

# MOTHER INDIA

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*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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## THE INNER SOVEREIGN

Now more and more the Epiphany within  
Affirms on Nature's soil His sovereign rights.  
My mind has left its prison-camp of brain;  
It pours, a luminous sea from spirit heights.

A tranquil splendour, waits my Force of Life  
Couched in my heart, to do what He shall bid,  
Poising wide wings like a great hippogriff  
On which the gods of the empyrean ride.

My senses change into gold gates of bliss;  
An ecstasy thrills through touch and sound and sight  
Flooding the blind material sheath's dull ease:  
My darkness answers to His call of light.

Nature in me one day like Him shall sit  
Victorious, calm, immortal, infinite.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 144)*

## SUPERMIND IN THE EVOLUTION

A NEW humanity would then be a race of mental beings on the earth and in the earthly body, but delivered from its present conditions in the reign of the cosmic Ignorance so far as to be possessed of a perfected mind, a mind of light which could even be a subordinate action of the supermind or Truth-consciousness, and in any case capable of the full possibilities of mind acting as a recipient of that truth and at least a secondary action of it in thought and life. It could even be a part of what could be described as a divine life upon earth and at least the beginnings of an evolution in the Knowledge and no longer entirely or predominantly in the Ignorance. How far this would go, whether it would eventually embrace the whole of humanity or only an advanced portion of it, would depend upon the intention in the evolution itself, on the intention in whatever cosmic or transcendent Will is guiding the movements of the universe. We have supposed not only the descent of the supermind upon the earth but its embodiment in a supramental race with all its natural consequences and a new total action in which the new humanity would find its complete development and its assured place in the new order.

But it is clear that all this could only come as a result of the evolution which is already taking place upon earth extending far beyond its present bounds and passing into a radically new movement governed by a new principle in which mind and man would be subordinate elements and no longer mind the utmost achievement or man the head or leader. The evolution we see around us at present is not of that kind and, it might be said, shows few signs of such a possibility, so few that the reason, at present our only sure guide, has no right to hazard belief in it. Earth, the earth we see, with its life deeply immersed and founded in inconscience and ignorance, is not built for such a development or capable of holding such an advent; its materiality and limitations condemn it to be permanently the field of a far inferior order. It may be said too that for such an order there must be a place somewhere and even if supermind is not a mere unwarranted speculation and is a concrete reality, there is no need and no place for its embodying itself here. Mind, as marking the full play of the knowledge possible to the ignorance, must have its field somewhere and to keep the earth as its natural field would best serve the economy of cosmic Nature. A materialistic philosophy would admit of no possibility of a divine life in Matter; but even a philosophy admitting a soul or spirit or a spiritual terminus of the evolutionary movement here could very well deny the capacity of earth for a divine life: a divine existence could only be achieved by a departure from earth and the body. Even if cosmic existence is not an illusion or Maya, a divine or a completely spiritual being is likely to be possible only in another less material world or only in the pure spirit. At any rate, to the normal human reason the odds seem to be heavily against any early materialisation on earth of anything divine.

Again, if too strong a stress is laid on the present or apparent character of the

evolution here as it is presented to us by physical science, it might be urged that there is no warrant for expecting any emergence of a principle higher than human mind or of any such thing as superhuman beings in a world of Matter. Consciousness is itself dependent upon Matter and material agencies for its birth and its operations and an infallible Truth-consciousness, such as we suppose supermind to be, would be a contradiction of these conditions and must be dismissed as a chimera. Fundamentally, physical science regards evolution as a development of forms and vital activities; the development of a larger and more capable consciousness is a subordinate result of the development of life and form and not a major or essential characteristic or circumstance and it cannot go beyond limits determined by the material origin of mind and life. Mind has shown itself capable of many extraordinary achievements, but independence of the material organ or of physical conditions or a capability for any such thing as a power of direct and absolute knowledge not acquired by material means would be beyond the conditions imposed by Nature. At a certain point therefore the evolution of consciousness can go no further. Even if a something definite and independent which we call a soul exists, it is limited by its natural conditions here where Matter is the basis, physical life the condition, mind the highest possible instrument; there is no possibility of an action of consciousness apart from the body or surpassing this physical, vital or mental Nature. This fixes the limits of our evolution here.

It might be suggested also that until something clearly recognisable like supermind manifests itself with some definiteness and fullness or until it descends and takes possession of our earth-consciousness, we cannot be certain that it exists; till then mind holds the place as a general arbiter or field of reference for all knowledge and mind is incapable of any certain or absolute knowledge; it has to doubt all, to test all and yet to achieve all, but cannot be secure in its knowledge or its achievement. That, incidentally, establishes the necessity of such a principle as the supermind or Truth-consciousness in any intelligible universe, for without it there is no issue, no goal for either life or knowledge. Consciousness cannot achieve its own entire meaning, its own supreme result without it; it will end in an inconsequence or a fiasco. To become aware of its own truth and all truth is the very aim of its existence and it cannot do so, so long as it has to tend towards truth, towards knowledge in ignorance and through the ignorance: it must develop or it must reach a power of itself whose very nature is to know, to see, to possess in its own power. This is what we call supermind and, once it is admitted, all the rest becomes intelligible. But till then we are in doubt and it may be contended that even if supermind is admitted as a reality, there can be no certainty of its advent and reign: till then all effort towards it may end in failure. It is not enough that the supermind should be actually there above us, its descent a possibility or a future intention in Nature. We have no certainty of the reality of this descent until it becomes an objectivised fact in our earthly being. Light has often tried to descend upon the earth, but the Light remains unfulfilled and incomplete; man may reject the Light, the world is still full of darkness and the advent seems to be little

more than a chance; this doubt is to some extent justified by the actualities of the past and still existing possibilities of the future. Its power to stand would disappear only if supermind is once admitted as a consequent part of the order of the universe. If the evolution tends from Matter to Supermind, it must also tend to bring down Supermind into Matter and the consequences are inevitable.

The whole trouble of this incertitude arises from the fact that we do not look straight at the whole truth of the world as it is and draw from it the right conclusion as to what the world must be and cannot fail to be. This world is, no doubt, based ostensibly upon Matter, but its summit is Spirit and the ascent towards Spirit must be the aim and justification of its existence and the pointer to its meaning and purpose. But the natural conclusion to be drawn from the supremacy and summit existence of Spirit is clouded by a false or imperfect idea of spirituality which has been constructed by intellect in its ignorance and even by its too hasty and one-sided grasp at knowledge. The Spirit has been thought of not as something all-pervading and the secret essence of our being, but as something only looking down on us from the heights and drawing us only towards the heights and away from the rest of existence. So we get the idea of our cosmic and individual being as a great illusion, and departure from it and extinction in our consciousness of both individual and cosmos as the only hope, the sole release. Or we build up the idea of the earth as a world of ignorance, suffering and trial and our only future an escape into heavens beyond; there is no divine prospect for us here, no fulfilment possible even with the utmost evolution on earth in the body, no victorious transformation, no supreme object to be worked out in terrestrial existence. But if supermind exists, if it descends, if it becomes the ruling principle, all that seems impossible to mind becomes not only possible but inevitable. If we look closely, we shall see that there is a straining of mind and life on their heights towards their own perfection, towards some divine fulfilment, towards their own absolute. That and not only something beyond and elsewhere is the true sign, the meaning of this constant evolution and the labour of continual birth and rebirth and the spiral ascent of Nature. But it is only by the descent of supermind and the fulfilment of mind and life by their self-exceeding that this secret intention in things, this hidden meaning of Spirit and Nature can become utterly overt and in its totality realisable. This is the evolutionary aspect and significance of supermind, but in truth it is an eternal principle existing covertly even in the material universe, the secret supporter of all creation, it is that which makes the emergence of consciousness possible and certain in an apparently inconscient world and compels a climb in Nature towards a supreme spiritual Reality. It is, in fact, an already and always existent plane of being, the nexus of Spirit and Matter, holding in its truth and reality and making certain the whole meaning and aim of the universe.

If we disregard our present ideas of evolution, all changes,—if we can regard consciousness and not life and form as the fundamental and essential evolutionary principle and its emergence and full development of its possibilities as the object of

the evolutionary urge. The inconscience of Matter cannot be an insuperable obstacle; for in this inconscience can be detected an involved consciousness which has to evolve; life and mind are steps and instruments of that evolution; the purposeful drive and workings of the inconscient material Energy are precisely such as we can attribute to the presence of an involved consciousness, automatic, not using thought like the mind but guided by something like an inherent material instinct practically infallible in all its steps, not yet cognitive but miraculously creative. The entirely and inherently enlightened Truth-consciousness we attribute to supermind would be the same reality appearing at an ultimate stage of the evolution, finally evolved and no longer wholly involved as in Matter or partly and imperfectly evolved and therefore capable of imperfection and error as in life and mind, now possessed of its own natural fullness and perfection, luminously automatic, infallible. All the objections to a complete evolutionary possibility then fall away; it would, on the contrary, be the inevitable consequence contained not only in Nature as a whole but even in material Nature.

In this vision of things the universe will reveal itself in its unity and totality as a manifestation of a single Being, Nature as its power of manifestation, evolution as its process of gradual self-revelation here in Matter. We would see the divine series of the worlds as a ladder of ascent from Matter to supreme Spirit; there would reveal itself the possibility, the prospect of a supreme manifestation by the conscious and no longer a veiled and enigmatic descent of the Spirit and its powers in their fullness even into this lowest world of Matter. The riddle of the universe need be no longer a riddle; the dubious mystery of things would put off its enigma, its constant ambiguity, the tangled writings would become legible and intelligible. In this revelation, supermind would take its natural place and no longer be a matter of doubt or questioning to an intelligence bewildered by the complexity of the world; it would appear as the inevitable consequence of the nature of mind, life and Matter, the fulfilment of their meaning, their inherent principle and tendencies, the necessary perfection of their imperfection, the summit to which all are climbing, the consummation of divine existence, consciousness and bliss to which it is leading, the last result of the birth of things and supreme goal of this progressive manifestation which we see here in life.

The full emergence of supermind may be accomplished by a sovereign manifestation, a descent into earth-consciousness and a rapid assumption of its powers and disclosing of its forms and the creation of a supramental race and a supramental life: this must indeed be the full result of its action in Nature. But this has not been the habit of evolutionary Nature in the past upon earth and it may well be that this supramental evolution also will fix its own periods, though it cannot be at all a similar development to that of which earth has hitherto been the witness. But once it has begun, all must unavoidably and perfectly manifest and all parts of Nature must tend towards a greatest possible luminousness and perfection. It is this certainty that authorises us to believe that mind and humanity also will tend towards a realisation that will be far beyond our present dreams of perfection. A mind of light will replace

the present confusion and trouble of this earthly ignorance; it is likely that even those parts of humanity which cannot reach it will yet be aware of its possibility and consciously tend towards it; not only so, but the life of humanity will be enlightened, uplifted, governed, harmonised by this luminous principle and even the body become something much less powerless, obscure and animal in its propensities and capable instead of a new and harmonised perfection. It is this possibility that we have to look at and that would mean a new humanity uplifted into Light, capable of a spiritualised being and action, open to governance by some light of the Truth-consciousness, capable even on the mental level and in its own order of something that might be called the beginning of a divinised life.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 578-84)*

*What you write is no doubt true and it is necessary to see it so as to be able to comprehend and grasp the true attitude necessary for the sadhana. But, as I have said, one must not be distressed or depressed by perceiving the weaknesses inherent in human nature and the difficulty of getting them out. The difficulty is natural, for they have been there for thousands of lives and are the very nature of man's vital and mental ignorance. It is not surprising that they should have a power to stick and take time to disappear. But there is a true being and a true consciousness that is there in us hidden by the surface formations of nature and which can shake them off once it emerges. By taking the right attitude of selfless devotion within and persisting in it in spite of the surface nature's troublesome self-repetitions one enables this inner being and consciousness to emerge and with the Mother's Force working in it deliver the being from all return of the movements of the old nature.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1684)*



## ‘THOU ART OUR REALITY, THE ONLY REALITY’

**January 1, 1914**

To Thee, supreme Dispenser of all boons, to Thee who givest life its justification, by making it pure, beautiful and good, to Thee, Master of our destinies and goal of all our aspirations, was consecrated the first minute of this new year.

May it be completely glorified by this consecration; may those who hope for Thee, seek Thee in the right path; may those who seek Thee find Thee, and those who suffer, not knowing where the remedy lies, feel Thy life gradually piercing the hard crust of their obscure consciousness.

I bow down in deep devotion and in boundless gratitude before Thy beneficent splendour; in the name of the earth I give Thee thanks for manifesting Thyself; in its name I implore Thee to manifest Thyself ever more fully, in an uninterrupted growth of Light and Love.

Be the sovereign Master of our thoughts, our feelings, our actions.

Thou art our reality, the only Reality.

Without Thee all is falsehood and illusion, all is dismal obscurity.

In Thee are life and light and joy.

In Thee is supreme Peace.

THE MOTHER

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, p. 43)*

## A FUTURE ... WHICH HAS BEGUN

(Continued from the issue of September 2006)

### 55. From the Conversation of 18 September 1957

*Mother, what place will occultism have in the supramental life?*

Why particularly occultism?

*Because everything will be known, won't it?*

Why occultism? There is a place for everything in the supramental life. Does this interest you specially?

*According to what we know about occultism, it is the science which shows us things that are invisible to us, the invisible world, the invisible forces.... But in the supramental world all this will be known.*

What do you understand by occultism?

*The knowledge of the invisible world and invisible forces.*

And so—I don't quite understand. In the supermind one will no longer have any knowledge, or what?

*One will have the knowledge already, so...*

Already.... But then it will be an occult knowledge! I don't quite understand. Occultism is a special way of dealing with things. In *The Life Divine* Sri Aurobindo has explained this in great detail. It is a special approach to knowledge and action, and there is no reason why it should disappear or why....

*It will become the natural consciousness. Then perhaps one won't need to learn this occult knowledge.*

Oh, you think one learns occultism as one learns to play the piano! (*Laughter*) But it is not quite like that, anyway, that things happen. In fact, those who have no special aptitude could read all the books on occultism in the world and never know how to practise it. It needs a special capacity.

It is true that you may also read all the books in the world on how to play the

piano—if you do not play, you will never know how to play. But there are born musicians, born artists, and there are people who may work at it all their lives and never come to anything at all. It is the same thing with occultism. If you mean that when one becomes a supramental being, one will have the gift of doing everything, very well, but that doesn't imply that the gift is spontaneous. It is possible that you might have to concentrate on the subject and then learn your work. And it is also possible that one may be potentially capable of doing everything but it is not necessary that one has to do everything! There will be differences and classifications all the same, and special functions according to people and their individual tastes. I don't see why you should deprive the supramental world particularly of occult activity more than of any other.

How do you conceive of the supramental life? As a paradise in which everyone will do the same thing in the same way?... The old conception of paradise where everybody became an angel playing the harp? It is not quite like that! All the differences will be there, all differentiations and different activities, but instead of acting in the ordinary human ignorance, one will act with knowledge, that's all; that is what will make the difference.

*And the capacities will also increase, won't they?*

Capacities?... You take occultism in the sense of the power to act on life and things, as a process; but that is not occultism, that is magic.

Occultism is a special use of the consciousness, that's all. That is, at the moment, as it is practised by human beings, it is a direct and conscious perception of the forces behind appearances and the play of these forces, and because one has the direct perception of them, one has the power to act on them, and one makes some higher will intervene in the play of these forces in order to obtain a required result.

*In the supramental world one will have these powers spontaneously.*

Spontaneously!... But everybody practises occultism without knowing that he does. Everybody has this power spontaneously but doesn't know he has it. It may be a very slight one, like a pin-head; it may be as vast as the Earth or even the universe. But you cannot live without practising occultism, only you don't know it. So the only difference you can make is that when one has the supramental consciousness one will know it. That is all. So, your question automatically vanishes.

When you think—I have explained this to you I don't know how many times—when you think, you are practising occultism. Only, you don't know it. When you are thinking of someone, some part of you is automatically in contact with this person, and if to your thought is added a will that this person may be like this or like that or do this or that or understand this or that—whatever it may be—well, you are practising

occultism, only you don't know it.... There are people who do this with power, and when they have a strong thought it manifests and is realised. There are people in whom it is very feeble and they do not obtain many results. It depends on the power of your thought and also on your power of concentration. But this kind of occultism everybody practises without even knowing it. So the difference from someone who really practises occultism is that he knows he is doing it and perhaps how he does it.

*But as you have spoken to us so often of Mr. X who was a great occultist, I thought that in the supramental world it would be something natural. All would be as capable as he.*

But why this in particular? That is what I don't understand! Why particularly occultism?

*Because I thought that all knowledge of the invisible world entered the sphere of occultism.*

Yes.

*So, now, in ordinary life man is unconscious, half conscious; but in the full consciousness he would also have the full consciousness of occultism.*

No, this is all very well, but do you believe that in the supramental life there will no longer be any classification of activities, or what? That everything will be mixed up in a general spontaneous capacity?

*No, there will also be a hierarchy.*

There will always be different ways of dealing with things. Perhaps the occult power will be more common, but if you imagine a world where everyone has equally the same occult power, there will no longer be any difference. You understand? There are people who have the occult power and act on those who haven't, but if everyone has it equally it will no longer be occultism!... Is that what you meant?

Yes.

Ah!... Well, I am convinced that even in the most perfect supramental realisation there will *always* be a differentiation between the capacities and functions of each one; but instead of being or not being in one's right place, of doing or not doing what one ought to do, unconsciously, one will be in one's right place—I hope always in one's place—and will always do what one ought to do, consciously. That is, instead

of always trying to know and groping in the dark, one will know what one ought to do and do it well. But that is the whole difference. Differentiations will be there, each one will have his own role, his own place, each one will have his own activity. Don't think that everybody will begin to look alike and do the same thing in the same way! That would be a terrible world.

We could say that the difference between the supramental world and our present world will be this: what you don't know, you will know, what you can't do, you will be able to do, and what you don't understand, you will understand, and of what you are unconscious, you will become conscious. But fundamentally this is the basis of the new creation: to replace ignorance by knowledge and unconsciousness by consciousness, and weakness by strength. But this does not necessarily mean that everything is going to be so mixed up that it is scarcely recognisable!

*(Long silence)*

Sri Aurobindo has told us that in the Supermind itself there are different planes of realisation and that these planes will manifest successively, with the same progressive movement that has always presided over the universal development. And simply because, till today, it is a world that is closed to the greater part of mankind or hardly half-open to some, it is difficult to conceive of this progress in the supramental life, but it will exist; and the moment there is progress, there is ascension, and there is a perfection which develops according to a law of its own, which is gradually unveiled to the consciousness—even to a fully illumined consciousness—and works in the truth instead of working in ignorance.... This something [When this talk was first published, Mother defined this 'something': "The unmanifest which will use the supramental world to manifest itself."] which is not there completely, totally, all at once—it could almost be said massively—in the Manifestation but is progressive, will follow the same law of development as that of the world we live in now, but instead of not knowing where we are going, well, we shall know the way and follow it consciously. Instead of standing there imagining or guessing or speculating about what ought to be, we shall see where we are going and know how to go there. That will be the essential difference. Certainly it will not be a dull existence in which everything goes on indefinitely without changing.

I believe there is always a tendency in the human consciousness to want to get somewhere, to sit down and feel it is at last all over: "We have arrived, we settle down and don't move any more!" That would be a poor type of Supermind.

But this ascending, progressive movement towards a growing perfection will be still more prominent, certainly, and instead of unfolding itself in the darkness where everybody is blind and gropes along, it will unfold in the light and one will have the joy of knowing where one is going and what one is doing. That's all.

So one must not come and ask, "Will this be there?" or "Won't that be there?"

There will be many more things still than we have now. Every possible thing will be there.

(CWM 9: 185-90)

## 56. From the Conversation of 25 September 1957

*“A new humanity means for us the appearance, the development of a type or race of mental beings whose principle of mentality would be no longer a mind in the Ignorance seeking for knowledge but even in its knowledge bound to the Ignorance, a seeker after Light but not its natural possessor, open to the Light but not an inhabitant of the Light, not yet a perfected instrument, truth-conscious and delivered out of the Ignorance. Instead, it would be possessed already of what could be called a mind of Light, a mind capable of living in the truth, capable of being truth-conscious and manifesting in its life a direct in place of an indirect knowledge. Its mentality would be an instrument of the Light and no longer of the Ignorance. At its highest it would be capable of passing into the supermind and from the new race would be recruited the race of supramental beings who would appear as the leaders of the evolution in earth-nature.”*

The Supramental Manifestation, *SABCL, Vol. 16, p. 67*

This was certainly what he expected of us, what he conceived of as the superman who must be the intermediate being between humanity as it is and the supramental being *created* in the supramental way, that is, no longer belonging to animality at all and delivered from all animal needs.

As we are, we have been created in the ordinary animal way, and therefore, even if we transform ourselves, there will remain something of this animal origin. The supramental being as he conceived of it, is not formed in the ordinary animal way *at all* but directly, through a process that for the moment still seems occult to us, but is a direct handling of forces and substance in such a way that the body can be a “materialisation” and not a formation according to the ordinary animal principle.

It is quite obvious that intermediate beings are necessary, that it is these intermediate beings who must find the means of creating beings of the supermind, and, undoubtedly, when Sri Aurobindo wrote this he was convinced that this is what we must do.

I think—I know—that it is now certain that we shall realise what he expects of us. It has become no longer a hope but a certainty. Only the time necessary for this realisation will be longer or shorter according to our individual effort, our concentration, our goodwill... and the *importance* we give to this fact. For the inattentive observer things may appear very much what they were before, but for one who knows

how to see and is not deceived by appearances things are going well.

Let each one do his best and perhaps not many years will have to elapse before the first visible results become apparent to all.

It is for you to know whether this interests you more than everything else in the world.... There comes a moment when the body itself finds that there is *nothing in the world* which is so worth living for as this transformation; that there is nothing which can have as great an interest as this passionate interest of transformation. It is as though all the cells of the body were athirst for that Light which wants to manifest; they cry out for it, they find an intense joy in it and are *sure* of the Victory.

This is the aspiration that I am trying to communicate to you, and you will understand that everything else in life is dull, insipid, futile, worthless in comparison with that: the transformation in the Light.

(CWM 9: 191-92)

## **57. From the Conversation of 2 October 1957**

It is somewhat like this. In the supramental vision one has a direct and total and immediate knowledge of things, in the sense that one sees everything at the same time, complete in itself, total. The truth of a thing in all its aspects at the same time and... simultaneous, complete. And as soon as one wants to explain that or to describe it, one is obliged to come down, so to say, to a plane which he calls here “the Mind of Light”, where things have to be said or even thought or expressed one after another, in a certain order and a certain relation with one another; the simultaneity disappears, for in the present state of our mode of expression, to say everything at the same time, all at once, is impossible, and we are compelled to veil one part of what we see or know in order to bring it out one thing after another; and this is what he calls the “veil”, which is transparent, for one sees everything, knows everything at the same time; one has the total knowledge of a thing, but one cannot express it fully all at once. There are no words or any possibility of expression, so long as we are what we are. We must necessarily make use of an inferior process to express ourselves, and yet, at the same time we have the full knowledge; it is only the necessity of transmitting his knowledge in words which compels us to veil, so to say, a part of what we know and to let it come out only successively. But it is a transparent veil, for we know the thing—we know it, see it, understand it in its totality—but we cannot express it all at the same time. We have to say it, one thing after another, successively. It is the veil of the expression adapted to our needs both of utterance and understanding. The knowledge is there, it is there in reality—not that one is searching for it and expressing it as one goes on finding it—it is there in its totality but the expression demands that one says it one thing after another; and so this naturally diminishes the omnipotence

of which he speaks, for omnipotence is the total vision of the thing expressed in its totality. Omniscience is there in principle, it is there, perceptible, but the total power of this omniscience cannot act since it needs to come down one plane to be able to express itself.

Do you catch what I mean? Yes?

To be able to live fully in the supramental knowledge requires other means of expression than the ones we have now. New means of expression must be worked out to make it possible to express the supramental knowledge in a supramental way.... Now, we are obliged to raise our mental capacity to its utmost so that there is only, so to say, a sort of hardly perceptible borderline, but one that still exists, for all our means of expression still belong to this mental world, do not have the supramental capacity. We do not have the necessary organs for that. We would have to become beings of the supermind, with a supramental substance, a supramental inner organisation, in order to be able to express the supramental knowledge in a supramental way. So far we are... half way; we can, somewhere in our consciousness, rise entirely into the supramental vision and knowledge, but we cannot express it. We have to come down again one plane in order to express ourselves.

So, this veil which is transparent even when it seems to cover, is transparent for the consciousness, you see, for the consciousness sees and knows things in a supramental way, but one part is veiled and it only comes out progressively, for there is no other way of doing it. But for the consciousness it is transparent, though apparently it seems to hide. That's it.

(CWM 9: 194-95)

## **58. From the Conversation of 9 October 1957**

[Mother reads the last pages of *The Supramental Manifestation*.]

*“Even in the material world which seems to us a world of ignorance, a world of the workings of a blind and inconscient Force starting from inconscience and proceeding through Ignorance and reaching with difficulty towards an imperfect Light and Knowledge, there is still a secret Truth in things which arranges all, guides towards the Self many contrary powers of being and rises towards its own heights where it can manifest its own highest truth and fulfil the secret purpose of the universe. Even this material world of existence is built upon a pattern of the truth in things which we call Law of Nature, a truth from which we climb to a greater truth until we emerge in the Light of the Supreme. This world is not really created by a blind force of Nature: even in the Inconscient the presence of the supreme Truth is at work; there is a seeing Power behind it*



*which acts infallibly and the steps of the Ignorance itself are guided even when they seem to stumble; for, what we call the Ignorance is a cloaked Knowledge, a Knowledge at work in a body not its own but moving towards its own supreme self-discovery. This Knowledge is the covert Supermind which is the support of the creation and is leading all towards itself and guides behind this multitude of minds and creatures and objects which seem each to be following its own law of nature; in this vast and apparently confused mass of existence there is a law, a one truth of being, a guiding and fulfilling purpose of the world-existence. The Supermind is veiled here and does not work according to its characteristic law of being and self-knowledge, but without it nothing could reach its aim. A world governed by an ignorant mind would soon drift into a chaos; it could not in fact come into existence or remain in existence unless supported by the secret Omniscience of which it is the cover; a world governed by a blind inconscient force might repeat constantly the same mechanical workings but it would mean nothing and arrive nowhere. This could not be the cause of an evolution that creates life out of Matter, out of life mind, and a gradation of planes of Matter, Life and Mind culminating in the emergence of Supermind. The secret truth that emerges in Supermind has been there all the time, but now it manifests itself and the truth in things and the meaning of our existence.”*

The Supramental Manifestation, *SABCL*, Vol. 16, pp. 73-74

In fact this was not finished. It stopped short there. There were others to come....

