

# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXI

No. 4

*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

---

### CONTENTS

<i>Sri Aurobindo</i>		
DESPAIR ON THE STAIRCASE (Poem)	...	303
<i>The Mother</i>		
‘THOU ART MY ONLY REASON FOR EXISTENCE...’	...	304
ON CATS	...	305
APPENDIX: A COMPILATION ON CATS	...	325
<i>Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna)</i>		
THE MOTHER’S AND SRI AUROBINDO’S WAY WITH ANIMALS	...	333
<i>Priti Das Gupta</i>		
MOMENTS, ETERNAL	...	338
<i>Sachidananda Mohanty</i>		
IN MEMORIAM: THE TEACHER AS A SADHAK—M. V. NADKARNI	...	344
<i>P. and G.</i>		
UDAR, ONE OF MOTHER’S CHILDREN	...	347
MEDHANANDA—A CENTENARY TRIBUTE		
<i>Yvonne Artaud</i>		
I. TRACING MEDHANANDA’S FOOTSTEPS	...	353
<i>Medhananda</i>		
II. THE GARDEN OF ONENESS	...	354
<i>Debranjan Chatterjee</i>		
III. MEDHANANDA, PASSIONATE SEEKER OF KNOWLEDGE	...	356
<i>Medhananda</i>		
IV. THE WAY OUT IS UP	...	358
<i>Shraddhavan</i>		
V. MEDHANANDA, EXCEPTIONAL MIND IN A “BODY OF JOY”	...	360

<i>Medhananda</i>		
VI. ON THE SHORES OF INFINITY	...	362
<i>Agnidhan</i>		
VII. MEDHANANDA, EXTRAORDINARY TEACHER AND GUIDE	...	365
<i>Medhananda</i>		
VIII. THE GIFT OF GRACE	...	367
<i>Prema Nandakumar</i>		
DEVOTIONAL POETRY IN TAMIL	...	370
BOOKS IN THE BALANCE		
<i>Sachidananda Mohanty</i>		
Review of INDIA AND THE FUTURE OF SOUTH ASIA BY KOSHA SHAH	...	380
<i>Pujalal</i>		
NAVANI STORIES	...	383

## DESPAIR ON THE STAIRCASE

Mute stands she, lonely on the topmost stair,  
An image of magnificent despair;  
The grandeur of a sorrowful surmise  
Wakes in the largeness of her glorious eyes.  
In her beauty's dumb significant pose I find  
The tragedy of her mysterious mind.  
Yet is she stately, grandiose, full of grace.  
A musing mask is her immobile face.  
Her tail is up like an unconquered flag.  
Its dignity knows not the right to wag.  
An animal creature wonderfully human,  
A charm and miracle of fur-footed Brahman,  
Whether she is spirit, woman or a cat,  
Is now the problem I am wondering at.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 113)*

## **‘THOU ART MY ONLY REASON FOR EXISTENCE...’**

**January 24, 1914**

O THOU who art the sole reality of our being, O sublime Master of love, Redeemer of life, let me have no longer any other consciousness than of Thee at every instant and in each being. When I do not live solely with Thy life, I agonise, I sink slowly towards extinction; for Thou art my only reason for existence, my one goal, my single support. I am like a timid bird not yet sure of its wings and hesitating to take its flight; let me soar to reach definitive identity with Thee.

THE MOTHER

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, p. 59)*

## ON CATS

### The attitude of the baby cat

*What are the dangers of Yoga? Is it especially dangerous to the people of the West? Someone has said that Yoga may be suitable for the East, but it has the effect of unbalancing the Western mind.*

THERE are two paths of Yoga, one of *tapasyā* (discipline), and the other of surrender. The path of *tapasyā* is arduous. Here you rely solely upon yourself, you proceed by your own strength. You ascend and achieve according to the measure of your force. There is always the danger of falling down. And once you fall, you lie broken in the abyss and there is hardly a remedy. The other path, the path of surrender, is safe and sure. It is here, however, that the Western people find their difficulty. They have been taught to fear and avoid all that threatens their personal independence. They have imbibed with their mothers' milk the sense of individuality. And surrender means giving up all that. In other words, you may follow, as Ramakrishna says, either the path of the baby monkey or that of the baby cat. The baby monkey holds to its mother in order to be carried about and it must hold firm, otherwise if it loses its grip, it falls. On the other hand, the baby cat does not hold to its mother, but is held by the mother and has no fear nor responsibility; it has nothing to do but to let the mother hold it and cry *ma ma*.

If you take up this path of surrender fully and sincerely, there is no more danger or serious difficulty. The question is to be sincere. If you are not sincere, do not begin Yoga. If you were dealing in human affairs, then you could resort to deception; but in dealing with the Divine there is no possibility of deception anywhere. You can go on the Path safely when you are candid and open to the core and when your only end is to realise and attain the Divine and to be moved by the Divine.

14 April 1929

(CWM, Vol. 3, pp. 4-5)

\* \* \*

### Necessity of personal effort

You remember, we spoke once of the attitude of the baby cat and that of the baby monkey. If you agree to be like a docile baby cat (there are also baby cats which are very undisciplined, I have seen them), like a docile little child, this may go very fast. Note that it is very easy to say, "Choose the attitude of the baby cat", but it is not so easy to do. You must not believe that adopting the attitude of the baby cat lets you off from all personal effort. Because you are not a baby cat, human beings are not

baby cats! There are in you innumerable elements which are accustomed to trusting only themselves, which want to do their own work, and it is much more difficult to control all these elements than to let oneself go in all circumstances. It is very difficult. First of all, there is always that wonderful work of the mind which likes so very much to observe, criticise, analyse, doubt, try to solve the problem, say, “Is it good thus?”, “Would it not be better like that?”, and so on. So that goes on and on, and where is the baby cat?... For the baby cat does not think! It is free from all this and hence it is much easier for it!

Whatever be the way you follow, personal effort is always necessary till the moment of identification. At that moment all effort drops from you like a worn-out robe, you are another person: what was impossible for you becomes not only possible but indispensable, you cannot do otherwise.

10 February 1951

(*CWM*, Vol. 4, p. 94)

\* \* \*

### **A quote from Sri Aurobindo**

Here is another quotation by Sri Aurobindo which will show you that your question is an ignorant one. There are many others which you could read to advantage and which will make your intelligence more supple:

“If there is not a complete surrender, then it is not possible to adopt the baby cat attitude,—it becomes mere tamasic passivity calling itself surrender. If a complete surrender is not possible in the beginning, it follows that personal effort is necessary.”

[*SABCL*, Vol. 23, pp. 593-94]

16 December 1964

(*CWM*, Vol. 16, p. 310)

\* \* \*

### **Mother cats**

...in animals there is sometimes a very intense psychic truth. Naturally, I believe that the psychic being is a little more formed, a little more conscious in a child than in an animal. But I have experimented with animals, just to know; well, I assure you that in human beings I have rarely come across some of the virtues which I have seen in animals, very simple, unpretentious virtues. As in cats, for example: I have studied cats a lot; if one knows them well they are marvellous creatures. I have known mother-cats which have sacrificed themselves entirely for their babies—people speak of maternal love with such admiration, as though it were purely a human privilege, but

I have seen this love manifested by mother-cats to a degree far surpassing ordinary humanity. I have seen a mother-cat which would never touch her food until her babies had taken all they needed. I have seen another cat which stayed eight days beside her kittens, without satisfying any of her needs because she was afraid to leave them alone; and a cat which repeated more than fifty times the same movement to teach her young one how to jump from a wall on to a window, and I may add, with a care, an intelligence, a skill which many uneducated women do not have. And why is it thus?—since there was no mental intervention. It was altogether spontaneous instinct. But what is instinct?—it is the presence of the Divine in the genus of the species, and that, that is the psychic of animals; a collective, not an individual psychic.

I have seen in animals all the reactions, emotional, affective, sentimental, all the feelings of which men are so proud. The only difference is that animals cannot speak of them and write about them, so we consider them inferior beings because they cannot flood us with books on what they have felt.

8 January 1951

(CWM, Vol. 4, pp. 27-28)

\* \* \*

### **A marvellous cat**

I had a very sweet little cat, absolutely civilised, a marvellous cat. It was born in the house and it had the habit all cats have, that is to say, if something moved, it played with that. Just then there was in the house a huge scorpion; as was its habit, the cat started playing with the scorpion. And the scorpion stung it. But it was an exceptional cat; it came to me, it was almost dying, but it showed me its paw where it was bitten—it was already swollen and in a terrible state. I took my little cat—it was really sweet—and put it on a table and called Sri Aurobindo. I told him, “Kiki has been stung by a scorpion, it must be cured.” The cat stretched its neck and looked at Sri Aurobindo, its eyes already a little glassy. Sri Aurobindo sat before it and looked at it also. Then we saw this little cat gradually beginning to recover, to come around, and an hour later it jumped to its feet and went away completely healed.... In those days, I had the habit of holding a meditation in the room where Sri Aurobindo slept (the room A uses now) and it was regularly the same people who came; everything was arranged. But there was an armchair in which this very cat always settled beforehand—it did not wait for anyone to get into the chair, it got in first itself! And regularly it went into a trance! It was not sleeping, it was not in the pose cats take when sleeping: it was in a trance, it used to start up, it certainly had visions. And it let out little sounds. It was in a profound trance. It remained thus for hours together. And when it came out from that state, it refused to eat. It was awakened and given

food, but it refused: it went back to its chair and fell again into a trance! This was becoming very dangerous for a little cat.... But this was not an ordinary cat.

To finish my story, if you leave an animal in its normal state, far from man, it obeys the spirit of the species, it has a very sure instinct and it will never commit any stupidities. But if you take it and keep it with you, it loses its instinct, and it is then you who must look after it, for it no longer knows what should or should not be done. I was interested in cats to make an experiment, a sort of inverse metempsychosis, if one can call it that, that is, to see if this could be their last incarnation as animals, if they were ready to enter a human body in the next life. The experiment succeeded fully, I had three absolutely flagrant instances; they left with a psychic being sufficiently conscious to enter a human body. But this is not what men ordinarily do; what they usually do is to spoil the consciousness or rather the instinct of animals.

22 March 1951

(CWM, Vol. 4, pp. 237-39)

\* \* \*

### **Two remarkable instances**

There are some very remarkable instances of exteriorisation. I am going to tell you two incidents about cats which occurred quite a long time ago in France. One happened very long ago, long before the war even. We used to have small meetings every week—quite a small number of friends, three or four, who discussed philosophy, spiritual experiences, etc. There was a young boy, a poet, but one who was rather light-minded; he was very intelligent, he was a student in Paris. He used to come regularly to these meetings (they took place on Wednesday evenings) and one evening he did not come. We were surprised; we had met him a few days before and he had said he would come—he did not come. We waited quite a long time, the meeting was over and at the time of leaving I opened the door to let people out (it was at my house that these meetings were held), I opened the door and there before it sat a big dark grey cat which rushed into the room like mad and jumped upon me, like this, mewing desperately. I looked into its eyes and told myself, “Well, these are so-and-so’s eyes” (the one who was to come). I said, “Surely something has happened to him.” And the next day we learnt that he had been assassinated that night; the next morning he had been found lying strangled on his bed. This is the first story. The other happened long afterwards, at the time of the war—the First [World] War, not the Second—the war of the trenches. There was a young man I knew very well; he was a poet and artist (I have already spoken about him), who had gone to the war. He had enlisted, he was very young; he was an officer. He had given me his photograph. (This boy was a student of Sanskrit and knew Sanskrit very well, he liked Buddhism very much; indeed he was much interested in things of the spirit, he was



not an ordinary boy, far from it.) He had given me his photograph on which there was a sentence in Sanskrit written in his own hand, very well written. I had framed this photograph and put it above a sort of secretaire (a rather high desk with drawers); well, above it I had hung this photograph. And at that time it was very difficult to receive news, one did not know very well what was happening. From time to time we used to receive letters from him, but for a long time there had been nothing, when, one day, I came into my room, and the moment I entered, without any apparent reason the photograph fell from the wall where it had been well fixed, and the glass broke with a great clatter. I felt a little anxious, I said, "There is something wrong." But we had no news. Two or three days later (it was on the first floor; I lived in a house with one room upstairs, all the rest on the ground-floor, and there was a flight of steps leading to the garden) I opened the entrance door and a big grey cat rushed in—light grey, this time—a magnificent cat, and, just as the other one had done, it flung itself upon me, like this, mewling. I looked into its eyes—it had the eyes of... that boy. And this cat, it turned and turned around me and all the time tugged at my dress and miaowed. I wanted to put it out, but it would not go, it settled down there and did not want to move. The next day it was announced in the papers that this boy had been found dead between two trenches, dead for three days. That is, at the time he must have died his photograph had fallen. The consciousness had left the body completely: he was there abandoned, because they did not always go to see what was happening between the trenches; they could not, you understand; he was found two or three days later; at that time probably he had gone out altogether from his body and wanted definitely to inform me about what had happened and he had found that cat. For cats live in the vital, they have a very developed vital consciousness and can easily be taken possession of by vital forces.

But these two examples are quite extraordinary, for they both came about almost in the same way, and in both instances the eyes of these cats had completely changed—they had become human eyes.

14 April 1951

(CWM, Vol. 4, pp. 320-22)

\* \* \*

### **Cat and mouse**

People always speak about the wickedness of cats, for instance, playing with the mouse before eating it. That's an example given to children; but I have seen cats. I know what they do. It is not at all true. They don't do this at all through malice. Usually it happens like this: the mother-cat hunts for the little ones and catches a mouse. If it were to give the mouse immediately to the kittens to eat, they wouldn't be able to eat it, for it is hard, tough, and they don't have the capacity to eat such hard, tough flesh. Besides, it is also bad when it is like that. So they play with it (they

seem to be playing with it), they toss it about, roll it, catch it, let it run, run after it, until it is very nicely softened. And then, when it is well softened, ready for eating, and the meat already worked upon, then they give it to the little ones who can now eat it. But certainly they don't go and play with the mouse for the pleasure of playing! They hunt first, you see, and then prepare the dinner. They have neither furnace nor fire to cook and soften the thing. They must prepare it and make it ready for eating.

But it is also said that the first expression of love in living beings is the desire to devour. One wants to absorb, desires to devour. There is one instance which would seem to prove that this is not altogether false—that is when the tiger catches its prey or the snake its victim, it happens that both the tiger's and the snake's victims give themselves up in a kind of delight of being eaten.

8 July 1953

(CWM, Vol. 5, pp. 148-149)

\* \* \*

### Superstitions

They depend upon the countries, besides; these things are quite local and one may even find contradictory superstitions in different countries. In certain countries if you see a black cat, it is a sign that a catastrophe will come. In others if you see a black cat, it means that something very fine will happen! If you put things together you will come to the conclusion that nothing at all will happen to you! It is like that. Almost all superstitions are the result of an experience that is quite local, occasional, exceptional, which has been raised into a mental principle. It is a mental formation, it is not a rule.

15 July 1953

(CWM, Vol. 5, p. 153)

\* \* \*

### Aspiration

I knew animals which aspired to become human beings, but they were living with human beings. Cats and dogs, for example, which lived in a close intimacy with human beings, truly had an aspiration. I had a cat which was very, very unhappy for being a cat, it wanted to be a man. It had an untimely death. It used to meditate, it certainly did a kind of sadhana of its own, and when it left, even a portion of its vital being reincarnated in a human being. The little psychic element that was at the centre of the being went directly into a man, but even what was conscious in the vital of the cat went into a human being. But these are rather exceptional cases.

19 August 1953

(CWM, Vol. 5, pp. 227-28)

\* \* \*

## A mother's love

*Sweet Mother, what kind of love do parents have for their children?*

What kind? A human love, don't they? Like all human loves: frightfully mixed, with all sorts of things. The need of possession, a formidable egoism. At first, I must tell you that a wonderful picture has been painted... many books written, wonderful things said about a mother's love for her children. I assure you that except for the capacity of speaking about the subject in flowery phrases, the love of the higher animals like the... well, the mammals for their children is exactly of the same nature: the same devotion, the same self-forgetfulness, the same self-denial, the same care for education, the same patience, the same... I have seen absolutely marvellous things, and if they had been written down and applied to a woman instead of to a cat, superb novels would have been made, people would have said: "What a person! How marvelously devoted are these women in their maternal love!" Exactly the same thing. Only, cats could not use flowery language. That's all. They could not write books and make speeches, that is the only difference. But I have seen absolutely astonishing things. And that kind of self-giving and self-oblivion—as soon as there is the beginning of love, it comes. But men... I sincerely believe, from all that I have studied, that there is perhaps a greater purity in animals for they do not think, while human beings with their mental power, their capacity of reflecting, reasoning, analysing, studying, all that, oh! They spoil the most lovely movement. They begin to calculate, reason, doubt, organise.

14 April 1954

(CWM, Vol. 6, p. 106)

\* \* \*

## Taming a cat!

He [*an Austrian who used to deal with wild animals*] had so terrific a will that without a whip, simply by the persistence of his will, he made them do all that he wanted. But he knew very well that it was a dangerous profession. He had no illusions about it. He told me that he had learnt this work with a cat—a cat!

He was a man who, apart from his work as a trader in wild animals, was an artist. He loved to draw, loved painting, and he had a cat in his studio. And it was in this way that he began becoming interested in animals. This cat was an extremely independent one, and had no sense of obedience. Well, he wanted to make a portrait of his cat. He put it on a chair and went to sit down at his easel. Frrr... the cat ran away. So he went to look for it, took it back, put it back on the chair without even raising his voice, without scolding it, without saying anything to it, without hurting it

of course or striking it. He took it up and put it back on the chair. Now, the cat became more and more clever. In the studio in some nooks there were canvasses, canvasses on which one paints, which were hidden and piled on one another, behind, in the corners. So the cat went and sat there behind them. It knew that its master would take some time to bring out all those canvasses and catch it; the man, quietly, took them out one by one, caught the cat and put it back in its place.

He told me that once from sunrise to sunset he did this without stopping. He did not eat, the cat did not eat (*laughter*), he did that the whole day through; at the end of the day it was conquered. When its master put it on the chair it remained there (*laughter*) and from that time onwards it never again tried to run away. Then he told himself, “Why not try the same thing with the bigger animals?” He tried and succeeded.

26 January 1955

(CWM, Vol. 7, pp. 27-28)

\* \* \*

### **A very human cat**

There are movements of certain vibrations which are vibrations of the species, you see, movements peculiar to the species to which you belong—there is the human species as there are all kinds. Now, some of these movements are not personal movements at all, they are movements of the species.

The human species has certain ways of being which are particular to it, which we reproduce almost automatically, as for example, walking upright, like this (*gesture*), whereas a cat goes on four feet, you see. This instinct of standing on one’s two hind feet, upright, is peculiar to man, it is a movement that belongs to the species; to sit as we do with the head up, you see, to lie down as we do on the back...

You have only to watch animals: they lie down curled up, don’t they? Almost all. It is with man that this way of lying on one’s back, stretched out, begins, I think; I don’t at all think that monkeys sleep like that, I think they sleep doubled up, that it is man who has started habits of this kind. And this reminds me...

I had a cat—in those days I used to sleep on the floor—which always came and slipped under the mosquito-net and slept beside me. Well, this cat slept quite straight, it did not sleep as cats do; it put its head here and then lay down like this (*gesture*), alongside my legs with its two forepaws like this, and its two little hind legs quite straight. And there was something very, very curious about it which I saw one night, like that. I used to ask myself why it was like this, and one night I saw a little Russian woman of the people with a fur bonnet and three little children, and this woman had a kind of adoration for her children and always wanted to look for a shelter for them; I don’t know, I don’t know the story, but I saw that she had her three little children, very small ones, with her... one like this, one like that, one like that (*Mother shows*

*the difference in height*), and she was dragging them along with her and looking for a corner to put them in safety. Something must have happened to her, she must have died suddenly with a kind of very animal maternal instinct of a certain kind, but all full of fear—fear, anguish and worry—and this something must have come from there and in some way or other had reincarnated. It was a movement—it was not a person, you know, it was a movement which belonged to this person and must have come up in the cat. It was there for some reason or other, you see, I don't know how it happened, I know nothing about it, but this cat was completely human in its ways. And very soon afterwards it had three kittens, like that; and it was extraordinary, it didn't want to leave them, it refused to leave them, it was entirely... it did not eat, did not go to satisfy its needs, it was always with its young. When one day it had an idea—nobody had said anything, of course—it took one kitten, as they take them, by the skin of the neck, and came and put it between my feet; I did not stir; it returned, took the second, put it there; it took the third, it put it there, and when all three were there, it looked at me, mewed and was gone. And this was the first time it went out after having had them; it went to the garden, went to satisfy its needs and to eat, because it was at peace, they were there between my feet. And when it had its young, it wanted to carry them on its back like a woman. And when it slept beside me, it slept on the back. It was never like a cat.

