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*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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### A CORRECTION

On page 554 of the June 2005 issue of *Mother India*, the date of Dr. Nripendra's passing has been given as 21<sup>st</sup> of July 1981. He passed away on the 21<sup>st</sup> June 1981.

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## SHIVA

On the white summit of eternity  
    A single Soul of bare infinities,  
    Guarded he keeps by a fire-screen of peace  
His mystic loneliness of nude ecstasy.  
But, touched by an immense delight to be,  
    He looks across unending depths and sees  
    Musing amid the inconscient silences  
The Mighty Mother's dumb felicity.

Half now awake she rises to his glance;  
    Then, moved to circling by her heart-beats' will,  
    The rhythmic worlds describe that passion-dance.  
Life springs in her and Mind is born; her face  
    She lifts to Him who is Herself, until  
The Spirit leaps into the Spirit's embrace.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 140)*

## ‘GROWTH INTO DIVINE LIVING’

ALL spiritual life is in its principle a growth into divine living. It is difficult to fix the frontier where the mental ceases and the divine life begins, for the two project into each other and there is a long space of their intermingled existence. A great part of this interspace,—when the spiritual urge does not turn away from earth or world altogether,—can be seen as the process of a higher life in the making. As the mind and life become illumined with the light of the Spirit, they put on or reflect something of the divinity, the secret greater Reality, and this must increase until the interspace has been crossed and the whole existence is unified in the full light and power of the spiritual principle. But, for the full and perfect fulfilment of the evolutionary urge, this illumination and change must take up and re-create the whole being, mind, life and body: it must be not only an inner experience of the Divinity but a remoulding of both the inner and outer existence by its power; it must take form not only in the life of the individual but as a collective life of gnostic beings established as a highest power and form of the becoming of the Spirit in the earth-nature. For this to be possible the spiritual entity in us must have developed its own integralised perfection not only of the inner state of the being but of the outgoing power of the being and, with that perfection and as a necessity of its complete action, it must have evolved its own dynamis and instrumentation of the outer existence.

There can undoubtedly be a spiritual life within, a kingdom of heaven within us which is not dependent on any outer manifestation or instrumentation or formula of external being. The inner life has a supreme spiritual importance and the outer has a value only in so far as it is expressive of the inner status. However the man of spiritual realisation lives and acts and behaves, in all ways of his being and acting, it is said in the Gita, “he lives and moves in Me”; he dwells in the Divine, he has realised the spiritual existence. The spiritual man living in the sense of the spiritual self, in the realisation of the Divine within him and everywhere, would be living inwardly a divine life and its reflection would fall on his outer acts of existence, even if they did not pass,—or did not seem to pass,—beyond the ordinary instrumentation of human thought and action in this world of earth-nature. This is the first truth and the essence of the matter; but still, from the point of view of a spiritual evolution, this would be only an individual liberation and perfection in an unchanged environmental existence: for a greater dynamic change in earth-nature itself, a spiritual change of the whole principle and instrumentation of life and action, the appearance of a new order of beings and a new earth-life must be envisaged in our idea of the total consummation, the divine issue. Here the gnostic change assumes a primary importance; all that precedes can be considered as an upbuilding and a preparation for this transmuting reversal of the whole nature. For it is a gnostic way of dynamic living that must be the fulfilled divine life on earth, a way of living that develops higher instruments of world-knowledge and world-action for the dynamisation of consciousness in the

physical existence and takes up and transforms the values of a world of material Nature.

But always the whole foundation of the gnostic life must be by its very nature inward and not outward. In the life of the Spirit it is the Spirit, the inner Reality, that has built up and uses the mind, vital being and body as its instrumentation; thought, feeling and action do not exist for themselves, they are not an object, but the means; they serve to express the manifested divine Reality within us: otherwise, without this inwardness, this spiritual origination, in a too externalised consciousness or by only external means, no greater or divine life is possible. In our present life of Nature, in our externalised surface existence, it is the world that seems to create us; but in the turn to the spiritual life it is we who must create ourselves and our world. In this new formula of creation, the inner life becomes of the first importance and the rest can be only its expression and outcome. It is this, indeed, that is indicated by our own strivings towards perfection, the perfection of our own soul and mind and life and the perfection of the life of the race. For we are given a world which is obscure, ignorant, material, imperfect, and our external conscious being is itself created by the energies, the pressure, the moulding operations of this vast mute obscurity, by physical birth, by environment, by a training through the impacts and shocks of life; and yet we are vaguely aware of something that is there in us or seeking to be, something other than what has been thus made, a Spirit self-existent, self-determining, pushing the nature towards the creation of an image of its own occult perfection or Idea of perfection. There is something that grows in us in answer to this demand, that strives to become the image of a divine Somewhat, and is impelled also to labour at the world outside that has been given to it and to remake that too in a greater image, in the image of its own spiritual and mental and vital growth, to make our world too something created according to our own mind and self-conceiving spirit, something new, harmonious, perfect.

But our mind is obscure, partial in its notions, misled by opposite surface appearances, divided between various possibilities; it is led in three different directions to any of which it may give an exclusive preference. Our mind, in its search for what must be, turns towards a concentration on our own inner spiritual growth and perfection, on our own individual being and inner living; or it turns towards a concentration on an individual development of our surface nature, on the perfection of our thought and outer dynamic or practical action on the world, on some idealism of our personal relation with the world around us; or it turns rather towards a concentration on the outer world itself, on making it better, more suited to our ideas and temperament or to our conception of what should be. On one side there is the call of our spiritual being which is our true self, a transcendent reality, a being of the Divine Being, not created by the world, able to live in itself, to rise out of world to transcendence; on the other side there is the demand of the world around us which is a cosmic form, a formulation of the Divine Being, a power of the Reality in disguise.

There is too the divided or double demand of our being of Nature which is poised between these two terms, depends on them and connects them; for it is apparently made by the world and yet, because its true creator is in ourselves and the world-instrumentation that seems to make it is only the means first used, it is really a form, a disguised manifestation of a greater spiritual being within us. It is this demand that mediates between our preoccupation with an inward perfection or spiritual liberation and our preoccupation with the outer world and its formation, insists on a happier relation between the two terms and creates the ideal of a better individual in a better world. But it is within us that the Reality must be found and the source and foundation of a perfected life; no outward formation can replace it: there must be the true self realised within if there is to be the true life realised in world and Nature.

In the growth into a divine life the Spirit must be our first preoccupation; until we have revealed and evolved it in our self out of its mental, vital, physical wrappings and disguises, extracted it with patience from our own body, as the Upanishad puts it, until we have built up in ourselves an inner life of the Spirit, it is obvious that no outer divine living can become possible. Unless, indeed, it is a mental or vital godhead that we perceive and would be,—but even then the individual mental being or the being of power and vital force and desire in us must grow into a form of that godhead before our life can be divine in that inferior sense, the life of the infraspirtual superman, mental demi-god or vital Titan, Deva or Asura. This inner life once created, to convert our whole surface being, our thought, feeling, action in the world, into a perfect power of that inner life, must be our other preoccupation. Only if we live in that deeper and greater way in our dynamic parts, can there be a force for creating a greater life or the world be remade whether in some power or perfection of Mind and Life or the power and perfection of the Spirit. A perfected human world cannot be created by men or composed of men who are themselves imperfect. Even if all our actions are scrupulously regulated by education or law or social or political machinery, what will be achieved is a regulated pattern of minds, a fabricated pattern of lives, a cultivated pattern of conduct; but a conformity of this kind cannot change, cannot recreate the man within, it cannot carve or cut out a perfect soul or a perfect thinking man or a perfect or growing living being. For soul and mind and life are powers of being and can grow but cannot be cut out or made; an outer process or formation can assist or can express soul and mind and life but cannot create or develop it. One can indeed help the being to grow, not by an attempt at manufacture, but by throwing on it stimulating influences or by lending to it one's forces of soul or mind or life; but even so the growth must still come from within it, determining from there what shall be made of these influences and forces, and not from outside. This is the first truth that our creative zeal and aspiration have to learn, otherwise all our human endeavour is foredoomed to turn in a futile circle and can end only in a success that is a specious failure.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(The Life Divine, SABCL, Vol. 19, pp. 1018-22)*

## ‘ALL IS CHANGED, ALL IS NEW...’

October 7, 1913

THIS return after an absence of three months to the house which is consecrated to Thee, O Lord, has been the occasion of two experiences. The first is that in my outer being, my surface consciousness, I no longer have the least feeling of being in my own home and the owner of anything there: I am a stranger in a strange land, much more of a stranger here than in the open countryside among the trees; and I smile, now that I have learnt what I did not know, I smile at the idea of having felt myself “mistress of the house”, an idea I had before my departure; it was necessary for all pride to be broken, crushed, trampled down definitively so that I could at last understand, see and feel things as they are. I used to offer to Thee this dwelling, O Lord, as though it were possible that I should possess something and consequently be able to make an offering of it to Thee. All is Thine, O Lord, it is Thou who placest all things at our disposal; but how blind we are when we imagine that we can be owners of any one of these! I am a visitor here as elsewhere, as everywhere, Thy messenger and Thy servant upon earth, a stranger among men, and yet the very soul of their life, the love of their heart....

Secondly, the whole atmosphere of the house is charged with a religious solemnity; one immediately goes down into the depths; the meditations here are more ingathered and serious; dispersion vanishes to give place to concentration; and I feel this concentration literally descending from my head and entering into my heart; and the heart seems to attain a depth more profound than the head. It is as though for three months I had been loving with my head and that now I were beginning to love with my heart; and this brings me an incomparable solemnity and sweetness of feeling.

A new door has opened in my being and an immensity has appeared before me.

I cross the threshold with devotion, feeling hardly worthy yet of entering upon this hidden path, veiled to the sight and as though invisibly luminous within.

All is changed, all is new; the old wrappings have fallen off and the new-born child half-opens its eyes to the shining dawn.

THE MOTHER

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, pp. 32-33)*

# TOWARDS A NEW SPIRITUAL POETRY

## SRI AUROBINDO'S VISION OF ASCENDING "PLANES" OF POETIC EXPRESSIONS

[The late Kathleen Raine—poet and scholar—invited K. D. Sethna in early 1988 to contribute a paper “on the theme of The Future Poetry, the idea of the various levels on which poetry operates” for *TEMENOS: A Review Devoted to the Arts of the Imagination*. *TEMENOS* had been edited by Ms Raine for nearly a decade but due to lack of funding and doing “it all ‘on a shoestring’” the journal’s future was not certain.

During the course of their correspondence in 1988 and 1989\* the project was discussed here and there, Ms Raine dropping little reminders and K. D. Sethna repeatedly promising to finish the task: “One of these days I must turn to the article you have asked me to write. Much of it is ready but the *grand finale* has still to be managed. I must invoke Sri Aurobindo’s help to get it done soon.” (12.9.1989)

In April 1990 Ms Raine requested K. D. Sethna one more time to send, for the last issue of *TEMENOS*, “something about the hierarchy of Worlds whence poetry is drawn, for this in my view is the single most important contribution that can be made by India to the discussion of poetry, which here comes from the widely held assumption that all is on one level—the material—and poetry becomes either political propaganda or ‘self-expression’ or the simple description of natural appearances. And, alas, India imitating this kind of verse. So please give me the opportunity to express the other point of view.” K. D. Sethna complied. However, due to certain differences of opinion, the paper remained unpublished in *TEMENOS*—as K. D. Sethna put it—“for a really invalid reason”.

We reproduce here the article intended for *TEMENOS*.]

### 1

VERSE is skimmed off the surface of our mind, poetry wells up from our depths. That is a commonplace of critical observation. But it required a poet-mystic of modern India to look into the depths, distinguish their various levels, characterise the poetry springing from each and discern an evolutionary trend running through these levels towards an ultimate which is also their origin. To do this he had to be not only a

\* Published as *Indian Poets and English Poetry—Correspondence between Kathleen Raine and K. D. Sethna* in 1994.



practitioner of the spiritual discipline of Yoga but also an explorer of the poetic art, one who was both steeped in the literatures of many countries and himself touched—as Hopkins would have put it—with the “sweet fire, the sire of the Muse”.

What Sri Aurobindo has found in detail and in extension is in general accord with traditional Indian spirituality. This tradition tells us that over and above the physical body of which we are ordinarily conscious we have several other “sheaths”, *kosas*, which set us in secret contact with “planes”, *lokas*, behind the material. Like the material plane, each of these has a universal existence with individual formations within it. According to Sri Aurobindo, our inner self—the being which transmits or projects poetry into our outer life—may be broadly said to function from levels which we may term subtle-physical, vital, mental, with a hidden background of “soul” or “psychic being”. These levels have an aspect either allied to the familiar features of our earth or else to the strange, recondite, mysterious. And beyond the multiple world-structure they present are planes designated by Sri Aurobindo “Overhead” because in spiritual experience they work in us from above the thinking mind. They constitute a spacious dynamism of more-than-mental consciousness in an ascending gradation of revelatory intensity and immensity: Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuition, Overmind.

These levels are superhuman and we do not commonly have access to them but they have contributed something of their knowledge and vision to human self-expression, especially in moments of a rare poetic inspiration. At the source of all these planes no less than those with which we are more in touch lies the still unmanifested Supermind, the final creative Godhead which the Vedic Rishis invoked as *satyam, ritam, brihat*—the True, the Right, the Vast—and which Sri Aurobindo, besides calling it Supermind, often names Truth-Consciousness or Divine Gnosis. It is the Supreme Power whose descent into humanity is the aim of Sri Aurobindo’s “Integral Yoga”, seeking to achieve in the end a total transformation of both individual and collective living.

Human evolution in general follows the order of the planes Sri Aurobindo has enumerated. There are interblendings, since man is a complex creature, having all the planes up to the Overmind acting in him at the same time though one or another may be in prominence. But whatever the prominent plane, Sri Aurobindo<sup>1</sup> counts three elements in the production of all poetry:

“There is the original source of inspiration, there is the vital force of creative beauty which contributes its own substance and impetus and often determines the form, except when that also comes ready made from the original source; there is finally the transmitting outer consciousness of the poet. The most genuine and perfect poetry is written when the original source is able to throw its inspiration pure and undiminished into the vital and there takes its true native form and power of speech exactly reproducing the inspiration, while the outer consciousness is entirely passive and transmits without alteration what it receives from the godheads of the inner or

the superior spaces.\* When the vital mind and emotion are too active and give too much of their own initiation or a translation into more or less turbid vital stuff, the poetry remains powerful but is inferior in quality and less authentic. Finally, if the outer consciousness is too lethargic and blocks the transmission or too active and makes its own version, then you have the poetry that fails or is at best a creditable mental manufacture. It is the interference of these two parts either by obstruction or by too great an activity of their own or by both together that causes the difficulty and labour of writing. There would be no difficulty if the inspiration came through without obstruction or interference in a pure transcript—that is what happens in a poet's highest or freest moments when he writes not at all out of his own external human mind but by inspiration, as the mouthpiece of the Gods."

Here two explanations will be in order. First, what is the difference between "the vital force of creative beauty" and the vital level from which, as distinguished from any other, say, the subtle-physical or the mental, poetry can draw its felicitous effects? The former, in its true functioning, is the requisite of all production of any value on earth. Poetry's vital level itself depends on it for the proper exteriorisation of the depth from which its typical utterance emerges.

The second point to be cleared is Sri Aurobindo's use of terms like "godheads" and "Gods". To a mystic, a Yogi, the terms cover actualities, but the alternative word Sri Aurobindo employs—"inspiration"—is common to all writers of poetry and remains distinct from those terms simply because certain intellectual views lead the writers away from probing sufficiently the "fine frenzy" which Shakespeare attributes to all poets when their eyes "roll" to "glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven". To aspire after inevitable form—a perfection, an absolute of sight, speech and sound—is their self-chosen mission and, whether they are avowedly religious or not, the sense of the godlike is their guide. They are instinctively Platonists in their art, serving the mission of some flawless archetype of beauty and truth waiting to be disclosed in their word-music. It is because of this spontaneous and unavoidable idealism that even a sceptic or an atheist can still create by means of the artistic conscience great poetry and make us feel as if immortal presences were secretly moving from one perfect poise to another. Did not Elizabeth Barrett Browning refer to the Roman poet Lucretius as denying divinely the Divine?

Sometimes Lucretius is indeed stupendous in the godlike movement of his Latin lines. For example, those phrases where he describes the philosopher Epicurus, of whom he was a disciple, as triumphing over the crude superstitions of popular religion that blocked the way of rational investigation:

\* The expression—"the vital"—in this sentence is a special term of Sri Aurobindo's and must not be taken as one lacking by oversight a noun after it. Thus elsewhere he writes: "The vital has to be carefully distinguished from mind, even though it has a mind element transfused into it..." (*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 320). Of course, the term often occurs with a noun, as the very next sentence in the passage quoted testifies. (K.D.S.)

*Ergo vivida vis animi pervicit, et extra  
Processit longe flammantia moenia mundi  
Atque omne immensum peragravit mente animoque.*

I have attempted to english these grand hexameters somewhat freely:

Therefore his vivid vigour of mind stood everywhere victor;  
Forward afar beyond the world's flaming walls he ventured,  
Crossing all the immensities, led by his thought and his longing.

It is also curious to note that, atheist though Lucretius is, he at his most inspired hails as "Nourisher Venus" and as "Delight of Gods and men" the procreative energy that is abroad in Nature: he invokes it as a Goddess to aid his exploration of "the secret ways of things". Again and again a profound awe, a solemn sense of universal Nature blindly and inexorably at work in its gigantic reaches of space and time pervades his philosophical epic like a religion *manqué*, just as the presence of an "unweeing" power, a "Will" absolute and endless in "crass casualty", is perceived in the world of that modern unbelieving poet, Thomas Hardy. This English materialist brings as most germane to his poetic feeling of the world a whole troop of presiding powers, spirits of pity and irony pressing onward from above the Napoleonic drama depicted in *The Dynasts*. An instinct of the true source of the magnificence that is poetic expression appears to have compelled both the Roman singer and the English to conjure up an atmosphere of the Superhuman around their highest moments, an inward impulsion affined, however indirectly, to what led Homer to appeal to his Thea and Milton to cry "Sing, Heavenly Muse".

Seeing how a sense of the mysterious Divine is always leaping out in this manner through great poetry, one would be right to conclude that if one consciously puts oneself in tune with a higher realm one is likely to be more receptive of the afflatus, provided one has the true poetic turn. This proviso is most important. One should guard against the glib belief that merely a spiritual subject and a religious articulation would make the deepest layers vocal. Even though we may breathe of God with every syllable properly significant, our words will serve Him ill unless we know how to make them winged. And their wingedness can soar to the empyrean either with the look fixed on the azure or with the gaze earthward as mostly happens in the early days of human poetry.

## 2

The historical beginning of poetic speech is, as a rule, to be found in an outflowing of the subtle-physical consciousness. It is the inner plane, as its very name implies, nearest the outer mind and in that sense the most elementary in its imaginative

responses. Homer, with his eye on physical object and bodily power of action and the externalised thought and emotion which they throw up into the surface roll of life, is the poet *par excellence* of the subtle-physical. Indeed his thought is mostly an obvious reaction to the stimuli of external life and common natural phenomena, but he has in addition to a sheerness of stirring simplicity a surge of verbal nobility as of deities expressing themselves in the human drama. It is not merely that they play a part in the story of antagonism between Greek and Trojan: their very ambience, as it were, is sometimes felt most gloriously. Sri Aurobindo, while discussing the highest effect achieved by poets—what may be called a super-inevitability—has cited the lines in which Homer describes Apollo's angry response to the Greeks' ill-treatment of his high-priest whose daughter Chryseis Agamemnon had captured and refused to return to her father. First, the father's grief, too great to be spoken, is unforgettably suggested by its pent-up state being juxtaposed with the vast tumult of waters on the Trojan beach. There is no more effective line of simple profundity in world-literature than Homer's

*Bē d'akeōn para thina poluphloisboio thalassēs*

which Sri Aurobindo renders by an answering hexameter:

Silent he walked by the shore of the many-rumoured ocean.

The English catches the straight subtle-physical level of experience and the massive drive of a faultless inspiration.

On the heels of the high-priest's departure comes the passage bringing into direct action the deity he serves. Sri Aurobindo<sup>2</sup> comments on the lines and brings out the master role of rhythm in creating poetic perfection:

“Homer's passage translated into English would be perfectly ordinary. He gets the best part of his effect from the rhythm. Translated it would run merely like this: ‘And he descended from the peaks of Olympus, wroth at heart, bearing on his shoulders arrows and a doubly pent-in quiver, and there arose the clang of his silver bow as he moved, and he came made like unto the night.’ His words too are quite simple but the vowelation and the rhythm make the clang of the silver bow go smashing through the world into universes beyond while the last words give a most august and formidable impression of godhead.”

Chaucer is another practitioner of subtle-physical poetry. Just as Homer stands almost at the very beginning of poetry in Greece, Chaucer marks the beginning of English poetry with the same plane. His look is mostly thrown outward on the general action of human life and character without any notable preoccupying idea or special probe into the complexity of feeling. A blithe sense of humour or a light and easy pathos, not an attempt at interpreting life in any depth but rather a lucid presentation of its surface variety with just a felicitously suggestive touch here and there and a passing echo caught from his ostensible models—French romance poetry and the

intense rhythms that run through the Italian of Dante and Petrarch: such is Chaucer in the main. Simple and unsophisticated, he rings true all the same with his proverbial “English undefiled”. And now and then something of high seriousness and of piercing pathos meets us:

What is this world, what asketh man to have,  
Now with his love, now in his coldë grave,  
Allone, withouten any companye?

See what Dryden does with this naive yet touching world-cry in his experiment of “modernising” the older poet and making him presentable to a more cultured intelligence:

Vain man! how various a bliss we crave,  
Now warm in love, now withering in the grave!  
Never, O never more to see the sun!  
Still dark, in a damp vault, and still alone!

Dryden is obviously “arty” with his deliberate alliteration and his pointed repetition “Never, O never” and his twice-hammered-out “still”. Only one line seems to have a genuine resonance—

Now warm in love, now withering in the grave—

And yet how far is its polished and elaborate achievement from the plain poignancy of Chaucer’s

Now with his love, now in the coldë grave,

where by just calling the grave “coldë” the heat of a hundred suns is packed by silent contrast in the bare unqualified “love” which conveys, along with the emotion, the sense of a personal object of it rather than merely the emotional act. It is a little masterpiece of what may be termed rich reticence.

*(To be continued)*

K. D. SETHNA  
(AMAL KIRAN)

### *References*

1. *The Future Poetry and Letters on Poetry, Literature and Art*, SABCL, Vol. 9, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, p. 291.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 303.

## SRI AUROBINDO AND MAN'S SOCIO-POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

*(Continued from the issue of June 2005)*

Two devices of absolutism have been tried—one negative, the other positive. The first worked by suppression of free thought, oppression of the life and soul of the community and by the methods of the taboo and the inquisition. The other device, positive, worked by means of the State religion, with the priest as the helper of the King. Both devices proved useless in the long run. They failed by decay and by the revolt of the oppressed. Still, this stage was necessary in human evolution, “for the absolutist monarchical and aristocratic State which seems now to be in process of birth.” Only thus could the rational self-governing society firmly evolve. Unity and uniformity constitute the principal trend of modern progress. How else could this complex human life be made calculable and manageable by rational intelligence and unified will? “Socialism,” says Sri Aurobindo “is the complete expression of this idea.” This socialism, in one form or another, bids fair to be the key-note of man’s collective life in the future.

The history of the growth of the State is, thus, a history of centralisation, of a growing uniformity in the various aspects of life. It is a change from a natural organism to a rational organisation. The unity of the human race implies the eventual formation and organisation of a World-State out of the already existing nation-units. Circumstances are becoming more and more favourable daily to the growth of such a State. “Science, commerce and rapid communications have produced a state of things in which the disparate masses of humanity, once living to themselves, have been drawn together by a process of subtle unification into a single mass which has already a common vital and is rapidly forming a common mental existence.” A great transforming shock was also necessary and that has now been furnished by the two World Wars. The idea of a single State is no longer confined to the mind of the isolated thinker but has appeared in the consciousness of humanity at large. Two distinct types of a world-union present themselves before us. One is based on the principle of centralisation and uniformity, and the other on the principle of liberty. The union of the world may be brought about in various ways—“by a mutual understanding or by the force of circumstances and a series of new and disastrous shocks.”

