest problem was keeping awake. Cerebral oedema or vision problems can always occur at such altitudes. Stephen had done a lot of preparation and hard work and was aware he might not get another opportunity to scale Everest in his lifetime. Finally his deep urge to summit Everest, and his sheer determination got him to the top. He reached the summit rather late at 3.40 p.m. on 12 May. There he hallucinated and saw three figures on the top. Seldom does a mountaineer continue to climb towards the summit, after the cut-off time of 2 p.m. has passed. It was a calculated risk for he still had to reckon with coming down the mountain.

On reaching the summit, Stephen writes:

...there was one small ritual for me to carry out. I reached into one of my inside pockets and pulled out a tiny polythene bag. Inside it were the two miniature envelopes given to me in Bombay by Nawang and Sonam. I carefully took out the flower petals and scattered them in the snow, then placed the two envelopes beside the oxygen bottles [left by previous climbers]. Then panting with the

effort of concentration, I took two pictures on the compact camera.

The film in the SLR with self-portrait was either not wound on properly or was lost on the journey home, for I was never to see the photo of myself on the summit. However, I do have a picture showing the little envelopes. Each envelope is decorated with the face of one of the teachers at Geeta's ashram at Pondicherry, staring up from amongst the radio boxes, yellow cylinders and wisps of prayer flag on the summit of Everest. (pp. 165-166. *The photograph of Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's blessing packets lying on the snowy summit is on page 167 of the book, which unfortunately, we could not reproduce.*)

The self-portrait photo Stephen took never came out and the only proof that he had summited was the photo of the blessing packets. Without this photo there would not have been evidence and a unanimous agreement that he had scaled Everest. He should have taken more self-portraits but had no energy to go through the rigmarole.

Stephen had about three hours to descend to the South Col camp. There was always the fear that he may lose control like those Japanese climbers who in 1985 had summited Everest without oxygen but had died in the descent. At 8000 metres and above reactions get dulled by hypoxia—lack of oxygen. He remembered Micke Burke, a climber who summited Everest alone but never came back. Afraid that he might plunge through a fragile cornice, he forced himself to concentrate. Most of the accidents happened high on the mountain when people were descending exhausted from ascents without the aid of oxygen. As he descended to the Hillary Step he veered off in the wrong direction. He felt disoriented and was frightened. After a rest he willed his legs to stand and not to sag and crumple. It started snowing, stinging his face and encrusting his glasses. His descent of the Hillary Step—a 20-metre cliff—was petrifying. He was gasping for breath and when he blindly reached the bottom of the step he collapsed, hyperventilating furiously. This ultra-rapid panting had never happened before and he was terrified. He felt like a fish out of water incapable of getting oxygen into its gills... Nothing seemed to get beyond his throat and for a ghastly moment he thought he was going to suffocate. Mercifully the air started to get through and he gasped great sobs of relief.

Stephen writes:

I slumped over again, gasping with exhaustion. The wind was flinging snow at me and I was starting to shiver. I was completely blind and tore at my sunglasses... At least I could see a little now, only blurred shapes, but better than nothing... There's no one to help me. Either I get myself down or I die. It would be so easy to die—just lie down here and rest and soon the wind will kill me. It would be the easiest thing in the world but I'll look so bloody silly. (p. 169)

His glasses were encrusted with ice and it was not possible to take out the other pair

without taking off the mittens (and risk frostbite) and so he decided to descend in half vision. He continues:

My invisible companion, the old man, had reappeared and together we moved forward, determined not to die. We stumbled half-blind along the ridge, crouched over the ice axe, peering anxiously through the driving snow, almost on all fours, laboriously dragging across the rocks, clinging carefully to avoid the death slide down the South-West Face. Fear and instinct kept me moving over the rocks.

The visibility was still atrocious and I strayed too close to the crest on the left... Suddenly my left leg shot down into a hole and I collapsed into another fit of hyperventilation. The jolt almost suffocated me; but I regained my breath and forced myself on up the fifteen-metre climb to the South summit. I collapsed again and this time, as I regained my breath in great anguished gasps, I was filled with pity for the poor old man who was finding it all a bit too much. (ibid.)

Stephen was exhausted, not fully conscious, dehydrated and emaciated. In this perilous state he had to concentrate hard on the more difficult sections to avoid any fall from the mountain. Soon after his mind must have gone blank for he only remembered blurred images of snow and cloud. He does not remember part of the descent. Nevertheless during the most critical and hazardous phase of the descent, Stephen palpably felt and was deeply aware that he was being supported and advised by an old man. Such was the concreteness of the experience that he felt an intimacy with the old man.

To descend rapidly to safety Stephen started sliding down the smooth slopes of Everest. He continues:

We were racing the darkness, using gravity to hurry down towards the safety of the South Col. But even sliding is hard work, because you have to brace your legs and brake with your ice axe. It was somewhere down here that Peter Habeler, during his phenomenal one-hour descent from the summit to the South Col, spurred on by his fear of permanent brain damage, almost flew out of control down the Kanshung Face. I was anxious about the big slope below me and kept stopping to walk further right towards the ridge. Then on one slide the old man became very frightened. We were gathering speed in a blinding flurry of powder snow. The surface underneath felt hollow and unstable and seemed to be breaking off in avalanches. We were sliding faster and faster down to the east and the old man was hating it. He had suddenly become a musician. Musicians hate this. The composer is sliding on his cello, riding the avalanche to his death. Please stop! Now!