Well, these things are habits of the species, movements of the species. There are many others of the kind, you see, but this is an example.

23 March 1955

(CWM, Vol. 7, pp. 96-98)

\* \* \*

### **An admirable cat**

There was a cat... what its name was I don't know; and I had many cats, you know, so I don't remember now; there was one called Kiki, it was the first son of this cat, and then there was another, its second son (that is to say, born another time) which was called Brownie.

This one was admirable and it died of the cat disease—as there is a disease of the dogs, there is a disease of the kittens—I don't know how it caught the thing, but it was wonderful during its illness and I was taking care of it as of a child. And it always expressed a kind of aspiration. There was a time before it fell ill... we used to have in those days meditation in a room of the Library House, in the room there—Sri Aurobindo's own room—and we used to sit on the floor. And there was an armchair in a corner, and when we gathered for the meditation this cat came every time and settled in the armchair and literally it entered into a trance, it had movements of trance; it did not sleep, it was not asleep, it was truly in a trance; it gave signs of that and had

astonishing movements, as when animals dream; and it didn't want to come out from it, it refused to come out, it remained in it for hours. But it never came in until we were beginning the meditation. It settled there and remained there throughout the meditation. We indeed had finished but it remained, and it was only when I went to take it, called it in a particular way, brought it back into its body, that it consented to go away; otherwise no matter who came and called it, it did not move. Well, this cat always had a great aspiration, a kind of aspiration to become a human being; and in fact, when it left its body it entered a human body. Only it was a very tiny part of the consciousness, you see, of the human being; it was like the opposite movement from that of the woman with the other cat. But this one was a cat which leaped over many births, so to say, many psychic stages to enter into contact with a human body. It was a simple enough human body, but still, all the same...

There is a difference in the development of a cat and of a human being...  
It happens... I think these are exceptional cases, but still it happens.

*In these cases is the psychic conscious?*

The aspiration is conscious, yes, conscious. The aspiration was very conscious in it, very conscious. It is not a formed psychic as when the psychic becomes a completely independent being, it is not that; but it is an aspiration, it is an ardent aspiration for progress—as we, you know, we have the aspiration to become supramental beings instead of remaining human beings, well, it was something absolutely similar: it was a cat doing yoga—exactly—to become a man.

It was perhaps because its mother had in it a movement, a formation, an emanation of consciousness which had belonged to a human being; it is probably that which had left a kind of nostalgia for the human life which gave it this intensity of aspiration. But truly it did yoga for that.

23 March 1955

(CWM, Vol. 7, pp. 98-100)

\* \* \*

### **Integral Yoga and the cat**

If all your being, as it is, participates in the yoga, it becomes for you an integral yoga. But your participation may be very poor and mediocre compared with that of someone else, and the number of elements of consciousness which you contain may be very small compared with the elements of consciousness contained in another person. And yet your yoga is integral for you, that is, it is done in all the parts and all the activities of your being.

You know, I had a cat which was doing yoga. Well, the yoga of the cat could not

be as powerful as the yoga of man, and yet it was *as* integral, it was quite complete; even its body took part in its yoga. But its way of doing it, naturally, was not human.

4 January 1956

(CWM, Vol. 8, pp. 7-8)

\* \* \*

### **Intelligence in Nature**

There is an intelligence which acts in her [*Nature*] and through her, in her action, but she is not conscious of this intelligence. You can understand this with animals. Take ants, for example. They do exactly what they have to do; all their work and organisation is something which really looks perfect. But they are not conscious of the intelligence which organises them. They are moved mechanically by an intelligence of which they are not aware. And even if you take the most developed animals, like the cat and dog for instance, they know exactly what they have to do: a cat bringing up its little ones brings them up just as well as a woman hers—sometimes better than a woman but it is impelled by an intelligence which moves it automatically. It is not conscious of the intelligence which makes it do things. It is not aware of it, it can't change anything at all in the movement by its own will. Something makes it act mechanically but over that it has no control.

If a human being intervenes and trains a cat, he can make it change its behaviour; but it is the consciousness of the human being which acts upon it, not its own consciousness. It is not conscious of the intelligence which makes it act.

And this kind of self-awareness, this possibility of watching oneself acting, of understanding why one does things, how one does them and, therefore, of having a control and changing the action—that belongs to the mind and in his own right to man. This is the essential difference between a man and an animal—that a man is conscious of himself, that he can become aware of the force which makes him act, and not only become aware of it but control it.

15 February 1956

(CWM, Vol. 8, p. 60)

\* \* \*

### **Need to become something other**

Sri Aurobindo says here 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 “incorrigible” 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.

4 December 1957

(CWM, Vol. 9, pp. 233-34)



## Looking at the supramental world

Between the beings of the supramental world and men, almost the same separation exists as between men and animals. Some time ago I had the experience of identification with animal life, and it is a fact that animals do not understand us; their consciousness is so constructed that we elude them almost entirely. And yet I have known pet animals—cats and dogs, but especially cats—that used to make an almost yogic effort of consciousness to reach us. But usually, when they see us as we live and act, they do not understand, they do not *see* us as we are and they suffer because of us. We are a constant enigma to them. Only a very tiny part of their consciousness has a link with us. And it is the same thing for us when we try to look at the supramental world.

19 February 1958

(CWM, Vol. 9, p. 271)

\* \* \*

## The cat and the asp

...an incident in which I helped a cat to defeat a little asp (there are asps there [in Tlemcen], like those of Cleopatra, very dangerous). It was a big ginger angora cat who had first begun to play with and then, naturally was infuriated by the asp. The asp would spring at him, and the cat... (I watched this for over ten minutes, it was extraordinary), the cat would jump aside so swiftly that the asp went like that, at a tangent. And at the moment when the asp passed him, the cat would take a swipe at it, claws bared—and each time the cat would inflict a scratch. The snake little by little began to lose its energy, and finally... I prevented the cat from eating the snake because it was disgusting.

(From a conversation of 4 February, 1961)

\* \* \*

## Stories of cats

*(The disciple had asked Mother's permission to poison some cats which were bothering him.)*

I had a cat which had almost the consciousness of a child, and it was poisoned. And the day when he came like that, poisoned, dying, I cursed all the people who poison cats. And that, is serious. So it should not be done. It was a real curse (it was with Sri Aurobindo, so it was serious), so do not do it.

But there is a way....

You know, I have a pact with cats, with the king of cats—it goes back very, very far. And it is extraordinary (it happened in Tlemcen, entirely on the occult plane), extraordinary! For certain reasons, the king of cats gave me a power over these creatures—and it is true. But I have to see them.

We shall try.

...

Cats are vital forces. They are incarnations of vital forces. The king of cats, that is to say, the spirit of the species, is a being of the vital world.

Cats, for examples, can very easily incarnate the vital force of a person who is dead. I have had two absolutely amazing experiences, like this.

The first, it was with a boy who was a student of Sanskrit and he wished to come to India with us. He was the son of a French ambassador, from an old, noble family. But his lungs were not good, and when he was told that, he joined the Army, just at the beginning of the war of 1914 (he was an officer). And he had the courage of those who no longer hold on to life. When he was given the order to emerge from the trenches and occupy the enemy trenches (it was utterly stupid! It was simply sending people to the slaughterhouse), but he did not hesitate, he went. He was hit between the two lines. For a long time, it was a no man's land; it was only after some days, when the other trench had been taken, that the dead could be picked up. All this, we came to know afterwards, from the newspapers. But the day he was killed, no one was aware of it, evidently.

I had a photo of him with a Sanskrit dedication (a beautiful photo), and I had placed it on top of a kind of chest which was in my bedroom. I open the door and ... the photo falls. (I had not caused any gust or anything of the sort, you know.) It fell and the glass broke into a thousand pieces. Immediately, I said, "Ah! Something has happened to X." ... I came back down from my room after that, and then I hear a mewing at the door (the door opened onto a garden, a large garden courtyard). I open the door: a cat bursts in and jumps on me, like that (*Mother thumps her chest*). So, I speak to him, I tell him, "What is it, what is it?" He falls back on the ground and looks at me—X's eyes! Ab-so-lute-ly his eyes! No one else's eyes but X's. And he clung on, he did not want to go away. I said to myself, "X is dead."

It was only eight days later that we received the news. But the newspapers gave the date, the day when they had emerged from the trenches and where they had been killed—it was that day.

(silence)

The other story is older. I was living in another house: one floor only, the fifth. And once a week I used to hold meetings there with people interested in occultism and who came to see me and have me show or tell them 'things'. There was a Swedish

artist, a French lady and... a young French boy who was a student and a poet. His parents were decent country people who bled themselves white to pay for his life in Paris. This boy was very intelligent and a true artist, but he was dissolute (we knew he was dissolute, but we did not bother: it did not concern us, it was his private life). That evening, there was to be a meeting (we were to be four or five): this boy did not come. He had said he would come and he did not come. We had our meeting, we did not think much about it—we thought he must have been busy elsewhere. But at the time when the people were leaving, around midnight, I open the door: a big black cat was sitting in front of the door, and in a single bound, jumps on me, like that, curled up in a ball. So I calm it down, I look at it—ah! The eyes of... (I do not recollect that boy's name) "Ah, the eyes of so-and-so!" So, immediately (at the time we were doing occultism), immediately, we said, "Something has happened; he has not been able to come and this cat had incarnated his vital force."

The next day, all the newspapers were full of a vile murder: a procurer had murdered this boy—disgusting! Something absolutely disgusting. And just, just before the time he was to have come, it happened—he had been seen, the caretaker had seen him going into that house with this procurer. What had happened? Was it just for money or for something else—vice? Or what?

But both times, the incarnation was so (how to say?) powerful that the eyes changed; the eyes of the cat had become absolutely the eyes of the dead person, one could not make a mistake. And sent to me. In the two cases, the same movement, the same... a sort of cat's howling—you know what it is.

But I have had cats.... I had a female cat who was the reincarnation of the mental portion of a Russian woman. This woman (I had the vision one day, it was so strange) this woman had been killed. She was Russian and she had been assassinated at the time of the Revolution there; she had two little children who had also been massacred. And then it [the mental part of the Russian woman] entered a cat here (how? I don't know). But this cat, my child (I got her when she was very young), she would come and lie down (I used to sleep on the floor, on a Japanese tatami), she would come and lie down like that, stretched out like that, like a human being, with her head on my arm! And she would remain lying there, quietly—did not move! The whole night. I was very amazed. Then she had kittens: and she wanted to give birth to them lying stretched out, not like a cat. It was very difficult to make her understand that the kittens could not come that way! And she had her kittens, one night, I saw her ... I saw a young woman in furs, with a fur bonnet, one could just see a tiny face which was human; she had two little ones and she would come to me and place them, like this, at my feet. And so, there was her whole story in her consciousness: how she had been assassinated and the children. And then I realised that it was the cat!

The cat did not want to leave her little ones, she did not want to! Not for anything! She would not eat, would not go outside to relieve herself, nothing: she remained there. So I told her, "Bring me your little ones" (cats understand very well when we

speak to them, when one knows how to take care of them), “Bring me your little ones.” So she looked at me, she went: she took one of her kittens and placed it between my feet, then she went to fetch the other one and placed it between my feet (not beside, between my feet). So I told her, “Now you can go out.” And she went out.

I had another cat: it was called Kiki. He had a wonderful colour! It was just like velvet. We used to have meditations and he would come; he would sit on a chair and he would go into trance; he would make the brusque movements of trance during the meditation. And it had to be me who had to wake him, otherwise he would not awake.

This one was stung by a scorpion—he was very imprudent, he would play with scorpions. One day, I rescued him: there was a big scorpion, like that, and I came onto the verandah just when this young fellow was playing with the scorpion. I caught the cat, put him on my shoulder and I killed the scorpion. But another time, I was not there, and he was stung. He came: it was over. I saw clearly that he had been poisoned by a scorpion, there were certain signs. I put him on a table and went to call Sri Aurobindo. “Kiki has been stung by a scorpion,” I said; (he was dying, isn’t it, almost in a coma.) Sri Aurobindo pulled up a chair, sat down facing the table and began to gaze at Kiki. This lasted about twenty or twenty-five minutes. Then, suddenly, the cat relaxed, completely, and... fell asleep. When he woke up, he was fully cured.

Sri Aurobindo did not touch him, he did not do anything: he simply gazed at him.

I had another, the one I called Big Boy. Oh, how beautiful he was, this cat! He was enormous! He had a tail—it was like the train [of a gown]. He was beautiful! And there were all kinds of cats prowling around (including a cat which was not ours at all, a big fierce tomcat who was extremely vicious). So I was very afraid for this one when he was little and I got him accustomed to spend his nights inside (which for a cat is difficult). I had forbidden him to go out. So he spent all his nights inside and, in the morning, when I got up, he got up too and would come and sit in front of me, and then I would tell him, “All right, Big Boy, you can go,” he would jump out the window and go off—but not before, never before. And this is the one who was poisoned.

Because, later, he would roam about: he had become terribly strong and would prowl around everywhere. At that time, I was living there, in the Library House, and he would go off as far as this street here (the Ashram did not belong to us yet: the house was owned by all kinds of people), but when I would go out on the terrace across from Champaklal’s kitchen and call, “Big Boy! Big Boy!” (he could not hear), he could sense it, and he would gallop, gallop, he always came back here, he never missed it. One day he did not come back. So, I was worried; the servant went looking for him—and found him moaning, vomiting, poisoned. He brought him to me. Oh, really! it was.... He was so nice! He was not a thief or anything you know: he was a wonderful cat. Someone had laid out poison for god knows what cat, and he had eaten it. I told Sri Aurobindo and showed him the cat: “He has been killed.”

Before that, I lost another one (there was a kind of typhoid that cats get). He was called Brownie, how beautiful he was, how nice he was! Oh! This one was such a wonderful cat! Even when he was extremely sick, he would not make a mess, except in a corner I had prepared just for that; he would call me to carry him to his box. He would call me with a voice, oh! so soft and mournful. He was so nice, with something softer than a child's, more trusting, it is more trusting, there is a trust in animals which does not exist in humans (children already have too much of a mind that questions). But there, it was a kind of worship, of adoration as soon as I took him in my arms—if he could have smiled, he would have. As soon as I held him, he was blissful.

That one too was beautiful, with such a colour! It was brown-bronze, I have never seen a cat like that. He is buried here beneath the tree I have named 'Service', I put him beneath the roots myself. There was a mango tree there, and the mango tree was withering, it was old; it was replaced with a little copper pod tree with yellow flowers.

They are so nice, these animals, when one knows how to treat them.

And so this cat... When I moved here, to the Ashram, I said, "We cannot keep cats in this house, it is quite impossible," so I let them go (it was after Big Boy's death, we had had enough of cats). I gave away the ones that remained. But the first one, who was the mother of the whole line, was old and did not want to leave. She remained in a house over there, within the Ashram compound. And one day (she was very old,... she did not move any more), one day, I saw her come dragging herself and sitting down on that terrace there, on the other side, (now you cannot see any more—the Service tree has hidden everything—but in those days you could see very clearly), she came, she sat down over there and she remained there... until she died. She died there, quietly, without moving, looking at me.

All these stories of cats!... If we had a series of photographs, we could have made a pretty little album of stories of cats.

And extraordinary details, extraordinary! revealing such intelligence, oh! ... This woman, I mean this cat who had been a woman, if you knew how she taught her children, oh! With such patience, such intelligence and understanding! It was extraordinary. One could tell long, long stories: how she taught them not to be afraid, to walk along the edge of walls, to jump from a wall to a window; and then she showed them, encouraged them, and finally, after showing and encouraging them very often (there were some who would jump, others were afraid), she would give them a push! So naturally, they jumped immediately.

And how she taught them everything, everything, to eat, to.... This cat would not eat before they had all eaten, never. She would show them what to do, give each one what was required. And then, when they had grown up and she did not have to look after them anymore, if they kept coming back to her, she would send them away: "Go away! Your turn is over, it is finished. Go out into the world!" And she would

take care of the new ones.

Once, one of her kittens was ill. She was pretty and grey, pale grey like those furs, very soft fur. Anyway, she was very pretty. She too had caught this cat sickness and was lying there. And the mother was teaching all the little ones not to come near her: she made them take a big detour, as if instinctively she knew that it could be contagious. And you would see them (the sick kitten was right in their way), taking a big detour, never coming near.

These stories of cats went on for years and years....

And it is not true that they do not obey! It is just that we do not know how to handle them. Cats are extremely sensitive to the vital force, to vital power, and one can make them perfectly obedient. And with such devotion! It is said that cats are neither devoted nor attached, nor faithful—that is not true, not at all true. One can have perfectly friendly relationships with them.

And incredible! This cat, she was very pretty, but she had a wretched tail, a tail like an ordinary cat (!) and once, when I was with her at the window, one of the neighbour's cats came into the garden: an angora with three colours, (three very prominent colours), and such a beautiful tail trailing behind! So I said (my cat was just beside me), "Oh! see how beautiful she is! What a beautiful tail she has, see how beautiful she is!" And I could see: she was looking—and, my child, in her next litter she had one like that! How did she manage it? I don't know. Three prominent colours and a magnificent tail! Did she hunt up a male angora? Or was it just like that, because she had willed it strongly?

They are amazing, you cannot imagine! Once, she was very heavy, and it was just when she was due to give birth, she was walking along the window ledge and ... I don't know what happened, but she fell. She had wanted to jump from the ledge, but she did not do it right and she fell. It must have injured something. The kittens did not come right away, they came later, but three of them were deformed (there were six in all). Well, she just sat on them! When she saw them like that, she sat on them; she killed them as soon as they were born. Such incredible wisdom! (They were completely deformed: the hind paws were turned the wrong way round—they would have had an impossible life.)

And she used to count her little ones; she knew perfectly well how many she had. Only, when I said to her, "Keep only two or three" (the first time, it was absolutely impossible, all had to be kept—moreover, there were only three, which was still too many). But later on, I had to scold her. I did not take them from her, but I would speak to her, convince her: "It is too much, you will be ill. Just keep these. See how nice these two are. Take care of them."

Oh! what lovely stories of cats. That was a whole period ... for how many years? ... many years.

Mind you, I would never have thought of it, but when I came to the house, there were cats, two cats who were not very interesting, but they became the parents of this

one [I just told you about] (those boys who were living with Sri Aurobindo, they had already had some experience; they knew quite a few things about cats), and that was the origin of all the cats I had here. But people (you know how simplistic they always are!) believed I had some special attachment for cats! And so, naturally, everybody started keeping cats! It was no use my telling them, “No, it is a kind of study (I wanted to see, to learn certain things, and I learned what I had to), but now that I have moved to another house, it is over; the old friends are gone, only the younger generation is left.” I gave them all away and said, “That’s enough.” But it is hard to make people understand—some here have 25 cats! They are not reasonable! But that is not the way to deal with cats; one must look after them as I used to, then it becomes interesting.

There was one,—I know I *saw*: when he died there was already the embryo of a psychic being which was ready for a human incarnation—I had made them skip the stages.