(Silence)

So, we are going to finish without questions?

*Mother, about the last paragraph here, there is a question: If the Supermind is hidden behind things, why is it so difficult to find it?*

Because it is hidden! (*Laughter*)

*Even in the Ignorance it is working, it leads to the Truth....*

Sri Aurobindo explains that if the supramental truth had not been there behind things, the world could never have been organised, even as it is organised now. We have the feeling of a consciousness with a very enlightened will which has organised everything in accordance with a very precise plan, which cannot be the result either of ignorance or of unconsciousness. In fact, your difficulty in perceiving the Supermind or the Truth-Consciousness behind things indicates the *exact* measure of your personal ignorance and unconsciousness; for those who have come out of this ignorance and

unconsciousness see it very clearly. The difficulty depends on the state of unconsciousness one is in. But for one who has gone beyond this state of unconsciousness it is not at all difficult to find the Supermind; it is very perceptible.

(CWM 9: 200-02)

## 59. From the Conversation of 4 December 1957

Sri Aurobindo says here [*The Life Divine*, pp. 827-28.—Ed.] that each species is satisfied with the particular characteristics of that species, the principles of its structure, and does not try to transform or change itself into a new species. The dog remains satisfied with being a dog, the horse with being a horse and never tries, for instance, to become an elephant! Starting from this Sri Aurobindo asks the question: Will man remain satisfied with being man or will he awaken to the necessity of being something other than man, that is, a superman?

That is the summary of the paragraph.

But when one is used to such expositions, if one has a speculative mind, and one reads this, something in the being is not satisfied. That is to say, this concerns only the most external form, that kind of crust of the being, but within oneself one feels “something” which has, on the contrary, a sort of imperative tendency to go beyond that form. And this is what Sri Aurobindo wants to bring home to us.

I have seen pet animals which truly had a sort of inner *need* to become something other than what they were. I knew dogs which were like that, cats, horses and even birds like that. The outer form was inevitably what it was, but there was something living and perceptible in the animal which was making an obvious effort to achieve another expression, another form. And every man who has gone beyond the stage of the animal man and become the human man truly has what I might call an “incurable” need to be something other than this thoroughly unsatisfactory semi-animal—unsatisfactory in its expression, its means of expression and its means of life. So the problem is this: Will this imperious need be effective enough in its aspiration for the form itself, the species, to develop and transform itself, or will it be only this thing, this imperishable consciousness in the being, which will leave this form when it perishes to enter into a higher form which, besides, as far as we can see now, does not yet exist?

And the problem before us is: How will this higher form be created? If we consider the problem, it becomes very interesting. Is it by some process which we have to imagine, that this form will gradually transform itself in order to create a new one, or is it by some other means, a means still unknown to us, that this new form will appear in the world?

That is, will there be a continuity or will there be a sudden appearance of something new? Will there be a progressive transition between what we now are and what our inner spirit aspires to become, or will there be a break, that is, shall we be obliged to drop this present human form and wait for the appearance of a new form—an appearance the process of which we do not foresee and which will have no relation with what we are now? Can we hope that this body which is our present means of earthly manifestation, will have the possibility of transforming itself progressively into something which will be able to express a higher life, or will it be necessary to give up this form entirely to enter into another which does not yet exist on Earth?

That is the problem. It is a very interesting problem.

If you will reflect on it, it will lead you to a little more light.

We can reflect on it just now.

*(Meditation)*

\*

[When this talk was first published, Mother added the following remarks:]

Why not both?

Both will be there at the same time; the one does not exclude the other.

*Yes, but will one be transformed into the other?*

One will be transformed and will be like a rough outline of the other. And the other, the perfect one, will appear when this one comes into being. For both have their beauty and their purpose, therefore they will both be there.

The mind always tries to choose—but it's not like that. Even all that we can imagine is much less than what will be. Truly speaking, everyone who has an intense aspiration and an inner certitude will be called upon to realise it.

Everywhere, in all the fields, always, eternally, everything will be possible. And everything that is possible, everything will exist at a given moment—a given moment that will be more or less delayed, but everything will exist.

Just as all sorts of possibilities have been found between the animals and man, possibilities which have not remained, so there will be all sorts of possibilities: each individual will try in his own way. And all this together will help to prepare the future realisation.

The question might be asked: Will the human species be like some species which have disappeared from the earth?... Certain species have disappeared from the earth—but not species which have lasted as long as the human species. I don't think so; and certainly not the species which had in them the seed of progress, this possibility of progress. Rather one has the impression that evolution will follow a curve which will

draw closer and closer to a higher species and, maybe, everything that is still too close to the lower species will fall away, just as those species have.

We always forget that not only is everything possible—everything, even the most contradictory things—but all the possibilities have at least one moment of existence.

(CWM 9: 233-35)

## 60. From the Conversation of 11 December 1957

*Sweet Mother, how did the first man appear?*

Sri Aurobindo says here, ["...if the facts with which Science deals are reliable, the generalisations it hazards are short-lived; it holds them for some decades or some centuries, then passes to another generalisation, another theory of things. This happens even in physical Science where the facts are solidly ascertainable and verifiable by experiment..." *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 19, p. 828.] precisely, that if we take the scientific point of view, we see that theories follow one another with great instability, and seem more like a kind of series of imaginations than things which can be proved—if one takes the purely materialist point of view. People believe that because it is a materialist point of view, it is the easiest to prove, but quite obviously it is the most difficult. If we take the occult standpoint, there have been traditions, based perhaps on certain memories, but as they are altogether beyond any material proof, this knowledge is considered to be even more problematic than scientific imaginations and deductions. For any inner logic, it is easier to understand and admit, but one has no more proof than one has material proof that there was *one* first man or that there were several first men or that there was something which was not yet a man but almost a man. These are speculations.

Traditions—which of course are only oral traditions and from the scientific point of view quite questionable, but which are based on individual memories—say that the first man or the first human pair or the first human individuals were materialised in accordance with an occult method, something like the one Sri Aurobindo foretells for the future supramental process; that is, that beings belonging to higher worlds have, by a process of concentration and materialisation, built or formed for themselves bodies of physical matter. It probably wasn't the lower species which progressively produced a body which became the first human body.

According to spiritual and occult knowledge, consciousness precedes form; consciousness by self-concentration produces its form; whereas, according to the materialist idea, it is form which precedes consciousness and makes it possible for consciousness to manifest. For those who have some knowledge of the invisible worlds and a direct perception of the play of forces, there is no possible doubt: it is *necessarily* consciousness which produces a form in order to manifest. Now, the way things are arranged on earth, it is quite certainly a consciousness of a higher order which

penetrates a form and helps to transform it, so that this form may become—either immediately or through successive generations—capable of manifesting that consciousness. For those who have the inner vision and knowledge, this is absolutely beyond doubt. It is impossible for it to be otherwise. But those who start from the other end, from below, will not admit it—but all the same it is not for ignorance to dictate knowledge to wisdom! And yet, this is what it does at present. As it is easier to doubt than to know, the human mind is accustomed to doubt everything; that is its first movement, and of course that is why it knows nothing.

Conception precedes manifestation and expression, that is quite certain. And all those who have had a direct contact with the past have the memory of a kind of human prototype, far superior to mankind at present, who came on earth as an example and a promise of what humanity will be when it reaches its acme.

*(Silence)*

There is in life a certain tendency to imitate, a sort of effort to copy “something”. One can find very striking examples of this in animal life—it even begins already in plant life, but in animal life it is very striking. One could give numerous examples. And so, in that sense, one might very well conceive of a sort of effort of animal life to attempt to copy, to imitate, to create some resemblance to this ideal type which would be manifested on earth by occult means, and it was probably through successive attempts, by a more and more successful effort that the first human types were produced.

(CWM 9: 236-38)

*(To be continued)*

*There is no other consciousness than the Supreme Consciousness.*

*There is no other will than the Supreme Will.*

*There is no other life than the Supreme Life.*

*There is no other personality than the Supreme Personality, the One and the All.*

*17 September 1967*

*The Mother*

*(Words of the Mother, CWM, Vol. 15, p. 10)*

## SRI AUROBINDO AS GURU

THE Upanishads and the Gita have compared the path of yoga with the sharp edge of a razor blade and have established as an absolute rule that it should not be practised without the help of a guru. With a few exceptions, this strict injunction has been obeyed even to this day. One seeks, waits, prepares oneself, and if one is sincere, the guru comes at the proper time. The traditional experience and teaching have confirmed that “He who chooses the Infinite, has been chosen by the Infinite.”

The guru once found, many relations are possible between the guru and the disciple, as with the Divine. In effect, for the disciple, the guru is the representative of the Divine on the earth: the relation can be that of father and son, master and servant, lover and beloved, etc. This relation is indissoluble and can cease only with death or with the guru’s permission. The guru takes entire charge of the disciple; he loves him, guides him, protects him like a mother. His only reward is the accomplishment of his sacred trust. Also, not to discuss the master’s directions but to obey him to the letter was an absolute rule to be followed by the disciple.

To illustrate the responsibility of the guru, Sri Aurobindo recounted to us an anecdote. A disciple, wanting to be a guru, sought his own guru’s advice in the matter. He got the reply: “To your already heavy burden you are going to add another one; for you have to take upon your shoulders all your disciple’s faults, and his sins.” Such was in particular the case of Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Aurobindo has given to the hoary but still continuing tradition of the mystic tie between guru and disciple a new character. The practice of yoga, while losing nothing of its essential spirituality, has become much more supple. Sri Aurobindo’s yoga being new, the methods and means too must be adapted to the modern spirit. Thus, first of all, Sri Aurobindo allows each disciple a great liberty. He should himself find out his own path, that which suits his own nature. Sri Aurobindo believed that without liberty the soul cannot attain its full development. “You truly give us a long rope!” I told him. “Even if we make grave errors, you simply observe silently, expecting us to approach you for advice.” To which Sri Aurobindo replied, “A long rope is necessary!” And the Mother spoke to the young people in these terms: “All of you, my children... live in an exceptional liberty... no social constraint, no moral constraint, no intellectual constraint, no rule, nothing, nothing but a light which is there.” Rabelais also gave this freedom in his *abbaye*, but there was no Light.

At the same time Sri Aurobindo accorded to us the privilege to ask him questions, to have intellectual, literary and yogic discussions with him and follow Ramakrishna’s advice to Vivekananda not to accept anything blindly. The mind has its need to be satisfied. Sri Aurobindo understood the modern mind, its doubts, its intellectual curiosities, because he himself was agnostic for a certain time and suffered from doubt. He never imposed his ideas, but considered everything with largeness, tolerance and sympathy. When somebody behaved badly, we would suggest that he should be either

sent away or put in quarantine. Sri Aurobindo would answer with a smile, “Yes, it is a simple remedy, no doubt, and in the outside world it would be fitting. But here we can’t apply it.” On another occasion a sadhak was asked why he did not listen to the Mother; he said, “That is my weakness.” The same sadhak dared to write to Sri Aurobindo a letter of sixty pages—on a different subject! Sri Aurobindo never lost his temper. “Anger is foreign to my nature,” he said. His relation with each individual varied in tone, accent and style according to the nature and each felt the Master near to him. It can be said in passing that when the Mother accepts a disciple, she accepts him as he is, and cannot abandon him for his weakness, because he also has left the world for the sake of sadhana.

It was my great good fortune to have Sri Aurobindo as my guru. In my exploration of spiritual history I have not come across any other guru who can be compared to him. He was not only guru, but also the Divine in a human body, the last Avatar, the supramental Avatar according to the Mother. A synthesis of two cultures, oriental and occidental—poet, philosopher, politician, linguist, literary critic—he was also the yogi who could justly say: “I have drunk the Infinite like a giant’s wine.”

My relation with him seemed exceptional to other disciples. None could imagine he would behave with a young novice like an intimate friend.

A medical man, materialist by education, I cared very little for God and had no faith. I started the sadhana without having any idea about it, as Stendhal’s Fabrice joined the army in utter ignorance of what war was like. And out of this raw and sceptic fellow Sri Aurobindo has made a fighter for the Divine. I am going to narrate how it was done and, if possible, give at the same time a glimpse of Sri Aurobindo’s life as I have come to know it.

I came to the Ashram at a period when the sadhana was going on in the subconscious, as Sri Aurobindo said to me. The subconscious is like a dense virgin forest: we find a superb description of it in his poem *A God’s Labour*. From his retreat he was corresponding with all his disciples, writing every night for about five to six hours. This period which I have called the “correspondence-period” lasted about twelve years. Each one related his inner and outer life, asked very often quite ordinary questions, and to all our human follies Sri Aurobindo replied with the patience and solicitude of a god. One day he wrote, “An avalanche of correspondence has fallen on my head.” Another day when I asked back my “hibernating” typescript of a poem, he replied, “My dear sir, if you saw me nowadays with my nose to paper from afternoon to morning, deciphering, deciphering, writing, writing, writing, even the rocky heart of a disciple would be touched and you would not talk about typescripts and hibernation. I have given up (for the present at least) the attempt to minimise the cataract of correspondence; I accept my fate like Raman Maharshi with the plague of Prasads and admirers, but at least don’t add anguish to annihilation by talking about typescripts.”

All were surprised to find that Sri Aurobindo took up this familiar and humorous



tone with a fresher, and were even shocked, for was not Sri Aurobindo the incarnate godhead, majestic and grave and serene, and should he not therefore be without any taint of humour? During the Darshan his “immobility” inspired an august fear. This was the prevailing conception of a god.

I did not fail to grasp my good fortune with both hands. When the Divine gives himself, one has only to accept him to the full. I asked him all sorts of questions from the most profane to the sublime, and he satisfied them in a simple, familiar style, always with an incomparable indulgence as if I was a prodigal son, though most of these questions had already been answered in his works. Thus our correspondence swelled up, striking many notes, sometimes sounding like a trumpet, sometimes murmuring sweetly like a stream, often bursting with a divine laughter. When I had a headache, I wrote:

Guru,  
My head, my head,  
And the damned fever!  
I am half dead!...

Sri Aurobindo replied:

Cheer up! Things might have been so much worse. Just think if you had been a Spaniard in Madrid or a German Communist in a concentration camp! Imagine that, and then you will be quite cheerful with only a cold and headache. So

Throw off the cold,  
Damn the fever,  
Be sprightly and bold  
And live for ever.

Another time I asked him what Brahmic consciousness was. In a light vein he explained to me a profound truth of Yoga:

“Eternal Jehovah! You don’t even know what Brahman is! You will next be asking me what Yoga is or what life is or what body is or what mind is or what sadhana is!...

“Brahman, sir, is the name given by Indian philosophy since the beginning of time to the one Reality, eternal and infinite which is the Self, the Divine, the All, the more than All, which would remain even if you and everybody and everything else in existence or imagining itself to be in existence vanished into blazes—even if this whole universe disappeared, Brahman would be safely there and nothing whatever lost. In fact, sir, you are Brahman and you are pretending to be Nirod; when Nishikanta is translating Amal’s poetry into Bengali, it is really Brahman translating Brahman’s Brahman into Brahman. When Amal asks me what consciousness is, it is really Brahman asking Brahman what Brahman is! There, sir, I hope you are satisfied now.

“To be less drastic and refrain from making your head reel till it goes off your



shoulders, I may say that realisation of the Self is the beginning of Brahman realisation;— the Brahman consciousness—the Self in all and all in the Self etc. It is the basis of the spiritual realisation and therefore of the spiritual transformation; but one has to see it in all sorts of aspects and applications first...”

Thus from these letters were born two volumes of *Correspondence*, containing literary, medical, spiritual and even political questions. Audaciously, following Vivekananda’s example, I tried to argue with him and even dared to differ on points about which my knowledge was as much as that of a village schoolmaster. But he suffered all my foolishness, my impertinence and never uttered a hard word or showed bad temper, only a sun-like magnanimity. I wanted to have with him the father-relationship—as particularly the lady-disciples did. But he refused sharply, saying, “Let the ladies ‘father’ me as much as they like. The ‘father’ has a Jewish and Hebrew odour, that I don’t like much.” Later on when I asked him why I was exceptionally favoured, he said, “Find out for yourself.”

It seemed he wanted to “intellectualise” me, but alas, he must have found that my grey matter was no better developed than a rabbit’s. But he did succeed, thanks to this special relation, in drawing me out of the chronic pessimism and doubt from which I suffered quite a lot. I wrote to him, “Your grandeur, your Himalayan austerity frightens us.” To which came the vibrant reply: “O rubbish! I am austere and grand, grim and stern! every blasted thing that I never was! I groan in un-Aurobindian despair when I hear such things. What has happened to the common sense of all you people? In order to reach the Overmind it is not at all necessary to take leave of this simple but useful quality. Common sense by the way is 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.”

This magnanimity, this sunny humour at last chased away the Man of Sorrows who had taken shelter, like the Panis of the Vedas, in my subconscious. The force was of course there working constantly, but what I felt was the joy of *rasa* of life engendered by the inimitable humour. I was tempted one day to ask how two incompatibles, humour and yoga, could so unnaturally combine in him. His reply was the Upanishadic: “He is indeed the veritable *rasa*.”

This relation, however, did not mean that I was dearer to him than the others. He would not be divine in such a case, for the Divine is *samam Brahman*, equal and impartial to all, He gives himself entirely to all, only the relation differs according to each one’s need, like the relation of the mother with her own children.

My intellectual preparation glided insensibly into creative activity. I wanted to be a poet. I had started writing in Bengali, then in English. There too my talent was green as a cucumber. But this didn’t matter, for Sri Aurobindo said that in the Ashram atmosphere a creative force was in action that could serve anyone’s aspiration to be a poet or artist. Every day he not only sent me inspiration but corrected my poems,

gave concrete suggestions, explained the meaning of the poems which I composed without understanding what they meant. Strangely enough in both Bengali and English I wrote, medium-like, many such poems, some of which Sri Aurobindo called surrealist-mystic. Many times I was on the point of throwing in the sponge since the inspiration got blocked or the result was not to my taste! But always his letters, persuasive like the wind, pushed me on till one day he cried out, "The poet is born. What about the yogi?" And he wrote to me this letter:

"As there are several lamentations today besieging me, I have very little time to deal with each separate Jeremiad. Do I understand rightly that your contention is this, 'I can't believe in the Divine doing everything for me because it is by my own mighty and often fruitless efforts that I write or do not write poetry and have made myself into a poet'? Well, that itself is *épatant*, magnificent, unheard of. It has always been supposed since the infancy of the human race that while a verse-maker can be made or self-made, a poet cannot. '*Poeta nascitur non fit*', a poet is born, not made, is the dictum that has come down through the centuries and millenniums and was thundered into my ears by the first pages of my Latin Grammar. The facts of literary history seem to justify this stern saying. But in Pondicherry we have tried, not to manufacture poets, but to give them birth, a spiritual, not a physical birth into the body. In a number of instances we are supposed to have succeeded—one of these is your noble self—or if I am to believe the man of sorrows in you, your abject, miserable, hopeless and ineffectual self. But how was it done? There are two theories, it seems—one that it was by the Force, the other that it was done by your own splashing, kicking, groaning Herculean efforts. Now, sir, if it is the latter, if you have done that unprecedented thing, made yourself by your own laborious strength into a poet (for your earlier efforts were only very decent literary exercises), then, sir, why the deuce are you so abject, self-depreciatory, miserable?"

We see then that Sri Aurobindo was not only a poet but a creator of poets as well.

We were at this stage of our collaboration when, in 1938, a grave accident happened to him and we were brought face to face. In the small hours of the morning we found him lying on the floor of his room. He seemed to have been in that condition for about an hour without having called anyone. He had tried all sorts of manipulations with the leg, but all in vain. The Mother felt in her sleep the vibration, and came up to find Sri Aurobindo in this state of immobility. She perceived at once what had gone wrong and sent for the doctors. After a series of examinations it was decided that the right femur had got badly fractured and that Sri Aurobindo should be kept in bed for some months. One can understand how the news shocked the whole Ashram. What struck me most was that while the Mother was discussing with the doctors all about the accident and its treatment, Sri Aurobindo listened in silence and accepted meekly like a child all the necessary medical prescriptions approved by the Mother. That was a lesson in submission to all of us. The doctors had observed that Sri Aurobindo was an ideal patient.

The accident compelled him to abandon his solitude and accept the help of his disciples for medical reasons. Even after his cure, our services were retained.

Truly speaking, I had nourished in my secret heart a desire to see him from near at hand, hear his voice, talk with him and if possible serve him. Perhaps our correspondence pushed me to this Utopian reverie. But when we actually met, no sign of recognition on his face! It was as if we had been unknown to each other—or too well known? His attitude towards all of us was most impersonal to start with.

During the two or three months of his illness, he kept his unperturbed calmness and good humour. Neither the gravity of the accident nor its inconveniences affected him in any manner. He told us later on that before the accident he could change pain into joy, but the suddenness of the accident and the intensity of the pain made him powerless for the moment... He did succeed afterwards. He said also that the accident, the illness etc. were for him only a phase of the inner battle.

We heard very little complaint during the long months he was in bed. Not only did he obey all the medical restrictions and bear physical discomforts with equanimity but lightened our own burden by cheerful talks. The Mother often used to ask, “Are they making you talk?” And his smiling reply was, “Oh, that’s nothing!” For over a year he had only a sponge bath; hunger did not seem to gnaw him; nor did heat unnerve him; he did not seem to live in the body. But he was far from being dry or austere, he was not an ascetic. He enjoyed good food, witty words and slept like all of us. He was not a “puritan god who had made of pleasure a poisoned fruit”; he read newspapers (but not books, for—in Mallarmé’s words—he “had read all books”!). He was not lost in meditation, eyes closed and legs crossed. In short, no external evidence would proclaim to us, “Here is the yogi who has reached the Supermind.” People were surprised to hear that his external life differed in no way from that of a common man, simple, natural and healthy. “To be transformed radically within, remaining apparently human without,” such is in effect the principle of his yoga.

And this was amply illustrated by the calm and serenity he maintained even in moments of great disturbance. He taught us that one must be able to keep a perfect equanimity even in the midst of massive destruction. We saw how, during the troubled period of war, he went on with his usual daily activity, never changing the normal rhythm of his life. He attended to his intellectual work. He started rewriting a good deal of *The Life Divine* soon after his convalescence and finished it in two years. We used to see him sitting on his bed with his pen, papers on the table, but no books. He had forgotten the world with its devastating war-thunder; the words came “flowing direct to his pen, as from a hidden silence”. Now and then he would stop, look in front and dive again. The Mother would come with a glass of coconut water, and wait till he would look up. He needed no books, no thinking. He had stopped thinking long ago—after his Nirvanic experience in 1907 and since then all that he wrote or said or did had come from the higher silence. “To be free from the responsibility of thinking is a great relief,” he used to tell us.

About the second or third volume of *The Life Divine*, when it came out, he remarked, "It is a huge elephant." All three volumes, neatly bound in polished white cloth, were sent to him to be blessed with his autograph. On each one he would write the name of the purchaser, add his blessings and his signature. More than three hundred such copies have conserved his autograph as an act of Divine Grace.

*The Life Divine* over, Sri Aurobindo took up his epic *Savitri*. I had the unique opportunity to follow its growth and development from a tiny seed into an *ashwattha* tree. With infinite care, exacting at each step a flawless perfection, he worked and worked, slowly, silently like a god in labour. One would gape with wonder to see how many versions he had made of some cantos! At the end when his vision was affected he had to dictate the verses like Milton. I remember that he dictated in successive sittings near about four hundred lines of *The Book of Everlasting Day*. He had made about twelve revisions of the first Book. And he would certainly have done the same for the entire *Savitri* had he had sufficient time. Many other incidental tasks like correspondence with sadhaks, answering letters from outside, reading of theses, essays, poems and other miscellaneous intellectual tasks took up much of his time till one day he had to speak out: "I find no time for my important work!" Then he began systematically the work on *Savitri* and we were proceeding well when again all of a sudden I heard him utter, "I want to finish *Savitri* soon." That struck my ear like a sharp slap! It was in 1950, a few months before his passing away. Such an accent was most foreign to his nature. In everything that he did, his talk, his walk, his eating, his dictation, there was not the least haste; he would give the impression as if "all eternity was before him." "Well then," I asked myself, "what imperious need could make him impatient, he who was an example of patience and equanimity?" The work was, however, finished somewhat hurriedly and even so some parts were not revised. Afterwards of course we could see in a clear light what had pressed him inordinately.

One can imagine then that his seclusion was neither that of an ascetic's refusal of the world nor an absorption in samadhi away from life. One might, on the contrary, reasonably ask, "Where in the midst of so much activity was the yogi? In what way was he different from other great men?" Here some understanding of the principle of Sri Aurobindo's yoga is necessary. It is a radical departure from most of the traditional yogas. For Sri Aurobindo all action depends on the consciousness from which it is done. Firmly seated in the divine consciousness one can do any kind of work which will be the reflection or translation of that divine consciousness. So whether in work or in activity, one is always united with the higher consciousness. And Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga demands that there should be no division between the external and the internal life. "All Life is Yoga." "Do you imagine that when I write to you these letters, I lose the divine consciousness?" he wrote to me. He has also said that so long as one cannot undertake any work with a perfect equality, one is not a yogi. The Mother too says that so long as this division remains in the mind, transformation of life is

impossible. Similarly when Sri Aurobindo used to give us inspiration for writing poetry, it was not to make us poets but that it might help us in our sadhana.