I dug my heels in and leant over hard on my ice axe, dragging the ferrule deep into the snow, and came to a halt. We were about to collapse and had to rest as soon as possible, but we could not sit down here. Too steep and insecure. Quick, cut a ledge. Ice axe and burrowing hand—that's it. Quick. Just enough of a hollow to sit down. Must rest. Must have a pee. The old man says do it in your pants—it'll keep you warm. (p. 170)

It became dark and due to the poor visibility it would be hazardous and reckless to descend to the South Col camp. It would be safer to take a chance and try to withstand the cold night in the open. Stephen continues:

After about half an hour of wandering about, the old man suggested that we should stop here for the night and wait for daylight to re-orientate ourselves. I decided that he would be warmest sitting on a rock and soon I found a ledge on the ridge where we could sit down. But it was precarious and sloping and we both longed to lean back properly, so we traversed back out onto the snow and dug a horizontal ledge where we could lie down properly. At about 9 p.m. we settled down for the night. (p. 171)

I was not really alone. The old man was still with me... (p. 172)

At 8600 metres, Stephen was forced to bivouac—to camp without a tent—one of the highest in mountaineering history. To prevent frostbite and freezing to death it was imperative that he dig a snow cave to protect himself from the wind. But he had no energy to cut a ledge, let alone dig a snow cave. He was without food or water. He had drunk just a litre during the day, was now so severely dehydrated that it affected his blood circulation, making him susceptible to frostbite. Dehydration and lack of food also leaves the body cold as it does not have enough energy to create heat. Fortunately there was no wind that night, otherwise he might have frozen to death. To escape a bivouac at such an altitude is providential. He however suffered frostbite and eventually lost several toes. He hallucinated through the night with the old man as company but after descending so far from the summit, felt confident he would survive in these conditions.

Next morning, after the long night was over, Stephen says, "...even the old man had gone but I had survived my night out." (p. 174) He had no strength to pack away his head torch. He slowly descended to the South Col and met Robert and Ed en route, who had earlier aborted their summit attempt and to survive the night had camped at an abandoned tent just above South Col. Robert and Ed, who had feared the worst for Stephen, were relieved and delighted to see him alive. There were few words exchanged but there was a strong bond of friendship. Stephen's success was a team effort and each member had contributed to this expedition. In a great show of

camaraderie they descended the last section to the South Col roped together. It was still a battle for survival for Stephen as every few metres he sank to his knees or just sat down, waiting for will power to return and help him move his legs again.

Since they had been in the death zone for three days, it was crucial that they descend immediately. Sadly they were too tired and drowsy to descend to Camp 2, so they camped at South Col. Next day, they lay half conscious and mumbled the imperative need to descend but failed to do anything about it. They were now in jeopardy, having spent 93 hours above 8000 metres. Fortunately Ed recognised the crisis and knew they would die if they did not move down immediately. He forced Stephen to sit up, get out of his sleeping bag, and after many pauses of rest, packed it into the rucksack. Exhausted, Stephen lay for half an hour, delaying the awful effort of putting on his boots. It was getting late for they should have departed in the morning to enable them to descend all the way to Camp 1. Finally they stirred at about 3 p.m. and reached Camp 2 at sunset. They were too weak to carry their tents from South Col to Camp 2. After a few steps Stephen sank to his knees to rest. It started snowing. Ed and Robert were ahead and Stephen knew that if he did not follow the other two he would die but he still dallied, stopping to rest every few steps. To save his energies he decided to slide down the steep snowy slopes. Due to rapid acceleration he lost control and hit submerged rocks where he heard a cracking noise on his hip. After bouncing faster and faster, he was flung in a somersault, only to accelerate again. With a last gasp of desperation he managed to brake by digging his heels in the snow and finally halting. He lay battered, bruised and helpless almost succumbing to terror before finding courage to stand up. He was lucky he broke no bones but his only ice axe had been wrenched off his wrist. He felt weak and helpless and in a fit of terror yelled down at Robert to please wait and not to leave him alone. Dusk was falling and he was sitting down every few steps, finding it harder and harder each time to stand up again. Snow was still falling and everything was cold and grey. Darkness fell and he felt lonely and frightened that he would not make it to Camp 2. He kept shouting "Robert! Ed!" But they were far ahead. He then saw the stove light at Camp 2 and was immensely relieved. He had finally arrived.

The following morning at Camp 2 they were still tired and not fully conscious, each lost in his private world of dreams, sprawled helpless, powerless to face reality. Stephen begged Robert and Ed to light up the stove to melt snow. Neither had the energy and Stephen was forced to do it himself. It was a big exhausting effort. Ed was largely conscious of their extreme danger, and strongly urged them "We must go down! Soon, we won't be able to move." At last they descended at 3 p.m. but to no avail as the weather immediately deteriorated. Ed who was leading, returned saying, "This is scary—I can't see a thing and have just slipped over a cliff. If we try to continue we're just going to get lost." They then made an excruciating ascent back to Camp 2. Stephen promised to produce a solid evening meal of potato knowing how desperately their bodies needed fuel, but the meal never materialised for he too fell

into an exhausted sleep.

The subsequent day, 16 May, they woke up at dawn aware that this was their last chance. They had virtually no food and if they stayed another night at this altitude they would probably be too weak to move. Paul and the others at Advanced Base Camp too must be worried as it had been five days since they made their final assault. Ed's blistered fingers were now agonising and Robert's too were painful. Ed looked like an old man. His face was lean and haggard and the light had gone out of his eyes as he stared in horror at his frostbitten fingers. His voice too was the dry croak of an old man repeating over and over again, "We've got to go down, we must go down. If we don't go down today we're going to die." Robert, like Stephen, was almost silent, fighting his own private battle against lassitude, building himself up for the great effort of departure. Ed, the most sensitive member of the team, seemed more deeply affected by the trauma of the descent and actually said it was going to take him a long time to get over the psychological shock of this experience. However, because he was so sensitive to the danger threatening them and because he so urgently needed to reach medical help at the Advanced Base Camp, he had become the leader. They were powerless to help each other physically. Stephen lay on his back, delaying feebly the moment of departure. He realised it would be easy and painless to lie there until he died. While Ed and then Robert set off, he sat for nearly an hour, bent over with his elbows on his knees and his head cupped in his hands. Ed's parting words to Stephen were, "Don't wait long, Stephen. You've got to get up and move: if you don't get down alive you won't be able to enjoy being famous."

