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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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SRI AUROBINDO: A LIFE SKETCH

[Sri Aurobindo wrote this piece in June 1930 for publication in *Among the Great*, a book written by his disciple Dilip Kumar Roy. He used the third person because he wished the piece to appear as an impersonal statement from an anonymous “authoritative source”. *Among the Great* consists of accounts of Dilip’s meetings and excerpts from his correspondence with five eminent contemporaries — Romain Rolland, Mahatma Gandhi, Bertrand Russell, Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo. Dilip began working on his manuscript sometime during the late 1920s. Around September 1928, he sent portions of it, including a life sketch written by him, to Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo’s remarks on this life sketch are published as item [1] of the Appendix (see page 650). In November 1928, Dilip became a member of the Ashram. A year and a half later, in March 1930, he learned that a publisher in New York was interested in his book. On the fifteenth of that month, he wrote giving this information to Sri Aurobindo and submitting some material he wished to have included in the book. Sri Aurobindo’s response is reproduced as item [2] of the Appendix (page 650). Dilip was unwilling to accept Sri Aurobindo’s suggestion to “omit all account or narrative”. He sent another draft of a life sketch, which Sri Aurobindo commented on in a letter of 25 March (page 650). Finally Sri Aurobindo agreed to write a brief life sketch himself. On 1 June, in the course of a letter on another subject, he noted: “I shall see whether I can get the thing done (the facts of the life) in these ten days.” The work was completed before 27 June, the date of the letter published on pages 651-52.

Among the Great was not accepted by the New York publisher. It was first brought out in India in 1945 (Bombay: Nalanda Publications). The “Life Sketch” appeared as an appendix to this edition, below the following note by Dilip: “*For the benefit of Western readers I append here a brief statement of the principal facts of Sri Aurobindo’s public and merely outward life from an authoritative source.*”]

SRI AUROBINDO was born in Calcutta on August 15, 1872. In 1879, at the age of seven, he was taken with his two elder brothers to England for education and lived there for fourteen years. Brought up at first in an English family at Manchester, he joined St. Paul’s School in London in [1884] and in 1890 went from it with a senior classical scholarship to King’s College, Cambridge, where he studied for two years. In 1890 he passed also the open competition for the Indian Civil Service, but at the end of two years of probation failed to present himself at the riding examination and was disqualified for the Service. At this time the Gaekwar of Baroda was in London. Aurobindo saw him, obtained an appointment in the Baroda Service and left England in [January], 1893.

Sri Aurobindo passed thirteen years, from 1893 to 1906, in the Baroda Service,

first in the Revenue Department and in secretariat work for the Maharaja, afterwards as Professor of English and, finally, Vice-Principal in the Baroda College. These were years of self-culture, of literary activity — for much of the poetry afterwards published from Pondicherry was written at this time — and of preparation for his future work. In England he had received, according to his father's express instructions, an entirely occidental education without any contact with the culture of India and the East.¹ At Baroda he made up the deficiency, learned Sanskrit and several modern Indian languages, assimilated the spirit of Indian civilisation and its forms past and present. A great part of the last years of this period was spent on leave in silent political activity, for he was debarred from public action by his position at Baroda. The outbreak of the agitation against the partition of Bengal in 1905 gave him the opportunity to give up the Baroda Service and join openly in the political movement. He left Baroda in 1906 and went to Calcutta as Principal of the newly-founded Bengal National College.

The political action of Sri Aurobindo covered eight years, from 1902 to 1910. During the first half of this period he worked behind the scenes, preparing with other co-workers the beginnings of the Swadeshi (Indian Sinn Fein) movement, till the agitation in Bengal furnished an opening for the public initiation of a more forward and direct political action than the moderate reformism which had till then been the creed of the Indian National Congress. In 1906 Sri Aurobindo came to Bengal with this purpose and joined the New Party, an advanced section small in numbers and not yet strong in influence, which had been recently formed in the Congress. The political theory of this party was a rather vague gospel of Non-cooperation; in action it had not yet gone farther than some ineffective clashes with the Moderate leaders at the annual Congress assembly behind the veil of secrecy of the "Subjects Committee". Sri Aurobindo persuaded its chiefs in Bengal to come forward publicly as an All-India party with a definite and challenging programme, putting forward Tilak, the popular Maratha leader at its head, and to attack the then dominant Moderate (Reformist or Liberal) oligarchy of veteran politicians and capture from them the Congress and the country. This was the origin of the historic struggle between the Moderates and the Nationalists (called by their opponents Extremists) which in two years changed altogether the face of Indian politics.

The new-born Nationalist party put forward Swaraj (independence) as its goal as against the far-off Moderate hope of colonial self-government to be realised at a distant date of a century or two by a slow progress of reform; it proposed as its means of execution a programme which resembled in spirit, though not in its details,

1. It may be observed that Sri Aurobindo's education in England gave him a wide introduction to the culture of ancient, of mediaeval and of modern Europe. He was a brilliant scholar in Greek and Latin. He had learned French from his childhood in Manchester and studied for himself German and Italian sufficiently to read Goethe and Dante in the original tongues. (He passed the Tripos in Cambridge in the first division and obtained record marks in Greek and Latin in the examination for the Indian Civil Service.) [*Sri Aurobindo's note*]

the policy of Sinn Fein developed some years later and carried to a successful issue in Ireland. The principle of this new policy was self-help; it aimed on one side at an effective organisation of the forces of the nation and on the other professed a complete non-cooperation with the Government. Boycott of British and foreign goods and the fostering of Swadeshi industries to replace them, boycott of British law courts and the foundation of a system of Arbitration courts in their stead, boycott of Government universities and colleges and the creation of a network of National colleges and schools, the formation of societies of young men which would do the work of police and defence and, wherever necessary, a policy of passive resistance were among the immediate items of the programme. Sri Aurobindo hoped to capture the Congress and make it the directing centre of an organised national action, an informal State within the State, which would carry on the struggle for freedom till it was won. He persuaded the party to take up and finance as its recognised organ the newly-founded daily paper, *Bande Mataram*, of which he was at the time acting editor. The *Bande Mataram*, whose policy from the beginning of 1907 till its abrupt winding up in 1908 when Aurobindo was in prison was wholly directed by him, circulated almost immediately all over India. During its brief but momentous existence it changed the political thought of India which has ever since preserved fundamentally, even amidst its later developments, the stamp then imparted to it. But the struggle initiated on these lines, though vehement and eventful and full of importance for the future, did not last long at the time; for the country was still unripe for so bold a programme.

Sri Aurobindo was prosecuted for sedition in 1907 and acquitted. Up till now an organiser and writer, he was obliged by this event and by the imprisonment or disappearance of other leaders to come forward as the acknowledged head of the party in Bengal and to appear on the platform for the first time as a speaker. He presided over the Nationalist Conference at Surat in 1907 where in the forceful clash of two equal parties the Congress was broken to pieces. In May, 1908, he was arrested in the Alipur Conspiracy Case as implicated in the doings of the revolutionary group led by his brother Barindra; but no evidence of any value could be established against him and in this case too he was acquitted. After a detention of one year as undertrial prisoner in the Alipur Jail, he came out in May, 1909, to find the party organisation broken, its leaders scattered by imprisonment, deportation or self-imposed exile and the party itself still existent but dumb and dispirited and incapable of any strenuous action. For almost a year he strove single-handed as the sole remaining leader of the Nationalists in India to revive the movement. He published at this time to aid his effort a weekly English paper, the *Karmayogin*, and a Bengali weekly, the *Dharma*. But at last he was compelled to recognise that the nation was not yet sufficiently trained to carry out his policy and programme. For a time he thought that the necessary training must first be given through a less advanced Home Rule movement or an agitation of passive resistance of the kind created by Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa. But he saw that the hour of these movements had

not come and that he himself was not their destined leader. Moreover, since his twelve months' detention in the Alipur Jail, which had been spent entirely in the practice of Yoga, his inner spiritual life was pressing upon him for an exclusive concentration. He resolved therefore to withdraw from the political field, at least for a time.

In February, 1910, he withdrew to a secret retirement at Chandernagore and in the beginning of April sailed for Pondicherry in French India. A third prosecution was launched against him at this moment for a signed article in the *Karmayogin*; in his absence it was pressed against the printer of the paper who was convicted, but the conviction was quashed on appeal in the High Court of Calcutta. For the third time a prosecution against him had failed. Sri Aurobindo had left Bengal with some intention of returning to the political field under more favourable circumstances; but very soon the magnitude of the spiritual work he had taken up appeared to him and he saw that it would need the exclusive concentration of all his energies. Eventually he cut off connection with politics, refused repeatedly to accept the Presidentship of the National Congress and went into a complete retirement. During all his stay at Pondicherry from 1910 to the present moment² he has remained more and more exclusively devoted to his spiritual work and his sâdhanâ.

In 1914 after four years of silent Yoga he began the publication of a philosophical monthly, the *Arya*. Most of his more important works, those published since in book form, the Isha Upanishad, the Essays on the Gita, and others not yet published, the Life Divine, the Synthesis of Yoga, appeared serially in the *Arya*. These works embodied much of the inner knowledge that had come to him in his practice of Yoga. Others were concerned with the spirit and significance of Indian civilisation and culture, the true meaning of the Vedas, the progress of human society, the nature and evolution of poetry, the possibility of the unification of the human race. At this time also he began to publish his poems, both those written in England and at Baroda and those, fewer in number, added during his period of political activity and in the first years of his residence at Pondicherry. The *Arya* ceased publication in 1921 after six years and a half of uninterrupted appearance.

Sri Aurobindo lived at first in retirement at Pondicherry with four or five disciples. Afterwards more and yet more began to come to him to follow his spiritual path and the number became so large that a community of sâdhaks had to be formed for the maintenance and collective guidance of those who had left everything behind for the sake of a higher life. This was the foundation of the Sri Aurobindo Asram which has less been created than grown around him as its centre.

Sri Aurobindo began his practice of Yoga in 1905. At first gathering into it the essential elements of spiritual experience that are gained by the paths of divine communion and spiritual realisation followed till now in India, he passed on in

2. This "Life Sketch" was written in 1930 and published in 1937. — Ed.

search of a more complete experience uniting and harmonising the two ends of existence, Spirit and Matter. Most ways of Yoga are paths to the Beyond leading to the Spirit and, in the end, away from life; Sri Aurobindo's rises to the Spirit to redescend with its gains bringing the light and power and bliss of the Spirit into life to transform it. Man's present existence in the material world is in this view or vision of things a life in the Ignorance with the Inconscient at its base, but even in its darkness and nescience there are involved the presence and possibilities of the Divine. The created world is not a mistake or a vanity and illusion to be cast aside by the soul returning to heaven or Nirvâna, but the scene of a spiritual evolution by which out of this material Inconscience is to be manifested progressively the Divine Consciousness in things. Mind is the highest term yet reached in the evolution, but it is not the highest of which it is capable. There is above it a Supermind or eternal Truth-consciousness which is in its nature the self-aware and self-determining light and power of a Divine Knowledge. Mind is an ignorance seeking after Truth, but this is a self-existent Knowledge harmoniously manifesting the play of its forms and forces. It is only by the descent of this supermind that the perfection dreamed of by all that is highest in humanity can come. It is possible by opening to a greater divine consciousness to rise to this power of light and bliss, discover one's true self, remain in constant union with the Divine and bring down the supramental Force for the transformation of mind and life and body. To realise this possibility has been the dynamic aim of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga.