Even so, Sri Aurobindo reserved a big part of his daily life for what he called his personal work of concentration. Generally, the whole morning till the time of breakfast, which was gradually pushed to three or four o'clock in the afternoon, he passed in complete silence. None but the Mother was supposed to "disturb" him except for exceptional reasons. We kept ourselves ready behind his bed, talking merrily or reading, while he was seated at ease in the bed, with eyes wide open, absorbed or concentrated, God knows on what! His consciousness was "voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone."

During this period, he was quite a different person, far removed from that of the *Correspondence* or of the *Talks*.

This period was perhaps the most mysterious part of his life. Nobody except the Mother had any idea of what he was occupied with. Was he drawing down the supramental Force or concentrating on cosmic problems or even some individual cases needing some special attention? At these moments we were strangers to him: we might be crossing his presence many times, but we had no apparent identity. If he needed something, it was an impersonal voice calling somebody impersonal, as it were, for he would call one of us, and the voice would come from afar, the tone grave, the look elsewhere; the noise, our chatter fell into a vacancy. Even the explosion of a bomb would have left him serene and silent.

On this point the Mother has told us a story. One day when a storm was raging outside, she entered Sri Aurobindo's room to find that a complete silence was reigning inside. This side of Sri Aurobindo I call the impersonal aspect of his person. People believed that we were all the time talking with him and that his radiant humour was pouring in a cascade and bathing us in its exultant flow. What a surprise to hear that such moments were numbered when he descended from his inaccessible heights to become "human". And this short time was our divine moment. Like bees to the flower we would gather round him. The supramental cloak would slip down from his shoulders to reveal a friend who talked with us without any conventional constraint. Philosophy, literature, politics, yoga, even the most common jokes about snoring or *The Sunday Times* trivialities were our fate. No ethical distinction between high and low, right or wrong ostracised any topic, only it must have some *rasa* in it. On one side his vast knowledge, his *prajna* was at our doors, on the other many small incidents, hitherto guarded secrets came to us in the form of reminiscences seasoned with light humour. One day he said, "All that I see in this room, these walls, these tables, the books, etc., etc., and yourself, Dr. Manilal, I see all as the Divine. No, it is not an imaginary vision, it is concrete realisation." Another day when Dr. Manilal had stopped his meditation due to fear, Sri Aurobindo scolded him mildly and said, "Oh, this fear! Even if you had died at that moment, it would have been a glorious death!" To another who had come out of his meditation he remarked with a smile, "I see your face beaming

with a supramental ananda!" Such humour, sweet, refined and restrained, put us on a footing of equality.

But there too, as in all other things, he kept his tranquil spirit, his impersonal way. He never raised his voice, he looked down or in front when he talked, and he talked very slowly, did not insist on his point, while a benign sweetness softened his countenance. When he criticised men or countries, there was no contempt or malice in his expression. He saw the Forces of which men are nothing but poor puppets. His divine compassion was over all. The impersonal again, saw all with an equal eye.

I have often asked myself how such a division was possible. How could he be both personal and impersonal at the same time? Did he not lose his universality when he became an individual with us in his talks? It appears that one can be the transcendent, the universal and the individual simultaneously. Similarly he could keep an absolute silence in the midst of full activity. His luminous verse, "Force one with unimaginable rest," gives a glimpse of what was a baffling mystery to me. All his activities, political, literary or otherwise, emerged from this Nirvanic silence and none knew it. All the volumes of the *Arya* had their source in this sovereign silence. And it was this force of silence that caused Hitler's downfall and India's independence. "There are two great forces in the universe, silence and speech... Infinite is the power of this calm and silence, in which the great forces prepare for action." Let us remember Buddha whose prodigious activity welled out from the ineffable silence of Nirvana!

In this modern age of feverish excitement and dizzy speed, Sri Aurobindo was never in a hurry, he remained calm and unperturbed even in the face of darkest calamities. He had an unshakable faith. His room was, as it were, packed with a concrete silence, but the force, the peace, the joy, the light were also there for anybody to feel and breathe them. During the first years of our stay with him, we were working almost twenty hours a day and yet there was no fatigue! Whence came all that joy and energy, I used to ask myself. I understood only after I had read Kalidasa's epic *Kumara-sambhava*, "The Birth of the War God". There the poet describes how Shiva's two servants were filled with inexhaustible energy that streamed from Shiva's third eye. Very often we had the feeling that Sri Aurobindo was himself Shiva, or rather Shiva was an aspect of his personality. His total abnegation, his non-attachment to material things, his liberality, universal compassion, childlike attitude, his complete surrender to the Mother who looked after him, all these are features that we associate with Shiva. His very body had a likeness.

One can say then that impersonality was the essence of his nature. All that he did, all that came from him, his ease, reserve, calm slowness, even certain aspects of humour gave me that impression. We know that in his political activities he preferred always to remain in the background: one day he said, "The confounded British Government spoiled my play." He was not even calling us by names when he needed something!

Though impersonal, he was a person and his personal body was so sweet, so



tender! A perfume like that of a child's body emanated from it. His small feet supporting a massive frame were warm like the down of a bird, and his palms were soft and velvety like those of a woman. When he lay down on the bed, his body covered the entire bed, and the trunk, lightly powdered after bath, hair plaited or loose falling down the neck reminded us again of Shiva. Sometimes the body was radiant with a white light. At other times when, seated on the edge of the bed, he waited for the Mother's coming, his majestic posture evoked the figure of Moses. The portrait of his last days is nothing but a travesty of this supreme grandeur. Sri Aurobindo has said that the Supreme is both personal and impersonal at the same time. His own life is a luminous example of this truth and has given me a small insight into the working of the Divine in the world. We had the unique opportunity of seeing two personalities together, the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, the Shakti full of energy, dynamism, Shiva, impassive, immobile; the Prakriti, the Purusha, two-in-one.

This impassivity was, to my shocked surprise, one day suddenly snapped when he uttered, "I want to finish *Savitri* soon." It is true that during the last phase of his life he became very grave and withdrawn. One of us dared to ask him the reason. He gave an enigmatic reply: "Things are getting very serious!" The meaning was clear only after he had left his body and this he did in a normal manner. An extraordinary phenomenon was observed the next day: the entire body was suffused with a golden Light. The Mother said that if the Light remained the body would be preserved in a glass case. But alas, after five days the Light vanished, which is quite in conformity with Sri Aurobindo's mode of life for he never wanted to capture the world's imagination by miracles; he was not a thaumaturgic magician.

One can imagine the enormous void created in the Ashram by his unexpected departure. It was a thunderbolt. And if the Mother had not absorbed the shock I do not know what a formidable chaos would have reigned in our world! She filled the void by her Grace, her power, by her very person. Sri Aurobindo's absence has brought into the world-gaze the greatness, the supreme power of the Mother. She has, by her love and care, rebuilt the nest badly shaken by the storm. Before his passing, Sri Aurobindo had written in *Savitri*, "She alone can save the world and save herself," which clearly pointed to the Mother's future role.

If Sri Aurobindo is physically absent his subtle presence is yet very near us, alive and active, and as before it is continuously working on to establish the supramental kingdom on earth, "In Death to repatriate Immortality."

Such was the Master's life, and such it abides even now, always silent and impersonal, a total self-effacement. We lived the last twelve years of his life following him like a shadow. We saw how much the Divine in the form of Guru, the Avatar, works, suffers for our "confounded humanity". He has said, "...my Yoga is not for myself who need nothing, and do not need salvation or anything else, but precisely for the earth-consciousness, to open a way to the earth-consciousness to change."

We have also watched the tragedy of his passing away in a normal tranquil manner,

subject to nature, not like some yogis who give up the body in meditation. Like Sri Ramakrishna, he took up the disease, allowed its natural course and reached the natural end. His whole life was an extraordinary phenomenon, but its external form so simple, natural and human, so to say, concealed the inner miracle. What we have seen is nothing but a few waves, small and big, on the surface, while his true life was ‘‘never on the surface’’. The depth of that life will always remain unfathomable. The Mother alone knows what he was and what he has done for the world. One day the world will wake up to a recognition and accept him as the Avatar, the World-Teacher.

NIRODBARAN

(Reproduced from *Nirodbaran: Divinity's Comrade*, edited by Hemant Kapoor, Sri Mira Trust, Pondicherry, 2003)

*Nirodbaran: You said, "circumstances are exceptional" as regards my early success in English versification. It must be so, otherwise how could I write these poems so fast and beautifully? But please*

*Let me know*

*How 'tis so*

*A dullard like me*

*Bursting like a sea*

*With the heart of the Muse*

*Makes his rhythm fuse?*

*Sri Aurobindo:*

*You are opening, opening, opening*

*Into a wider, wider scopening*

*That fills me with a sudden hopening*

*That I may carry you inspite of gropening*

*Your soul into the supramental ropening.*

*N.B. Surrealist poetry.*

*(Nirodbaran's Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo, 1995 Ed., Vol. 1, p. 493)*



## **SRI AUROBINDO AND GREECE BY K. D. SETHNA**

### **A GLIMPSE INTO ITS “MAKING”**

IN February 1965 Prof. G. V. Subrahmanyam, a lecturer in the Department of Philosophy at the Vivekananda College in Madras, contacted K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran) and requested him to write an essay “dealing with the influence of Greek mythology and Greek thought on Sri Aurobindo”. Subrahmanyam’s interest in modern Greek literature had brought him in contact with Kimon Friar, the then editor of *Greek Heritage*. Friar, translator of modern Greek poetry and widely known for his translation of Nikos Kazantzakis’ *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel*, worked as professor and lecturer in many universities and acted as editor and contributing editor to several magazines. (It may be mentioned here that Friar translated another book by Kazantzakis, *The Saviors of God: Spiritual Exercises*.)

The following letters written between February and July 1965 give us a glimpse as to how Sethna’s *Sri Aurobindo and Greece* took shape. Three of Sethna’s letters to Subrahmanyam are not available; Subrahmanyam’s answers, however, clearly show which issues had been addressed. Some repetitious material dealing solely with technicalities has been omitted.

\*

Subrahmanyam’s introductory letter to Sethna on 2 February 1965 reads:

“May I introduce myself to you? I am a lecturer in the department of Philosophy, Vivekananda College, Madras. I have been studying modern Greek literature for some years now and in that connection have cultivated Mr. Kimon Friar who has translated into English Nikos Kazantzakis’ *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel*. Mr. Friar is now editing *Greek Heritage*, a quarterly devoted to Greek culture and history.

“I sent him in November 1963 Sri Aurobindo’s *Iliad*, *Perseus the Deliverer* and his essays on *Heraclitus* and recently *Savitri* along with Sri Purani’s work on the epic and Sri M. P. Pandit’s *The Teaching of Sri Aurobindo*. He has evinced much interest in these books. I am enclosing copies of his letters herewith. He intends publishing selections from *Perseus the Deliverer* in *Greek Heritage* for which I obtained permission from the Ashram.

“He now requires an article of about 4,000 words dealing with the influence of Greek mythology and Greek thought on Sri Aurobindo, quoting exclusively from his books on Greek themes. The article should be preceded by a short biography.

“Mr. Friar has asked me to contact an authority on the subject to write this article. Having benefited much by your book *The Poetic Genius of Sri Aurobindo*, I could think of none better than you for the task. Needless to mention, Mr. Friar and I will be

greatly indebted to you, if you will agree to write an essay on this subject. Of course, you may take your own time and it may be routed through me.”

The first of the two enclosed letters dates back to 6 March 1964:

*[From Friar to Subrahmanyam]*

I wrote to you some time ago that I had not received Sri Aurobindo's *Perseus the Deliverer*, but I have found it among some of my other books.

It is an extremely curious work, for it is a drama on a Greek myth written by an Indian in the style not only of the Elizabethan age, but also that of Milton. The cross breeding is strange, but attractive, and I am thinking of publishing selections from it, with a running commentary of the plot. From whom do we have to obtain permission? Is the author still alive? Would you be so kind as to obtain the permission for me? Could you send me a short biography of the author? If he is alive, would you kindly send me his address; I might ask him to write a special foreword. I could use illustrations from ancient Greek vases, but I wonder if by any chance there happen to be drawings of Perseus and Medusa by some Indian artist. Has the author been primarily influenced by Greek mythology? Please do let me hear from you soon.

The second letter enclosed is dated 27 January 1965:

*[From Friar to Subrahmanyam]*

I am immensely grateful to you for taking all the trouble you have taken to send me the various books of and about Sri Aurobindo.

At first glance they are most interesting, and as soon as I have an available opportunity I shall give them my full attention.

I have been terribly occupied in recent weeks with all the responsibility and volume of work that goes with editing a magazine such as *Greek Heritage*. Furthermore, I am leaving on February 13<sup>th</sup> for a two-month lecture tour in the United States, so, as you can see, I have a full schedule ahead of me.

I should very much like you to suggest a person who could write an essay of about 4,000 words on Sri Aurobindo's Greek thought and Greek influences, quoting perhaps from his "Greek" works. May I leave it up to you to contact such a person and have him write an article? Could you perhaps do it? Either way the article should be preceded by a short biography.

Again, many thanks for your kind interest, and I shall look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Sethna carefully considers Subrahmanyam's proposal on 9 February 1965:

“I was glad to get your kind letter. I too have always been interested in Greek thought and life. You have done well to contact Mr. Kimon Friar and to draw his attention to Sri Aurobindo’s works. I wonder what Mr. Friar will have to say on *Ilion*. It is *Ilion* and not *Perseus the Deliverer* that is Sri Aurobindo’s greatest contribution to immortal Greece, though *Perseus* is a very fine play. What is important about *Ilion* is not only the wide yet detailed treatment of a Homeric theme but also the employment in English for the first time of a truly living quantitative hexameter like Homer’s on a large scale. I think Mr. Friar should take note of this achievement in *Greek Heritage*. Just as Kazantzakis’s epic is a sequel to the *Odyssey*, this is a sequel to the *Iliad*. And, although it is much shorter and although unfortunately the closing portion of it is missing in spite of having been written, it is poetically a greater work than Kazantzakis’s, at least so far as the English version of the latter is concerned. Mr. Friar is to my mind an excellent translator—he has vigour and speed and “happy valiancy”—but the line he has adopted has not always the fitting wing-beat of poetic rhythm, the true hexametrical roll and rise without which we cannot have the living movement needed for anything Homeric, ancient or modern. What a masterpiece Friar’s translation would have been if in addition to his gifts he could have brought something like Sri Aurobindo’s powerful verse-structure.

“It is very complimentary of you to pick me out to write on the influence of Greek mythology and thought on Sri Aurobindo. At the moment I have very little time, but I shall keep your proposal in mind.

“What I have said above on *Ilion* need not discourage Mr. Friar from giving prominence to *Perseus* in his quarterly. But I would wish you to draw his attention in particular to a study of *Ilion*. His observations on it will be of extreme value and interest.

“By the way, I should recommend Miss Prema Nandakumar’s recent study of *Savitri* as a good general introduction. It has also references to Kazantzakis. I suppose you have sent Mr. Friar my own little book, which contains a fairly long study of the opening parts of *Ilion*, the only parts published when the book was written.”

Subrahmanyam responds to these suggestions on 19 February 1965:

“Thank you for your very interesting, unsigned letter of 9.2.1965.

“Mr. Friar intends publishing selections from *Perseus the Deliverer* in one of the 1965 issues of *Greek Heritage*.... Please discuss in detail the different aspects of the influence of Greek mythology and Greek thought on Sri Aurobindo, quoting exclusively from his books and short poems on Greek themes. Since so far none has dealt with this side of Aurobindo’s philosophy, your essay will be of immense value both to Greek and Indian scholars. You may also make a short comparative study of Aurobindo and Kazantzakis, putting in the points in your above letter to me.

“I too feel that Mr. Friar’s views on *Perseus the Deliverer*, *Ilion* and *Savitri* will

be of extreme value and interest. I have already requested him for his detailed critical assessment of these books. If he does so, I shall send you a copy of his letter. If possible, I shall persuade him to write an article on Aurobindo after his return from U.S.A....”

Sethna seems to have expressed some doubt as to his competence in dealing with the subject matter at hand; Subrahmanyam replies on 23 March 1965:

“I wonder what made you diffident about your competence in the subject proposed by Mr. Friar. Your book *The Poetic Genius of Sri Aurobindo* and your reply to the criticism of the poetry of Sri Aurobindo in the *Illustrated Weekly of India* do not justify your diffidence. In fact I can hardly think of any one more competent for this work.

“Mr. Friar requires just an introduction to Sri Aurobindo to his selections from *Perseus*, bringing out the influence of Greek mythology and Philosophy on him and explicating his interpretation of some Greek themes on the basis of his cosmology.

“I suppose Mr. Friar would require:

- a) A short biographical introduction to Sri Aurobindo.
- b) His early education in Greek and Latin: early poems in these languages: translations of Plato, Meleager (*Collected Poems and Plays*) and Homer (*More Poems*).
- c) Summary of his philosophy: influence of Plato, Aristotle and other Greek thinkers.
- d) His interpretation of *Heraclitus*.
- e) His handling of *Ilion*: interpretation of the story of Perseus on the basis of his philosophy.

“This is how I thought of the essay when I received his letter. I await with interest your approach to the subject.”

Sethna sends an appeal to the Mother on 25 March 1965:

Dearest Mother,

There is a very beautiful quarterly, called *Greek Heritage*, edited and printed in Athens and bound in America. It is similar in get-up to *Horizon*, which you have seen in the past. It is also highly favoured by the literati. Its editor, Kimon Friar, has got interested in all of Sri Aurobindo’s writings bearing on Greek subjects. A professor from Madras, G. V. Subrahmanyam, sent Mr. Friar *Perseus the Deliverer*, *Ilion*, *Heraclitus*, as well as *Savitri*. Mr. Friar so far read *Perseus the Deliverer* and he has got from the Ashram, through Prof. Subrahmanyam,

permission to quote from this drama. Now he wants an article of about 4,000 words on the influence of Greek mythology and Greek thought on Sri Aurobindo, quoting from all his works on Greek themes and preceded by a short biography. Prof. Subrahmanyam introduced himself to me by letter and requested me on Mr. Friar's behalf to write the needed article. He said that he had read my *The Poetic Genius of Sri Aurobindo* and added: "Having benefited much by your book, I could think of none better than you for the task."

Ananta who, like myself, is deeply influenced by Greece, tells me that here is a wonderful opportunity. If I wrote the article I would, of course, show the light thrown by Sri Aurobindo on Greek mythology and thought together with the early influence of them on him—influence more of Greek poetry and drama, I should think, than of other things.

I wrote to Prof. Subrahmanyam that I didn't feel quite competent but he insists and his latest letter ends: "Once again may I say how grateful Mr. Friar and I would be if you undertake the task?"

Mother, please give me inspiration and tell Sri Aurobindo also to help me.

Love, Amal

The Mother writes her reassuring reply at the bottom of the letter:



All right  
blessings  
Mother

Upon receiving the good news of Sethna accepting the task, Subrahmanyam elaborates on his outline on 27 March 1965:

"I am delighted at your decision to write the article on Sri Aurobindo.

"I should like to add to my outline of the essay:

- 1) Sri Aurobindo's views on Quantitative Hexameters.
- 2) Aurobindo and Kazantzakis: a short comparative study:
  - a) Both erudite scholars.
  - b) Masters of several languages.
  - c) Always worked on a vast canvas.
  - d) The epic of Kazantzakis begins with the worship of the sun and ends with it.
  - e) Perhaps it has been patterned into service for beginning each canto (suggested by my friend Sri R. S. Desikan). Compare *Savitri*, opening canto, *Ilion*, first book.
 

Both Aurobindo and Kazantzakis have an abounding faith in the infinite evolution of the Spirit which is implicit in matter.
  - f) Either of them believes in individual salvation. No man can be happy until the whole creation moves towards the far-off goal."

Sethna then informs Subrahmanyam of the title he has chosen and the length of his essay. Subrahmanyam refers to these points in his next three letters:

"The title *Greece and Sri Aurobindo* given by you is quite apt. Of course, as you have said it is impossible to do justice to the subject in about 4,000 words. But each issue of *Greek Heritage* is a discrete whole by itself and so you may make it a single independent essay. It does not matter if it becomes lengthy. I shall be writing to Mr. Friar today." (11 May 1965)

"As Mr. Friar is away from Greece on a lecture tour of the U.S.A., I wrote to Mr. John Goumas, research editor, the *Greek Heritage*, about your article. In reply he regrets their inability to publish two articles in two successive issues, each issue being independent, complete in itself. Further it is the policy of the journal to publish only articles of 4,000 words. Hence he requests you not to exceed this length.

"It will be difficult to do full justice to this great topic within such a short span. Yet I am sure you can and you will, considering that it is going to introduce Sri Aurobindo to a new circle of intellectuals who have not even heard of this eminent philosopher and poet." (22 May 1965)

"I am very happy to learn that the article has grown into a small book. I request you to continue and complete it according to your original plan. You may publish it in the form of a book, under the same title, *Greece and Sri Aurobindo*, as one of the ashram publications.

"After thus completing it, you may yourself carve out an article of 4,000 words for the *Greek Heritage*. We need not show the original article to Mr. Friar. First, he has not yet returned to Greece from his tour of the U.S.A. Secondly, he will hesitate

to advise us on this matter as he has himself been introduced to Aurobindo-literature only recently.” (27 May 1965)

On 17 June 1965 Sethna informs Subrahmanyam:

“Tomorrow or on Saturday I’ll be sending you my article *Greece and Sri Aurobindo* by registered book post. Even this small carving out from the mass of 40,000 words is itself more than the 4,000 words wanted: it comes to nearly 6,990. But with less than this number it seems impossible to present Sri Aurobindo the Hellenist in any significant manner. Possibly the biographical part may be shortened a little, but already it is far from being long. I do hope the editor of the *Greek Heritage* can make a bit of allowance on one side or the other of his stipulated length. Of course he is welcome to make any suggestions as to how the article may be shortened somewhat. I am prepared to act in a reasonable way.

“I shall be glad to hear of your impressions of my effort. It is divided into two parts: 1. A Lifelong Hellenism; 2. The Homeric Hexameter in English. I thought these subtitles necessary to interest the reader. At the end of the first part I have given an indication of all the various Greek matters touched on by Sri Aurobindo. I had to choose only one most momentous contribution and plumped for the prosody and poetry of *Ilion*. Some other topics, of course, I have brought in—but not in much detail. *Songs to Myrtilla* and *Perseus the Deliverer* have figured briefly in Part 1.

“Did you receive the Note I sent you on the author? I haven’t heard from you for quite a time.”

The pertinent matter of Subrahmanyam’s next two letters reads:

“I shall be writing to Mr. Friar this week. I will certainly mention your full book on *Greece and Sri Aurobindo* and even enquire whether he would publish it through the *Greek Heritage Foundation*. I shall refer to the present length of the article and the difficulty of presenting Sri Aurobindo the Hellenist more briefly.” (21 June 1965)

“I am very happy over the three pictures of Sri Aurobindo to accompany the article, though I do not know how Mr. Friar will use them. With a view to appending selections from *Perseus the Deliverer* to the article, he asked me for sketches of Perseus and Medusa by Indian artists in the absence of which he would be using illustrations from ancient Greek vases. I wondered whether there were any Indian sketches and enquired of many people. No one could give me any definite information. Anyhow, you send me the three pictures of Sri Aurobindo you are now preparing and also enclose a short note as to how these may be used.

“The article and the enclosures will be packed very carefully and dispatched by registered & air mail book-post. Regarding postage and handling expenses, it should greatly please me to bear them.” (23 June 1965)



On 27 June 1965 Subrahmanyam sends Sethna his detailed comments on *Greece and Sri Aurobindo*:

“I went through every page carefully yesterday. May I congratulate you on writing such a fine and interesting essay within a very short period of time? It brings out the many-sidedness of Aurobindo’s personality and incidentally it shows your love and grasp of the subject and devotion to it. To have first written a book of more than 40,000 words on it and then carved out of it an essay of 4,000 words for the *Greek Heritage*, shows your diligence, patience, deep interest in the subject and above all your obliging nature. The fact that all this is done to popularise the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo should give you immense satisfaction, though it must have taxed you very much.

“Now to the essay. The biographical part of it, though short, contains all the important facts about the poet and his intimate relationship with the world of Greek letters. The comments of co-students and teachers of Sri Aurobindo’s scholarship reveal his genius even at a very early period of his life. You have aptly referred to his English translations of Greek poems. The comparison between his version of Meleager and F. L. Lucas’ and your comments on them are very apposite, bringing out the greatness of Sri Aurobindo as a translator. Perhaps you might have included his rendering of Plato (*Collected Poems and Plays*) and Homer (*More Poems*, p. 49). Though his version of the first book of Homer is incomplete, it will not, I am sure, fail to arrest the attention of Greek scholars.

“You have also dealt with the Greco-Roman themes of Sri Aurobindo, though only two or three of them. There are many such fine pieces in the *Collected Poems and Plays*, *More Poems* etc., discussion of which will establish Aurobindo’s intimate knowledge of Greek history, mythology and literature and that he was not handling Greek themes casually, now and then, according to his whim and fancy.

“Your treatment of *Perseus the Deliverer* is too brief and of Homeric Hexameter too long. Nearly twelve pages have been devoted to it alone in an essay of 25 pages. Sure, it is rich and interesting. But being highly technical, it will not interest the general reader. I think it should not have such a dominant place in an essay which merely attempts to introduce Sri Aurobindo to those who have not even heard of him. You are dealing in great detail with one aspect of the problem of versification which may seem disproportionate here; and it is at the expense of a full discussion of the theme of the poem, its real significance and how it has been ably handled by Aurobindo. The problem of Homeric hexameter and Sri Aurobindo’s solution to it, may be mentioned in passing, and the space thus gained may be devoted to the theme and significance of *Iliad*, *Perseus the Deliverer* and his interpretation of *Heraclitus*—all of which are requisite for a full impact of the Hellenism of Sri Aurobindo. It will be of great value and interest to Greek scholars.