Stephen tried to get up but failed. He wanted to descend but would have to concentrate harder on the task: lean forward, down on his knees, shoulder the rucksack and stand. He began to worry but was finding it so difficult to save his life. This was a small team so there were no climbers below capable of coming up to help in an emergency. He was frightened now that when he stood up on his legs he might be too weak to remain standing. With a final concentrated effort he went through the whole process and, though wobbly, managed to stay upright. It was so tempting to sink back down and fall asleep. He forced his mind to concentrate on directing all energies to his withered legs. The effort succeeded and he managed six faltering steps down the slope, sat back for a rest, then took six steps more, then again six steps. Though he was still struggling, he managed to get some momentum and descended towards Camp 1. En route he reached Ed and together they descended with Robert slightly behind. At times he had to rest three or four minutes between steps. Once, for a long time he sat in the snow, wondering whether he would stand up again. Just before sunset they reached the fixed ropes anchored high above Camp 1. Ed realised they had reached safety and now nothing would stop him from descending the ropes that night. He urgently needed medical help, food and water; and wanted to reach Advanced Base Camp, with the aid of the fixed ropes already placed. They reached the Jaws of Doom and were immensely relieved that the rope bridge was still intact, for they had been

terrified by the thought that if the rope had ripped off it would have cut off their retreat. It was almost dark now and soon the head torches were not functioning; so they descended in total darkness. Nearly every metre of the ropes had to be pulled out from the snow and ice. At times the ropes were buried in knee-deep soggy snow and had to be pulled out. The metre-by-metre excavation of the rope was painful. At Camp 1 Stephen noticed that an ice boulder had fallen on the spot where their tents had been pitched earlier. Ed's fingers were wrecked and even though he was wearing his mittens, the eight hours of fighting with the frozen ropes had burst the insides of the delicate fingers, leaving them shredded raw. They had moved for twelve hours without water and had hardly eaten for five days. Towards the end Stephen was struggling again, stopping repeatedly to close his eyes and striving to keep awake. They reached Advanced Base Camp at 3.45 a.m. on 17th May 1988. Robert could not keep pace with Stephen and Ed and stayed a night at Camp 1 with no tent.

Ed had led them down the mountain—cajoling them, finding the route and despite his frostbitten fingers had dug out all the snow-encrusted fixed ropes. The previous tracks had been covered by fresh snowfall and he had at times to navigate through mist and falling snow, at times guessing his way through. He was terrified of losing his way and sliding down the ice cliffs. A careless mistake could have been fatal. During the descent they had been living off their own muscle tissue and now the whole body was shrunk. They had not taken off their boots for three days!

They could not eat on the first day at the Advanced Base Camp but instead drank copious amounts of liquid and remained collapsed in their tents. On the 2nd day Stephen managed to walk ten metres but it was exhausting. He reflected that he had travelled far beyond the frontiers of any previous experience, drawing on enormous reserves of will power and endurance to reach the highest point on earth and return alive. Robert arrived the next day. Though he was now only at 5450 metres he hallucinated during the first night. Stephen felt guilty that he had left Robert alone in Camp 1 but Robert was very understanding and sporting about it. Nevertheless Robert had the satisfaction of having inspired and led one of the most ambitious and harmonious expeditions ever to climb Everest. Paul and the other crew had not seen them for five days and had surmised that they were dead and had sent a message to the Chinese authorities that they were missing. Frantically they had to change the message before it reached family and friends.

Pasang, the Sherpa cook, came to see Stephen. Stephen was deeply moved by the sympathy, love and the obvious delight in seeing him alive. The Sherpas are a unique race. From personal experience I can affirm that they are so humble yet noble and courageous. I had the privilege of having a few Sherpa and Nepalese staff on some of the Himalayan treks that I led. They were always contented, never grumbled and were so self-giving. In one instance I found myself in an unpleasant situation with some irate American clients; I trudged to the kitchen tent to be with my crew. No words were exchanged but my Sherpa cook understood the situation. The sympathy

and compassion that pervaded and permeated the air was poignantly palpable. On countless occasions, the Sherpas have endangered their own lives to save others from the high mountains. Stephen writes, “The remarkable thing about Sherpa people is that, in spite of constantly witnessing the incomparably greater wealth of foreign tourists, most of them have managed to retain their legendary dignity, humour, efficiency and generosity.”

From the Advanced Base Camp the team now returned to the Base Camp and rested for three days before leaving for the road head. Stephen’s and Ed’s toes were frostbitten and they had to be carried on stretchers. Ed needed to be hospitalised. On one occasion he burst into tears and screamed, “I can’t stand it any more! I’ve got to get out of here!”

On returning to England, it took Stephen at least three months to regain his strength and during the first few weeks he often lay awake at night troubled by memories of the descent. Due to frostbite, three and a half toes had to be amputated. Subsequently he was enjoying life with a new intensity after the extraordinary escapade on Everest. Ed lost eight fingers due to frostbite. Such is the sacrifice of the mountaineer who loves his sport.

The expedition’s success was an unprecedented feat in mountaineering circles. The joint achievement in completing the East Face and Stephen’s solo climb was greeted as the most significant climbing feat of the year. It was the smallest team ever to climb by a major new route without oxygen. Even the legendary mountaineer Reinhold Messner commented “You have done a very hard thing... but you were lucky.”