APPENDIX

Letters on "Sri Aurobindo: A Life Sketch"

[1] Circa September-October 1928. Sri Aurobindo wrote these sentences in the margin of a letter written by Dilip Kumar Roy shortly before he joined the Ashram in November 1928. [2] This paragraph is part of a letter from Sri Aurobindo to Dilip dated 16 March 1930. The balance of the letter deals with various writings by Sri Aurobindo that Dilip wanted to include in *Among the Great*. [3] 25 March 1930. Sri Aurobindo wrote this letter after reading a "biography" (that is, a life sketch) written by Dilip for *Among the Great*. [4] The manuscript of this letter is not dated, but it apparently was written in June 1930. [5] 27 June 1930. This letter deals with the draft of a proposed note on Sri Aurobindo's "occidental education" (see the last sentence of letter [4]), which Dilip intended to add to Sri Aurobindo's "Life Sketch". In the printed text of the "Life Sketch" the paragraph that Sri Aurobindo placed here between inverted commas was printed as a footnote. The sentence about Sri Aurobindo's prizes and examinations, which he wanted to have omitted, was tacked on rather awkwardly as a closing parenthesis. In a typescript of the text that was submitted

to him, Sri Aurobindo emended “to study Goethe and Dante” to “to read Goethe and Dante”.

[1]

I understand from Ratikanto Nag that you have very nearly finished reading through my manuscript.

I have read through most of the MS. — but the narrative portion of the account of my life is full of inaccuracies of fact. I hope to write about this shortly.

1928

[2]

I do not know where you got the facts in your account of my life; but after starting to correct it I had to give up the attempt in despair. It is chock-full of errors and inaccuracies: this cannot be published. As for the account of my spiritual experience, I mean of the Bombay affair, somebody must have inflicted on you a humorous caricature of it. This too cannot go. The best will be to omit all account or narrative and say — at not too much length, I would suggest — what you think it necessary to say about me.

16 March 1930

[3]

I see that you have persisted in giving a biography — is it really necessary or useful? The attempt is bound to be a failure, because neither you nor anyone else knows anything at all of my life; it has not been on the surface for man to see.

You have given a sort of account of my political action, but the impression it makes on me and would make, I believe, on your public is that of a fiery idealist rushing furiously at an impossible aim (knocking his head against a stone wall, which is not a very sensible proceeding) without any grasp on realities and without any intelligible political method or plan of action. The practical peoples of the West could hardly be well impressed by such a picture and it would make them suspect that, probably, my yoga was a thing of the same type!

25 March 1930

[4]

No, certainly not.³ If you gave my name, it would be as if I were advertising myself in your book. I did not care to have anything of the kind written, as I told you, because I do not think these things are of any importance. I merely wrote, in the end, a brief summary of the most outward facts, nothing inward or personal, because I have seen that many legends and distortions are afloat, and this will at least put things in the straight line. If you like, you can mention that it is a brief statement of the principal facts of Sri Aurobindo's public life from an authoritative source.

Necessarily I have mentioned only salient facts, leaving out all mere details. As for an *estimate* of myself I have given none. In my view, a man's value does not depend on what he learns or his position or fame or what he does, but on what he is and inwardly becomes, and of that I have said nothing. I do not want to alter what I have written. If you like you can put a note of your own to the "occidental education" stating that it included Greek and Latin and two or three modern languages, but I do not myself see the necessity of it or the importance.

June 1930

[5]

I would prefer another form more in keeping with the tone of the text, — eg

"It may be observed that Sri Aurobindo's education in England gave him a wide introduction to the culture of ancient, of mediaeval and of modern Europe. He was a brilliant scholar in Greek and Latin, | passed the Tripos in Cambridge in the first division, obtained record marks in Greek and Latin in the examination for the Indian Civil Service |. He had learned French from his childhood in Manchester and studied for himself Italian and German sufficiently to read Dante and Goethe in the original tongue."⁴

I have left the detail about the Tripos and the record marks, though I do not find these trifles in place here; the note would read much better with the omission of the part between the vertical lines.

(But what is Beachcroft doing here? He butts in in such a vast and spreading parenthesis that he seems to be one of "these ancient languages" and in him too, perhaps, I got record marks! Besides, any ingenious reader would deduce from his presence in your note that he acquitted me out of fellow-feeling over the two "examinations" and out of university camaraderie, — which was far from being the case. I met him only in the I.C.S classes and at the I.C.S examinations and we never

3. *The question was whether the correspondent could publish the "Life Sketch" over Sri Aurobindo's signature. — Ed.*

4. *The passage within inverted commas is Sri Aurobindo's correction of a note that had been submitted to him by the correspondent. The final version of the note appears as footnote 1 on page 646. — Ed.*

exchanged two words together. If any extralegal consideration came in subconsciously in the acquittal, it must have been his admiration for my prose style to which he gave fervent expression in his judgment. Don't drag him in like this — let him rest in peace in his grave.)

27 June 1930

SRI AUROBINDO

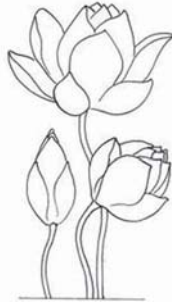
(The entire text published above has been taken from the book *Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 2006.

The editorial box note: pp. 557-58.

'Sri Aurobindo: A Life Sketch': pp. 5-10.

The editorial box note to the appendix: p. 559.

'The Appendix': pp. 11-13.)



AT FIRST SOUL SIGHT

*“Blessed was the day when I came to know Thee, O Ineffable Eternity.”**

The physical eyes behold the physical forms. It is the inner sight that perceives deeper realities.

In the following pages we have gathered from the reminiscences of a number of sadhaks and devotees, children and visitors the recordation of their experience when they first saw Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, when the soul had ‘darshan’ of divinity.

Each person’s development is unique, and the preparatory period or the set of circumstances before the actual ‘darshan’ is an important and integral part of the story. Unfortunately, we have had to shorten many of the narratives, mainly to focus on the ‘Moment’. Our apologies to the authors for this. The references are provided and hopefully the reader will be able to find the full version easily.

When collecting these luminous nuggets, we found that there were too many to be accommodated in a single issue. It is proposed to continue with the series, in smaller instalments, in the forthcoming issues.

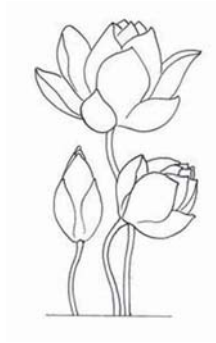
Our thanks to the authors, editors and publishers from whose labour the following pages have been culled.

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

I HAD the Darshan of the Mother for the first time in the Playground. That very first Darshan sealed my destiny. It was love at first sight. Ever since the [. . .] spiritual experience that I had at the age of fifteen, I had been in search of a person who could bring down paradise on earth. Now the search was ended. I had found her.

TARACHAND BARJATIYA

(How They Came to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, Volume 1 by Shyam Kumari, published by Mother Publications, Bombay, 1990, p. 92)



OLD LONG SINCE

IN our village and all around, four names of four great personages were being continually talked of. It was the time when Independence, Foreign Rule, Slavery were the cries that used to fill the sky. And the four great names that reached our ears in this connection were Tilak, Bipinchandra Pal, Lajpatrai (Lal-Bal-Pal) and Aurobindo.

Of these only one name caught my heart and soul. Just to hear the name — Aurobindo — was enough.

All the four persons were pioneers in the service of the country, great leaders of the front rank. Why then did one name only out of the four touch me exclusively? For many days to come the mystery remained to me a mystery.

In 1905 I came to Pondicherry for study. In 1910 Sri Aurobindo also arrived here. What a coincidence! He came to the very town where I had come! I was full of joy, thrilled with delight.

A strong desire arose in me that I must see Sri Aurobindo. He had been there in our town for six months, very few knew of his arrival, but I knew of it on the third day itself. My uncle was engaged in politics and was in contact with the national workers and leaders. He came to know of the incident on the very day. In fact the number of those who knew could be counted on one's fingers. The idea gained on me that somehow I must see Aurobindo. Hearing must be translated into vision.

Day after day, night after night, this was my sole thought. Two years passed by.

Finally one day, at about six in the evening, my friend Krishnaswami Chettiar and I started from Muthialpet, a suburb of Pondicherry, — near about our present Sports Ground and proceeded towards the beach where Sri Aurobindo's house stood. We walked the whole distance. I was a boy of about fourteen years. Chettiar had his cycle, but he was wheeling it by him as he walked along. As it had become somewhat dark, Chettiar proposed to leave the cycle in Sri Aurobindo's house before going to the beach. He thought it would be burdensome to carry a cycle with us and we would not be free to walk about as we liked. That was the only reason why we went to Sri Aurobindo's house.

...

In the Mission Street (Rue des Missions Etrangères) close to the Duplex Street there was a house with its front facing west. It extended from the Mission Street backward down to the Rue de la Cantine on the East. It consisted of three courtyards. Each courtyard had four verandas around it; Sri Aurobindo's room was in the third block. The front block was occupied by Nolini, Sourin, Bejoy; Moni was in the second block. I heard it said that Sri Aurobindo would daily walk round and round the courtyard from about five in the afternoon till the other inmates returned from

their playground at about eight or eight-thirty in the evening.

When Chettiar and I approached Sri Aurobindo's house, we found the door bolted. We both knocked at it with some hesitation. All on a sudden the door opened and was left ajar. Sri Aurobindo had come quietly and turned back immediately as the door opened — it looked as if he did not want to let us have a glimpse of his face.

In that fading twilight only his long hair hanging gracefully upon his back and his indescribably beautiful small feet caught my eyesight! My heart throbbed within me as though I had been lifted up into the region of the gods! It took me long to come back to normal composure.

I did not know what were the feelings and thoughts of Chettiar and I did not care to know!

1910-1914

All these five years served the need of my preparation. It should be called a pilgrimage to Sri Aurobindo.

Each act of mine, each event of my life had become, as it were, offerings in the sacrifice done unknowingly by me. Prior to my surrender to Sri Aurobindo, Bharati helped me a great deal to attain wideness in the heart, to loosen the ties of old samskaras and the like, to impart purity and newness to my thoughts, by means of his words, his deeds and his way of living.

Because of Bharati's association with Sri Aurobindo and his immense respect and devotion for him, I felt in me a great inexplicable attraction to Bharati.

...

Now as I cast a retrospective look, I perceive that the past was in a way a period of tapasya before reaching the Gurudeva.

As I said, not a single evening would pass without Bharati's calling on Sri Aurobindo. . . .

On his way to Sri Aurobindo's house, Bharati would first call at Srinivasachari's, go with him to the beach, stay there till 7 p.m., and then make for Sri Aurobindo's house. The three together would jocularly discuss a variety of subjects. Bharati, on his way back, would often halt for a while at Srinivasachari's and then go home. As soon as they reached home from Sri Aurobindo's, the people assembled there would put the identical question: "What did Sri Aurobindo say today?" It was as though the Jivatman wanted to know the Will of the Paramatman.