“The essay would be more even with a treatment of all the heads suggested in



my outline: 1) Just an outline to Sri Aurobindo's life. 2) His early education in Greek and Latin. 3) His translation of Greek poems. 4) His poems on Greek themes. 5) His philosophy—a general outline. 6) The influence of Plato, Aristotle, Pythagoras and other Greek thinkers and poets on him. 7) Discussion of his *Perseus the Deliverer*. 8) *Ilion*. 9) His interpretation of *Heraclitus*. 10) Sri Aurobindo and Homeric Hexameter. 11) Concluding remarks.

“This outline lists all things Greek relating to Sri Aurobindo, and all of them will have to be cited briefly to help the reader to form a good general idea of Aurobindo the Hellenist.

“These are my comments on the article. Mr. Friar may feel differently. Shall I pass on the essay to him as it is or would you like to revise it? Of course, Mr. Friar can be expected to play his editorial role of effective mediation between the author and the reader, by means of suitable changes. In that case we may send the article as it is. Kindly arrange to send the photographs at your earliest convenience.”

On 14 July 1965 Friar acknowledges receipt of *Greece and Sri Aurobindo* sent by Subrahmanyam:

“We have received Mr. Sethna's manuscript safely and I have read it over. It is an outstanding piece of work and will make a valuable contribution to *Greek Heritage*. Thank you very much for making all of the arrangements for the article. Shortly I will be in contact with Mr. Sethna himself.”

Friar seems to have written to Sethna the same day (14.07.65), ending his letter with a rather unexpected piece of news:

“Mr. Subrahmanyam has just sent me your article *Greece and Sri Aurobindo*.

“I read your text with great interest and fascination. It is an outstanding piece of work and a most valuable addition to the *Greek Heritage*.

“There are, however, one or two suggestions I would like to make since the article is well over our 4,000 word limit and needs cutting. Could you possibly condense the material on meter to a single paragraph? This section is very crucial to the specialist, but not of great interest to the general reader. On the other hand, could you also add a full summary of the plots of *Perseus* and *Ilion* and mention Aurobindo's book on *Heraclitos*. These I think are most important and of great interest.

“Thank you for the photographs of Sri Aurobindo on his deathbed. I am sure that at least one will be used.

“I should tell you that I have resigned as Editor of *Greek Heritage* and therefore cannot tell you definitely when your article will appear. I will, however, recommend it most highly to the next Editor.

“Once again, thank you for your excellent article.”

Sethna acknowledges Friar's appreciation on 23 July 1965:

"I thank you very much for your appreciation of my article *Greece and Sri Aurobindo*. I shall certainly try to cut it and make the changes you have requested. But I may confess that when I wrote the part on quantitative metre I did not quite have the general reader in view, though I thought the exposition was simplified enough for him even if it might not particularly interest him. I had in mind the long list of distinguished Greek scholars appearing in one of the front pages of the *Greek Heritage*—men like Bowra whose attention needs to be called to the far-reaching theory of Sri Aurobindo's English hexameter no less than to his masterly practice of it. Would it not be a bit of a pity to make too short what such scholars would really like to be set forth at some length? No doubt, the general reader has mainly to be satisfied; but can't a few articles be allowed with a somewhat specialist flavour added to popular elements? Please don't think I am complaining against your proposals. I am just submitting an idea which you may pass on to the next Editor. In the meantime I am starting to carry out your suggestions as best I can.

"Let me repeat again that I am very thankful for your kind letter."

Subrahmanyam offers the following suggestions on 25 July 1965:

"I had written to Mr. Kimon Friar to ascertain the feasibility of his publishing your original disquisition on *Greece and Sri Aurobindo*, as a separate volume. He regretted his inability as the *Greek Heritage* was no publishing house.

"I suggest now that you write another article on Sri Aurobindo so as to cover the aspects outlined in my letters dated.... Besides, other Greek topics too that engrossed Sri Aurobindo could be included, in as much detail as you like, under suitable heads.

"Later on this article and your original disquisition on *Greece and Sri Aurobindo* may be published together in one volume entitled *The Hellenism of Sri Aurobindo*.

"None has so far written on this side of Aurobindo's philosophy. Hence it will be of great value and interest to scholars in India and abroad.

"I hope that this will receive your immediate attention."

\*

For reasons unknown the quarterly *Greek Heritage* ceased to be published.

Eventually Sethna sent his essay to Kishor Gandhi who duly started serialising it from 1986 on in *Sri Aurobindo Circle* as *Sri Aurobindo and Greece*.

In 1998 The Integral Life Foundation brought out *Sri Aurobindo and Greece* as a small book.

"E"

## “A SPLENDID VALIDATION”

Once, whilst stuck  
knee deep in muck  
in the boggy shallows  
of the murky mind,

A wise man too of his time  
to remind me of  
the inevitable victory,  
which awaits the Divine.

I hope he knows  
how he lifted me  
and left me wanting  
the sight of his kind.

MICHAEL DOYLE

## PAINTING AS SADHANA

**Krishnalal Bhatt (1905-1990)**

*(Continued from the issue of September 2006 )*

12

### **[Krishnalal's correspondence with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo]**

4-Aug-'35: Mother,

The night on which I wrote the previous letter (of aspiration for Mother) I had a nightmare. In it I saw a neat house with a thatched roof. It was an Ashram building about which I felt that it looked neat but without anything interesting from outside but really it was full with the atmosphere of Yoga and art inside. I slept outside the house and was caught by a being. I struggled with it and got hold over it. I took it by its hands and wanted to take it to Mother. After going to a short distance it managed to take me somewhere down. There I had to struggle hard to get out of him. While struggling I woke up.

Last night I had disturbed sleep. In the beginning as I got sleep, very soon I had to get up in the condition of a man, quite dull of his senses. For a minute or two I could not feel or know where was I or what was I doing. In that way so many times I got sleep and again woke up in that condition. The remaining night also the sleep was not quiet and sound.

The condition about which I wrote formerly is there but not with so much of weeping. Some part is aspiring for Mother against another part which seems to be rigid. I am not able to know what is that part that hinders.

Sri Aurobindo: It is something in the mind as well as something in the very material part. It is probably these that "slept outside" and had the difficulty.

21. Aug.'35: Mother,

Herewith is a picture of a vision which I saw before the 15th Aug. Before the 15th I was concentrated on doing pictures for some days. Daily I was finishing one picture. I did seven or eight small pictures like that. During that time I had visions of different kinds of colour schemes. This one is a clear vision of that period. May I know from Mother its significance?

Sri Aurobindo: The light of the higher knowledge and consciousness rising up out of the darkness of the Ignorance from the sea of life.

K: The picture of Shiva and the cloud which I offered to Mother on the last occasion was the perception of the above-said period, and it was so clear that I finished it within three days without hesitation. I would like to know from Mother what it

represents and on what level of consciousness can be its origin?

Sri Aurobindo: It seems to come from the mental plane.

Sri Aurobindo:

27.Aug.35

I do not quite understand—we do not supply copies of messages. If people want to take copies of the messages that are allowed to be sent outside they ask for permission. Is it that Prithvisingh has to take the copy for which we give permission? If so, you might speak to him about it.

[*K in pencil* “(copy of messages for Ajit Chakravarty)”]

[Undated] Mother,

I have begun the classes for drawing. All are interested in them. I showed them how to put even washes with colour and also have shown them that their drawing is weak. They have shown their desire to do drawing from the beginning.

Now they want to show me their drawings whenever they do and want my suggestions and corrections. Should I give them suggestions and corrections?

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

K: Today I send the drawing of the flower of Divine love. I have no appropriate red for it, so I could not bring out its brilliancy.

Sri Aurobindo: It is excellent.

K: Can I give my clothes to washerman for washing?

Sri Aurobindo: Yes.

Mother: The appropriate red can be got here in a small box of colours worth 5 annas. You can ask Champaklal where it can be got.

6/9/35: [*end*] ...may write to a firm at Bombay and get its quotations [*pencilled under this* “(Painting materials)”]

Mother: Yes.

Have you begun some sketch for the town hall’s decoration? They have asked also for a rough estimate of the expenses.

Will the eight panels be all of the same size? and how many everite pieces are needed for each panel?

They are waiting for our answer, so we cannot make them wait too long.

19-Sept-’35: Mother,

Since my interview with Mother on last Saturday I find that there remains restlessness during sleep at night or in daytime. When I get up from sleep my whole body is aching. Headache is more or less constant.

I get the suggestions for the pictures but they are disturbed by some kind of mental constructions or suggestions.

What is all this due to? And why it has begun after the interview with Mother?

Sri Aurobindo: I suppose it must be some wrong or restless activity of mind that was thrown upon you afterwards so as to come across the action of the Mother in you. You have to reject it till it falls quiet.

2.10.'35: [end]...mood.

My mother has devotional temperament from the beginning and it is kept up due to her strong faith in Vaishnava religion.

Sri Aurobindo: What sadhana is she doing?

7-10-35: Mother,

To-night Champaklal might have given the picture which he and Vishnu finished with my help. They thought of starting a big picture of sea half-seriously. When I came to know of it I pushed their idea by asking them to give help. When they began they found it difficult to start and so I had to give a rough sketch which they enlarged. But most of the work I had to do. In such a way of doing work they learnt some things such as how to develop a picture, how the water surface of the sea and foam can be done.

In this way to push their idea of painting—is it good? They were not capable of starting or finishing such a picture.

Mother will let me know if such a trial comes from them, should I push it up and help them as I did this time?

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

K: The picture could not be finished as it ought to be when started and finished by one person. Anyway it is made a finished picture.

Sri Aurobindo: The picture is good and of course it is very clear from it that you did almost all.

18-10-'35: Mother,

Now-a-days I am trying to reject the unquiet ideas and impulses due to which I am disagreeable sometimes with others. In doing it I find that I am successful, I get Mother's presence and quiet and am much relieved from the disturbed condition. But that lasts for three, four days and again the former condition comes—perhaps in the same intensity and it lasts also for some days and again I am quiet and in Mother's presence.

I would request Mother to explain me where I may be wrong. Why I get the disturbance after having Mother's presence and quiet? Is it because I may not be able to bear the nervous strain of having Her presence or can it be that the condition of disturbance wants to have its place again in me? How can I keep it separate and at a distance from me and not lose the Mother's presence and guidance?

Is this an unbalanced condition which may throw me out of the path towards Mother?

Sri Aurobindo: No. When one tries to change something in the vital, then, due to the nature's habit of persisting in a movement to which it has been accustomed, there is usually an alternation like this; the new condition persists for some days, then the old forces its way for some time to the surface. If one persists, the old movement begins to lose its force and die out and the new permanently replaces it.

Mother: How are the sketches for the Town-Hall going on? It will soon be the moment to send them to the Governor (at the end of the month).

19-10-'35: Mother,

I send three pictures for the town-hall of which two are unfinished. About its colour scheme I could not manage and so was a little slow.

Now I intend to consult and take help of my friend Jayantilal who has come and wants to stay for November Darshan. He knows and has done much of fresco-work and decoration-work. I may take his help if Mother has no objection. I will keep the same subjects for the pictures but want to change the compositions and colour schemes in them.

I think it will be ready by the end of this month or latest in the beginning of November.

Can I allow Jayantilal to come to my room?

Sri Aurobindo: Yes. The finished picture is very pretty.

20-10-35: Mother,

Herewith I send some sketches by Jayantilal. As he has no other paintings with him he sends these for Mother's kind look at them. He intends to do some paintings which he will send to Mother when ready.

May I request Mother to let me know what Mother thinks of these sketches?

Sri Aurobindo: As studies they are interesting and skilful. Mother will wait for the paintings before forming an idea of his work.

21-10-35: Mother,

I have done some cards with the idea of distributing them, mostly to those who are doing painting work. The list of those to whom I want to give I write at the end. From that, those meant for sadhikas may be given by Mother and the others, Mother may give or I may give, as Mother desires.

If the idea of distributing, Mother does not like or any other suggestion is there I will be glad to accept.

The names: Champaklal, Vishnu, Sanjiban, Anilkumar, Nishikanta, Romen, Arjava, Purani, Dayakar, Chinmayi, Kamala, Tajdar, Anu.

Mother: The cards are all very nice, some extremely pretty. I am sending them back for distribution except one that Chinmayee has chosen and kept with great pleasure.

All the names are all right.



(Oct-35?): Because in November we will have the exhibition work and the occasion of Darshan and so, much time will be engaged in that. This was my idea, but I think I will do according to Mother's instructions.

Mother: Yes, it is all right. When the sketches are ready they will have to be shown to the Maire [*the Mayor*] and the Governor and this will take some time. That is to say between the sketches and the actual beginning of the painting there will be plenty of time for the exhibition and the Darshan.

K: I have done 12 pictures during last one month; I want to offer them to Mother. May I ask if Mother can find some time and oblige me by giving an interview?

Mother: Next Saturday I shall call you.

1-11-35: Mother:

As I told you, it would be good to show the sketches to the Governor on the 10th of this month or about, because the Conseil General [*regional council*] is sitting just now and the final decision has to be taken by this Conseil. Four sketches and the elevation of the room will be sufficient.

1/11/35: [*end*] ...Mother will kindly supply me with one if possible. [*Here K has pencilled "(about time piece)"*]

Mother: I am asking Amrita to give you one.

3. Nov. 35: Mother, I send the four sketches of the decoration work which are ready to be sent to the Governor. The drawings of them are done by me and the colouring by Jayantilal.

Mother will see them and suggest if any alterations are necessary in drawing or colour-scheme.

Mother: They are truly very fine. I see no change to suggest.

K: The smaller sketches for the elevation will be done within two days after Mother has seen the sketches. And then I will submit everything to Mother to be sent to the Governor.

Brushes, colours and other things for this work will have to be ordered now so that everything may be ready by the end of November. For that some money will be required. Can this order be put now or when these sketches are sanctioned?

Mother: You can put the order now.

(15-11-35): [*end*] ...I put the thing before Mother to consider whether I should go to Madras or drop the idea. If I am to go I may start to-morrow and return before the 19th inst.

Sri Aurobindo: To the Mother such a journey or activity has no meaning, so she is obliged to leave it to you to decide.

26.11.35: I have the idea to do some decoration on the ground when the Governor is invited for the concert. A design can be done by arranging cereals of different natural colours. The available corns of different colours can be used by spreading on the ground to make a good form of design. If Mother approves the idea I would think of doing it in the space between the semi circles of the guests and musicians or any other better space which Mother may suggest.

Mother will kindly let me know about the idea of the decoration.

Sri Aurobindo: How long will it take to do it and how much space will it take? The idea is good; it has to be seen whether the execution is possible.

27.11.'35: Mother,

The decoration design can be done on a whole piece of everite—4 feet square—instead of on the ground. The work will take about 3 hours to finish. If the work is to be done on everite, it can be done on it and kept in a corner of the same hall and put in its proper place when the seats are arranged.

Sri Aurobindo: Very well, it can be done like that.

K: Myself, Jayantilal and Vishnu intend to work in it. Anu is eager to work in it, I may ask her if Mother allows.

Sri Aurobindo: Yes.

(27.11.35) [end] Why do I feel unhappy? Is it that I make myself unhappy or is it the condition when everybody will feel the same?

N.B. Mother, most probably to-morrow I will send all the four sketches of the decoration work.

Sri Aurobindo: The unhappiness is not necessary or inevitable in the Sadhana, but it comes because your inner nature feels the touch of the Divine Presence indispensable to it and uneasy when it does not feel it. To feel it always a certain constant detachment within allowing you to remain within and do everything from within is necessary. This can more easily be done in quiet occupations and quiet contacts. For it is quietness and inwardness that enable one to feel the Presence.

[On 6 December, the doctor wondered if he ought to stop giving cod-liver oil to Krishnalal as he “seems all right”. (Nirodbaran’s *Complete Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*, p. 397.)

Sri Aurobindo: It might be stopped. Perhaps Nergine may be given instead. He will have hard work now, so a little support may be necessary.]

9/12/35: [end] ...in it.

Mother: I do not think it will be quite safe to leave the pictures in that house so long as the work is going on and nobody will live there to prevent the robbers from coming.

Also some arrangement will have to be made to keep them safely from the insects and that cannot be done in a day.

16.12.35: Mother,

I prepare some cards to be offered to Mother on the new year's day. For that I want one album to be bound; I have papers and other materials for it. Mother will kindly give the permission for binding.

Mother: Yes.

Undated: [*end*] ...to the arrangements.

Mother: You can ask another key for the gate, through Amrita. (Show him this note.)  
Blessings.

P.S. To avoid all further complications the key will remain with Nolini and you will fetch it whenever required.

[*Apparently about the key to the "Painters' house".*]

17-12-'35: Mother,

I think it will be better for me to see Mother, to ask about some points for the exhibition.

May I ask Mother to spare some time and kindly give me an interview?

Mother: I will see you Saturday at about 12.30.

23.12.35: Mother,

13 curtains in all are necessary for the exhibition-rooms. 36 yards of cloth will be sufficient for the purpose.

Mother: What cloth do you want? If it is ordinary Japanese cloth which we usually buy, you can ask Amrita to buy a piece of 36 yards. Remember that if the cloth is dyed it will shrink—I can not sanction anything more costly than 2 or 3 annas a yard. Perhaps it would be better if you went yourself to choose what you want.

25-12-35: Mother,

Herewith I send the list of the things required for the exhibition which Mother will sign.

May I suggest Nayak to talk in Tamil with carpenters when necessary? As he is on work in the same building he can be called for. [*rest on this sheet is cut off*]

Mother: Yes.

K: [*top of next sheet has only*] ...of the exhibition.

Mother: I will write to him about it.

I have written also to Benjamin about the curtains.

26-12-'35: Mother, we worked up to 12 o'clock with the 2 carpenters and Sanjiban's

room is completely arranged. [*Pencilled beside this is “(about Exhibition in Nouveauté)”*]

Myself and Anilkumar have a point on which we do not agree. Mother will consider it. [*rest of the letter snipped off*]

Sri Aurobindo: The Mother has said very clearly in front of all that it is you who have to arrange the pictures for the exhibition—Anilkumar’s and Nishikanta’s included. This decision stands and cannot be either changed or modified.

27.12.35: Mother [*on a chit*]:

Krishnalal, you know that you have much hard work to do in day time until the end of the month, consequently I expect you to go to sleep early in the night.

Moreover it is not proper that you should go to Kanta as it was understood that she came here and was kept on the condition she would no more consider you as her husband.

I feel sure you will understand my point.

Undated: [*End of Kanta’s letter in Gujarati*]

...mulle evi kripa karsho. Kanta-na pranam.

(I shall be grateful if I can get [the things from the Stores]. Kanta’s pranam)

Sri Aurobindo: Certainly you can have things from the Stores; Mother did not know you were not getting.

As for permanence, you can stay so long as you wish to do so; but Mother does not nowadays wish to give a formal permission of permanence as it is not good for the mind—it comes practically however to the same thing.

28/12/35: [*end*] ...Mother wanted that the copies should be kept separate.

Mother: This was not explained to me, otherwise I would have said to leave them where they are.

K: In the copy-room there are other oil-paintings which are original, these are kept because Anilkumar [*parts of the next 2 pages have been cut out*] ...to be considered copies—as Mother instructs.

Mother: If everything is arranged—you need not change anything.

K: We used fly-tox yesterday night in all the rooms. But the whole bottle was used up. No pictures are spoiled by the insects last night. Should we use the fly-tox daily or at interval of certain days?

Mother [*underlining K’s “interval of certain days”*] Yes.

K: The curtains are dyed and ready I will send them to-morrow for Mother to see.

Mother: All right.

(*To be continued*)

S. V. BHATT

## LIVING A SPIRITUAL LIFE

*[This is an adaptation composed of extracts from two lectures given by Dr. G. Venkataswamy at the Divinity School, Harvard University, Boston, U.S.A. on 10th and 11th April 1991.]*

I AM an eye doctor—a medical man trained in the rational and scientific way.

I was born to a farmer's family in a small village in South India, almost near the tip. My father was brought up in a deeply religious fashion, and used to have a Vaishnava caste mark put on his forehead every day. He would walk 25 miles each way to the temple of our family deity once a month, carrying a pot of melted ghee on his head to offer to the Divine. It was a tradition in those families to have a teacher, a guru. The tradition was hereditary, so your son would become a disciple to your guru's son. My father's guru lived in the town near our family deity's place, and they had frequent contact.

My father also spent his own time and money to plant hundreds of shade trees around pools and avenues in the village, and in the neighbouring areas. He used to feed the poorer sections of our villages with sumptuous meals. He built a hall with granite stone at a temple near our village. He built a modern house and was fond of using big granite boulders. He practised good agriculture and was far ahead of the people in the village. He was known for truthfulness and straightforwardness. People did not dare to tell him a lie. He aimed at perfection in all his works, and his children inherited this quality.

There was no school in my village. As school children we had to walk a mile and half across a river to a village nearby. Every house had a buffalo, and the children had to take it out for grazing early in the morning. We came back home, had our gruel, and went to school. When we did get a school a few years later, we had no pencils or paper, not even a slate. We used to collect sand from the riverbed, spread it over smoothly, and write in it with our fingers. Later we were promoted to palm leaves, to write in script. The school only went up to grade five, and most of the village children stopped their studies with that. Few dreamed of going on to higher studies. But my father was keen that I should continue, and he sent me to a nearby town where there was a high school. I was put up with a distant relative whose son was educated in the same school. But I fell ill constantly, and did not do well in the exams. The following year my maternal uncle, who worked as a clerk in a local office in the town, took me in and I stayed with him for the next eight years. I finished school and did two years of college under his care. My uncles had been the first few from the village to get an education and work in white-collar jobs.

It was during the time that I was under the care of my uncle that Mahatma Gandhi was in the political forefront of the country, fighting for India's independence. His followers were everywhere, preaching and practising his teachings. Gandhiji's ideas

of celibacy, non-violence, truthfulness and simple life appealed to a large number of people in the younger generation. As small schoolboys we started spinning yarn with hand charkhas or spindles. We shared the spindles to thread our yarns and we boycotted foreign goods. There was picketing in front of indigenous liquor shops and shops selling foreign goods, and the police used to beat the demonstrators and put them in jail. My father started wearing khadi—homespun cloth and I also started wearing it.

I remember well reading the *Bhagvad Gita* in those days. I wrote to a friend that I would like to practise yoga and be a yogi someday. But I didn't understand it then. At the same time Swami Vivekananda became very popular with us. His speeches were so powerful and inspiring they made me look forward to doing something challenging and great.

Occasionally I visited the Ramakrishna Math in Madras to listen to the discussions, and for several years I used to practise *yogasanas*. These contacts influenced our thinking greatly in those days. We were not thinking of amassing money as our goal in life. We always aspired for some perfection in our life, like realisation of God, or reaching higher levels of consciousness in yoga.

In 1944, after finishing medical school I joined the British Army and served in several parts of India and Malaysia. But, in 1947, I developed severe arthritis, and I was discharged in 1948. I joined the maternity hospital at Madras for postgraduate training because I had lost my three cousins to a condition called eclampsia. All of them died in the last three months of their pregnancies. I was anxious to become an obstetrician, to do something to prevent other women from dying in the same way. But after a few months, because of rheumatoid arthritis, nearly all my joints were severely swollen and painful. I was in the Madras hospital for over a year. I could not hold anything. I could not sit up. Severe pain has been my companion since then, and it has never left me. The arthritis crippled me badly and for years I could not walk long distances, something I was accustomed to doing as a village boy. In the acute stage, for several months, I could not stand up, and was confined to bed.

I still remember the day I was able to stand on my feet. A relative had come to see me in the hospital ward and I struggled hard to keep my feet on the ground and stand close to the bed without holding onto it. When I did it, I felt as though I was on the top of the Himalayas. For several years I used to struggle to walk a few yards or squat down on the floor. Even now, in villages, we normally squat on the floor when we eat, and I find it difficult. I could not hold a pen with my fingers in the acute stage of arthritis. We normally eat our food with our fingers, and I found it difficult to take the food with my swollen fingers.

I drifted away from my interest in maternity, and I joined the eye hospital. I trained slowly to hold the knife and cut the eyes for cataract operations. After some years I could stand for a whole day and do one hundred operations or more at a stretch. Eventually I learned to use the operating microscope and do good, high-quality cataract operations and other eye surgeries.

While all this was going on in Madras, a Gandhi-ite friend of mine said, "Let's go to the Ashram in Pondicherry and have the darshan of Sri Aurobindo." It was April 1950. India had freedom but Pondicherry did not, and we had to get passports to enter Pondicherry. It was my first darshan of the masters, and Sri Aurobindo passed away that year in December. People were able to see him once every three months, and there was usually a big crowd, about two thousand people. You marched in a line, you saw him for a second and then you marched off. That day in April he did not make any sort of impact upon me worth remembering, but some of the people who had come with me said they had seen the Divine. I could not understand what they meant at the time. I went back to Madras and started working in the eye hospital. I had some patients from the Pondicherry Ashram, and we became friends. I started visiting the Ashram regularly for every darshan. People from the Ashram used to come and stay with me, and gradually, over the years, I read Sri Aurobindo's books and became involved with his teachings.

I was never an "idea" man. I always had to do something. In medicine we are practically involved in giving eyesight to someone, in relieving someone's pain. I completed my medical residency in a hospital in Madras, where the medical school, organised by the British, was over 170 years old. I stayed in Madras until 1956, when I was posted to the medical school in Madurai as head of the eye department.

The Madurai hospital was a district hospital, converted to a teaching hospital for the new medical school in 1954. I had the Madras model to copy, and an opportunity to build up the eye department and make it a centre for training graduate students.

In 1961 the state government gave a mobile eye unit to organise eye camps and provide eye surgery for people who couldn't reach the hospital. The facilities we had at the hospital were meagre, hardly fifteen or twenty beds, and we had thousands of patients to operate on. The government gave us a van, some staff, and about fifty dollars for each cataract operation camp. I was lucky to have many of my Gandhian friends working in the government development department. We had nearly two hundred patients to operate on in the very first camp, and we also had to feed them for a week before sending them home. Without asking, community leaders and volunteers came forward with enormous support, and fed the patients after the operations. It was a wonderful response, and the camps became very popular with the people.