Lord John Hunt, the leader of the first expedition team to have conquered Mt. Everest in 1953, and the honorary leader of this expedition, wrote in the foreword to Stephen’s book, *Kangshung Face*, that when he in 1953 saw the Kangshung Face down below from South Col, he thought that it would never be climbed. In his opinion this was one of the most remarkable adventures from which man had returned, surviving against all odds. During their descent they were severely frostbitten, dehydrated, without food and the exhaustion was so extreme that they were on their last legs. Only the thought, that if they did not descend quickly they would die, slowly spurred them out of their comatose state. Said Lord Hunt on Stephen, “From the South Col to the summit and until he rejoined his companions, after surviving a night out at 8500 metres, he was on his own, his stamina and his will power somehow kept him going, despite his state of exhaustion after the long days of strain which the climbers had already endured in reaching the Col.”

In a lighter vein, the Earl of Limerick, a member of our Kanchenjunga trek, composed some limericks on Stephen. The metre of the limerick is a strict one, with the five lines following a pattern, as shown in the verses below:

Yoksum, 2nd May 1990

It is Venables' birthday, and so
 We all stand and salute, in a row;
 That's the thing about Stephen—
 We would follow him even
 To places we don't want to go.

In this case it was clearly ordained
 We'd return, just a mite travel-stained
 From this memorable trek—
 Each a physical wreck,
 But rich in the mem'ries we've gained.

To Steve, we must seem mad as hatters,
 With our winds and our limbs, all in tatters;
 Yet he's patient and kind—
 Though he leads from behind
 He's always right there when it matters.

So I counsel you, each gentle reader,
 If ever you go where you need a
 Strong lead you can trust,
 Then Stephen's a must—
 Happy birthday! Most excellent leader.

And a few extras:

Steve V. (he of Kangshung Face fame)
 Sotto voce, was heard to exclaim
 "This lot need a bit
 Of hard work to get fit—
 But they'll give me some laughs, all the same."

The party at last reached Darjeeling,
 Limbs aching and visages peeling
 They were heard to relate
 "Yes, the trekking was great,
 But it's stopping that gives you the best feeling."

In this modern age of technology, where ease, plenty, convenience and wants are the byword, the contrast to those trying hazardously to stretch and surpass themselves is stark and inspiring.

Prior to the expedition Stephen had met Charles Houston, a fine mountaineer and a highly respected high-altitude physiologist. He told him, “We know that the people who climb Everest, even the ones who have now climbed it without oxygen, are not supermen. They don’t have unique bodies. Physiologically they are just the same as all the rest of us. No it’s here”—and he put his hand up to his chest—“They have heart. It’s their spirit and determination and courage that got them to the top.”

And Stephen adds, “To succeed on Everest, you have to believe that you are capable of it and you have to want very much to get to the top.”

In fact there have been mountaineers whose stamina was that of an average sportsman but it was their belief, zest and motivation that got them to the top.

Once when the courage of the legless pilot—WWII ace Douglas Bader—was referred to the Mother, she commented,

That is exactly the kind of determination one must have to practise the yoga of integral perfection.

7 June 1963

(CWM, 1st Ed., Vol. 16, p. 280)

On another occasion when she was asked how to light the psychic fire, she replied:

By aspiration.

By the will for progress, by the urge towards perfection.

Above all, it is the will for progress and self-purification which lights the fire. The will for progress. Those who have a strong will, when they turn it towards spiritual progress and purification, automatically light the fire within themselves.

8 August 1956

(CWM, 1st Ed., Vol. 8, p. 252)

Stephen’s adventure is a story of sheer determination, singlemindedness and will power. It is also a story of endurance, extreme exhaustion, pain and the relief of getting down the mountain alive, perhaps thanks to an old man.

(Adapted from the book *Everest: Kanshung Face* by Stephen Venables, published by Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1989.)

GAUTAM MALAKAR

DEVOTIONAL POETRY IN TAMIL

(Continued from the issue of April 2008)

23. Saint Ramalinga

THE 19th century in Tamil Nadu was gifted with a saint-poet who achieved phenomenal popularity. His handling of the language helped to shape the future of Tamil poesy in a big way. Saint Ramalinga's life was one of not only deep devotion to the Divine with a Form and as the Formless, but it was also concerned with the ills faced by the Tamil society of his day. Nor was there any dearth of drama in this great mystic's sojourn upon earth.

Ramalinga was born on 5th October, 1823 to Ramiah and Chinnammal at Marudhur in South Arcot district. He lost his father when he was just a baby and so was brought up by his eldest brother Sabapati who made a modest living by giving religious discourses. Ramalinga showed no interest in studies. Sabapati tried various means to get his brother to concentrate on education and when he failed, he ordered his wife not to feed the boy any more. His kindly wife Parvati could not bear this. She fed Ramalinga secretly for several days and begged him to study for her sake. Ramalinga was deeply touched and immediately was transformed into an obedient student.