(From a conversation of 12 April 1961)

\* \* \*

### Too many cats

...I have been told that in Aspiration there is a big number of cats and dogs. It is true? You know, I have nothing against cats and dogs. I have kept some also at one time. But the climate is not good; it is almost impossible to avoid... to avoid rabies. And then, you understand, it becomes dangerous and you will have to kill them, which is not a pleasant business. It would be better to diminish the number as much as possible. I have been obliged to ask not to keep dogs; some keep them all the same. But you can’t have a pleasant contact with them. They carry the illness. There are some diseases, rather serious, and dogs, cats, carry them. I don’t want to give nasty descriptions, but... It is not safe and it cannot be peaceful. Do you know the illness they carry? There are two: one is plague, the other is leprosy.

Are they personal animals or belonging to the community?

*A: Some belong to the community, but some are personally owned.*

They live in their huts?

*A: Some of them.* (Murmurs of disagreement; A corrects himself) *No, they don’t live in the huts any more.*

They are not allowed to come in?

*A: No, not in the huts, but even so they are in the camp. They are often in the cafeteria where we have our meals.*

And then, well, they breed. (*Laughter*) There is no end to it. And breeding—what can we do? Drown them all? It is not pleasant. Naturally, you could easily tell me: if we chase them away from here they will go somewhere else. But, anyway, what I would like is that this should not be encouraged. You know, you will have

more cats and dogs than human beings. That's how it is....

In fact, all I am asking you to do is not to allow the number to increase, in any case. One day you will come to me all in tears, saying: life has become unbearable! (*Laughter*) So, I am warning you.

21 April 1970

(CWM, Vol. 13, pp. 327-28)

\* \* \*

## Significance

The cat means receptivity.

21 February 1933

(CWM, Vol. 17, p. 6)

\* \* \*

Cheer up, all will be all right, if we know how to last and endure.  
Love and blessings.

*Cheer up, all will  
be all right, if we know  
how to last and endure.  
Love and blessings*



A happy cat sketched by the Mother to cheer up her unhappy disciple.

(CWM, Vol. 17, pp. 329-30)

THE MOTHER



## APPENDIX

**Animals can think**

Sri Aurobindo: They say that animals can't think or reason. It is not altogether true. They have an intelligence which acts within narrow limits of the needs of their life. These faculties are latent in the animals and have not been developed, that's all. The cats have a language of their own; they utter different kinds of mews for different purposes. For instance, when the mother leaves her kittens behind a box, mewing a particular rhythm, then the kittens understand that they are not to move from that place till she comes back and repeats the mew. It is through rhythm that they express themselves and they understand human language if it is every time in a particular rhythm. ...

Why go further, even in our Ashram the Mother's cat Chikou was unusually clever. One day she was confined in a room and it was discovered that she was trying to open the window in exactly the same way as the Mother used to do. Evidently she had watched the Mother doing it before going to the window and taking up the string.

(A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks*, pp. 661-62)

\* \* \*

**Life is life**

Disciple: There are people who say that killing a dog or a cat is not so sinful as killing a man.

Sri Aurobindo: Life is life—whether in a cat, or dog or man. There is no difference in that between cat or man. The idea of difference is a human conception for man's own advantage perhaps.

(*Ibid.*, p. 607)

\* \* \*

**Cats and yoga**

Sri Aurobindo: It is the Europeans who make a big difference between man and animals. The only difference is the animals can't form a concept, can't read or write or philosophise.

(*laughter*)

Disciple: But they also can't do yoga.

Sri Aurobindo: I don't know that. While Mother and myself were meditating a cat used to be present. We found that she was getting queer and was getting into trance and was almost on the point of death, but recovered. Evidently, she was trying to receive something.

*(Ibid., p. 662)*

\* \* \*

### **Crossing the border**

The animal has its consciousness held and imprisoned by the vital; and when it is ready the consciousness changes to the mental and the animal reincarnates as a human being. Some of our cats are ready for the human birth. In man that transition has taken place, he has crossed the border.

*(Ibid., p. 457)*

\* \* \*

### **Psychic element**

Sri Aurobindo: Well, some flowers have got psychic beauty in them: for instance, the jasmine is a very psychic flower.

Disciple: The flowers have a beauty but it is something new to learn that they have a psychic beauty.

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, it is the beauty of the soul of the flower.

Disciple: Soul of a flower!

Sri Aurobindo: I knew it would astound you. You think the flowers have no soul? It is again man's ignorance that makes him think that he is the greatest being in creation. Many dogs have got a finer psychic being than many men!

Would you believe if I were to tell you that there is a psychic element in the love-making of animals? Take our cat, Big Boy. When he makes love to Bite-bite, he is physical; when he makes love to Baby, he is vital; when he makes love to Mimi, he is emotional and sentimental; and when he makes love to Girly, he is psychic!

Disciple: Then how is it that man is regarded as the highest being in creation?

Sri Aurobindo: It is the egoistic ignorance of man that makes him think so.

*(Ibid., pp. 434-35)*

\* \* \*

## Great Vitality

Sri Aurobindo: They [cats] have great vitality. They disturb the whole atmosphere while they are excited and throw the vital force around when they are in that state. They have wonderful vitality.

(*Ibid.*, p. 391)

\* \* \*

## Cats as representatives of the animal world

At one stage, the Mother showed a special interest in cats. Not only has she been concerned with human beings, but the animal creation and the life of plants too have shared in her direct touch. The Veda speaks of the animal sacrifice, but the Mother has performed her consecration of animals in a very novel sense; she has helped them forward in their upward march with a touch of her Consciousness. She took a few cats as representatives of the animal world. She said, the king of cats who ruled in the occult world—you might call him perhaps their Super-cat—had set up a sort of friendship with her. How this feline brood appeared first in our midst is somewhat interesting. One day all of a sudden a wild-looking cat made its appearance at the Guest-House where we lived then; it just happened to come along and stayed on. It was wild enough when it came, but it soon turned into a tame cat, very mild and polite. When it had its kittens, Sri Aurobindo gave to the first-born the name of Sundari, for she was very fair with a pure white fur. One of Sundari's kittens was styled Bushy, for it had a bushy tail, and its ancestress had now to be given the name of Grandmother. It was about this Bushy that the story runs: she used to pick up with her teeth all her kittens one by one and drop them at the Mother's feet as soon as they were old enough to use their eyes—as if she offered them to the Mother and craved her blessings. You can see how much progress this cat had made in the path of Yoga. Two of these kittens of Bushy are well-known names and became great favourites with the Mother; one was Big Boy and the younger one was Kiki. It is said about one of them—I forget which, perhaps it was Kiki—that he used to join in the collective meditation and meditated like one of us; he perhaps had visions during meditation and his body would shake and tremble while his eyes remained closed. But in spite of this sadhana, he remained in his outward conduct like many of us rather crude in many respects. The two brothers, Big Boy and Kiki, could never see eye to eye and the two had always to be kept apart. Big Boy was a stalwart fellow and poor Kiki got the thrashings. Finally, both of them died of some disease and were buried in the courtyard. Their grandmother disappeared one day as suddenly as she had come and nobody knew anything about her again.

The style in which these cats were treated was something extraordinary. The arrangements made for their food were quite a festive affair; it was for them alone that special cooking was done, with milk and fish and appropriate dressings, as if they were children of some royal family,—all was according to schedule. They received an equally good training: they would never commit nuisance within doors for they had been taught to use the conveniences provided for them. They were nothing like the gipsy-bedouin cats of our Ardhendu.

(Nolini Kanta Gupta, *Reminiscences*, pp. 77-78)

\* \* \*

### **The ever-considerate Master**

The upstairs verandah [of the Library House, 9, rue de la Marine, the house the entrance to which is now the main gate of the Ashram] is hallowed by the Master, for He sat there daily for 2 to 3 hours in the forenoon and about an hour in the afternoon when the Evening Talks took place sometimes with the Master and sometimes among the sadhaks, the Master participating in them when He thought fit or called for.

There was arranged a simple table and an equally simple chair a little to the east of the middle door and there the Master sat, going through the newspapers or seeing some sadhaks or an occasional visitor.

But sometimes before He came, one of the house cats found it comfortable to occupy His chair—perhaps as a matter of right—and would not leave the chair for the Master. It probably wanted to enjoy the celestial warmth emanating from the yogic body of Sri Aurobindo, as the light from the sun. And the ever-considerate Master never disturbed the confident cat in anyway whatsoever, but simply, nay precariously sat on the little border-space all the time He remained there. He was by nature a democrat—more than any democrat. His democratic susceptibility extended not only towards human beings but towards animal life also.

(Pujalal in *Breath of Grace*, pp. 81-82)

\* \* \*

### **Bushy—the cat**

Cats, too, were along with us, bright recipients of the bountiful grace of Sri Aurobindo. For long years, right from His early stay in Pondicherry, i.e., soon after 1910, some lucky cats enjoyed His divine hospitality and made His house their own.

It started like this. A cat persisted in her desire to adopt His house, and although

other house-members were at pains not to allow her there, she remained resolute in her will and won.

Sri Aurobindo thought of working upon cat-consciousness also, and this cat-sadhika found a home for herself and her progeny.

It may need a long chapter for dealing with this cat-colony, which we cannot afford. I will, therefore, limit myself to one, Bushy by name, one who is immortalised by Sri Aurobindo, the Master-Poet in his poem “Despair on the Staircase”.

Bushy was a great devotee of the Mother and the Master. She had made it a rule of her life to follow the Mother like a faithful dog, whenever She came down either for giving of Her soup-prasad or for general meditation. Bushy’s greatest ambition or rather aspiration was to carry her kittens to the Mother and if possible to the Master to be laid at Their feet as her offering.

It was for this reason that she kept her young ones under the corner-cupboard, half-way up the stairs. From here as soon as the door opened and the Mother came out, she would carry them and lay them at Her feet. It was, indeed, a touching sight. How even a cat aspired to make her offering of her dear ones to the divine Mother!

And this was not all. She yearned to lay her offering at the Master’s feet also. But before she could reach Sri Aurobindo’s room there was first the main entrance door to be negotiated and then there was a wooden partition over 7 feet high. So at night when the Master was alone and the Mother in the meditation hall, Bushy would wait at the stairs to take her chance and at the first opportunity jump in with her kitten in her mouth and again jump over the wooden partition, and perhaps have the Master’s darshan, but I don’t know whether she laid her baby at His feet or not.

Sri Aurobindo in His stroll at night must have seen her waiting on the topmost stair at the entrance door, ardently desiring to enter, but being refused the opportunity, showing her pose of self-respect worthy of a cat belonging to the Divine.

There she was in despair, magnificently upholding her dignity. This is the subject of the poem “Despair on the Staircase”, wherein is revealed the way our Lord looked at all creatures. He writes, “Whether she is spirit, woman or a cat” and “A charm and miracle of fur-footed Brahman”. He naturally looked upon all beings as forms of the One Brahman, and in this particular case clearly indicated that there was in her cat-body a future woman too.

*(Ibid., pp. 83-84)*

\* \* \*

## **Pudding**

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. She showed me how to do it and was particular that no grains should be left unmashed. And when she passed on the work to me, I followed her directions to the letter.

And do you know for whom this portion of the pudding was meant? For the cats! Later on I learnt that they were not mere cats but something more. You would be interested to know that at one time Sri Aurobindo himself removed bones from the fish meant for these cats. It was a sight to see him doing it with Chinese chopsticks.

(Champaklal, *Champaklal Speaks*, p. 51)

\* \* \*

### Consideration

[In Library House] Mother used to prepare a soup for Sri Aurobindo. Later she asked me to prepare that soup.

She would take a cupful for Sri Aurobindo and leave some for me, after sipping it. One day it so happened that the cat, Bushy, put her mouth in the cup meant for me. On seeing it, Mother quickly removed the top layer of the soup, herself took a mouthful (normally she used to take just a sip) and then told me: "Take it." She expressed her love and grace in this way in order that I may not shrink from drinking that soup.

[*Bushy also attended the soup ceremony and meditations. She would carry her newborn kittens to Mother and the Master and lay them at their feet. —Editorial Note*]

(*Ibid.*, p. 78)

\* \* \*

### Bushy and the Meditation House

*Today I felt like writing a story.... it is an autobiography of "Bushy" the great cat—and in the opening statement she claims to be one of the greatest personalities in the world.*

Sri Aurobindo: Bushy was the cat who introduced us to this house (Meditation) running before us and showing us all the rooms. That ought to find a place in her autobiography.

12 October 1934

(From the forthcoming *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*)

\* \* \*

### Sadhana on the Physical Level

*Last night during my meditation I saw a cat—probably one of the Mother’s cats, the one which sleeps on the staircase—come and enter the room where I was meditating. But I at once opened my eyes. Would you very kindly let me know the meaning of this cat and why I opened my eyes.*

Sri Aurobindo: If it is the cat Bushy, she has some strange connection with the siddhi in the physical consciousness. It was she who ushered us into our present house running before us into each room. The change to this house marked the change from the sadhana on the vital to the sadhana on the physical level.

7 July 1936

[*Sri Aurobindo and the Mother moved into 28 rue François Martin, the “Meditation House” on 7 February 1927. —Editorial Note*]

(Ditto.)

\* \* \*

Sri Aurobindo: It is no wonder that cats develop human consciousness, if they are in contact with men. We are trying to push the cats in evolution. The cats have a subtle vital being, which is subtly responsive to all sorts of forces. Kiki was always being worsted in fight by any cat. I put vitality into it and from then on Kiki became a fighter; it is always the victor now. Intelligence is more difficult to develop. By repeating certain things, sounds or movements, they can be made to understand them. The cats develop, through coming in contact, [being] in the atmosphere, and also through our efforts. At a certain point, nature resists and we can’t go further.

For example, it would be wrong to try to develop a lion like that. These cats are almost like children, they have the same intensity of feeling. Of course, they are not conscious of the influence, just as children are not conscious, when quite young, of the care bestowed on them by the parents.

The cats respond to suggestion. If they go out, and I send a suggestion to them to come back, they will come back. It requires a little effort at first and it takes some time. It is no wonder if they take a human birth in their next lives. W. will become a lady of fashion, jealous, vain... K. will become a philosopher, rogue, fighter... They may take birth as primitive men, not savage, but undeveloped men. The mental being in them is not yet there...

...If you develop the intelligence of the cats or dogs, they become cunning and roguish.

(From Chidanandam’s notebooks at the Archives)

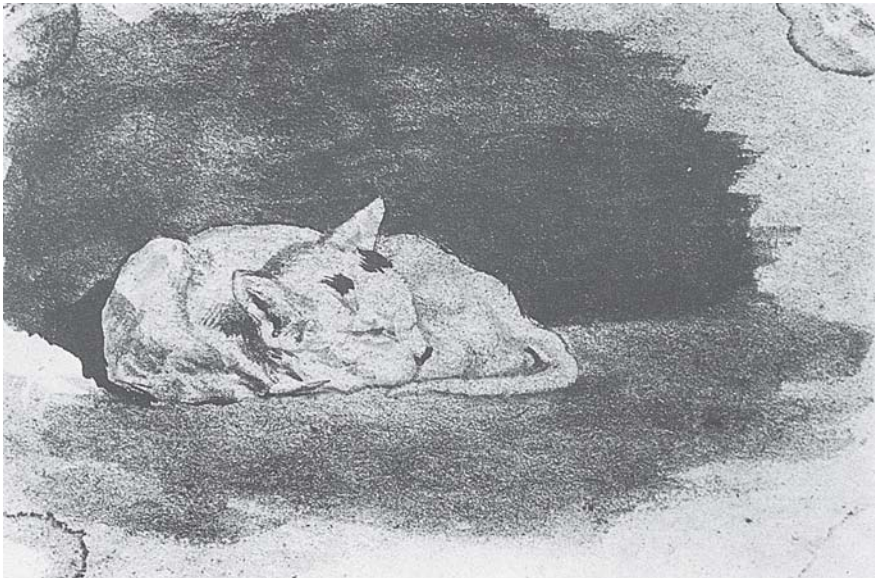
\* \* \*

Sri Aurobindo: The cat is more vital than psychic. The dog is psychic (psychic in the physical) i.e. the development of the dog is one way, of the cat another way.

*(Ibid.)*



Study of a cat—sketch by the Mother



Study of a cat (brush and ink)—by the Mother



## THE MOTHER'S AND SRI AUROBINDO'S WAY WITH ANIMALS

THE MOTHER was known for her love of animals and her deep understanding of their nature. It was a delight to hear her speaking to a cat in a musical tone full of affection, a tenderly modulated baby-talk. She dealt with the Ashram cats as if they had been "persons" with rights. The man who was in charge of the "Prosperity" Room in the thirties was given strict orders not to interfere with the movements of the beautiful female cat Bite-Bite which had made this place its home. If a cupboard was left open by him and Bite-Bite got on to any shelf of it, he had to respect its right to be there: not only was he forbidden to shoo it off but he had also to let it commit nuisance there if it wanted. His job was to develop his own consciousness and remember always to shut the cupboards. Else he should bear with equanimity the catty consequences of his own oversight.

The Mother has recorded many reminiscences of her dealings with cats. When I first came to the Ashram, they were a part of the life in it, serving various occult ends. How powerful the Mother's influence could be was borne in on me when she acted on a semi-wild female cat which she had named "Pichune". It had got into the habit of spoiling the bed of the sadhika—Lalita—who had it for her companion along with two other she-cats named by the Mother "Pink Nose" and "Black Nose". The bed was an unprotected area and no amount of hurdles put in the way of Pichune could prevent its perversity. So at last the Mother was informed. From the very next day Pichune was a well-behaved civilised creature.

Pink Nose had the Mother's darshan just before it died. There is a tribe of people in Pondicherry that looks out for cat-meat. These strange persons carry a long pole with a hook at one end. On seeing a cat pass, they rip open its belly with that hook. Pink Nose got attacked by one of the savages. It ran away and hid itself in a place difficult of access. Somehow Lalita and I pulled it out. We took it in a basket to the Ashram dispensary which at that time was within the main block of buildings. While Lalita stayed with her pet, I waited at the back-entrance of the Ashram through which the Mother used to go for her evening drive and return home. As soon as she was back I told her of what had happened. At once she came with me to the dispensary. She said something and Pink Nose stood on its hind legs and putting its front paws on the top-rim of the basket looked up at the Mother. The Mother again spoke to it. Its little nostrils quivered. After the Mother had gone we had to get it chloroformed for the operation by Dr. Rajangam: its intestines, which were hanging out, had to be put in and the skin stitched. Naturally Pink Nose tried with its paws to slash away at the chloroform wad and the doctors' fingers. So I had to catch its front legs and hold them forcibly wide apart while the chloroforming was being done. It gazed at me with a most pained surprise as if wondering why I who loved it so much was torturing it by stretching apart its legs. Then it went under the anaesthetic and was lifted out to

the operation-table. The intestines were pushed in and the ripped skin joined with stitches but Pink Nose died. Probably the anaesthetic proved too strong for it.

Almost immediately afterwards there was the Mother's Soup Distribution. The memory of Pink Nose's last look at me of unbelieving bewilderment haunted me all through the meditation, it was quite a trial of my Yoga, keeping my mind and heart quiet before I went to the Mother to get my cupful.

Lalita was very grieved, for she had loved the cat dearly. The Mother gave an interesting explanation of the accident that had happened to Pink Nose. In that period there was a talk of Lalita's moving to a better flat. The Mother said that the desire for such a place had become very strong in her, a wrong movement. This movement drew adverse forces. The cat, being extremely open to its owner and thus easily affected by that desire, found itself exposed to the attack. With the cat-eaters around, it fell a victim and thus sidetracked what might have harmed the owner in some subtle occult way affecting her body.

(In those days the inner movements tended very much to have repercussions in the outer being—a hypersensitive connection used to be there. For example, I once had a horrid crop of boils near my eyes and ears. The Mother reminded me of a certain acute desire I had allowed in myself a little earlier.)