Two years passed in this way.

...

I had to pass through a period when my inner being would say one thing and my outer life would express something else. Gurudeva, whom I had not yet seen

with naked eyes, caught hold of my heart and brought about its radical change. Bharati was very helpful in effectuating my inner nearness to Sri Aurobindo. Often it would occur to me: "Why did I not have, like Bharati, courage enough to act according to the inner voice?" . . .

. . .

I made repeated requests to Bharati to take me to Sri Aurobindo. He, however, kept silent each time I made this request. Several times I requested my late uncle also. But no definite reply from him either. I used to hear that a very limited number of persons had permission to see Sri Aurobindo; that only Bharati and Srinivasachari could see him daily; that my uncle had his Darshan only once a month.

It had been made evident to me after those numerous attempts that Sri Aurobindo's Darshan was a rarity and to obtain it with the help of Bharati or Srinivasachari or my uncle was well-nigh impossible. Then how was I to have Sri Aurobindo's Darshan? In the core of my heart burnt a living faith incessant and unwavering, that somehow some day I would have his Darshan.

During that period, one day at about five-thirty or six in the evening, I happened to meet on the beach Ramaswami Iyengar, who a few years later became well renowned as Va Ra. He had been living then in Sri Aurobindo's house. As intimacy with him grew, I felt a singular attraction for conversation with him. His remarks were always trenchant and scintillating. Never would he speak of anyone with respect. His face had charm. His eyes beamed. While returning home from the beach I would always feel sad to break off conversation with him. And the hope to meet Sri Aurobindo through him drew me all the more to his company.

. . .

It became a habit with me to meet Ramaswami Iyengar on the beach every evening at about 5.30 just after leaving school. It was natural for my school friends also to accompany me.

. . .

One day all of a sudden a thought arose in me; I told Ramaswami while on the beach, "I would like very much to dine with you once." I could make out from his face that this proposal of mine came to him like a thunderbolt. The proposal was not made in the presence of others, I whispered it into his ears, when I found myself alone with him; very clearly there was but one motive behind it. I hoped that if I dined with him, Sri Aurobindo also would be there. Ramaswami, evidently bewildered, thought for a moment and then questioned me, "But it is no vegetarian meal in Sri Aurobindo's house; how do you propose to dine there?" He said this somewhat hesitatingly and hoped it would put an end to the matter. But I was not to be baulked so easily. A little perplexed, I too retorted, "What if there be no vegetarian

meal? I am ready to dine with you all.” He must have been terribly vexed to get such an unexpected reply and in such a categorical manner, without a moment’s hesitation. He however gave no expression to his surprise, but asked me to come next day straight from the school at 12 noon and join him. I was beside myself with joy.

Next day the closing bell at the Calvé School went ding-dong at 11.30 sharp. Along with the other students, I too walked out of the school. I went straight home to Muthialpet, took my bath — rather hurriedly — and reached Sri Aurobindo’s house at 12 noon precisely. Plunged in the thought that in a little while I would be seeing Sri Aurobindo, I became forgetful of everything else.

The main door of Sri Aurobindo’s house in Mission Street was left open. As soon as I entered, Ramaswami came and received me. There was none else. The house lay dead silent in the intense heat of broad daylight. My heart too was motionless.

Ramaswami made a move and said, “Let us go to the hotel.” On hearing these words I felt as if I had suddenly been thrown down from a height to which I had been lifted up. I could not understand anything. I was then almost dying with hunger. The citadel built by me was cast down by one breath as it were. Well, I started trudging, in that excessive heat, with Ramaswami towards a hotel more than a mile away; I walked the distance with bare feet, without sandals. The meal was served for me alone. Silently, without uttering a single word, I swallowed the food and then proceeded towards my school, Ramaswami accompanying me. I entered the Reading Room of the school, the classes were to start at 3 p.m. And I tried my best to attend to my lessons. In the same street, just a little to the south, lay Sri Aurobindo’s house and Ramaswami moved towards it. So far as I remember this happened in the first week of July in the year 1913.

In the Matakcoil Street, called Mission Street, Sri Aurobindo lived for six months in a house with a tiled roof. That house has at present undergone a radical change; the very spot is unrecognisable. It was in this house that I had Sri Aurobindo’s Darshan. There I had the first opportunity of seeing him but from a distance.

During his stay in this house I had the habit of meeting Ramaswami Iyengar every evening on the beach, as I have already said. His heart started melting in my favour little by little even as ants slowly and persistently leave a trail on granite. The result was: he began to welcome me to his room. The school remained closed two days in the week, Sundays and Thursdays. Those days I could meet Iyengar in Sri Aurobindo’s house at about 4 p.m. From 4 to 5 p.m. we would be alone conversing with each other. Our relation thus began to ripen. After 5 we would go straight to the beach and join other friends.

Because of my friendship with Iyengar Sri Aurobindo’s house appeared to me

as my own. That is why I felt no timidity or shyness to go to Iyengar's room; whether he was at home or not, I would go there. But I never took courage to go farther than his room; to do so seemed improper.

As I got more and more familiar with Iyengar, the names of the inmates of Sri Aurobindo's house came to be known to me.

...

During this period I requested Iyengar once or twice to introduce me to Sri Aurobindo. But my requests seemed to carry no weight with him.

Sri Aurobindo's birthday was drawing near — August 15, 1913. I requested Iyengar once more. I appealed to him to take me to Sri Aurobindo on his birthday. He replied, wonderful to say, in a consenting tone. I felt an immense joy.

On the 15th August Iyengar asked me to come at about 4.30 p.m. I reached there slightly earlier. All the invitees started coming one by one from all sides. By about 5 or 5.15 all of them had arrived. It was probably one hour before sunset. This I surmised by the dimness of the light inside the house.

In the hall of the front portion of the house some twenty or twenty-five banana leaves were laid out on three sides just as it is done during a marriage feast. As far as I can remember, no sooner was the main gate bolted from within than Sri Aurobindo came into the hall and stood on one side; some one garlanded him with a rose garland; all present clapped their hands and Sri Aurobindo spoke something in English. All this I can recollect but vaguely. This vagueness of memory is due, I suppose, to an overwhelming joy and palpitation in me on that occasion.

All of us sat down before the banana leaves as we do at a collective dinner. I was one of the guests; with eyes full of delight I saw Sri Aurobindo as he stood before each banana leaf, looked at the person seated there, gently passed on to the next and thus to the last person — meanwhile someone walking by his side served various kinds of sweets and other preparations.

In the courtyard a big jar full of water was kept and by its side a small tumbler. We took some refreshments and after washing our hands we gathered together and kept chatting for a short while. In the meantime Sri Aurobindo had gone to the verandah of the middle portion of the house and sat there in a chair kept for him before a table covered with a cloth. Evidently he was waiting for some other item in the programme. By then it had become dark. In each section of the house one or two lighted hurricane-lamps were put up. The guests took leave one by one or by twos and threes and went home.

I kept on waiting, not knowing what to do. As soon as the guests left, Iyengar came and told me that three big persons, namely, Bharati, Srinivasachari, V.V.S. Ayer, would see Sri Aurobindo to pay their respects to him. If I could wait till they left, there would only be the inmates of the house, five or six, alone with Sri Aurobindo. He had a mind to take me then to Sri Aurobindo. But for that Sri

Aurobindo's permission was required, he said finally. I nodded assent immediately. It might have already struck seven or gone on to seven-fifteen. A fear lurked in me that I would be questioned at home, "Why this delay?" But still I ventured to give my consent.

Iyengar once again asked me, "Do you intend to see Sri Aurobindo with Bharati and others? Or with the inmates?" I could not make out what answer to give. Whether in the midst of Bharati and others or in the midst of the inmates of the house Sri Aurobindo would be the same Sri Aurobindo. I began to revolve in my mind how there could be any difference. A little while, it might be less than a minute, I wavered in mind and replied, "When the inmates are there." "If so, you must wait for some time," said Iyengar and left.

I had to wait till 8 p.m. Bharati, Srinivasachari and Ayer at the time of going out of Sri Aurobindo's house looked closely at me with a view to recognise me. They did not expect me there so late. They at once doubted and wondered if I had become an inmate of Sri Aurobindo's house. Their faces betrayed this mixed feeling.

At about 8.15 p.m. Iyengar came to me and said: "You may get Sri Aurobindo's Darshan as you pass before his table. Go with folded hands. But no permission to speak with him. While passing by his right just stand in front, stop awhile, join your hands, silently take leave of him and go home." Iyengar's words were imprinted upon my mind.

I was soon called in. I got up and approached Sri Aurobindo's table. From the ceiling hung a hurricane-lamp that served to dispel the darkness only partially. Going round Sri Aurobindo by way of *pradakṣiṇa* I stood in his presence with joined palms and made my obeisance to him. Sri Aurobindo's eyes, it seemed, burned brighter than the lamp-light for me; as he looked at me, in a trice all gloom vanished from within me, and his image was as it were installed in the *sanctum sanctorum* of my being. Nothing was very clear to me. I went behind him, stood again in front, offered my homage to him and not knowing whether to stay or go I staggered perplexed. Sri Aurobindo made a gesture with his heavenly hands to one of those who stood there. A sweet was given me once again. I felt within that he had accepted me though I did not quite know it. I left Sri Aurobindo's house and proceeded towards my own.

When I reached home, it was 9.30 p.m. What happened at home? What trouble befell me? All this is of little importance.

AMRITA

DARSHAN OF SRI AUROBINDO

THEY were coming still, the stream of visitors to the Ashram swelled day by day till it grew into a flood on the day of *darshan*. Men, women and children, with their packages and their hold-alls, their Sunday *Hindu* and their umbrellas, crowded near the gate of the Ashram on the morning of the fifteenth of August 1943 — and the *sadhaks* discharging “gate duty” patiently coped with the rush with a quiet assurance, with a ready smile for one and all. From the four ends of India — from obscure nooks and by-paths, from distant cities and inaccessible hamlets — the pilgrims had assembled in Pondicherry in the vicinity of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

They had come braving the hundred and one annoyances minor and major that our imperfect society engenders in its midst; they had come — these princes and paupers, these financiers and politicians, these landlords and merchants, these poets and philosophers, these students and teachers, these sinners and saints, these seeming scoffers and these half-hearted believers — they had all converged towards the *sanctum sanctorum*, desiring to have *darshan* of Sri Aurobindo. Did they know — did *all* of them know — what *darshan* meant? What precise experience was in store for them, how exactly it was going to grow into their being and shape their future — they cared not, perhaps, to speculate about all this or, if they did, their minds were baffled in an instant and they quickly gave up the struggle.