In 1965 I was invited to the United States to learn about the rehabilitation of the blind. We were going to begin a rehabilitation centre for Madurai. It was an era of promoting rehabilitation of the handicapped. I didn't know anything about rehabilitating the blind, so I attended the conference in New York, where there is a world council for the welfare of the blind. There I saw how the blind were trained to walk with long canes. They learned to read Braille and received vocational training. All this I had to learn.



In New York I also met Sir John Wilson who founded the Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind. He is blind himself, and I used to see him standing alone, waiting to have someone guide him to his room or to a bus. Most of the people at the conference were blind; I was one of the few sighted ones so I used to offer my help to Sir John, and we came to know each other. I told him about our eye camps, and he suggested increasing their numbers with the help of the Royal Society. It was a very great gift for me, because my idea had always been to help my own village folk—honest, sincere people who for some reason had lost their sight but had no way of regaining it because the hospitals did not provide enough beds to take care of them.

We organised more and more camps, and once performed over 700 cataract operations in one day, a world record at the time. Local industries and businesses gave us much support. In 1973 the government established the Chief Minister's Eye Camp Project, and we organised huge numbers of eye camps, restoring sight to thousands of people.

A few years later Sir John and I went with another friend to see Indira Gandhi when she was the Prime Minister of India. Sir John talked to her about the problem of blindness, explaining that millions of people in India were blind, and we needed a national organisation to control this blindness. She readily agreed, and gradually I was moving up from working in just a small hospital to overseeing a growing network of eye camps. As the national consciousness about eye camps about blindness grew, our own physical work increased.

In 1976, I retired at the age of 58 from government service and my professorship at the medical school in Madurai. I had my pension, and I did not need more money, but I wanted to continue my serious work. I began getting involved in WHO (World Health Organisation) programmes.

I also began a non-profit public charities trust, and under that trust I founded the Aravind Eye Hospital at Madurai in the name of Sri Aurobindo. I worked with my sister and her husband, who are also ophthalmologists. We began with 10 beds, and gradually were able to expand to forty beds and build a low cost/free hospital. I had little money at the time, and it was all somewhat improvised, but in a country where poverty is the main impediment, we had to improvise because we could not get any help from the government or from missions. Now Aravind has grown to become the biggest eye hospital in the world. Over 50,000 major eye operations are performed annually, and over two-thirds of them are done free for the poor. Poor villagers are screened in rural areas by hospital doctors and technicians, and people in need of surgery are transported free of charge to the hospital, given free food, free operations, free eyeglasses and then taken back to their homes. All of this is financed with the revenues from the paying patients, with no support from the state, though partial support for free operations comes from international non-governmental agencies. We also offer speciality eye clinics which provide high-quality care. There are two branches of Madurai hospital, one in Tirunelveli, one hundred miles to the south, and another

at Theni, forty miles to the west.<sup>1</sup> In these hospitals more than sixty percent of the work is done for free.

Today the Madurai hospital is also recognised for its residency training, and we train most of the staff we need. Residents from Chicago, Boston, New York and elsewhere also come to work and learn here. WHO sends eye doctors and ophthalmic technicians from neighbouring countries for training in community ophthalmology. More than a dozen fellows are trained each year in a number of sub-specialities, and we help neighbouring countries—Sri Lanka, Nepal, Maldives, Burma, Indonesia by sending our senior staff there and by bringing their eye specialists to Aravind for training. We also train Tibetans from refugee camps as ophthalmic assistants, and they go back to work in their communities.

The effort to control needless blindness has become increasingly global in recent years. Some of the same workers from the world small-pox campaign embarked on a project in Nepal, hoping to eliminate blindness there in five years. The International Lions Foundation has initiated a “Sight First” campaign, and the American Academy of Ophthalmology started a programme to support that global work. For developing countries, the Aravind model of providing free eye operations without state support seems an ideal example, and there is an effort to replicate the model in many parts of the world.

From the earliest days of my career as an eye doctor, I have been deeply distressed to see young children going blind due to vitamin deficiency. In 1971, with the help and support of the Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind I established a Nutritional Rehabilitation Centre at the government hospital in Madurai. I wanted to continue the work to prevent nutritional blindness in children when I retired. Since there was a threat that the centre would be closed, in 1984 I began the Aravind Children’s Hospital.

This hospital has not established itself as a pioneer institution, nor earned a reputation for quality service like the Aravind Eye Hospital. In spite of all my efforts, I have not succeeded in the building of the hospital or the field work. But it is a good lesson for me to see how our efforts alone cannot succeed without Divine Grace. I have tried to motivate the staff to show compassion and kindness to the patients, but somehow we still have not succeeded. It is a constant reminder to me that however good I may be in one area, I can simply be a failure in another. There is always a greater need to surrender to Divine Grace.

In India, we still have... the joint-family system though it is gradually disappearing. I am the eldest in my family. My father died in 1950 when I returned home from the Army. I was still suffering from acute arthritis. My two younger brothers and one younger sister were all studying; one sister who had finished school stayed at home to help my mother. It became my responsibility to support their education, to arrange

1. Since the time this lecture was delivered, two more Aravind hospitals have come up in Coimbatore and Pondicherry.—Ed.

their marriages and to help them settle in life. My mother was able to look after our farm with the help of my youngest brother; my father had groomed him in farm work even when he was very young. He used to buy the bullocks, sell the produce, and purchase whatever the farm needed. My other brother was in engineering school; he found a job in Madras when he finished and I became an assistant surgeon in the Madras hospital, so we lived together. By 1954 I had gotten one brother and one sister married. Eventually both brothers went to the United States for engineering studies and returned to India in 1964 to start a construction company. The company has built all the Aravind hospitals at cost, and my younger brother looks after finances and gives most of his time to hospital management. Besides one sister and a brother-in-law who are ophthalmic surgeons, my brother-in-law's sister and her husband are also ophthalmologists and are working with us as specialists in cornea and paediatric clinics. There are two more eye surgeons from the family at the hospital and four more young doctors in training who are part of the family.

Some of the family members are also devoted to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, and this is a great support for the growth of the hospital. Many of them have visited other famous international eye institutes in Boston, Baltimore, Chicago, and Bethesda, Maryland, so that they can develop a vision for our own Aravind hospitals. Finally one sister looks after the guest house, where we accommodate residents coming from the United States and other countries. All this is a great asset for the future growth and maintenance of the hospitals.

All of us must aspire, Sri Aurobindo said, for Divine grace to work in us, for the opening of our consciousness to something higher. He advised us to reject all the qualities of the law of nature—lust or hatred or anger or ill-will. It looks so silly, wanting love and goodwill for everybody. Instead we think, “That fellow cheated me yesterday; how am I going to feel love for him?” It is indeed a difficult task to practise love and goodwill in our daily lives. Yet it is especially important in our professional lives. Normally, said Sri Aurobindo, we react to things with our outer consciousness. We lose our temper, for example. But if we step back a bit and watch with our inner being—all of us have an inner being—we will say, “Yes, I lost my head and talked very badly.” If we try harder to get in contact with another person's inner being we will find near that inner being a soul—what Sri Aurobindo called the psychic being—in the heart's centre.

Doctors have many patients to see. But do they really see the patients, or just the patient's wallet? Do they see whether the patient is a rich man who is going to pay them well, or do they see his soul and really become interested in his problems? Try to see a patient's inner being. It is a very, very interesting experiment. I used to see many rustic, unsophisticated, ordinary village men and women as patients. But when you contact their inner being, suddenly you seem to be one with them. They are not trying to determine your knowledge, or whether you are a qualified and capable doctor. What you see, rather, is a soul full of simple confidence: “Doctor, I accept whatever

you say.” There is an implicit faith in you and you respond to it. You think, “Here is an old woman who has got so much faith in me I must do my best for her.”

But how can I train myself to practise spiritual perfection? Once you separate your inner consciousness from your outer consciousness, you must try to realise your psychic being or soul, which can contact a deeper reality than your reason can.

I have constantly tried to realise the peace and calmness that form the basis for sadhana. I experience it, but it is so transitory that I seem to lose it in no time. I remember when the Mother at Pondicherry gave a balcony darshan at 6 o’clock in the morning every day. When I went to Pondicherry, this early morning darshan was a must for me even when I reached the ashram late in the night. It gave me the necessary energy and peace for the day. So I still visit the Aravind hospital meditation room every day, morning and evening, but my surrender is not complete enough to allow the Mother’s force to stay and work in me. I live in my own superficial consciousness with its small attachments and prejudices. Even if another person has selfish motives, I must be able to place myself firmly in peace and samata, and return love to him without expecting any gratitude in return.

I want to radiate love and goodwill on all occasions without giving any place in my consciousness to pride or prejudice. I want to love patients and staff uniformly all the time. But I know that I create a sense of fear in my staff if they come late or if they are not efficient in their work. This has become a strong habit with me as I have been keen to maintain discipline in the work. I should have tried love and kindness rather than by instilling fear. I find that when people are not effective in maintaining discipline, the morale declines and the quality and quantity of work also decline rapidly. It would be ideal if discipline can be maintained with love and kindness. But when some people have complete freedom to act as they please, they degenerate very quickly. They still need some amount of external force to maintain discipline. If people can grow into the higher consciousness and act from the higher level, they could have the right influence. Real discipline can come only when people are motivated by spiritual force.

I like to watch people and try to observe their consciousness. Similarly, I watch my own mental and vital feelings and reactions. It is interesting to watch how alcohol or anger gets hold of people. Normally many of us are caught up in these lower “vibrations”, or live in our own small, narrow worlds. Only a very few are ready to become aware of higher levels of consciousness above the mental, the physical, the emotional. We cannot expect everyone to become spiritual, just as we cannot expect everyone to become a research scientist.

At Aravind we are deeply interested in getting people to pursue spiritual practices. The hospitals demonstrate that eyesight can be restored to all people irrespective of social or economic status, if we can combine modern technology and management with spiritual practice. When we grow in spiritual consciousness, we identify ourselves with all that is in the world, and there is no exploitation. It is ourselves we are helping; we do not act from a feeling of doing good to some poor, deprived person. Human

beings must change, and Sri Aurobindo says that the Divine will bring about the next step in the evolution human consciousness needs to undergo. What we need are “laboratories” where people interested in progressing in spiritual consciousness will have opportunities to work. All over the world good scientists work in laboratories seeking new discoveries in the physical sciences. Similarly we need laboratories where people can pursue spiritual pathways. Throughout history, India has produced spiritual people since the days of Buddha or even earlier in the Vedic ages, have produced centres of spirituality to continue that tradition. There are people genuinely interested in having spiritual experience and we must encourage them.

There is a saint in the northern part of India. His name is Neem Karoli Baba. He was not educated in the conventional sense, but he is a real saint who has had many disciples both in the East and the West. One day he told an American Doctor, Dr. Larry Brilliant, who had come as a disciple to his ashram, to join the United Nations medical forces and give small pox vaccinations in the villages. Baba sent Dr. Brilliant to the WHO office in Delhi to work for the eradication of small pox, but at the time WHO had no job for him, and smallpox was not one of its priorities. Dr. Brilliant returned to the ashram but Baba sent him back to WHO six times until he got the job and began working on smallpox. Dr. Brilliant had gone to the Baba for spiritual knowledge and solace. He was surprised, to say the least, when his guru wanted him to join a programme to eradicate smallpox. He had never even seen a case of smallpox, but his guru told him everything about the disease in great detail: where it was located in India, where the bad epidemics were and in what seasons, what the transmission cycles were—everything about the epidemiology. The guru said, “This is the Divine’s gift for human labour, that smallpox must be eradicated from the world.” Once Dr. Brilliant was admitted to the WHO programme, orders arrived from the WHO central office to tackle smallpox with a prevention programme.

Some of my friends ask me how we have trained our staff in the “Aravind Culture”. We do not know how it has been done but it has been done. When we need technical assistants, we select girls from villages—simple honest people brought up in the traditional culture, which includes consideration for family and the community. Their families have provided a certain discipline, love and care in their daily lives. They have not been urbanised. They are not interested in drugs and irresponsible sex. They can be easily trained to care for somebody else. Twice a year we find them and train them intensively. Whenever there is an opportunity, we take some of them to Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry.

The meditation room and also the aspiration of the senior staff to have the divine guidance have combined to create an atmosphere of spiritual influence in the hospital. The staff are kept busy and are trained to be efficient and courteous in their work. Gradually the senior nursing staff has come to appreciate the atmosphere of serenity and quiet efficiency and they set an example to the juniors.

Though Aravind Eye Hospitals do the largest number of eye operations in the

world, very seldom do we talk about it. We do not publicise the excellent work that goes on in the special clinic's retina vitreous unit, I.O.L. (Intra Ocular Lens) unit and the cornea unit. It may take longer for people to know about us, but it is better to be slow and steady, and to aspire for perfection in our work.

Some doctors join us from their residencies. We try to condition them gradually for longer hours of concentrated work. In some medical schools the training is poor, and the students are not accustomed to working for more than a few hours a day. At most hospitals the staff members work for a few hours and go home in the afternoon. When doctors are posted to primary health centres they go to work only in the mornings, and only three or four days in a week. Government office workers work only from 10 a.m. or later until 5 p.m., five days a week. Many government servants work only 30 hours a week. We normally work for eight to ten hours a day, six days a week.

We want the doctors to develop a helpful and kind attitude towards the patients, especially poor villagers. The bureaucracy of government institutions intimidates people; that is a remnant of our colonial rule. We regularly send our staff to village eye camps, where there is no fear or intimidation, and try to develop in them love and affection for the people. We create an opportunity to develop comradeship between the hospital staff and the villagers and the staff can also observe the villagers and aspire to improve them.

It does help that many of our doctors and nurses and field organisers come from villages themselves. Rural people are well-informed about the urban community because of television. We insist on high-quality care in diagnosis, surgery and all treatment whether the patient is from a rural or an urban area. Some doctors are open to spiritual influence and appreciate the opportunity to work in Aravind Eye Hospitals. Others look only to the financial or other benefits from the hospital. It is very difficult to get people really interested in the spiritual aspect of life. We do try to motivate our staff to achieve excellence in their surgery and publications and some of them are internationally known for the quality of their work. Every opportunity to work in Nepal, Maldives, or Ganeshpuri—helps us to enlarge our vision and dedication. Our doctors are in demand for scientific paper presentations in other states of India; every opportunity to work and to keep this high quality in our work is my spiritual aspiration.

When we are very attentive and very sincere, we can have an inner but perceptible indication of the value of what we undertake, the value of the action we are doing. For someone whose goodwill is entire, who is sincere, with the whole conscious part of his being, who wants to do the right thing in the right way, there is always an indication. If for some reason or other, one launches upon a more or less fatal action, one always feels an uneasiness in the region of the solar plexus. The unease is not violent and it does not compel dramatic recognition. But it is very perceptible to someone who is attentive. It is something like regret, or lack of assent. It may go as far as a refusal to collaborate. It makes no noise, it does not hurt. It is at most a slight uneasiness. If you disregard it, if you pay no attention, attach no im-



portance to it, after a little while it completely disappears.

It has been my privilege to be in contact with several disciples at Sri Aurobindo Ashram and at other ashrams of India. I used to talk to them about hospital problems and family problems. Once I was upset about an incident and I was angry and depressed for weeks. The disciple quoted the words of Sri Aurobindo:

To remain quiet within, firm in the will to go through, refusing to be disturbed or discouraged by difficulties or fluctuations, that is one of the first things to be learned in the Path. To do otherwise is to encourage the instability of consciousness, the difficulty of keeping experience of which you complain. It is only if you keep quiet and steady within that the lines of experience can go on with some steadiness—though they are never without periods of interruption and fluctuation; but these, if properly treated, can then become periods of assimilation and exhaustion of difficulty rather than denials of sadhana.

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, 23:651)

Not to be disturbed, to remain quiet and confident is the right attitude, but it is necessary also to receive the help of the Mother and not to stand back for any reason from her solicitude. One ought not to indulge ideas of incapacity, inability to respond, dwelling too much on defects and failures and allowing the mind to be in pain and shame on their account; for these ideas and feelings become in the end weakening things. If there are difficulties, stumblings or failures, one has to look at them quietly and call in tranquilly and persistently the Divine help for their removal, but not to allow oneself to be upset or pained or discouraged. Yoga is not an easy path and the total change of the nature cannot be done in a day. (*The Mother*, SABCL, 25:328-29)

Normally, people think of spiritual or religious practice as a means to attain salvation or heaven. They think spirituality is for old age after you have had your share of life's pleasures by whatever means. But spiritual discipline and practice can enhance the capacity of our body, mind and heart and make them better tools. Some of the people under the yogic influence of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother became poets and artists; others were cured of their illnesses. Others had spiritual experiences of a very high order, like reaching Nirvana or experiencing the Overmind. Spiritual life is not reserved for life after death only; its purpose is to make the present life rich in all its aspects. The Mother of Pondicherry worked on the cells of the body to transform them. She and Sri Aurobindo guided people to advance in their spiritual consciousness and ascend to the level of the Supermind. In the work at our own hospitals there is constant spiritual help and guidance at all levels. Our global effort to control blindness is the will of the Divine, and we pray to be made into good instruments for that work. We want more people join us in it and to work for a life that is divine.

G. VENKATASWAMY



## A TRIBUTE TO DR. G. VENKATASWAMY

DR. G. VENKATASWAMY, visionary and ophthalmologist, passed away on 7 July, 2006 at 1.30 a.m. at Madurai. On hearing this news, memories flashed in my mind. In September 2002 I had been to Aravind Eye Hospital for a check-up of my cataract-operated eye. When I reached Madurai station, I found a car ready to take me to my destination. A room was reserved at the hospital. A nurse escorted me to the room. As soon as I entered the room, I felt an atmosphere of serenity and was overwhelmed by the aura of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Doctors, nurses, helpers, all worked with joy, and the whole management seemed to be running as by the sheer Grace of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Automatically my head bowed and I felt a deep regard for the founder of the institution, Dr. G. Venkataswamy, a great soul. A magnificent work he has done as an instrument of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. This line from *Savitri* seems to me to capture Dr. Venkataswamy's life, work and achievement:

“He made great dreams a mould for coming things.”

*[Here is a selection of short quotes from several sources, throwing some light on the man and the work. —NILIMA DAS]*

He (Dr. V.) once famously said, “I ask God that I be a better tool, a receptacle for the divine force. We can all serve humanity in our normal professional lives by being more generous and less selfish in what we do. You don't have to be a 'religious' person to serve God. You serve God by serving humanity.” This attitude has helped him make Aravind a showpiece to the world. Aravind's unique success proves that to bring the best medical care within the reach of the poorest of the poor, you don't have to resort to massive charity handouts. All it needs is someone with a vision.

B. Surendar  
(In *Man's World*)

*Q. In the course of accomplishing your objectives, what are the barriers you come across? Do you sometimes feel frustrated?*

Dr. V.: I always think of every challenge as an opportunity to work. Today, thanks to people like Prof. M. S. Swaminathan, information technology and computers have

reached the villages. Farmers and fishermen in villages now have access to all kinds of information, like health, market prices, education, developments in agriculture and agro products, and movement of fish near the coast. If we can use information technology properly, I don't see any reason why people should be poor at all. Poverty must go. We can at least ensure that people have enough food and decent places to live.

(In conversation with Janat Shah and L. S. Murty)

When Brother retired from government services, he seemed awfully impatient to serve society in a big way. He asked me and my husband if we would give up our government jobs to join him. Usually in India, when one leaves government service to enter private practice, incomes go up threefold. In this case we were told that our salaries would be about Rs. 24,000 a year. And worse still, Brother always believed in pushing the mind and body to its highest effort levels. So we would have to work twice as hard for half the salary. My husband and I talked it over and said, yes. We did not have the heart to say no. But what we lost in earning was made up by the tremendous professional support that Brother gave us. We were encouraged to attend conferences, publish papers, buy books, and do anything to advance our professional standing in the field. It is only in the last five years that our senior surgeon's salaries are reasonably consistent with their reputation in the field.

Dr. Natchiar, Dr. V.'s sister

(In Harvard Business School Case Study of Aravind Eye Hospital)

"You don't have to qualify for the free hospital," says Dr. V. "We never question anyone. I don't run a business. I give people their sight."

\*

"Two qualities for leadership are to be a visionary and to know execution," says Dr. V. "If I can go from consciousness to higher consciousness, then I'll be a leader."

\*

At the Aravind Eye Hospital in Madurai, India, 82-year-old Dr. Govindappa Venkataswamy has solved the mystery of leadership: he brings eyesight to the blind and light to the soul.

\*

I ask Dr. V. a simple question designed to get him to talk about his unique vision: “What are your gifts?” I ask him. Dr. V. replies. “People thank me for giving them sight.” This is no error of translation, no slipup of English. Dr. V. considers his gifts to be the things that he has given others, not what he possesses.

Here is another clue to the mystery: *The reward for work is not what you get out of it but what you become from it.*

\*

“We were not thinking of amassing money as our goal,” says Dr. V. “We always aspired to some perfection in our lives.” Perfection, as he defines it, is a means of following God or pursuing a form of higher consciousness.

(In the article *The Perfect Vision of Dr. V.* by Harriet Rubin)

In the spiritual field I consider myself to be a beginner or a lay person, though one with the great good fortune to be in contact with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother of the Pondicherry Ashram, and I have made only a beginning in my attempts to put spiritual truth into practice.

\*

Once I asked the Mother for an interview, to tell her about my skin and arthritis problems as I could not talk clearly, could not hold anything and even walking for ten feet was painful. [Dr. V. later told Shyam Kumari that when he was before the Mother, he could not ask Her anything.]

\*

I began to come to the Ashram once in a month or two and then I offered my services to the Mother as an eye doctor. At that time Dr. Sen had a clinic in his house. There I examined the Ashram patients. All the Group members (those Ashram members who participated in the physical culture activities arranged by the Ashram) came there for eye examination. I had good friends among some senior members of the Ashram, like Dr. Indrasen, Murlidhar, etc. I started reading the books of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

\*

I worked in Madras till 1956 and then was posted to Madurai Medical School as the

head of the eye department. Madurai is about 200 miles from Pondicherry. From there I came to Pondicherry for every Darshan, for my birthday and other occasions. A little later I started operating at “Trésor Nursing Home” of the Ashram and operated upon Amal Kiran, Udar and later Nolini. Pavitra and Purani I knew well and I am sure the Mother knew about me through them.

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In spite of my deformity I used to do a tremendous amount of work. I could stand for a whole day and do 100 cataract operations or more at a stretch. My contacts with America and Britain developed. I felt as if I was being pushed and guided by the Mother.

\*

Gradually this movement of the eradication of blindness became global. I was awarded Padmashree by the Government of India; and the University of Illinois in Chicago conferred upon me a doctorate in science.

\*

It is obvious to me that whatever I have been able to achieve is not due to me or my mental efforts but due to the Mother’s Force working through me and guiding me constantly. I had never thought of going to America. All these contacts of which I never thought came so spontaneously as if Someone was pulling the strings. Lots of activities were not planned, they just happened. When this happens constantly, one feels it is the Mother at work.

\*

In addition to the high quality of the treatment we are trying to bring in spiritual practice in the work. In the hospital we have a meditation room with the Relics of Sri Aurobindo. There is no compulsion for anybody to go there but staff and patients visit the meditation room.

(From *How They Came to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother* by Shyam Kumari, Volume 4)

“I want to radiate love and goodwill on all occasions without giving any place in my consciousness to any pride or prejudice. How can I express this love uniformly on patients and staff and patients’ attendants all the time?”

\*

“Spiritualism is the antidote to our present crisis.”

Dr. V. (Harvard Talk)

I have known Dr. Venkataswamy for over three decades.

\*

Whenever I visited Madurai, for me, it was a pilgrimage to visit the Aravind Eye Hospital and meet the great soul, Dr. G. Venkataswamy, who gave light for more than 100,000 patients. But today Dr. Venkataswamy is not with us. But his vision and how he has transformed many hospitals, many ophthalmologists and many managers is visible to us all. He has left an imprint on the minds of all the eye-care community who came in contact with him.

\*

Whenever I think of a great soul like Dr. Venkataswamy, I would like to refer to an ancient thought: Almighty God addressing his human creation:

“We have made thee neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, so that with freedom of choice and with honour, as though the maker and moulder of thyself, that is Dr. G. Venkataswamy, thou mayest fashion thyself in whatever shape thou shalt prefer.”

\*

When I see the divine services Dr. G. Venkataswamy, the founder of Aravind Eye Care System, I can see that he has succeeded in fulfilling God’s mission for man with freedom of choice and with honour as though the maker and moulder of thyself, that is Dr. G. Venkataswamy.

A. P. J. Abdul Kalam

# WORK IN THE ASHRAM

(Some Departments)

## A peep into the Past which shows us the way to the Future (1)

THIS Ashram in Pondicherry has always stood for an integral approach to spiritual life. Work on the material plane is a means to become aware of the need of self-perfection and harmony in physical activities and with the others. Even those whose personal way of communion with the Divine was through art, music or poetry, were usually given a physical work in some department of the Ashram in the earlier days. The Mother was their guide and whenever any problem came up she would decide what was to be done. For, only thus could they understand their individual nature, make the necessary progress and create a more perfect collectivity.

I am in my office, late in the evening. [The writer is associated with the distribution of work in the Ashram, for Ashramites, volunteers and visitors. —Ed.] That is the time when people who want to work in the Ashram nowadays come to meet me. One lady, visiting the Ashram for the first time, commented, “Life here is so different from the one we are used to outside. One difference is very obvious, everyone here is working, is doing some work or another.” True, I thought, most of the people here, Ashramites or visitors—young or old—are engaged in some form of work as their service to the Mother.

At times, I have to face different types of enquiries. These may come from both Ashram inmates and visitors. “Don’t you feel bored?” they ask, or, “You are here at this hour; are you not tired?” Though surprised at such comments, my spontaneous answer has been, “It is the Mother’s Work!” Thus, these questions seemed to me meaningless. However, I began to see our work in a more objective way.