Another cat, which was connected with me and had the Mother's darshan in its last hours, was the tom Miel. It was a very handsome animal. Sehra and I were indeed proud that it stayed with us, but it was never quite domesticated. It had sometimes a savage manner, as if it did not quite like our possession of it. In its sixth month, it caught the infection of an enteric epidemic which had already laid low all the cats in the neighbourhood. I have noticed that cats are very hardy creatures and can survive almost unthinkably adverse conditions of life, but when attacked by diseases their proverbial "nine lives" slip away pretty easily. The malady which affected Miel usually kills its victims within a few hours. Miel amazingly held out for nearly three days and went on suffering, most probably because Sehra whose first feline pet it was, and therefore doubly beloved, was extremely attached to it. At our wits' end we took it to the Tennis Ground where the Mother was having her daily game in the afternoon. When her set was over and she was walking out towards her car, we showed Miel to her. She looked into its eyes and said: "You don't look very brilliant, my little one." We had the impression that she found the case hopeless and did something occult to put an end to the "little one's" misery. Two hours later I noticed a dried-up wizened look on Miel's face. Sehra was perturbed. I gave the cat some drops of Coramine. It crawled under my bed and after half an hour died. The Mother confirmed the next day that she had severed the connecting "cord" between the subtle body and the gross.

Sehra was very cut up by the loss of Miel. The Mother, however, soothed her with the words: "You were attached to Miel, but it was not attached to anybody. It had a free wild nature. The relationship was rather one-sided. It was not particularly upset to lose you. It has gone to a special part of the subtle plane where there is a Cat-

Kingdom with a kind of Cat-God ruling it.”

The next cat which we had—Goldie—lived longer. It was very affectionate and spent more than half the night in Sehra's bed, sitting on her chest and purring away. The Mother was apprised of whatever unusual happened to it. Thus, when the wheel of a rickshaw once went over its abdomen, Sehra lost no time in informing her. The Mother said: “Cats have some of their inner organs in a flexible mobile position and when the wheel was felt on the abdomen the organs moved away automatically. If the cat is eating its food normally, you don't have to worry.” Goldie was much upset by the accident, its “mind” was confused for nearly an hour by what had so heavily passed across its body and it was in a slightly bad temper with us for a while. But it recovered soon enough and took its normal meal after a few hours.

The high spot of each day for it was the afternoon outing in my hand-pulled single-person rickshaw. It sat quietly behind my head on the lowered hood while our fox-terrier Bingo sat at my feet and barked at all passers-by who came too near the vehicle. After a full happy life Goldie, like Miel, succumbed to an enteric infection. When the Mother thought the case hopeless we consulted her as to putting it to sleep and thereby sparing it suffering. She said: “It is better to let it live out its life—unless the suffering is too acute.” Goldie died a couple of days later.

Both the dogs which, one after the other, Sehra and I had were also fortunate to be in contact with the Mother. Bingo was already famous with her because it had figured in all the letters we had written from Bombay prior to Sehra's first visit with me to the Holy Land. When on the day of our arrival we went to the Playground, the Mother was standing in the midst of some boys and girls. She put up her right hand in greeting to me and soon came towards us. After Sehra had been introduced and blessed, the Mother caught sight of Bingo which had been given in charge of a friend sitting nearby. Immediately she exclaimed: “I must meet Bingo. I can miss people but Bingo I must meet.” She hurried over to the dog, asked an attendant to bring some groundnuts and offered them to it. Bingo returned the Divine's courtesy with a growl of (I hope) gratitude. Sehra cried out: “Mother, don't be afraid. He won't do anything.” The Mother turned towards her and, smiling, asked: “I afraid?” She fed the groundnuts to Bingo. The English expression “Lucky dog!” could not have been more literally true.

Bingo died in the Ashram while I was in Bombay to see my grandfather pass away. The Mother was kept in touch with its condition from day to day. Our next dog was *Épave*, meaning “Waif”. It was a street pup, a bag of bones, with severe diarrhoea and with a rump hurt by a cow's kick. Thoughtless street-urchins were harassing it. We took it into our garden to let it have a peaceful death. It survived the crisis and grew into a sturdy specimen of a cross between a bull-terrier and a fox-terrier. When, after years of a happy and even “bossy” life, it fell ill and its condition seemed to go from bad to worse, Sehra informed the Mother. The Mother went into a short meditation and then said: “I don't feel it can recover.” Soon after, *Épave* sank into a coma. Our sadhak-friend Barin Ganguly, a great lover of animals and an expert veterinary doctor,

tried his best to bring it round but to no avail. Sehra watched over the inert body all through the night following the evening when she had spoken to the Mother. At one point she felt as if she had to touch the dog to make sure it was alive, but suddenly she saw a faint form approach with outstretched arms and make the motion of taking up Épave. That very moment Épave gave a gasp and died. The next morning Sehra reported the night's experience to the Mother. The Mother said: "Yes, I came to take your dog's soul."

Although within my actual knowledge the Mother had only to do with cats and dogs and the Ashram's bulls and once a small donkey bought by Udar, she was interested in many other animals. She has referred to horses as well as to birds, which, like some cats and dogs known to her, had an aspiration to become human beings. But perhaps the animal she most fancied is the puma. I remember her telling us in the "Prosperity" Room with a very appreciative smile that the puma had a natural affinity with human beings and could make close friends with them. Of course, the dog is best known for such an affinity but the dog has been a domesticated animal for millennia, while the puma is still a denizen of the wild. *The New American Encyclopedia* [1945] has the entry on page 1135: "Puma (or Cougar), a large species of the cat-family found in America, where it ranges from Canada to Patagonia. The puma, sometimes called the American lion, from its tawny color, is about the size of a leopard, which it resembles in habit, preying upon animals up to the size of deer, but rarely attacking man. It is now scarce in North America, but in South America is found both in the tropical forests of Brazil and up in the snow on the Andes." It is surprising that no book comparable to Joy Adamson's series on a lioness and on its young has come out on this carnivore about which the Mother spoke so enthusiastically.

In my presence she twice talked of snakes. Once in connection with the liquid known by its patent name Lexin she said: "You can safely use it for scorpion-stings. But if a snake bites you it is better to inform me immediately." Lexin is really an effective inhalant antidote for all injuries from insects: I have seen it relieve a scorpion-sting within a matter of twenty minutes. I have not seen a case of snake-bite in the Ashram and evidently the Mother was not willing to take any risk with so serious an injury. It is equally evident that she was confident of curing it by her spiritual force.

The second occasion on which she mentioned snakes was when she related an experience of hers during one of the outings she made daily in the late afternoon. She said: "I was walking rather absorbed. Suddenly I saw a snake sliding past just in front of my feet. One step more and I would have trodden upon its body. It never struck me that I might be bitten. The only thought I had was: 'I would hurt the snake by stepping on it.' "

Sri Aurobindo too is known to have dealt with animals. During the years of his association with the Mother he came most into touch with cats. Once Purani found him busy arranging a plate of fish for some cat of the Mother's. It is said that if a cat came and sat on his chair he would not allow anyone to disturb it. A certain dog also

used to go to his room and lick his toes. When the cat Big Boy was about to die, Sri Aurobindo came down from his room and kept caressing it with his right hand. Very few people, however, have heard of his doings with animals prior to his association with the Mother, though there is a clear evidence of a most unexpected kind. In the course of reading the proofs of the Centenary Edition of his works I came across an early writing, entitled "Some Selected Notes", on an epic by Kalidasa. Sri Aurobindo quotes a commentator on Kalidasa's mention of peacocks. The commentator gives an interpretation which says that peacocks are not attached to their environment. Sri Aurobindo rules out this interpretation and remarks: "I have reared peacocks myself and I can assure the reader that they have as much attachment as any other creature." Sri Aurobindo rearing peacocks is indeed a revelation!

But perhaps from the occult viewpoint this is in the fitness of things. The peacock is the national bird of India just as her national flower is the lotus and Sri Aurobindo laid the true foundation of Indian Nationalism, and his date of birth—August 15—coincides with the date of India's Independence. Again, in Sri Aurobindo's own symbology, the peacock stands for Victory. November 24, 1926, is the momentous landmark in the Aurobindonian Yoga, called the Day of Siddhi or Victory: on this occasion the Overmind descended into the physical beings of the Master and the Mother, laying the foundation for the future descent of the Supermind. The Victory Day is also the birthday of the Ashram's real and regular start under the Mother, to whom Sri Aurobindo then handed over the charge of his disciples and of the houses in which he and she and they were residing.

AMAL KIRAN (K. D. SETHNA)

(From *Our Light and Delight*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, 1980, pp. 185-92)

*Closely connected with the Soup Ceremony was a series of meetings between the Mother and a few sadhaks in the Prosperity Room before she went down. ... We sat before the Mother in a rough semi-circle. But there was one exception. At the Mother's feet was a stool, and Chandulal, our Ashram engineer, somehow got to lie flat in front of the Mother with his head resting against the stool, and the soles of his feet displayed to us. "Bite-Bite", the cat, often came and made herself comfortable on Chandulal's chest and he would try to talk to her in the endearing way the Mother used to address cats. His attempts were extremely funny to hear. All of us and the Mother herself laughed heartily.*

*Amal Kiran*

*(Light and Laughter—Some Talks at Pondicherry, by Amal Kiran and Nirodbaran, 2004, pp. 67ff)*

## MOMENTS, ETERNAL

*(Continued from the issue of March 2008)*

AFTER the Mother's physical withdrawal Nolini-da wrote:

So long her physical body was our protection; we did not suffer the full consequences of our Karma because her body acted as a buffer: it broke the force of the impact of the Karma and reduced its evil effects to a minimum.

Let me write about a vision that Nolini-da had. This vision is a clear proof that the Mother, though She did leave Her body, hasn't left us. In times of pain and difficulty She continues to protect us as always. And therefore 'Do not fear':

The Mother says, "Look at me, I am here, come back in my new body, divine, transformed and glorious. And I am the same Mother, still human. Do not worry. Do not be concerned about your own self, your progress and realisation, nor about others. I am here, look at me, gaze into me, enter into me wholly, merge into my being, lose yourself into my love, with your love. You will see all problems solved, everything done. Forget all else, forget the world. Remember me alone, be one with me, with my love."

\*

One day I found the Mother sitting with a very stern expression. I wondered what the cause was. The Mother looked at me and said:

"I still cannot understand you human beings. How can you continue to tell lies to my face?"

I replied:

"Mother, normally everyone is afraid of You and that is why they resort to lying. How many are there who are truly courageous and truthful? Out of fear of punishment they cannot accept responsibility. On the other hand, they know perfectly well that You know and understand everything. And still they cannot get rid of their fear. Mother, we all love You so much but in our reverence for You why is there a tinge of fear that hides in our hearts? Why, Mother?"

The Mother just kept looking at me with exceeding tenderness.

\*

After Sri Aurobindo's physical departure it was the Mother who pulled us out of our deep gloom by pouring Her infinite love and joy on us. Right from very early in the

morning till late in the night the Mother would spread cheer all around carrying all of us in Her heart. From under Her protective wing we slowly emerged stronger to bear the deep pain and sorrow of losing our Lord, Sri Aurobindo. The Mother gave of Herself to humanity so that we could all receive this strength.

During the Marching in the Playground and at every moment we were dazzled by the ever-changing ever-new form and movement of the Mother. There was a deep sense of void that descended on us after Sri Aurobindo left his body. The Mother was acutely aware of this. She would tell us all sorts of amusing things to bring back laughter and joy on our crestfallen faces. One day She recounted to us the story of Hans Andersen 'The invisible dress' with so much fun and humour that we were all rolling with laughter. Suddenly She became very serious and whispered to us:

"I don't think Pavitra is enjoying our laughter very much. So let us keep quiet a little."

And like a little girl She folded Her arms and began watching the Marching seriously. All this playfulness and mischief of the Mother helped to take us out of that solemn grief into which Sri Aurobindo's departure had plunged us. The Mother was now totally alone. This fact caused us a lot of pain. From time to time the Mother would become extremely serious. We could not understand this. The thought that was uppermost on our minds: when would Sri Aurobindo come back? We used to feel a strange sort of pain for the Mother.

Let me tell you about one of the Mother's pranks. During the Playground Marching the Mother would often be engaged in interviews. She used to sit in the interview room and remain there for a long time. One day after finishing an interview She came out striding towards the map of India, holding Her hands behind her back. Her eyes glinting with mischief, She looked at us and suddenly held out a photograph before our faces. It was the photograph of the person with whom She had just had the interview. This gentleman had given Her one of his photographs. Can you believe that! We just laughed like mad! The Mother also broke into a childlike laugh, full of mischief. All these little incidents of playfulness by the Mother took place after Sri Aurobindo's physical withdrawal. The Mother would not allow anyone to sink into any feeling of despair.

Another day, She came striding out after an interview and moved towards the map of India. We were all waiting there for Her. On seeing Her face we knew at once that She was going to give us some good news and good news it was. The Mother said:

"I have had a very good interview today. I hadn't spoken with such a full heart as I did today. The gentleman I met is very honest and sincere and really feels a great love for Sri Aurobindo and me. He is a high-court judge." (By the way, this gentleman was my elder uncle, Subodh Kumar Niyogi. So it was quite natural for me to be curious.)

The Mother went on:

"Ah! He looked so wonderful in his judge's gown. Elegant, well-built, erect."

The Mother's eyes and face were glowing with a marvellous tenderness. Probably it was from this divine Mother that the human mothers had learnt to praise their own children. While She was saying this, the Mother looked exceedingly beautiful. It was after a long time that I had heard something like this from the Mother. After the descent of the Supramental Light in 1956, the Mother started becoming strangely worried or serious. I felt She was slowly withdrawing into Herself, getting more and more absorbed in the work of the transformation of the body. So one day finding Her close again, I exclaimed to Her:

“The judge's work is only to punish people. How many people they must have sent to the gallows! I really don't care much for the judge's profession.”

The Mother looked at me a little surprised:

“Whoever told you that these judges spend their time punishing people? You have no idea how much time and energy they put in to try and save the innocent. This judge for instance who came for the interview wakes up every morning at four in order to meditate. Then he sits down to write the judgement and he remembers me before putting down each word. I can hear his call. He hasn't sent a single person to his death.”

I can still hear the Mother's voice. The Mother always helped all Her children and devotees whenever they called out to Her.

Needless to say, I was filled with joy on hearing so much praise for my uncle. The Mother probably didn't know that this Subodh Kumar Niyogi was my uncle. He was, in fact, my younger uncle Himangshu Kumar Niyogi's elder brother. When I got back home from the Playground my father and elder uncle enquired:

“What was the Mother telling you for so long?”

I told them and they were both very happy. My elder uncle felt a little embarrassed. I was happy because after a long time, I had found the Mother once again close to me like before.

After the Marching had begun the Mother would sit down in a chair in front of the map of India and watch the Marching. Five of us young women, Minnie-di, Milli-di, Violette, Gauri and I, were given the privilege of staying next to the Mother. The Mother used to enjoy talking to us about a host of things. She would watch very attentively how each person marched. One day all of a sudden She exclaimed:

“Look there, a spider!”

We turned and saw that one of the sadhaks was stretching his arms sideways in such a way that he really looked like a spider. Gauri and I could not help laughing. Then I exclaimed:

“Mother, look there, an elephant!”

Our Dilip-da used to come and join the Marching on some days. The Mother put a finger on Her lips and asked us not to make any remarks about Dilip-da. I was slightly taken aback. Dilip-da was Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's very dearly loved child.



And so through such varied, apparently insignificant talk the Mother came close to all of us. Even as the Marching went on, the Mother taught us French as well on some days. Chitra, Minu, Nebu and I would bring the essay that She had asked us to write in French and She would correct these sitting in Her chair. I had observed from the very beginning that the Mother was equally interested in both studies and sports. In Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's Integral Yoga everything is equally relevant and meaningful.

After the Concentration, the Mother distributed groundnuts to all the groups. All the groups used to line up to receive the groundnuts from the Mother's hand as Amiyo, carrying a pot full of roasted groundnuts and a large spoon, walked along with the Mother. The Mother would scoop out the groundnuts with this spoon and distribute to each one. Some received one scoop and some two. To some She would give just one groundnut! We could not hold our laughter then. The sadhaks felt very embarrassed. Then this custom of going round the Playground distributing groundnuts stopped. The Mother started distributing prasad sitting in Her chair in front of the map of India. Now everyone present in the Playground, including the visitors, had the privilege of receiving prasad from Her hand. Everyone felt happy. The Mother would also give prasad and Her blessings to those whose birthday it was. Only after She had finished this would She begin Her other work.

Pranab taught his group of captains all types of exercises. He was most attentive while teaching his captains, especially the women captains. He would stand very vigilant next to them while they practised vaulting on parallel bars. There was absolutely no chance of any accident. These girls were doing such difficult exercises for the first time! The Mother just sat quietly and very attentively watched each person.

A well-known leader and educationist once came to the Ashram. After seeing the sporting activities in the Playground he observed:

"I have been to many educational institutions all over India. I have seen girls do gymnastics. But it is here in the Ashram that I have seen for the first time girls doing vaulting, and even parallel bars. I have never seen this anywhere else."

He was greatly impressed. The girl captains who used to practise these exercises were Chitra, Sujata, Minu, Kusum-ben, Mani-ben, Kumud, Tapati, Sushila, Arati, Amita, Mridula and many others. They also practised on the *malkhamb* and had become very skilful. Amita used to perform the Swiss drill marvellously. From among all the girls she would stand out. Among the men captains, Mona, Sumantra, Bacchu, Batti, Narendra, Manoj, Ranjan picked up everything beautifully with exemplary concentration.

We had absolutely no difficulty in discovering or understanding this new life. The Mother was constantly with us guiding and helping us along the path. Whenever we faced any difficulty we went to the Mother and told Her everything without any diffidence. And the Mother always listened to us with a ready, sweet smile. As She nodded Her head we knew that everything would be resolved. And with renewed enthusiasm we resumed the journey. And in this way our days unfolded from moment

to moment. The more we endeavoured to walk on the path shown by the Mother, the more we encountered difficulties, obstacles, desires, temptations of all sorts that tried to push us off the track. The Mother firmly held the hull of our boat and there was no way we could go off-course. We did everything according to Her instructions. And if ever we went awry the Mother would unveil Her Rudra aspect. There is no child of Hers who has not received Her scolding. Quite clearly I am talking here of the young. This scolding was not necessarily expressed in words. She could make us feel without verbalising the awful weight of Her strong dissatisfaction. It was like the tremendous Himalaya. Every boy and girl of our time had a taste of this tremendous psychological pressure at some time or the other. Probably the adults did not totally escape from this either. The Mother did not always express Her feelings through words but those who were sensitive understood at once Her displeasure about an act, a thought or conduct. And immediately we set about trying to locate that dark spot in us. We needed to be alert and conscious at every moment of our lives if we wished to walk with one-pointed earnestness on the path shown by the Mother.

I remember an incident. At that time Mr. René used to be in charge of our Press. Mr. René was born into an aristocratic Muslim family of Hyderabad.

The Mother needed some envelopes and She entrusted '*Baudi*' (Rajsenah Nahar) with this work. René showed '*Baudi*' how to make these envelopes. Sujata, Suprabha, Chitra, Tapati and I sat down to make them under '*Baudi*''s instructions. From time to time René kept checking our work and seemed rather happy. As soon as he turned up '*Baudi*' would hold up the envelopes one by one before him and ask him jocularly:

"Is it all right, Monsieur?"

Although we quietly enjoyed '*Baudi*''s prank we went on seriously with the work.

Mr. René, however, went and complained to the Mother. When I went to Her She gave me a flower rather sternly. I could not figure out what had caused the Mother's dissatisfaction. Then the Mother explained:

"René was complaining that 'The fair girl teased me a lot today. She kept showing me each envelope and saying, "Is it all right, Monsieur?"' You probably do not know that René loves perfection in work. That is why he came back repeatedly to check if each envelope was made properly."

"It was Rajsenah who kept showing the envelopes to Mr. René, it wasn't I."

"You did nothing at all?" the Mother asked.

Even after much reflection I could not detect anything wrong I had done.

"Just think a little," the Mother insisted.

Then suddenly it flashed on me that I had indeed been enjoying '*Baudi*''s prank, although outwardly I had shown no sign of it and went on working in all seriousness. As soon as I told the Mother this, She was extremely pleased and remarked:

"This kind of conduct on your part is not becoming at all."