Having indicated two alternate possibilities, Sri Aurobindo goes on to affirm that “the idea of a world-union of free nations and empires, loose at first, but growing closer knit with times and experience” appears to be the only form immediately practicable, if the will to unity becomes rapidly effective in the mind of the race. On the other hand, the State idea, which has so far proved to be the most effective means of unification, is the one to which the human mind has grown accustomed. So it is surmised that even if there is a loose union to begin with, it would rapidly grow into

a stringent form of World-State. The ideal of human unity is no longer a Utopian ideal. Even if it be not immediately practicable, it proves nothing. In history, a scheme that looks absurd and unpracticable to one generation has often been acclaimed and put through effectively by the next. But there are certain indispensable conditions to be fulfilled here. A central organ of power standing for the united will of the component nations is necessary to begin with, and then there must follow the unification of all power—military, administrative, judicial, economic, etc. But what is going to be the form of the central governing authority? Czars and Kaisers, Imperators and Chakravartis, are obsolete. A kingship like that of Great Britain is ornamental, a survival and nothing more. Britain's great gift to the world today is her Commonwealth of Nations and not her Constitutional Monarchy which was boosted so much in the last century. The King, today, has indeed less power than the French President and infinitely less than the head of the U.S.A. Monarchy as an institution has been more or less discredited everywhere. The Hapsburgs, the Hohenzollerns, the Romanoffs, have departed for good. Italy too, has discarded her King. If Japan still has a Mikado, China has declared definitely in favour of a republic—although a communist one. As far as Moslem countries go, Persia has still a Shah and Egypt a Khedive, but Turkey has got rid of her Sultan. So, the future World-State is by no means likely to be an autocracy.

The republican ideal is, no doubt, European in origin. But modern Asia has accepted it wholeheartedly. The two halves of old India—India and Pakistan—have decided against monarchy. Even an old fashioned State like Hyderabad has accepted without serious demur a democratic constitution. The new institution of Rajpramukhs is an evident compromise, a transient device at best. The Caliphate of Turkey has vanished, but the Mikado of Japan and the Dalai Lama of Tibet still cling to their sacrosanct authority. But even in Tibet, it cannot last long—half a century at the most. Japan, may in the future decide to keep a sort of a monarch on the throne; but we can safely predict that he will be without his divine trappings.

The monarchical idea can survive only if it serves as a convenient symbol of unification. But, since we find that in the component units the symbol has been dispensed with quite successfully, there is no reason why the World-State should require it. If the example of Britain encourages the world-union to have a King, there is also the example of the U.S.A. to pull it in a contrary direction. A world monarchy must necessarily be very much more democratic than anything we can imagine today. The two World Wars we have been through of late have set up a strong reaction in favour of nationalism, and Internationalism has received a serious check. This we can see clearly in spite of the U.N.O. and its altruistic efforts. It is very difficult to predict anything about the political ideals of tomorrow, for, the world is passing through a definite transition—"a bourgeois World-State is not a probable consummation." The old parliamentarianism of the nineteenth century has been challenged in Soviet Russia and in the Fascist countries. Fascism has met with a rebuff for the

time being, but the Soviet scheme of collective life is in full force and appears to have at least as much vitality as any other. It is extremely unlikely that the proletariat world acquiesce in the domination of the bourgeoisie a minute longer than it must. Sri Aurobindo goes over various possible forms of economic organisation and says, "If any of these things were done, any movement towards a World-State would then take the same direction and evolve a governing body of the same model." But in considering these various alternatives we must not lose sight of "nationalism and the conflicting interests and tendencies it creates". It has been supposed that a world-parliament would overcome these difficulties. But there are serious obstacles in the way.

Parliamentarianism, very useful as it has been in the past, has been always an instrument either of a modified aristocratic or of a middle class rule; over and above, there has always been the danger of the tyranny of a majority, even a very small majority. All this would certainly be a more serious evil in the World-State and might lead to discontent, disorder and even revolution. A parliament of nations must, after all, be a united body made up of free nations. The present distribution of power in the world is anomalous. Sri Aurobindo warns us, "The Asiatic problem alone, if still left unsolved, would be a fatal obstacle and it is not alone..." A Supreme Council of free and imperial nations of the existing world system has also its difficulties. It could only be successful, if controlled by an oligarchy of a few imperial nations. But it is very doubtful if national egoism would permit such control. Whichever way we turn "this question of the form of a World-State is beset with doubts and difficulties". But the form of Government is not the really important thing, "The real problem is that of the unification of powers and the uniformity which any manageable system of a World-State would render inevitable."

*(To be continued)*

C. C. DUTT

(This instalment first appeared in *Mother India* in December, 1951)

*I am weary of the childish impatience which cries & blasphemes and denies the ideal because the Golden Mountains cannot be reached in our little day or in a few momentary centuries.*

*(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 464)*



# PAINTING AS SADHANA

Krishnalal Bhatt (1905-1990)

## Prologue

WHEN the 20th century was born, opening “the widest door on destiny”,<sup>1</sup> the social and political condition of India “had reached a nadir of impotence”.<sup>2</sup> When Sri Aurobindo took up Yoga around 1905, it was to help emancipate India—not a piece of earth but a Power, a Godhead, a Devi<sup>3</sup>—from that dark abyss. It was also then that he wrote the revolutionary booklet, *Bhawani Mandir*. The idea was to start a centre for sannyasins who, consecrating themselves to the Divine Mother, would invoke and embody Her Shakti and dedicate themselves to the freedom and greatness of their motherland. The fiery spirit of his articles in the *Bande Mataram* surged through the veins of every self-respecting youth; for thousands he became their lifelong political guru. One of them was Chhotalal Purani.

Chhotubhai had joined the Baroda College in 1903 (after his Intermediate at Ahmedabad) at the age of eighteen. After his M.A. at St. Xavier’s, Bombay, he began teaching at the Kalabhavan in Baroda in 1907.<sup>4</sup> When Sri Aurobindo came to Baroda after the 1907 Surat Congress Chhotubhai obtained a private interview with him. Sri Aurobindo and, later, Barindra acquainted him with the type of revolutionary movement they had started in Bengal. Chhotubhai was asked to create a three-tiered organisation: a wide external circle in the form of an open *akhada* (gymnasium) movement that would contribute to society’s educational, religious, economic, cultural progress; a middle one of solid well tested workers; and from among whom he would form secret clusters of revolutionaries, each cluster of three comrades working under one *tyagi*. Within a decade, with the help of his closest friends and younger brother Ambalal, Chhotubhai built up the highly disciplined and cohesive Purani Mandal with dynamic centres all over Gujarat.

But when Sri Aurobindo enlarged the theatre of his action from the national political to the universal spiritual, “many regretted his retirement as a great loss to the world because they could not see any external activity on his part which could be regarded as ‘public’, ‘altruistic’ or ‘beneficial’. Even some of his admirers thought that he was after some kind of personal salvation which would have very little significance for mankind in general. His outward non-participation in public life was construed by many as lack of love for humanity.”<sup>5</sup> Whereas actually a decade before this retirement he had noted that “The mind of humanity feels it is conscious of a voice of a distant advancing Ocean and a sound as of the wings of a mighty archangel flying towards the world, but whether to empty the vials of the wrath of God or to declare a new gospel of peace upon earth and goodwill unto men, is as yet dark to our understanding.”<sup>6</sup> Therefore one of the reasons his inner Guide commanded him

to withdraw and concentrate on his Yoga was the imminent descent of Titanic Vital Forces bent on destroying mankind's highest endeavours towards Truth, Light, Freedom.<sup>7</sup>

Of the handful who dared to believe and tried to follow Sri Aurobindo was Ambubhai; he not only gave himself body and soul to the Mandal but was among the first subscribers to the *Arya*. In 1916, at the age of twenty-one, he obtained Sri Aurobindo's permission to translate portions from it into Gujarati. But in 1918, when he came to Pondicherry to seek from Sri Aurobindo the command to mobilise the secret cells of the Mandal, he was turned instead towards the cardinal field of action, the Integral Yoga. And finally in 1923, he was permitted to join Sri Aurobindo at Pondicherry. In June 1926, Anilbaran Roy came to Pondicherry for the first time. "No amount of reading would have taught me as much about Sri Aurobindo's Yoga," Anilbaran writes, "as did the practical example set by this couple [Ambubhai and his wife].... Purani gave me his files of the *Arya*—I had not read them before.... These works of Sri Aurobindo made one realise that a new light, a new world, had dawned upon earth."<sup>8</sup>

When Ambubhai came away to Pondicherry in 1923<sup>9</sup> he realised he was being admitted into the *gurugriha* for "these spiritual parents bestowed upon the disciples freely of their Light, their Consciousness, their Power and their Grace.... So much was this feeling a part of Sri Aurobindo's nature and so particular was he to maintain the personal character of his work that... he did not like his house to be called an 'Ashram', as the word had acquired the sense of a public institution."<sup>10</sup> And among the earliest members of the Purani Mandal who were admitted to this *gurugriha*<sup>11</sup> were Pujalal<sup>12</sup> in 1925, Vishnuprasad in 1930, and Krishnalal in 1933—the most significant cluster of the Mandal: a poet, a physical culturist, an artist, guided by a *tyagi* to the Feet of the Supreme Mother.

## Ahmedabad

Krishnalal was born on 1 July 1905 in Kalavud (*lit.* black banyan tree), a village 50 km SE of Jamnagar, in the then princely state of Navanagar, in Kathiawad. He was quite young when his father, Keshavlal Bhatt, moved to Sarangpur, a crowded locality in Ahmedabad. What a palpable difference between those two environments—between countless buildings jostling in an exasperating profusion of lanes and bylanes, raucous chaotic neighbourhoods encroaching upon every available plot that the walled city of Ahmedabad was even in those days, and the simple dwellings of a hardy agricultural community living in the midst of a vast pulsating countryside with two small rivers that Kalavud was. While the early environment instilled in the sensitive child an affinity for Nature, his instinctive love of Beauty was rooted in his

Vaishnava sanskaras. Known as Girnara brahmins, the community was considered best qualified to act as priests in the rich havelis (temples) of the Pushti Sampradaya (cult) of Srimad Vallabhacharya. In addition to the gorgeous elaborate rituals—no Deity is worshipped as often every day—these priests maintain and make hundreds of costly costumes and ornaments for the Lord, decorate His swings, furniture, halls, etc. for the numerous periodical festivals. In no other religion does colour and beauty play such a dominant role. Keshavlal inculcated in his children gentleness, courteousness and the love of beauty characteristic of a true Vaishnava.<sup>13</sup> There was too his own example: a diligent and conscientious confectioner whose shop, the ‘Jamnagri Mithai’ on Richie Road, under the Fernandes bridge, became so famous that the family was popularly known as the Jamnagris.

It was the innate artist in Krishnalal who prompted him to join the Sarangpur Sarvajanic Vyayam Mandir (*akhada*) started by Ambubhai in 1919: How can a body be beautiful without also being whole and healthy? Before Ambubhai took over, the place was managed by a wrestler in a manner that put off rather than attracted the well-bred. Ambubhai transformed it with his revolutionary principles, his gentle loving behaviour and his stern discipline. The aim was to create a disciplined, well-knit community of vigorous young men fully conversant with history, politics, literature, religion, art, philosophy, commerce, science,—a brotherhood well-qualified to transform society. To this end it improvised tests and created activities that instilled strength, courage, nobility, all-round knowledge, physical and psychological endurance, enabling one to break free from all superstitions and undemocratic conventions. During several decades this brotherhood played a prominent role in the resurgence of Gujarat.

In 1920, when Ambubhai saw Krishnalal’s illustrations in his *akhada*’s hand-produced periodical, he recognised the latent artist and took the boy to the artist Ravishankar Rawal for a thorough grounding. Rawal had been introduced to Ambubhai by Dr. Hariprasad V. Desai with whom Ambubhai had spent hours studying the *Arya*. Hariprasad was himself a keen student of Indian Sculpture and Architecture.<sup>14</sup>

“Like a hungry man,” Krishnalal wrote in 1975, “I swallowed everything that came my way. Then, to add to what he gave me in four years, Ravibhai decided to send me to Abanindranath in Calcutta.” But just around that time, the mystic Bengali artist, Promode Kumar Chatterji, was appointed by the Gaekwad to teach at Baroda’s Kalabhavan to preserve and promote the ancient traditions of Indian art. To Chatterji’s surprise, just one student chose to enrol in his class. He soon found that there was a widespread prejudice in Bombay Presidency against the new Bengali styles. Hurt and confused, he wrote to Rawal who sent him two of his own students: Somalal Shah, then unhappy with his course at the J. J. School in Bombay, and Krishnalal, for whom he obtained the Sir Chunilal Scholarship. Chatterji taught his three students new techniques of coloration and purity of line, encouraging them to choose subjects from their own milieu. He also impressed them by his own vivid depictions of the

ethereal beauty of the occult worlds — “a study of his paintings widened my vision,” says Krishnalal. But after 18 months Chatterji suddenly resigned.

Among Krishnalal’s early paintings, “Bheelkumar”, “Evening at the Well”, “Wild Flowers”, and “Flames of Wrath” were published in Rawal’s art magazine, *Kumar*. According to Jayanti Parekh (*Silpi*, 1948), “Rawal, who had taken his diploma at the J. J. School of Art in Bombay, taught Bhatt two things: to study from Nature and to love and seek inspiration from his native Gujarat, its life and history. Bhatt’s early works are mostly about Gujarati life with its distinct landscapes. Promode Kumar, on the other hand, encouraged Bhatt to free his imagination and gave him self-confidence to express himself.”

With Chatterji gone, Krishnalal was forced to return home and accept the traditional grooves: marriage in 1927 and teaching. At first he taught at Sharada Mandir and C. N. Vidyalaya (two Gandhian schools). And as a freedom fighter, he was inevitably drawn into Gandhi’s programmes—he was one of Gandhi’s couriers in the Dandi March and was awarded, with Kanu Desai, a classmate under Rawal, the task of decorating the Congress pavilions at its Karachi Session.

“On the one hand, family responsibilities prevented my joining another art school,” Krishnalal wrote in *Kumar* (Dec. 1948), “on the other, I was dissatisfied with what I had—the incompleteness hurt. Occasional flashes, as if behind an opaque curtain, provided vague hints but obstacles loomed up; I wished to open out but felt immured. Without light and sustenance the inner artist was being choked.” In Parekh’s words, “The art schools of our country were, till recently, run by English painters of no distinction; and for over one hundred years, this foreign influence devoid of imagination hid our souls and filled the country with works of crude realism.”

It was at this time that Krishnalal turned to his Vaishnava roots for inspiration, partly at least because he had heard that one of his uncles had gained spiritual experiences through dedicated priesthood. After all, what is the greatest source of light and sustenance to a sincere artist if not the supraphysical world of Beauty, the world of Gods and Goddesses? The ecstatic forms of Vaishnavism, says Sri Aurobindo, were the most complete manifestation of the inward turn given by the classical age to even the most exterior activities of life. For “the Indian mind is always compelled by its master impulse to reduce all its experience of life to the corresponding spiritual term and factor and the result was a transfiguring of even these most external things into a basis for new spiritual experience. The emotional, the sensuous, even the sensual motions of the being, before they could draw the soul farther outward, were taken and transmuted into a psychical form and, so changed, they became the elements of a mystic capture of the Divine through the heart and the senses and a religion of the joy of God’s love, delight and beauty.”<sup>15</sup>

In a thin notebook Krishnalal copied out six cantos from the *Chitra Khanda* (Chapter on Art) of the *Shri Vishnu Dharmottara Purana*: The first two, in which Rishi Markandeya tells king Vajra that the way to true happiness is to worship only

those images of gods and goddesses which have the prescribed *lakshanas*, characteristics; adding that to know them fully one must also be well acquainted with Nriya Shastra, *Aatodyam* (a musical instrument) and the Bhagwad Gita which describes the nature and form of the Lord. And cantos 35 to 38, where the Rishi describes how various forms were created, and the proportions and measurements of the parts of their bodies.\*

“The Gods already exist,” Sri Aurobindo explained to a Vaishnava disciple, “they are not created by man, even though he does seem to conceive them in his own image;—fundamentally, he formulates as best he can what truth about them he receives from the cosmic Reality. An artist or a bhakta may have a vision of the Gods and it may get stabilised and generalised in the consciousness of the race and in that sense it may be true that man gives their forms to the Gods; but he does not invent these forms, he records what he sees; the forms that he gives are given to him. In the ‘conventional’ form of Krishna men have embodied what they could see of his eternal beauty and what they have seen may be true as well as beautiful, it conveys something of the form, but it is fairly certain that if there is an eternal form of that eternal beauty, it is a thousand times more beautiful than what man had as yet been able to see of it.”<sup>16</sup>

\*

Inevitably at this point, the worshipper of Divine Beauty who is a disciple of Sri Aurobindo and Mother will turn to their Sadhana in the context of the transformation of the body.

A decade before he wrote the words just quoted above, Sri Aurobindo had the Vision of Sri Krishna, the realisation of “the cosmic consciousness and of the Divine as all beings and all that is” and was on his way to the realisations of “the supreme Reality with the static and dynamic Brahman as its two aspects and that of the higher planes of consciousness leading to the Supermind...”<sup>17</sup> And after coming to Pondicherry, he began the Sadhana of the Sapta Chatusthaya—a programme of seven parts, each of which consisted of four siddhis—of which he kept a clinical (i.e., systematic and technical, not merely scrupulous) record between 1912 and 1920. One of the seven, the Sharira Chatusthaya, consisted of the siddhis of Arogya, Utthapana, Saundarya, and Ananda. He defined Saundarya as “the state of being beautiful. There are also three stages here: (1) When there is brightness in the body combined with sweetness of voice and charm of expression etc. (2) Continual youth. (3) When the features and figure can be changed to a form of perfect beauty.”<sup>18</sup>

“...I know by daily experience that they [siddhis] exist,” he wrote in 1911. “Our great rishis of old... recognised them as a part, though not the most important part of Yogic accomplishment, and used them with an abundant and unhesitating vigour.

\* See *Additional Notes* at the end of this article.

They are recognised in our sacred books, formally included in Yoga by so devotional a Purana as the Bhagawat, noted and some of their processes carefully tabled by Patanjali.”<sup>19</sup>

Around 1915: “What is the value of the Formless unless it has stooped to Form? And on the other hand what truth or value has any form except to represent as in a mask the Indefinable and Invisible?”<sup>20</sup>

Circa 1917-18: “All depends upon consciousness. For all world-existence is a form created by consciousness, upheld by consciousness, determined by consciousness. All that is is a consciousness veiled or unveiled, manifesting or concealing its own substance. All is energy of consciousness masked by movement of mind and life and matter and taking forms which are merely motions of the energy stabilised to appearance, yet always in movement; for the consciousness that constitutes these forms is always in dynamic movement; the visible rhythm and self-result of this self-repeating or self-continuing vibration and never resting motion and dynamis is what we call form. Disperse the energy that constitutes it and the form dissolves. Withdraw the consciousness that expresses itself in the energy and the energy can keep up no longer its sustaining rhythm; therefore it disperses, therefore the form dissolves. If we could so intensify the power of the consciousness put out in us that we could keep the energy always repeating, continuing, enlarging, progressing in its rhythm, then, the form might change but need not dissolve and even physically we should be immortal.”<sup>21</sup>

And in 1949-50: “The supramental consciousness is not a fixed quantity but a power which passes to higher and higher levels of possibility until it reaches supreme consummations of spiritual existence fulfilling supermind as supermind fulfils the ranges of spiritual consciousness that are pushing towards it from the human or mental level. In this progression the body also may reach a more perfect form and a higher range of its expressive powers, become a more and more perfect vessel of divinity.[...] This destiny of the body has rarely in the past been envisaged or else not for the body here upon earth; such forms would rather be imagined or visioned as the privilege of celestial beings and not possible as the physical residence of a soul still bound to terrestrial nature. The Vaishnavas have spoken of a spiritualised conscious body, *cinmaya deha*; there has been the conception of a radiant or luminous body, which might be the Vedic *jyotirmaya deha*. A light has been seen by some radiating from the bodies of highly developed spiritual persons, even extending to the emission of an enveloping aura and there has been recorded an initial phenomenon of this kind in the life of so great a spiritual personality as Ramakrishna.”<sup>22</sup>

This brings us to the Saundarya aspect of the change in Sri Aurobindo brought about by his practice of Sapt Chatusthaya. “In 1918,” writes Ambubhai, “the colour of his body was like that of an ordinary Bengali—rather dark—though there was lustre on the face and his gaze was penetrating. On going upstairs to see him [*in March 1921*] I found his cheeks were apple pink and the whole body glowed with a

soft creamy white light.”<sup>23</sup> And Chidanand, who saw Sri Aurobindo around 1924: “Spiritual fire shone through his eyes. I remembered the epithet in the Mahabharata describing the eyes of the Tapaswin as *Durnirikshya*, difficult to behold. It was not always so. Usually there was a soft and gentle light like that of the stars. The eyes were bright and clear and deep... very often twinkling with humour. Then there was his face, gentle, tranquil and luminous.... His voice was soft and low but distinct and musical.”<sup>24</sup>

The Mother too had participated in that Yoga. Notes Ambubhai, who saw her for the first time in 1921: “Such unearthly beauty I had never seen,—she appeared to be about twenty years of age whereas she was more than forty.”<sup>25</sup> In her talk of 25 August 1954, Mother would reveal: “...when I began with Sri Aurobindo to descend for the yoga..., when we brought down our yoga from the mind into the vital... I was forty at that time... and after a month’s yoga I looked exactly eighteen. And someone who had seen me before, who had lived with me in Japan and came here, found it difficult to recognise me. He asked me, ‘But really, is it you?’”<sup>26</sup>

(To be continued)

S. V. BHATT

### Notes and References

1. “...of the twenty centuries it seems the most full of incalculable possibilities and to open the widest doors on destiny,” Sri Aurobindo noted around 1900. (*Sri Aurobindo: Archives and Research*, April 1983, p. 50)
2. Peter Heehs, *Sri Aurobindo—A Brief Biography*, 1989, p. 36.
3. *Letters on Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library (SABCL), Vol. 22, p. 424.
4. Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad inaugurated the College in 1887 and the Kalabhavan in 1890; in 1906 he introduced free compulsory primary education all over his State.
5. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Introduction.
6. *Sri Aurobindo: Archives & Research*, April 1983, p. 50.
7. In my opinion the Mandal was one of the hundreds of patriotic groups that were, by the mid-twenties, infiltrated or possessed by an overpowering Vital Force whose motives and methods were not consonant with those Sri Aurobindo had sought to implant in the freedom movement.
8. Translated from his article in *Shri Ambubhai Purani Shashtipurti: Abhinandangranth*, 1955, p. 12.
9. Though on a smaller scale than his Guru, Ambubhai too faced severe criticism for leaving the freedom struggle. In a public ceremony, recalls Krishnalal’s youngest brother Vasudev, placing a photo of Ambubhai on the dais, Hariprasad declared, “Only photos of the dead are unveiled like this. Ambubhai has rejected our world—he is dead.” Even years later, when Chhotubhai came to Pondicherry, he refused to enter the Ashram premises as he firmly believed that his guru was Sri Aurobindo the revolutionary-politician, not the one who himself deserted the country when it needed him most and pulled away such effective workers as Ambubhai.
10. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Introduction.
11. As the Ashram grew into a more *public* institution, it has grown too into a less overt *gurugriha*.
12. Says Pujalal, who joined Ambubhai in 1917-18, “Day by day we began to come close to each other....

Consequently, my being was vitalised by his vitality, his zest animated me, his upward-moving soul inspired mine. The lack of warmth that confused and tortured me, disconnected as I was from my parents' loving atmosphere, was provided by his heart's affection and he baptized my aspiring inner being with the blessings of the highest ideals." (...*Abhinandanganth*, pp. 40-41)

13. Keshavlal's artistic refinement influenced all his children: Krishnalal, the subject of this article, made his art his sadhana; Sridam made a name for himself as an innovative photographer; Harivadan, a graduate of Shantiniketan, showed great promise as a sculptor but succumbed while young to an accident; Vasudev, an ideal graduate of the Purani Mandal, distinguished himself in the freedom movement and social service and finally settled in Pondicherry; his two daughters were well-known for their workmanship in embroidery.

14. Hariprasad was often called to speak in seminars on these subjects. Later, he and Rawal toured all over India studying the ancient sculptures and architecture in temples and published a monograph in 1940.

15. *The Renaissance in India*, Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo (CWSA), Vol. 20, p. 376.

16. *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 424.

17. *Sri Aurobindo on Himself*, SABCL, Vol. 26, p. 64.

18. *Record of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 11, p. 1477.

19. *Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA, Vol. 12, pp. 14-15.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 300-01.

22. *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 539-40.

23. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, p. 20.

24. V. Chidanand, "Evenings with Sri Aurobindo", *Mother India*, September 1972, p. 589.

25. A.B.Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, pp. 296-97.

26. *Questions and Answers*, Collected Works of the Mother (CWM), Vol. 6, p. 303; Mother is talking of James Cousins who visited Pondicherry in 1920. (Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, p. 176)

## ADDITIONAL NOTES:

[We take this opportunity to dwell a little longer on the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa.

First, a translation by Sampadananda Mishra of a portion of the Purāṇa that Krishnalal had copied in his notebook.]

### I. Translation of a portion of the text copied by Krishnalal in his notebook

Vajra spoke:

1. What ought man to do? Doing what does he attain to happiness? How does he get into a greater happiness both here in this world, and in the world after?