Maybe, it was only an idle curiosity that brought some of the visitors to Pondicherry; maybe, some had caught the contagion of enthusiasm from their friends and had therefore proceeded to the Ashram on *darshan* day to put their half-baked aspirations through the acid test of experience, so that the fluidities of enthusiasm may harden into the pure gold of faith or — failing in the test — break into so many drops and atoms of disillusionment; maybe, some had accidentally chanced to read *Yoga and Its Objects* or *Baji Prabhou* or *Heraclitus* or *The Mother* or an instalment or two of *The Future Poetry*, had been swept off their feet, the spark thus enkindled had, day by day, hour by hour, blazed into a bonfire of adoration — unreasoned, irrational adoration — and the poor victims had by sheer gravitational pull, been drawn to the Ashram, they had to count the minutes, the seconds, that divided them from the “unhoped-for elusive wonder” . . . “the illimitable” . . . “the mighty one” . . . “the minstrel of infinity”; maybe, again, some had learned by slow degrees to follow and admire the career of Sri Aurobindo as a nationalist, as a poet, as a philosopher, and yet had failed to go further, had in fact nurtured a giant scepticism about the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo, had even — once or twice — dubbed it all mysticism and moonshine, and had accordingly, come to satisfy themselves whether their own views were not, after all, the correct views, Sri Aurobindo was not, essentially, a poet and an apostle of nationalism rather than a saint and a *mahāyogin*. There were men and women of all categories, and children too of all categories, some carrying heaven in their hearts, others merely frolicsome and gay, many

suddenly charmed and chastened by the Ashram atmosphere, but few stubbornly resisting even its invisible currents and persisting in their own unique life-force movements and convolutions.

One heard casual remarks, stray greetings, whispered confidences. The premises of the Ashram were filled with a suppressed excitement. One heard the accents of many Indian languages. One idly wandered hither and thither: one gazed and gazed about oneself and — one felt fairly at home in those seemingly exotic and unusual surroundings. What did it matter if one didn't know *who* one's neighbour was? One knew *what* he was, or seemed to be, — a co-pilgrim to the shrine of fulfilment. One might speak to one's neighbour if occasions arose — or if the formal introductions had been made — but it was safer, on the whole, to sit or move about quietly. It was better to participate in the luxurious repast of silence; it was more becoming to seek refuge in the wisdom and strength of a chastening and uplifting reticence.

Many of the *sādhaks*, and many even among the visitors, had a noticeably abstracted air. They sat, by themselves or in little clusters, on the pavements or on the steps of a flight of stairs — and seemed to be lost in thought; of them perhaps it was written:

wisdom's self

Oft seeks a sweet retired solitude,
Where with her best nurse contemplation
She plumes her feathers, and lets grow her wings,
That in the various bustle of resort
Were all too ruffled and sometimes impaired.

And there were others too — other groups and clusters — and the men and women were agitatedly conversing in pointed jerks, expressive gesticulations, and impatient exclamations. But the generality belonged, perhaps, to neither of these categories. The majority of those who had come to the Ashram for the first time wore just a puzzled air: they had indeed come to an Ashram, they were on the threshold of a unique experience (if the *sādhaks* were to be believed), they were suddenly projected into a strange new world — and they just wondered, they wondered in their ignorance, they wondered in their humility and awe, they just wondered whither all that pageantry was leading, what priceless revelation was waiting for them round the corner, and how exactly they were going to embalm it and preserve it during all the savourless tomorrows of their star-crossed lives.

The queue was being formed at last. It was about two in the afternoon. It was a bright day in Pondicherry, and it was a great day for Pondicherry. The queue was forming, and though the endless line of pilgrims hardly seemed to move, it actually did move on; the coil curved upwards towards the library and reading room, and curved downwards, emerging into the garden, followed for a little while a straight

course, soon turning sharply towards the meditation hall. It moved on, like an impossibly long centipede, enveloping the pillars, scaling the stairs now in one direction now in another and at last reaching the very hall, the very spot. . . . The queue was long, with its cusps and crests, links and breaks, its ascents and descents, it swayed and moved, it stopped and moved and swayed, and a hushed expectancy filled the pores and cells of the human frame and even the very chambers of the obscure human heart. How patiently they awaited their proper chance — how statuesque many of them stood, their eyes avoiding the midday glare of the sun, their fingers firmly clasping the Tulsi garland or the fair white flower or the bright red rose — they waited and they moved, they moved and they prayed. “I cannot believe. . . I want to believe. . . I must believe. . . I will believe. . . let me believe” . . . thus even the agnostic prayed, and hope and despair warred in his bosom, and he held the garland in a yet firmer grasp.

The last turn was taken. One’s eyes grazed over the intervening pilgrims and rested on the two figures seated together in unblenched majesty and aura serene. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo! The great moment had come . . . the presence was a flood of Light and Truth . . . and the mere mind staggered under the blow, the mere human frame lurched forward mechanically, but the eyes were held irretrievably in a hypnotic spell. Thought was impossible then . . . the mind had abdicated its sove-reignty for the nonce . . . and one (dare one say it?) had become almost a living soul. The crowning moment of all! One faced the Mother, one faced the Master . . . it was impossible to stand the smile, it was impossible to stand the penetrating scrutiny of those piercing eyes. A second or two, perhaps, no more . . . but how can one take count of the fleeting units of Time? One rather glimpsed then the splendorous truth — “There shall be no more Time!” Eternity was implicated in a grain of Time . . . one all but crossed the boundaries of Space and Time . . . one experienced a sudden upsurge of glory that was nevertheless grounded on a bottomless humility. And — but already one was out of the room!

The pulses of life started beating once again; the wires, the machinery of the mind were resuming their work once more; the feet knew whither they should go. The heart was agog still with the agitations of the hour — and one returned to one’s room to gather, to piece together, the thousand and one fancies, the thousand and one aspirations, that had welled up in prodigious exuberance during that one great moment of timeless Time. One grew quieter, serener, one registered a feeling of singular, inexpressible fulfilment. One was abnormally calm, but one was also radiantly, almost divinely, happy!

The presence that thus flooded my storm-tossed soul and chastened it with the gift of grace bore little resemblance to the published photographs and even less to one’s deliberate mental imaginings. And yet — how can I account for it? — it was a truly familiar face. Where had I seen the Master before? I had seen Him ever so often — yet where? The mind raced through the dizzy corridors of thirty-five years

of terrestrial life . . . where, O where had I seen His face before? Was it the face of Zeus that had once held me enraptured as I chanced upon it in a book of mythology? . . . Or was it rather the face of Aeschylus? — Perhaps, Vasishtha looked even like this when he blessed Dasaratha’s son; and it was thus, perhaps, that Valmiki sat when the whole of *Ramayana*, to the minutest particularity, shaped itself before his wise and lustrous eyes! And the vision of the Mother and of the Master — were they in very truth the cosmic Mahashakti and the all-highest Ishwara? — the vision remained, the experience persisted, the memory of the smile eased yet the multitudinous pricks of the work-a-day world, and the memory of the *brahmatej*, austere yet inconceivably beautiful, that was resplendent on Sri Aurobindo’s face yet gave one the hope and the strength to bear the heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world — nay, gave one even the strength to aspire to change it all and boldly to nurture the incipient hope that even the frailest and the foulest clay can evolve — however long the journey and arduous the path — into the supermanhood of the Gnostic Being and the triune glory of Sachchidananda!

K. R. SRINIVASA IYENGAR

(This article was written by Dr. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar in August 1943 immediately after his first darshan — before, in fact, he completed the first draft of his well-known book on Sri Aurobindo. It was printed in November of the same year in a paper called Human Affairs published from Udipi. That paper has been discontinued for many years. The article is of particular interest as having been the author’s very first piece of writing on the Master, a charming passage towards a corpus of biographical and expository literature that is, to use one of his happy pet adjectives, “multifoliate” and, to employ accurately for once an epithet too frequently cheapened, “brilliant”. — K.D.S.)

(Mother India, August 1969 pp. 492-95)



‘ENCOUNTER’ WITH THE INFINITE

IT was in 1941 that I first saw the ‘siddhi’ photograph of Sri Aurobindo in the house of V. Chandrashekharan’s niece. His bright eyes transfixed on some distant splendour, he looked a Jnani of the Timeless with a special magnetism of his own, and destined to salvage the human race. An unaccountable wonder captivated me forever. Thereafter I kept my initiation alive by reading whatever little informative literature I could procure from friendly sources. A few booklets on his sublime philosophy and Yoga served only to whip up my hunger for the Illimitable.

Five years later, in 1946, as a student of M.A. Philosophy, I had the singular opportunity of reading the first volume of *The Life Divine* for detailed study as part of our post-graduate syllabus. And Prof. S. K. Maitra was our esteemed teacher and guide. Indeed it was providential. In a well modulated voice he would slowly read line by line the Master’s *magnum opus*, leaving us all not a little dumbfounded and bewildered — dumbfounded because of the overwhelming theme, and bewildered because we could not understand by ourselves the high argument of the supreme Yogi. Moreover, our Professor would not at all condescend to explain it. With the result that while our interest in the monumental work steadily increased, our enthusiasm was not correspondingly served or spawned. After three months of painful endurance, at the behest of two of my close friends and benchmates, I ventured to request our sage-professor to explain the text to which he said simply, “Even if I explain it now you will not understand it, but a time will come when you will understand everything.” The truth is that nothing of Sri Aurobindo can be understood except by the merciful agency of the Mother’s Grace.

None of my friends then knew anything of the Ashram at Pondicherry. The stray stories that wafted in the groups were both amusing and mystifying. One such incredible narration bordering on fabrication was that Sri Aurobindo remained in his room ever absorbed in the Transcendent oblivious to the earthly environment. And that during Darshan time he was wrapped up in *dhoti* by his close disciples and presented as the presiding Yogi-figure of the Ashram. During this period I scribbled a few lines of poetry, entitled it ‘Consciousness’, and sent it to the Ashram as my humble tribute-offering to the great Master. Promptly I received a postcard from Anilbaran who while acknowledging receipt of my letter significantly observed: “We are happy to note that people in the universities are taking interest in Sri Aurobindo.”

I was in the final year of my Master’s programme when I discontinued my studies to contribute my wee bit to the freedom struggle in my home State. Soon I got disillusioned by the nature of the struggle, and withdrew to a distant place where I could read all the three tomes of *The Life Divine*. Finally, I decided to go to Pondicherry to have Sri Aurobindo’s Darshan on 15.8.1949.

To go to French Pondicherry in those days it was required to have a visa-

permit of sorts both from the Nizam's Government as well as from the Madras Central Secretariat. The City Police Commissioner, Hyderabad, very wryly remarked, "Why do you want to go to Pondicherry? Those who have gone there have either never returned or keep commuting again and again." I did not answer, and kept quiet. It was a call — an irresistible summons from beyond. Earlier I had written to the Mother for permission to visit the Ashram. She graciously permitted me to do so. Subsequently I obtained her permission also for my brother, L.

Parc à Charbon was the place of our stay in the Ashram, it already gave us a mystic feel of the unique 'grotto' of dynamic *tapasyā*.

* * *

Here is an intimate account of my adoring encounter with the Infinite — of the meeting of wayside human man with the almighty Divine Man, of a close reckoning of the mystery of new birth of an almost lost soul. Wandering for long through the wilderness of Time the pilgrim had at last arrived at the gates of the Timeless. Voyaging aimlessly across the uncharted seas of stark ignorance he had stepped on the frontiers of infinite Light.