That I had been able to find my mistake on my own pleased the Mother very

much. On the other hand She also told Mr. René:

“They work very well and I love these children very much.”

The following day Mr. René came to give us this happy piece of news. And we got down to our work very seriously.

The smallest of faults could not escape the Mother’s eye. I was really quite impressed by this incident; similar incidents occurred in my life on several occasions. This made me ever so alert and helped me to correct the little fault in me.

*(To be continued)*

PRITI DAS GUPTA

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

*True impersonality of the nervous being does not consist in an entire and absolute surrender to the Divine Will. This submission is but a preparation. Perfect impersonality—whether in the prana or in the other worlds of being—lies in identification with the terrestrial prana, or rather with the divine bliss deep within all sensations as within all universal activities. The result is that instead of feeling the joy of a sensation, one is this very sensation in all those who enjoy it. Then the individual prana no longer exists; but there is instead a force, at once impersonal and conscious, which manifests in all the organs that are capable of perceiving it.*

*For example, there is a subtle joy, both sweet and profound, in the sensation one feels while walking alone or with a companion with whom one is in perfect harmony, through seldom trod or virgin tracts of countryside unspoiled by any human atmosphere, where Nature is tranquil, vast, pure like an aspiration, holy like a prayer; on mountains, in forests, along stray paths beside limpid streams, or on the shores of a boundless ocean. So long as the prana remains individual, this joy can only be experienced when certain outer conditions are fulfilled. On the other hand, when the prana is truly impersonalised, universalised, one becomes this delightful bliss in all those who feel it; one no longer needs, in order to enjoy it, to be surrounded by certain specific material conditions.*

*With regard to the nervous plane, one is then perfectly free from all circumstances. One has attained liberation.*

30 July 1914

*The Mother*

(Words of Long Ago, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 2, pp. 119-20)

**IN MEMORIAM**  
**THE TEACHER AS A SADHAK—M. V. NADKARNI**  
**(1933-2007)**

**I**

SOME relationships go beyond stereotypical categories. We met for the first time in a classroom at the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (CIEFL), now ‘The English and Foreign Languages University’ (EFLU), Hyderabad, in 1977. He was my teacher of Linguistics. In course of time, over the years, our ties blossomed and I was privileged to see other dimensions of Sir’s personality as a brother, friend, fellow seeker and at times as a father.

At the CIEFL and the University of Hyderabad, Mangesh V. Nadkarni was a star professor! We flocked to his class. Tall, fair, handsome and articulate, he stood out as a charismatic teacher and performer in the classroom. I had heard that he regularly spoke on *Savitri* at the Sri Aurobindo Centre at Himayatnagar close to the Osmania University Campus. And therefore his popularity with us students was a great source of satisfaction to me.

Champaklal-ji visited Hyderabad in 1978. As Professor Nadkarni and I stood outside the Institute of Human Study, ably run by late Professor Madhusudan Reddy, Professor Nadkarni turned to me and announced in a matter of fact manner: “Today, I give up smoking! From this moment onwards!” It showed me what the presence of a great soul like Champaklal-ji could do. But it also demonstrated an aspect of Professor Nadkarni that I came to admire over the years. He was absolutely clear-sighted, never mixed up issues, never indulged in self-deception and acted decisively. He would much rather withdraw in a dignified manner than be a party to dishonesty or self-deception.

**II**

Mangesh V. Nadkarni was born on 6 March 1933 on the West Coast of Karnataka at a place called Kodibagh. A Konkani Saraswat Brahmin, his parents were Shantabai and Vithal Nadkarni. He was the eldest among a family of four brothers and three sisters. His father, a simple God-fearing man, was an insurance agent who came from the village Bankivodla in North Kanara.

Professor Nadkarni graduated in the arts from Kolhapur. Two of his school teachers, Mr. Pillay and Mr. S. R. Ekundi had a formative influence on him, and promoted in him a spiritual bent of mind. He obtained his Masters in English from Poona University in 1957 and was taught by a very distinguished scholar, Professor V. K. Gokak who was a great admirer of Sri Aurobindo. Recalls Mrs. Meera Nadkarni: “My husband came to know of Sri Aurobindo from 1956. He read *The Life Divine*

and the other books of the Seer. The expression: ‘All Life is Yoga’ fascinated him.”

Marriage to Meera turned out to be part of the Divine grace. Meera’s father, a deeply spiritual person, had the darshan of Sri Aurobindo. “After our marriage,” she recalls, “we came for the first time to Pondicherry in April 1961.”

Professor Nadkarni had a brilliant academic career: Post-graduate diploma in the teaching of English from CIE in 1963, M.A. and Ph.D. in Linguistics from University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in 1970. He taught English at Rajkot and Vallabh Vidyanagar, Gujarat from 1957-1962. He was a Reader and Professor of Phonetics and Linguistics at the CIEFL from 1963 to 1984 and went on to teach at the National University of Singapore (1984-1992).

Professor Nadkarni was recognised as an outstanding teacher and researcher. He published extensively in national and international journals. However, unlike most professors, he did not remain confined to the academia. He took a keen interest in world events and the life around him. He was deeply attracted to the spiritual view of life and after his retirement from service went on to author more than eight books and monographs on spiritual and cultural topics including *A Brief Introduction to Savitri*, *Sri Aurobindo and the Problems of Human Unity*, and *India’s Spiritual Destiny: Its Potentiality and Inevitability*.

After I departed from Hyderabad, we met at Bhubaneswar and Pondicherry. Through my sister Pranati, I came closer to his family: Meera-didi and the children: Sucheta and Nandita, both of whom are well settled in life.

Professor Nadkarni endeared himself to the Sri Aurobindoneans as an eminent speaker and organiser. He was closely associated with the Sri Aurobindo Society, Mushirabad, Hyderabad, and successfully organised many events in Hyderabad and elsewhere. He travelled widely and spoke in the Ashram, Auroville and abroad in various countries. Disciplined, modest and firm, he carried out many workshops and seminars on the major books of Sri Aurobindo.

Professor Nadkarni brought in a great deal of humour to his lectures. He was particularly effective when he spoke on *Savitri*, and in the true spirit of service, was seldom bothered about the size of the audience. “I always carry my audience with me,” he once joked. “My audience comprises my wife and two daughters!” Such was his selflessness.

An extraordinary sense of modesty marked the personality of Professor Nadkarni. He would often share his writings and thoughts with me, a junior, and welcome constructive criticism. This is a quality I see in very few people. Most of us are ego-centric and fond of self-love. A frequent e-mail would always bring in a question or query about a line from Tennyson or a quotation from a contemporary writer.

Mangesh Nadkarni was a great intellectual who always spoke of the need to uplift the intellect to greater spiritual heights. He knew that the academic community, the University system and the media needed the power of illumination.

He was a great mentor to many of us. I for one can never forget his words of

comfort when my father passed away in 2005 and I was in America. Such was his greatness. In Professor Nadkarni's passing, we have lost a worthy son of the Divine Mother, a fellow seeker and a soulmate who was an unfailing source of support and encouragement.

As I write these lines, I cannot believe that Sir is no longer with us. I can hear his loving voice ringing with mirth and laughter. We knew that he had had a bypass surgery in 1995, but he continued the Mother's work and early morning on 23 September 2007 at 6.30 a.m. he passed away peacefully.

Recalls Meera-didi: "He was the happiest in the presence of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo." Can there be a finer tribute than this!

SACHIDANANDA MOHANTY

*There is indeed the desire of possession, but even this is overcome in the fullness of the self-existent love and the final demand of the Bhakta is simply that his bhakti may never cease nor diminish. He does not ask for heaven or for liberation from birth or for any other object, but only that his love may be eternal and absolute.*

*Love is a passion and it seeks for two things, eternity and intensity, and in the relation of the Lover and Beloved the seeking for eternity and for intensity is instinctive and self-born. Love is a seeking for mutual possession, and it is here that the demand for mutual possession becomes absolute. Passing beyond desire of possession which means a difference, it is a seeking for oneness, and it is here that the idea of oneness, of two souls merging into each other and becoming one finds the acme of its longing and the utterness of its satisfaction. Love, too, is a yearning for beauty, and it is here that the yearning is eternally satisfied in the vision and the touch and the joy of the All-beautiful. Love is a child and a seeker of Delight, and it is here that it finds the highest possible ecstasy both of the heart-consciousness and of every fibre of the being. Moreover, this relation is that which as between human being and human being demands the most and, even while reaching the greatest intensities, is still the least satisfied, because only in the Divine can it find its real and its utter satisfaction. Therefore it is here most that the turning of human emotion Godwards finds its full meaning and discovers all the truth of which love is the human symbol, all its essential instincts divinised, raised, satisfied in the bliss from which our life was born and towards which by oneness it returns in the Ananda of the divine existence where love is absolute, eternal and unalloyed.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(The Synthesis of Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 24, pp. 569-70)*

## UDAR, ONE OF MOTHER'S CHILDREN

*(Continued from the issue of March 2008)*

### **Furniture in Sri Aurobindo's Room**

SRI AUROBINDO'S room was old and rather dilapidated and the Mother decided that it should be redone. So it was done up by all of us, Building Department, Harpagon, Electric and Water Service, Golconde Service, etc. But the furniture was also old and made of boxwood painted green or brown, quite useful at one time but now become shabby. So the Mother suggested to Sri Aurobindo that we make new furniture for him and he agreed. I was given the wonderful opportunity of designing the furniture and having it made under my direction at Harpagon.

Udar

\*

The sadhaks who were attending on Sri Aurobindo had become so used to the existing furniture that they insisted I keep before me the dimensions and conveniences to which they had been accustomed. This put a sort of limit on the design potential and also the existing spaces had to be considered such as those between the doors and the windows, niches, etc. This was good as it gave some concrete dimensions on which to base the designs. I had been reading Le Corbusier's book *Modulor* and had been quite taken up with his ideas based on the Golden Ratio of proportions and so I used the principle in my design so as to be sure of a harmonious blending of the furniture with the room itself. Then with regard to the material, with the Mother's happy approval, it was decided to have a blend of two of India's best woods: teak and rosewood.

We had a fairly good supply of very high quality rosewood which I had purchased some time back when someone had offered an old stock for sale. But teakwood we had to buy and, as Pondicherry merchants did not stock such a good quality at that time, I said to the Mother that I would have to get it from Cuddalore, twelve miles away. At that time the Mother had started going out for drives in her car, Pavitra (Phillipe Barbier St.-Hilaire) driving. She said with joy that she herself would go to Cuddalore with me and watch me select the timber. I was thrilled.

We went on to the Cuddalore timber depot and I spent quite some time there selecting the teak logs that I needed. The Mother sat quietly in the car watching me all the time. Then, when my selection was complete and the price, etc. settled, she called me to her and asked if I had all I needed. I said, "Yes." Then she pointed to a very large log lying in a far corner, a log of wide girth but not square. I had not chosen that log because of this reason and it was really not what I wanted. But the

Mother said that the log had spoken to her and had pleaded to be taken as it wanted to go to her. I was again thrilled to hear this and immediately included that log in our selection at a special price. It was so large that I needed two carts to transport it to Pondicherry. I did not cut up the log. But quite some years later when I was to make furniture for the Mother's new room on top of the roof, I cut up the log as I knew it would be happy to go to Mother.

Udar

\*

### **Cartier Bresson**

When Cartier Bresson went to photograph Sri Aurobindo, Udar was the only other person present. Mother asked Udar to go to help him shift the apparatus. Sri Aurobindo sat throughout absolutely immobile, without blinking even once. Mr. Bresson said he had never seen such a model in his life.

Lilou

\*

There was no picture of Sri Aurobindo taken from 1926 to 1950. There was no [recent] photograph of him at all. And in 1950, the year that he left his body—I'll tell you of the Divine play—that famous French photographer, Cartier Bresson, came to the Ashram. The Divine arranged it for some reason or the other. He came to the Ashram and he asked Mother to allow him to take photographs. And then Mother called me and she said, "This man is going to take photographs. I am giving him permission. So you look after him. Do whatever he wants you to do."

At that time we didn't have such powerful lenses. And he said to Mother, "I regret that our present technology has not advanced so much to take a full beautiful picture in the present light. I'll do the best I can." And he really did the best he could. And then he went to take pictures of Sri Aurobindo sitting in the chair. I tell you it was so wonderful, so sweet, Sri Aurobindo sitting in the chair and I was by the side of the photographer. And he said, "Turn your head like this, look up, look that side, look this side..." Cartier Bresson said he had never had a model like this who never moved or even blinked.

Udar

\*

...Mother was so helpful and she convinced Sri Aurobindo and I came in his bedroom with my camera. The room was so neat and tidy and impersonal. Sri Aurobindo did not wink an eye during the entire ten minutes I was watching him, he did not seem to belong to that impersonal setting.

From notes by Cartier Bresson

\*



... when I had the privilege of seeing Sri Aurobindo, I had the impression that he was beyond time...

Cartier Bresson—(21 Dec 1950; translated from the French)

\*

### Sri Aurobindo's Passing

In spite of all medical treatment, there was no improvement in Sri Aurobindo's physical condition and it became worse from day to day till he came to a state when oxygen had to be administered. I was asked to arrange for it. It was not available in Pondicherry and had to be obtained from Cuddalore. Pondicherry was still a French possession and there was some tension between the Indian Union and the Pondicherry Government. At the frontier, movement was restricted. It was here that R. K. Tandon, the Indian Consul General at Pondicherry, helped us a lot. He sent me to Cuddalore in his own car to get the oxygen equipment. When I brought it here I was shown how to use it.

It was about 10:00 on the night of 4<sup>th</sup> December 1950 that I got a call to go to Sri Aurobindo's room to work the oxygen equipment. I went at once and was present throughout that fateful night when Sri Aurobindo left his body, and I was witness to his last moments on earth.

We know now that he had decided to leave his body because, as the Mother explained to us later, the quickest way at that time to help conquer Death for the world was to cross the barrier and work from the other side.

Having taken a decision he chose to carry it out in a "natural way" and allowed his body to be subject to an "illness". He therefore did not apply his Force to cure it as he had done before with several ailments. Neither was any treatment given except during the last days when the situation became very serious. The doctors gave various medicines which I had to procure for them at any time of the day or night.

Udar

\*

The Mother was standing by the side of his bed. Champaklal, Dr. Sanyal, Dr. Nirod, Dr. Satyabrata, Dyuman and Purani were present in the room. I may be omitting someone else who was there but my memory does not go further. At about midnight the Mother said that she would retire for a short rest of two hours or so, that she used to take each night. Sri Aurobindo continued to be in a comatose condition from which, I understand, one does not come out, as it precedes the final state of death. But at about 1:00 a.m. He suddenly woke up and asked Nirod the time. On being informed, he went back into his previous condition which I then understood to be that of a deep meditation and not a coma which is a state of unconsciousness.

Then Dr. Sanyal said that it was better to call the Mother. Dyuman went to her room and called her. She came in a few moments and stood again by the side of Sri Aurobindo's bed. After a while Sri Aurobindo woke up once more and asked Nirod to give him something to drink. Then he sank back. At 1:26 a.m. his breathing ceased. Everyone and everything was completely still and silent. The Mother was like a rock of strength.

At this most grave moment in the history of the world, she stood erect, unmoved, a tower of peace and fortitude. At that moment I saw in her the fullness of her Divinity and loved and worshipped her in my heart to an extent I had never been able to do before.

Udar

\*

The Mother then said Sri Aurobindo had lived so long in the Supramental Consciousness that it had come down into his body and made it shine with a golden light. But she added that one could not be sure how long the light would remain and in case it remained for a long time it was necessary to protect the body against dust and air-borne insects. So she asked me to prepare a large glass covering to go over the whole body in a way which would not disturb it. Immediately a man was sent to Madras to get the necessary large sheets of glass and through Dyuman we arranged for the silver angle strips to join them to form a cover.

In the meantime we thought it would be good if we could keep the room temperature low by arranging large blocks of ice round about with fans to blow over them. We did this without consulting the Mother. As soon as she saw it, she asked us to remove everything at once: she did not want any artificial measure to be taken at all. If the body was to remain without perishing, it would be by his will alone.

Meanwhile the news had spread in the Ashram and as soon as Sri Aurobindo's body was properly laid out, people began to come in. All the doors were opened and everyone was free to enter. It was the morning of 5<sup>th</sup> December. We were now constantly going to the Mother for instructions. It was at this time that she told us many important things and particularly about Sri Aurobindo's decision to cross over.

When the Mother saw that I was protesting so strongly about placing Sri Aurobindo's body in the Samadhi, she took me by the hand and led me to his body, then asked me if I could still see the golden light that had been there all these days. I had to admit that it had gone. Then the Mother said that it was because Sri Aurobindo himself had given the sign to her that it was now time to bury his body. I had to accept this and the burial was fixed to take place on the evening of the 9<sup>th</sup>.

When his rosewood case was ready, we had the inner sides lined with pure silver sheets and over them a white satin covering was put. Cushions were placed on the bottom of the case.

Udar

\*

### The Samadhi

Mother gave me instructions for the casket which was made of solid wood and lined with silk. Sri Aurobindo was still lying on his bed and there was the most marvellous golden light emanating from his body, and a scent like a celestial perfume. The Mother told me how deep to go into the Samadhi and how to design it.

We built the Samadhi not as a hole in the ground but as a vault with thick concrete walls nine inches thick with cement floors and a cement roof. We went down eight feet and built a four-foot room with cement slabs. Over that the Mother instructed me to build another room also with walls, a floor, and a roof. She told me to fill it with clean river sand and to put a large slab on the top. Thus was the Samadhi built.

Mother wanted Sri Aurobindo's Samadhi to be under the Service Tree in the Ashram courtyard. She gave detailed instructions, saying how deep we should go and that we should construct a waterproof chamber down below with a waterproof cement slab cover and then an air-space with another waterproof cement slab cover. Then earth was to be filled over this till it came above the surface of the ground, and around it the walls of the Samadhi were to be built.

The Mother also told us to prepare a fine case for his body. I got the Harpagon Workshop to start making one in solid thick rosewood with brass straps and brass rings on the side to take the ropes.

We started working from the morning of the 5<sup>th</sup>. We decided to build the Samadhi ourselves and not with paid labour. The ground was hard—very hard—and breaking it was quite a job. It was decided that the burial would take place on the evening of the 5<sup>th</sup>. Discoloration of the body generally sets in within 24 hours, 35 hours is the outside limit. But when it was about time for the burial there was no sign of it at all. In fact, even though life had left the body, it was suffused with a golden light and Sri Aurobindo's face shone with it.

Udar

\*

In *Savitri*, 'The Book of Death' is short. When Sri Aurobindo was asked about this he said, "You cannot be expected to write about something you have never consciously experienced." So he experienced death consciously and will return to complete 'The Book of Death'.

Udar

\*

After the Mother passed away, we opened up the top room. We took the clean river sand that had been lying over Sri Aurobindo's tomb from 1950 to 1973 and put it

into barrels. We made packets from the sand and gave them out to many people and it helped them in sickness and pain and in times of trouble.

Udar

\*

Even though Sri Aurobindo has left his body, his Presence is very real and powerful in the Ashram and even outside it. We have also his assurance to the Mother that he will come back to us in a Supramental Body built in the supramental way. How this will happen we do not know, but he will certainly come and then, along with the Mother, he will lead us to the Glorious Age of the Supramental Transformation of humanity.

Udar

*(To be continued)*

P. AND G.

*True love, that which fulfils and illumines, is not the love one receives but the love one gives.*

*And the supreme Love is a love without any definite object—the love which loves because it cannot do other than to love.*

*15 May 1968*

*The Mother*

*(Words of the Mother - II, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 14, p. 123)*

# MEDHANANDA—A CENTENARY TRIBUTE

## I

### Tracing Medhananda's Footsteps<sup>1</sup>

“MEDHANANADA” was the name given by the Mother, on February 26, 1952, to a disciple of hers who was born Fritz Winkelstroeter on April 28, 1908, son of a wealthy engineer and industrialist in Pforzheim, Germany.