Mārkaṇḍeya spoke:

2. The man who desires to have happiness in both the worlds should worship the gods with the knowledge of the inner and the outer grounds of sacrifice.
3. The worship of the gods in the sacrifice is known as the inner ground. Fasting



and vows are known as the outer ground. By successful completion of the sacrifice the man desiring to obtain the happy worlds can attain these.

4. Houses of the gods should be made, especially, in this age of *Kali*.
5. In the other three ages (*Satya*, *Tretā* and *Dvāpara*) men see the gods. But when they enter into the age of *Kali* then, since they are not able to see the gods, in this age, adoration of the gods means idol worship.
6. Having seen the gods in the other three ages, men worship the image of the gods in *Kali* age as per the prescription of the *śāstras*.
7. The idols are made as per the instructions of the *Citrasūtra*. The wise should worship such beautiful idols and get absorbed in them.
8. The man who worships the gods in their own forms with all their attributes gets all his desires fulfilled. He becomes eternally happy in this world and in the world after. There should be no doubt about it.
9. The man who worships the idols devoid of all qualities finds himself in many difficulties. Therefore, do not worship such idols.
10. It is propitious to build palaces as well as idols of gods. Worshipping gods is meritorious, and further, prostrating before idols is even more beneficial.
11. Therefore, the wise man should always worship, with much care, the idols made perfectly with all attributes, not the imperfect idols.
12. O King, the joy of the Yadu dynasty! The gods fulfill any object of human pursuit, any one of the four objects or aims of existence: *kāma*, the gratification of desire; *artha*, acquirement of wealth; *dharma*, discharge of duty; *mokṣa*, the final emancipation.
13. The gods fulfill all the desires of the human beings, and give all the happiness of heaven. Therefore, with all care men should worship the gods.
14. All becomes beautiful and easy for the men who worship the gods. The worshippers of the gods become prosperous and enjoy the state of eternal happiness here in this world.

*Translated by Sampadananda Mishra*

*[Then, a few paragraphs (pp. viii-x) from Kapila Vatsyayan's "Foreword" to the book The Citrasūtra of The Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa, published by Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi, 2001.]*

## II. A Few Introductory Words

While this is not the occasion to delve more fully into the contribution of the Puranas as also the *Upapurāṇas* in facilitating the flow of a tradition through an alternate mode of expression, it is well to remember that no Purana is a single isolated entity,

unrelated to the other Puranas or to other texts on the arts. There is a continuing dialogue within their own category and each component also has interaction with the discourse in the specific disciplines. A vertical transmission and a horizontal movement can be discerned.

The *Viṣṇudharmottara-purāṇa* occupies a predominant position amongst the *Upapurāṇas* and is also related to the discourse within the Puranas. Moreover, it is central to the discourse on the arts, both preceding and succeeding it. The voluminous text can be viewed only within the framework of the Puranas or it can be placed through Khanda III in the mainstream of the discourse on the arts from the *Nāṭyaśāstra* to the medieval texts (...). Its contents can be profitably compared with those of both its predecessors as also successors such as *Mayamatam*, *Mānasollāsa*, *Śilparatnakośa*, *Śilpaprakāśa* and *Aparājitapṛcchā*.

The *Citrasūtra* (Khaṇḍa III Chapter 35-43) constitute an important cluster in the larger concerns of the *Viṣṇudharmottara-purāṇa* on both the nature of art, artistic expression and communication as also its insistence on establishing a meaningful interdependence and inter-relationship between and amongst the arts. (...) the Puranic methodology is in the narrative mode. An oft quoted story about a dialogue between Vajra and Mārkaṇḍeya embodies the essence of the theoretical position of the composer of the *Viṣṇudharmottara-Purāṇa*. (...) it would be relevant to quote it in full as a constant reminder:

“King Vajra requests the sage to accept him as his disciple and teach him the art of icon-making, so that he may worship the deities in their proper forms. The sage replies that one cannot understand the principles of image-making without a knowledge of painting. The King wishes for instruction in this art and is told that, unless he is accomplished as a dancer, he cannot grasp even the rudiments of painting. The King requests that he be taught dancing, whereupon the sage replies that, without a keen sense of rhythm or a knowledge of instrumental music, proficiency in dance is impossible. Once again the King requests that he be taught these subjects; to which the sage replies that a mastery of vocal music is necessary before one can be proficient in instrumental music; and so finally the sage takes the King through all these stages before he is taught the art of iconography.” (*Viṣṇudharmottara-purāṇa*, III.2.1.)

Equally important is the other statement:

*yathā nṛtte tathā citre trailokyānukritissmṛtā* (As in dance so in painting, there is to be a close observation and reproduction of the world around us in as charming a style as possible.) (*Viṣṇudharmottara-purāṇa*, III.35.5)

In the first quote, the method is narrative, in the second, aphoristic and deductive. The chapters relating to the arts have therefore to be seen together. Each is integral to the other. (...)

Kapila Vatsyayan

[Next, a portion of the “Introduction” by Parul Dave Mukherji in the same book, pp. xxi-xxii.]

### III. Introductory Observations

In comparison to other *Śilpa* texts such as the *Citralakṣaṇa* of Nagnajit, the *Samarāṅgaṇasūtradhāra*, or the *Aparājitapṛchha*, the *Citrasūtra* offers a more comprehensive coverage on art. Comprising of the *adhyāyas* from 35 to 43 of the III *khaṇḍa* of the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*, the *Citrasūtra* encompasses a wide spectrum of topics related with art practice. The 35<sup>th</sup> *adhyāya* opens with a creation myth which attributes the origin of painting to the birth of *Urvasī*. The 36<sup>th</sup> *adhyāya* is concerned with the five male stereotypes exemplifying the canons of iconometry. The next is *adhyāya* 37 which classifies five types of eyes. The following *adhyāya* 38 deals exclusively with the norms of idol-making accompanied by dire warnings in case of any transgression of the prescribed measurements.

The *adhyāya* 39 marks a shift from the strictly religious/ritualistic context to the rules of foreshortening (*kṣayavṛddhi*), which pertains to the problem of representing three-dimensional figures on a two-dimensional surface, from changing points of view as in a painting or a sculpture in relief.

Devoted mainly to the technical aspects of painting, the 40<sup>th</sup> *adhyāya* pays attention to the methods of ground preparation and mixing of colours. *Adhyāya* 41 is central to the *Citrasūtra*. It is here that the paintings are classified into four types: the *Satya*, *Deśika*, *Nāgara* and the last one *Miśra* being a combination of the first three. Most elaborate and important for iconography is the penultimate *adhyāya* which concerns the typology of various figures such as kings, the ministers, the wrestlers and so forth, according to their relative placing in the social hierarchy. It also incorporates a section on the conventions for delineating not only the different times of the day and night but also the four seasons. As it concludes, the *Citrasūtra* brings within its focus the *citra rasas* or the sentiments to be portrayed in art.

Parul Dave Mukherji

[And finally, certain portions of the *Citrasūtra*, translated by Parul Dave Mukherji from the same book.]

### IV. Selection

Adhyāya 35

*Mārkaṇḍeya* spoke:

1-3b. O Sinless One, I shall henceforth teach you the treatise on painting. O Prince,

sage *Nārāyaṇa* [who was engaged in penance] for the welfare of the worlds, created *Urvasī* in form of a painting. The great sage after taking the juice of the mango tree, painted on the ground [a picture of] a beautiful woman to deceive the wives of the gods who had approached him.

3cd. Then she, the best of the *Apsarās*, endowed with beauty came into being as a painting.

4-5b. On seeing her, all the wives of the gods were put to shame and they fled. Then the great sage having painted [this] picture with [all] the marks of excellence made the imperishable *Viśvakarman* learn it.

5cd. As in dance, so in painting, the imitation of the three worlds is prescribed.

6-7. Those eye [and eyebrow] expressions, moods, primary and secondary limbs and hand (gestures) mentioned earlier in the (section on) dance, O Best of Kings, are the very ones to be known in painting (for) painting is considered to be parallel to dance.

Now listen [to me for] I shall teach you [the rules of] proportion, which were not mentioned in [my treatment of] dance.

8. Know that there are five [types of] men to be known: *Haṃsa*, *Bhadra*, *Mālavya*, *Rucaka* and *Śaśaka*. I shall tell you the distinguishing features of [each of] them.

9-10. Know that they all are equal in height and width (individually) according to the (given) proportion. O King, the proportion (i.e. height) of the *Haṃsa* should be 108 *aṅgulas* according to its 108<sup>th</sup> part determined by itself. A *Bhadra* is 106 *aṅgulas* in height and *Mālavya* should be 104 *aṅgulas*.

11. The height of a *Rucaka* man is 100 *aṅgulas*, and of a *Śaśaka* man 92. A *tāla* ought to equal 12 *aṅgulas* in extension.

12-13b. The height of the foot up to the ankle is said to be four *aṅgulas* (*bhāga*); the shank (from the ankle to the knee) measures 2 *tālas*; the knees measure a *pāda* (i.e. a quarter of a *tāla*); the thighs measure the same as the shanks; the distance between penis and navel is 1 *tāla*.

13cd. The distance between the navel and the heart, and that between the heart and the neck is the same. (i.e. 1 *tāla*).

14. The neck measures 1/3 of a *tāla* and the face 1 *tāla*. The head above the forehead (i.e. the crown) is said to be 1/6 of a *tāla*.

15. ...

O King, it is taught that the palm is a *tāla*, the hands (from wrist to the elbow), 17 *aṅgulas*.

16. The forearms are said to be of the same measurement (17 *aṅgulas*). One half of the chest measures 8 [*aṅgulas*]. O King, this proportion is prescribed for the *Haṃsa* male in terms of the width.

17. One may calculate the proportion of the remaining [types], based upon this very model. [For] all the lords of men are equal in height (*āyāma*) and breadth (*pariṇāha*).

18. O Best of Kings, I have taught in general terms proportion of the *Haṃsa* variety of king. Listen now, O Lion amongst Kings, as I teach you in outline the proportions of the minor limbs.

### Adhyāya 36

*Mārkaṇḍeya* spoke:

- I.1. Now begins the section on the secondary members of the body. The head measures 32 *aṅgulas* in circumference.
- I.2. The forehead is 4 *aṅgulas* in height and 8 in width; the temples measure 4 *aṅgulas* [in breadth] and 2 in height.
- I.3. The cheeks measure 5 *aṅgulas*. The jaws are 4 *aṅgulas* (in width) and 2 *aṅgulas* in height. The ears are 2 *aṅgulas* [in breadth] and 4 in height.
- I.4. The centre of the ear measures 1 *aṅgula* and its hole, half an *aṅgula*. Regarding the earlobe, there is no rule. The nose is 4 *aṅgulas* [in length].
- I.5-6. At the tip it is 2 *aṅgulas* in height and breadth. The wings of the nostrils are half an *aṅgula* [in thickness] and four times as much (i.e. 2 *aṅgulas*) in length.
  2. A *Haṃsa* man has honey coloured eyes, is as fair as the moon, has arms which resemble the king of snakes, a swan-like gait, a slender waist, is strong and handsome.
  3. A *Bhadra* man has cheeks covered with hair, a gait like that of an elephant, is highly intelligent, has rounded and well-developed arms and who resemble[s] a lotus (in complexion).
  4. A *Mālavya* man is dark as a green bean (?), slender waisted, has a symmetrical body, with arms reaching down to his knees [and] has broad shoulders. [His] nose resembles that of an elephant[’s nostrils] and has large jaws.
  5. A *Rucaka* man has reddish brown complexion, conch like throat, is highly intelligent, courageous, laborious and strong.
  6. A *Śaśaka* man is said to have a reddish brown (a dark blue or black?) complexion, slightly protruding teeth, full cheeks, is clever and has large eyelids.

### Adhyāya 37

*Mārkaṇḍeya* spoke:

1. O Best of Men, know that just as men are understood to be of 5 types according to the measurement of the major and minor limbs, so are women.

## Adhyāya 38

*Mārkaṇḍeya* spoke:

- 1-2b. O King, it is beneficial to the people if the eyes of the gods are made similar to a blue lotus petal, with reddish corners, black pupils, benevolent, possessing long eyelashes, pleasing to the mind and having delicate eyelids.
- 2cd. [The eyes should be] level [looking straight ahead], with their whites of the colour of cow's milk and with long-ended eyelashes.
3. [The eyes that are] benevolent, with reddish corners, pleasing to the mind, beautiful to look at, with black pupils, and large, grant wealth and happiness.
4. The standard face (*avikāri mukham*) should be symmetrical (*caturasram*), fully complete (*susampūrṇam*), benevolent, possessing auspicious characteristics, neither triangular (*atrikoṇam*) nor crooked (*avakram*).
5. In the case of gods, faces which are long, circular, crooked, triangular etc. should be avoided by one who desires the well-being of the people.
6. O Perpetuator of the *Yadu* race, the gods should be made according to the *Haṁsa* measurements. Their [only] hair should be on the eyelashes and eyebrows.
7. Therefore, the gods are hairless on all other parts of their bodies. They should be portrayed as [though they were] 16-year olds.
- 8a. [They should] always be portrayed with benevolent faces and with a smile in the eyes.
- 8b-9a. They should be decorated with crowns, ear rings, necklaces, armlets and bracelets. They should be portrayed wearing beautiful garlands and an elaborate girdle, foot ornaments, sacred thread and ear ornaments.
- 22c-23. Gods, even though invoked by the best of *brāhmins*, do not enter an idol which lacks proportion and is bereft of the [auspicious] characteristics....
26. O King, the gods should always be made magnificent and resemble lion, bull, serpent and swan in gait.
27. A painting endowed with auspicious characteristics increases the glory of the country, the patron [*yajamāna*] and the king. Therefore the [image] should be made carefully, with all the auspicious marks, by diligent men according to the rules.

## Adhyāya 39

*Mārkaṇḍeya* spoke:

1. Figures have nine postures whose transformations are beautiful (*śubhākāra-vikāraṇi*) in shape and possess various colours. Listen to them one after another.

2. The first is *Rjvāgata* (Frontal), followed by *Ardharaju* (Afrontal), *Sācīkṛta*, (Averted) and *Adhyardhalocana* (One-and-a-half-eyed).
3. *Pārsvāgata* (Profile) comes next, followed by *Parovṛtta* (Turned away), *Prṣṭhāgata* (Backview), *Purovṛtta* (Turned towards the front or Reverted) and *Samānata* (completely Bent).
4. O King, these nine postures have innumerable variations. Listen to me about each of the characteristics as I speak....
51. People in this world, as a rule, lack [fixed] proportion because of being conditioned by time. Keeping this in mind, the proportion is determined by the wise [artist] using his own discretion, in conjunction with the [laws] of foreshortening.

### Adhyāya 41

*Mārkaṇḍeya* spoke:

1. Painting is said to be of four types: *Satya* (“Naturalistic”), *Daiśika* (Provincial/local), *Nāgara* (Urban/Professional) and *Miśra* (Mixed). I shall speak about its (their) characteristic(s).
- 2ab. Whichever painting that bears a similarity with the world [that painting] is called *Satya* (“Naturalistic”).
- 2cd-3. That [painting] which has elongated figures, is large in size (*supramāṇam*) effortless, [ly painted] (*sukumāram*), profusely decorated (*subhūṣaṇam*), symmetrical [in composition] (*caturāśram*) fully complete (*susampūrṇam*), in which the figures are neither difficult to accomplish nor strong in shape (*na durghaṭolvaṇākṛtīm*) and in which the plumb line is used for making symmetrical [i.e. frontal] postures (*samānasthāna*) is called *Daiśika* (Provincial/local).
4. [That painting] in which all the figures are firmly developed, (*drḍho-pacitasarvāṅgam*) [so as to appear three dimensional], in which calculation [for foreshortening] is derived from a circle (*vārtulānayanolvaṇam*) and very little decoration in form of garlands (*svalpamālyānbhūṣaṇam*) is used, such a painting is called *Nāgara*.
5. O Best of Men, a *Miśra* [painting], in short, is known to be mixed [i.e. a combination of the three types as listed above]. The three types of line-rendering (*vartanā*) are said to be: *Patrajā* (leaf/paper born), *Acchaidikā* (unbroken) and *Bindujā* (dot-born).
- 6ab. The *patra* [type] of line-rendering is drawn by lines which are partly done [drawn] and partly undone [not drawn] (*kṛtākṛtābhi rekhābhiḥ*).
- 6cd. *Acchaidikā* (unbroken/continuous) type is said to be extremely fine (*atīva sūkṣmā*).
- 7ab. A *Bindu* (dot) type employs dotting [lit. sprinkling] (*ukṣāvāṣṭambhanā*).

- 7c-8. The demerits of a painting are as follows: Lines that are either [too] weak [thin] or [too] thick (*darbalyamsthūlarekhatvam*), lack of variety (*avibhaktatvam*), oversized eyes, lips and cheeks (*brhadgaṇḍoṣṭhanetratvam*), inconsistency (*samviruddhatvam*) and deviation from [the rules of] proportion (*mānavikāratā*).
9. Merits in a painting are said to be:  
[The use of] perpendiculars for postures and proportion (*sthānapramāna-bhūlamba*), loveliness (*madhuratvam*), variety (*vibhaktatā*), verisimilitude (*sādrśya*), and foreshortening (*kṣayavṛdhi*).
10. The ornaments of painting are, O Best of Men, to be understood as the lines, line-rendering, decoration and colour.
11. The master (*ācārya*) praises the lines, critics (*vicakṣaṇa*), the shading, women, the ornamentation and common people, the richness of colour.
12. O Best of Men, keeping this in mind, effort should be made in such a way that there comes about captivation of the minds of everyone.
13. The (following) are the reasons for an unsuccessful painting: A bad manner of sitting, of crouching, being thirsty, and state of being distracted [lit. thinking about something other than painting] (*anyacittatā*).
14. The site of painting should be spotlessly plastered (*śubhraliptam*), spacious, free of insects, bright, very pleasant and secluded (?).
15. A painting, O learned One, made with lines that are smooth, clear, having beautiful colour [representing] dress appropriate to that particular country, without lacking in the beauties of proportion is indeed an extraordinary one (*atīva citram*).

#### Adhyāya 42

*Mārkaṇḍeya* spoke:

49. Regarding the visible things, a very close resemblance ought to be made without any exception [because] in a painting, the accomplishing of verisimilitude is said to be vital.
50. O Lord of men, men in every land should be painted just as they are, after understanding [their] appearance, the way they dress and [their] colour.

#### Adhyāya 43

*Mārkaṇḍeya* spoke:

1. There are said to be nine kinds of sentiments of painting (*citrarasāḥ*)—Erotic (*Śṛṅgāra*), Comic (*Hāsyā*), Tragic (*Karuṇā*), Heroic (*Vīra*), Wrathful (*Raudra*),



Terrible (*Bhayānaka*), Disgusting (*Bībhatsa*), Marvellous (*Adbhuta*) and Tranquil (*Śānta*).

2. In the Erotic sentiment, the figures should be depicted clad in sophisticated dress and ornaments (*vidagdhaveṣābhūṣaṇam*) and in which their amorous beauty (*kāntilāvanyam*) is expressed by the exquisite beauty of the lines.
3. In the [representation of the] Comic sentiment, the portrayal of the hunch-backed, dwarfs, that which looks somewhat distorted and [gestures such as] the unnecessary clenching of the fists is said to bring about laughter.
4. In case of the Tragic sentiment, one should paint situations that evoke sympathy such as begging, separation from the beloved, renunciation, ailment, calamity etc.
5. To express the Wrathful sentiment in a painting, one should depict harshness, agitation, anger, hostility, and the destruction of property and foodgrains. It should be furnished with glinting weapons and armours (*dīptaśastrāvarāṇavat*).
6. In [a painting expressing] Heroic sentiment, there should be [a display of] nobleness in form of oath [taking], pride, in the matters of heroism etc; the hero should [be depicted] with a frown and an arrogant expression.
7. In a painting which expresses the Terrible sentiment, the subject of portrayal should be vile, frightful [lit. difficult] to look at, fading away in decay [lit. shrivelled up?] and that which [looks] contemptible and murderous.
8. That painting which disturbs the mind (*cittavikṣeptṛ*) due to its terrifying [subject matter such as the] funeral grounds (*śmaśāna*) and [the] acts of reprehensible violence gives rise to the sentiment of Disgust.
9. The [lit. abode of] Marvellous sentiment is conveyed by depicting someone showing horripilation (*āvīrbhūtaromāñcam*), having a wide eyed look (*viṣṭṛākṣī*) an expectant face (*unmukhāṇanam*), and [beads of] perspiration (*svedena*).
10. The representation of the Tranquil sentiment consists mainly of ascetics in meditative postures with a band [clasping their legs] and of any [other] subject that expresses calmness.
- 17b-18. The following are said to be the [eight] demerits of a painting:  
Lines that are either [too] weak or [too] thick, lack of details (*avibhaktatvam*) oversized cheeks, lips and eyes, crooked lines and the (undue) merging of colours (*varṇānām saṁkaraḥ*).
19. The [following] are said to be the eight merits of a painting: postures, proportions, [the use of the] plumbline, charm, details, verisimilitude and the loss and gain [i.e. foreshortening].
20. A painting that lacks postures, sentiments, has [figures with] vacant stare [or without eyes], is dirty and bereft of life [likeness] is considered to be unpraiseworthy.
- 23cd. A wise painter only depicts that which is recognisable [or trustworthy] (*pratītam*) and never should he paint that which is unconvincing (*apratītam*).

24. O King of men, a painting is best painted by he who is well-versed with the treatises. [Such a painting] brings about prosperity and wards off misfortune.
25. [Such a painting] dispels one's anxiety and obstructs misfortune which has befallen. It spreads purity (*śuddhim*) and brings about incomparable joy.
36. O King, what you have been told [so far] is only a summary, for it is not possible to relate [the rules] in detail even in many hundred years.
37. O King of Earth, all that has been left untold should be understood from [the section on] Dance. O King of men, that which has been left untold in Dance should be improvised from Painting.
38. Painting is the most excellent of all arts and grants *dharma artha*, and *kāma*. The house which has a painting is considered auspicious.
39. Just as *Sumeru* is the most excellent mountain, *Garuḍa* the chief amongst birds, king best of all men, painting is the best of all the arts.

*[Our thanks to the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), New Delhi, for their kind permission to reproduce portions from their book, The Citrasūtra of the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa, critically edited and translated by Parul Dave Mukherji, and published by IGNCA in association with Motilal Banarsidass, Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 2001.]*

### **Art and Yoga**

*The discipline of Art has at its centre the same principle as the discipline of Yoga. In both the aim is to become more and more conscious; in both you have to learn to see and feel something that is beyond the ordinary vision and feeling, to go within and bring out from there deeper things. Painters have to follow a discipline for the growth of the consciousness of their eyes, which in itself is almost a Yoga. If they are true artists and try to see beyond and use their art for the expression of the inner world, they grow in consciousness by this concentration, which is not other than the consciousness given by Yoga. Why then should not Yogic consciousness be a help to artistic creation? I have known some who had very little training and skill and yet through Yoga acquired a fine capacity in writing and painting.*

*The Mother*

*(Questions and Answers, CWM, Vol. 3, p. 105)*

## MOMENTS, ETERNAL

(Continued from the issue of June 2005)

### Sports and the Beginning of the Playground

PHYSICAL education started with a group of small boys. During the first years of the Ashram there was no organisation for any sports or games here. The younger boys, Mona, Manoj, Harit, Kittu, Gama, Sumantra and several others would wander and play all around. Nirmal-da and Shanti-bhai had made a group with these boys and they used to make some arrangements for them to play. Nirmal-da and Shanti-bhai were these younger children's captains.

The real physical education that you see now, started when Pranab came here in 1945. Slowly all the groups got organised and in 1949 J.S.A.S.A was formed. That same year the first issue of the *Bulletin* was also printed in our Press. Chitra, Sujata, Suprabha, Tapati and myself typed this *Bulletin* in monotype with great enthusiasm. The Mother requested Sri Aurobindo to write something. Sri Aurobindo's writings started coming out at first in this *Bulletin*. What an air of eager expectancy there would be among the Ashramites! What was Sri Aurobindo going to write in the coming issue? Everyone would anticipate and imagine different things. We, who used to work at the Press, were extremely privileged. We read the issue several times over before it actually came out!

Many years later the Mother remarked in a displeased way that none of us in the Ashram ever read the *Bulletin*.

"Whereas my children who live outside read it with so much eagerness. They wait in eager expectancy and are impatient to receive the next issue."

I at once questioned the Mother:

"Who has told you, Mother, that the Ashramites don't read the *Bulletin*? Let us see then. Ask me a question from any page. Let's see if I can answer or not."

What could the Mother say to this? She kept quiet.

The Mother started coming to the Playground from 1947. Because of the influence of the Mother's presence all the groups started getting spontaneously organised. In the beginning our physical education activities were limited to the Playground and included volleyball and a few other games. Boys and girls had different time-schedules for sports. Sometimes it was the girls who played first and at other times it was the boys. In the mornings the boys used to go in a group to the Military Ground to play football.

In 1948 the Ashram acquired the Tennis-ground and the Volleyball-ground. From then the sports activities were organised in these three grounds. Then in 1951 the Sports-ground came into existence.