It was the 15th of August, 1949. The Ashram was more like a veritable beehive resplendent with immortal Soma. Seeker-souls from different parts of the world had converged upon the place to drink to their fill the ambrosia of divine life. In the very atmosphere there was the charge of effulgent silence; a celestial peace had precipitated as it were around us all. And we waited patiently and prayerfully for the great event. In addition to the inmates there were several hundred visitors waiting to have a glimpse of the great Master. At the scheduled hour the queued up devotees fully drenched with devotion started moving slowly in a state of semi-trance towards the Darshan room on the first floor.

On entering the front room, to my utter surprise, I found it fully charged with golden light. The meagre furniture, the windows and walls seemed to radiate a powerful vibration. Verily, it was a chamber of golden sunshine. Very soon I discovered the radiant source. It was Sri Aurobindo sitting in an empyrean posture in the adjoining front room facing the approaching devotees. Lo and behold, I saw the one and only God — the Purushottama, the Golden Purusha. I was deluged by a flood of deep silence and honeyed light. There was installed in our midst the very embodiment of celestial splendour — a Guru with sublime dimension, a God with infinite span. The cosmos itself was like a temple built in honour of his advent, and I felt certain that a thousand suns must have borrowed their radiance from the glowing face of Sri Aurobindo. The wonderment is too towering and massive for words!

*Divi sūryasahasrasya bhaved yugapad-utthitā
yadi bhāḥ sadṛṣi sa syād bhāsas-tasya mahātmanaḥ.*

(Gita, XI. 12)

If the light of a thousand suns were to flare forth all at once in the sky that might resemble in some measure the splendour of that Supreme Being.

His eyes of light had transformed me into a transparent facade, his distant luminous look transported me into another world of pure consciousness. The exhilarating and extraordinary Vedic experience, once again came alive and vibrant before my soul's eyes:

Idam śreṣṭhaṃ jyotiṣṭāṃ jyótir-uttamam viśvajid dhanajid ucyate bṛihat
(RV X. 170. 3)

It is this Light, the best and foremost of all Lights, the Veda declares, is the all conquering and radiant winner of felicities many.

The Supreme, for the ancient Rishis, is suffused with light; he is the perennial source and the unbounded body of light. Diffusing glory and grace, the All-Creator is the apotheosis of infinite radiance:

Vibhrājañ jyotiṣā svar-agaccho rocanaṃ divaḥ
yenemā viṣvā bhuvanāny-abhṛitā viṣvakarmaṇā viṣvadevyāvatā.
(RV X. 170. 4)

Illumining the universe with thy radiance Thou hast scaled the shining score of heavens. It is by Thee that all living beings are supported, Thou art indeed the all — Creator and the divine substance of everything.

His lambent looks penetrating through all inner spaces, indeed he appeared as the very embodiment of the Infinite and Eternal. He was here upon earth to give a new lease of life to earth itself and radically change forever its course of evolution. Seized with an unnameable beatitude I felt pulled towards his radiant feet in utter gratitude.

After seeing Sri Aurobindo on 29.3.1914 the Mother wrote in her diary the next morning:

It matters not if there are hundreds of beings plunged in densest ignorance. He whom we saw yesterday is on earth: His presence is enough to prove that a day will come when darkness shall be transformed into light, when Thy reign shall be indeed established upon earth.

* * *

And what must have happened to the limited and vainglorious mortal human mind of a university educated youth? A tidal wave of super-reason had swept him off his feet. No longer was seen anywhere the rule of limping dialectics, only the logic of the Infinite reigned supreme. The very presence of the Supreme had melted down all that dross and gross of his embodied existence. Verily, it was an alchemy of Grace! Did not Sri Aurobindo precisely come for that, come to totally transform, nay to spiritualise our inconscient earth?

By the side of Sri Aurobindo, to his right, was seated a figure of tangible Love and Grace wrapped up in sheer compassion — the Mother of infinite felicities. With folded hands, totally soaked with the sovereign radiances of the twin infinitudes, I offered my humble Pranams to Them from an intimate distance as no one was allowed to touch Their hallowed feet. The world around had lost its solidity, Time itself had stilled, and I returned to my lodgings in a state of mystic somnambulism.

In the evening I went to the nearby beach; sitting on the seafront wall I watched the immense expanse of waters. But compared with what I had seen in the morning it was a mere play-plaza.

Nearly thirty years later when I happened to narrate to N my ‘golden’ experience of Sri Aurobindo, he listened with solicitous silence, and thereafter asked me to repeat what I had seen of the Lord. Yes, he was of golden complexion, radiating golden light — the supreme Sun of all suns. Many years of intense Yoga had indeed mellowed down his otherwise light brownish dark complexion but still he was not golden yellow as I had seen him, said N. He then added: “Once he (Sri Aurobindo) told us that his subtle physical body had that complexion.” Nevertheless I had to go by what my eyes had seen, *pratyaksa pramana*. When I had the unique good fortune of having his darshan again in August, 1950, then too I saw him as before as the ultimate of golden radiance. What could be seen only after absolute and impeccable purification of the senses and by deep and profound reflection was revealed to me by his transcendent Grace.

My adoration and my gratitude are laid at his refulgent feet.

V. MADHUSUDAN REDDY

(*The Alchemy of Her Grace – Grateful Remembrances* by V. Madhusudan Reddy, published by Institute of Human Studies, Hyderabad, 1996, pp.1-8)

DO YOU REMEMBER?

Do you remember the climb up the narrow twisting stairs?
Do you remember waiting on the terrace above the tops of
trees, clutching your bunch of flowers
and listening to the sound, in winter,
of the mumbling sea?

Do you remember those noisy crows looking in her window?
Do you remember then the call and the gesture and the
open door and the room filled with light?

Do you remember sometimes not even finding her for a
moment in all that light?

Do you remember the look? The investigations? Now then,
she seemed to be saying, what have we
got here. And then the reaching out. . .

Do you remember her laughter, like ancient crystal bells?
Do you remember your tears, happy as rainclouds?
Do you remember her silences?

Do you remember her “hey?” when you couldn’t untangle your tongue?
Do you remember the fragrance of her silver hands?
Do you remember the touch, as gentle as a child’s kiss?
And do you remember her grip when she
held you as firm as the foundations
of the universe?

Do you remember the eternal depths of her eyes?
Do you remember the infallibility of her choice when
she gave you back flowers? And when
she gave you roses, do you remember
the roses? O God, what roses!

Do you remember the way she peeled your blessings
packet from the bundle as if they
were the Lord’s rupee notes?

Do you remember leaving, and her crisp and clean
formidable strength going out with you?

And do you remember promising yourself that this time,
this time, you would keep her with you for ever. . .

Do you remember?

NORMAN THOMAS (NAVODITTE)

(Invocation – An Anthology of Spiritual Poems selected by Lloyd Hefman and Vignan Agni,
published by IntEnt, Auroville, 2007)

MY FIRST DARSHAN

My first Darshan was in the Meditation Hall upstairs.

There is a big sofa there even now — Mother and Sri Aurobindo used to sit on it and give us Darshan. At that time we were very few in the Ashram, and very few visitors were permitted for Darshan. The day previous to the Darshan, or two days in advance, the list of the names of all those who would be going for it was made and put up in the hall downstairs for everyone to read. One copy of it used to be with Sri Aurobindo at Darshan time. According to the order in which the names were written in the list, we had to go, and when Sri Aurobindo saw a new person coming he took up the list to see who that person was. I have still with me the list of the names of the people who went for Darshan on 21st February 1928. I should have brought it to show to you.

I was to go for Darshan with my brother. We took flowers — we could offer flowers. From outside the Hall, from the staircase steps we could see what the previous person was doing but we would enter the Hall only individually. Each one was allowed some time to make his offering and do Pranam to both Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Generally the Darshan would start at about 6 or 6.30 in the morning. It did not last very long as there were not many people, but still it lasted two or three hours as people were allowed some time. Since we used to see Sri Aurobindo only thrice a year, we were not hurried on.

On the day of my first Darshan there were about 65 people — sadhaks plus visitors. In the afternoon Mother would distribute among the sadhaks the garlands received at Darshan time. She gave each one of us a garland. And then at night we used to get soup from her, as on all other days. But on Darshan days we used to decorate with flowers a canopy over her seat.

That very year or the next, the Darshan room was changed. The Darshan was held in the small room at the further end of the upstairs Meditation Hall.

VASUDHA

(Mother India, August 1975, p. 639)

RECOLLECTIONS

1. First “Darshan” of the Mother

My first sight of the Mother was on the very day I reached Pondicherry on December 16, 1927. I had been taken by Pujalal, who had received my wife and me at the station, to Purani’s room — previously Sri Aurobindo’s for 6 years and afterwards mine for 9. Looking out the north window I saw the Mother walking on the roof-terrace of her house, drying in the sun her just-shampooed hair. This was the most enchanting vision and my heart leapt out to her and since then has kept leaping. The word “leap” is very appropriate to my response to her as compared to my answer to the Divine Call through Sri Aurobindo. I do not leap but sweep towards Sri Aurobindo. A warm deeply reverent continuity of movement is experienced in regard to him, whereas in regard to the Mother there is always a swift and sudden movement of exultation. If I may pick up a clue from this last word, I may say that face to face with the Mother I feel my heart intensely exultant. Fronting Sri Aurobindo I know my heart to be immensely exalted. The heart is concerned and dynamised in either case — profound love is astir, but on the one side it is tugged by a dazzle of beauty and bliss while on the other it is drawn by a tranquil glow of compassionate grandeur.

15.6.1992

*

2. First Darshan Day

. . . my first Darshan Day was approaching — it was the 21st of February [1928], the Mother’s birthday. People were not very encouraging at that time, they left me in doubt whether I would be able to attend the Darshan or not. Up to almost the last minute I didn’t know my fate. I had to go and scrutinise the list of names put up. At last I found my name. “Good!” I said, “I am lucky to be allowed.” Later I took my place in the queue. Of course in those days the queue was a small one: I think there were only 40 people staying in the Ashram and perhaps as many visitors.

The Darshan used to be in the long front room upstairs. I went in my turn — first, of course, to the Mother because Sri Aurobindo I didn’t know, while the Mother I had seen again and again. I knelt down at her feet, she blessed me; then I went to Sri Aurobindo’s feet and looked at him. My physical mind came right to the front: “What sort of a person is Sri Aurobindo? How does he look?” I saw him sitting very grandly, with an aquiline nose, smallish eyes, fine moustaches and a thin beard. . . . I was examining him thoroughly. At length I made my Pranam. He put both his hands on my head — that was his way — a most delightful way with his very soft palms. I

took my leave, looking at him again. . . .

The next day I met the Mother and asked her: “Mother, did Sri Aurobindo say anything about me?” She answered: “Well, he just said that you had a good face.”

*

3. An Impression of Radiance

Q: Would you describe your first darshan with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother? What experiences did you have with them?

The first darshan with the Mother I had the impression of a radiance all around her. When I first saw Sri Aurobindo I had the sense of something leonine, as well as a mountainous calm. He leaned forward and blessed me with both hands about my head. The Mother kept smiling all the time as if to set me at ease in the presence of Sri Aurobindo. My turn to go to them was to follow an American couple that I overheard discussing whom to bow to first. They solved the problem by bowing between them. This way they touched the feet of neither but had the rare experience of being blessed by both of them at the same time.