He had his first spiritual experience when he was still crawling on all fours, and more compelling ones when he was three or four years old. Others followed. With the first pocket-money he received, he bought a book on Hindu gods—to the great astonishment of his family.

But it was only after he fled the mounting tide of Nazism, leaving his position as a junior judge in the Frankfurt High Court and going as far away as possible, to the other side of the globe, to Tahiti, and then to its sister island Moorea, that he found in the virgin forest there the natural conditions for his inner life to blossom luxuriantly. His yoga was entirely spontaneous, and did not follow any book.

It was many years later, after the end of the war,... that the only bookseller in Tahiti started receiving, along with the latest novels, works by or about Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Brahmananda, Sankaracharya—and a list of books by Sri Aurobindo.... Books of Sri Aurobindo started to arrive. Medhananda plunged into them, saturated himself in them. Then he wrote to Sri Aurobindo, who sent a reply through Pavitra.

At the beginning of 1951 the “divine realisation” promised to Medhananda by Sri Aurobindo... reached its consummation.

For several months after this the Ashram heard nothing from him, except orders for new books of Sri Aurobindo as they were published. Then on 31 August 1951, after receiving a brochure from Pavitra, Medhananda wrote,

“I am enthusiastic after reading the prospectus of the University Centre in Pondicherry. I send you my best wishes for an early start. At the same time, I renew my offer of unconditional service, from cleaning the rooms to collaboration in higher studies of comparative mysticism. Meanwhile I could help you lay bricks. All my aspiration lies behind these wishes. Please receive the expression of my total devotion.”

The Mother gave him permission to come to the Ashram.

After travelling for two months, he reached his Mother's home on the 15<sup>th</sup> February 1952. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of the same month she gave him his name “Medhananda”.

Medhananda left his body on 26 May 1994.

YVONNE

1. *With Medhananda on the shores of infinity*, by Medhananda, pp. 1-3, published by Sri Mira Trust, Pondicherry.

## II

**The Garden of Oneness<sup>2</sup>**

When Adam opened his eyes he found himself in a beautiful garden. The birds were singing in the trees—and the birds were he, himself, and his heart was singing the same songs. When he walked through the garden the flowers bloomed for him, and their beauty was his own beauty. And there was no limit, no difference between him and the flowers. And as he met all the animals of the garden one after the other and spoke to each one, and as each answered to the name he gave it, the delight of the garden was his own delight. Everything he met was himself in another form. When he was hungry, fruits offered themselves, and he did not wonder why they tasted so good, but ate simply with delight in the fruits and their taste. Since everything was as it should be, there was no need or occasion to ask questions such as why there was a garden, or what was the meaning of things. Obviously everything was for his very own pleasure. He was living in the great oneness; all was one. He was one and all at the same time. There was nothing to think or wonder or meditate about. There was nothing to do or desire or aspire to. He simply was in his fullness, and enjoyed being. As one being, divided and multiplied among all, he had no feeling of I or my or you. There was no need to make distinctions or to classify things. He was his body, and his body was the whole garden, and there was no end to the delight, no limit to the enjoyment of the whole. When he basked in the sun, its warmth was in him, and the sun was as much a part of himself as he of the sun. When he swam in the cool river, the coolness was he, himself, and there was no division between inside and outside, near and far.

All was one, and he was at the same time the one and the all.  
And so the aeons passed.

Then something happened. Some people think it was dreadful and accursed, but a few think it was good and necessary and a blessing in disguise. Some people think there was something evil in the garden which contaminated Adam, and others think the thing was already in himself. But whatever it was, nobody can explain how it came to be there. Had it always been part of the garden and in its original planning, or was it introduced from outside? Whatever it was, it was irreversible. A veil descended on Adam, and stood between him and the oneness of things.

‘I’, he started to say, and ‘you’; ‘mine’, he said, and ‘yours’. ‘Yesterday’, ‘tomorrow’. ‘This is good, that is evil’.

2. *The Way out is Up and other stories from Equals One*, by Medhananda, pp. 43-45, published by Sri Mira Trust, Pondicherry.

Some people think he must have eaten a poisonous fruit to think in that way. But however it happened, with this kind of thinking time started, and evolution, and striving, but also aspiration. Hatred began, but love also, dissatisfaction, and satisfaction for work well done. Things were declared evil, but then research started, to find ways of doing better. Constant desire led to amelioration.

Then Adam started to build: new gardens, with villages, cities and towers, with bridges, civilisations, culture.

For an aeon the garden became a workshop full of smoking chimneys, slums, and ugly buildings. But then a beautiful garden appeared again, and this time it was built by Adam. And this time he did not build it for himself. That was why it was so beautiful: he built it for all the beings in the garden. He still continued to say 'I' and 'you', but the veil was gone between him and the oneness of things. Now he could look through the 'I' and the 'you' right into the oneness.

He still distinguished between good and evil, but now he knew that evil was merely something momentarily out of place. He still liked some things better than others, but he recognised that all had their place in nature, and he respected their right to be.

Sometimes he was yet dissatisfied with this or that in himself or even in something outside himself, but he knew now that dissatisfaction was a sign of something asking to be transformed.

Time he still knew, but time had now become his friend and helper. He still chose to leave his body when it became burdensome, but he knew now that there was no death, only eternal change. He still felt a pain in his heart when he lost from sight a loved one, but he knew he would find him again and again in different forms, somewhere in the great oneness of things. He knew now that he knew and had attained life eternal, and yet he still lived in the garden, the garden of oneness.

The garden was no longer a little piece of land between two rivers, as in the beginning. It had opened into new dimensions, taken into itself new worlds, the worlds of the infinitely small and the infinitely large. The garden was now the whole universe, from the sub-atomic particles to the galaxies, from the chemistry of molecules to the magnetohydrodynamics of the stars. The garden had become really the garden of oneness, and Adam the image of God.

MEDHANANDA

*Whatever Sri Aurobindo says is never on the moral level but on the path towards a total transformation, akin to what the medieval alchemists called transubstantiation into pure gold.\**

\* All fillers in this section are from Medhananda's books.

### III

#### **Medhananda, passionate seeker of knowledge<sup>3</sup>**

We often split a personality into two parts: the outer and the inner, the surface man and the subjective man. And yet this division cannot be exclusive. The outer may reflect something of the inner self as much as the inner may be built up of external acts. There are rare personalities who plunge deep within to discover the secret of the self. It is usually a strenuous uphill journey, and mostly hidden from others.

Medhananda was just such a seeker of his inner self. He came thousands of miles from Tahiti to Pondicherry to live under the spiritual light of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

How far he travelled in his inner quest will remain hidden to us. But some rays of his inner light surely filtered through onto his external being. This added unforgettable charm to his personality. When I think of Medhananda the image that presses most clearly before me is a handsome man of a very robust physical stature, with penetrating eyes like crystals. He was very energetic, both physically and mentally. I never saw any sign of lethargy in his mind; he was constantly alert, always bright and happy, never depressed or moody. A voracious reader, he was well chosen by the Mother to be our librarian. In fact, she often referred affectionately to him as Medhananda, the Librarian.

When I joined the work at the Ashram Library in the early 1960s, I was the youngest member on the staff. Even so, he treated me as he did the others, never interfering with any work he had assigned to me, but always stepping back and observing my work with a kindly attention—more like a benevolent father than a supervisor, or boss. It was this loving personality that endeared him to so many.

Medhananda was unique in that he combined a warm, expansive nature, inclined to hearty laughter and an amused perspective, with a keen intellect of the highest order. He believed fully in the education of the psychic and the higher emotions as an essential corollary to the development of the mental capacities, and he practised this with the many students who came to him for studies as he had done with his own [...] children.

...

Everyone knows of his passionate interest in Egyptology and how he gave a totally new interpretation to Egyptian hieroglyphs in the light of Sri Aurobindo's own studies of the Vedas. He knew Greek and Latin, in addition to French, and guided many serious students of the humanities in their studies of history, literature, philosophy, and comparative religions. He arranged small exhibitions at the Library on such subjects as the "oneness of the world", using scientific and historical facts

3. Adapted from *Recent Publications*, a bi-annual newsletter published by SABDA, the Sri Aurobindo Books Distribution Agency, Pondicherry.



combined with visual stimuli, to interest and encourage people to explore these subjects....

Although he was a master of erudition, a creative and original thinker, and an inspiring writer, he was above all a child of the Mother, with whom he had the most extraordinarily sweet relation. It is surely that sweetness that became the nectar of his life and drew so many friends to his side.

DEBRANJAN CHATTERJEE

*All is one  
Aei en  
This oneness is the great secret  
Ekam asti: One being  
Kai Aei Estai  
One Tao one life One Brahman one mind  
One consciousness  
One bliss  
One felicity  
One beatitude  
Filled to the brim  
Without end  
Forever and forever.*

\*

*The world of truth cannot but be infinite. Science, like a spider, tries to spin a web around it, by linking as many points as possible into one formula—and then they are surprised when it does not hold!*

## IV

**The Way Out is Up<sup>4</sup>**

Man: (*picking up telephone*) Please give me God.

God: God speaking

Man: Look, we are getting too crowded on this planet. What shall we do?

God: I told you to be fruitful and multiply.

Man: Yes, that's just the trouble. We have been doing that for too long. There is hardly a lake or a river which is not polluted. Forests are mostly gone, almost no animals left, only men—still multiplying.

God: You like multiplying?

Man: Yes ... but ... soon there'll only be standing room here.

God: Don't worry, go on, multiply; it's your birthright! (*hangs up*)

Man: (*shaking telephone*) Hello, Hello!

Exchange: Exchange.

Man: What kind of God did you give me just now?

Exchange: Why, yours of course.

Man: Mine? What do you mean, mine!

Exchange: Your tribal God—the god of your fathers.

Man: It's a long time we have no tribes here anymore.

Exchange: Well, whose God do you want?

Man: Isn't there a God of the whole ecosystem? Of the biosphere, of planet Earth?

Exchange: I see. I'll connect you with Mother Earth.

Mother Earth: Mother speaking.

Man: Mother, it's me, your child—man.

Mother: It's a long time you didn't call me 'mother'.

Man: I know, but we need you. We have become too many here.

Mother: The last time I met you, you spoke about conquering Nature, meaning me.

Man: I am sorry, but you must help us.

Mother: What do you want me to do? Send a flood, an earthquake, an ice age, a magnetic pole-reversal?

Man: No, not that. Too drastic. Have a heart!

Mother: Perhaps an epidemic? I have been preparing something new.

Man: Don't be crude now.

Mother: You want me to be subtle?

Man: If you can, please.

4. *The Way out is Up...*, pp. 64-66

Mother: I could do something psychological.

Man: Yes?

Mother: How about a suicide wave? I am doing that with the lemmings, you know.

Man: If that's what you call subtle...

...

Man: Is that all you can offer as help?

Mother: Look, you spoke about conquering nature, why don't you conquer yours and simply stop multiplying? (*hangs up*)

Man: (*shakes the telephone*)

Exchange: Exchange.

Man: Isn't there a higher authority than Earth that I can ask for information?

Exchange: I can give you Galactic Cybernetics.

Man: Yes, please.

Galactic Cybernetics: Galactic Cybernetics speaking.

Man: I am man. Earthman. We have a problem. Suddenly we have become too many. How to stop multiplying?

Galactic Cybernetics: You are a biologically evolving being, a dominant species with no natural enemies left but yourself. You can stop yourself multiplying only by evolving further.

Man: How to evolve?

Galactic Cybernetics: Stop being man.

Man: How can I stop being what I am?

Galactic Cybernetics: Become superman. As man you are doomed.

Man: I still don't see how that can be done.

Galactic Cybernetics: The programme for that is already in you; find the programme and follow it.

Man: There is no other way?

Galactic Cybernetics: No.

MEDHANANDA

*So long as you want liberation  
for yourself  
you tighten the chains.  
Liberate God in yourself  
and you will be free.*

## V

**Medhananda, exceptional mind in a “body of joy”<sup>5</sup>**

Medhananda was the name given by the Mother, on February 26, 1952, to a disciple of hers who had arrived in the Ashram only a few days earlier, on February 15th. He was born in Pforzheim, Germany, on April 28, 1908, the son of a prosperous self-made industrialist and his beautiful young wife. They named their son Fritz Winkelstroeter—a name which he came to dislike intensely.

...

The name which the Mother gave to him contains two elements: *medha* (mind) and *ananda* (delight, bliss). And these two elements correspond to the distinctive characteristics which stand out when I recall him. He really had an exceptional mind, of great intelligence, developed by the very highest standards of Western education, and, moreover, deeply cultured—something which does not always accompany great intelligence or a high level of education. From the time when he amazed his family by using his first pocket money to purchase a book on Hindu art and religion, Medhananda had immersed himself in the profounder riches of many civilisations. Moreover, there was something in him, apparently from early childhood, which predisposed him to take a deeper view of things. By the time he came in contact with the writings of Sri Aurobindo after the Second World War, he had already experienced many enriching glimpses of inner worlds, as well as an overwhelming spiritual experience which lasted more than a month and left a permanent stamp on him. It was my privilege to be asked to translate from German his notation of this experience, which happened in Tahiti, found pencilled into a notebook which he brought with him to the Ashram.

...

I met Medhananda on a few memorable occasions during his lifetime—for example, in 1978 when Paolo Soleri, the visionary architect of Arcosanti in Arizona and a disciple of the French mystic Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, was on a visit to Auroville. Among other events, it was arranged for him to meet with Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna). Amal had written two books comparing the insights of Teilhard de Chardin with those of Sri Aurobindo, and the occasion was meant for a kind of philosophical exchange of views. Medhananda and Yvonne, who were staying in Fraternity at that time, hosted the occasion. Through my close friendship with Amal, I was one of the few privileged to be present. But though I can clearly visualise all of us sitting under a sort of thatched rotunda in the sunlit greenery of an Auroville afternoon, unfortunately I have not the slightest memory of any of the illuminations expressed by those present.

5. Adapted from *Recent Publications*.

A more recent meeting took place at IRISI in Reddiarpalayam, the lovely garden to which Medhananda and Yvonne moved later in 1978. This might have been on New Year's Day or on Medhananda's birthday in 1989 or 1990. Yvonne maintained the custom of inviting a few of their close friends and co-workers on those occasions, and by then I had become a co-worker.... On the occasion I have in mind, it would have been well worth recording his remarks. By then he was deep into his Egyptian researches, and entertained us in his usual humorous and illuminating way, amongst other topics with an explanation of the hieroglyph for gnosis or wisdom, a small square of interconnecting lines, like that used for a 'noughts and crosses' game. He explained that this symbol showed the way in which everything is connected with everything else—it is like a net, or perhaps rather a woven mat or carpet. If we can truly experience the world like this, we can possess the wisdom that transcends the divisions and limitations of time and space—which is perhaps why and how the possession of a 'flying carpet' became the mark of a sage or a magician.

Medhananda himself seemed to possess this capacity of seeing unexpected connections, and of looking through the warp and weft of things to surprising underlying significances. And he was able to communicate these insights in a way that brought a smile of delighted discovery or recognition to his hearers or readers—an 'Aha!' reaction.

It was from 1988 onwards that I came into a closer connection with him and his unique way of seeing things.

...

In answer to a question from an American seeker who was visiting the Ashram, Medhananda said, "Any time I lean back and want to be in my psychic being, I can do it." The questioner asked, "And does that give you some special feeling?" Medhananda replied, "It gives the sense of independence, of freedom, of joy—and of several other things too, such as power. But the real hallmark of the psychic being is joy. It is our body of joy. Every time you feel a great joy, a joy which doesn't have a material reason or something like that, if you are just joyful, you are living in your body of joy. Westerners to whom this experience happens don't even know that at that moment they are having a spiritual experience.... They have not been educated or made aware that joy is a very important religious and spiritual experience—because Western religions very early on, in medieval times, took some queer turn so that suffering was considered the quickest and nearest way to reach God. But it is just the opposite. God is joy, you see. And the body of joy he has given us is a glorious body, which can only feel joy. So if you are living in this body, then nothing else can happen to you."

This is something I like to remember when I think of Medhananda.

## VI

**On The Shores of Infinity<sup>6</sup>***Unforgettable moment*

I was twelve years old. I was alone in a sitting room belonging to my mathematics teacher, Herr Reinfried. And suddenly I saw myself, absolutely independent of everything around me, the people, things, the times, independent of everything.

For the first time I felt truly, sovereignly myself. I didn't know it was a spiritual experience, but I felt very happy. And I have never forgotten it.

\*

*The young judge*

I remember a woman who had committed a theft—not a petty theft, something on quite a large scale. I was in charge of preparing the case, and during a pause in the court she was allowed to meet her little daughter, whom she had not seen for several weeks.

Then in that tight and disagreeable face something relaxed and a gleam of joy passed. When the mother looked into her child's eyes, for a few seconds the true person was there.

It is in moments of great joy that our true being is most visible.

\*

*The tree*

One can really have an experience of the identification with one of those big trees that are the kings of the forest—an ordinary plant is too small for a human to feel at ease in.

One day on our estate on Moorea I was sitting beside a little stream, leaning against a tree. I didn't know what kind of tree it was. I was fascinated by the big eels in the river, sacred eels. Then I felt a presence behind me. First I noticed the rough trunk I was leaning against; then the tree began to vibrate inaudibly, in a very special way something a little like a cat purring: it was a slow vibration of contentment. This corresponded with a deep note inside me. Gradually I let myself be overcome by this contentment, and a door opened. Soon the whole body was seized by this ananda and

6. With *Medhananda on the shores of infinity*, pp. 27-28; 33-34; 50-51; 56; 120-21.

I found I had become a tree: I was a tree. I lost awareness of my human body. I remained a tree for a long time. I experienced the rhythmic pulsation of the sap being pumped upwards, the sparkling play of sunlight in the foliage, the vivid intimate presence of everything that lives in it, and all the little plants round about it. It was a real paradise for that tree, to have its roots bathing in the coolness of the river. Its crown was very large and higher than the other treetops.

It is very pleasant, soothing and enriching to be a tree. That species of tree is found in India too. The Mother called it “Health”.

\*

*Where every encounter is a game*

To think that there are people who take themselves so seriously and think themselves so important that they are no longer able to play at being someone else! They deprive themselves of the delight of living in the golden age from time to time. In the solitude of nature, in fact one is never alone. You can identify with everything you meet. It is a very easy movement—but not a complete, absolute identification, because there is duality and play. Everything wants to play with you, and you can play with everything; and everything is a light, a vibratory energy.

One day I was sitting beside a stream that comes down the mountainside, cascading from level to level; and beneath each little cascade there is a pool that is so nice to bathe in. I didn't know what had happened to me, it was so quick: I found myself with lots of brothers and sisters, playing at sliding, tumbling, whirling, doing wonderful dance-steps ... I played and played with them. It was only after I got back into my body that I understood: it was the stream. A little experience like that is like a complete life that one has lived.

\*

*Beauty*

When one sees one beautiful thing, it's bearable. But when there is beauty wherever you look—as happened to me in some landscapes on Moorea—it is at the extreme limit of the bearable. It hurts.

\*

### *Sri Aurobindo's planet*

Haven't I told you about the time I left my body on the marketplace in Papete? It was during the time when my wife had gone to take the children to school in France, and I was looking after a chemist's shop for a friend in absence. The market starts at five in the morning, and by six-thirty or seven it is more or less finished. If you want good fish, you must go there at five when the fishermen have just come in. The fish are sold strung together on a cord. You have to buy a whole string of eight or ten fish. So there I was at the market. Just being there so early in the morning, and in such a crowd, was strange. Suddenly I became aware that I had left my body somewhere there in the marketplace, gazing at the fish.

#### *Q. What did it do there?*

What everybody does.... People don't do much—it got jostled around a bit. When I wanted to return to my body, it was impossible to remember what earth I belonged to, to what solar system, what galaxy. There are lots of earths, even inhabited ones. It is a problem if you lose your connection with your body, especially in an expanding universe where you are in danger of getting further and further away from it.