There are those who are not Ashramites and have settled in Pondicherry and have expressed their desire to work a few hours a day. They feel that they need some activity to keep themselves occupied and also as a means to be part of the Ashram community. They are happy to participate in the Mother’s work.

There are others who have been accepted as Ashramites and these are expected to give some service to the Ashram and the majority of them do the work given to them. Each one is allotted some work in one of the departments of the Ashram. However, as expected, one observes differences in the actual performance. The attitude in the work varies with each individual and it is that which gives its real value to the work done.

Some people do the job because it is a routine they have to follow in order to stay here. As if the work is, as it is done in most of the other places, just to satisfy some regulations. They do their duty and expect much in return. They seem to consider their own needs only.

This reminds me of a comment made by Ravindra, to whom the Mother had given the responsibility of allotting work to people in the Ashram. He remarked once that each one is given work for about eight hours a day; but very soon they reduce their working hours. “You know,” he said, “if you enquire you find that they are not idle, they are busy, but busy with their own work. How much of their time are they giving to the Ashram?” It makes us wonder how far the values we held true in our lives, are true for the present generation and what will be the picture in the future.

There are also those who are happy with their work and perform it with care. Of course, there are others, who have always been sincere and hard-working, efficient in their own activities. The satisfaction of a work performed well is enough for them. Efficiency in a job is a valuable quality in one’s nature and to achieve that, one needs to work with care.

Yet, here in the Ashram, it is not enough. Work must also have a deeper dimension: it is a dedication and an offering of oneself through one’s work to the Mother. Only when it is done consciously in this spirit does it become a means of personal enrichment and a progress—a part of the *sadhana*. This is a fundamental concept in the Yoga as explained by Sri Aurobindo.

Now and then, this question occurs at the back of my mind, and I think about it, and sometimes travel back rambling slowly along the lanes of my memory.

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I quote here a few lines from the impressions of a French savant, Maurice Magre, who visited the Ashram in 1936:

Here is a community perfect in the measure in which perfection can be of this world. Each is devoted to his favourite task, according to his knowledge and his ability. There is a workshop for the carpenter, and a room where flour is kneaded. The bindings of books shine out like swords from the shelves of the book-cases. Through the open bays one sees like great marble pieces the brows of the readers. But most do manual labour, for in the handling of matter and in the attention that one gives to it there is a method that helps the soul. No bell is there for rest, and no rigorous discipline. Each finds his liberty in the harmony of love.

*(Mother India, June 2005, p. 504)*

How true this is, regarding work in the Ashram! The picture I have of the Ashram,—as a girl of twelve when I was here on a visit in 1940,—is also the same. Apart from the other aspects of the Ashram at that time, what struck me most was that the Mother was the centre of all activities, and, somewhere in my being, I was touched by the concept that everyone was working for Her. Bansidhar remembers:



In those days no question arose as to how many hours of work one was doing. There was only one aim—to do as much work as possible.

(*How They Came to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother* by Shyam Kumari, Vol. IV, p. 64)

At that time, in 1940, we used to see everyone work in one department or another. There were about 200 sadhaks then. All of them, men and women from different parts of the country or the world, had come here to lead a spiritual life. We saw that the sadhaks themselves actively participated in all the work of the departments, with the help of only a few paid workers. Most of the work we saw them do was physical—with exceptions like the Library and the Accounts, etc.

Here we can quote from Sri Aurobindo on the value of physical work:

One cannot be said to be in the full yogic condition for the purposes of this Yoga—if one cannot take up with willingness any work given to one as an offering to the Divine. At one time I was absolutely unfit for any physical work and cared only for the mental, but I trained myself in doing physical things with care and perfection so as to overcome this glaring defect in my being and make the bodily instrument apt and conscious. It was the same with some others here. A nature not trained to accept external work and activity becomes mentally too top-heavy, physically inert and obscure. It is only if one is disabled or physically too weak that physical work can be put aside altogether. I am speaking of course from the point of view of the ideal—the rest depends upon the nature.

(*Reminiscences & Anecdotes of Sri Aurobindo* by M. P. Pandit, p. 207)

In the book *Champaklal Speaks*, on page 81, Champaklal says:

You would be interested to know that after Sri Aurobindo moved into Meditation House (28, *rue François Martin*), he was himself recording the reading of the electricity meter which was fitted in the bathroom upstairs. He stopped doing this work after the meter was shifted to the ground floor.

Here again is another interesting example recorded by him:

In the early days, Mother used to prepare a pudding. She would set aside a small quantity in a saucer, add a little milk and stir it with a spoon till it became smooth and consistent...

This portion of the pudding was meant for the cats. Champaklal soon learnt that they were not mere cats but something more. When in Library House, (28, *rue François Martin*, now north-eastern part of the main Ashram building):

Sri Aurobindo himself removed bones from the fish meant for these cats (with Chinese chopsticks!). (p. 51)

Another interesting detail recorded by Champaklal:

...In the Meditation House, Sri Aurobindo used to arrange one vase of roses everyday and keep it on a small table in Mother's dressing room... At nightfall, he would take all the flower vases from the rooms and leave them on a table... in the passage one enters on opening the staircase door... Mother did not like flowers to remain in the room at night. (p. 82)

Once, when I was learning drawing under Sanjeeban's guidance, he felt that I was ready to start painting. I asked the Mother if my father could get for me the necessary paints. She asked, "When you draw, do you feel a sudden touch of joy—something that flames up in your heart?" "No, Mother, but right from my childhood I have enjoyed drawing and painting in my own way." Her reply was very important for me ever afterwards. She said, "My child, I have many artists, philosophers, writers. Now, I need workers." After that, She sent me to the newly formed Ashram Press where I was taught hand-composing—there were no monotypes still. Sujata Nahar and I spent also some extra time working at the treadle machines for printing.

I feel that is what She did for all of us. Her Force has developed the latent qualities in our nature, and yet She has made of us basically Her workers. Without our conscious knowledge She moulded us so that we might be ready to follow Sri Aurobindo's yoga. She gave to each one some work that had to be done regularly and harmoniously with other people. We were simply told what had to be done and we participated happily in whatever we had to do. This habit still persists. Work for us is not an occupation to be separated from our life. It is not a 10 to 4 duty to be done and escape from it till the following day. Work is part of ourselves and our life. It is interwoven with our daily activities of food, play, rest and meditation.

In the book *A System of National Education*, Sri Aurobindo says:

The first work is to interest the child in life, work and knowledge....

It is interesting to note the sequence of the words: 'life' and 'work' precede 'knowledge'. For, we have noticed that an understanding of life is also a type of knowing and to work on something also makes us learn about ourselves and the world.

Once, for my birthday, I had offered to the Mother two embroidered tray covers for Her use. She saw carefully the work done and liked it. "You have so much time?" She asked. I felt embarrassed when the Mother told me that. However, my reply was spontaneous and immediate "Ma, can anyone who has seen you even once, ever say that he has no time?" Oh, yes! It was the right thing to say. A very sweet smile conveyed

to me that She had liked the answer. For indeed, Her whole day was dedicated to the upliftment of life in the Ashram. The Mother Herself was busy with Her work day and night, so much so, that She had hardly any fixed time for food and rest. She was Herself the most dedicated worker. She never stopped any of Her activities to gain some time for another work. There would be times when we saw Her speeding up one of Her innumerable activities and it made us think—“Perhaps She has some yet extra work to do today.”

Champaklal notes:

Today the Mother was not well and a notice to this effect was put on the Ashram notice board. And yet She went down and gave Pranam. When She returned, She was so tired that I could not go to see her; tears welled up in my eyes. I went and informed Sri Aurobindo about this. Sri Aurobindo said: “She ought not to have gone downstairs.” But next day, though she was still unwell, She went down and gave Pranam. These were not the only occasions when She did so. They were innumerable, especially during later years. People have no idea how much She exerted herself and in what condition—22.9.1948 (p. 143)

And this is what we have learnt from Her: not to stop our activities due to minor ailments, such as fever, headache, stomach aches etc. Actually, to work when affected with such ailments, without unduly straining the body, helps us overcome the difficulties. She appreciated this quality in us and encouraged us to develop it further. Once Priti complained to the Mother about her sister, “Mother, in spite of having a temperature for a few days now, Tapati won’t stop her work. She is going to the press regularly.” The Mother’s short revealing reply was, “That is why she is so fit and is not like you.”

Hardly any one of us knows about this purely physical activity done by the Mother. “Mother used to order a number of things from France so that sadhaks would not have to go to the bazaar for them ...” Lids of these deal-wood boxes were taken apart and Mother “Herself joined by nailing side bars on both sides. She asked me [Champaklal] if I could undertake that work. I willingly agreed to try and She was happy to see me doing it. She would sit on a low Japanese stool and watch me doing the work, giving instructions when necessary.”

*(Champaklal Speaks, p. 62)*

Her work was perfect and we know She wanted us also to strive for perfection in work and take care of material things. Pranab-da recounts:

She took immense care of each and every object. Everything has life and consciousness so Mother used everything with extreme affection, love and care.

When we saw her take care of things we felt as if she was caressing them. She would herself clean the wash basin after using.”

*(I Remember by Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya, p. 130)*

She has reminded us time and again, that these are two very important aspects of our life. How She would teach the young ones the importance of organising their time, to take care of their things, clothes, books etc. and to keep each thing in its place, was quite a revelation to adults who had never heard Her speak at that level of material life.

*(To be continued)*

CHITRA SEN

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## THE WALL

I stood beside the wall  
 Wondering, “What’s behind it?”  
 The wall faced me  
 And wondered, “Who’s in front of me?”

The wall was my doing,  
 My imagination  
 Or projection of my self  
 In the mirror of life.

The wall grows and crumbles  
 Every moment with my thought;  
 Waxing and waning like the moon  
 Betwixt the twilight zones.

ARNAB CHOWDHURY

# HISTORY OF THE FUTURE

*(Continued from the issue of September 2006)*

(Return to the Source: Age of the Spirit—  
Transformation of the Body)

## **Return to the Source: Age of the Spirit**

ACCORDING to Indian thought, there are two major and distinct phases in human evolution: first is the movement away from the spiritual source and centre of our being and second is the return towards the source and centre. First is the externalised, “secular” or the “worldly” movement or effort for power, mastery and enjoyment of the outer world. Second is the inner psychological and spiritual movement towards the source of our being, return to the Origin, re-discovery of our true Self, the true meaning of Religion. The history of the past was predominantly a movement away from the source and the history of the future will be predominantly a movement towards the source. As we have discussed earlier, this return movement will begin or be initiated in the subjective age. And if the race pursues this subjective urge to its roots, without stopping in between, it should logically culminate in the Spirit, which is the deepest source of our subjective being.

This doesn't mean there was no effort towards the source in the past. In fact, most of the ancient civilisations had this religious ideal as the goal of individual and collective life. But the deeper spiritual significance of the ideal and the path to realise it was never fully understood and implemented on a collective scale, except perhaps, to a certain extent, partially, with a very limited success in ancient India. Only a few exceptional spiritual individuals or thinkers had the deep and clear insight into the ideal and tried to realise or give form to it in their consciousness and life or in thought, feeling and action. But in the collective life, the large majority of the masses received the ideal in a diluted and externalised form through organised religion. Even among the few who understood or realised the deeper spiritual significance of the ideal, most of them viewed the path towards the ideal as the renunciation of or escape from the world and a flight to a transcendent Beyond. So the return to the source was accompanied or followed by abandonment of the world and this spiritual effort itself was confined to small élite groups of seekers.

In the future, we will be witnessing a much more widespread return-to-the-source movement, with a more integral spiritual ideal. The future spiritual ideal may not be merely a lonely return of the individual to the Source, a flight of the “alone into the Alone”; it will be the return not only of the individual but also the collective life to the Source. And also, more importantly, return or descent of the Source or more precisely the light and power of the Source into every activity of the individual and collective

life of humanity, leading to a spiritual transformation of the whole of human life.

This will herald the spiritual age of the future. The Age of the Spirit will be characterised by a widespread quest for the ultimate source of our being, the deepest, highest and the total truth of life. This quest will not be confined to Religion and Spirituality but will be manifest in every activity of human life. This will eliminate the distinction we make at present between the “spiritual” and “secular” or “worldly” life. This distinction comes from the traditional conception of Religion which equates Spirituality with belief in God, prayer, meditation, asceticism, ashram, monkhood. But a spiritual quest may or may not have all these marks. An intuition into a supreme Reality beyond Mind as the source of our being and life and a seeking for it; the quest for the deepest and highest truth, law and principles of life; a sincerity and persistence in the quest until the highest is fully realised in the inner consciousness as well as in the outer life: these are the signs of a true spiritual quest. In the Age of the Spirit this spiritual quest will be manifest in every activity of the human life—in education, science, philosophy, art, literature, economics, politics, business, commerce, government.

The other important characteristic of the spiritual age is Freedom, inner and outer freedom, inner freedom from Ego and desire and outer freedom from externally imposed rules and regulations and authorities. Each individual and collectivity will have the freedom to grow in harmony with the unique truth and law of her or its inner and outer nature, Dharma, as it is called in Indian thought, realise her or its highest potentialities and contribute to the progress of the whole. This freedom will not infringe on the freedom of others. For there is a great harmony and rhythm in universal Nature. When we live in harmony with the truth of our own nature, which is a part of universal Nature, we are consciously or unconsciously in tune with the harmony of universal Nature, and therefore in harmony with the nature of all others and that of the environment.

Not only every individual and the collectivity, but also every human activity like philosophy and science or economics and politics, will have the freedom to grow in harmony with its own dharma and realise its highest ideals. There will be a free, lively and vigorous interaction between various activities and sciences, but none of the activities, including spirituality, will try to impose its ideals on other activities. In the spiritual age there will be a general acceptance of the spiritual ideals in all sections of the human society. But this acceptance would have come about not by the imposition of the ideal from a spiritual authority, but a free growth from within each part of the human society. Leaders with spiritual consciousness will emerge from every section of the society and in every activity of human life and give a spiritual direction to that part of human life by their thought, action or living example or just by their sheer silent presence. Thus, in this way, the entire human life will move consciously and with a free and joyous élan towards its spiritual destiny. We will discuss these transitional stages from the present condition of humanity to the spiritual age in our

subsequent articles. Here we will briefly touch upon some of the possibilities and dangers that lie ahead in this transitional period from the subjective to the spiritual age.

There is an interesting parable in the Upanishad which may provide some prophetic clues to the stages of transition from the present to the future spiritual age. In this parable, a disciple comes to the Master seeking for the knowledge of the supreme Reality, Brahman. The Master first instructs the disciple to meditate on Matter as the Brahman; Matter as the Origin and End of all things. The disciple comes back with the realisation: "From Matter alone are these creatures born and being born they live by Matter and into Matter they depart and enter again." Interestingly this is the realisation of modern scientific materialism. The advent of new physics and its brief flirting with Eastern philosophy might have softened much the hard-core materialism of modern science. But the basic philosophical standpoint of established orthodox science is very much materialistic; it still believes that some form of physical energy, electromagnetic, nuclear, gravitational or biological is the source of man and the universe and that the psychological realities like mind or soul are an "epiphenomenon" emerging from the physical reality and ending in it. This is more or less the first realisation of the seeker in the Upanishadic parable. But the seeker in the Upanishad was not satisfied with his first realisation. He probably knew intuitively that Matter was not the highest reality and "Matter is Brahman" was not the highest realisation. He again asks the Master: "Teach me the Eternal." The Master again instructs his pupil to meditate and realise successively "Life-force is Brahman", "Mind is Brahman" and finally the eternal Delight of the Spirit as Brahman. This Upanishadic parable throws some luminous hints on the future progress of humanity towards its spiritual destiny.

In the subjective age, as the higher ranges of consciousness which we have discussed earlier begin to manifest more and more, humanity as a whole will be rapidly awakened to a deeper and inner reality beyond Matter. There will be a vivid and concrete subliminal or spiritual intuition of an inner universal Force, a universal vital Energy or a universal Mind or a universal Spirit as the source and origin of things. This will abolish all forms of naïve and crude materialism from the human consciousness. However, if the evolving human race opens more widely to the subliminal rather than to the spiritual ranges of consciousness, it may lead to a vital or mental subjectivism which mistakes the vital energy or the mind as the supreme Reality. We must note here that there are regions in the subliminal which can very effectively imitate the higher spiritual states of consciousness. Someone who doesn't have the experience of the higher spiritual realms, may mistake some luminous region of the subliminal vital or mind as the highest spiritual reality and rest content there.

In our modern age, some of the Western philosophies like that of Bergson, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, or Emerson are the result of a subjective vital or mental intuition of a universal vital energy or mind, and formulated differently according to the nature, temperament and conditioning of the mind of the thinker. But in a



predominantly materialistic mentality of the modern West, they remained only as intuitions of a few great thinkers and abstract intellectual ideals in the upper regions of the mind, without sufficient force to catch hold of the entire mind and life of the race. But in the subjective age, when the human consciousness awakens to the subliminal, these ideas will lose their abstractness; they will acquire a concrete experiential reality and sufficient living force to possess and govern the whole consciousness and life of the race, in the same way the idea of scientific materialism took hold of the race for nearly a century. We have already discussed briefly the dangers and possibilities which lie ahead when the human race passes through this stage of subliminal subjectivism of the vital or mental kind. On the positive side, it will release and manifest the higher faculties of the subliminal mind and vital in humanity, leading to a richer life, greater mastery of the mind and vital over the material life, and a deeper knowledge and awakening to the inner dimensions of life. The danger is that since the subliminal is not free from Ego, it may lead to a larger edition of the present fiasco, the Ego misusing the greater power of the subliminal for a more grandiose and sublimated satisfaction of the lower motives of the vital and mental for power and enjoyment. And if this happens again there is no guarantee our present human civilisation will reach its evolutionary destiny or even survive. It may end up like the legendary civilisation of Atlantis.

On the other hand, if our present civilisation is destined to realise its spiritual destiny, it will be as sincere and persistent as the seeker in the Upanishadic parable we have recounted earlier, not satisfied with any intermediate realisations in the vital or mental plane, seeking persistently for the deeper and higher reality and pushing on until the highest is realised. To this sincere and persistent quest, Nature will respond by sending spiritual leaders and teachers like the Master in the parable, who will guide the race safely and wisely to its highest destiny.

And finally comes the most important and central characteristic of the Age of the Spirit, freedom from Ego or the transcendence of Ego, and as a result, Consciousness of Oneness, and the realisation of the Unity of all existence. We have already discussed this theme in some detail in an earlier section on "Global Consciousness". We will discuss the process of transition from the egocentric to the egoless and the Global consciousness in our consequent articles.

However we would like to indicate here that elimination of Ego is a crucial factor in realising the highest human potential. For in our spiritual perspective Ego is the source of all limitation and bondage. It is Ego which limits and constricts the infinite essence and potentialities of man; it limits the infinite being, consciousness force and delight of the essence of our self and reduces us to a state of ignorant, struggling, suffering, and striving creature, confined within the narrow bounds of a small Ego. With the elimination of Ego, humanity recovers its infinite essence and human life becomes a free, conscious, delightful and progressive unfolding of the Infinite in the finite.

### Transformation of the Body

We have come almost to the end of our quest for the future of humanity. With the return of humanity to the Source, elimination of Ego, unfolding of the higher ranges of consciousness in the consciousness and life of man, we as a race will have reached the highest potential of transformation.

The spirit or the soul of man will be delivered from Ego and ignorance and redeemed to its original purity and perfection. The life of man and all its activities will be governed not by the ignorant mind but by the intuitive truth-conscious wisdom of the Spirit. But what happens to Matter and our human body made of Matter in the Age of the Spirit? As we have explained repeatedly, the spirituality of the future will not be satisfied with the past spiritual formula of returning to the Source and abandonment of the Creation. In the future Age of the Spirit, return to the Spirit will be accompanied or followed by a return of the Spirit to the World of Mind, Life and Matter, transforming them into its perfect instruments.

So spiritual transformation of Matter,—matter within our own body and also the terrestrial matter,—will be the final consummation of the future Age of the Spirit. This is an ideal which has not even been conceived in the past spiritual traditions. But it is an integral part of Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's spiritual vision of the future. This profoundly original insight of Sri Aurobindo and Mother has important implications for the future of the human potential. For it throws light on the destiny and the hidden potentialities of our human body.

(Concluded)

M. S. SRINIVASAN

*Any premature attempt at a large-scale collective spiritual life is exposed to vitiation by some incompleteness of the spiritual knowledge on its dynamic side, by the imperfections of the individual seekers and by the invasion of the ordinary mind and vital and physical consciousness taking hold of the truth and mechanising, obscuring or corrupting it. The mental intelligence and its main power of reason cannot change the principle and persistent character of human life, it can only effect various mechanisations, manipulations, developments and formulations.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

(*The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 19, p. 885)

## STRANGER

*Be not forgetful to entertain strangers  
Lest we turn away angels unawares.*

*Bible*

I HAVE not named the person. But I am penning my story to show how it was in those days when the Ashram was young and its rules rather unbending (for good reasons). When you came you were a stranger unless proven otherwise.

I refer to the friend in the story as “he”—for the time being. Now the story:

(The “STRANGER” of the title and the first para does not refer to the “angel” in the quote from the *Bible*).

Long ago in 1920 a young lad of 16 ‘chanced’ to attend a political or soap-box meeting (of patriots) somewhere in Andhra Pradesh, Ongole Dt. Again, it was ‘chance’ (seems more like a planned chance) that a young poet read out a poem wherein he addressed Mother India thus: “O Mother, why are you so sad, crestfallen, head bowed —when Sri Aurobindo is there to save you?” etc.... Our young man’s interest was roused. The first buzz of a bee in his bonnet. He thought, “Who is this Sri Aurobindo? I must see him.” He was too young to make any independent moves. But, when once the family (father, mother, brother etc.) came to Tirupati, he suggested, “Why not go to Pondicherry and see Sri Aurobindo?” The others did not evince any interest—the idea or urge went back into incubation.

In 1928 another occasion came his way. The family was travelling to Kumbakonam to see the family guru. This time his suggestion to make a slight diversion to Pondicherry was accepted.

The family came to Pondicherry, to the Ashram and knocked at the gate. The gate, in those days, was kept closed, to be opened only when someone called. It opened a wee bit, and a person from inside enquired as to what business brought them hither. Naturally, he replied, “We would like to see Sri Aurobindo.”

The person (inside): Do you have a reference or have you sought prior permission?

He: No sir, neither.

Someone: Sorry, then we cannot let you in.

The door was shut gently on them. Great disappointment. But they made the best of a bad situation. They went round the Ashram (*pradakshina*).

I think another chance went the same way—ended in another *pradakshina*.

Then one day, back in his village, he met a sadhu, walking with great steps northwards. He invited the sadhu home, offered him a meal and enquired of him, “Where are you going, swamiji? From where are you coming?” The sadhu replied that he was coming from Pondicherry and going to Bengal (walking!!)—it was not

that he couldn't have money to buy a train-ticket. Walking was the preferred way of locomotion and the only one he took—for this was none other than our old friend Poornananda (*Among the Not so Great*, pp. 71-82) who after a short stay at Pondicherry was going back. Our “he” asked Poornananda if there was any Telugu-speaking person living in the Ashram at Pondy. The sadhu said, “Yes, one Krishnayya is there.”

‘He’ started again for the Ashram. By now he was married. His wife too went with him. They met Krishnayya and introduced themselves and told him about their desire to meet Sri Aurobindo. Krishnayya, unmoved, said, “But, I don't know you. You just introduced yourselves, that will not do. You must be introduced by someone who knows you and knows me.” Back again to Ongole after the usual *pradakshina*. Once there he found out, to his great joy, that their family lawyer happened to know Krishnayya—again that “chance”! He got a letter of introduction and went to Krishnayya. This was in 1934. Sri Aurobindo had retired in 1926, saw devotees only four times a year, and the Mother had taken up the helm and the rudder of the Ashram. Krishnayya consented to take him to see the Mother. His perseverance paid off. He did not even know that there was now a “Mother” at the helm. He was nervous as he approached Her. He had hardly ever seen an European (white) lady—let alone coming so close to her and then talking to her. He started by addressing Her as “Sir”—he was all that shaky. Then he changed over to “Madam”, then by and by to “Mother”.

This was his first contact—yet no sightings of Sri Aurobindo. But a long-cherished and nurtured desire was at last bearing fruit.

The “he” was Kameshwar Rao.

After a few days stay, Kameshwar thought of going back to settle some matters. The Mother said, “Oh! you are leaving us?” Kameshwar mumbled some excuse and left. It was only in 1936 that he could ‘get a fix’ on himself vis-à-vis this place and settle down to this life. A voyage, with three false starts since 1920, had at last arrived at a midway point. The next leg of the pilgrim's progress was about to begin.

How did I miss Kameshwar—all these many years? We had much in common. He was quite close to me and my family. I was indebted to him in other ways, (I'll speak of it later) yet I passed him over! Perhaps he was too close to come into the right focus... no matter, a confession is half an absolution. I will proceed with my story.

Kameshwar was a cheerful, strangely likeable and mild-mannered character. He was born on the 7<sup>th</sup> of November 1904. I too share the day with him—32 years later. He was all of a Telugu gentleman, a Brahmin (pukka). He was of medium height and build, rather on the slimmer side. Later, the all-too common middle-age paunch asserted itself. He did not do much to fight it. He was soft-spoken and his eyes too were soft and tinged with kindness. He wore a lush crop of hair and a beard—not too long but respectable. Both hair and beard did not grey much through the 80 years or so of his life. A small vermilion bindi came on long back. It grew in size (2 cm dia) (till he looked a tantric, starting from a small-time poojari). His dress was and remained

from the start to the end a white dhoti and a white shirt. He would, on special days or function (Darshan, pooja), wrap on a chuddar; a “rudraksha” mala (beads) was a later addition. The picture is now complete—a priest, or a sadhu (no ochre clothes). That was the Kameshwar as I saw, from 1945 to his last days with the many small changes in the outer appearance. The man, his ways and his attitude were more unchanging. Deeper is not for me to probe.

