Inspiration, Effort, Development

Writing and Rewriting

It will be valuable knowledge to learn how Six Poems were written and the three recent sonnets and how Savitri is being led forward to its consummation.

There is no invariable how — except that I receive from above my head and receive changes and corrections from above without any initiation by myself or labour of the brain. Even if I change a hundred times, the mind does not work at that, it only receives. Formerly it used not to be so; the mind was always labouring at the stuff of an unshaped formation. The sonnets by the way are not recent, except Nirvana — two are some years old already. In any case, the poems come as a stream, beginning at the first line and ending at the last — only some remain with one or two changes only, others have to be recast if the first inspiration was an inferior one. Savitri is a work by itself unlike all the others. I made some eight or ten recasts of it originally under the old insufficient inspiration. Afterwards I am altogether rewriting it, concentrating on the first Book and working on it over and over again with the hope that every line may be of a perfect perfection — but I have hardly any time now for such work.

31 October 1934

Harin used to write ten or twelve poems in a day or any number more. It takes me usually a day or two days to write and perfect one or three days even, or if very inspired, I get two short ones out, and have perhaps to revise the next day. Another poet will be like Virgil writing nine lines a day and spending all the rest of his time polishing and polishing. A fourth will be like Manmohan
as I knew him setting down half lines and fragments and taking
2 weeks or 2 months to put them into shape. The time does not
matter, getting it done and the quality alone matter. So forge
ahead and don’t be discouraged by the prodigious rapidity of
Nishikanta. 8 December 1935

If Harin could receive his inspiration without any necessity for
rewriting, why not you?

So could I if I wrote every day and had nothing else to do and did
not care what the level of inspiration was so long as I produced
something exciting.

Do you have to rewrite because of some obstruction in the
way of the inspiration?

The only obstruction is that I have no time to put myself con-
stantly into the poetic creative posture and if I write at all have to
get out something in the intervals of quite another concentration.

With your silent consciousness, it should be possible to draw
from the highest planes with the slightest pull.

The highest planes are not so accommodating as all that. If
they were so, why should it be so difficult to bring down and
organise the supermind in the physical consciousness? What
happy-go-lucky fancy-web-spinning ignoramuses you all are.
You speak of silence, consciousness, overmental, supramental
etc. as if they were so many electric buttons you have only to
press and there you are. It may be one day but meanwhile I have
to discover everything about the working of all possible modes
of electricity, all the laws, possibilities, perils etc., construct
modes of connection and communication, make the whole far-
ing system, try to find out how it can be made fool-proof
and all that in the course of a single lifetime. And I have to do
it while my blessed disciples are firing off their gay or gloomy a
priori reasonings at me from a position of entire irresponsibility
and expecting me to divulge everything to them not in hints — but at length. Lord God *in omnibus*! 29 March 1936

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Every time I complain of difficulty in writing, you quote the names of Milton and Virgil, but you forget they had no Supramental Avatar or Guru to push them on.

Considering that the Supramental Avatar himself is quite incapable of doing what Nishikanta or Jyoti do, i.e. producing a poem or several poems a day, why do you bring him in? In England indeed I could write a lot every day but most of that has gone to the Waste Paper Basket. 13 November 1936

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A great bother and an uninteresting business, this chiselling, I find. But perhaps it is very pleasant to you, as you cast and recast *ad infinitum*, we hear, poetry or prose.

Poetry only, not prose. And in poetry only one poem, *Savitri*. My smaller poems are written off at once and if any changes are to be made, it is done the same day or the next day and very rapidly done. 9 May 1937

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After so much trouble and pain, yesterday’s poem was maimed! What a capricious Goddess is the Muse! But how partial to you!