I was like a tiny child confronted with those vastnesses, which began to question me. And suddenly I remembered, "Sri Aurobindo!" I came from Sri Aurobindo's planet. "Ah!" they seemed to exclaim, those cosmic entities who look after the intergalactic traffic, "Sri Aurobindo! You should have said that to start with!" And contact was re-established with this poor body standing in the middle of the marketplace.

MEDHANANDA

*Man is a specialised sound-maker, and so by specialising he lost his faculty for intimate silent communication, just as by writing down his literature he lost his faculty for remembering the spoken tale and the recounted epic. The moment you specialise by inventing a tool or an instrument to do the work of some original faculty you find that you have lost that faculty.*

*If you continue to cut your food with machinery, you will lose your teeth; if you always roll on wheels you will finish without the use of your legs and will have to resort to a wheelchair.*



## VII

**Medhananda, extraordinary teacher and guide<sup>7</sup>**

Medhananda—a formidable, multifaceted, radiant personality. ... We can see many of his extraordinary capabilities, experiences, and realisations as they are revealed in his autobiographical book *With Medhananda on the shores of infinity*. Reading about his fascinating inner and outer life happenings one is struck with awe and wonder.

...

In Tahiti, where he spent sixteen years, Medhananda had found exceptionally favourable conditions for delving deeper into the inner and higher realms of his being. Solitude, peace, and an environment of paradisiacal beauty and harmony were naturally very congenial for his extended explorations of the vastnesses within, around, and beyond him.

...

As we learn from the book, he had the capability to identify with manifested and unmanifested beings, with animals and plants, with the drops of a waterfall... His wide consciousness could contact and embrace everything. And he was a fearless fighter, a warrior to the core. ... He always pointed out the importance of attaining the consciousness of Gnosis, which is knowledge by identity, entering into the heart of things and seeing all manifested forms not only as expressions of the Divine but also as the One Divine.

Medhananda's intellectual powers were brilliant, outstanding. His was a mind that was not only highly cultured, complex, vast, and profound but which could see the various manifestations of life as a totality, as an organic whole where everything is connected. Illustrating this, he liked to use the image of a carpet where all the knots and threads are intimately interwoven to form a single whole. Whatever we see in the world of phenomena is just a knot in the big carpet; nothing is isolated, everything has an effect on everything else. And he would always emphasise the importance of *varuna*: to become wide and vast in order to open to and receive the new consciousness. From his notes: "The new consciousness of man does not manifest by solving problems but by inventing problems. The number of problems surrounding us shows that we are living in a golden age. Poor ages have only few problems. A widening consciousness naturally discovers new problems, problems which clamour not for a 'solution' but for a further widening of our awareness." In his talks and writings he stressed very much the fact that everything is vibratory. Everything is fluid, a process, a happening, and not a fixity. Also the soul is nothing "fixed", nothing we *have*. "The soul is a verb," he explained, "We *are* it."

7. Adapted from *Recent Publications*.

...

It was a great privilege to be with him, to breathe in his powerful, luminous atmosphere. Unforgettable are those beautiful hours in the afternoon when we, a small group of friends, would meet in the Library garden, asking questions and listening in rapt self-forgetfulness to what he shared with us from his vast store of knowledge and experience. His remarks were often spiced with a trace of provocation, and there was always this wonderful sense of humour, of amusement, and the hilarious laughter, the playfulness. He did not take anything too seriously.

He fired our aspiration towards self-perfection and a widening of consciousness; and by a mere look he could touch my inner being and help me to establish the connection. He could be uncompromising in terms of what he expected from us, and he was sometimes harsh like a Zen master. But then again he would be loving and gentle, showing infinite patience. ... One morning it happened that I was in a state of extreme anguish, almost terror, and I went to see him, trembling, unable to speak. He quietly looked at me, just for a few seconds—and immediately a wave of peace descended into me, enveloping me like a cocoon. It was a peace unfathomable, solid, compact, almost material, which stayed with me the whole day.

...

I recall how he used to emphasise that “We are not what we have become, but what we can become.”

Medhananda, for many of us, was a bright star, illuminating the way.

AGNIDHAN

*The word “supramental”, carefully chosen by Sri Aurobindo with his precise knowledge of Latin, should not be confused with “Super-mental” which would rather signify a hyperactivity of the mind. “Supra-” is a prefix for “beyond” or “above”. It can be understood, for example, in the word “supraterrestrial” which clearly means something that surpasses our terrestrial activities. In the same way “supramental” means “above all mental activity”.*

## VIII

**The gift of grace<sup>8</sup>*****“The Mother”***

*In 1948 someone gave Medhananda Sri Aurobindo’s book “The Mother”, which had just reached Tahiti, without suspecting what a spiritual explosion it would provoke in a well-prepared field of consciousness.*

Today it is one week since the awareness of Her supreme Grace descended into me. A week that feels like an eternity, a week of unparalleled riches.

A moment ago I felt sad, thinking of the happiness of a week ago, when She blessed me for the first time. It is the essence of life to demand always more and not to be satisfied with memories and hopes. I have learnt that one must not be exigent, one must not demand anything, not even Her presence. But just now when I opened that marvellous little book of Sri Aurobindo, when my eyes fell on the title “The Mother”, She penetrated me like an arrow. I do not know when I shall be able to read this book coherently. I have hardly started, when the joy of his words prevents me from continuing.

***Letter to a friend who gave him the book “The Mother”***

My dear friend,

I could thank you my whole life long without being able to repay my debt. I know you will reply that you were only an instrument. But you were such a perfect instrument. And if the wellspring of love which flowed from Her, and has overflowed, can help you on the path towards knowledge, it will make me happy. The constant happiness I am experiencing is certainly not merited in this life, and if it testifies in a minute way to many incarnations, the rest is pure grace. The grace is so enormous, so disproportionate to everything a man can give to the Divine, that that human greatness vanishes, confronted with the whole universe and all its galaxies.

***An opportunity missed***

On Sunday Subodha returned from the Tennis Ground bringing a German fellow to meet me. The next day the Mother asked me about him.

I replied, “We talked for an hour, particularly about his work, not about anything spiritual.”

“Ah?” the Mother said.

8. *With Medhananda on the shores of infinity*, pp. 77; 80; 86; 103-04; 109.

In excuse I added, “If you don’t ask a question, you don’t get an answer—like in the story of Parsifal.”

And I added, “This visitor didn’t know what yoga is.”

Mother said, “But very few people do, even those who think they know.”

In the end I added, “And then, he smelt of alcohol.”

“That’s very good!” said the Mother. “It’s an excellent moment to go straight to the psychic.”

When the young man came, I didn’t know that the Mother had sent him to me—otherwise I would have been more welcoming. Not only did he fail to ask a single question—he didn’t even notice that this is a library. But he did say, “There are a lot of books here.”

I said, “Yes, there are a lot of books.” I showed him a magazine called “Yoga”, suggesting, “You know this?”

He asked, “What is it, some kind of sport?”

I said, “Yes, it is a sport.”

I spent an hour with him. There was some sort of contact between us. He explained his problems to me in detail.

But one doesn’t feel like talking about the Mother and Sri Aurobindo to someone who smells of alcohol. There we are—with our petty preconceptions! I reconstructed the scene afterwards.

When the Mother arrived at the Tennis Ground, he was leaning on the wall looking at the sea, unaware that he was on private property. She saw him from behind for a moment. He was a real giant, very tall and very young. He was feeling all alone. He must have found the sea very beautiful and had entered into resonance with that beauty. Mother saw a possibility there immediately, and She said to Pavitra, “Send him to Medhananda.” And Pavitra told Subodha to bring him to me.

Afterwards I asked the Mother a question, “What can one say to someone who doesn’t know anything?” That must have worked in Her, because the following day She gave me this paper on which She had formulated how to present the Ashram to a stranger, “A centre of education that teaches integral life.”

\*

### *Words of the Mother*

The first interview given by the Mother to Medhananda, who had recently arrived in the Ashram, was almost entirely silent.

She told him, he has written in his notebook of experiences, “Since long I am following you.”

On 5<sup>th</sup> April 1956, when Medhananda went to fetch the flowers the Mother used to give him every morning for himself and for the Library, She confirmed the

manifestation of the Supramental upon earth with these words, “Nous avons passé le tournant, nous sommes de l’autre côté.” [We have turned the corner, we have reached the other side.]

MEDHANANDA

*To be one  
with all this delight  
for ever and ever  
and at every moment  
feel it vibrating in myself  
and everywhere in all things  
and to be constantly discovering  
this delight afresh—  
that is my true self.*

\*

*A prophet  
is not one who predicts the future  
but one who speaks with the voice of truth,  
so that what he says comes true.*

# DEVOTIONAL POETRY IN TAMIL

(Continued from the issue of March 2008)

## 22. Christian Bhakti Poetry

THE Christian contribution to Indian philosophy is considerable. Indian philosophy has always been found to have two strains: Sramanic and Vedic. The Vedic strain includes Advaita, Visishtadvaita, Dvaita, Nyaya, Vaisesika and other disciplines. The Sramanic has two chief exponents: Buddhism and Jainism. In recent centuries there have been other implants. The coming of the Parsis, Mahomedans and Christians has brought about certain changes in philosophical attitudes as well. The nineteenth century saw a good deal of interaction between Hindus and Christians with Henry Vivian Derozio, Keshub Chunder Sen and Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya contributing to it. More recently, there has been a veritable explosion of Christian-Hinduism studies thanks to the desire of many Christians to have a wider horizon while they bring the message of Christ to a people who primarily belong to the Hindu culture. And this is exactly what is being done by the Christian hymnologists in Tamil.

Singing the glory of God is a matter of personal experience. Dr. John Chettimattam, the Christian theologian said once in a seminar on Christian-Hindu studies that *anubhava* (personal experience) is important for Indian philosophy and this should be kept in mind when students trained in the Objectivism of the West seek to study it:

Starting from the side of the infinite and immutable divinity, the finite material world has nothing to add. But if we start from below and look at the world as the fullness of Christ, the Son of God who could really become incarnate without any change in the divinity, the world has a real meaning. Theos was exemplified for Christian believers in the mysteries of Immaculate Conception and Assumption of Mary, the Mother of Christ.

Those who are trained in the nuances of Tamil bhakti poetry will find this approach perfectly credible. As exemplified in these hymns, ultimately it is the Supreme's love for creation that flows forth as Grace, a point which accords with Christianity. This is the reason why from the beginning, Christian bhakti poetry has drawn its inspiration from the Alvars and Nayanmars, especially the latter. Shaiva Siddhantam has helped in formatting the theological background as the former's idea of '*anava malam*' (the impurity of Ego) can be a distant parallel to the theory of Original Sin posited by Christianity. Man is redeemed of Ego, Original Sin by the grace of God.

Quite early in the eighteenth century, Christian hymns in Tamil began to be

sung by the new adherents to the religion. First came the foreign missionaries. The earliest of them to make a strong impress upon the local population was Father Constantine Beschi (1680-1746) who learnt Tamil and wrote in that language too. He came to be widely known as Veerama Munivar. His epic poem is *Tembavani*, which recounts the ministry of St. Joseph in 36 cantos. The miraculous life of St. Quiteria of Portugal has been retold by him for the common folk as *Kitteri Ammal Ammanai*. His *Tirukkavalur Kalambakam* uses the classical Tamil genre of “*kalambakam*” which is ideal for praising Goddess Adaikalamatha whose image had been consecrated by him in the village of Elakurichi. Miracles were attributed to her. As one engaged in proselytisation, he had realised the importance of the worship of the Mother Goddess in India. The icon of a mother with a child in hand appealed to the populace most, even more than that of the crucified Jesus. Hence he encouraged the worship of Mother Mary in a big way.

Fr. Beschi encountered opposition for such image worship in Christianity from the Danish missionaries, but the prayers found in his works came in the tradition of bhakti poetry and charmed the adherents of Christianity and so this image worship came to stay.

She is the Mother who has showed us the treasures above  
And come down to illumine the earth below!  
She reached Tirukavalur resounding with the floods  
Of Kaveri, a spread of flowering gardens  
That extend scent from the blossoms, the *akil* trees  
Give coverage and make the place cool.  
Having reached the place  
Won't she grant me the grace of her feet  
That is pearly moonlight?  
If my mind is purified by her beautiful feet  
The darkness around will be chased away.  
Those flower-feet are my help to the Beyond.<sup>1</sup>

As the religion of Christianity spread in Tamil Nadu, the converts were athirst for their own reading and understanding of the Bible. The Bible was in non-Indian languages. Even English was as yet a strange language for the majority. The Tamil version was in the making. Most of the converts were illiterate. Hence ‘listening’ to the religious voice became important. Singing hymns was the answer since the Church already had a tradition of choir music. Christian hymnology was thus launched by Vedanayakam Sastriar (1774-1864).

If Christianity gained a strong foothold in South India, much of the credit should go to Rev. C. F. Schwartz (1726-1798), a German Protestant missionary who learnt

1. All translations from Tamil cited in this article are by Prema Nandakumar.

Tamil and English and became the tutor of Serfoji, the Prince of Thanjavur. Schwartz was also the tutor of Vedanayagam and so a lasting friendship grew up between him and Serfoji. Vedanayagam became a school teacher and took to composing songs to propagate his faith. He was certainly the first to be inspired by the hymns of the Alwars, Nayanmars and Tayumanava to write in simple, mellifluous Tamil as is seen in his various works like *Gnanapada Kirtanam*, *Jabamalai* and *Gnanakkummi*. Since classical carnatic music and dance were easily assimilated by the common man, Vedanayagam composed songs in the carnatic style and has even written a dance-drama, *Bethlehem Kuravanji*. A hymn composed in the raga of Tyagaraja's *kamas kriti*, 'Sujana Jeevana' as 'Parama Jeevana' with the same notes reveals the devotee's ardent heart:

One who gives the greater life,  
And frees from earthly existence!  
Verily the Seat of Compassion,  
Granting the Christian way of life,  
Treasure-trove of gentleness,  
Verily, holder of all riches!  
O King Yesu!

A contemporary of Fr. Beschi, Antony Kutty Annaviar (1710-1730), wrote *Aradanai Prasagam* and *Arul Vasagam* and a devotional poem, *Perinba-k-kathal*. His one desire was to sing of Jesus:

I must always have your lotus feet twain;  
Ever must I worship you;  
I must have strength and power for tapasya;  
And discrimination to give up evil ways;  
I must read your scriptures and sing them;  
I must gain salvation, O child  
In the hands of mother Mary, Lord Jesus!

Apparently his poems were popular with singers as the songs are inspired by the *Thevaram* and *Tiruppugazh* hymnology. An anthology of these poems has been published as *Christava Sangeetham*. One song makes fun of the Hindu religion:

His is the divine Presence  
That cannot be had by ritual dress,  
Tarpana, White Ash or fire sacrifice.  
He cannot be bound by any law  
That speaks of the Six Letters,  
The Eight or Three Letters.



During 19<sup>th</sup> century, Inba Kavirayar (Xavier Henry Leon), gained fame for his musical discourses on Christian themes. A considerable poet, his one great influence was Tayumanava as may be seen in this series of questions addressed to Jesus:

Was not the hunger of four thousand  
 Assuaged by seven loaves?  
 Water turned to wine? Four days  
 After death, did not the Son  
 Regain his life? Wasn't the woman  
 Rid of her disease by touching the hem  
 Of the garment?

Other Christian devotional poets of this period include Savarayalu Nayagar and Pandit Saverirayar. While the former was a disciple of the great Tamil scholar Mahavidwan Minakshisundaram Pillai, the latter has written a fine poem, *Sri Bhagartha Vilasam*. Retelling the life of St. Alexis of Rome in Tamil cultural diction, Pandit Saverirayar brings out the piteous state of a chaste wife with moving verses, when Alexis leaves home on the night of his wedding. At the same time, the welling compassion in the heart of the rich Alexis is revealed with gentleness. Alexis becomes a beggar in Edessa and returns to Rome after seventeen years. It is only when he dies that a parchment in his possession reveals his true identity. Considered the patron saint of beggars, he was canonised. The story of Alexis as retold in *Sri Bhagartha Vilasam* would have elicited the sympathy and interest of the Indian listeners who were no strangers to such acts of renunciation in India from immemorial times.

Pandit Saverirayar uses folk genres a-plenty in conveying the story of Bhagartha (Alexis) such as 'Talelo' (Lullaby) and 'Odam' (Boat songs). This is Bhagartha speaking to his heart:

O my heart! Walk the path  
 Of Eternal comfort, and avoid sorrow.  
 Do not be a feast to the five hunters  
 Ever on the lookout; this body  
 Is a forest of sensual desires.  
 Do not remain bound in it!

Henry Alfred Krishna Pillai (1827-1900) was an Anglican Christian. This denomination has, perhaps, the longest history of praying in English. Thus it was natural for Krishna Pillai to pray in his mother-tongue Tamil. Unlike Father Beschi who wrote in classical Tamil which could confuse the comprehension of the illiterate devotee, Krishna Pillai used very simple terms. Since he dealt with genres made familiar by the earlier bhakti poets which were popular with the common folk, his

epic creation, *Ratchaniya Yatrikam* caught the immediate attention of the Christian community. The work was inspired by John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* but as it was in conformity with the Tamil tradition, the Tamil scholars also welcomed it. As in the epics of Sekkizhar and Kamban, *Ratchaniya Yatrikam* opens with the word 'Ulaku' (the world). The diction is appropriately blended with the story of Christian's journey from the City of Destruction with the recounting of the birth of Christ, the fall of Adam and the struggle in the Slough of Despond. The ancient Tamil genre of "opening the door" (*Kadai Tirappu*) is used when Anmikan (Christian) in search of spiritual illumination goes to a Holy Place and knocks at the door:

I am the servitor of the feet  
Of the Pure Lord who granted us  
Endless Grace by destroying attachment  
To the illusion of earthly life!  
Be pleased to open the door!

Poor me, I left the City of Destruction  
Having been caught in desire  
And attachment. I have come  
In search of illumination.  
Be pleased to open the door!

Christian's prayers are almost totally a remake of verses from the *Thevaram* of the Nayanmars. Except for a change in denomination (Jesus in the place of Narayana or Shiva), these verses might well have been uttered by an ancient hymnodist. As in this decad which reminds one of Tirumangai Alwar's verse beginning, '*Kulam tharum, selvam thanthidum*':

The name of Jesus gives all that is good,  
Makes you upright, saves you from evil,  
Chases away troubles, destroys enmity,  
Raises you high, saves you always.

The name of Jesus is termed as a 'mantra' as the Nayanmars sang of the Holy Ash, "*mandiramaavadhu neeru*":

The mantra that destroys conspiring demons,  
The mantra that controls the senses five,  
The mantra that chases away the illusion of the world,  
That is the name of Jesus, faultless!

Again, in the same manner in which Andal describes the vision of Krishna in Brindavan in *Nachiyar Tirumozhi (Vrindavanaththe Kandome)*, we have here a Christian's vision of Jesus on the Cross (*Siluvaimisai Kandome*):

The treasure of faultless eyes that pour  
 The flood of infinite compassion  
 To save even me who am lowly and evil,  
 The honey that lifts our hearts in joy,  
 Life of our life, blameless nectar,  
 Sweet fruit; I have seen Him on the Cross.

Such rendering of the Christian message through Hindu diction was a natural evolution of the way in which many foreign missionaries approached Indian people during the early days. The first Christian ashram was founded in Madurai by the Jesuit, Roberto de Nobili in 1607. He lived an austere life, was a vegetarian, wore a sacred thread and the ochre garment of a Hindu renunciate. By the time he passed away after half a century, he had over a thousand high-caste converts living with him. But this type of ashram ideal which laid the foundations of successful proselytisation was given up later. It was only in the twentieth century this ashram ideal was revived by Christian missionaries.<sup>2</sup>

Among other hymnologists who were active in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was N. Samuel (1850-1927). His *Kallu Kummi* uses dark laughter to convey the evils of the drink habit. Apart from his *Gospel Lyrics* which contains 200 songs, he was known for his effective translation of German lyrics for being sung in the choir. Liturgical music gained its early compositions from Father Santiago (1848-1926). Early in his life when he was a boarder in the Catholic School at Madurai, he became the leader of a *bhajan* group. Later on he joined the College at Nagapattinam where his Tamil song, “*Sesuvin madura tiru irudayame*” (Sweet heart of Jesus) was sung by the choir boys in the college chapel. The song is simple and gracious:

The heart of Jesus so sweet and holy  
 Is full of the flames of friendliness!  
 O compassionate Lord! Do be our friend  
 Through all our days here!