The Playground was in a pitiable state and so the boys had to dig up the entire

area and they cleaned it thoroughly to make it fit for sporting activities. The whole Playground was strewn with pieces of broken glass. This place was connected with some liquor business and so naturally there were pieces of broken glass all over the place. A lot of trees had come up in this abandoned field. How much work the small boys put in to prepare this ground! When there is joy and enthusiasm how much work gets so effortlessly accomplished! The Playground is its living proof. The difference between the Playground of today and the Playground of those times is like heaven and hell. With discipline and order our boys transformed the place into a beautiful playing field.

What is called today group D was then called group C. Mona, Manoj, Harit and several others were in this group and Biren-da was their captain. Biren-da was a well-known boxer. He used to coach them in boxing, vaulting and many other games. He would designate two captains for each month and their aim was to give proper instructions in sports to the group of boys. And in this way he always tried to inculcate discipline, order and responsibility in them. At the end of the month a small demonstration was organised.

The Mother came to see this demonstration from time to time. Both captains conducted the “Marching” for their respective groups. The captain who had trained and commanded his group better would receive a prize.

It still feels extraordinary when you think of those times. Everyone’s destiny is fixed beforehand. All that needs to be done from our side is personal effort and aspiration.

Now all the groups were organised. In 1948 all the groups were given their uniform, each a different colour. The Mother appointed five boys as captains: Mona, Narendra (Promesse’s brother), Harit (Pranab’s youngest brother), Sumantra and Manoj. Mona was the head-captain. These boys were then merely 12 or 13.

The establishment of our school—the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education—happened on January 6<sup>th</sup> in 1952. A ribbon was put at the southern gate of the school and the Mother came to cut it in the evening. And so at that auspicious moment She launched our school. Our school was first called *L’école de Sri Aurobindo* (Sri Aurobindo’s School) but from 6<sup>th</sup> January 1952 it became *Sri Aurobindo International University Centre*.

While the Mother was cutting the ribbon on the southern gate COUNUMA stood beside Her. Everyone has surely seen this photograph. That ribbon and pair of scissors have been carefully preserved in a glass case. The Mother’s touch is still on them. You can see them if you go to the school.

I remember the year 1950. That year the Mother announced that a prize called *Prix d’Honneur* would be awarded. To deserve this prize one had to be good in everything, an all-round development was necessary. The Mother announced this in the Playground. The boy or girl had to be equally outstanding in studies and sports so as to have cultivated a complete personality in order to merit this *Prix d’Honneur*.

The Mother was proud to announce this. By giving Her own child an award with Her own hand She began praising him with unrestrained joy. All those who were present in the Playground were thrilled. Pranab was delighted and listened with a gentle smile. He had after all formed them,—Mona, Sumantra, Debu, Harit, Kittu, Manoj, Amarendra, Batti, Narendra, Vishweshwar, and so many others loved and nurtured by Pranab. Therefore Pranab was especially happy to see his efforts bear fruit.

I kept looking at everybody. When the Mother came to our group (E) to distribute groundnuts and stood in front of me She looked at me with such exceeding delight that I felt She would burst with joy. As human mothers while praising their children are filled with pride, the Mother too exuded the same feeling. The first *Prix d'Honneur* was awarded to Manoj.

The little ones came running to see the *Prix d'Honneur*. You can see Lakshmanraj in the photograph bending over to catch a glimpse of the prize.

From 1953 onwards the Mother used to Herself give this *Prix d'Honneur* to one of Her children every year. This came to a stop in 1960. It was decided to give in its place two prizes. The student who excelled in studies got the *Prix d'Excellence*, the student who excelled in sports received the *Sportstar*. This is still the practice.

Our boys used to get into all sorts of problems while playing football and the Mother was concerned about it. Mona was then a captain. Before one such football match Mona went to the Mother to ask for Her permission.

This is how Mona has recorded that conversation in his book, *Sweet Mother—Harmonies of Light*, Part Two, pp. 88-91:

Can't you play football without hurting yourselves? What, can't one do better than that? Accidents! Every day there is something, an accident or an unpleasant story. Someone is limping, another one has broken his arm, yet another has twisted his ankle, and many others... The list is endless. What? Is there no end to all these things? Is that where you are? Can one not be a little more conscious? All of you are in such a miserable condition. You are wallowing in the mud, and you do not want to do anything better.

*But, Mother, what to do?*

So, this is the effort you are making to be conscious?

*Sometimes we try, and soon we forget.*

Ah! you don't want to react against this unconsciousness!

*But, Mother...*

No, there is no excuse.

(Silence)

*Mother, the only way is to stop football—if football is responsible. If You want, You may stop football, and we'll see whether accidents still occur or not. You may stop football.*

Ah! my little one, how? That I will never do! I can't take such a decision. It is a very good game requiring tremendous endurance and physical capacities, when it is played well. I remember, I saw a match with a team from Calcutta and it gave me a very fine impression. It was a team from Calcutta.

*Yes, Mother, it was 'Mohan Bagan'.*

Yes, yes, it was so beautiful to see and so spectacular. It was a flawless game of a high quality. What unity, what cohesion amongst them, with co-ordinated movements, and each one of them doing his little work. And those passes, and those unexpected feints and, especially, the anticipation of what the other was going to do. On the whole, it was power-packed but neat and precise. And also, without nervous brutality. To me, it seemed to be a complete game in itself. I enjoyed it very much.

It must be played like that, without knocking yourselves, without brutality. Then it is good. And how could I stop the game when so many people like to play football? It is not possible. I can't do something that would hurt everybody. Moreover, it is a game which requires much talent. Better to find a way to avoid any accident.

And it is not football alone, but gymnastics, sports and everything. I am asking you to become a little more conscious, a little more conscious without getting excited. Then you will avoid many accidents. I am watching over you all every minute, and I am giving you all the Peace and the Force needed so that you all may become conscious. Conscious of what is around you, conscious of yourselves. But without any result. It is not football alone that I am blaming, but all the activities.

First of all, I don't want anybody to get hurt, because I am protecting my children with transparent cocoons, like a glass case put on each one individually, so that the adverse forces cannot touch them. You are well surrounded by the Force and the Light through which nothing can penetrate. It is an absolute protection I have put around you all, and in spite of all this, if you still get hurt, I do not know what to do. Maybe it is a lack of faith or an excitement of the body. Let us see what I can do. In any case, these accidents must be avoided. And I don't want anybody to get hurt. Once again I give you the Force and my blessings so that you may become conscious. You have to raise these children

out of this unconsciousness, out of this *tamas* and this excitement; above all, never get excited. I am here to help you. Let us see. Good luck!

The tradition of sporting activities has been there since the beginning of the Ashram. Nolini-da, Suresh Chakravarty and a few other younger people used to go and play with local boys in one of the fields in town. They were all very skilled in football. The local players used to praise highly Nolini-da's style of play. On everyone's lips were the names of Roy, Chakra, Basak. All of them used to live here then with fictitious names. They used to go and play at the *Cercle Sportif*. After all, these boys were the fearless, young revolutionaries of Muraripukur Bagan.

Let me tell you about two amusing incidents here.

This Chakra was actually Moni or Suresh Chakravarty. He had preceded Sri Aurobindo to Pondicherry to make arrangements for his stay here. Shankar Chettiar revered Sri Aurobindo. He asked Sri Aurobindo, Bejoy Nag and Suresh Chakravarty to come and stay in his two-storeyed house. It is difficult to imagine that under 20-year olds like Moni and Bejoy could stay in that two-storeyed house with Sri Aurobindo for three months at a stretch, day and night. They used to come down once a day just to have their bath. After three months had passed Sri Aurobindo permitted these two youngsters to go out. He had probably understood that now the boys could go out. The danger had passed. Well, now let me tell you why I brought this up.

On their first sortie, Suresh Chakravarty and Bejoy Nag went straight out to the market to buy some eggs. After all they needed a change of taste! For one month they had had only rice, *moong dal*, *brinjal* and some sort of tomato *chutney*. At night they used to have some rice and sugar in milk. Now they had their eggs but foolishly they dumped the shells into the pipe upstairs thinking that the pipe was connected to the drain.

One day while Suresh Chakravarty was going down all of a sudden Chettiar caught him. He took him straight to the pipe which ended one foot above the ground. The eggshells were rolling past on the ground. Mr. Chettiar seriously enquired:

“*Ee Kya?*” (What is this?)

It is said that the dumb do not have enemies. Suresh Chakravarty stiffened with fright. He was speechless. Mr. Chettiar:

“*Aisa mat karna.*” (Don't do this.)

This did not stop their eating of eggs. But they had now become cleverer. They used to fill their pockets with eggshells and on their way for the evening walk throw them out.

Then came the fish-chapter.

One day Suresh Chakravarty and Bejoy Nag had a strong desire for fish. They went to Iyer for help. (This Tamil youth used to look after Sri Aurobindo regularly when he stayed in the Arya House for six months. Iyer used to remain in the house

day and night during that period.) Even though he was a strict Tamil brahmin vegetarian he did not feel limited by petty traditions. He was quite young in age. He permitted Suresh Chakravarty and Bejoy Nag to cook fish in his house. They used to cook and cover their fish-preparation to bring it home and eat it to their full satisfaction. They used to smuggle the fish-preparation at a time when there was nobody downstairs. One day Moni went and bought some fish from the market, fried it in Iyer's house and wrapping it properly in some paper brought it directly to Shankar Chettiar's house. As he got into the house with the paper-wrapped fish he noticed Mr. Chettiar sitting in the living room. The staircase leading to the top floor was at the southeastern corner of this living room.

Without looking anywhere else, Suresh Chakravarti rushed straight for the staircase. But Mr. Chettiar was swifter and he blocked Moni's path just at the bottom of the staircase. He looked at the bundle and enquired:

*"Ismey kya hai?"* (What's in there?)

*"Kucch mithai hai"* (some sweets), Moni replied.

It seemed somebody was pounding at his heart with a hammer.

*"Kahansey mila?"* (From where?)

*"Baajaarsey kharid..."* (Bought from the shop.) Moni's voice choked with fright. Suddenly he had a divine flash!

*"Babukey liye,"* Moni exclaimed.

He meant the sweets were for Sri Aurobindo.

That was it! Here, the name of 'Babu' was enough to make Mr. Chettiar at once clear Moni's path. Moni sprang past him and ran up the stairs like lightning.

Listen to Suresh Chakravarty's concluding words:

"In human society it is customary to take the name of a great man before eating but taking it for eating fried fish was probably the first time."

You cannot imagine the joy I derived from reading these two stories. How impossibly hard it must have been for two young Bengali youngsters to stay without fish or meat or eggs!

Let us now return to sports. From the very beginning, importance was given to the body in sadhana. But it was done in a different way then.

Even Sri Aurobindo would take a walk on the verandah for a long time after Nolini-da and Suresh Chakravarty had gone away to play. His walking stopped only when the boys returned in the evening.

Amrita-da had the privilege of seeing Sri Aurobindo walk. The house in which Sri Aurobindo lived then had three terraces and each terrace was surrounded by walls. Sri Aurobindo lived in the third block. In the block in front stayed Nolini, Souren, Bejoy. Moni lived in the second block. It was in this house that Sri Aurobindo walked around the terrace daily, from five in the evening till eight, half past eight. One evening Amrita-da and his friend, Chettiar, on their way to the sea-front for a walk, suggested leaving their cycle in Sri Aurobindo's house so that they could walk peacefully. On



arriving in front of Sri Aurobindo's house they found the door closed. They reluctantly knocked. The door suddenly opened. Sri Aurobindo had quietly come, opened the door and immediately gone back to His walk. And so this is how Amrita-da had the privilege of watching Sri Aurobindo taking His walk. Sri Aurobindo had been accustomed to walking all His life. When he moved to the Guest House He used to walk in His room during a fixed time. What was astonishing is the fact that His continuous walking had left footprints on the floor. It is our misfortune that His footprints completely disappeared when the floor was repaired. Later, when He was living in the main building of the Ashram, Sri Aurobindo used to walk in the passage of His room taking support of Champaklal-ji's and Nirod-da's shoulders. After His accident it had become impossible for Him to walk all by Himself. But He would still walk. It is important to keep the body healthy for sadhana. Some sort of exercise is indispensable. And this is what He taught us right from the beginning.

It was from 1942 that small children started coming to the Ashram. These were children of those families that wanted to shelter their children here away from the dangers of war. At that time regular, organised sports had not yet started.

In the beginning only a small portion of the present Playground came into the younger children's use. The goal post was two sticks and a string tied across served as the crossbar and the children used to play football with great enthusiasm. Most children had their first lessons of football on this field. It was also here that the first match was played between the young and the adults. The adults lost that match by 16 goals! Following this there was another match between the two groups and this time it was on a regular field in town, the famous *Cercle Sportif*. This match ended in a goalless draw. Nirod-da scored a goal but it was nullified because of an offside. Kalyan-da, Rishabhchand-da, Kalikumar-da used to play beautifully. The other players were Udar, Bula-da, Rajen-da etc.

Then football was started at the Tennis-ground. The Ashram boys played their first match on the invitation of a teacher at the French College, Professor Saravane and the landowner Bordichou in his village against a team of boys from outside. Our boys lost as they had not yet got used to playing on a regular field. Ranju had been made the team captain. An eyewitness report of the match was prepared on the Mother's instructions and submitted to her by Sri Aurobindo's follower and revolutionary of the time, our dear father and professor of philosophy, Narendranath Das Gupta. On the same ground in a return match our boys were victorious. The Mother went to witness this match but came away before the end. The Mother had been to quite a few football matches. In one such match while playing with outside boys, Hriday (Pranab's younger brother) was playing at the back. He was extremely agile, strong and extremely courageous. He was injured when an opponent attacked him unfairly and so could not play any more. Just before the end of the match in a heading duel between Ranju and that same boy, the latter received a head injury and began bleeding. The Mother was present at that time in the *Terrain Militaire* (the Police

Ground). After the match when everyone came to the Mother, She told that boy from the rival team:

*“Ce n’est pas si facile!”* (It isn’t all that easy!)

With time the Ashram boys became extremely talented in playing football. They went to play a match against a local team in Cuddalore. This time Manju played in place of Hriday as the right out. The Mother went to see this match as well.

By then our own football field at the Sports-ground was ready. It had been Jalad-da’s groundnut field before. The boys went and pleaded with him to convert that field into one for playing football. Jalad-da agreed at once to give up his groundnut field.

Then we got a second field. It was in this ground that the Ashram boys played against the formidable Bengal team. When the reputed Mohan Bagan played an exhibition match with a local team at the Police Ground the Mother was present as the chief guest. Thangaraj, Sailen Manna, Sharat Das, Anil Dey, Nair, Manas Dasgupta who was a classmate of Ranju’s in his college days, were some of the players of the Mohan Bagan team. The game was clean, beautifully coordinated and skilful and the Mother remarked: *“C’est un jeu artistique!”* (What an artistic game!)

Our boys used to inevitably get injured while playing. Sunil-da was always the team-captain. Sunil-da also played the sitar beautifully. Unfortunately he broke his right hand badly during one of the football games and his sitar-playing came to an end. We were all terribly saddened by this, especially his mother, Indumukhi. After seeing so many people get injured in this game the Mother nicknamed football a *‘jeu brutal’* (a brutal game).

When Mohan Bagan came to play here, however, the Mother changed Her mind. After the game She affectionately gave all the players a gift. At the conclusion of the game, their captain, Anil Dey thanked everybody and then along with the rest of the team they all loudly hailed the Mother:

“Three cheers for our Ma!”

Needless to say the Mother was deeply pleased by Her children’s, Her devoted footballers’ exemplary conduct.

At the beginning Arun used to play at the goal. Arun’s game was flawless and he was a most dependable player. As backs we had Hriday and Sudhir from Chittagong. Later Kashi Das too joined. Bir Singh, Abhay Singh, Dayakar, Kunjbehari and Robi Gupta used to play in the midfield. As forwards we had Sunil-da, Amiyo, Kanak, Jayant, Manju and Ranju Gupta. Sunil-da often led the team. His game had courage, agility, powerful kicks and heading and he was just perfect as centre-forward, what today is called a striker.

Kanak was very good at clever passing and as inside-forward he used to feed the ball to everyone and his play’s main strength was his discipline.

We had subsequently a second team of younger people that came up too! Among these the notable ones were Rathin, Kalu, Mona, Prabhakar, Amarendra, Kittu, Debu,

Manoj, Arvind-babu, Shailesh, Ashok and some others. Mona's game was most complete. He could shoot equally well with both legs, had great ball-control, could head well, was strong, fast and had great stamina. He was a perfect pivot as a centre-half. Had he wanted he could have made it into any state team.

Debu's game too had great attraction but he did not play as much. It was enough, however, to win praise from connoisseurs of the game. Kittu and Prabhakar also played well.

Often there would be exhibition matches between the young and the adults. There is a photograph of one such match in the *Bulletin*. The Mother would start off the match by touching the ball with Her Foot. In the photograph you can see the captain of the adult team, our revered Nolini-da, who is gently smiling and looking at the Mother's Feet. This photograph was taken on 31<sup>st</sup> July in the year 1954.<sup>1</sup>

We would all watch from far the Mother's way of kicking the ball and playing with it. We enjoyed that moment thoroughly. In everything the Mother did what enthusiasm and delight there was! And these would infect everybody around!

Before going to their football match the boys assembled in front of Pavitra-da's workshop. Now there is Pavitra-da's office here where our Chum works. Chum looks after the replies to all the letters that come from abroad. Mother would call Chum sweetly 'Choom'.

The Mother used to come down to bless the boys as the boys were going out to play. How enthusiastic She looked! And we too would be filled with the same enthusiasm and joy. As if we ourselves were going to play!

*(To be continued)*

PRITI DAS GUPTA

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

1. I am indebted to Ranju for all the information pertaining to football.

*...of a higher import than the foundation, however necessary, of health, strength and fitness of the body is the development of discipline and morale and sound and strong character towards which these activities can help. There are many sports which are of the utmost value towards this end, because they help to form and even necessitate the qualities of courage, hardihood, energetic action and initiative or call for skill, steadiness of will or rapid decision and action, the perception of what is to be done in an emergency and dexterity in doing it.*

*(The Supramental Manifestation, SABCL, Vol. 16, p. 2)*



# THE HUMAN CYCLE AND THE MODERN AGE

*(Continued from the issue of June 2005)*

## 2. GAINS OF THE MODERN AGE

THERE are two conflicting views regarding the modern age. First is that of the orthodox cultured mind which comparing the modern “materialistic” culture with the great, noble, aesthetic and spiritual cultures of the past, considers modern culture as a relapse into some form of barbarism. And the second view is that of naive unthinking sections of the “modern progressive” mind which considers the economic, social, and technological progress as a great advance towards civilisation from the barbarous past. There is a truth behind both these views which is not fully understood by their exponents. As we have indicated in a previous article there is undoubtedly a loss or veiling of the sensitivity to higher values in our modern culture. So there is much truth in the views of the cultured orthodox mind that there is a certain amount of relapse into barbarism. But this doesn’t mean that there is no progress or evolution in the modern age. However, the true and enduring progress made in the modern age is something deeper than the superficial glamour of prosperity and technology which a large section of the modern mind considers as progress. In this section we will try to understand this deeper and inner gain made during the modern cycle of evolution.

### **The Ideal of Progress:**

Most of the modern conceptions of progress may be naive and superficial. But the awakening to the ideal of progress, especially outer progress, is one of the important evolutionary gains of the modern age. Some of the ancient civilisations, like for example the Indian, had the ideal of inner progress, of a spiritual aim, but none of them had a clear conception of outer progress. Their conception of society was rather static, as a rather fixed framework for the spiritual development or liberation of the soul. But in our integral perspective, both inner and outer progress is needed; the inner progress should express itself in the outer life leading to a progressive improvement in the quality of human life. So this modern, rajasic cycle of human development has established an important ideal which is essential for the integral fulfillment of the human being.

### **The Ideal of Individual Liberty:**

The second crucial contribution of the modern age is the democratic idea of individual liberty. The individual is the engine of progress. The collectivity progresses only when the individuals who constitute it, develop fully all their potentialities and express them in and through the outer life of the collectivity. So the growth of the individual is extremely important for the progress of the collectivity. The foundation

of this individual growth is liberty. Freedom is the condition of all growth, inner or outer.

Ancient communities had a keen subconscious collective instinct, but they were very weak and undeveloped in terms of self-conscious individuality. They did not have a clear conception or understanding of the importance of individual liberty for collective progress. They had the ideal of inner spiritual liberty as the highest aim of life. But in outer life, they had only a sense of communal liberty, which means each community organising its outer life freely according to its ecological, social and cultural environment. This ancient concept of communal liberty has a truth behind it; it is the other important principle for collective progress. But without individual liberty communal liberty leads to a closed, stagnant and top-heavy society in which most of the fruits of collective progress are cornered by a small coterie of elites while the large part of the communal mass remains poor and backward. The other defect of ancient communism, and also of the modern version of it, is that the individual is viewed only in terms of his social function and as an insignificant or subordinate part of the collectivity. What is not understood or recognised here is that the individual is a much greater creative force with higher potentialities than the collectivity. So, trying to subordinate the individual to the collectivity is to limit the higher factor with the greater potentialities within the boundaries and potentialities of the lower factor.

But in our integral spiritual perspective the modern democratic ideal has a very limited, partial, or even a faulty vision of the freedom and potentialities of the individual. It is right when it conceives the individual as someone who is greater or more important than the collectivity and declares that every individual should be given the equal freedom and opportunities to contribute to the society and rewarded for his or her talents or contribution. But the modern democratic ideal errs when it conceives the individual as an ego in competition with other egos and the individual liberty as the freedom of the ego to pursue its self-interest, disregarding the interest, well-being or progress of other individuals or the society. Many of the evils of modern civilisation which we see in western democracies are due to this egocentric conception of liberty.

However, notwithstanding all these aberrations and errors of modern democracy, its ideal of individual liberty has established certain positive attitudes regarding the individual, which are essential for realising the highest spiritual potential of the individual. The experience of modern democracy, however limited or partial it may be, will prepare the human race for the future spiritual democracy. This future democracy will be based not on the liberty of the competing egos but on the free growth of the individual soul towards its highest potential. And an important part of this highest potential is the realisation of the inner fraternity or oneness of all human souls.

### **The Scientific Method:**

The third important gain of the modern cycle of evolution is that certain faculties

of the intellectual and pragmatic mind which were not well-developed in the ancient civilisations or cultures began to be more fully developed. The ancient systems of knowledge were predominantly intuitive and philosophical. The modern cycle of evolution has added to the human intelligence the scientific reason. The scientific thinking, enquiry and attitude is an important contribution by the modern cycle to the mental development of humanity. The ancient systems of knowledge used mainly intuition, philosophy and faith in the traditional authorities of the past, like for example scriptures, as the main instruments of knowledge. But this approach, though helpful and valid in the spiritual realm, is inadequate for a more widespread and progressive march of knowledge in other fields. Even in the spiritual realm, without a rational, scientific, progressive and critical approach, the spiritual intuitions tend to get encrusted in rigid, inflexible and stagnant dogmas, customs, rules and superstitions.

This doesn't mean that the scientific spirit or quest was absent among the ancient people. But the ancient sciences were mainly intuitive and not rational. The scientific method or attitude tend to be associated with reason and the material sciences. But this is a false association. The scientific approach is valid and applicable also to an intuitive quest for truth in the psychological and spiritual realms of our consciousness. In fact, ancient Indian Yoga is such an intuitive science. Similarly, there can also be an intuitive physical science. Some of the ancient civilisations including India might have developed advanced physical sciences based on intuition.

But modern science brings a new set of mental attitudes which leads to the development of certain parts of the intellectual and pragmatic mind which were not very developed in the ancient mind. First, there is a quest for truth not based on faith or authority but on an impartial and unbiased observation and critical questioning. Second, there is the quest for universal laws of Nature behind the observed facts. Third, there is the urge to know the why and how of Nature's phenomena. Fourth, there is the urge for continuous research and experimentation. And finally, there is the urge and the capacity for a widespread and generalised application of science and its discoveries for the progress and development of human life. All these attitudes applied in a methodical and systematic way, in a progressive and collective quest, represent the uniqueness and strength of modern science and constitute a collective psychological capacity added on to the human consciousness.

In our modern age this collective scientific capability is used mainly for the progress and development of the outer life. If and when this collective capability of modern science turns its attention from physical science and outer development to the science of consciousness and for the inner development of humanity then it will become a great force for the future evolution of humanity. In ancient India, the science of Yoga which is a science of consciousness, had more or less the same scientific attitude as modern science. But the collective consciousness of ancient India did not have the scientific capability of the modern age. So, if the ancient science of Yoga can ally itself with the collective capabilities of man for modern science, the

combination becomes a potent force for accelerating the future evolution of humanity.

The other major defect of the ancient systems of knowledge, which the modern age rectifies, was the dependence of science on religion. The ancient world was ruled by religion. Religion and its edicts were held to be something sacrosanct, eternal and unalterable. So there was a compulsion for (or even a threat to) ancient science to square its conclusions with religious dogma. Such a compulsion is not healthy for the growth of science or religion.