Not at all. I have to labour much more than you, except for sonnets which come easily and short lyrics which need only a single revision. But for the rest I have to rewrite 20 or 30 times. Moreover I write only at long intervals. 3 October 1938

**Pressure of Creative Formation**

I know very well these pressures of a mental Power or creative formation to express itself and be fulfilled. When it presses like that, there is nothing to do but to let it have way, so as to leave
the mind unoccupied and clear; otherwise it will be pushed two ways and not in the condition of ease and clearness necessary for the concentration.

Inspiration and the Silent Mind

When I ask for “advice” I want to know how to direct my consciousness. Should I concentrate on anything in particular or just quiet my mind and turn it upwards and inwards? And I should like you also to tell me why it is that poetry seems to have fled.

I don’t know why poetry has fled you — it seems to me to have intervals in its visits to you very often, is it not? I used to have the same malady myself when I was writing poetry. I rather think it is fairly common: Dilip and Nishikanta who can write whenever they feel inclined are rare birds, now-infant phenomena.

I don’t know about the direction of consciousness. My own method is not to quiet the mind, for it is eternally quiet, but to turn it upward and inward. You, I suppose, would have to quiet it first which is not always easy. You have tried it?

5 October 1936

Do you mean that the method you advised [to “sit in vacant meditation and see what comes from the intuitive Gods”] can really do something?

It was a joke. But all the same that is the way things are supposed to come. When the mind becomes decently quiet, an intuition perfect or imperfect is supposed to come hopping along and jump in and look round the place. Of course, it is not the only way.

I understand that you wrote many things in that way, but people also say that Gods — no, Goddesses — used to come and tell you the meaning of the Vedas.

People talk a stupendous amount of rubbish. I wrote everything
I have written since 1909 in that way, i.e. out of or rather through a silent mind and not only a silent mind but a silent consciousness. But Gods and Goddesses had nothing to do with the matter.  

22 October 1935

Reading, Yogic Force and the Development of Style

To manufacture your style, you will hardly deny that your enormous reading contributed to it.

Excuse me! I never manufactured my style; style with any life in it cannot be manufactured. It is born and grows like any other living thing. Of course it was fed on my reading which was not enormous — I have read comparatively little — (there are people in India who have read fifty times or a hundred times as much as I have) only I have made much out of that little. For the rest it is Yoga that has developed my style by the development of consciousness, fineness and accuracy of thought and vision, increasing inspiration and an increasing intuitive discrimination (self-critical) of right thought, word form, just image and figure.  

29 October 1935

Methinks you are making just a little too much of Yogic Force. Its potency as regards matters spiritual is undeniable, but for artistic or intellectual things one can’t be so sure about its effectiveness. Take Dilip’s case; one could very well say: “Why give credit to the Force? Had he been as assiduous, sincere etc. elsewhere, he would have done just the same.”

Will you explain to me how Dilip who could not write a single good poem and had no power over rhythm and metre before he came here, suddenly, not after long “assiduous” efforts, blossomed into a poet, rhythmist and metrist after he came here? Why was Tagore dumbfounded by the “lame man throwing away his crutches and running freely” and surely on the paths of rhythm? Why was it that I who never understood or cared for painting, suddenly in a single hour by an opening of vision
got the eye to see and the mind of understanding about colour, line and design? How was it that I who was unable to understand and follow a metaphysical argument and whom a page of Kant or Hegel or Hume or even Berkeley left either dazed and uncomprehending and fatigued or totally uninterested because I could not fathom or follow, suddenly began writing pages of the stuff as soon as I started the *Arya* and am now reputed to be a great philosopher? How is it that at a time when I felt it difficult to produce more than a paragraph of prose from time to time and more than a rare poem, short and laboured, perhaps one in two months, suddenly after concentrating and practising Pranayama daily began to write pages and pages in a single day and kept sufficient faculty to edit a big daily paper and afterwards to write 60 pages of philosophy every month? Kindly reflect a little and don’t talk facile nonsense. Even if a thing can be done in a moment or a few days by Yoga which would ordinarily take a long, “assiduous, sincere and earnest” cultivation, that would of itself show the power of the Yoga force. But here a faculty that did not exist appears quickly and spontaneously or impotence changes into highest potency or an obstructed talent changes with equal rapidity into fluent and facile sovereignty. If you deny that evidence, no evidence will convince you, because you are determined to think otherwise.