The poem attracted the attention of the rector who encouraged him to translate the European canticles into Tamil. The result was *Teva Tottira Kirtanaikal* (Hymns of Divine Praise) which became immensely popular. Another extremely popular Christian composer was Mayuram Vedanayakam Pillai. An administrator, he was

2. See David L. Gosling, ‘Hindu and Christian Ashrams in India’, *The Aryan Path* (Bombay, February, 1975), pp. 76-80.

District Munsiff of important places such as Sirgali, Tarangambadi and Mayuram. He was a friend of the legendary Tamil poet and scholar, Mahavidwan Minakshisundaram Pillai. A novelist and author of the ethical text, *Needhi Nul*, Vedanayakam Pillai had a special concern for women and called for education as the one major instrument to emancipate them. He has been very popular on the classical music stage for more than a century. His *Sarva Samaya Samarasa Kirtanaikal* (1876) reveals his eagerness to avoid separativity on the basis of religion. A truly secular poet, his songs sing of the Supreme and do not indulge in denominational compartmentalisation. Where is the need for names when all that is glorious and is good but reflects the Creator? The song, “*Inda varam*”, for instance:

Give me this boon  
Though you may deny me all others.

O Divine who art all-beautiful,  
The Keeper who holds up this earth, ever!

May I never be guilty  
Of deceit, jealousy, falsehood  
And anger; may I never learn adultery,  
Greed, and evil ways;  
May I never stray from the Path Divine;  
O Lord! Never advertise myself.

Paranjoti (the Supreme Luminance), Veda Nayakan (Lord of Scripture), Adi (the Ancient) are some of the terms used by Vedanayakam Pillai to address God and his concise hymns make up a beautiful bouquet of prayers which are popular with people professing other faith as well. The hymn, “*Adiye paranjothiye*” is a good example:

O Ancient! The Supreme Luminance!  
Protect me by granting me grace!

O Compassionate One who is not comprehended  
By mere studies! You are a sea of purity  
Who is verily the personification of justice!

Only as long as the eyes are there, can sight be;  
Good deeds can be done only when there is life;  
O Lord! Look upon me and confer the kingdom  
Of Knowledge upon this earth.  
Your greatnesses cannot be listed;

Your grace is ever aglow; you are worshipped  
 By the immortals! You are the Teacher  
 Who is a treasure-trove of auspicious qualities!

Vedanayakam Pillai's insistence upon an ethical conduct for the devotee is no doubt a result of his spending years watching false cases having a field day in the court of justice. Himself an upright judge, he was shocked by the amount of sham that was unwrapped in the law courts. "When can I think of God when I spend all my time with two liars screaming at each other flinging scandalous verbiage?" he asks in a poem. Dark laughter reveals an ugly social truth:

This chap plucked sky-flowers, he says;  
 And a blind fellow shot an arrow at him.  
 The notoriously dumb fellow cursed, he says;  
 And I believe the deaf scoundrel heard it all  
 And laughed! It appears the plaintiff  
 Was caught by a fellow who had no limbs  
 And kicked at with feet repeatedly;  
 The chap who had no head seems to have bitten  
 Sharply; all this was learnt by Vedanayakan  
 Used to writing poetry. Am I in charge  
 Of these many complaints? Is every one  
 Who comes here, my master?

The twentieth century has also given us a number of devotional poets. There has been quite a few attempts to make use of the tunes from western choir music, but the traditional Indian tunes remain popular. Vedanayakam Sastriyar (1884-1936), a descendant of his ancestor of the same name became very well known for his *katha kalakshepam* using all the traditional modes to convey Christian themes. *Satya Veda Sankeerthanam* (1935) by T.M. Aiyathurai Bhagavathar of Kayathar contains songs which have minimum verbal changes to transform existing hymns by Jnana-sambandhar, Tyagaraja and Ramanathapuram Srinivasa Iyengar. Originally from a Shaivite family, he became a Roman Catholic and was a legend in his time for drawing crowds whether in India, Sri Lanka or Burma. One can imagine the reason at this distance of time because there is power in his poetry, the power of pity and terror:

It is my fate which is the cause  
 That has placed Him on the Cross.

The frightened Pilate rejected grace  
 And listened to the words of the leaders

Who were the plotters. For his judgement  
It is my fate which is the cause:

Ah me! the lowly deed!  
Alas! What patience He has shown!  
He did not open his coral-lips  
Even when undergoing intense pain.  
Yet showed compassion to us,  
Our Supreme Lord, on this earth!

His “*Esu Nayaka Swami Padikam*” is full of devotional fervour and has striking poetic images.

Ignatius Hirudayam (1910-1995) was a crusader for the entry of classical music into Church rituals. Author of mellifluous poems and the drama *Velviti* (Saga of Sacrifice), he combined devotion for the Divine with devotion for the motherland in a hymn he composed on Mother Mary when India became independent 1947:

The conch shells reverberate with their sound,  
The earth from slumber awakes, and wonders in joy,  
And gazes at Mary who rises to heaven,  
Freed from the bonds of death, in glory.  
Who is she who follows closely the Queen of Heaven?  
Come then, daughter Bharat, and grace receive.<sup>3</sup>

He has also written *Pillai Ayiram* following the story line of Francis Thompson in *The Hound of Heaven*, indicating what constitutes total surrender:

In your out-stretched hands have I struck;  
I have bathed in your blood and become pure;  
In your sacred heart open to me have I laid my heart;  
In the Lord's ocean of mercy have I set sail.

But the 20<sup>th</sup> century devotional poet who has, perhaps, given us the finest Tamil poem on Jesus Christ is Subramania Bharati, who, however, did not profess that religion!

‘My Lord expired on the Cross  
and ascended in three days.’  
Beloved Mary Magdalene  
saw this happen.

3. This and the following translation from Ignatius Hirudayam are by Anand Amaladass.

Friends! here's the esoteric sense.  
 The gods will enter us  
 and guard us from all ills  
 if we transcend pride.

Mary Magdalene is Love,  
 Jesus the Soul.  
 The outer evil destroyed,  
 the good life sprouts.  
 She praised the radiance  
 in that golden face.  
 That was the love of Magdalene,  
 Ah, what joy!

If Sense is bound to the Cross of Truth  
 And crucified on the thorn austerity,  
 Jesus of the strengthened soul  
 will rise as the boundless sky.  
 Magdalene is the Eternal Feminine,  
 Jesus Christ is deathless dharma.  
 Draw we close to the symbol;  
 Look, an inner meaning glows.

*(To be continued)*

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

*If in their grosser forms ... religions aim only at the ignorant joys of the lower heavens, yet there is a far higher and profounder sense in which we may appreciate the cry of the devotee poet when in a homely and vigorous metaphor he claimed the right of the soul to enjoy for ever the ecstasy of its embrace of the Supreme. "I do not want to become sugar," he wrote, "I want to eat sugar."*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(The Synthesis of Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 377)*

## BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

**India and the Future of South Asia** by Kosha Shah, Auroville: Auroville Arts, 2007, pp. 84, price Rs. 80.

### SOUTH ASIAN FEDERATION: MYTH OR REALITY

In this brief analysis of the subject, 'India and the Future of South Asia', Kosha Shah makes a fervent plea for greater understanding and political unification among the people of this impoverished and strife-torn region. Firmly grounded on some of the foundational approaches of Sri Aurobindo on this issue, the study, in the form of an expanded paper, suggests that further delay in the way of a confederation of South Asian nations would prolong the existing malady and take a huge toll in economic, cultural and political terms.

Comprising nine brief chapters, aside from a conclusion, an annexure and a bibliography, the booklet attempts to develop an underlying argument whose logical interconnections deserve closer scrutiny.

Two sets of chapters are brought together in the overall exercise: those that underline the spiritual significance of the concepts such as civilisation, culture, nation-state, federation and confederation. Then there are those that speak of contemporary South Asia, such as formations like the SAARC. To integrate both the sets in a dynamic and imaginative manner, poses a challenge. Kosha brings in a wide range of observations and insights and argues out her case.

It is perhaps appropriate, and Kosha does well to begin with the Independence Day Message of Sri Aurobindo that speaks of his five dreams. One of these, in Sri Aurobindo's words, stands for the "resurgence and liberation of the peoples of Asia and her return to her great role in the progress of human civilisation."

The Introduction underlines the paradoxical nature of the Indian State, riddled as it is, with contradictions. What steps ought to be taken within India and South Asia in order to fashion out a greater regional identity? Kosha offers her own understanding of the situation. While this is unexceptionable, perhaps the approach would have been better served by paying greater attention to linkages in arguments that may be visible to the disciples of Sri Aurobindo but somewhat unclear to others. For instance, from the Sri Aurobindonean declaration that the surface of life is easy to understand, there is a leap to a firm though somewhat undemonstrated assertion that "the future of humanity, not only South Asia, rests on the growth of consciousness."

The main strength of the thesis is the belief that South Asia comprises a common economic, political and civilisational entity. This is easily experienced by the inhabitants of the region. Kosha shows us that major religions like Hinduism are common to India, and Nepal, Buddhism to India, Bhutan and Sri Lanka, Islam to India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Maldives, and so on.



The underlying concepts are then explained. There are references to notions like civilisation, culture, religion, spirituality and secularism that have unfortunately become sources of discord in South Asia today. While each could be complementary to the others and play a role for greater harmony, we notice a greater manifestation of divisiveness as well.

The basic truth of collective life, especially in the context of nations and nationalities, as Sri Aurobindo argues, is that it affirms the importance of group souls that have separate distinctness but could move in the direction of greater wholeness. It is on the basis of self-determination that a true federation or confederation of South Asian nations could be attained. As Kosha argues, "This could be through a more federal form of government within each country. It would take a lot of organisation to find the right balance between the centrifugal and centripetal tendencies at the local and central level. But in the end, this could be the most workable model and one which could last, once a certain degree of understanding has been reached."

Possibilities of the confederation models are then examined. The question is to what extent the States are willing to surrender their sovereignties while retaining the rights of unilateral secession. The European Union has emerged as a unique attempt. SAARC nations themselves could aspire for closer cooperation. What is necessary is not just the right material circumstances, but the play of the more vital psychological and emotional factors that alone could contribute to greater homogenisation.

The examples of some other regional formations such as ASEAN, OAS, African Union, NAFTA, SADC etc. are then examined. We see the strength and weaknesses of each of these groupings and associations. Kosha recognises the rationale for the formations like the EU and ASEAN, each coming into existence *vis-à-vis* larger powers like the United States and China.

The problems and possibilities of a South Asian Confederation are next taken up. This involves resolution of political problems, sharing of natural resources and above all, the emergence of a better federal structure within each nation-state.

What then are the possibilities of a loose voluntary confederation in South Asia? It is not just the desire for a pragmatic union, Kosha argues, for common benefits alone, but "a way of evolving together in the highest way; a search for a self-becoming, in tune with the lofty aims that have been manifested in various ways in this region" that must triumph.

This is a noble aim that must be achieved. Germany has shown the way in a different context. It is therefore important that South Asian nations must come together. They must overcome their traditional rivalries that date back to the colonial period. They must become an example before other nations and play a pivotal role for greater human unity.

*India and the Future of South Asia* is not a scholarly treatise. It is not meant to be one. Clearly, there are gaps in the book's arguments and there are disjunctions. The structure of the book needs to be better organised. There is a need for offering a

greater rationale for the chapterisation, and within each chapter, the justification for the sequence of quotations and arguments offered.

Kosha is an interested reader of the South Asian situation. She has faith in Sri Aurobindo's prophecy and is a dedicated member of the Auroville experiment. This is the perspective that must ultimately guide our judgement of the book. Her work is to be seen alongside the significant contributions of others like Professor Kittu Reddy.

*India and the Future of South Asia* is an early commendable effort. Hopefully this work would pave the way for a more detailed and comprehensive treatment of the subject in future.

SACHIDANANDA MOHANTY

*Life differs from the mechanical order of the physical universe with which the reason has been able to deal victoriously just because it is mechanical and runs immutably in the groove of fixed cosmic habits. Life, on the contrary, is a mobile, progressive and evolving force,—a force that is the increasing expression of an infinite soul in creatures and, as it progresses, becomes more and more aware of its own subtle variations, needs, diversities. The progress of Life involves the development and interlocking of an immense number of things that are in conflict with each other and seem often to be absolute oppositions and contraries. To find amid these oppositions some principle or standing-ground of unity, some workable lever of reconciliation which will make possible a larger and better development on a basis of harmony and not of conflict and struggle, must be increasingly the common aim of humanity in its active life-evolution, if it at all means to rise out of life's more confused, painful and obscure movement, out of the compromises made by Nature with the ignorance of the Life-mind and the nescience of Matter. This can only be truly and satisfactorily done when the soul discovers itself in its highest and completest spiritual reality and effects a progressive upward transformation of its life-values into those of the spirit; for there they will all find their spiritual truth and in that truth their standing-ground of mutual recognition and reconciliation.*

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Human Cycle*, CWSA, Vol. 25, pp. 213-14)

## NAVANIT STORIES

### SADHE TE VADHE!<sup>1</sup>

A KING and a queen. The queen was as intelligent as she was beautiful; one who, in Sanskrit, is called *manaswini*. The king was neither bright nor *manishi*; it was plain luck that he was born in a royal family; he was just a simple-minded gentleman.

After the Durbar the king would return to his palace, sit beside his queen and with great joy and affection describe to her all that had struck him there as unusual. At the end the queen would remark, “So what? What is so special in that?” Never would she show any surprise, never utter any “Oh!” or “Ah!” This hurt and disappointed the king. “How is it that nothing surprises her? Why does she always throw cold water on my enthusiasm? What sort of woman is this?” But for the sake of harmony, not willing to upset her, he would swallow his annoyance telling himself that perhaps she was actually right and the thing was not really all that strange after all. And the next time he would attempt to come up with something more striking. But the queen always reacted with the same cool remark, “So what...?”

One day, the king hurried back to the palace with the most extraordinary thing he had ever seen, convinced it would force the queen to express the surprised happiness he so longed to see in her. Unable to contain his enthusiasm he began even before he had settled beside her on the swing, “You know, something happened today that just bowled me over.” He narrated the whole story with gusto while the queen just kept smiling softly all the while. At the end she uttered her usual “So what?”

This time the king lost control over himself. Trembling with the long-pent-up frustration he shouted, “Get out of here! How many wonderful, how many astounding things have I not gathered for you, and every time, sitting smugly on your swing you have insulted me with your ‘So what’—as if you were yourself the most extraordinary thing ever on earth! Get out; and don’t come to me until you can yourself demonstrate something beyond all belief.”

Before the king could add another word, the queen got up and, like a proud-necked swan, swept out. After a time, the rage left him and repentance rushed in. “My God, what have I done? This self-respecting woman will never come back! Woe to me!”

Two years passed—the king mourning and groaning his loss in his palace; the silent queen, smarting to the core, allowed none but her most trusted attendants to come into her quarters in the palace so that nothing of what was going on inside could leak out.

Then one day the queen emerged and went straight to the king. Seeing her walk in majestically like a royal elephant, the king was more ecstatic than stunned. He rose

1. Sadhe: follows a discipline, sadhana; te: she/he; vadhe: grows, develops, achieves a siddhi.

to welcome her with love and respect. But the proud woman stopped a few paces away from him and solemnly said, "Sire! I come to show you what you wanted to see. But first summon your best *mallas*, your strongest wrestlers, and let them demonstrate their skills."

The simple-hearted man, eager to celebrate her coming, ordered, "Call the *mallas*."

A hundred *mallas*, each vying in strength and skill with the other, came. The king and queen sat on the royal dais, the royal officers sat in their place, the public crowded in theirs, and the *mallas* lined up in the arena. Boxing, wrestling, fights with all sorts of weapons were exhibited. At the end of the show, the king turned to the queen, "So, what do you think?"

"So, what is extraordinary in any of all this?" Discomfited though he was, the king held his tongue, hoping that she would somehow make up to him and heal the painful rift. Gauging all that was going on in his mind, the queen spoke. "Sire, it is not for nothing that I say, 'So what?' I am perfectly conscious of what I am saying. Let these *mallas* perform what I will ask them now. Please ask your people to bring my buffalo here."

The buffalo looked like a small elephant. Seeing it, the audience was filled with expectations. The queen took off her costly necklace and holding it up declared, "*Mallas*, anyone among you who can lift this buffalo and climb up to our dais can claim this necklace." The assembly was stunned. People started talking among themselves, discussing which of the *mallas* would dare. The *mallas* looked at each other, equally unsure. The animal seemed to weigh a tonne. Not only was it to be lifted but carried up those steps? Impossible!

At last one came forward. He put his shoulder under its vast belly but failed to get up. People laughed and sniggered. A stronger one came. He felt he was succeeding but suddenly his knees began to wobble and he gave up. Again the crowd burst out laughing and taunting. Then the chief of the *mallas* got up, a Yamaraja in comparison to the huge buffalo. Hope began to awaken in all hearts. "This man surely will succeed; why, he seems strong enough to lift two such creatures...." Amidst great clapping the *malla* put his shoulder under the animal's belly and heaved. Heaved again, and filling his lungs, made a powerful effort. It seemed he was succeeding and anticipatory clapping began. He managed to lift the buffalo on his shoulders and stand up. But walking with it proved difficult; just a couple of steps and he collapsed.

"My queen, you have humiliated my *mallas* as well as me!" the stricken king groaned.

"Do not give up, sire. Your prestige will not be lost, someone can still come up."

"Who would now dare? My chief *malla*, such an elephant, failed? No, there's no hope."

"Hope is immortal, sire. Tell me, what would you offer if someone succeeds?"

"My entire kingdom! And gladly serve him all my life!"

Saying, “All right then, here is the lifter,” she got up and swaggered over to her buffalo. Even while fondling it, suddenly, in the blink of an eye, she lifted it on to her shoulders and with effortless steps went straight up to the king amidst a mounting cheering from the entire assembly following her all the way.

Back in her seat beside the king, quietly she said, “*Sadhe te vadhe!* Now do you understand the reason behind my ‘So what’? There is no *siddhi* that cannot be achieved with steady, regular *abhyasa*. Nothing is impossible for the human being, only sufficient *sadhana* is required. Sire, when I used to utter ‘So what’ you were hurt, but listening to what you called ‘unusual things’, I really felt that nothing is truly extraordinary. For if one tried, if one persisted in one’s *tapascharya*, surely far more wonderful things could be achieved. I am before you now as a living example of that conviction. I did not sit moaning and mourning the last two years in my palace. From the day this buffalo was born I began to practise lifting it and carrying it up to my terrace. I kept at it, day in day out. It became my sole and whole *sadhana* throughout the day. It was sheer practice that helped me as the buffalo began to grow and fatten. It is not brute strength that has helped me today but regular *sadhana*. Without intense *sadhana* there is no *siddhi*.”

The king was only too happy to declare, “My queen, I have lost the challenge.”

“Well, then from today your kingdom and your self belong to me!”

“There can be no doubt about it!”

PUJALAL

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

*Something there is in us or something has to be developed, perhaps a central and still occult part of our being containing forces whose powers in our actual and present make-up are only a fraction of what could be,... This might be found in the system of Chakras revealed by Tantric knowledge and accepted in the systems of Yoga, conscious centres and sources of all the dynamic powers of our being organising their action through the plexuses and arranged in an ascending series from the lowest physical to the highest mind centre and spiritual centre.... These centres are closed or half closed within us and have to be opened before their full potentiality can be manifested in our physical nature: but once they are opened and completely active, no limit can easily be set to the development of their potencies...*

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Supramental Manifestation and Other Writings*, SABCL Vol. 16, p. 34)