. . . Sri Aurobindo had a soft, very soft voice, I am told, but I never heard him speak.

(1999)

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

1. *Life-Poetry-Yoga, Some Personal Letters*, Vol. 3, pp. 30-31.
2. *Light and Laughter — Some Talks at Pondicherry* by Amal Kiran and Nirodbaran, “Talk One” delivered by Amal on August 26, 1970, p. 14.
3. *The Golden Path – Interviews with Disciples of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville* by Anie Nunnally, published by East West Cultural Center, California, 2004, pp. 11-12.

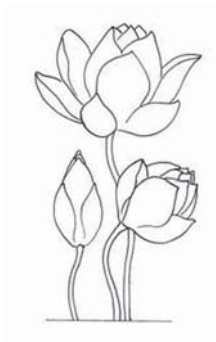
A CHILD AT PLAY

Q: Tell me about your early days in the Ashram.

Well, I was just an infant and there was actually not much of an Ashram community at that time and no school. I remember one story that my father [A.B. Purani] told about me when I was still in the crawling stage. My father's quarters were just across from Sri Aurobindo's rooms. The talks with sadhaks would take place in the evenings. The sadhaks meditated, also, with Sri Aurobindo and perhaps I heard them speaking about meditation. Sometimes, as Sri Aurobindo's room had swinging doors, I would crawl into Sri Aurobindo's room and settle into a chair. My father would come looking for me and apologise to Sri Aurobindo and ask me, "What are you doing?" I would say "jeu, jeu". At times doors to both quarters were left open. One night I crawled from my father's flat into Sri Aurobindo's rooms and I was heard repeating the words "dana", "dana". It was surmised that I had heard the sadhaks during these evening talks discussing sadhana so often that I was trying to imitate the sound of the word!

ANU PURANI

(The Golden Path – Interviews with Disciples of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville by Anie Nunnally, published by East West Cultural Center, California, 2004, pp. 179-80)



MY FIRST DARSHAN

07.11.71

In 1969, while running a TV magazine in Holland, I one day remarked to a close musician friend of mine: “Oh dear, I wish I had something to *believe* in . . . I have so much energy and it’s such a waste to use it only for these dumb little stories we have to feed the public with. . . !”

Some weeks later my friend brought me a magazine, *Bres Planète*, in which I found an article by Ruud Lohman, “They build their own city”. “I think this is what you are looking for!” said my friend. I read the article, got in touch with a contact address given in it, went to a reading with slide shows and started reading Satprem’s *The Adventure of Consciousness*, in Dutch.

New worlds opened for me. . . Yes, yes, yes . . . I kept thinking and feeling and sensing, this was it for me.

In order not to come with empty hands, I kept my job for another year, and it was in September 1971, after a half year of travelling in India (*because “once I disappear in Auroville, I probably never will get out of it. . .”*) that I arrived in Pondicherry, now Puducherry.

Immediately attracted by the very special energy field prevailing in the Ashram, I inwardly had the strong sense that I first needed to get closer, more familiar, more intimate with the Mother before going to Auroville. So I decided to remain in the Ashram for some time.

And then a bizarre problem arose. . . . While I had given up my all and everything, had burned all my ships in order to come to the Mother and Auroville, I now found myself embodying an enormous resistance. For days and days I walked around Pondy, in the park, at the beach, sat in the Playground, and near the Samadhi, continually struggling with thoughts like, “How can she be divine. . . , she was married. . . , even had children. . . , what is divine anyway. . .” etc, etc. . . Until the day came that I finally shook myself, realising, “What on earth do I care who she is or what she did. . . , let me listen to her message at least. ! !”

Having made up my mind, I then was ready. I asked for a darshan and, when the day came, went to the Ashram’s flower section to search for a flower to give to Mother. When asked which flower I wanted, I had absolutely no idea and suggested they give me something white.

A friendly sadhak gave me a bunch of white plumeria and there I went, to the Samadhi, waiting downstairs. . . , waiting up the stairs. . . , waiting half way. . . , it was a dreamlike, timeless waiting with a strange sort of intensity, as if there was no past and no future. . . , just a very full everlasting moment of waiting. . . , awaiting. . . .

It was as if the space outside of me and the space inside of me had become exactly the same, mingling and getting stronger and stronger. . . , I could hear its sound. . .

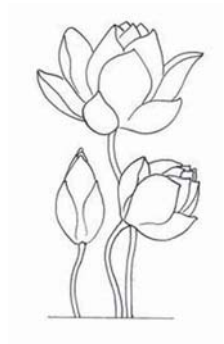
And then I found myself in the room. . . and there she was. . . , so very, very fragile and almost transparent. . . , almost blue. . . She was so light. . . , hardly sitting in her chair, — and the space intensified, throbbing, sounding. . .

When it was my turn I gave my flower and knelt down for her as I had seen the ones before me do. In one of Sri Aurobindo's *Letters On Yoga* I had read that one had to "let Mother look into your heart", so in all my naiveté I looked up at her, opening my eyes for her to look into them. I didn't look at her face, at her looks, I just held my head a bit backwards and found myself opening my eyes, wide, like doors.

And there it came. . . , it was as if two beams or streams bored themselves, very steadily and gradually straight down into me. . . , almost like two rods physically drilling downwards, very slowly, very gently. . . And after staying there for some silent, ageless, timeless time. . . , the two beams very gently and slowly withdrew again. I felt them leaving me, and then. . . I *looked* at her. . . I *saw* her face, and she saw mine. . . , and we smiled and smiled. . . , and I felt her little tick on the top of my head and someone gave me a flower, and I floated and smiled and beamed out of the room, downstairs, into the world. . .

The message had been received . . . and from that time onwards everything, everything was different. . .

MAUNA

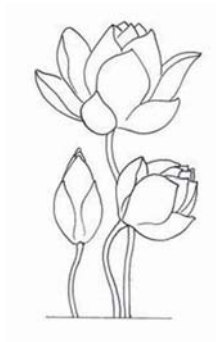


MY FIRST HAPPY MEETING

IT was during my stay at the Gardens that I had my first meeting and interview with Sri Aurobindo. Barin had asked me to go and see him, saying that Sri Aurobindo would be coming to see the Gardens and that I should fetch him. Manicktolla was in those days at the far end of North Calcutta and Sri Aurobindo lived with Raja Subodh Mullick near Wellington Square in the South Calcutta area. I went by tram and it was about four in the afternoon when I reached there. I asked the doorman at the gate to send word to Mr. Ghose — this was how he used to be called in those days at the place — saying that I had come from Barin of the Manicktolla Gardens. As I sat waiting in one of the rooms downstairs, Sri Aurobindo came down, stood near me and gave me an inquiring look. I said, in Bengali, “Barin has sent me. Would it be possible for you to come to the Gardens with me now?” He answered very slowly, pausing on each syllable separately — it seemed he had not yet got used to speaking Bengali — and said, “Go and tell Barin, I have not yet had my lunch. It will not be possible to go today.” So, that was that. I did not say a word, did my *namaskāra* and came away. This was my first happy meeting with him, my first *darśan* and interview.

NOLINI KANTA GUPTA

(*Reminiscences* by Nolini Kanta Gupta and Amrita, published by
Mother India, 1969, pp. 16-17)



KALI, THE DESTROYER OF OBSTACLES

I CAME to Pondicherry from London at the very start of 1972. I had wanted to come immediately after I discovered Sri Aurobindo and the Mother a few months earlier, but the Bangladesh war intervened. Having used the months of waiting to read much of the works of Sri Aurobindo, I arrived at the Ashram and very soon met Navajata. I don't know what he saw, but he mentioned me to the Mother and She asked me to come to see Her. I went to Her a few days later, which was perhaps the 17th of February. It was a totally unexpected grace to see Her; I knew that She was seeing very few people at that time. I went to see Her again on the 20th of February, which was my birthday. And again I saw Her on the 21st at the Darshan at the Ashram. These four days were a revelation and deepened my connection immeasurably.

I began to work with Navajata on relation first with the United States and then on relation between Auroville and the outside. The story that I want to tell you is very personal but for those who have not known the Mother, I think it shows the extraordinary grace that She could bestow on all of us, in a very tangible form. I was living in the Ashram and at a certain point, perhaps it was in March, I wrote to Her — I cannot recall the subject exactly but it had to do with my *sadhana*. She asked me to come to see Her. So I went on my own, and not through Navajata or Shyamsundar or any of the other secretaries people went through. I waited upstairs on Her terrace and went in when I was called.

In my previous visits to Mother, [. . .] nothing existed in the room but the Mother and She was enormous. You would walk in with flowers, you would place your head on Her lap, look into Her eyes, She would touch your hand, give one a flower and off you go. This time it was very different. As She was looking at me, perhaps She saw an obstruction in my inner being and decided to do some 'spiritual surgery'.

Holding both my hands between Her two hands, I suddenly felt an enormous pressure, — certainly too great to originate from a very frail, small, ninety-three year old person. It was very, very powerful. And Her face went from that smile — as all those who have seen the Mother will remember, it went from ear to ear, vast — and took on the ferocious face of Kali by an imperative determination. Her right eye seemed very distant, perhaps in other worlds, but Her left eye appeared to begin to spin around as though it were a drill, and She bored down into my deepest heart right down to the level of my chest. She hit a deep, tenacious layer of what felt like hard rubber. She pushed against it and it barely budged. It actually hurt physically. She pulled back out, and smiled broadly from ear to ear while patting my hands. Then again, She dove back in, — with Her eye spinning, — entering through my eyes, with Her consciousness. She hit the same obstruction. Again She came back up, reassuring me in the same way, then dove back in a third time with an ever

greater intensity. This time the obstruction ripped open. Her consciousness went right into my heart centre and opened it. It was an incredibly powerful experience. When She came back out, She said, “*Et Voilà, mon petit,*” and She patted my hands and gave me a big smile along with a *transformation* flower.

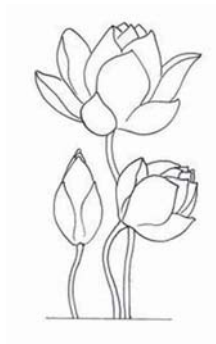
It was an extremely intense experience. That is the kind of work that She could do and it was a great grace. It was the turning point of my life and it is what, I believe, truly made me what I now am. I thank Her forever with a heart absolutely full of gratitude. I left Her room with a mixture of thankfulness and post-surgical pain, but soon I felt only an intense, constant connection with Her presence that lasted for ten days.

A giant dance of Shiva tore the past;. . .

Savitri, Book III, 4

ROGER TOLL

(*Darshan – Remembering Sweet Mother and Sri Aurobindo*, published by Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research, Auroville, 2006, pp. 47-48)



LIVING EXAMPLES

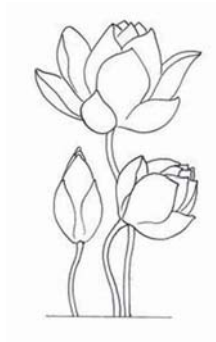
You once asked me what were my impressions when I first met Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Well, it is difficult to describe them. But I remember this much, that I felt I was in the presence of Shiva when I saw Sri Aurobindo. When I saw the Mother, I felt an extraordinary closeness to her and saw in her an embodiment of Beauty.