For several days Ramalinga made it a habit to sit silently all by himself in a first-floor room. He fixed a mirror on the wall, lit a lamp in front of it and meditated upon the reflection of the light in the mirror. Meditation presently opened the streams of poesy in him. It is said that he had a vision of Subramania and his first poem of thirty-one verses was indited at this time. For more than a century, this 'Deyva Manimalai' hailing the presiding deity of Kanda Kottam temple in Chennai has been popular with devotional singers in Tamil:

May I have contact only with the good people
Who meditate upon your holy feet;
I must not get in touch with people
Who dissemble in talk;
I must ever sing of thy fame;
Never should I utter a lie.
May I keep to the glorious path
Of virtue, and avoid the devil, pride;
I must forget any desire for woman;
And never forget You;
I beseech you for intelligence, the wealth
Of your compassion, and a body

Free of sickness; O askesis-rich Kanda,
 Who presides over Kandakottam
 In Chennai known for its Dharmic ways;
 Jewel, Shanmukha, Divine Gem!¹

Precocious he was. One day when Sabapati was down with fever, Ramalinga substituted for him as the lecturer on a religious topic. Hardly ten years old, he took the audience by storm. Though he was successful as a speaker, his mind was not in making a career of his oratory. He would take long walks to temples in nearby places like Tiruvotriyur, Tiruvellore and Tirumullaivayil. Charming devotionals blossomed in these silent adventures, self-lost in the vasts of mystic at-one-ment with the divine.

As with any mystic of yore, innumerable legends concerning the miracles performed by him during these days have been recounted by his followers. It is quite possible that Ramalinga had mastered the occult. But he never seems to have used this capability to impress the public. He was a loner in almost every way. The attempt of his family to get him to come back to 'normal' life by getting him married to a niece proved fruitless. He had already become a bride of Shiva, so how could he act as the lord of a household? Nothing more is known of his married life except that he lived alone, untouched by material anxieties.

Hailed as a rare scholar and a fine teacher, Ramalinga launched upon a writing career when he was twenty-five years old. He edited *Olivil Odukkam*, a book of philosophy, in 1851, and wrote his own prose work, *Manumurai Kanda Vachakam*. In his thirty-fifth year he found Chennai to be unsuitable for his spiritual longings and left the place for a long tour to Chidambaram, Vaitheeswaran Kovil and other holy places. By now a small group of disciples had joined him and he founded the Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga Satya Sangam in 1865 at Karunkuzhi, near Chidambaram. Giving prime importance to living beings as all life carries the Divine, he underlined the importance of non-violence and human unity (*Jeeva kārunyaṁ*, *Ānma Neyam*).

By 1867, his poems were anthologised as "Tirumurai" by his disciple Irukkam Rattina Mudaliyar. There were objections to the use of the term "Tirumurai" which is associated with the Tamil Shaiva canon, *Panniru Tirumurai*. The eminent Shaiva scholar, Arumuga Navalar of Jaffna led the critics and a war of pamphleteering issued between the pro- and anti-Ramalinga groups. The Saint himself seemed unperturbed by the commotion. Angered, Navalar brought the matter to the court and was represented by Saundara Nayakam Pillai of Jaffna. The case was heard in Manjakkudi. Ramalinga refused to ask any lawyer to plead his case.

On the day of hearing, Saint Ramalinga himself entered the court as the defendant. Clad in a simple white dhoti which was worn in such a way as to cover his entire body, he seemed a picture of simplicity and spiritual glow. The entire court rose as

1. All translations from Saint Ramalinga are by Prema Nandakumar unless otherwise stated.

one man and saluted him. Yes, including Arumuga Navalar and the Judge himself! When it was the turn of Navalar to be questioned, the Judge asked him why he had joined the others in getting up and saluting Ramalinga. Was it not because everyone in the room recognised the accused as a saintly person? Navalar could not counter it and so the case was dismissed. The works of Ramalinga have now been anthologised as the six *Tirumurais* and have gained scriptural validity among the followers of Saint Ramalinga.

Apart from his incorruptible life, his scholarship and devotional hymnology, Ramalinga was also distinguished in personal appearance. In a statement made to the Theosophical Society, Ramalinga's disciple, Thozhuvur Velayudha Mudaliyar says:

In personal appearance, Ramalinga was a moderately tall, spare man—so spare indeed as to virtually appear a skeleton—yet withal a strong man, erect in stature, and walking very rapidly; with a face of clear brown complexion, a straight thin nose, very large fiery eyes, and with a look of constant sorrow on his face. Towards the end he let his hair grow long; and what is rather unusual with yogis, he wore shoes. His garments consisted of but two pieces of white cloth. His habits were excessively abstemious. He was known to hardly ever take any rest. A strict vegetarian, he ate but once in two or three days, and then was satisfied with a few mouthfuls of rice. But when fasting for a period of two or three months at a time, he literally ate nothing, living merely on warm water with a little sugar dissolved in it.²

It certainly fits in with our image of Ramalinga drawn from his poems and utterances. A vast pity for suffering lives welling in him, Ramalinga considered it his life's mission to feed the hungry any time of the day. He inaugurated the Satya Dharma Salai on 23rd May, 1867 at Vadalur in an open space of about one hundred and eight acres gifted to him by forty landowners of the place. Here people are fed even today, with no discrimination based on caste. Ramalinga also stayed in this place giving discourses and helping people overcome their varied ills through his counsel. He shifted to nearby Mettukuppam in 1870 to continue his austerities. Simultaneously, a temple, Uttara Gnana Chidambaram was being built by him in Vadalur.

Actually, Ramalinga did not call it a temple. It was to be known as Satya Jnana Sabha, the Hall of True Knowledge. Seeking the One behind the Many, the Core behind the multitudinous manifestation, Ramalinga sought to reveal the Unitive Principle behind all appearance. He set aside all religious icons and chose the symbol of light. A four foot mirror that reflected the light symbolised man's soul illumed by the Supreme Effulgence. Seven curtains in different colours, one behind the other, surrounded this symbol, to represent the seven levels of worldly illusions which keep us away from

2. Quoted in Purasu Balakrishnan, *Ramalinga: Poet and Prophet* (1984), p. 38.

Truth. The Hall of True Knowledge was inaugurated on 25th January, 1872.