Any system of knowledge can progress fully to its highest potential only when it is allowed to grow freely according to its own unique dharma without undue dependence on or domination by other systems of knowledge. There may be vigorous interaction between various systems of knowledge, but no dependence on or domination by any single system of knowledge and its viewpoint. The holistic ideal of knowledge is a perfect harmony between religion, philosophy and science, between the spiritual and secular sciences, between intuition and reason. But this harmony, to be enduring and creative, has to be realised through a free and equal interaction between various fields of knowledge and not through subordination, dependence or domination of a single discipline over others. So the divorce between science and religion, or the spiritual and the secular which occurred during the modern age, is not entirely a negative phenomenon as many thinkers assert. This modern divorce between science and religion has undoubtedly created much avoidable conflict and a hasty denial of all religion as mere superstition. But it is probably a necessary split with an evolutionary purpose behind it. It has freed science from the domination of religion.

This free growth and mutual interaction of various disciplines of knowledge may lead to a more enduring, creative and a richer harmony and unity between science, philosophy and spirituality. For example free interaction between eastern spiritual philosophy and modern physics has led to a better understanding of the deeper significance of some of the latest discoveries of physics. Similarly, concepts in modern science may help in a better understanding of spiritual truths. As Sri Aurobindo, one of the greatest spiritual thinkers of the modern age, points out: "Nothing can be more remarkable and suggestive than the extent to which modern Science confirms in the domain of Matter the conceptions and even the very formulae of language which were arrived at, by a very different method, in the Vedanta,—the original Vedanta, not of the schools of metaphysical philosophy, but of the Upanishads. And these, on the other hand, often reveal their full significance, their richer contents only when they are viewed in the new light shed by the discoveries of modern Science...."<sup>1</sup> If the scientific reason keeps its mind open, not remaining closed in a rigid intellectual or scientific orthodoxy, and pursues the inner truth of human consciousness with the same sincerity which it displayed in seeking the truth of matter and outer life, then it may possibly discover the spiritual truth of man and the world in a much better way than organised religions. Again, as Sri Aurobindo points out:



“Science and philosophy are not bound to square their observations and conclusions with any current ideas of religious dogma or ethical rule or aesthetic prejudice. In the end, if left free in their action, they will find the unity of Truth with Good and Beauty and God and give these a greater meaning than any dogmatic religion or any formal ethics or any narrower aesthetic idea can give us.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Progress in the Pragmatic Mind:**

The faculties of our human mind may be broadly classified into two categories: the conceptual faculties which create the idea, and the dynamic or pragmatic faculties which execute the idea in life and action. The fourth important gain of the modern era is a distinct enhancement of the capabilities of the pragmatic faculties of the race.

If pragmatism be defined as the ability to convert an idea into a material fact, then the modern pragmatic mind scores over the ancients in many parameters, like efficiency in utilisation of resources; quick adaptation to the changing times and environment; scientific precision in planning, organisation and execution exemplified in the moon-landing project; an increasing openness and interaction with ideas of the intellectual mind from all fields; a scientific, experimental and progressive approach to problem solving and implementation; and a greater capacity for spreading the fruits of development, in terms of wealth, knowledge or culture, to larger sections of the population.

We are not trying to say that the ancients were entirely lacking in these pragmatic skills. The ancients excelled magnificently and incomparably in what we may call aesthetic pragmatism, by which we mean the ability to give an artistic form in stone or canvas or words to a philosophical, religious, aesthetic or spiritual idea. In this artistic skill, in comparison to the ancients, we moderns are quite primitive and uncultured barbarians. The ancients also displayed a high level of competence in social and political organisation, like for example the Roman Empire in the West, or the Maurya and Gupta empires in ancient India. But in this area of practical organisation the ancient mind was rather rigid and rule-bound. The process of realisation was set into rigid and fixed rules and inviolable religious sanctions and taboos. This rigid approach led to lack of flexibility and adaptive skills for coping with the changing environment. The modern pragmatic mind, especially in business, has acquired great skills in coping with the fast-changing environment.

But the main domain of pragmatism where the modern mind has made considerable progress is in organising the resources for wealth-creation or project management and in using the available resources with maximum efficiency and productivity and with minimum waste. This achievement of the modern mind in this area is mainly due to two great pragmatic sciences, Technology and Management. Modern technology and the advent of scientific management have triggered accelerated evolution in the capabilities of the pragmatic mind of the human race. In general we may say that in the modern era, the pragmatic mind of humanity has

made great strides in its capacity for converting ideas into material reality. But most of the ideas attempted by the modern pragmatic mind are either scientific and technical, like for example the moon-landing project or economic, commercial and utilitarian ideas like converting a business-idea or project-idea into a marketable entity or a social and political idea like democracy or communism or empowerment.

In the emerging scene in business there are more or less successful attempts at giving a pragmatic form to mental and philosophical ideas like, for example, the learning organisation of Peter Senge or the ideas of systems theory or ecology or some values like innovation, customer service, quality and work-place democracy. In our modern age business has also acquired great skill in practical organisation, in giving a material or pragmatic outer form to an idea at different levels—material, economic, commercial, scientific, social, cultural, mental. If this organising power and skill which is at present concentrated in modern business were put to the service of some higher ethical, aesthetic, psychological and spiritual idea and help in manifesting these higher ideas in the collective life, business could become a great force for the future evolution of humanity.

These are what we may call the inner gains of the modern age. There are also outer gains in the economic, social and political life. Looked at superficially these outer gains may appear purely external. But they have a positive psychological result or impact on the inner levels of the collective consciousness of humanity.

### **Awakening of Women and the Worker:**

Two such major gains in the outer life are the movements for the emancipation of Women and the Worker who were very much suppressed in the ancient world. The outward gain is the progressive empowerment of these two important sections of human society. Inwardly or psychologically, it is the rajasic awakening of these sections of society from a state of tamasic existence to which they were reduced in the previous cycles of evolution. This also involves a release of their inner potentialities which were suppressed by the social environment of the past.

### **The Ideal of Nationalism:**

There is one more phenomenon of the modern age which we have to understand in an evolutionary perspective: Nationalism. Outwardly, nationalism represents a shift of the centre of collective life of humanity from the family, clan and the community to the nation. It is a progressive step in the evolutionary march of Nature towards human unity. For, progressive identification with the larger and larger group is one of the methods through which Nature drives humanity towards unity. Nationalism has helped in the progress of the mass-consciousness of humanity by creating in it the capacity to identify with a larger unit. Here also as in the awakening of Women and the Worker, the outer shift in the centre of the collective life creates a corresponding inner modification in the collective consciousness of humanity.

The nation is at present not only a political unit but also a psychological unit. The communal consciousness of the ancient man was strongly identified with his family, caste, clan and class and a vague sense of cultural identity with those who have the same system of values or ideals. The advent of nationalism has given birth to a new sense of communal identity in the form of political patriotism. Psychologically, it involves a greater political awareness and identification with a larger collective unit than that of the ancient communal consciousness. Political patriotism has also awakened in some nations an acute sense of cultural identity and has triggered a search for the cultural roots of the nation. This is, from a psychological perspective, a welcome development. For in our view a nation is in its essence a Soul and a Mind and its polity, economy and society are only the outer expressions of this inner spiritual and psychological being. And it is this inner self of the nation, revealed in its cultural history and values, which contains its unique genius and evolutionary destiny. So, the cultural awakening of a nation is a positive and progressive step towards the realisation of its higher potential and destiny.

### **The Rajasic Gains of the Modern Age — A Critical Summary and Appraisal:**

But all these gains of the modern era, which we have discussed so far, are achieved in the reign of the rajasic ego. So most of these gains are appropriated by the rajasic ego, individual and the collective, for the realisation and fulfilment of its self-interested vital motives like power, wealth, expansion and enjoyment. The progress achieved by the modern pragmatic mind through science, technology and management was used almost totally for the realisation of the self-centred motives of the individual and collective vital ego in man. Progress achieved in the consciousness of individual liberty was misdirected towards the “pursuit of happiness” in a personal and egocentric way, and as a result degenerated into a competitive individualism of the rajasic vital ego. The greater political awareness and identity achieved through nationalism has become in the consciousness of the collective rajasic ego, an urge for world-domination through military, political, economic conquest. The cultural awareness aroused through nationalism has given birth to a sense of cultural pride or superiority and the urge to impose a single culture and its values on the whole world. The awakening of the Worker and Women is achieved through much conflict and struggle between Man and Woman, between Labour and Management. This may be to a certain extent necessary in the initial stages of evolution from the tamasic to the rajasic consciousness. A militant display of rajasic power, strength and confrontation may be needed for the oppressed to shake off the yoke of their obstinate and tyrannical oppressors. But if this confrontationist posture settles into a fixed or permanent attitude, then it will block further progress towards the higher sattwic poise of peace and harmony. The danger here is that the newly awakened rajasic ego, generalising from its past experience, may think that confrontation is the only way to get things done.

Thus most of the gains achieved in our modern age are marred, misdirected or misused by the rajasic ego. But this doesn't mean that these evolutionary gains are destroyed. The essence of the progress or gain are not destroyed; they are retained in the conscious or subconscious mind of the race. A capacity developed or an inner progress achieved in the course of evolution may be misused for wrong ends. But that doesn't annul or destroy the capacity or the progress achieved. When the consciousness of the race evolves and rises from the rajasic to sattwic levels, these gains made during the rajasic phase of evolution will be used in a more constructive and enlightened way under the guidance of sattwic values. This brings us to the sattwic influences of the modern age.

*(To be concluded)*

M. S. SRINIVASAN

#### *References*

1. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 18, p. 13-14.
2. Sri Aurobindo, *Social and Political Thought*, SABCL, Vol. 15, p. 215.

#### ***'The True Subjectivism'***

*Beyond it [vitalism] we get to a subjective idealism now beginning to emerge and become prominent, which seeks the fulfilment of man in the satisfaction of his inmost religious, aesthetic, intuitive, his highest intellectual and ethical, his deepest sympathetic and emotional nature and, regarding this as the fullness of our being and the whole object of our being, tries to subject to it the physical and vital existence. These come to be considered rather as a possible symbol and instrument of the subjective life flowing out into forms than as having any value in themselves.*

*(The Human Cycle, CWSA, Vol. 25, p. 61)*

## THE ASHRAM OF PONDICHERRY\*

### A FRENCH SAVANT'S IMPRESSIONS IN 1936

*(Continued from the issue of June 2005)*

*(This is the concluding part of the translation of the chapter "L'Ashram de Pondichéry" in Maurice Magre's book À la Poursuite de la Sagesse published by Fasquelle Éditeurs, Paris, 1936. The translation first appeared, with the permission of the Publishers, in Sri Aurobindo Circle, Thirteenth Number, 1957, without the present subtitle. Our acknowledgments are due to Sri Aurobindo Circle. The Mother is reported to have remarked that Magre's impressions were shot with a psychic vision. Thus they have an inner value in addition to the purely historical.)*

In the order that reigns in the Ashram one feels admiration for the divine work. The work portioned out to each, the glances filled with quietude, the form of the shadow projected by the tree, everything proclaims obedience to law. Happy the one who can find the divine law beautiful, the law that since the aggregation of the first atoms has willed the triumph of the strongest. Sometimes I happen to say to myself: If I were God!

All my efforts would have consisted of contradicting the order of things. I would have given sap to the trees during the winter so that the fruits might appear under the snow and that it might make them fall by the bursting of their warm flesh. I would have given to the solitary man the surprise of finding a thin-bodied virgin in his empty bed. The servant would have seen his work ended before having begun it. To one who is avid of beauty I would have brought dreams so splendid that he would keep lying down until he died, for fear of interrupting them. According to my capacity as God I would have prevented man from degrading himself. A God cannot reform the world but He can help to better it by supernatural creations. Baseness comes from pride and it comes from misery. I would have lowered the pride of the powerful by peculiar miracles and they would be stripped of their dresses and their houses as the butterflies emerge from their chrysalises to become winged beings. I would have breathed into the heart of miserable creatures such a hunger for beauty that they would have laid aside their tools, their brushes, their sacks of coal to see how a flower blooms or what grace the clouds have when they stretch across the setting sun. I would have mastered the sexual energy which blinds the clear-sighted and makes four-footed those who before were standing on two feet. I would have castrated them and made them learn the inutility of reproducing themselves and of spreading

\* Reprinted from the May 1976 issue of *Mother India*.

upon the planet beings condemned to pluck bitterly their sustenance without ever thinking of their souls. I would have fixed myself to the earth in order to transform it so forcibly that I would have felt against me the palpitation of its substance; I would have clasped the hearts of men with a love so puissant that I would have moved them to a love equal to mine. O the mad dream of being God!

\*

The Buddha teaches that we should escape from the wheel of lives and re-enter most swiftly the bosom of God and not occupy ourselves with the magnificent curve in which the creatures are put forth.

You contradict this ancient sage, this reformer of personal views. God, you say, has not organised with an infinite prevision the descent of life into matter, from the dull rock to conscious man, so that man may profit by this consciousness in order to escape from the law and return by a short cut to the primary source whence he started. It is thus the lamb does, hardly desirous of skipping in the sunlit hills; it returns, when the dog is inattentive and the shepherd sleeps, to the stable where it can dream at ease. But why is the lamb not right in preferring the prairie of its dreams to the hard rockpath where short grass grows and it bruises its delicate hooves? The work of God is immense and the curves He traces are of infinite variety. Certain comets trace limited ellipses around the suns whose satellites they are, while others lose themselves in the infinite without the astronomers being able to calculate their return. Are we not in the right to consider earthly evil and its visible aggravation even by our uncertain standards as the sign that we must retrace our steps?

The divine creation does not develop with surety. It resembles the work of an architect who makes attempts, builds and demolishes without any care for the materials he uses. There have been grotesque species, which had organs not adapted for living and which the Creator had given up sustaining. There have been over-prolific ones which exceeded His plans by their pullulations and which he had to destroy by means beyond natural laws. Why should not the human creation end in an impasse whose sorrow, injustice and falsehood would be the Mané, Thecal, Pharès, warning the souls that they must find in themselves the resource of their salvation?

“Evil is incomprehensible,” you reply, “for a human intelligence and one should be much farther and much higher in order to seize the necessity and the benefit.” But it is a strange paradox unworthy of God who has willed it. What is the better part of us, what is divine, revolts against this explanation. One cannot shut up a prisoner and make him suffer in the prison, telling him that these torments have an origin which has to remain incomprehensible to him and which he must bless in spite of this. Or if these torments have a cause to which he has himself given rise in previous lives, how should we judge a Creator who has taken away the memory of these causes and in consequence the possibility of modifying them, who has made man responsible for

chastisement and irresponsible for redemption? "One has not the right to judge the Creator," you will say. But why? Since He has willed that with the human reign there should appear a faculty of judgment. Unless this faculty has been born despite Him, unless He has been, at some minute of the cosmic ages, like one who sowing the wind reaps the whirlwind, like one who playing with fire forgets the power of his creation and lights in his own dwelling a flame which he cannot any more extinguish.

\*

You have penetrated the wisdom of books and of traditions. You have made a tour of the sciences like Aristotle and of metaphysics like Shankara, and after having followed the immense circle of human knowledge you have leapt towards the supreme essence of the spirit like a jet of water that is urged by a formidable hidden pressure and carries in itself the spirit of solar rays. You have crossed the invisible world of illusions as a dauntless swimmer crosses a gulf full of monsters, dispersing them with his breath. And now you are stripped of fear, enveloped in calm, concealed in serenity. You keep yourself in the midst of your disciples' love like a unique rose around which the foreseeing gardener allows only delicate grasses to grow.

How could you deceive yourself, you who have touched the Divine, you who have gained the experience of what is above human reason? And yet I cannot prevent myself from remembering that the Buddha told his disciples to believe nothing beyond what they had understood with their own inner faculty, what was of the divine essence.

\*

In the country from which I come, one does not worship the spirit. Hardly a few men, in the monasteries, practise methods analogous to yours by glorifying the prophet who was born in Judaea. I do not shave my head, as is their practice, I am not dressed in rough serge, I have not sung their canticles. I dreamt of a light for which the cloisters have too much shadow and the basilica too much sadness.

Once only in my childhood I grazed the mystery of solitude and of the Presence. It was not far from Toulouse, the town where I was born, in a country where all is sweetness and half-tint and where nature is like a child that has never been ill-treated by its father. On the bank of the Garonne where the poplars grow, there is a great house of stone. When I had run up to it, I stopped, seized by the silent beauty of the landscape. And suddenly I saw, emerging from a pathway, men clothed in robes and looking into themselves. They were walking gravely. They were going nowhere. They disappeared among the trees. A clock struck six. I have not been able to forget them.

The men whom I see here do not resemble them at all. They have more love for the sun and for living nature. I feel closer to them than to the others. And while I have seen them walking under the trees where there were so many singing birds, I have

not been able to check myself from dreaming of those men of Toulouse who were passing under the poplars when the clock struck six and whose prophet had been crucified.

But towards these or towards those, I have gone too late or too early. It is one's youth that one should offer to the Divine. Fortunate are those who rise at dawn and have reached the end of the course before sunset. When I crossed the threshold of the Ashram, there was a form which barred the way. It stretched out its arms and said: "Turn back your steps! It is too late!" And this form it was myself who created. In the gladness of arrival I had passed by it, seeming to ignore it, but it has pursued me step by step, it has kept by my side and always it has whispered in a low voice, with a great deal of melancholy: "Turn back your steps, it is too late!"

\*

The men in rough serge, who walk under the poplars of Toulouse, have too melancholy songs. The organ has always moved me to despair. I am penetrated with the joy of life and cannot bear human injustice.

Torn by this contradiction, I am tossed between my admiration for the forms of earth and my revolt against their suffering. When I see the trees in cluster lifting harmoniously towards the sun, like chalices of sap and leaves, I wish to be only a branch and share in such a surge. When I see a stunted bush writhing among dry stones, straining towards an ungracious universe the anger of its thorns, I want to give it my blood if it can change it within its substance into a bit of fresh greenness.

But I am crushed by the immensity of law and I ask myself why I have been given this faculty of accepting it when I cannot modify it in the least? How to get out of these two opposed ideas that answer to each other like the sound and the echo, like the beatings of a clock, like day and night? Should one admire nature and hurl oneself gladly like a swimmer who follows the current of a river, letting himself be carried by the waters and getting drunk with the beauty of the banks? Or should one believe in the word of a host of saints who have rejected the temptation, revolted against Evil, prepared themselves their cross, loved better to be flayed alive than to bow before God?

O Master, if you know, resolve for me the problem, utter the liberating word, the word that makes the inner chains fall. If in the mysteries of Samadhi you have caught a glimpse of the truth, if you know why man is on the earth, what sense has the face of beauty, what sense has the grimace of grief, whether one should love them equally, say it and your word shall make the universe ring, it shall rejuvenate it to its foundations. For the truth is divine. There cannot be any calm for the disciple, even though he take ten million breaths attuned to the rhythm of the stars, if he knows not why creatures have been thrust upon the planet, to live there, to decompose there and be reborn.

\*



O Master, it is not possible that there should be no redemption for a man of the West! I do not have the pride common to those of my race. It has been for a long time that I have regretted not having been born with a bronzed face, near a temple where I would have performed rites since my childhood and where I would have obtained naturally what I seek with so much pain. Out there, I am solitary in the midst of men. I do not understand them any more and I feel that they have ceased to love me because I am no longer like them. But here I am a stranger. The language and the dress create an insurmountable barrier. I should like to cry out my love for men and for things and I remain an indifferent personage who pronounces banal words. But this again is nothing. You have given me a welcome most magnificent. The room is very beautiful and the food very rich and the servant very zealous.

I have visited all the rooms of the Ashram and all the doors have been opened to the guest. But there is one invisible room which has neither door nor walls and which is the room of the Spirit. Within that, I have not been admitted. If I were worthy of entering it, there would be no need to demand and I would find myself there by the power of wishing. I know my unworthiness and I have gauged the distance which separates me from a goal of which I have not even a glimpse; but is there not an instruction which you give to some people? As one who reaches the summit of a high mountain throws a rope to those who are remaining in the valley, you should throw some marvellous words to fill the soul with happiness and allow it to raise itself.

O Master, make these words resound for me. I know that the voices which go from below can always be heard, thanks to the force which sound has, and that no prayer is lost. And I know that the voice from on high has a tendency to rise and is not perceived by the deaf who are housed below. I need a sublime order, an instruction which falls like a luminous stone, a teaching come from the summit. Tell me how the spiral of meditation should climb up, give me a formula of prayer, even a syllable to which I would cling like a swimmer who has found a buoy. I am one who is deaf and still wishes to hear, who is blind and yet opens wide the eyes. Make one sign from your side, a tiny bit of it can save me from despairing of salvation.

\*

Perhaps I have understood the secret. He who has mounted cannot redescend, even if he wishes it with his heart of old times. He who has attained the house of wisdom cannot re-open the marble gate, even if there is someone who begs, on a stormy evening, in a desperate tone. Just as we do not bother ourselves whether the water of marshlands is vivifying enough to let tadpoles grow harmoniously into frogs, so too he who has access to divinity cannot soil his feet any more in the marshes of men.

I knock at the marble gate. Never has the night been so thick. Never has the

wind blown with such tumult. Is it not already much to have discovered this gate across the shadow, even if one has to die by the perfection of its whiteness?

O Master, what is the sign by which to recognise the one who ought to enter, the one who is permitted to receive the transmission of the Spirit? Is he chosen by virtue of an incomprehensible grace or does he choose himself by the ardour of his faith and the purity of his love?

\*

O Mother, while your hands of a Sheherazade are stretched in the half-light of the hall of elevations for the benediction of disciples, the invisible Presences stand by your side.

Then the souls mount in a group, disengaged from the body's form, and by this grace that comes from you they have the faculty of uniting.

I have seen them, at the twilight hour, like a cloud of radiant beauty, rise towards the tranquil sky, lift high in a single sheaf, when the birds go to sleep, when the stars begin to appear.

As long as your hands are outstretched, like two symbols of adoration, the souls of all the disciples are united in love of the Master, they taste the beatitude and the perfection of love.

And when you sweetly lower your hands there is an invisible separation, the beautiful Egregore of the bluish gold fades and comes back to the earth, all the souls return to their earthly form, as the colours of a rainbow, after having shone in a circle, become again mist and azure.

\*

O Mother, I have not risen with the chosen ones and the blessing has passed by me. But, in the measure of his sincerity, has not each the right to a little bit of love?

It is part of the attributes of your power to help the men who appeal to you at the beneficent hour of death. And this hour is like a cloud that sails round my sky without moving farther or disappearing.

O Mother, when this hour comes for me, may my breath have strength enough to pronounce the syllables of your name; may my memory be lively enough to build up your exact image within the shadows of remembrance!

May you keep by my side like a seraph of pity and dispel before me the ensnaring people of the shadows! May you lead me, stripped of fear and pride, towards the abode where the pure ones go, where all is love and beauty!

\*

I shall depart loaded with a precious treasure. I have not gained the answer

which I came to seek. But the great masters answer not to the questions of men. Jesus and Buddha kept silent and they have taught that it was vanity to know. Perhaps the supreme wisdom is to limit the vision to the span of what one sees. Perhaps there is even a higher wisdom which lies in not seeing.

On the most sacred soil of the world I have come to seek that which I name the Truth. I have beheld men good and pure and such as I did not know could exist. They have had merely to stand before me to attest by their presence that there is no wisdom superior to uprightness of heart. I am going a thousand times brimmed. I feel myself marked by an elective grace. I am like him who has gone to quest for gold and who brings back a stone precious like one that can only be in the planet Venus. It is because somewhere, in the dark world, there is this beauty of the soul, because some men have uplifted themselves silently towards perfection, that all men can be saved.

\*

I have taken a handful of earth, a handful of the earth of India, to carry it for remembrance in my own country. I have looked at this earth in the hollow of my hand. It was exactly like the earth of a field of Toulouse, which I took when I was a child and which I ran between my fingers. All the earths resemble one another. All are made of the primitive substance and of the refuse of dead plants. But the spirit is different. What I should have carried was a little of the eternal light whose ray has descended here. I have come quite close to it. But the light of a divine order has this subtle quality of passing without leaving a trace. Has it perhaps touched me? How shall I know, my God? Oh if I have carried merely this handful of earth in the hollow of my hand, this handful of Indian earth so like the earth of other countries!

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I was going to leave and someone carried my baggages across the rooms and along the staircase. I saw a man who was naked with a loin-cloth. He prudently kept apart and lowered his eyes while joining his palms all the time my look met his. There was under these traits a strange joy and the illumination of perfect beings. I thought of some saint come at the last hour for a marvellous communication.

“What is this man?” I asked with an inner emotion the servant who acted as my interpreter, “and what does he want?”

The servant answered: “He has come to know that you are leaving for France and he wishes to get a bit of money on this occasion.”