Now, after all these years of stay with them, the total impact on me is this:
Sri Aurobindo is a living example of complete surrender.

The Mother is a living example of perfect service to the Lord.

CHAMPAKLAL

(*Champaklal Speaks*, edited by M. P. Pandit, revised by Roshan,
published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2002, p. 39)



KNOWN FOR AGES

THERE were, however, one or two striking vision-experiences which revealed their meaning to me later. The first was the vision of two feet with golden anklets. While seeing them I had the distinct feeling that they were the Mother's feet. The second experience came to me in response to a telegram I had sent to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother conveying some good sentiments after I was refused permission for Darshan in November, 1932. I saw a marble staircase rising in front of me up to 8 or 10 steps then taking a turn to my right then turning again arising straight up into infinity. I saw a lady swiftly descending from its invisible top and coming and stepping in front of me at the first bend. She opened out her arms wide. Her face was European and her dress of the Greek type. It was difficult to judge her age, but no doubt she was young. This scene has remained stamped on my consciousness even four decades after.

It was in 1934 November that a friend wrote to Sri Aurobindo asking him whether I could come for the November Darshan that year and the request was immediately granted and I came for Darshan. On the 3rd or 4th day of my stay here, as I was lying down at night I had a peculiar experience. It was as if someone was drilling a hole in my head. In a spiral of light I saw a little figure entering through my head, entering into the heart and stopping there in the heart. Immediately I recognised the figure to be the same lady with a European face that I had seen two years earlier.

During that visit every time I approached the Mother for Pranam I experienced a strong impulse to give and give. If I had a gold button on my shirt I would take it out and place it at her feet. If there were a few coins in my pocket I would do the same thing. I could not resist the push.

*

You ask what was my experience at Darshan of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The moment I had sight of him from a distance, there was a surge of emotion and I strongly felt that I had known him for ages. There was such a joy that I could not contain myself and I embraced the man who was in front of me. When my turn came, Sri Aurobindo looked at the Mother and Mother looked at Sri Aurobindo and he nodded.

Before going back I met the Mother. She asked a few questions about myself and then asked "Will you come here?" "Yes, Mother" was my answer. And it was not long before I was back.

S.T.

*(Breath of Grace, edited by M. P. Pandit, published by Dipti Publications,
2nd edition 2002, pp. 184-85)*

“SEEING” SRI AUROBINDO

Q: Would you describe your first darshan with Mother and Sri Aurobindo or share any of the darshan experiences you had with them?

I saw the Mother twice a day. She used to give darshan in the mornings in the meditation hall. In the evenings we would go up for darshan to the top of the staircase. I remember my first darshan of the Mother. I saw her sitting at the top of the stairs wearing the most exquisitely beautiful blue sari. Her eyes were something indescribable. I was overwhelmed by the experience. She took us over immediately. Sri Aurobindo's power was quite different. I saw him only when he gave darshans four times a year. We passed by him one by one very quickly but he transferred so much Force into each of us in such a short amount of time. I remember one April darshan in the afternoon sitting in the courtyard waiting to go upstairs. I could feel, palpably, the entire courtyard rocking back and forth from the amount of Force emanating from his presence. This is one of the reasons children were not allowed in the Ashram until a certain age. The Force was too strong. They would often fall ill.

During my first darshan, as I was approaching the inner room, when I reached the door I could feel two rays of light entering my chest. I was still standing at the door when I felt this. When I stood in front of Sri Aurobindo it was as though I was in a trance and I walked away still in that state. Once, however, I was talking to the Mother prior to a darshan with Sri Aurobindo. I said, “Mother, I don't ‘see’ Sri Aurobindo during the darshans. Of course I see him physically, but I feel that I don't see him inwardly.” The Mother said, “Yes, it is true, this is very difficult.” “But Mother, others tell me that they ‘see’ him.” She said, “Then, perhaps they are only pretending.” After that next darshan I “saw” Sri Aurobindo in a totally different way. The Mother had opened my inner sight and given me the ability to truly “see” Sri Aurobindo.

TEHMI

(The Golden Path – Interviews with Disciples of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville by Anie Nunnally, published by East West Cultural Center, California, 2004, pp. 71-72)

THAT ETERNAL MOMENT

It was at the end of December 1970 when I was landing at New Delhi airport on a four weeks surprise trip to India. I was warmly greeted by the golden rays of an early morning sun when coming down the gangway and breathing in the fresh air of a misty dawn. It was my first encounter with India and it was during that first day that I was struck by an overwhelming and deep sensation of finally coming home.

When travelling through Northern India the following weeks that intensive impression never left me and did warmly colour my daily encounters. It was like looking through the eyes of the soul and the soul only. An atmosphere of inner calm and timelessness took hold of me. I was as if embraced by Mother India and had no choice but to dismiss my scheduled return flight and instead to embark on a long lasting memorable journey through the whole of India with just a hundred dollars left in my pocket. At that moment of utter freedom it was only logical to choose Pondicherry as the very first goal and destiny because there was the Sri Aurobindo Ashram which persistently had remained in my memory.

Way back in Germany, after having been part of the student revolt at West Berlin's universities seeking a radically new way of life I came across a book of a newly published paperback edition, a series of monographs, the first one being dedicated to Sri Aurobindo. This simple and honest account of his life, thoughts and universal work had an enormous impact on my life: finally I had found somebody who could convincingly 'explain' to me everything and without flaw — no questions left!

It triggered in myself a stunning recognition of the essential oneness of all life and beyond all mental comprehension it became the one book carrying the one magic word changing my life. This experience stayed on in my body like a rock, it never left me.

Now, just one year later, having been thrown into India as if out of the blue and following its call against all odds, it was only natural to turn my attention to Pondicherry straight away, what else?! It was the beginning of a new adventure:

The early morning ride from the station through the small township was graced by a serene atmosphere which became ever more tangible when coming closer to the Ashram.

Days later in the Ashram guest house I heard news about the 'birthday darshan of the Mother' whose portraits were seen everywhere. At first I did not pay much attention to frequent invitations to come to her 'darshan'. This 'Mother' was barely in my mind and even less on my agenda. Obviously didn't she leave the same impression in that famous book? Moreover I wasn't too much interested to see a 'guru' or a 'grande dame' at her balcony. Yet, as destiny willed I was gently encouraged by one of those early pioneers from Auroville to go anyway so as to see

for myself what's on with 'the pope on the balcony'. Well, it turned out to be the most memorable event of my life.

It was February 21st under a warm Indian afternoon sun when we arrived in that small street adjacent to the main ashram building where already thousands of devotees had gathered. It seemed they had come from all over India, most of them in their traditional white clothing, a few westerners among them. There was a lot of chatting and excitement mixed with an atmosphere of intense expectation for that special moment to come. I landed just in the middle of the packed crowd getting fully the feel of it all. By then one or the other was looking intensely up to the roof terrace where the Mother was to appear at any moment.

Suddenly a great silence descended on all and everybody, the air felt still and compact, when a small hand was seen groping along the railing up there. Then a little face was emerging slowly from behind radiating the presence of a great power.

I was stunned. [. . .] When hearing two westerners next to me talking to each other like: oh; she is old and fragile, I was wondering in utter disbelief — look, can't you see, can't you see the eternal himself?! During those minutes of eternity and feeling the massive experience in my body I followed Her when she was slowly moving down the railing from one end to the other. At one moment she suddenly was like throwing herself over the railing with such a concentrated power so to reach out to everybody, no one to be left out, to perceive all, to be seen by everyone who had gathered there from one end of the street to the other — and everybody was looking up to her.

I was caught by her overwhelming glance, a stream of compact energy from eye to eye, soul to soul, in utter abandon and trust. . .

Long after the Mother had retreated to her room and the crowd had dissolved I was still standing there all alone in the deserted street, I had not moved an inch as if glued to that sacred power point where that Presence was still there all powerful, that feeling of total bond without fear. . . and no time, no time.

It sounded as if from far away when my companion, trying to get me back to time-bound reality, appealed to me: Peter, she is gone since long, let's go! — yes, yes, I made an attempt to gather myself and to get going, but only to sit down a few steps further at the edge of the street. . . remaining there for a very long time keeping my sacred space.

For many years I didn't talk to anybody about my precious experience. To myself I could say that I never felt such a power emanating from a human being, an overwhelming power, which instead of closing me because of fear it opened me up like a flower to the sun, because it is the power of all encompassing love. At that eternal moment there was no more outside, there was only that immense presence lived through the feeling of an indestructible bond of consciousness-force.

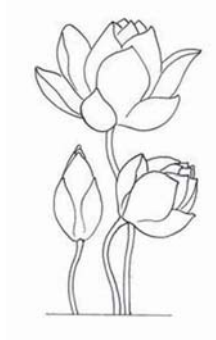
Much later, when asked and recounting my experience to friends and seekers alike, it dawned on me that this very day may have been really my day, 'my' darshan.

Anyway it happened to be the last and decisive encounter which changed the course of my life, all beginning with a simple book on Sri Aurobindo, the divine word in action with the discovery of Mother India as being my spiritual homeland, and Auroville, the promised land, 'the tower of Babel in reverse'.

I remain for ever grateful that I have been offered these four essential gifts of my life which nourish me, give me strength and the power of joy.

PETER A.

(*Darshan – Remembering Sweet Mother and Sri Aurobindo*, published by Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research, Auroville, 2006, pp. 208-11)



MOTHER'S GAZE

You who from my soul's rest roused me
Who to earth's sphere compelled me
Out of my nest of space and light,
With a look both musing and sure you drew me
So that I thought nothing of hovering
The long fretful years away
Gazing upon the ocean
And wondering if it was that
Or a bright flower below,
Or a bird's call,
Or a single sparkling day,
Which made the coming to earth worth it.
And stilled the why and the wherefore
Of life's intermittent gray,
Ever broken by the memory . . . the memory of what?

When I arrived and I saw you
My heart rose then dipped with a sigh,
Slipped through your eyes and at last alighted
And knew why,
Knew the why and the wherefore,
Knew itself from the beginning anchored
As well as in the sky of your eyes,
In the days that were now all brightness,
And in oceans and birdsong and flowers
And in each everyday good
Born of the gaze of your eyes.

MAGGI

(*Seeds* by Maggi, published by the author, 2006, p. 41)

TRYST WITH THE DIVINE MOTHER

‘DARSHAN’ was a word familiar in my childhood. There were the usual festivals at home which were celebrated with traditional Prasad. If it was Janmashtami, amma¹ would prepare salt and sweet ‘seedai’; Diwali meant ‘okkorai’ and ‘marundhu’ (a herbs-based sweet appropriately termed ‘medicine’); Sri Rama Navami would bring ‘panakam’ (a drink made of jaggery and dry ginger) and buttermilk. The Karadaiyan Nonbu was special too. This was the Savitri *vrata* (in our Tamil Brahmin family) when women at home recalled the Savitri legend, wore auspicious threads dipped in turmeric around their neck and ate hot ‘adai’ (a sweet made of jaggery, rice flour and lentils) with fresh butter melting all over it saying, “I have performed this *vrata* with adai and non-clarified butter. May my husband never leave me.” As our house had immense reverence for the short and squat “University edition” of *Savitri* which was often read and occasionally explained to us by father, the association kept ‘Karadaiyan Nonbu’ and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram at distant Pondicherry very close to the child’s heart.