Open to all, the Hall continues to attract the devout. The only people barred from entering the Hall are meat-eaters. There is no worship of any traditional kind. Ramalinga's philosophy is simplicity itself: by living a pure life dedicated to the alleviation of human misery, and by meditating upon the Great Effulgence of Grace (*arut-perum-jothi*) one should aim to transform one's life on earth and become a living divinity as the Siddhas of old. His philosophy was, "No running away from life, but facing its ills and transforming it into the life divine."

To one like him, occult powers came without asking. Several miracles have been attributed to the last phase in Ramalinga's life on earth. We are told that he had attained the power to become invisible for days together: nor need we doubt any of these statements, as it has all been scientifically processed since Patanjali wrote his *Yoga Sutras* and Tirumoolar gave detailed lessons in his *Tirumandiram* three thousand years ago. Ramalinga's aim was a "graceful life that had overcome death" (*maranam illā peruvāzhvu*). His last discourse given on 22nd October, 1873 (delivered three months prior to his withdrawal), makes this clear. He now felt that he had risen to a higher consciousness. The earlier one, steeped in religion and siddhis (occult powers) played its part, but now he was in the spaces of the spirit:

They (the religions) do not give you the spiritual experience born of true knowledge.... The faith I had in Shaiva religion it is hardly possible to exaggerate. My poems and prayers in my book are standing testimony to this. The reason why I had such deep faith in them was my lack of true knowledge.

Now God has raised me to a pinnacle. This is because I gave it all up. You may likewise gain divine life if you likewise give up all... But what was it that actually raised me?... It was compassion which one may call grace.... one attains that sense of compassion by a sense of universal unity. Only that sense can lead one to compassion. Now my knowledge has gone beyond the wheeling universes.³

Certainly Ramalinga who had attained a higher plane of consciousness was looking at the humanity around him, people who were still unable to taste divine consciousness. They could not adapt to the symbolic nature of the Hall of True Knowledge and hence he closed it down a year later.⁴ In November 1873, he placed the light burning in his room on the outside *pial* and told his followers to worship the light continuously, meditate and sing his verse, "*ninaindhu, ninaindhu*"⁵ and that soon his presence would be dispersed in the body of all humanity. On 30 January, 1874 he

3. Translated by Purasu Balakrishnan.

4. The Satya Jnana Sabha was reopened for worship four years after his withdrawal, and was renovated in 1950.

spoke to his immediate disciples that he would lock himself up in his room and no one should disturb him. If they did, they would not find him. They must continue to seek inspiration from the Great Effulgence of Grace.

The followers of Ramalinga consider the song to be the saint's way of telling them of his movement into the *arut-perum-jothi*. Soon there were many rumours of his disappearance and the government decided to intervene. After all, hardly a score of years had passed since the "Sepoy Mutiny" and any unusual occurrence came under the direct scan of a jittery government. J. H. Garstin, the Collector of South Arcot and George Banbury, Member of the Board of Revenue came to Mettukuppam in the month of May, and the room in which Ramalinga had locked himself was opened. It was empty. They found no evidence of anyone having lived there. They went round the area, were satisfied that life was normal and the Sathya Dharma Salai was feeding the hungry regularly. After making an offering of twenty rupees to the Salai, they left the place. Ramalinga's withdrawal from the physical continues to be a big question mark for those who hang on to reason. For the faithful, there has been no problem. Saint Ramalinga's life as a siddha was in keeping with the great Indian tradition and they believe he had merged with the Great Effulgence of Grace.

Ramalinga has left behind a considerable amount of writing consisting of poems, prose works and correspondence. His poetry and prose have been brought out in an authoritative edition by the Vallalar scholar, Ooran Adikal. Taken together, they are a remarkable testament of an extraordinary personality. Despite Ramalinga speaking against his own poems on religion after he had risen to a higher consciousness, these works continue to inspire the devotees who are still in the earlier stages of sadhana. The attraction of these devotional poems is universal among lovers of Tamil poetry.

Ramalinga has covered more than a dozen well-known pilgrim centres. After 'Deiva Mani Malai' on Subramania, the hymns simply flowed on without any stoppage. Some of the songs are on specific deities while many of the works record his own sadhana, forming an intermittent spiritual autobiography. Shiva pervades his consciousness as the Dancer in many striking poems:

You are this earth rich in gems, the living beings
And the Giver of the Great Life

5. Thinking, thinking again; moved by love
Fully that it flows as tears unstoppable
Bathing my body; so I hail Him, O nectar of grace,
My Treasure, Dancer in the Hall of Knowledge,
My rightful Consort! Come, worldly-wise ones!
See, you can gain the gracious life
Sans death! This is no imagination. I lie not!
I am telling verily the truth.
This is the moment of my entering the Golden Hall,
The Hall of Divine Consciousness.

By chasing away the evil that haunts men,
 The God who smiled when torching
 The Three Cities, the Treasure
 Of vast knowledge, the youth
 Who holds the lance in his hand,
 The noble elephant-faced deity,
 God who accepts our service, the Supreme
 Whom the gods worship,
 Our Superior Leader, verily the Knowledge
 Of the Beyond, the image of sound,
 Ruling over the plane of Realisation,
 One who is Realisation itself,
 The Effulgence, image of auspiciousness,
 Dancer in the Hall of Knowledge.

The Supreme is hailed as the Medicine, the Nectar, the Eternal Friend. Some of the poems are on human unity. His matin song is an exultant cry on the future humanity ruled over by the Great Effulgence of Grace:

The conches and the pipes blow:
 May the earth be granted human unity.
 They are praising the famous Samarasa Suddha
 Sanmarga, our Darling, Image of Simplicity,
 My Lord who dances of attainment
 In the Hall! O Great Effulgence of Grace!
 That has assured us both lives! My king!
 Be pleased to waken.