I kept silent and then my soul was filled with joy. If the face of the beggar and that of the saint wear the same beauty it is because to give and to receive are two actions of the same essence, which only seem different to eyes that do not know how to see.

O Master! through the intermediary of one who asked me for an offering, your message has reached me!

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O Master, you have not cured the leper, you have not delivered the woman possessed nor ostensibly walked on the waters. By the path you have discovered in the inner labyrinth of the spirit, you have reached the realm of the Divine. No Lazarus has risen from the tomb to bear witness to your power, no miracle has flashed forth like a celestial aerolite. But a few inspired men have known that the miracle has taken place in silence and solitude and they have come to gather around you. With the souls of these perfect ones you have condensed a spiritual diamond of such purity that the earth has not known its like. What pride would be required of me to believe that I could mingle with these perfect ones or rather what ignorance would be required! Now my soul will turn back eternally to the place of election where you live and each night it will perch on the trees of the Ashram, lost in the thousands of birds that sleep with folded wings and fly off at dawn.

\*

There are words which one uses and whose sense one understands only very late. One pronounces them a thousand times without knowing their value. And all of a sudden these vague words become alive in front of you, as if they had blood in their letters and flesh in their syllables.

Ah! how poignant they are and nostalgic, charged with all the distress of my soul, these words which have remained up to now mute and lack-lustre, these words which have just revealed themselves to me in their profundity of despair, these words of "Lost Paradise"!

\*

I would wish there were more than five parts of the world and that the oceans were more numerous. It is not enough to have one China and it is not enough to have one India! I would wish there were several pole-stars and a whole pack of Great Bears. How swift go the ships! How equal are the shores! How deceptive is the Southern Cross! The sharks are too few and the flying fishes fly hardly enough to make a parade of their little power of leaping. Faintly lit, the cities fade out and all the ports dwindle. The gulfs are thin like serpents, the islands have not the air of being water-ringed on all the sides and the revolving lighthouses are so low that one thinks always that they are on the point of being extinguished. The beauty of the world is less great than what one has dreamed in writing books of travel. One sole lamp is bright and shall not ever pale for all its smallness, scarcely a dust-grain of

gold above the night of the oceans. It is the lamp of the pure spirit which needs no oil once it has been lit!

O ship, you can sail on and carry me towards no matter what world, even beyond the Red Sea and beyond Greece, towards the country where reigns the fog and where turns the machine! There, on the shore that I leave behind me, is a man garbed in white who bears aloft a lustre for me despite the rain and the glooms which have suddenly spread. He makes a gesture of farewell, the gesture of a brother to a brother. I have no need to open the eyes in order to see him and the farther away I move the more brilliant grows his light.

(Concluded)

MAURICE MAGRE

(Translated by K. D. Sethna from the original French.)

*If a subjective age, the last sector of a social cycle, is to find its outlet and fruition in a spiritualised society and the emergence of mankind on a higher evolutionary level, it is not enough that certain ideas favourable to that turn of human life should take hold of the general mind of the race, permeate the ordinary motives of its thought, art, ethics, political ideals, social effort, or even get well into its inner way of thinking and feeling. It is not enough even that the idea of the kingdom of God on earth, a reign of spirituality, freedom and unity, a real and inner equality and harmony—and not merely an outward and mechanical equalisation and association—should become definitely an ideal of life; it is not enough that this ideal should be actively held as possible, desirable, to be sought and striven after, it is not enough even that it should come forward as a governing pre-occupation of the human mind. That would evidently be a very great step forward,—considering what the ideals of mankind now are, an enormous step. It would be the necessary beginning, the indispensable mental environment for a living renovation of human society in a higher type. But by itself it might only bring about a half-hearted or else a strong but only partially and temporarily successful attempt to bring something of the manifest spirit into human life and its institutions.*

*...A spiritual type may be a temporary mould into which spiritual living may flow, but it is also a limitation and may become a prison in which it fossilises and perishes. A spiritual idea is a power, but only when it is both inwardly and outwardly creative. Here we have to enlarge and to deepen the pragmatic principle that truth is what we create, and in this sense first, that it is what we create within us, in other words, what we become.*

(The Human Cycle, CWSA, Vol. 25, pp. 261, 262)

## A CENTENARY TRIBUTE TO PRADYOT-DA

*“I need you as my instrument”*

*The Mother*

THIS tribute is entirely based on Nirodbaran’s articles, “Pradyot—the Evolution of a Soul” (*Mother India*, February-April 1985) and his small book daringly named *Mother’s Instrument Pradyot* and recounts how the Divine put Pradyot-da on the road of his spiritual realisation.

The Mother gave Pradyot-da this message on 7.5.67:

Pradyot, my dear child,  
I need you as my instrument, and you will remain so.  
Be very quiet—endure with courage.  
I am with you,  
in love and in victory.

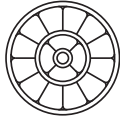
This implies an extreme movement from the depths of the heart—the constant outflow of what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother call the true soul which is a scintilla of the Divine and has a spontaneous leap of self-surrender. A rapt devotion for the supreme streams out from it. When I turn the pages of Nirod-da’s book I feel that there is a complete surrender by Pradyot-da and that the Divine Grace was acting upon him throughout his brilliant career. And I see a man of practical imagination, sharp technical knowledge and constructive wisdom with a dynamic energy and courage. He was a great worker, sailing on the ocean of life, sweeping wide across the calm skies. He was a great composer surmounting his limitations, and however harsh and shrill the contrary notes, blending them into life’s great symphonic movements. This tribute is only a pale reflection of his great personality.

“True friendship is an act of Divine Grace.” Nirod-da’s expression of his deep love for and association with Pradyot-da begins thus:

A singular and unaccountable friendship formed itself between Pradyot and me and it lasted for more than seventy years. Strangely romantic is this friendship and worthy of being told about. It had very little outer expression, particularly in the early part of our association. I thought of writing about it some day, but never imagined the circumstances in which I am now impelled, one may even say compelled, to do it. For it is his sudden passing away that is the compulsion.<sup>1</sup>

Pradyot Kumar Bhattacharya was born on 31.8.1905 at Chittagong. His father, Shri R. C. Bhattacharya, was a well-established pleader in the town. He was a man

7.5.67.



Pradyot, my dear child,  
I need you as my  
instrument, and  
you will remain so.

Be very quiet -  
endure with courage -  
I am with you,  
in love and in  
victory.

A stylized signature or flourish consisting of a long, sweeping horizontal line with a small vertical stroke at the end, resembling a stylized 'J' or a similar character.

of reserve and poise and a true Brahmin. Pradyot-da was the fourth son in the family. Two elder brothers were admitted in the school where Pradyot-da was studying. He is supposed to have been the most diligent. Due to his habit of monitoring his other brothers he was called “munsiff”.

The seed of Pradyot-da’s future was sown at an early age. Nirod-da says:

From his very childhood he had to pass through an austere training from his father. Sleeping on a rough bed, sometimes without pillows; wearing plain but clean dress, going about without footwear; during the thread ceremony, enduring hunger and other brahmanic disciplines till... he was eleven years.<sup>2</sup>

One can note with interest his acting the role of Krishna from a small story narrated by Nirod-da:

Pradyot’s father was... an orthodox Brahmin and a worshipper of Kali.... They had also the idols of Radha and Krishna in their house. One day the idol of Radha was missing. A search began and it was found under Pradyot’s pillow. The exquisite figure of the idol tempted him to appropriate it, but Radha was not to be so easily captured. He would, however, facetiously say, “See, I have been after Radha since my childhood and my horoscope name is Keshta (Krishna).”<sup>3</sup>

It shows the “evolution of his inner being”.

Pradyot-da decided to go abroad. This decision “was taken very suddenly after he had already got himself admitted to St. Xavier’s College, Calcutta”. Nirod-da had already sailed for Edinburgh with his niece from Rangoon. Nirod-da reports:

Now we were no longer two former shy birds of Chittagong Valley. The wide summer air—he arrived in the summer season—blowing from the Scottish hills had swept away the veils of shyness and I found the tongue. We started at once for Glasgow, for the sessions had already started.<sup>4</sup>

Nirod-da says:

Another trait in Pradyot’s nature was his love of company. He was fond of moving about with friends and admirers and during leisure time would organise cultural activities.... Studies were not his only pursuits in which he was already brilliant; he had besides a keen intellect that would inspire authority and confidence wherever he moved. He was also very generous and helped me in times of need.<sup>5</sup>



In one word his life was the story of a progressive unfoldment and its last step was spiritual. For the spiritual, Nirod-da had a small part to play. After their return from Scotland they were posted at far-away places, but very soon Nirod-da became a member of the Ashram. Naturally, his gravitational pull tried to draw Pradyot-da towards the Ashram from Jamshedpur. At Jamshedpur Pradyot-da rose to fame. But first he joined the Tata Company on a monthly salary of Rs. 200/-. He was undergoing hardship due to his meagre salary. Nirod-da writes:

From this lowly position he rose to the status of a superintendent of Electrical Engineering and Construction by sheer merit and had a beautiful bungalow in an aristocratic quarter with all other amenities added to it....

Meanwhile he suddenly got married to a Bengali Christian lady [named Rani]...<sup>6</sup>

She was a School Inspectress at Dacca and whom he had known through Jyotirmayee and Nirod-da in England. He informed Sri Aurobindo about it.

Slowly his interest in the Ashram began to take shape and with the local Bengalis he formed a centre in Jamshedpur for the visitors. He earned their love and respect because of his loving nature. Now he was coming regularly to visit the Ashram. Once when he was in acute pain he dreamt that Mother Kali had taken him on her lap and was rocking him like a baby.

While Pradyot-da was at Jamshedpur his father wired to him to come to his native place, Chittagong, to accompany him to Benares. There were other brothers too, but he wanted Pradyot specially as he was his father's darling. At Benares they were about to enter the temple for the Goddess's darshan and puja, but Pradyot-da would not go in. "He was averse to public shows. He sat outside the temple, in the courtyard, reading a newspaper. Suddenly an elderly woman in a sari accosted him and said, 'My son, I want to have the Mother's darshan. Will you come with me?' He was astonished but could not refuse. He obeyed her, but when they came out, he lost trace of the lady: she had vanished. Long afterwards, he got the truth of the matter, that it was the Mother-Goddess [Annapurna] herself who had appeared before him. There was a traditional belief that none could return without having the darshan of the Mother."

Pradyot-da's close contact with the Ashram and the Mother began to increase. "He wanted to leave Tata and take up a Government job at Calcutta which had fallen vacant. The reason was that the authorities at Tata were not willing to consider his just claim, for though he first officiated as Chief Engineer and then held the post he was not given the salary assigned to it. The Mother, on hearing about it, asked Pradyot to give them an ultimatum. It had no effect. Perhaps the authorities were not very pleased with him because of his being too popular with the workers whose fair demands met with his sympathy.... As the ultimatum had failed, Pradyot applied for

the Calcutta job. On the day of the interview he saw that many candidates were his own assistants. So he kept himself apart and was pacing in the corridor. When his turn came, the interview passed off splendidly. He was found to be of outstanding merit. It so happened that on the eve of the interview he had found a book on Electricity on his table, but he did not know how it had come or who had placed it there. After the interview he realised that all the questions he had been asked had been fully answered in that book and so it had been an easy ride for him. When he returned home from the interview, the book had vanished!... all barriers fell down before the unseen Power that acted. Afterwards he was given the job of Chief Engineer in Damodar Valley. It was a new project. It seemed that all the officers of the Damodar Valley wanted Pradyot to be appointed as their chief. His fame had gone abroad. They had already heard of his ability and efficiency.”

When the post of the Chief Electrical Engineer was sanctioned to Pradyot-da, late Dr. B. C. Roy, the former Chief Minister said, “Pradyot is my own man. He should get the job. Without him, the West Bengal Electrical Development schemes will not be a success.”<sup>7</sup>

During this period Pradyot kept close touch with the Mother and solicited her blessings and counsel in all problems....

There was a talk of Pradyot’s going to France. The Mother, when referred to, asked, “Oh, he wants to go to France?” Hearing this, he came to see her. She kept some papers and files ready for him, but he at once blurted out, “Mother! I am not going.” He had felt in the Mother’s laconic question a vibration of her disapproval. The Mother then explained to him at length why she disapproved. She said that in such instances it entailed a lot of inner work for her....<sup>8</sup>

But he had lost interest in the work. He wanted to come away and preferred some work in the Ashram. But his wife was not ready at that time.

She [the Mother] told some of us, “What work befitting his position can I give him here?”... A few years later, however, the Mother herself called both Dr. Sanyal and Pradyot. These two distinguished professional experts left their friends, admirers and colleagues... when they responded to the call.<sup>9</sup>

On page 32 of his book Nirod-da says, “Let me append here some excerpts from an article written by Mr. C. D. Ayyar, formerly Superintending Engineer, D.V.C., one of Pradyot’s subordinate officers in the D.V.C. They will demonstrate very clearly what I have tried to describe from a second-hand knowledge.” It is from Mr. Ayyar’s tribute that the following is taken:

To begin from the beginning. We were a batch of Senior Engineers abounding

in “Wisdom” and “Engineering Knowledge”, so smug and self-sufficient that we considered our opinion the “last word” on any topic under the sun. Little did we know then that the small frame of P.K.B. housed an intellectual giant. We were to find our levels soon. Our first encounter with P.K.B. began when he issued orders forbidding engineers of our ranks to have direct discussions with the Company’s representatives. When his second order asking us to get our letters monitored through his technical P.A. followed, we decided that this was the limit. We felt humiliated and wanted to rebel. Burning with anger, we proceeded in a batch to P.K.B.’s room to “have it out” with him. His technical P.A. let us in. We were received cordially by the smiling P.K.B., so full of charm. Over cups of coffee, P.K.B. explained in a few clear words the significance of those orders. At that time, the D.V.C. was placing orders worth several crores of rupees with many firms. There was the question of ensuring a fair deal and convincing the public of our accountability. We junior engineers were not that experienced to deal with major problems independently. We saw sense in P.K.B.’s method of working and decided to cooperate. P.K.B. assumed full responsibility for all his actions. He never believed in passing on the blame. Throughout his professional career there is not a single instance of a junior having been let down by him. What began as an encounter with P.K.B. became goodwill and understanding of a lifetime.<sup>10</sup>

Nirod-da explains thus how Pradyot-da was made an instrument in a specific area:

Now he was made a special instrument for collecting funds for the Ashram. We were passing through difficult times after Sri Aurobindo had left his body. In 1958, the Mother called Pradyot and said, “I have no money. I shall have to go to the Himalayas.” “How much do you need, Mother? How long will the crisis last?” he asked. The answer: “I need ten lakhs. Will you be able to get five lakhs at least?” “I shall try, Mother.” “But how? If people become paupers as a result?” she queried. “What of that? What if they bust? Can anyone become a pauper on the score of offering money to the Divine?” he queried. The Mother smiled, “No!” Pradyot left for Calcutta, assembled all friends and devotees and placed before them the predicament. There was a generous response. Somebody even sold his car. Thus the crisis was averted. When he returned, the Mother said, “I was thinking how you could go on such a bold venture. I looked into your past and I knew.”

During a second crisis, the Mother had to sell her *saris*, ornaments, etc. Dyuman appeared one day before Pradyot with a box of these ornaments for disposal. He went to Calcutta and disposed of them to his familiar associates at whatever reasonable or unreasonable price struck him as fitting. On another occasion, Sri Aurobindo himself said to the Mother, “Ask Pradyot.”

...Once, back from Calcutta with offerings, he said..., “Now I can sit in my easy chair and enjoy rest.” Hearing of this, the Mother remarked, “You can’t just sit on an easy chair and change the world.”

Here the question likely to be asked is: “From where did Pradyot get his power? How could he exercise such power?”

There are many answers. But the main one, I believe, can be found in Sri Aurobindo’s book, *The Mother*. Sri Aurobindo says about money, “When you ask for the Mother, you must feel that it is she who is demanding through you a very little of what belongs to her and the man from whom you ask will be judged by his response. If you are free from the money-taint but without any ascetic withdrawal, you will have a greater power to command the money for the divine work.” I believe Pradyot fulfilled this condition admirably.

The second answer is to be discovered in the history of his past which the Mother hinted at.

The third answer is, of course, the Mother’s occult Force acting through and behind him. She once gave him what looked like an old Tibetan coin. It was on her table with a coiled wire-like snake upon it. She removed this figure, as the snake, a symbol of the sex-power, was guarding the money-power. She gave also a talisman. Both these represented the money-power. She said, “Keep them with you. These will bring all the money you need.”

In this context Pradyot told the Mother, “Mother, where lies any credit for me in all this? It is your Force which is doing everything. Anybody can be your instrument.” The Mother smiled and replied, “It is so, but you can’t play the piano on a log of wood.”<sup>11</sup>

\*

Soon after Pradyot had become an inmate of the Ashram the Mother formed two committees: A.C.C. and T.C.C.—agricultural and technological. All the members concerned were called by the Mother and she herself inaugurating the meeting, introduced Pradyot to them and said that he had acquired a vast experience and his technical knowledge and constructive wisdom would be of great help in their collective work. She asked them to meet regularly and discuss their problems with him as their Chairman. The Mother was the President. As I was not directly involved, I cannot go into the intricate problems associated with the work. I noticed that Pradyot used to meet the Mother every day for some months. When the Committee’s hundredth sitting was completed, the Mother came and congratulated the Chairman for the fine role he had played in conducting their affairs.

When, on 29<sup>th</sup> April, 1961 the 300<sup>th</sup> meeting of the T.C.C. was completed, the Mother wrote on a card, “My blessings on this memorable occasion and the

assurance of my constant presence for efficiency and success.” Again on the completion of its 400<sup>th</sup> meeting she wrote: “ To T.C.C. for its 400<sup>th</sup> meeting. Blessings and appreciation of its fine and useful work.” One can easily mark the importance she gave to this work.<sup>12</sup>

The following excerpts are taken from Sri Sadhan Dutt’s chapter in Nirod-da’s book:

No doubt, the well-being and success of an organisation depends largely on the corporate policies it chooses. The quality of leadership is a prime determinant of corporate behavioural patterns and plays a major role in shaping the organisation’s fortunes. However, to what extent an organisation’s performance is accepted by society, is reflected in the kind of well-wishers it gathers around itself, and the quality of interaction that comes about automatically, without intent or effort.

It is a matter of great satisfaction and pride that Development Consultants Private Limited (DCPL) found in the late Sri P. K. Bhattacharya not only its most ardent well-wisher, but also its Friend, Philosopher and Guide of a stature that will remain unparalleled.

D.C.P.L. got acquainted with Mr. Bhattacharya when he was Chief Electrical Engineer of the D.V.C. D.C.P.L. was The Kuljian Corporation then, and was entrusted with the consultancy assignment for Bokaro Power Station. Though it was a mere formal relationship, Mr. S. C. Dutt and other senior officers of D.C.P.L. realised even in those early days that here was an engineer not only wholly sound in knowledge, but committed in heart to the task under his charge. D.C.P.L. being equally committed to the Bokaro job, a relation of mutual trust and confidence was established instantaneously between Mr. Bhattacharya and D.C.P.L.

Around 1954-55 P.K.B. retired prematurely from the D.V.C. ....

Upon retirement from the D.V.C., P.K.B. went to live at the Ashram so he could serve the Mother and be at her beck and call without having to be interrupted by worldly distraction. It was a crucial period in his life, following which, he emerged a person with heart and soul dedicated to the service of the Mother....

His interest and deep concern for D.C.P.L was also evident when the organisation undertook consulting activities for the Bandel Thermal Power Station in West Bengal. He often visited the site during the plant’s construction stages, evinced keen interest in the multifarious project implementation activities and offered valuable advice that came as much from experience as from his love and good wishes for D.C.P.L.<sup>13</sup>

We now return to Nirod-da’s narrative:

On one of his birthdays, in 1966, the Mother said to Champaklal, “Tomorrow is Pradyot’s birthday. Prepare a card for him with that picture of me which signifies ‘Realisation.’ On the left side of the picture, near about my chest, fix the head of a lion.” Pradyot remembered gratefully till his last day that the Mother had kept him close to her heart. The next day the Mother, wishing Pradyot “Bonne Fête”, gave him the card. From that day, his house was converted into a quiet den of lions pictured in various poses: they were hanging in the curtains, sitting on the tables, watching from above the staircase and protecting Pradyot in his bedroom. On his birthday in 1967 the Mother presented him a card with the picture of a lion surrounded by smaller animals with a fire in the centre, saying, “It is a symbolic image of your action.”

Once Pradyot made the following prayers to the Mother:

- i. That you may get all the money you need.
- ii. That I may be a good and faithful instrument, not a weak or broken one.
- iii. That the child Gargi be happy and healthy and a faithful instrument.
- iv. That all those who are around me turn towards you.
- v. That we may have your constant presence.

The Mother wrote back, “Granted.”<sup>14</sup>

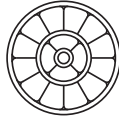
The following extracts are from the chapter called “The ‘Home of Grace’” dealing with the “Sri Aurobindo Institute of Culture” at Calcutta:

...whenever Pradyot visited Calcutta he stayed in premier hotels. Now the Mother asked him to take up residence in the “Home of Grace” along with Arun Tagore. The “Home of Grace” is a very big edifice in Regent Park, belonging to one Lakshmi Devi Loyalka and called Lakshmi’s House. She had offered the house to the Mother in memory of her dead husband. The Mother wrote, “We shall call it Lakshmi’s house and it will be the Home of Grace.” Arun Tagore, attorney and friend of the family, was invited by the lady to come and settle there and look after the house. In 1968, he accepted the proposal with the Mother’s permission. Arun was a great friend of Pradyot’s...

Lakshmi’s House is a unique testimony to Pradyot’s creative genius as regards its organisation and operation. There were two sides to it; one, a surprising efflorescence of his individuality in an hitherto unknown splendour; the second, giving the Lakshmi’s House a touch of novelty among other centres by his glowing faith in the Mother’s Grace aided by his untiring zeal.<sup>15</sup>

On the 6<sup>th</sup> February 1971, the Mother appointed him as one of the Trustees. Nirod-da writes:

On 8<sup>th</sup> February 1971, I went to see him. He gave me a letter of the Mother to



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“ Bonne Fête ! ”

To Pradyot  
with my love  
and blessings for  
a happy and everlasting  
collaboration

read. I was very happy to note that the Mother had appointed him one of the Trustees of the Ashram. In this capacity he rendered invaluable service with his rich knowledge and experience and he developed a natural insight which helped him in taking a correct decision in many matters. He used to say that he was needed most when a decision was in question.<sup>16</sup>

It was found in 1979 that he had a disease of the blood. With his ailment he had carried on his work from 1979 to 1984. There was no relaxation, no abatement of his industry, not a moment's gloominess. He paid regular visits to Calcutta once a month. Two big responsibilities had settled upon his frail shoulders—D.C.P.L. and Lakshmi's House.

He passed away on 22.11.1984 at 11.30 pm. Nirod-da writes:

Next day, the 23<sup>rd</sup>, I had finished my Samadhi work at 4 a.m. and was going back to my room when I saw Dyuman waiting for me. I thought he wanted news of Pradyot's condition. Instead it was he who delivered the dreadful news: "Pradyot passed away last night at 11.30." "What?" I cried. "Yes," he repeated. I was stunned. I felt my eyes grow moist. Dyuman continued, "I was called at night. They asked me to inform you. I said that you must be sleeping and I would give you the news on my return. I saw that Datta was giving intravenous saline or glucose. Suddenly at one time Pradyot started up restless and the next moment everything was quiet." Dyuman and I went at 4.30 a.m. to see the body. Pradyot was lying calmly on a spacious bed, like a prince, the Mother's picture with the lion shining at his head!<sup>17</sup>

To conclude, here is Pradyot-da's notation of his conversation with the Mother on 28.1.64:

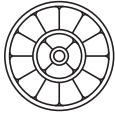
### **The present problem in the country and the solution**

*P.: I am going to Calcutta. There they will ask me one question regarding the present situation—communal riots. What is the solution?*

Mother: The solution is, of course, the change of consciousness. I know those other people behaved badly, like animals—even animals are better than human beings—but if people here also do the same, they are playing into the hands of the forces that make people do evil and strengthen the hold of these forces. Retaliation like that is no remedy.

*P.: People here feel frustrated, they see no remedy, do not know which way to go, whom to look up to. They are going the wrong way, following the wrong*





31. 8. 67

Bonne Tête !

to Pradyot

with love

and blessings

for the strength

to fulfil his

mission

*head. Isn't the division of the country responsible for much of these troubles?*

Mother: Yes, division of religion, of country, of interest. If people felt like brothers, not brothers who quarrel, but conscious of their common origin—

*P.: When are you coming amongst us?*

Mother: Don't be under the illusion that I am not there. I am there, the force, the consciousness are there, but there is no receptivity. During the Chinese trouble, I was in those places in the front, concretely, but I am sorry to say that the only people who were receptive were the Chinese. Their impulsion to advance disappeared. That is receptivity. No one knew why they withdrew. On the Indian side a few were touched and they told me of terrible conditions.