So about your style too, it is difficult to understand how much the Force has contributed towards its perfection.

It may be difficult for you to understand, but it is not difficult for me, since I have followed my own evolution from stage to stage with a perfect vigilance and following up of the process. I have made no endeavours in writing. I have simply left the higher Power to work and when it did not work I made no efforts at all. It was in the old intellectual days that I sometimes tried to force things, but not after I started the development of poetry and prose by Yoga. Let me remind you also that when I was writing the *Arya* and also since whenever I write these letters or replies, I never think or seek for expressions or try to write in
good style; it is out of a silent mind that I write whatever comes ready-shaped from above. Even when I correct, it is because the correction comes in the same way. Where then is the place for even a slight endeavour or any room at all for “my great endeavours”? Well?

By the way, please try to understand that the supra-intellectual (not the supramental only) is the field of a spontaneous automatic action. To get it or to get yourself open to it needs efforts, but once it acts there is no effort. Your grey matter does not easily open; it closes up also too easily, so each time an effort has to be made, perhaps too much effort — if your grey matter would sensibly accommodate itself to the automatic flow there would not be the difficulty and the need of “assiduous, earnest and sincere endeavour” each time. Methinks. Well?

I challenge your assertion that the Force is more easily potent to produce spiritual results than mental (literary) results. It seems to me the other way round. In my own case the first time I started Yoga, Pranayama etc., I laboured 5 hours a day for a long time and concentrated and struggled for five years without any least spiritual result, but poetry came like a river and prose like a flood and other things too that were mental, vital or physical, not spiritual, richnesses and openings. I have seen in many cases an activity of the mind in various directions as the first or at least an early result. Why? Because there is less resistance, more cooperation from the confounded lower members for these things than for a psychic or a spiritual change. That is easy to understand at least. Well? 1 November 1935

1 N.B. When the spiritual experiences did come, they were as unaccountable and automatic as — as blazes.

To try to be a literary man and yet not to know what big literary people have contributed would be inexcusable.

Why is it inexcusable? I don’t know what the Japanese or the Soviet Russian writers have contributed, but I feel quite happy and moral in my ignorance. As for reading Dickens in order to be
a literary man, that’s a strange idea. He was the most unliterary bloke that ever succeeded in literature and his style is a howling desert. 19 September 1936

You have nowhere said anything about Firdausi, the epic poet of Persia, author of *Shahnameh*? How is it that you who have made your own culture so wide by means of learning so many languages have allowed a serious gap in it by not knowing Persian?

I have read Firdausi in a translation long ago, but it gave no idea at all of the poetic qualities of the original. As for gaps in the culture — well, I don’t know Russian or Finnish (missing the *Kalevala*) and have not read the *Nibelungenlied* in the original, nor for that matter Pentaur’s poem on the conquests of Rameses in ancient Egyptian or at least the fragment of it that survives. I don’t know Arabic either but I don’t mind that having read Burton’s translation of the *Arabian Nights* which is as much a classic as the original. Anyhow the gaps are vast and many.

13 July 1937

Old Forms into New Shapes

Jyoti doesn’t want to rest content with the forms. The *yuga-dharma* must be satisfied.

I don’t follow the युग-धर्म myself in English poetry. There I have done the opposite, tried to develop old forms into new shapes instead of being gloriously irregular. In my blank verse, I have minimised or exiled pauses and overflows. 20 March 1937

Exceeding Past Formulas

I have crossed out “turned Rishi” [*in an essay called “Sri Aurobindo — the Poet”*], because that suggests an old formula of the past, and the future poet should exceed all past formulas.

5 February 1931