Kameshwar lived very simply and happily. Life in general, in those days, was very simple, even bare. And most ashramites did with very little, most often by choice. Kameshwar’s house was small considering that it was also his department (maids, visitors, etc.). It was a typical Pondicherrian house—a seating place in front, an ante-room opening on to a three-sided pillared verandah enclosing an open-to-sky courtyard. The verandah itself gave access to 2-3 rooms and to a passage to a backyard with a well and the lavatories. His terrace was covered with a *keeth* (coconut leaf) shed. There was no running (tap) water for a very long time. I don’t know if later he got a connection. He got water from neighbours. He had a mongrel that usurped his heart and the best spot at home i.e. right under the single ceiling fan, on a table. Once when I saw this browbeating (dog) I teased him about it. He smiled resignedly and said, “Oh! this is not all. When there is a power cut, I am expected to fan the fellow!”

Kameshwar’s first work was to help in the construction work. Golconde was being built at the time. Kameshwar was to work under Chandulal, the engineer overseeing the work there. (Chandulal was Vasudha-ben’s—alias Akka of the Embroidery Department—brother. Akka was the Mother’s personal attendant.) Though Kameshwar’s father and brother too had come, they left. Only his young wife stayed back. They were given accommodation in what is now the “Grace” office (earlier the Mother’s kitchen, behind the Ashram across the road). But he did not last long in the construction work. Amrita-da, then the Ashram manager, needed help, so Kameshwar was given that work. That too was not for long. He was given another work and shifted house too—a house on the rue Law de Lauriston where he lived for more than 50 years till the end of his earthly sojourn (except the very last few days when he took ill). The new work he was given was ‘Liaison’ work between the Ashram and the many Departments of the Government and the Town. He had another thankless job too—to provide maids or man servants to the many ashram houses. (There was already one department for this—Padmasini-amma, Amrita-da’s relative, looked after it. But it was not enough.) This Liaison work suited him well and he took to it like a duck to water. We will see him at work.

Kameshwar also worked in the Laundry for a period, under Jyotin-da (late). They went collecting “to-wash” clothes, and delivered the washed ones from door to door! It was very nice of them, but only possible on those days when the quantity of clothes was small and the quality of the people concerned was different. Now we are more ‘organised’.

The Liaison work took Kameshwar all over town and further, brought him into

contact with many people, and of all sorts and levels—from Governor to rickshaw puller, landlords, police, rich, poor—all. Naturally he came to be well-known, a most popular figure all over Pondicherry. His nature—mild, pleasant and straightforward dealings entrenched him in their hearts. It was a treat to move along with him down any street—everyone was greeted with either ‘Bonjour’, ‘Namaskaram’ or “How are you, bhai”—in Tamil, Telugu, English or French. (He never picked up any Bengali, Gujarati or Hindi? Something strange!) Usually it was an “*Enna Thambi*”, a sort of “Hello, Brother” in Tamil, for his work was to do much with the daily working class, the police constable or a young officer or clerk—all were Thambis.

Kameshwar was a *passepourtout*, it was a natural spill over of his general comportment. He could walk into any office or even many homes of those who had once come into contact with him, and be received with respect and fondness.

Kameshwar was a film buff. He got to know about all the films that came to town. He was quite knowledgeable about the actors and actresses. He enjoyed the old type of stories, legends and mythologies. But that did not exclude other types. Tamil and Telugu films were favoured—but he did not miss out on the English or other language films shown in our Play Ground. He could walk into any of the 4-5 film tents (only later halls)—of course—no ticket. Just the “*Enna Thambi*” pass word and the ticket collector or manager would show him to his chair. He could even choose to see the first half one day and come for the rest another day.

Sometimes, he would tell me, “*Orai* (a way of addressing a younger and/or close friend in Telugu) film *chchala bagaundhira* (that film is very nice)” by way of tempting me to go and share his little misdeed. I was not tempted, for I was too young and the formidable figure of my uncle loomed large in my mind and moreover, I was never a film buff. (My uncle was Pantulu—see *Among the Not so Great*, pp. 39-59.)

(Those film tents were like circus tents. The floor was the earth—sandy and convenient rest-place for rickshawallas who had a pillow—their rickshaw seat. There were rickety old galleries, and chairs. There could be, and usually were, gaping holes, the stars were seen overhead.)

Many young and old went to Kameshwar with their problems. Be it to get a driving licence, a theft at home, a passport, etc... he would never refuse anyone coming for help. At the least he would say, when he had no immediate solution (like Kamraj—late chief minister of Tamil Nadu)—“*Paarkalaam*” (we will see what can be done). That would give him some time and the complainant some solace.

A long time back Kameshwar had to meet an old French lady—one of the old residents of Pondy. (I think her name was Mme. Garnier?) She lived somewhere near our Arya House. (I had accompanied Kameshwar once to the house. She had a horde of cats well cared for and pampered—each having a silken pillow for bed, with a mosquito net!) She was very pleased that an old ashramite had come. She opened an old wine bottle—genuine French make—none of these IMFL (Indian Made Foreign Liquor) and offered some to Kameshwar. He a *pukka* Brahmin, an ashramite, was



mortified, and as politely as he knew how, refused the “Amritam”. The poor lady was not a little unhappy. Kameshwar recounted the incident to the Mother. She laughed and: “Oh! Why did you refuse? You should have taken my name and taken the wine!” (I think, a truly French response.) She added, “You see, it is customary in France. It is a mark of hospitality. She would have been pleased if you had just sipped some.” (I couldn’t know if any such chance came his way again—and if it did, what did he do with it.)

I spoke of Kameshwar’s liking for films. That was not all. He must have imbibed something from them—for he liked to act (drama) and even dance. In the days of yore, when the Mother came to the Play Ground every day, many programmes were held in front of Her—dances, playlets, songs, magic shows, etc. It was on a darshan day, if I recollect correctly, Kameshwar surprised us all. In walked a Ganesh—dhoti-clad, a mocked-up paunch, a mask complete with a crown and elephant trunk and—I can’t imagine why, a *mridangam* (a drum) hung round his neck. He came tapping on the *mridangam* in rhythm to a few ‘dancing’ steps, that I suspect, he choreographed himself. It was all good fun—but there is more. The Ganesh went and picked up a beautiful statuette of Joan of Arc astride a semi-rearing horse!! It was a piece of art, done in detail, in metal. How Ganesh was connected with Joan of Arc is difficult to figure out. Kameshwar, (the Ganesh was Kameshwar) went up to the Mother and offered it to Her. She seemed to enjoy the whole episode—and why not?—one of Her older children at play. The statuette today occupies a good corner of the Mother’s Room in the Play Ground—on a tall stool in the South East corner.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of November 1954, Pondicherry got her freedom—(the French left) and joined the Motherland. There were celebrations in the town. The Ashram too took part. A cultural programme was held behind the Duplex statue (now, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru’s statue has displaced Duplex). One of the items was a dance drama, “Mahishasura-Mardini”. Anu-ben was Durga, Togo her lion and the asura was who—but Kameshwar (I think he had on two horns).

On one of the 1<sup>st</sup> December Programmes (School’s Anniversary) there was a 6-hour programme titled “The Spiritual Evolution of India”. One of scenes depicted the Muslim invasion of India. There was Kameshwar, a turban on his head and a sword at his waist, a glittering waistcoat, and of course his beard—he strode across the stage with conquering steps—and disappeared. He looked good.

Kameshwar had an incurable “roaming trait” in him. Not a very serious or harmful kind. It was more a homely and pilgrim sort of urge. He roamed the countryside or near places of interest. Some time during the early stages of the War (1939-45) one such escapade led him into a lot of trouble. The cause was: a German Warship had run aground, off the coast somewhere south of Pondy, close by. There was excitement. Kameshwar took off on his bicycle in the afternoon. He got to the beach, waded across the Ariankuppam river taking the cycle with him, and reached the spot, hungry, thirsty and sweaty. No German, no warship—just an old tramp (French probably) somehow



caught in a sandbank. Kameshwar had 4 annas (= 25 paise, dare not give it a beggar nowadays!). There happened to be a man, surely an enterprising one, who was selling small packets of pills, 2 annas apiece. One pill dissolved in ½ litre of water—that much of milk! Our man bought one, had his milk and returned home, hungry but wiser (or so he thought). He relived the adventure for the Mother. She stood him on the carpet, saying, “Do you realise into what this thoughtless escapade could have led you? You crossed over into British territory. They could have arrested you, accusing you of being a spy, etc...” She took away the remaining “milk tablets”. Now, he was a wiser man. He had hoped She would return the tablets but no such luck.

Decades later, when retelling the story he was laughing. Maybe at that time he felt sorry for himself and sulked like a young lad. But his roaming propensities did not always spell trouble. The Mother made use of them. He had the duty often to escort people who needed help and guidance, maybe to Chennai or Cuddalore. He was sent to buy medicines or clear goods from the Customs. There was for a period an oldish French lady named Diana. She too had some inclinations to travel and “search” elsewhere. She went to Tiruvannamalai, Tirukkoilur (a 100-year-old sadhu lived here), and Kameshwar was deputed by the Mother to accompany her.

Kameshwar also helped negotiate and buy land for Auroville. His local popularity stood him in good stead at these times.

Kameshwar was always and remained a pious man, god-fearing as the saying goes, but I would term it god-loving. Yet as the years advanced he was more and more into poojas and meditation. He had a fixed time for his pooja or meditation, when he would close the door of his pooja-room. The instructions to his man were that he should not be disturbed at that time. Once when he went to the Mother he said, “Mother, these many years I am doing pooja and meditating on God. I am leading a pious life. How is it God never appears to me (Darshan)?” The Mother smiled and said, “But are you ready? Can you recognise Him if he does appear?” Kameshwar was confident enough. A good length of time went by then....

Kameshwar was closeted, meditating as usual. A couple, simply clad (as the locals) arrived at his main door. Kameshwar’s man opened and enquired. They said they would like to see Kameshwar and insisted even though the man told them he could not be disturbed for a while. They said, “We are coming from afar and will leave soon. Please call him.” The man went in and knocked on the pooja-room door. Kameshwar opened, somewhat annoyed. When told about the couple and their persistence, Kameshwar said, “Ask them their names and tell them to return later.” The man did just that, Kameshwar returned to his meditation and the couple waited some more time and left giving their names. The gentleman was Shankar and the lady (I forget but it was one of the names of Parvati). It was then that Kameshwar was suddenly struck by some vague sense of unease or a sense of something missing. He rushed out. His man gave the two names.... By now Kameshwar was more stricken. He went out on to the road, made a few enquiries here and there along the road and

neighbours.—“No,” none had seen the couple! Kameshwar was now numb with remorse and feeling sorry for himself. When he went to the Mother and recounted the whole sorry tale, She said, “I told you so—you are not ready.”!!

I wonder and the question arises: Did he, could he, get over the loss, of that once-in-a-lifetime, opportunity? Is it only ONCE? Have I, have others such close misses? Each one can ponder over such “blindedness” and pray for “sight” and “readiness”.

There was an episode of a happier note—a quietly enlightening story. This happened in that good old golden period when devotees could go close to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo on Darshan days, and lay their heads on Their feet—a real pranam. Kameshwar happened to be in the queue behind (a place or two) a man holding a huge garland of flowers that he would obviously place at the Lord’s feet. A casual thought of concern crossed Kameshwar’s mind, “Such a huge mala. Won’t it weigh down the Master’s feet? He will be so uncomfortable!” His turn came to kneel and bow down. The ‘thought’ led him automatically to move the mala off the Master’s feet. Only then the next thought hit him, “What have I done? I removed one devotee’s offering! What business had I to do it?” Fearfully from his pranam position, Kameshwar slowly peered upward.... What relief! The Lord was smiling at him. (I don’t think many have seen Sri Aurobindo smiling! It was a rare glimpse.)

I have to be thankful to Kameshwar for more reasons than one. There is this “planned” coincidence of our birthdays falling on the same day. What follows is probably an offshoot of that coincidence. It had and has a long-range bearing on my life. It all happened after 1973 (The Mother had left Her body). As is the practice both he and I went up to Sri Aurobindo’s Room on our birthday (7<sup>th</sup> Nov.). We met again outside and wished each other “Happy Birthday”. He then asked me, “Did you go and meet Nolini-da?” I said, “No.”

Then K: Why don’t you go and see him once?

I: But why?

K: Oh, for nothing. Just go for my sake and see him.

I went more to please him probably, or with no particular thought or expectation. I told Nolini-da that it was my “Bonne Fête”, and approached him. He smiled and even through that great moustache of his, the smile broke out on me. It was after that, I believe, that the beginning of a relationship formed between us (I hope this is not assuming too much). It was a happy moment anyway and one to cherish. What started did continue later. So there is the debt I have to repay old Kameshwar. He himself was a great admirer, more—a disciple, of Nolini-da. He accompanied him (Nolini-da) on a daily visit to Sport Ground. They walked round the track or ground from 4 or 4.15 p.m. and left usually before the Groups started. Sometimes when we were playing football and a stray ball went their way, Nolini-da could not resist, he would pick up his dhoti and shoot it back to us. (He was a good footballer in his youth. In 1952, he was in the “Veterans” team. The Veterans played the young ones on the inauguration

of our Football Field. The game was kicked off by the Mother.) I asked Kameshwar who never moved towards the ball, “You are much younger than Nolini-da. See how he is drawn towards the ball. You never do it?” He replied with a sad smile, but an admiring tone “Oh what is he? And what am I? How can you compare?”

This was Kameshwar of many “gunas” (qualities). You couldn’t probably choose out one that would set him apart above the common man. He was perhaps “the common man”—put into many an uncommon corner. He came out of them unscathed (so to say) without much realising the extraordinariness of the whole.

His centenary passed off without any fanfare (as must have many other centenarians). Not that our bugle sounds are necessary. Yet would I rekindle a few fading memories in the minds of some old friends, his and mine, and maybe introduce him to some new friends.

His coming was so long ago, his sojourn here filled with the mundane, with a few bright happy streaks, and his going was the quietest after 88 years, on the 8<sup>th</sup> of December 1992. One may ask, “What realms did he reach?” Knowing him I would guess—took a false start and a detour and reached just in Time to say “Yessir” to the Mother and enter those Pearly Gates left ajar for him. He needed now no references—a Passepartout.

BATTI  
(PRABHAKAR)

*As for propaganda I have seen that it is perfectly useless for us—if there is any effect, it is a very trifling and paltry effect not worth the trouble. If the Truth has to spread itself, it will do it of its own motion; these things are unnecessary.*

\* \* \*

*Well-known or unknown has absolutely no importance from the spiritual point of view. It is simply the propagandist spirit. We are not a party or a church or religion seeking adherents or proselytes. One man who earnestly pursues the yoga is of more value than a thousand well-known men.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 23, p 855)*

## DEVOTIONAL POETRY IN TAMIL

(Continued from the issue of September 2006)

### 8. The King, the Dalit

WE enter a fascinating democracy when we begin to study the origin of the Bhakti Movement. Here there are no kings and commoners. Equals all! One moment we watch royalty spreading all its pomp and show, and presently we find ourselves in the settlement of the “untouchables”, choking with poverty. But, if a devotee is present, the regal pomposities crumble away as we watch the ecstatic king lost in the Ananda of the Divine. A devotee’s presence, again, makes the Dalit settlement a place of smiles and satisfaction. From whence comes the spiritual magnet that makes everyone equal in the material world?

There were no doubt hundreds of self-rapt singers in the first millennium, but it so happens that the Alwar group of twelve presents a crystallised representation of this wide spectrum. One of them, Kulasekara, was a king of Kerala. He was no doubt a good king, and a hero. But we do not have any definite biographical sketch of him. All the same, he is very real to us because of his hymns and his humility. His images to explain the nature of a complete “surrender” captivated Sri Aurobindo and he chose to render the nine verses and publish them in the *Arya*:

The sufferer loves the wise physician even when his flesh is cut and burnt. O Lord of the City of the wise, let thy Illusion inflict on me an endless pain, I will yet remain thy servant, I will yet look up to thy feet.<sup>1</sup>

As with other hymnodists of earlier times, we have a sumptuous hagiological literature on Kulasekara. He ruled the Chera land from Tiruvananthapuram during the 8<sup>th</sup> century but gave up temporal power so that he could wander in the lands of devotional mysticism. He utilised his immense personal property in the service of Lord Ranganatha at Srirangam. He built the Senai Venran Mandapam in the third circle of the temple. An intense devotee of Vishnu, his 105 verses constitute the “Perumal Tirumoli” of the *Nalayira Divya Prabandham*.

Kulasekara was certainly the first to write a complete *Ramayana* in the Tamil language. The story of Rama was familiar in folklore and perhaps the most dramatic documented reference is in *Purananooru*:

It was like the time when a huge family of monkeys,  
their red mouths gaping open, shone in splendour as they scooped up  
the beautiful ornaments fallen to the ground the day the mighty demon

snatched away Sita, the wife of Rama who has the ferocious power of destruction.<sup>2</sup>

The incarnations of Vishnu helped the religious mind weave colourful narratives and spread Srivaishnavism. The Rama and Krishna incarnations, in particular, were of immense help in this desire to propagate the religion of Vishnu. It is possible that Kulasekara, who was deeply devoted to Rama, decided to write a crisp, complete narrative that could be recited and gain for the devotee the Ananda of having recited the whole of Valmiki's epic. Of Kulasekara's devotion to Rama, we have a charming episode recorded fondly by tradition.

The king was fond of listening to discourses on the *Ramayana*. Once a speaker was dealing with events in the "Aranya Kanda". Rama was facing Khara, Dushana and their vast rakshasa army. He was standing alone as Lakshmana was in the hermitage guarding Sita. Kulasekara was deeply troubled. How could a single archer demolish this oceanic army of fourteen thousand demons? He turned to his commander-in-chief: "Bring me my bow and arrows. Get my chariot ready. And all of you, follow me!"

It was clear the king was in a trance and the *Ramayana* incidents were alive for him. Nobody dared to disturb him. Fortunately the lecturer realised what had happened. With an admirable presence of mind, he continued with his speech: "Behold, there returns Rama after vanquishing the demon army, single-handed! Hail Rama the peerless hero!"

Kulasekara stopped in his tracks and was comforted that his hero had emerged unscathed and victorious.

How long could this double-life continue? Kulasekara's heart was set on serving the Divine. He anointed his son Didavrata as the king, travelled to many pilgrim centres and spent a long time in his favourite temple at Srirangam. His daughter, Cherakulavalli merged with Lord Ranganatha. Kulasekara spent his last days in Mannarkovil near Tirunelveli, worshipping the presiding deity, Rajagopala.

Kulasekara's 105 verses are known as *Perumal Tirumoli* (the sacred sayings of the king). He brings in a variety of approaches and moods to these verses bunched into ten decads. With his mind steeped in Rama's glorious life, it is not surprising that his favourite iconic deity was that of Lord Ranganatha at Srirangam, since Ranganatha was originally the family deity of the Ikshvaku race. Kulasekara's works included in the *Nalayira Divya Prabandham* open with a magnificent decad on Ranganatha:

In the noble city of Srirangam, chasing away the darkness  
Is the king of serpents, Ananta the magnificent flame,  
His thousand hoods with the image of the twin feet,  
With jewels spreading a wide brilliance.  
On this white bed rests the Lord, even as the waters

Of Ponni river, crystalline, swirl around  
 Massaging his feet. When will I gain the privilege  
 Of seeing this Dark Jewel of unequalled gentleness  
 With my eyes twain and gain Ananda?<sup>3</sup>

Kulasekara's anxiety to spend his life in Srirangam was such that his capital reverberated to the exclamation: "When shall we begin our pilgrimage to Srirangam?" (*ghuṣyate yasya nagare rangayātrā dine dine*). He wanted to serve the Lord, stand along with other servitors in the verandahs of the temple, shed tears of joy at the divine presence, roll on the dust of the environs in ecstasy. "My heart is set upon the life of a servitor, dancing and singing for Ranganatha, as if I were mad!"

In the realms of yoga, apart from the familiar paths of Karma, Jnana, Raja, Tantra and Bhakti, our ancients have also posited the yoga of surrender or Prapatti yoga. This yoga has six limbs:

1. A firm resolution to perform only the acts that conform to the Lord's desire.
2. Not perform acts that displease Him.
3. Hold on to a firm belief that the Lord is the protector.
4. A complete surrender.
5. Humility and
6. Remain engaged always in praising the Lord.<sup>4</sup>

While all the Alwars exemplify Prapatti yoga, Kulasekara's hymns are drenched in surrender and are guiding lamps for the aspirant proceeding on this path. In tune with his choice, he commits himself firmly to serve the Divine, and rejects the blandishments of material life:

I shall hold no truck with these people  
 Who anxiously run after food and clothing.  
 I am in a frenzy for the Supreme Lord,  
 Ranga, who destroyed demoness Putana.

Nor does Kulasekara think it necessary to have a human birth or riches or comforts to help him make the great leap forward in consciousness. What is needed most is *sat-sanga*, a favorable atmosphere for meditative aspiration. He would rather be born a stork on Tirumala hills, a fish in a tarn there, or a champak tree, a mountain spire, a rain stream, or anything there! The nature of surrender is explicated in yet another decad with a series of brilliant similes. The decad became so dear to Sri Aurobindo that he has translated it. The jivatman is like the child which yet looks up to its mother and cries, though chased away by her; like the citizen who hopes for loving guardianship from a tyrant, like the lotus that opens only to the rays of the sun, like the rivers that have only the ocean as their final refuge. Indeed the jivatman is like the bird that had perched upon the mast of a ship anchored at a port. Come daylight, and

the port had vanished. The ship was now sailing the high seas. The bird repeatedly flew around but could see only water all over the place. It had to get back to the masthead for sanctuary, and Sri Aurobindo conveys the image in his simple, literal translation:

O Lord of the City of the wise, who didst slay the strong and cruel Beast, ah, where shall I fly for refuge, if I leave thy feet? On the tossing sea the bird leaves the mast of the ship, he flies to all sides but no shore is visible, and he again returns to the mast. I am like that bird.<sup>5</sup>

Those who choose the path of bhakti leading to total surrender find the keenest instrument for recordation in bridal mysticism. Kulasekara has written a few hymns in this mode in which a Gopi chides Krishna for his indifference and doubletalk. *Perumal Tirumoli* then moves to the heart-wrenching lament of Devaki for having lost the charms of bringing up the baby Krishna. The good luck belonged to Yashoda! Again, his lullaby song recalling *Ramayana* incidents and the lament of Dasharatha on his deathbed are extremely moving:

Come back. Ah, now you can go. Just for one moment come back and see me. You had broken the bow of Shiva for gaining Sita who wears fresh flowers on her tresses and has bamboo-like shoulders! My son who turns my mind into liquid! Today, as you go to the immense forest where huge elephants wander, my heart remains unbroken still!<sup>6</sup>

Kulasekara's decads conclude with a luminously abridged version of the *Ramayana*. Rama is born as the scion of the sun dynasty, kills Tataka to guard the sacrifice of Vishwamitra, shatters Rudra's bow to marry Sita, receives Parashurama's bow in a victorious manner, leaves Ayodhya to justify the command of Kaikeyi, crosses Ganga with the help of Guha, hands over the kingdom and his sandals to Bharata in Chitrakuta, kills Viradha, receives the handsome bow from Agastya, slices off Surpanakha's nose, destroys Khara and Dushana, kills Maricha with his arrow, becomes sorrow-laden due to separation from Sita, guides Jatayu to the supreme region, makes friends with Sugriva and kills Vali, torches Lanka through Hanuman, threatens the ocean with his arrows and builds a bridge, decimates Ravana and gifts his kingdom to Vibhishana, gets crowned in Ayodhya along with Sita, learns of Ravana's antecedents from Agastya and his own story from Sita's sons, decapitates Jambuka who was engaged in unholy tapasya, regains the life of the Brahmin boy, is decorated by the jewelled garland given by Agastya, kills Lavanasura through his brother Shatrughna, is separated from Lakshmana because of Durvasa's curse, and finally takes all living creatures with him and goes back to his original dwelling of Srivaikuntha. It is a breathless telling that has won for Kulasekara a special place among the devotees.



Almost all temples to Rama in South India have an installed image of Kulasekara.

The Alwar's love for the Krishna incarnation has also been famous because of a beautiful hymnal garland in Sanskrit, *Mukundamala*, attributed to him. The forty verses record the ecstasies of a soul a-throb with the flute-call. The mellifluous words appear as a purposeful approach to the Divine for eternal servitude. Kulasekara's description of the Lord's All-Beautiful Form, his calling upon our sense organs to speak, hear and worship Krishna and his exhorting us to depend upon the Lord's name as *mani* (curative jewel), *mantra* (sacred chant) and *ausadha* (medicine) in verses 22, 23 and 24 for overcoming the disease of birth are memorable.

The intensity of this king's devotion for Ranganatha was adequately paralleled by the dedication of a Dalit to the presiding deity of Srirangam. Tiruppan Alwar's decad, "Amalan Adhippiran" shimmers like an inlaid pearl in *Nalayira Divya Prabandham*. This was Tiruppan's solitary surviving poetic work. In eight brief verses, the impersonal Brahman assumes the beautiful, bejewelled, *saumya* form of Lord Ranganatha. In the concluding two verses, even the icon and the grand temple structure vanish, and the poet's eye sees nothing but the cowherd boy, Krishna, come to lead the devotee to the bliss ineffable.

Tiruppan (circa 7<sup>th</sup> century AD) was a foundling brought up by an "untouchable" couple of Uraiur near Srirangam. Originally the Panar community was in charge of war drums when leading armies into battle. Though the community fell upon evil times and were marginalised, the Panars became famous for their mastery of music. Tiruppan who grew up in this atmosphere was schooled in humility and found joy in simply singing about Ranganatha. Although as an "outcaste" he could not enter the huge temple complex, he was content to sit on the banks of Cauvery as it flowed past Urayur, play his lute and sing. Indeed he became a part of the circumambient nature, and the beauty of nature and the ardour of the devotee fused in him to effect a great transformation. He had become the voice of immortal poesy.