Ramalinga often speaks of his experiences in the Golden Hall where he had come face to face with Nataraja as pure Effulgence. He is pervaded by Shiva consciousness which makes him sing. There are hymns cast in the mode of bridal mysticism as well. Though Shiva is the term he uses, it is more in the tradition of Tamil Siddhars and the Veerashaiva Vachanakars of Karnataka who use the name to indicate the Supreme Lord. This Shiva is not the Shiva of the Puranas. He clarifies this point in several verses:

I'm asked: "Is your dancer-spouse the same as
 The godheads of other creeds?"
 Indeed, the hallowed names of these will fit
 My beloved Spouse also.
 When even the word "madman" he'll not spurn,

Whose name will not chime with Him?
 Nor can he bear only the names of gods
 Of the diverse religions:
 Your name, my name, or anybody's name
 Is also my Spouse's name,
 His ecstatic dance, multiplying Him,
 Blazons forth this mystic Truth.⁶

Ramalinga's admiration for *Tiruvachakam* is clearly reflected in his poetic diction. That a thousand years after, Manickavasagar should exert such a firm hold on the Tamil consciousness proves the deep, penetrative power of the Bhakti Movement. It is said that Ramalinga would recite the *Tiruvachakam* verses while standing in front of Lord Tyagesa in the Tiruvotriyur temple and often fall down in a swoon of ecstasy. His own decad on Manickavasagar is deeply moving and extols the path of pure love:

While all those who had been performing
 austerities
 since a long time,
 with bodies reduced to bony forms
 and their minds concentrated
 on the spot midway between their brows,
 stood disappointed,
 Oh Lord of beautiful Vathavoor,
 You first became the embodiment of love,
 Then the embodiment of charity
 And, after that, you became
 The embodiment of bliss.⁷

While Ramalinga spent a long time in such mystic at-one-ment with his Lord, the Great Effulgence of Grace, he was also very much aware of the condition of humanity which was beset by innumerable ills. In fact, compassion for all living beings was the keynote of Ramalinga's writings:

Every time I saw crops withering,
 I withered too; as often
 As I saw hungry destitute beggars,
 I too fainted with hunger.
 The sight of chronic victims of disease

6. Translated by K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar.

7. Translated by G. Vanmikanathan.

Made me tremble like a leaf,
 And the defeat of the meritorious
 Has made me wilt in pain...
 Compassion has overwhelmed me as oft
 As I've mixed with living beings.
 In distress I've petitioned You for help,
 As I do again today.
 My life's run and soul of compassion are one,
 Not wholly different things.
 My life must cease when my compassion dies—
 I swear this at Your feet.⁸

This is the reason why his utterance “*Arut-perum-jothi: thani-perum-karunai*” (The Great Effulgence of Grace, the Undeniable Immense Compassion) is recited as a mantra by his followers. Rising into spiritual consciousness holding on to the Supreme as Effulgence is not enough. One must also cultivate a wide compassion. Without compassion for suffering lives, what price individual salvation or Ananda?

Reflecting upon the selfishness of man in turning away deliberately from suffering humanity, Ramalinga wrote some burning pieces of satire. ‘*Kudumba Ghoram*’ (Terror of Family) is one of them.⁹ It is a sustained piece of allegory on how the various forces of nature inveigle man into helplessness.

Man was wedded first to Ego who limited his perceptions. The two begot Ignorance who blinded his inner vision. At this time, someone who is the Creator and Dancer celebrated Man's union with Illusion. This second wife kept up a running fight with the hapless husband and presently they had children too: Mind, Intelligence, Consciousness, Pride. Unfortunately, even as Man was in great trouble, he married a third wife, Lust. As man waned under her power they had three children too: Rajas, Tamas and Sattva. Meanwhile the house (man's body) had become unfit for residence while the house owner would force him to pay rent (food). Finally the man says, “Enough of this ‘family life’ and the society which wastes his time in idle tales.” He takes to renunciation. Ramalinga has a dig at the fake sannyasins in the conclusion of the poem:

As if whitewashing a wall,
 He smeared Holy Ash on his body,
 And as if he were a “Rudrakasha Cat”¹⁰
 He began rolling his Japa seeds,

8. Translated by K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar.

9. The poem was actually written for Ramalinga's disciple, Muthuswami Mudaliyar on the latter's wedding day. The disciple was happy to receive this strange missive and memorised it, and recited it happily now and then!

10. The reference is to a folk tale about a cat which put on the dress of a monk, closed its eyes, rolled the rudrakasha beads and was considered a great yogi.

Stood as a crane in yoga for a while,
 Sat down to do his ritual worship,
 Fed his body made up of flesh
 And thus paid in full his rent,
 Deceived many by his hypocrisy.
 Then he rested in peace embracing
 The courtesan, Sleep.
 Now his days move pleasantly.

This poem does have a distant resemblance to the canto, 'The Mother of Evil and the Children of Darkness' in Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*. Ramalinga's impatience is understandable. Because it was for him an experienced reality, Ramalinga hoped mankind could easily follow his method of invoking the Great Effulgence and practising a limitless compassion. Unfortunately he realised that men were not prepared to take the hard path of sadhana. In his last great discourse in 1873 he said:

Alas, instead of searching for God, people are going round me, calling me a god. Alas! Is it not their ignorance that makes them do so? I sorrowed over this development, I continue to do so and shall continue to pity you. You have not realised the Divine. The reason is not far to seek. You cannot know the taste of an eatable unless you eat it. You will not desire something of which you do not know the taste. You cannot increase your love of God unless you experience him. Hence go on meditating upon the Divine wishing to realise him.