Since World War II I have been keeping Kali quiet, but she is restless. Times are critical, anything may happen. If people will only give up their ego.

*P.: I shall suggest a simpler way, to turn to you.*

Mother: Perhaps the time has come to tell what I have told you. You may talk if any occasion arises. Keep your faith and go like a warrior.<sup>18</sup>

NILIMA DAS

### *References*

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  2. *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.
  3. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
  4. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
  5. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
  6. *Ibid.*, pp. 19, 20.
  7. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
  8. *Ibid.*, pp. 28, 29-30.
  9. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
  10. *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.
  11. *Ibid.*, pp. 43-45.
  12. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
  13. *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60.
  14. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
  15. *Ibid.*, pp. 53, 55.
  16. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
  17. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
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- And *Mother India*, February-April 1985, pp. 82-86, 157-163, 231-237.

## NARSINH MEHTA

MORE than five hundred years have gone by, reducing to dust the might of the Rajputs and the Pathans, the Mughals and the Marathas, and even the powerful British Empire. But no ravages wrought by flood and fire, earthquake and political upheaval could spoil a single note of the songs of a simple Vaishnava poet. To this day the haunting melodies of Narasimha Mehta, popularly known as Narsinh Mehta, reverberate all over Gujarat, sending the listeners into pure rapture.

Narsinh Mehta was born in a middle class *shaivaite* family in Junagadh circa 1416. When he was a very small boy, his mother realised that he was dumb. She took him to a sage. The sage was astonished, because his prophetic soul told him that this little boy was destined to become a great singer and enthral the world with his devotional songs. He took the boy on his lap and patiently kept pronouncing the words “Radhe Krishna”, all the while urging the boy to repeat the words after him. Soon his efforts were rewarded. To the surprise of all who were present there, little Narsinh falteringly uttered his first words: “Radhe Krishna.”

Narsinh Mehta lost his parents when he was very young. His elder brother gave him shelter in his house partly out of natural affection and partly from a sense of duty. But no such consideration moved his hard-hearted wife who regarded Narsinh as an unwanted burden and never lost an opportunity to let him know her mind.

The affection that was denied him at home, Narsinh found in the streets in the company of wandering bands of sadhus. Their intuitive vision discovered the rare soul inhabiting this little boy. They encouraged him to play on the *manjira* and the *kartal* and sing. But this made the termagant of a sister-in-law treat Narsinh even more cruelly, calling him a good-for-nothing, a vagabond. One day when her taunts and abuses became unbearable, Narsinh left home and ran to find solace in an abandoned Shiva temple in a forest on the outskirts of Junagadh. He embraced the Shiva Lingam and bathing the deity with his tears, worshipped him sleeplessly for seven days and seven nights, without taking even a drop of water. No god can remain unmoved in the face of such devotion. Shiva appeared before the little boy and asked him what boon he wanted. Young Narsinh prostrated himself at the feet of the god and said, “Grant me that which you yourself love the most.” Narsinh was blest with a rare spiritual experience. All of a sudden the forest was transformed into the celestial groves and pasture lands of Vrindavan and with his physical eyes Narsinh watched the divine *Ras Lila* of Sri Krishna and Radha and the gopis and heard the enchanting notes of Sri Krishna’s flute.

The vision ended leaving Narsinh in a state of bliss, brimming with poetic inspiration. He was eternally grateful to his sister-in-law but for whose cruelty his third eye would not have opened.

Years passed. Narsinh Mehta spent most of his days composing devotional songs and singing them to his *Ishta Devata*, Sri Krishna. In course of time he got married

to Manek and had two children by her—a son, Shyamalshah, and a daughter, Kunvarbai. His own livelihood and that of his family he left entirely in the hands of Sri Krishna, to whom he had surrendered himself completely.

But soon a problem arose. A leper woman had been driven out of their locality. When Narsinh saw the pitiable condition of this woman, he carried her back to the village and nursed her. This act of defiance infuriated the leaders of his society and he was thrown out of his own house for having touched a leper. Narsinh accepted his fate with perfect equanimity and roamed about in the forest. One night when he was walking down a forest path holding a burning brand to give him light, he saw Sri Krishna and Radha before him. Their ethereal beauty entranced him and he went on gazing at them, not even realising that the fire had reached his hand and it was burning. The divine couple blessed him, made him whole and gave him the boon of *Raga Kedar* which would make him a peerless singer. Sri Krishna took his own crown and placed it on Narsinh's head and put a pair of *kartals* in his hands. In a state of trance Narsinh returned home. Later, when he recounted his miraculous experience in the forest, nobody believed him, not even when he produced the crown and the *kartals* as evidence.

Narasinh Mehta is said to have composed one hundred and twenty-five thousand verses. Many of his poems are autobiographical in nature wherein he describes some actual incident of his life culminating in a spiritual miracle. Thus in his poem, *The Marriage of Syhamalshah*, we hear of the wealthy Madan Mehta who was looking for a suitable bridegroom for his only daughter, Ratan. Some local pranksters guided him to Narsinh Mehta's house hoping to embarrass the poor poet. But contrary to their expectation, Madan Mehta was deeply moved by the air of devotion, peace and happiness prevailing in Narsinh's home and gave his daughter in marriage to Shyamalshah.

On another occasion, Narsinh Mehta had to approach a moneylender to borrow some money to help out a stranger in desperate need. When the moneylender demanded some security, poor Narsinh pledged his most precious possession—his *Raga Kedar*. When Narsinh's enemies heard about this pledge, out of sheer malice they went to the king and persuaded him to invite Narsinh Mehta to his court to sing. Narsinh sang many beautiful songs but the king was not satisfied. He requested the poet to sing *Raga Kedar*. Narsinh expressed his inability to sing that particular *Raga* because it was in mortgage. The king became furious and threatened the poet with dire consequences if he did not sing that *Raga*. Just then the moneylender himself came to the king's court and said that one Damodar Doshi and his wife had redeemed the pledge and had sent him forthwith to deliver the *Raga Kedar* to Narsinh Mehta. Soon the divine sounds of *Raga Kedar* filled the court and enchanted the king.

A group of travellers visited Junagadh. They were going to Dwarka. They did not want to carry much money on their person for fear of being robbed on the way. Having heard of Narsinh Mehta's integrity, they deposited a big sum of money with

Narsinh Mehta in Junagadh and asked him to issue a Letter of Credit against that deposit to some reliable person in Dwarka, so that they could draw the money from him when they reached Dwarka. Narsinh said that the only reliable person whom he knew there was Shyamal Shah. Accordingly he issued the Letter of Credit in the name of Shyamal Shah. When the travellers reached Dwarka and made enquiries about Shyamal Shah, they discovered to their dismay that there was no such person. They were very angry and began to curse Narsinh Mehta, calling him a cheat. Just then a very beautiful young couple presented themselves to the travellers as Shyamal Shah and his wife and said that they were the employees of Narsinh Mehta and that they were there to honour Narsinh Mehta's Letter of Credit. Thus Dwarkadhisha Sri Krishna declared himself a servant of love.

Another song of his tells us of a man whose young son was dying of some incurable disease. Apparently the young boy could live only if somebody lent him his own span of life. With Narsinh Mehta's approval his son, Shyamalshah, gave his own life to the boy. Unable to bear the loss of her only son Maneka, Narsinh's wife, died. Faced with this double tragedy, Narsinh's laconic comment was, "With all my obstacles removed, I can now concentrate entirely on Sri Krishna."

Narsinh Mehta's uncle, Parvatdas of Mangrol, found a beautiful black stone statue of Ranchod Rai (another name by which Sri Krishna, the king of Dwarka, is known) in a well on the bank of the sacred river Gomti. Around this time Vasudev Salat had carved a beautiful throne in black stone and wishing to offer his masterpiece to Dwarkadhisha Ranchod Rai, had set sail for Dwarka. But a fearful storm forced him to cast anchor at Mangrol and he offered this throne to the stone statue found by Parvatdas. To celebrate this event, Narsinh Mehta sang devotional songs all through the night. When he felt thirsty his widowed daughter-in-law, Ratan, brought him water. But as she was approaching him, Narsinh had a vision of Vishnu in his Mohini aspect bringing him nectar and he composed three celebrated verses describing Vishnu's Mohini *rūpa* followed by a fourth one describing his daughter-in-law, Ratan.

Perhaps Narsinh Mehta's most popular song is *Mameru Kunvarbai*. Narsinh Mehta's beloved daughter, Kunvarbai, was married into a very wealthy family but she was cursed with a most unpleasant mother-in-law and even worse grandmother-in-law who never let an opportunity go by without taunting her about her father's poverty.

Kunvarbai became pregnant and soon it was time for her *mameru*, that is, the desire fulfilment ceremony, when it was customary for the girl's father to shower her with gifts. Kunvarbai knew all too well how poor her father was and so did not want to burden him with any demands. But the two old women goaded her to such an extent that she was forced to approach him. Narsinh heard the whole story from his daughter and calmly said, "Tell them to give me a list of everything that they want from me." Soon the list came with demands that would make a dent even in a king's treasury. Narsinh Mehta consoled his tearful daughter with the words, "If Sri Krishna

does not want to put me to shame, he will provide.” And sure enough, on the appointed day Damodar Doshi and his beautiful wife introduced themselves to Kunvarbai’s mother-in-law as close relatives of Narsinh Mehta. Pointing at the two over-laden bullock carts which had accompanied them, they said, “Narsinh Mehta has sent all the items that you had put on your list, including the two stones that you had particularly asked for.” This last was in reference to the sarcastic remarks of the mother-in-law who had said to Kunvarbai, “If your father cannot afford to give you anything, let him at least send a couple of stones as a token gift.” But the stones that Damodar Doshi handed over to Kunvarbai’s mother-in-law were of solid gold!

Some untouchables pleaded with Narsinh Mehta to sing his devotional songs in their courtyard. Narsinh told them to clean their courtyard thoroughly, purify it by smearing *panchagavya* and erect a Tulasi *mancha* there together with an image of Sri Krishna. When all was ready, he showered his divine songs on their receptive hearts. But the narrow-minded, caste-conscious village panchayat took him to task for his misdemeanour and threatened to ostracise him. A serene Narsinh Mehta replied to their accusation, “Your man-made society may regard them as untouchables. But their deep devotion makes them true Vaishnavas, and lord Krishna says, ‘Wherever true Vaishnavas are, I am present there.’ ”

Again the enemies of Narsinh Mehta became active. They reported to the king that Narsinh was a cheat and was deceiving the gullible public by pretending to possess supernatural powers. Intending to put the matter to a test, the king invited Narsinh Mehta to his court and asked him to sing such songs that they would oblige Sri Krishna to garland him with his own garland. Narsinh Mehta prayed to Sri Hari and began to sing. Everybody who heard him was thrilled by the longing in his voice. He sang the whole night long and just as dawn was breaking, a beautiful garland with a heavenly fragrance came swaying and undulating through the air and wrapped itself round Narsinh Mehta’s neck.

Gujarati literature will always remain indebted to Narsinh Mehta for the immeasurable wealth that he has bequeathed to it. Apart from the autobiographical poems which have already been mentioned, we have his *Sudamacharitra*, *Dan Lila*, *Ras Lila*, *Surat Sangram* and many other Kavyagranthas. The mainspring of his poetry is bhakti or devotion. He did not compose his poems because he was a poet, but because the devotee in him had to express the yearning for God that constantly rose in him and threatened to drown him if he did not open the floodgates.

In his poetry one feels the soul’s joy in uniting with the Beloved. About his poetry the great savant, Sri Kanhaiyalal Munshi, says, “In Narsinh Mehta’s songs we do not find the grace of Mirabai’s bhajans, the nobility of Tulsidas’ verse or the intensity of Surdas’ songs; but his words carry us away on their wave of devotion and complete surrender at the feet of Sri Krishna.”

To give the reader a taste of Narasinh Mehta’s poetry, I am appending three of his most famous songs translated from the original Gujarati:

*Vaishnava jana to tene kahiye...*

The true Vaishnava is sensitive to the sufferings of others, and though he helps those in need, he is never proud of it. He respects everyone in the world and is not critical of anybody. He has complete control over his body, speech and mind. The mother of such a son is blessed!

He has given up desire and is full of equanimity. He looks upon all women, except his wife, as his mother. He never speaks a lie, nor desires another's wealth. He is above infatuation and attachment and his mind is firmly rooted in renunciation. He is ever engrossed in remembrance of God and all holy places reside in his body. He has given up greed and crookedness in his dealings with others, and has risen above anger and lust. The very presence of such a man purifies many generations.

*Akhila brahmandama eka tu Sri Hari...*

The entire universe is only you, Sri Hari, manifested in myriad forms. You are divinity within the body of man. You are the essence of light. You have become the Word in the ether and that Word has its abode in the Vedas.

You, who lifted up the Mount Govardhan, are the wind, the water and the earth. You are the tree that has its roots in the sky. You have created this manifold universe to taste a variety of *rasa* (delight). It is in the same pursuit of delight that you have changed yourself from the original state of *shiva* (Spirit) into *jiva* (ego).

The Vedas and the Upanishads state that there is no difference between the gold and the earrings since in spite of numerous different forms, bearing different names, everything is essentially gold.

You are the seed in the tree and the tree within the seed. I witness these changes which are so close to each other. This cannot be known by the mind; it is by Love alone that this is revealed.

*Jyan lagi atama-tattwa chinyo nahi...*

All sadhana is futile till you have experienced the soul. Until one has that experience, the human life is as useless as a shower of rain out of season. Nothing really helps you, neither bathing and worship and charity nor growing long hair nor smearing the body with ashes nor having a shaven head.

Going to places of pilgrimage, performing penance or telling of beads, wearing the sacred mark or the Tulasi mala or drinking of the water of the river Ganga—none of these have any spiritual significance.

The knowledge of the Vedas and Sanskrit grammar or observance of temple ceremonies, the study of the six systems of philosophy or maintaining of the rules of the caste system cannot give you enlightenment.

Unless one has experienced one's soul which is one with the Parabrahman, all these are of no avail: they are only worthless means to earn one's daily bread. Until one has seen the Highest Truth which is like a rare wish-fulfilling jewel, this life is wasted.

ILA R. JOSHI

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## YOUR LIGHT

*The world is here to manifest the unmanifest.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

Cling to your dream in the waking world  
and the light of your being

midst the dim crowd or contrary time

Employ the tools of your bliss  
with invisible help

Sail new horizons in the wind  
of the ideal

Hold the fulfilling thought  
in the venture

Cherish the ancient one  
the Divine

Know the Self

Unfold the future  
in the now

Ascend to a luminous age  
in new light

for the new millennium

JOSEPH KENT



# THE PURANAS AND OUR CENTURY

(Continued from the issue of June 2005)

## 20. The Raising of Govardhan

A FAVOURITE term used for Krishna by Srivaishnava acharyas is, *aghaṭita ghaṭanā sāmārthya*: one who is capable of impossible feats. Babydays onwards, Krishna is associated with a series of impossible feats like the destruction of Putana, the smashing of Shakatasura and the killing of Trinavarta. Of all such feats, the episode of Krishna's lifting up the Govardhan Hill has been a favourite of devotees, poets and sculptors. One of the early epigraphical recordings of the *Govardhana-uddharaṇa* inscribed about six hundred years ago comes from the Jodhpur inscription of Rupadevi:<sup>1</sup>

At first they laughed at it; then they were surprised at his shaking the hill with the movements of his arms; then they got frightened lest his creeper-like arms were injured by the weight of the hill. At last, seeing the hill balanced on his lotus-like palms, the *gopis* clapped in delight. May the tingling of their bangles while clapping their hands protect you!

There are quite a few other inscriptions too in Ajmer. Ms. Mukhopadhyay feels that this is probably an allusion "to the check that Indra-cult received from the expansion of the Krishna cult." The move towards change must have become definite by the time *Harivamsha* was composed. Considered to be the earliest *Purana* and referred to as the 19<sup>th</sup> Parva of the *Mahabharata*, *Harivamsha* refers to Indra's vengeful act when denied worship by the cowherd clan. He ordered the Samvartaka group of clouds to play havoc in the Vraja land. Krishna lifted up the Govardhan Hill as a "home" for the clan. The poem describes the hill as an image of a peacock and is full of sensuous details that make the hill a treasury of Mother Nature. The episode concludes with the crowning of Krishna as Govinda by Indra.

The *Vishnu Purana* also deals with this legend. Sage Parashara speaks of heavy rains for seven days and Krishna's holding up the Govardhan Hill throughout the period and thus saving the denizens of Gokula. A few centuries later, in the *Bhagavata* days the episode acquired a prime position in Krishna lore and has continued to remain so. The "Govinda Paṭṭābhiṣekam" (announcing Krishna's divinity) is celebrated with éclat throughout India.

The story is simply told. Krishna asked his father not to offer the annual yaga in honour of Indra. It was not Indra but the Govardhan Hill that sustained them. The worship must be directed to the hill. The *Bhagavata* says that Nandagopa and the other elders of Vraja accepted Krishna's advice because the Time-spirit had decided to humble Indra's pride, *kālātmanā bhagavatā śakradarpam jighāmsatā*. The cowherds

and cowherdesses decked themselves in finery and brought plenty of food offerings.

To generate faith in the minds of the Gopas, Krishna assumed a huge form declaring himself to be the spirit of the mountain and consumed large quantities of the food offerings. And the same Krishna, standing by in his usual form, said to them: “Ah, how wonderful! This mountain has appeared before us as a living form and blessed us. This mountain, which can assume any form, appears as wild animals to destroy people who insult it. For the good of our cattle and of ourselves, we should make prayerful prostrations to him.”

Infuriated Indra sent down thunderous rains to destroy the cowherd settlement of Nanda (*nanda goṣṭha jighāmsayā*) for he could not stand the pride exhibited by a set of unlettered cowherds who had become very prosperous since the advent of Krishna. There arose a tremendous uproar and the entire settlement looked to Krishna for relief. He quietly lifted up the mountain as if it were a mushroom plant (*chatrāka*) and held it up as an umbrella for the settlement and put it down only after the sky became clear of clouds. Humbled, Indra came down to Vraja and began singing the praises of Krishna. Nay more. The heavenly cow, Surabhi, also accompanied him and together they anointed Krishna with Surabhi’s milk and proclaimed him “Govinda” which means “Indra of the cows.” Immediately prosperity reigned everywhere:

When Krishna was thus crowned, even the habitually cruel animals like serpents gave up their bad traits. Having thus installed Krishna as the master of cows and Gokula and made him Govinda, Indra with other celestials went back to his abode.

Certainly, there is more than meets the eye in the Govardhan episode. Considering its popularity for more than fifteen hundred years, it is obvious that the celebration of Krishna’s “Govinda Paṭṭābhiṣekam” by a grateful nation marks a major victory for the local forces who had till then been dismissed as mere cowherds who did nothing more than play the flute while grazing their flock. Long before this time, it was only Indra who was famous as a prime deity. The ancient Tamil epics, *Silappadhikaram* and *Manimekalai* have extensive references to the Indra festival which proves that the city-dweller and the forest-dweller were both deeply attuned to honouring him as the Supremo of the immortals. In the former, it is the festival that is the catalytic agent for the events in the poem. In the latter, the king tries to revive the Indra festival that had gone into disuse. It was a festival spread through twenty-eight days and brought ill-luck if it was discontinued. The traditional drummer announced the celebrations:

Our elders knew for certain that when  
 This auspicious jubilee is held to  
 Honour our island, *Indra*, his fourfold  
 Gods, and the Eighteen godheads  
 Famed for their special propitiating grace  
 Come here leaving the heavens forlorn  
 As this city was when King Karikala  
 Went northwards in search of new victories.<sup>2</sup>

It may be relevant here to add that *Silappadhikaram* has also a settlement of cowherds in Madurai where the hero and heroine, Kovalan and Kannaki find refuge. When the elder cowherdess Madari sees omens of a terror striking them, she sets up a “Kuravai Koothu” (A folk dance like the Rās) where the girls sing of Krishna’s dancing with his hand linked with Nappinnai.

There is then the lifting up of a hill. Surely it was no mere fancy. Mere fevered imagination would not become a classic that lasts for centuries. Lifting up a whole hill may have been a loving exaggeration, but contests for lifting up heavy rocks were obviously a way of heroic manhood in ancient India. There was the concept of a bride as *vīra-śulka*, “a gift for heroism”. One may bend (or break) a mighty bow; another might bring down a target whirling above by watching its reflection in the waters below; yet another might subdue seven fierce bulls in a contest (as Krishna does in the South Indian myth of his marriage with Nappinnai). In the same way, folklore speaks of heroes who were able to lift up huge rocks to win a bride. Rajam Krishnan in her Tamil novel, *Kurinji-then* on the Badaga community in the Ootacamund Hills writes of such a contest, as received from their folklore.

If so, the Govardhan episode is to be taken as the bold subduing of an extra-territorial lordship. Certainly such a struggle and victory may have happened in the ancient times, for the Puranic lore of the Vedic stream is not the only one to speak of the Govardhan episode. There is a tenth century epic poem in Tamil, *Choolamani* by Tolamozhi Devar. When Jainism was very popular in Tamil Nadu, a Manipravala (a mixture of Sanskrit and Tamil) work *Sri Puranam* came into existence. It is a summary of the *Mahapurana* in Sanskrit. *Choolamani* retells the story of Sreyamsa Swami which is part of *Sri Puranam*. The hero of the epic poem is descended from Vijaya Triprishta who is referred to as a contemporary of Sreyamsa Swami. He is said to possess the conch and the discus and is hailed for raising up the Kotisila (The Great Rock), *thrikantaparathāti patikalākiya vijayatriprushtar kōtisilai etuththapin*.

While retelling the story of Triprishta as Tivitta, Tolamozhi Dhevar describes him as Krishna:

With discus, mace, sword, conch, bow,  
 And the gem of glowing sheen,

He shone brilliantly as the divine  
Whom people and kings worship.<sup>3</sup>

When he posits a victory over Ashwagriva, Tivittan is crowned and he is praised by those present. A poet deep in Puranic lore says that the *Mahapurana* speaks of earlier kings. After defeating an enemy and gaining the “five armaments” (*pañcāyudhā*), Lakshmi, Garuda and the rest, it was customary for such kings to prove their personal prowess by ulifting a hill. Tivittan says in all humility:

Kings who ruled over the earth  
Are larger in number than sands of the sea;  
I am but one of them. Who knows  
How many more the world is yet to see?”

As scholars spoke of such lives,  
He who was rich in his dharmic nature  
Got up with his armaments  
And reached the Kotimasilai Hill.

Pressing both his ornamented hands  
Deep into the bowels of the earth,  
The god-like hero clutched the roots  
And raised the hill of precious gems.

There were sounds from within the earth as if the mouth-like holes were screaming. The thick and long tails of the serpents in the holes appeared like roots. The streams seemed like the tears of the hill.

Folding one leg below and raising high  
The glowing hill, he stood appearing  
As if a huge, blue mountain  
Had raised another mountain above.

After a while Tivittan replaces the hill in its original place. It is a tantalising mix-up of the possible and the probable, the divine and human, the Vedic and Shramanic, Krishna and Triprišta. But enough gets percolated into us that the North-South divide is, perhaps, not such a divide in India; and the lifting up of the Govardhan Hill remains quite relevant to our century when personal, physical heroism has not been totally destroyed in the age of science and technology. In fact, scholars even discuss the manner in which Krishna might have lifted up the hill. Did he keep it in his raised hands as it was or did he hold it up like an inverted pyramid? Vedanta

Desika's tremendous epic poem, *Yādavābhyudāyam* (for which Appayya Dikshita himself has written a Sanskrit commentary) reserves a good deal of space for the Govardhan episode. Desika says that Krishna just placed his hand on top of the hill and lifted it up like an elephant that pulls up a blade of "nala" grass. He then inverted the hill and raised his hand:

*Abhughnaratnāṅkulipañjaram̐ tat ratnormikāraśmiśalākamataḥ  
Navodakakṣaumavṛtam̐ vyabhāsīñchatraprakāṇḍam̐ haribāhudanḍe.<sup>4</sup>*

The hill was like an umbrella. Krishna's shoulder was like the stick of the umbrella, the red fingers that were bent seemed like the cage-fixture and the illumination of the gems in his rings were like wires holding up the cloth and the falling rain like the white silk.

Since the legend is also associated with huge mounds of cooked food, it has remained popular as a lesson in sharing food with all living beings. An auspicious day after Diwali is celebrated all over India as *Anna-koot* when mounds of food are offered to the Govardhan Deity (Krishna). It would be relevant to mention here that the International Society of Krishna Consciousness has made the celebration a major event in their annual calendar when huge hillocks of cooked rice are made, offered to the Lord and then distributed as prasada. The biggest beneficiary of such an event is the common man who is also generally very poor. A good meal in the twenty-first century is assured for him thanks to a legend that gained currency more than a millennium ago! In Govardhan itself, devotees come in tens of thousands one day after Diwali. They do *jagaran* (remaining awake throughout the night) and prepare 108 varieties of bhog. Cooked rice, pulses, fruit, vegetables, chutneys and even pickles... Krishna the butter-thief loves everything!