The one significant event of his life that survives in Tamil racial memory is itself a piece of divine drama, symbolic of the man and his ministry. One day, the priest Lokasaranga Muni had gone to Cauvery to fetch water for Ranganatha's ceremonial bath. The Muni's request to Tiruppan to move and make way for him to go to the stream went unheeded. This was because the devotee was communing with the Lord and was lost to the world and its siege of dualities. The Muni was patient but the young assistants were incensed by what they took to be Tiruppan's insolence. They turned to violence and one of the stones they threw hit him and drew blood. Awakened from his self-absorption, Tiruppan realised what had happened, bowed in humility seeking forgiveness and withdrew.

That night, Lokasaranga Muni had a dream. The Lord came to him with a bleeding wound and commanded the Muni to bring Tiruppan to the sanctum sanctorum. An "untouchable" to enter the temple and be taken to the *garbhagriha*? Tiruppan himself, when he learnt of the dream-vision, was not ready to venture the sacrilege. But the

Muni was clear about the purport of his dream, and faithfully fulfilled the Lord's desire by carrying Tiruppan on his shoulders. Tradition avers that the devotee was deeply moved by his first sight of Lord Ranganatha's auspicious form. He began to sing describing the limbs of the Lord, and at the climactic moment of "mystical tremendum" he resolved that, having seen Him, he would not see anything else. The same moment the devotee merged with the deity.

The ten verses of "Amalan Adhippiran" certainly corroborate the traditional story of Tiruppan's journey into the sanctum and his immersion in the Lord. During the last thousand years and more, the recitation of the poem has been considered an instrument of purification. It is believed that if one commits a mistake unintentionally, a recitation of the "Amalan Adhippiran" decad will cleanse one of the sin with immediate effect.

The poem is cast in the traditional mode of describing a deity from the feet upwards. Even now, one who wishes to enter the innermost sanctum for darshan of Lord Ranganatha has to circumambulate the First Circle, then go up the Gayatri Mandap, walk past Kulasekara's Step, keep to the left and move towards the right, as if to go round the Gandha Stambhas (Pillars of Scent). Once we near the icon, our first glimpse is of the Lord's twin feet. Before we settle ourselves to a "complete view", our eyes move under magnetic compulsion from the feet leftwards, till we sight the crowned visage of the Lord, serene beneath the hooded serpent, Adishesha.

There is an imbedded power and emerging glory in the verses of Tiruppan which are actually cast in the simplest Tamil words available. More than twelve centuries after, the words are understood with electrical ease even by the unlettered. Touched by the incantatory magic of the Tamil verses, the great Vaishnava acharya, Vedanta Desika, has given it a Sanskrit habitation and name in his work, *Bhagavat-Dhyana-Sopana*.

The first verse of "Amalan Adhippiran" memorably describes the beatific feet of the Lord:

Pure Home of origins,  
 Puissant Lord of the Immortals,  
 Dweller in garden-hill Venkata,  
 Holy, stainless, righteous  
 Lord of high-walled Srirangam!  
 I am but a slave of Thy devotees,  
 Yet have Thy twin lotus feet  
 Enraptured my eager eyes.

From the feet to the Lord's raiment: "My thoughts have strayed to Thy russet robe." Then, the navel: "My heart and life are lost in Thy navel's depth." Now the waist band claims the devotee's gaze, and soon the divine chest is revealed, and Tiruppan's words take wings:

Having annulled the burden of my sins  
 And made me lean to Him for support,  
 Now has he entered and filled me.  
 I know not what severe tapasya I have done  
 To deserve this shock of joy.  
 'Tis Ranga's chest gleaming  
 With the Divine Spouse's presence  
 That has readily enslaved me.

Thence the neck, the promise and foretaste of the Life Divine: and now the lips finely etched: and the bright and large eyes that make the gazer mad with joy and longing. The total effect of the first eight verses is to invade and possess the reader's heart with an excess of the love divine.

It is, however, the last two verses that finally bridge the gap between the devotee and the Lord, the human and the Divine. Had we eyes to see, we could watch the Lord repeatedly descend into discernible forms, walk and mingle in our life-ways in a seamless togetherness. For, there comes the moment when the Divine coerces the human being into his clasp of love:

A babe on the banyan leaf,  
 He had encompassed the seven worlds.  
 Fondly He reclines on the serpent.  
 He is bedecked with pearls and gems  
 Bright with fadeless beauty.  
 His sky-blue omnipresent form  
 Wholly fills my being, ah me!  
 Cloud-hued Cowherd—  
 With butter-stained lips  
 He has captivated my heart.  
 Lord of the immortals!  
 Ravishing Ranga! Nectar Supreme!  
 Having seen Him, nought else  
 Shall my eyes encounter.

This is the fascinating truth about bhakti yoga, the one yoga which needs the presence of a personal deity, even in these times which boast of a scientific and technological thrust in every walk of life. How does one come to “believe” in his personal deity? There is the telling Tamil proverb: “For the non-believer, it is a stone; for the man of faith, it is Ranganatha.” Sri Aurobindo says that it is the heart that spells out the belief:

Spiritual intuition is always a more luminous guide than the discriminating reason, and spiritual intuition addresses itself to us not only through the reason, but through the rest of our being as well, through the heart and life also.<sup>7</sup>

For Tiruppan of Uraiyur, his whole heart and life were turned towards the iconic deity in the neighbouring town of Srirangam. What is the use of all our philosophical systems, logical jugglery and tomes of scholarship for our soul, if we do not gain the closeness with the Supreme Being that was achieved by Tiruppan? He had seized Ranganatha with his visionary eye and in that moment had been himself possessed by the babe on the banyan leaf. Who else can explain this mystery for us but Sri Aurobindo?

The God-lover is the universal lover and he embraces the All-blissful and All-beautiful. When universal love has seized on his heart, it is the decisive sign that the Divine has taken possession of him; and when he has the vision of the All-beautiful everywhere and can feel at all times the bliss of his embrace, that is the decisive sign that he has taken possession of the Divine. Union is the consummation of love, but it is this mutual possession that gives it at once the acme and the largest reach of its intensity. It is the foundation of oneness in ecstasy.<sup>8</sup>

*(To be continued)*

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

### *Notes and References*

1. *Perumal Tirumoli*, V, iv; Translation: CWSA, Vol. 5, p. 593.
2. Verse 378. Translated by George L. Hart and Hank Heifetz.
3. I, i. All translations from Kulasekara and Tiruppan are by Prema Nandakumar unless otherwise stated.
4. ānukūlyasaṅkalpaḥ prātikūlyavarjanam  
rakṣiṣyatīti viśvāso goptṛtvavaraṇam tathā  
ātmanikṣepakārpaṇye ṣaḍaṅgānīti hi śrutiḥ
5. V, v; Translation: CWSA, Vol. 5, p. 593.
6. IX, iv.
7. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Part Three, chapter 5.
8. *Ibid.*, chapter 6.

## SOMETIMES IN DREAM—HERON RISING

I saw her as the sun began to die,  
A slowly rising ribbon of feathered light  
The great wings flapping soundlessly and I  
Beneath the unfolding miracle of white.

Sometimes in dream my soul has swiftly flown  
To heavens unvisited by mortal thought  
In silver vastnesses with God alone  
Where golden tapestries of life are wrought.

And now the silence sings to me its songs  
The breezes whisper fragrantly a Name,  
A power of love to rectify all wrongs  
A face divine the seraphim proclaim.

I have heard his voice melodious and sweet  
And knelt before the Golden Lady's feet.

NARAD  
(RICHARD EGGENBERGER)

## PANCHASSEE-MOUNTAIN

*(Continued from the issue of September 2006)*

*(A Travelogue and an exploration: Can this Mountain, meaning “Five Seats of the Divine Mother”, be an indication of a living Vedic culture?)*

### **(9) Yoga-House ... the Panchasse “hill”**

ONE afternoon while working in the Panchasse lodge garden, I noticed at the top of the hillock thick vines growing over some large and old trees. It took two years of weeding cabbage below this hill-top for me to notice its collection of trees and greens above the buffalo shed.

I asked a member of the family weeding with me, “What is in those trees up there?”, pointing to the greens-collection in a darkening afternoon sky.

I could feel a hesitation in the response, “Sadhu-house, but don’t go up there.”

The feelings were now turning a little serious after the fun they had just finished, teasing me about being squeamish in spreading fresh buffalo dung around the vegetables. The buffalo is milked in a thatch-roofed three-sided stone dwelling above the two vegetable terraces in which we worked, and just below the hill-top tree-maze.

Of course as soon as I was left alone in the garden I went up to have a closer look. Evening was approaching and so the time had come for the filling of the simple brass oil lamps, as well as starting the dinner process. Up the vegetable terraces, across the huge flat stones on the buffalo area, then holding onto grass clumps up, pulling myself up, and in a minute I was inside the unkempt area. A few steps in knee-high grass closer, and pushing aside vines dangling from the enormous trees, I saw two ancient and dilapidated stone dwellings.

Panchassee village sits in one of those intimate Nature “seats” of the divine Female, called a saddle in Western outdoor English. And strangely enough, right in the centre of this village where 5 paths cross, is a miniature cone-shaped hill. Three of the four lodges have buffalo quarters on this western, warm, afternoon sun-side of the central village hill, all below this cone-peak.

Cutting a way around these ancient places of meditation, I could see that one roof had completely fallen, while the second dwelling facing the sunset-vastnesses, had a roof ready to fall in. One dwelling faced north and the other faced west, with both of them remaining open in these directions. Sitting at the open doorway in the sunset-facing Mother-vastness-house, the view was of a red infinity. Both of these little stone huts seemed to be held in the arms of the two huge Tree-mothers. I sat down on a fallen roof-rock in the afternoon sun.

Later in the evening, after dinner, at my suggestion to clean around the trees,

there were fearful reproaches about what would happen if I angered the Goddess up there.

“How will you know what to cut and what to leave?”

So I asked the priests when they next visited the lodge, a few days later, about cleaning up the hill-top shrines. Perhaps because of having spoken to them on earlier occasions about the details of their rituals, they agreed, but I could feel that the lodge-family remained fearful.

First I cut a clear path to the sadhu-huts, then slowly cut a path completely around the trees. These dwellings had three closed sides, with the opening, a doorway, that framed visually the symbol for concentration. Earlier, having sat in the west-facing doorway, once the thick brush was cleared from the northern side of this ancient “seat”, I climbed over the large fallen roof-rocks inside the second hut, and sat to lean against the back wall. The inside was maybe one and a half-metres wide and two and a half metres in length...

“Really,” I thought, “just enough room to sit.”

The doorway actually framed a nature scene as if in a photograph, and settling against the back wall I gasped: the first two peaks of Panchassee completely filled the view! Whoever last sat in this primal seat of the Mountain-mother, had Her as the concentration point.

Another week passed as I fussed around this sacred site in between the many other village activities, like carrying wood, and trekking down to the nearest roadside village about 2 hours away to return with foodstuff. I cleaned here and there around this Deurali, this “seat” of the Mother, and piled the scattered rocks to make my visit productive, but all the while I was thinking about these structures built with no wood. Some of the overlapped roof-stones were more than a metre in length, and built as steps finally forming a rain-shedding roof-pitch. Without wood the buildings could be thousands of years old.

When the priests visited the lodge next, I surprised everyone present by blurting out that I wanted to repair one of the sadhu-huts for a meditation practice. The lodge-family again suggested that this might disturb the Goddess. I countered this fear by describing how my suggestion was in the same seeking as the previous occupant, the same seeking for an experience of the Panchasse Yoga tradition: the Brahmins agreed.

There remained 11 days before the annual autumn Nature-mother celebration would begin with goddess Saraswati’s birthday. A few days later the work started with an agreement that the room would be rebuilt in time for the beginning of the nine-day Himalayan festival, called in India, Diwali. But I had to agree with the use of wood for the roof, and the dismantling of the low stone boundary wall around the site for stone-material. The evening before Her harvest-celebration began, the roof was up, but the area was left looking like a construction site.

The next morning, the morning of Saraswati’s birthday, after a symbolic lighting of five tiny camphor flames, and everything else with the number five as a format,



like five sticks of incense and five flowers etc., I got up to look from the outside at what had just transpired inside the now square rebuilt sadhu “house”: my mind was still spinning. So I stepped over the long flat stone of the entranceway and walked out into the now cleaned and open garden area in front, imagining how in the past, flowers were planted there in the way they still are around the village lodges.

I walked two or three paces towards Panchassee and what still remained of the low northern boundary wall, looking around to the view in all other directions. Then I turned and framed the rebuilt sadhu-hut amid the trees and surrounding vastnesses in my mental focus. Perhaps there was too much to integrate in the view and so the mind could not grasp it satisfactorily, and instead seemed to float in a happy confusion at the sight of this tiny roofed room in the middle of nowhere on a holy Mother-mountain in the Himalayas.

Then something descended, and in the mind a remembrance:  
“My house is Shakti”....

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

*Sri Aurobindo, The Secret of the Veda*

(Concluded)

GARY

*If we look at the beginnings of Indian society, the far-off Vedic age which we no longer understand, for we have lost that mentality, we see that everything is symbolic. The religious institution of sacrifice governs the whole society and all its hours and moments, and the ritual of the sacrifice is at every turn and in every detail, as even a cursory study of the Brahmanas and Upanishads ought to show us, mystically symbolic. The theory that there was nothing in the sacrifice except a propitiation of Nature-gods for the gaining of worldly prosperity and of Paradise, is a misunderstanding by a later humanity which had already become profoundly affected by an intellectual and practical bent of mind, practical even in its religion and even in its own mysticism and symbolism, and therefore could no longer enter into the ancient spirit. Not only the actual religious worship but also the social institutions of the time were penetrated through and through with the symbolic spirit.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

(The Human Cycle, CWSA, Vol. 25, p. 7)

## BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

**With Aurobindo in Baroda**, by Dinendra Kumar Roy translated by Maurice Shukla from the Bengali *Aurobindo Prasanga*. Published by Smriti, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 2006, pp. 66. Price: Rs. 28.

### Essential Reading

THIS is an amazing booklet, one of the finest and most moving accounts of the young Sri Aurobindo in Baroda, written by Dinendra Kumar Roy, a well-known *littérateur* of his time. Roy had the charge and the privilege of teaching Sri Aurobindo Bengali in Baroda. He recalls his extraordinary experience, summed up in a single sentence that appears on the back page blurb of the booklet: “As I became acquainted with his nature, I realised that Aurobindo was not of this world. He who has spent even a few days with Aurobindo can never forget him for the rest of his life.”

The brief memoir by Roy (1869-1943) first appeared in Bengali as *Aurobindo Prasanga* (literally, *About Aurobindo*). The chapters initially appeared in the journal *Sahitya* between 1911 and 1912. In 1923 they were brought out as a book.

It is not that Dinendra Kumar Roy’s account has not been known. Biographers of Sri Aurobindo have faithfully recorded his impressions. Some of these, in the translated form, could be compared with those by Maurice Shukla. In *Sri Aurobindo: His Life Unique*, (pp. 55-56), for instance, Rishabhchand brings in a fairly long and apt quotation from Roy, translated by Sanat Banerjee. The footnote on page 56 of Rishabhchand’s biography states that this translation had appeared in *Mother India*. Similarly, the anthology: *Sri Aurobindo in Baroda* on pages 100-101, gives a record of Sri Aurobindo’s reading, as seen by Dinendra Roy. Likewise, A. B. Purani, in *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, refers to Roy’s impressions of the Master on pages 46-47 of his book. It seems to me that a critical introduction could have brought out some of these aspects for the benefit of the readers.

In any case, by the time the first of Roy’s chapters appeared in 1911, Sri Aurobindo was already in Pondicherry. By then, his status as a celebrity poet, author, nationalist and revolutionary was firmly established. It was the Partition of Bengal movement, the editorship of *Bande Mataram* and his subsequent trial in the famous Alipore Bomb case that projected Sri Aurobindo before the nation as an undisputed leader who captured the imagination of his countrymen.

It is this setting of sedition and revolution that catapulted Sri Aurobindo to public attention. Dinendra Roy recreates some of these aspects while narrating his association with Sri Aurobindo. He does concede that “Aurobindo hasn’t yet crossed the threshold of his youth and the time for writing the story of his life has not yet come. Besides, for various reasons, it is not quite proper to bring out the biography of a living person.” Similarly, he may have been partly motivated, he concedes, by the sale of a person’s

life story, but the real reason is that “all those who are born as men in Bengal will be pleased and profoundly delighted to contemplate the story of Aurobindo’s life.”

The early recollections of Roy, dating back to 1898, conform to our knowledge of Sri Aurobindo, his Western upbringing, his deep knowledge of English and the European languages, his distinguished lineage, especially on his maternal side. All these are crucial factors that shaped the personality of the younger Sri Aurobindo. Roy was selected as the tutor by Sri Aurobindo’s maternal uncle, the late Jogindranath Bose, eldest son of Rishi Rajnarayan Bose.

On his way to Baroda, Roy passes through Deogarh and has a privileged meeting with Rajnarayan Bose. On his sickbed, the latter tells him, “May your Sadhana in literature be fruitful.”

We learn of Roy’s association with several eminent Bengali writers such as Krishnakumar Mitra, the respected editor of *Sanjivani* and Jogindranath Bose (both Sri Aurobindo’s close relations) and Dwijendranath Tagore.

Sri Aurobindo’s personal library, Roy tells us, contained many gems, books that he had picked up in Cambridge and in England. A beautiful edition of *Arabian Nights* had a pride of place on his shelf.

The first appearance of Sri Aurobindo surprises Roy. Although from a Western background, his pupil shows surprisingly no outward signs of Europeanness. Unlike many of his countrymen who like “cockroaches turned into beetles”, Sri Aurobindo, according to Roy, was Indian in an utterly modest and down-to-earth manner. As Roy recalls vividly:

Old-fashioned slippers with ends turned up on his feet, his clothes of coarse, flounced Ahmedabad-mill khadi; the end of his dhoti hanging loose; a tight-fitting waistcoat on his back; on his head, a mane of long, thin hair parted in the middle and hanging down over the neck; tiny pockmarks on his face; his eyes with a gentle dreamy look... (p. 6)

Dinendra Roy shows an incredible ability to grasp the essentials of Sri Aurobindo’s character and personality. He admires his student’s simplicity and modesty, his patriotism, austerity, detachment and selflessness, completely free from pride and pretentious behaviour. Neither vanity nor diffidence marked his nature. He remained poised and serene at all times.

Roy draws attention to Sri Aurobindo’s immediate family members, his father, the noble and generous Dr. Krishnadhan Ghose, his mother, sister and acclaimed brothers, Manmohan, Binay Bhushan and Barindra. While those with a short-lived stay in England would come back to India “full-fledged sahibs” calling a banana peel “kelaka phool”, Sri Aurobindo remained a true “son of the motherland”.

As an ideal son, few could surpass Sri Aurobindo. The first thing that he did with his salary every month, Roy tells us, was to send an allowance to his mother and

sister. Even here, others took precedence. Once he handed over a half filled in money order form and money so that instead of him, his teacher, Roy could send money home: “Your need,” he said, “is greater than mine.” (p. 11)

Among Sri Aurobindo’s close friends and associates, Roy counts Khasirao Jadhav and Lieutenant Madhavrao Jadhav. Similarly, we get a glimpse of Maharashtrian and Bengali culture in Baroda. Sri Aurobindo greatly admired the Maratha spirit of valour and chivalry.

A sense of detachment and freedom from pleasure and pain are seen to mark Sri Aurobindo’s attitude in day-to-day life. With a cast-iron bedstead, an ordinary blanket—he lived the life of a sanyasin. He read and wrote late into night and rose late. He wrote poetry and translated from the *Mahabharata*. He was a great admirer of Valmiki, Dante and Homer. He preferred Bengali cuisine but never complained of bad food. Roy gives a detailed account of his reading and food habits.

We read the amusing account of Krishna or Kestha the domestic help, his antics and his nostalgic feeling for home as he sits singing mournful lines: “Fly, O cuckoo, to where my soulmate lies!” (p. 21) We hear of bewildered foreigners who attempt to eat the husk of the coconut, of Sri Aurobindo’s great standing among the teachers and students of Baroda College, and a memorable meeting with Romesh Chandra Dutt.

No teacher could hope to have a better student. Sri Aurobindo picked up Bengali fast, and read books like *Swarnalata* and *Sadhabar Ekadashi*. He read Marathi with the elder Phadke.

Considerable space is devoted in Roy to Sri Aurobindo’s legendary reading habits and his power of concentration. As Roy recalls memorably:

Aurobindo would sit on a chair beside a table under the light of a “jewel lamp” and untroubled by the awful mosquito-bites, would read on till one o’clock. I would see him with his eyes fixed on a book, sitting in the same spot with the same concentration for hours on end, oblivious of the outer world like an ascetic rapt in yoga! He wouldn’t have noticed if the house caught fire. (p. 36)

Nor was Sri Aurobindo a puritan. With Roy he visited the local theatre and saw plays like *Tarabai*, adapted from Shakespeare. But reading was what attracted him the most. He received books from Gurudas Babu’s library in Calcutta, from *Basumati* office and from Atmaram Radhabhai Segun and Thakkar and Co., two famous booksellers of Bombay.

The narrative is also punctuated by many fascinating details such as the term ‘Ackroyd’ in the middle of Sri Aurobindo’s name. His interest in astrology, the incredible story of a Goswami Prabhu that speaks of the importance of destiny in life, his association with the Bengali youth Jatindranath Bandyopadhyaya who was keen to join the Baroda army to prepare himself for a revolutionary career, the visit of the famous painter Sashikumar Hesh who became a resident artist in the Baroda state—

all these are brought out well.

Dinendra Roy's narrative could be treated as a brief but significant companion to *Sri Aurobindo in Baroda*. It is racy, insightful, gripping and extremely well written. It evokes strong emotions in us. Maurice Shukla's translation retains the original flavour of the Bengali and takes us to a little known chapter in the biography of Sri Aurobindo. We look forward to more such titles under the imprint of Smriti.

This is a booklet that makes an overwhelming impact on our being. It questions the utterly commonplace nature of our own lives and underlines the need to awake from our slumber.

This little gem should reach the hands of all aspirants of spiritual life. It is the best reading I had this summer.

SACHIDANANDA MOHANTY

*Aurobindo was born on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1872, in Calcutta. His father, a man of great ability and strong personality, had been among the first to go to England for his education. He returned entirely anglicised in habits, ideas and ideals,—so strongly that his Aurobindo as a child spoke English and Hindustani only and learned his mother-tongue only after his return from England. He was determined that his children should receive an entirely European upbringing. While in India they were sent for the beginning of their education to an Irish nuns' school in Darjeeling and in 1879 he took his three sons to England and placed them with an English clergyman and his wife with strict instructions that they should not be allowed to make the acquaintance of any Indian or undergo any Indian influence. These instructions were carried out to the letter and Aurobindo grew up in entire ignorance of India, her people, her religion and her culture.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

(*On Himself*, SABCL, Vol. 26, p. 1)

## দুর্গা-স্তোত্র

মাতঃ দুর্গে! যোগশক্তি বিস্তার কর। তোমার প্রিয় আৰ্য্য-সন্তান, লুপ্ত শিক্ষা, চরিত্র, মেধাশক্তি, ভক্তিশ্রদ্ধা, তপস্যা, ব্রহ্মচর্য্য সত্যজ্ঞান আমাদের মধ্যে বিকাশ করিয়া জগৎকে বিতরণ কর। মানব সহায়ে দুর্গতিনাশিনি জগদম্বে, প্রকাশ হও ॥

মাতঃ দুর্গে! অন্তঃস্থ রিপু সংহার করিয়া বাহিরের বাধাবিঘ্ন নিস্মূল কর। বলশালী পরাক্রমী উন্নতচেতা জাতি ভারতের পবিত্র কাননে, উর্ব্বর ক্ষেত্রে, গগন-সহচর পর্ব্বততলে, পূতঃসলিলা নদীতীরে একতায় প্রেমে, সত্যে শক্তিতে, শিল্পে সাহিত্যে, বিক্রমে জ্ঞানে শ্রেষ্ঠ হইয়া নিবাস করুক, মাতৃচরণে এই প্রার্থনা, প্রকাশ হও ॥

মাতঃ দুর্গে! আমাদের শরীরে যোগবলে প্রবেশ কর। যন্ত্র তব, অশুভ বিনাশী তরবারি তব, অজ্ঞানবিনাশী প্রদীপ তব আমরা হইব, বঙ্গীয় যুবকগণের এই বাসনা পূর্ণ কর। যন্ত্রী হইয়া যন্ত্র চালাও, অশুভ-হস্তী হইয়া তরবারি ঘুরাও, জ্ঞানদীপ্তিপ্রকাশিনী হইয়া প্রদীপ ধর, প্রকাশ হও ॥

শ্রীঅরবিন্দ

## HYMN TO DURGA

MOTHER DURGA! Extend wide the power of Yoga. We are thy Aryan children, develop in us again the lost teaching, character, strength of intelligence, faith and devotion, force of austerity, power of chastity and true knowledge, bestow all that upon the world. To help mankind, appear, O Mother of the world, dispel all ills.

MOTHER DURGA! Slay the enemy within, then root out all obstacles outside. May the noble heroic mighty Indian race, supreme in love and unity, truth and strength, arts and letters, force and knowledge ever dwell in its holy woodlands, its fertile fields, under its sky-scrapping hills, along the banks of its pure-streaming rivers. This is our prayer at the feet of the Mother. Make thyself manifest.

MOTHER DURGA! Enter our bodies in thy Yogic strength. We shall become thy instruments, thy sword slaying all evil, thy lamp dispelling all ignorance. Fulfil this yearning of thy young children, O Mother. Be the master and drive thy instrument, wield thy sword and slay the evil, hold up the lamp and spread the light of knowledge. Make thyself manifest.

Sri Aurobindo

(Translated by Nolini Kanta Gupta and approved by Sri Aurobindo)

With Compliments from Well-wishers