In short, Ramalinga realised that man was not yet ready for the great change. He could only hope for the best and give them an easy way to follow: Feed the hungry! His own life remains a beacon light for people groping in the dark; and his devotion-laden poems continue to be sung with great faith and hope. To conclude with the words of K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar:

He (Ramalinga) was a tireless castigator of all profession without practice, all false assumption of superiority based on birth, class, status or privilege alone, all blind superstition and ritual, all bigotry and hypocrisy, all avarice and ostentation. And yet what gave the accent of apostolic authority to his animadversions and denunciations was his own personal purity, his radiant sincerity, his decisive ascent into sanctity.¹¹

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

11. Introduction to G. Vanmikanathan, *Pathway to God Trod by Saint Ramalingar* (1976), p. xxiii.

Addendum

[From the Mother's conversation with a disciple on 11 July 1970]

(A letter was read out to the Mother in which a disciple spoke of Swami Ramalingam's experiences of the physical changes in his body and asked the Mother for some clarifications.)

Mother, one more thing. The person who wrote the letter has asked a question. He asks if this vast "Grace-Light" or "Truth-Light" that Swami [Ramalingam] speaks of, is it the supramental light?

Which light?

This vast "Grace-Light".

Grace-Light... Oh! I liked that very much in his letter... Grace-Light. Yes, it is that which works, you know: the work is being done through this [the body], it is absolutely like that, it is absolutely like a "Grace-Light". I liked it very much. It is absolutely that.

Isn't it, it is a light that has several degrees, and in the most material, it is lightly... it must be the supramental force, because it is slightly golden, slightly pink, (you know that light) but very, very pale. There is one (*gesture indicating another level, higher*) which is white like milk, opaque—it is very strong. And there is one (*gesture, very high*) which is a white... which is a transparent light. That one, it is a curious thing: one drop of it on the hostile forces, it dissolves them. They melt like that (*gesture at eye-level*). I told all this to Sri Aurobindo, he confirmed it fully. That, it is essentially the Grace in its... (*gesture, very high*) supreme state. It is a Light... it has no colour, isn't it, it is transparent, and this light, (I have done the experiment, I say it because I know it): one puts it on a hostile being and... the hostile being melts like that. It is extraordinary... And so, in its aspect that could be called 'benevolent' (that is to say, the Grace that helps, aids and cures), it is white like milk. And if I want an absolutely material action (but this, it is recent—it is recently, since this new Consciousness has come), so, in its physical action, on the physical, it has become slightly coloured: it is luminous, it is golden with a touch of pink, but it is not pink... (*Mother takes a hibiscus that was beside her*). It is like this.

Like the flower of Auroville?

Like the flower of Auroville. But I chose this as the flower of Auroville intentionally, because of this. And I have the impression that it is this, the supramental colour:

when I see the beings of the supramental, they have... not quite this colour... It is not like a flower, it is like flesh. It is like this (Mother indicates the colour of the flower).

(silence)

Yes, he has been in contact with that, this man, surely. I felt it immediately when you read to me that letter.

One has the impression... It is probable that through the ages, such individual experiences must have occurred.

Yes, oh! Yes, surely. Surely. And there must be some even now, that we do not know of.

But the difference now is that it is a collective thing.

Yes.

* * *

...the endeavour towards this achievement is not new and some yogis have achieved it, I believe—but not in the way I want it. They achieved it as a personal siddhi maintained by yoga-siddhi—not a dharma of the nature.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 95)

NAVANIT STORIES

DRISHTI EVI SRISHTI¹

Kasturchand: How are you Kapurchand-bhai? Where are you going at this time?

Kapurchand: Oh, Kasturchand-bhai, isn't it? Well, I was on my way to purchase some betel nuts. Where are you going?

Kasturchand: Ah, we have well met! I am on the same errand; I am glad of your company. Two are always better than one on such errands.

Chatting about business, community matters, the marriage season, and other home affairs, the two of them finally arrived at the *gandhi*'s.²

Kapurchand: How are you Gordhan Gandhi? Are these betel nuts of good quality?

The *gandhi*: You have come at the right time. Just yesterday I have received a fresh stock of *seventara* betel nuts. I have not even opened the gunny bag.

Kapurchand: All right, then we shall be your first customers. Weigh one kilo for me.

Kasturchand: And another kilo for me.

The *gandhi* opened the sealed gunny bag in front of his customers and weighed and packed one kilo of betel nuts for each of them. After paying for their purchases, the two friends walked away chatting some more and finally went home.

Every morning, Kasturchand empties his bag of betel nuts on a tray and selects four of the worst ones. Then taking his nut cutter he starts to cut them into slices muttering, "Rotten stuff! Rotten, and tasteless!" And putting some in his mouth, continues to curse, "How can you call this a betel nut? No punch at all, like bits of wood shavings!" Tosses another lot in his mouth, chews it, makes faces, and showers a spate of curses on the *gandhi*.

Thus goes Seth Kasturchandji's routine every time in the day that he sits to enjoy his betel nuts. Every morning he selects the four worst ones and.... Though he eats all of them, it is always in a foul mood, every time his curses rain on the poor *gandhi*. Never does he enjoy the pleasure for which one chews betel nuts, never is his mood a help to his digestion.

Kapurchand Seth is of a different nature. Every morning he empties his bag of betel nuts on a tray and selects the best ones, and he relishes their flavour throughout the day, exclaiming again and again, "Ah, how wonderful! This is what a fresh stock can give you. The mouth and the mind are both in bliss."

Both of them have purchased the same quality of nuts from the same stock and yet with what a difference to their health and happiness!

In the end, we are ourselves the creators of our joys and sorrows.

PUJALAL

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

1. As you see, so you create.

2. Grocer.