It so happens that of all the avatars we have known so far, Krishna is the most recent. This is no doubt the reason why all the festivities associated with his manifestation and ministry are celebrated as contemporary happenings. The memories are so fresh! Let us draw closer to the Govardhan Hill itself. It is in Vrindavan and has a seven-mile long ridge around which pilgrims go to perform their parikrama.<sup>5</sup>

At the southern tip of the Govardhan Hill is the town of Jatipura. On its north, the Radha Kund. The town of Govardhan and the famous water tank, Manasi Ganga, overlooked by the Haridev temple are in the middle. The temple is of red sandstone. The Manasi Ganga has a charming legend too. When Krishna killed Vatsasura, he was told that he had committed a terrible sin by killing a cow. And this was Govardhan, the hill which nourishes cows! Only a bath in the Ganga could purify Krishna of this sin. He immediately brought the Ganges to the hill by his *sankalpa*, bathed in it and was purified. Hence, a bath in this Manasi Ganga is said to purify us of any sin committed knowingly or unknowingly. It is certainly a wonderful sight when thousands

of candlelights are floated in its waters during Diwali.

On one side of the ridge we have the Govind Kund and on the other, the Kusum Sarovar. It is said that only after Sri Chaitanya went around the hill and spent long hours meditating upon the Maha Mantra that the location of the Radha Kund was found and now the true periphery of the circumambulation includes the twin pools which he identified as the Krishna Kund and Radha Kund. Followers of Chaitanya use the bare tiny villages around the twin ponds as a retreat. We are also shown the garden of Uddhava near the Kusum Sarovar. Well, he had wished to be in Vrindavan always, at least as a plant or tree, and we may take it that his wish has been fulfilled. The Govardhan Hill area must have been an environmentalist's delight at one time but had fallen into disuse. Once again work has been undertaken to clear the *parikramā* so that pilgrims will be comfortable when they worship the hill. For, the *parikramā* could be very strenuous, especially when a devotee offers *danḍavat parikramā*. One performs 108 prostrations before moving forward one body length! The number of prostrations is counted with the help of a heap of stones. The length of the *parikramā* of the hill today is about twenty-three kilometers.

There is no legend in India that does not go back to the beginnings or remains tantalising in future time. The Govardhan Hill has a past too in the folds of mythology. The King of Mountains, Dronachala, had a son Giriraja who unwillingly accompanied Sage Pulastya to Kashi. On the way, when they were passing the Vrindavan area, Giriraja purposefully grew heavy and was put down. He could not be moved from the place. When Rama was building the stone-bridge to Lanka, Giriraja offered his services. Since the bridge was ready by then, his offer was politely refused. To the crestfallen Giriraja, Rama gave the assurance that the next incarnation (Krishna) would play on the hill and even worship him. And in the following Kali yuga devotees would throng to the hill and attain their wishes.

Legendary information, influenced by the early narrative in *Harivamsha* has it that Govardhan Hill is in the shape of a peacock. Radha Kunda and Shyama Kunda are the eyes, Dan Ghati is the neck, Mukharavinda is the mouth and Panchari is its back and tail feathers. It is said that as a peacock often curves its neck and puts its head under its stomach. Govardhan Hill is shaped in this pose of a peacock. Describing the hill and the way Krishna held it up with electrical ease has been a favourite pastime of poets; and we also prefer to suspend our disbelief reading the various versions. The celebrated Tamil poet, Sevvaichooduvar says that the Lord gobbled up all the offerings using all his four hands! And when the terrifying rains came Krishna was very much in charge of the situation:

“Fear not the rains sent by Indra’s anger,” he said  
 And stood there with the immense hill in his hand  
 Raised in a jiffy, holding it verily  
 Like a soft, *kandal* blossom.

With one hand he lifted the hill  
 To chase away the fear of the cowherds.  
 People on the earth were astonished;  
 The heavenly denizens saluted.  
 With the hill in his hand, the Lord said:  
 "Give up fear; come unto this place."  
 Damsels, menfolk, cows, calves  
 Came in fast, forgetting their fears.<sup>6</sup>

He assures them that they need not take him to be a mere boy and worry whether the hill would fall. "Be assured that this hill will be soft and light for my hands! Remember, I am the God to whom you gave food offerings." The poet adds that for the Lord anything is possible. As a baby he had gobbled up all the worlds and so it is no big deal, lifting up a small hill! The heavy rains last for a week but no harm comes to the cowherd clan. Sevvaichooduvar uses a striking simile to describe this:

One who follows the righteous path,  
 Controls his five senses, and ever recites  
 The peerless Brilliance's Name is not attacked  
 By the results of the evil karma of the past.  
 In the same manner, none was harmed by the rains.

Indeed, all *Bhagavata* lore (literature pertaining to the devotees of Bhagavan) hails the Govardhan episode in a fulsome manner. In a land where bhakti is closely aligned with music, composers have often used the image of Krishna as Govardhan-dhaari. Meera Bai used "giridhaari" as her signature:

I will dance singing the glories of Hari!  
 I will dance singing the glories of the Lord!  
 Sitting in my own temple  
 I will read the Gita and the Bhagavata!  
 Making a bundle of knowledge and meditation,  
 I will stick to the company of Hari!  
 Says Meera: I shall always enjoy the feeling of love  
 Towards my Lord Giridhar Krishna!<sup>7</sup>

If the Bhakti Movement begun by the Alvars of South India soon transformed the methodology of ritualistic worship in the whole of India, the Govardhan had a great hand in inspiring the devotees of the Hindi and Gujarati heartland. The image of Krishna as Govardhan-dhaari worshipped by Madhavendra Puri (Chaitanya's guru's guru) was consecrated in a temple at Govardhan. After 1672, the priestly families in

charge of the image moved out due to political reasons. Maharana Raj Singh of Mewar invited the priests to come with the image and settle down in his kingdom. He gave land in Sinhar village for building the temple and its upkeep. As the image of Krishna holding up the mountain was known as Srinath, the place was renamed as Nathdwara. The Vallabhacharya sect of Vaishnavism to which the temple belongs bases its ritualism on the childhood and boyhood of Krishna. An extremely popular pathway, it attracted Surdas who completely devoted himself to Srinathji. We may have entered a post-science-cum-technology age and mechanised our lives with bits and bytes and roving cameras but the charm of the Govardhan episode remains the greater reality even today as we begin our *parikramā* of the *Anna-koot* prepared in the Diwali season, listening to a song of Surdas whether in Chennai, Auckland or Norwalk. Suddenly, we find ourselves in the Vraja land and all our yesterdays become the present, with the firm assurance of the Lord holding up the Hill of Grace to guard us from the killer-storms of earthly life:

If Mohan adopts someone as his own  
 Not a single hair on his head can be harmed  
 Even if the world is armed to oppose.  
 With him to guard the modesty of Drupad's daughter  
 Who could steal away her clothes?  
 He broke the proud plans of Duryodhan  
 By covering her with streams of cloth.  
 Hiranyakashipu went down in weary defeat  
 While Prahlad felt no shred of fear.  
 And Uttanapad's son reigns unflinching to this day,  
 Shines with an unwavering light.  
 The captain of the gods aimed his rage at Gokul,  
 But what could his fury command?  
 For Nanda's protector was the guardian of Braj  
 And the Mountain-Lifter's honour filled the land.  
 Since he earns his fame by shattering pride,  
 How could he fail to show the lowly his love?  
 Surdas says, by singing praises to that Lord  
 One finds a place of refuge and is saved.

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR



*Notes and References*

1. See Manisha Mukhopadhyay, *Brahmanical Mythology in Sanskrit Inscriptions* (1981), pp. 186-87.
2. Translated by Prema Nandakumar.
3. Translations from *Choolamani* are by Prema Nandakumar.
4. Canto VII, verse 51.
5. I am indebted to Srivatsa Goswami's *Celebrating Krishna* (2001) for the information regarding the worship of Govardhan today in Vrindavan. It is a pictorial study of how bhakti is actually practiced by the common man today and the intensity with which he pursues the Divine and how relevant the *Bhagavata* is for infusing peace, calm, hope and a sense of fulfilment in his everyday life.
6. Translated by Prema Nandakumar.
7. Translated by V. K. Subramanian.

***Krishna***

*O immense Light and thou, O spirit-wide boundless Space,  
Whom have you clasped and hid, deathless limbs, gloried face?  
Vainly lie Space and Time, "Void are we, there is none."  
Vainly strive Self and World crying, "I, I alone."  
One is there, Self of self, Soul of Space, Fount of Time,  
Heart of hearts, Mind of minds, He alone sits, sublime.  
Oh, no void Absolute self-absorbed, splendid, mute,  
Hands that clasp hold and red lips that kiss blow the flute.  
All He loves, all He moves, all are His, all are He!  
Many limbs sate his whims, bear His sweet ecstasy.  
Two in One, Two who know difference rich in sense,  
Two to clasp, One to be, this His strange mystery.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 590)

## ON THE ROAD

(April 24, 2005)

In this time capsule of the road  
I live within a steel cocoon,  
The miles speed by, the garish signs  
Promising the empty boon

To sate the ravenous appetite,  
Fill mind with desultory dreams.  
The miles speed by and all my soul  
Seems rapt in other worlds, the streams

Of music melding with the tyres.  
My thoughts roam far beyond these wheels  
And sounds impinge upon my ears  
From a place beyond this life's ordeals,

The quiet of an Ashram's peace.  
The faces of its devotees  
Return as deep remembrances  
Of soul arisen from unplumbd seas

And I am carried back through years  
Of longing held within the heart  
For One, in all this changing scene,  
The constant in this crowded mart

Of time, this panoply of life,  
Whom I no longer see but know  
Above the turbulence of days,  
The Friend to whose abode I go.

NARAD (RICHARD EGGENBERGER)

## SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

*(Continued from the issue of April 2005)*

IN Book One, Canto Two, entitled “The Issue” we see Savitri rising up to confront Time and Fate. This canto leads to the conflict between Death and Life Eternal, the issue of Destiny and the conquest of Death. The issue is the prologue to the drama of the life of Savitri. She sees the whole course of her evolution. As the poet puts it,

Her witness spirit stood reviewing Time.  
All that she once had hoped and dreamed and been,  
Flew past her eagle-winged through memory’s skies.  
As in a many-hued flaming inner dawn,  
Her life’s broad highways and its sweet bypaths  
Lay mapped to her sun-clear recording view,...”<sup>1</sup>

Savitri is reviewing her past mapped on the canvas of memory. She sees:

...the bright country of her childhood’s days  
And the blue mountains of her soaring youth  
And the paradise groves and peacock wings of Love  
To joy clutched under the silent shadow of doom  
In a last turn where heaven raced with hell.<sup>2</sup>

In her consciousness the time she had lived with Satyavan seemed to have passed almost like a day. The twelve passionate months had elapsed and now the fated day is here. The need of the hour is described thus:

An absolute supernatural darkness falls  
On man sometimes when he draws near to God:  
An hour arrives when fail all Nature’s means;  
Forced out from the protecting Ignorance  
And flung back on his naked primal need,  
He at length must cast from him his surface soul  
And be the ungarbed entity within:...<sup>3</sup>

She has to break the determinism of her past by her soul’s force because it is “a block on the Immortal’s road”.<sup>4</sup> The outer personality of man which is the result of evolution of the soul in ignorance and which is only a representative of his true self has to be dissolved in order to allow the greater self to come forward and act. Sri Aurobindo then describes what Savitri is rising to do:

Her soul's debate with embodied Nothingness  
 Must be wrestled out on a dangerous dim background:  
 Her being must confront its formless Cause,  
 Against the universe weigh its single self."<sup>5</sup>

M.P. Pandit says: "In itself Nothingness has no form; but here it embodies itself in form; it is the god of Death. Being has a form, but its base is formlessness. Thus Savitri representing Being has to face her source, 'Nothingness', in an embodiment on the borders where the known meets the unknown."<sup>6</sup>

This is a world issue. In trying to solve it, Savitri is really solving the world issue. So:

The world unknowing, for the world she stood:...<sup>7</sup>

She has to meet the challenge of "embodied Nothingness" and

Look into the lonely eyes of immortal Death...<sup>8</sup>

for

The great and dolorous moment now was close.<sup>9</sup>

In her idyllic setting,

Love came to her hiding the shadow, Death.<sup>10</sup>

The God of Love had found Savitri's consciousness pure and sincere,

In her he found a vastness like his own,  
 His high warm subtle ether he refound  
 And moved in her as in his natural home.  
 In her he met his own eternity.<sup>11</sup>

Savitri's nature was not narrow like that of other human beings whose love is egoistic and selfish:

A wide self-giving was her native act;  
 A magnanimity as of sea or sky  
 Enveloped with its greatness all that came  
 And gave a sense as of a greatened world:...<sup>12</sup>

She had a universal, a "kindly care" and a "deep Compassion":

Love in her was wider than the universe,  
The whole world could take refuge in her single heart.<sup>13</sup>

Her nature had a Godlike element of sympathy and universal helpfulness.

Although she leaned to bear the human load,  
Her walk kept still the measures of the gods.<sup>14</sup>

Savitri yearned to bring about a radical inner change in man's consciousness in order to cure his ills. She went to the root of man's malady and found that

There is a darkness in terrestrial things  
That will not suffer long too glad a note.<sup>15</sup>

And for what she wanted to accomplish, she had to accept the situation:

On her too closed the inescapable Hand:  
The armed Immortal bore the snare of Time.<sup>16</sup>

Soon she found herself face to face with the problem of Satyavan's death. She was eminently fitted for the task, because she was not like other humans,

...one more pawn who comes destined to be pushed  
One slow move forward on a measureless board  
In the chess-play of the earth-soul with Doom,—...<sup>17</sup>

Death seems an inevitability and life seems to be under its sway. Thus we see in the world the working of an iron law. This law applies equally to all, restraining "the Titan in us and the God".<sup>18</sup> Savitri, conscious of her divinity, defies the authority of the law of ignorance and wants to assert the sovereign right of the Spirit. She will not allow the divine Light to go away from her. She feels in her not only the presence of divine Light but also the drive of the evolutionary force from the earth consciousness towards the Supreme. She feels that she has come to do the work and that the divine power has entered in her.

As Sri Aurobindo says:

A magic leverage suddenly is caught  
That moves the veiled Ineffable's timeless will:  
A prayer, a master act, a king idea  
Can link man's strength to a transcendent Force.  
Then miracle is made the common rule,

One mighty deed can change the course of things;  
A lonely thought becomes omnipotent.<sup>19</sup>

(*To be continued*)

NILIMA DAS

*References*

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|---|---------------------------|
| 1. <i>Savitri</i> , 1993 ed., p. 11.                    | 11. <i>Ibid.</i> , p. 16. |
| 2. <i>Ibid.</i>   | 12. <i>Ibid.</i> , p. 15. |
| 3. <i>Ibid.</i>   | 13. <i>Ibid.</i>          |
| 4. <i>Ibid.</i> , p. 12.                                | 14. <i>Ibid.</i> , p. 16. |
| 5. <i>Ibid.</i>   | 15. <i>Ibid.</i> , p. 17. |
| 6. <i>The Book Of Beginning</i> by M. P. Pandit, p. 50. | 16. <i>Ibid.</i>          |
| 7. <i>Savitri</i> , p. 13.                              | 17. <i>Ibid.</i> , p. 18. |
| 8. <i>Ibid.</i>   | 18. <i>Ibid.</i>          |
| 9. <i>Ibid.</i>   | 19. <i>Ibid.</i> , p. 20. |
| 10. <i>Ibid.</i> , p. 14.                               |                           |

*Mother, suffering comes from ignorance and pain, but what is the nature of the suffering and pain the Divine Mother feels for her children—the Divine Mother in Savitri?*

It is because she participates in their nature. She has descended upon earth to participate in their nature. Because if she did not participate in their nature, she could not lead them farther. If she remained in her supreme consciousness where there is no suffering, in her supreme knowledge and consciousness, she could not have any contact with human beings. And it is for this that she is obliged to take on the human consciousness and form, it is to be able to enter into contact with them. Only, she does not forget: she has adopted their consciousness but she remains in relation with her own real, supreme consciousness. And thus, by joining the two, she can make those who are in that other consciousness progress. But if she did not adopt their consciousness, if she did not suffer with their sorrow, she could not help them. Hers is not a suffering of ignorance: it is a suffering through identity. It is because she has accepted to have the same vibrations as they, in order to be able to enter into contact with them and pull them out of the state they are in. If she did not enter into contact with them, she would not be felt at all or no one could bear her radiance.... This has been said in all kinds of forms, in all kinds of religions, and they have spoken very often of the divine Sacrifice, but from a certain point of view it is true. It is a voluntary sacrifice, but it is true: Giving up a state of perfect consciousness, perfect bliss, perfect power in order to accept the state of ignorance of the outer world so as to pull it out of that ignorance. If this state were not accepted, there would be no contact with it. No relation would be possible. And this is the reason of the incarnations. Otherwise, there would be no necessity.

The Mother

(*Questions and Answers 1953*, CWM, Vol. 5, pp. 388-89)

## THE IMPOSSIBLE IS HERE

The Impossible is here  
A bursting effulgence  
Of a thousand suns  
Filling the sky with wonder.

I never knew how  
A handful of dust  
A breath and a flicker of eyes  
Could ever blow up in a blast  
That filled the firmament with stars.

I never could believe  
That the king I hugged  
The brother I addressed  
The friend I shared my bed with  
Could contain such immensity  
And this appalling vastness  
Could squeeze into my arms  
As a sweet face and form,  
A name and attribute to match.

He tricked me into his womb  
And showed me this wondrous wonder  
I trembled and prayed, my eyes closed  
I couldn't trust his familiar self  
It was again the Impossible  
Distanced from me  
By an infinity.

CHANDRASHEKAR RATH

## PREFACE TO INTEGRAL HEALING

*Integral Healing*\* presents the insights of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother into the causes and cure of illness. This book of selections from their writings and talks examines the mechanism of illness primarily from a psychological point of view, taking into account the whole of our being including much that is beyond the range of our normal awareness. It explores how the hidden causes of physical disorders can be uprooted by discovering and utilising one's inner power and participating consciously in the accelerated evolutionary process known as Integral Yoga.

Integral Yoga is the spiritual path that was originally developed and taught by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother at Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, India. In this book, the central principles of Integral Yoga and its vision of the evolving relation between matter and Spirit are explained in Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's words in the Introduction, "Yoga, Evolution and the Human Body".

Sri Aurobindo, the prophet of a higher evolution, envisaged this path of Yoga as leading eventually through a radical change of consciousness to a total freedom from illness and the possibility of physical immortality. With regard to the body and its present subjection to illness, he stated that "the aim of our yoga is not to find out the most efficient method of healing diseases so much as to change the entire consciousness—even the physical—in order that disease may not come at all. The entire being must be so transformed that disease becomes impossible."

Integral healing in its completeness implies such a transformation by which illness, suffering and death would become things of the past. But before an evolutionary leap carries us beyond human nature as we know it, there are practical ways to maintain physical as well as psychological equilibrium and deal with the challenges that illness may present. These are the main subject of this book.

The seriousness of the problem has to be recognised and no simple panacea can be expected. As is explained in Part Four, "Medicine and Healing", medical treatment according to mainstream or alternative systems has its place alongside the inner and spiritual methods that are discussed in Parts Two and Three, "Cure by Inner Means" and "Cure by Spiritual Force".

Illness, suffering and death have been unavoidable circumstances in the emergence of living and thinking beings in a world of inanimate matter. But at a certain point, the human consciousness begins to become aware of something within or beyond itself whose nature is self-existent peace and bliss. A potent new factor is then introduced. This higher reality has long been experienced in various aspects by mystics and practitioners of the disciplines that in India are grouped under the heading of Yoga. In these disciplines, however, spiritual liberation has often been

\* Compiled from the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department. Pages: 260. Price: Rs. 105.



pursued for its own sake with little regard for its relevance to material life.

On the other hand, there are forms of Yoga that have concerned themselves with the body, such as Hathayoga, which is now synonymous with “yoga” for most people. But these have tended to rely on techniques that are predominantly physical and inherently limited in their results, however powerful within those limits. The attempt of the Integral Yoga to bring a force from the highest spiritual plane into the depths of matter opens up a frontier whose exploration could alter the equation between consciousness and the body it inhabits, with incalculable implications for the future.

Both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother practised healing over a period of decades in the course of their spiritual work, besides being engaged in the process of transformation in their own bodies. On the basis of their extensive experience, they sometimes spoke about illness and healing—especially self-healing—but did not fully systematise their knowledge on this subject. What they wrote or said in various contexts has been compiled in this book and arranged in such a way as to bring out the coherence and comprehensiveness of their vision of the human whole, including their understanding of the body, its disorders and its limitless potential....

It is hoped that *Integral Healing* will be of value not only to those who wish to cure or prevent illness on the spiritual path, but to all who are interested in the theory and practice of holistic approaches to healing.

RICHARD HARTZ

*Certainly, one can act from within on an illness and cure it. Only it is not always easy as there is much resistance in Matter, a resistance of inertia. An untiring persistence is necessary; at first one may fail altogether or the symptoms increase, but gradually the control of the body or of a particular illness becomes stronger. Again, to cure an occasional attack of illness by inner means is comparatively easy, to make the body immune from it in future is more difficult. A chronic malady is harder to deal with, more reluctant to disappear entirely than an occasional disturbance of the body. So long as the control of the body is imperfect, there are all these and other imperfections and difficulties in the use of the inner force.*

*If you can succeed by the inner action in preventing increase, even that is something; you have then by abhyāsa to strengthen the power till it becomes able to cure. Note that so long as the power is not entirely there, some aid of physical means need not be altogether rejected.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1569)

## NAVANIT STORIES

### SEE THINGS AS THEY ARE

SHETH GOPALDAS of Bhavnagar (Kathiawad) and Babu Ramdasji of Ahmednagar (Uttar Pradesh) first met each other in Bombay where they often went in connection with their business. Since they always stayed in the same hotel they began to meet frequently. Gradually, acquaintance deepened into friendship and each began to invite the other to visit him in his hometown....

Finally, one morning, when he was in Kathiawad on some business, Ramdasji turned up at Bhavnagar. Eager to make the visit memorable, Gopaldas offered several alternative programmes for the day, but Ramdasji sighed, "Brother, right now a good long sleep will be heaven for me—the constant running around and sleepless nights have exhausted me completely."

Now Kathiawad in the month of Chaitra, as you know, is a sheer furnace. Water was lightly sprinkled on the floor of the room upstairs, a bamboo mat spread out and a thin mattress was laid over it. An earthen pot of cool water and a glass were placed nearby. Ramdasji was requested to lie down and a soft thin silken coverlet laid over him; Gopaldas himself sat at the bedside, fanning him with a large *khus*-scented fan. An embarrassed but grateful Ramdasji was soon asleep.

By the time he awoke, lunch was ready. After a bath for which he was provided with cold water, he was served sweet cold *Srikhand*, hot *puris* and seasonal vegetables. During and after the meal a very pleasant conversation was carried on, making the event memorable. Charmed by the reception, Ramdasji with great affection made Gopaldas promise to visit him when he was in the vicinity of Ahmednagar.

In due course, an occasion arose for Gopaldas to go to Uttar Pradesh, and one evening he reached Ahmednagar. Ramdasji was determined to provide him with the same hospitality that had been provided for him.

After a dinner of cold *Srikhand* and *puris*, etc. with a glass of cold water, Gopaldas was taken to the upstairs cabin on the terrace where a thin mattress on a bamboo mat was spread over a wet floor. A soft silken coverlet was provided and with a wet scented hand-fan and Babu Ramdasji insisted on fanning his friend to sleep, until Gopaldas managed to persuade him to retire.

It was the month of Pausha—the height of winter. With only a fine silk coverlet between him and the cold draught, not to forget the cold bed under him, Gopaldas was frozen by the morning. Soon after he woke up, Ramdasji led him to a bathroom where cold water, kept overnight in brass cauldrons, awaited him.

Finally, when Gopaldas was ready to leave, Ramdasji humbly enquired: "I hope everything was to your satisfaction?"

"Well, the only shortcoming is that I am still alive."

"Why do you say that? When you provided these things for me, how invigorating

they had been! I didn't mean to....”

“Alas, how dangerous can the most loving action be when it fails to heed the circumstances!”

PUJALAL

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

*Common sense is by the way not logic (which is the least commonsense-like thing in the world), it is simply looking at things as they are without inflation or deflation— not imagining wild imaginations—or for that matter despairing “I know not why” despairs.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

(Nirodbaran, *Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*, 1983, pp. 156-57)

*Logic is the art of correctly deducing one idea from another and inferring from a fact all its consequences. But logic does not itself possess the capacity to discern the truth. So your logic may be indisputable, but if your starting-point is wrong, your conclusions will also be wrong, in spite of the correctness of your logic, or rather, because of it.*

*The Mother*

(*On Thoughts and Aphorisms*, CWM, Vol. 10, p. 68)