There was an equally joyous but untraditional celebration in our house which my friends could not comprehend. This was what I could explain only as Darshan Day. “I had today ‘Kesari’,” I would boast to my friend. “Why, anything special?” “Of course, it is Darshan Day.” “What is Darshan Day?” “It’s Darshan Day, that is all”, I would say with impatience and we would then go on with our skipping or hop-scotch. When I had attended a Darshan Day in Pondicherry and returned home I could not explain much to my friends about it either. I remember telling them how we stood in a queue and a beautiful lady smiled at me when my turn came and gave me a flower. That was all. This was perhaps in 1946.

But this first day at Pondicherry has remained clear with me as a few images. One was, the Mother. She was familiar because of the photographs at home, but as we had been asked to keep strict silence, I was very anxious lest I speak something or exclaim about this or that. And it was a moment’s encounter and my amma who was behind me gently pushed me onwards and herself did pranam. I turned back a wee little bit to see amma getting up and receiving a flower and a very big smile. Once again a fleeting moment and I could feel amma’s hand shaking a little as she held my hand when we moved out. I believe I told amma that the Mother looked like grandmother!

Shankar Gowda Patil and father were standing a little away and we went to them. We showed our flowers. I do not remember what flower I had received but I remember amma’s for Patil uncle saw it and told my father: “Psychological Perfection!

1. My parents, Padmasani and Srinivasa Iyengar were devotees of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. While Amma read *Savitri* regularly and tried to translate it into Tamil, father is well known as the author of *Sri Aurobindo: a biography and a history* and *On the Mother: a manifestation and ministry*.

So apt for your wife!” Then father explained what was meant by “psychological perfection” in Tamil to amma. It was the Champa or Pagoda flower which bloomed in abundance in our garden at Waltair. From that day onwards the flower was referred to only as “Annai Kodukkum Poo” (the flower that Mother gives) in our house. I remember amma happily saying often, “Today the tree is so full of Annai Kodukkum Poo that you cannot see the leaves.”

The other image is Patil uncle giving me two lotuses and teaching me how to hold them by the stem. And Paru-bai instructing me how once I had moved near Mother in the queue, I should offer the flowers and do pranam. Very, very vague films in the back of memory. But how precious!

On two of my subsequent visits in the late 'fifties, I had the wonderful opportunity of Balcony Darshan. We all stood expectant, prayerful. By now I had begun my research work on *Savitri* and had drawn close to the Aurobindonian world. I was standing beside my father who assured me that the Mother would be looking directly at me. And so it had been, when she appeared, walked a little, held on to the balcony, leaned forward and gazed at us, intense yet smiling. Yes, she looked at me! I am sure this was the feeling of each one of us in the crowd, for she certainly flung on us her “vast, immortal look”. One felt a deep sense of satisfaction. For me, it was beautiful and memorable for father walked with me reciting lines from ‘The Symbol Dawn’, his favourite routine:

Ambadress twixt eternity and change,
The omniscient Goddess leaned across the breadths
That wrap the fated journeyings of the stars
And saw the spaces ready for her feet.

At this time in 1957, when I had begun working on *Savitri* for my research dissertation, he gave me a portrait of the Mother, standing with a smile, a card in her right hand held forward. He told me that the Divine Mother is always ready to give you whatever spiritual treasures you want; but you must go forward and hold out your hand for her to drop her message of grace into it. The portrait has been with me all this time, reminding me of father’s words whenever I gaze at it. And so sweet Mother’s message too, printed below, has been my favourite during this half a century:

A Power greater than that of Evil can alone win the victory.
It is not a crucified but a glorified body that will save the world.

This is a picture of Savitri herself! So it became easier for me to understand the descriptions of Savitri by Sri Aurobindo in the epic as I was drawn deeper into it for my research work:

The great World-Mother now in her arose:
 A living choice reversed fate's cold dead turn,
 Affirmed the spirit's tread on Circumstance,
 Pressed back the senseless dire revolving Wheel
 And stopped the mute march of Necessity.
 A flaming warrior from the eternal peaks
 Empowered to force the door denied and closed
 Smote from Death's visage its dumb absolute
 And burst the bounds of consciousness and Time.

It was in 1961 that I received the joyous news that my doctoral dissertation on Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* had been passed *summa cum laude* by a panel of examiners from England: Professor Vivian de Sola Pinto, Prof. T. J. B. Spencer and Prof. H. O. White. This was the first time someone had taken up the epic for doctoral research and the message was immediately conveyed to Sri Nolini Kanta Gupta by my father. In the Ashram, eminent Aurobindonians like Nirodbaran, A. B. Purani, Kishor Gandhi and K. D. Sethna expressed their joy and I was told the Mother was very happy to get the news. On the suggestion of my father, I had submitted a copy of my thesis to the Mother before sending the other copies to the Registrar's Office in Andhra University on their onward journey across the seas. The Mother now gave the copy to K. D. Sethna to go through it and suggest corrections and improvements if any, and also asked the Ashram to print and publish the work. I had been a scholar of the University Grants Commission and the Commission now gave a grant for publication as well. The book was published in 1962.

A little before the book was out, the Mother was pleased to grant me an interview. I believe she said that she wanted to see the girl who was Iyengar's daughter. I went with my father. This remains the most wonderful half an hour in my life. Interestingly enough, the actual conversation in the room remains a blur. I was behind my father. He performed pranam to the Mother and I heard a very, very sweet voice, saying quietly: "Srinivaaasaaa, it is a long time since you came here." He grew emotional but controlled himself immediately and brought me to the front. "This is Prema, your child." And the sweetest of smiles, a deep, penetrating look into my eyes from the Mother. M. P. Pandit who had brought us into the room held out a plate to the Mother. She took out the symbols of Sri Aurobindo and herself and a rose and put them in my hands. I bowed to her and sat down while she spoke to father on his work and Sri Aurobindo-related articles. He spoke about his lectures on Sri Aurobindo at the Leeds University and how there was an increasing interest in Sri Aurobindo's writings in academia. There was then another beautiful smile from the Mother as she held out her hands in blessing while father and me performed pranam and withdrew. I still felt close to her as I did with my paternal grandmother. The gifts she gave were placed in my jewel box by me and there they have remained guarding me, as always.

The Balcony Darshans after this momentous audience with the Mother became even more entwined with my studies in *Savitri* and the marvel of the moment has been indescribable. One could notice with a pang the slight change in the human frame but the Ananda remained, giving a sense of fulfilment each time. Father has tried to describe the scene and perhaps succeeded too, to an extent:

But what's this bewildering drama of
 The Divine in human mould?
 To suffer our painful mutations — yet
 Be gloriously divine!
 The Avatar's descent is also her
 Rehearsing our transcendence.
 In defiance of scientific laws
 A great new Force is abroad . . .
 And She appears above the human sea,
 The brief nectarean Dawn.
 Walking with trembling steps and clutching at
 The railing, — Mother of Love!²

The Balcony in Pondicherry still draws us. She is there! Recently a group of us, strangers all, remained standing for a while looking up at the Balcony. I could see the same anxious expectation and total faith in the other faces as it was in the earlier days. What was it but the Mother's Love that bound us together as we stood on the pavement? There was a meditative silence, undisturbed by the occasional cyclist or a speeding car. And then we turned to look and smile at each other. At last, as dear friends parting, we went our ways with a sense of fulfilment. How true it is: this faith in all of us does emblazon the Divine Mother's Living Flame.

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

2. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Tryst with the Divine* (1974).

MY FIRST MEETING WITH SRI AUROBINDO*

It was April 1917. I had received an invitation in Madras to deliver a lecture in connection with the Shankara Jayanti celebrations at Pondicherry. There was some hesitation on my part in accepting the invitation, for the organisers of the function were known to be a rather orthodox set of gentlemen and though my way of life conformed to the usual standards of orthodoxy, I had my own doubts whether my opinions and views which ran counter to the rigidly conservative outlook would be palatable to my hosts. But they pressed their invitation. There was another and a more intimate factor which decided my choice. I had long wanted to see Sri Aurobindo. Here was an opportunity too good to be missed particularly since, as I fondly imagined then, the police would not bother one who goes on such a pious mission as to participate in a religious function like the Shankara Jayanti. Events, however, turned out to be otherwise; police attentions were not wanting, but that is a different story.

I had first heard of Sri Aurobindo under peculiar circumstances. In 1907, Bepin Pal had come down to Madras on his lecture tour and the city was all agog over his thunders on the Marina. Being caught up in the general whirlpool of the raging new spirit, I could not help attending those lectures. And it was after one of these that a friend, who was a college student then and later retired as the Principal of a local college, took me aside and said: "This Pal is a loud speaker; inspired, he orates, true, but he is not the chief leader. There is another man behind the scenes, working at the desk, giving directions. His name is Aurobindo Ghose — a saintly man, a Shakti-Upasaka." I got interested and when in the course of a year another friend returned from Nagpur where he attended a lecture by Sri Aurobindo (after the Surat Congress on his way from Bombay to Calcutta), I lost no time in getting as much information as possible from him. He was all admiration and respect while describing the leader. "He does not have a loud voice. But when he started speaking slowly in distinctive tones, we all felt a kind of rhythm creeping over the vast concourse and when the lecture was over, we woke up as if from an enchantment," he said. It is outside the scope of this brief narration to trace the course of my further acquaintance with Sri Aurobindo's activities and writings — first political and then the epoch-making *Arya*.

So then, I decided to take the trip with this main object of visiting Sri Aurobindo. On arrival at Pondicherry, I called at Poet Bharati's. He was then living in Ishwaran Dharmaraja Kovil Street and when I was announced, his little daughter led me up to the first floor where I found him singing:

*Victory in this life is certain
O Mind, fear there is none.*

* As related to M. P. Pandit, August 1949.

Then after a pause he made enquiries of one or two friends in Madras. I had met Bharati before in Mylapore; the last I saw him was a little before 1907. But what a change! Circumstances had conspired to wreck the physique and the handsome and spirited face of the inspired poet, the national poet of Tamilnad; he was shrunken, pale and setting. Suddenly he burst out:

*In the secret cave, O growing Flame,
Son of the Supreme.*

I knew Bharati had some knowledge of Sanskrit which he had studied at Kashi but not that he had acquaintance with the Vedas deep enough to give expression to such an essentially Vedic Conception as the growing Flame in the heart of man. Besides, the poet identifies Agni as Guha, Kumara, son of the Supreme. When I asked him how he caught the idea, he gave an interesting explanation in the course of which he said:

“Yes, I have studied 200 hymns (I do not quite recollect whether he said hymns or Riks) under Aurobindo Ghose.”

It was from Bharati himself that I learnt he got the inspiration and general knowledge of the Vedic gods and hymns from Sri Aurobindo. Later he translated into Tamil some of the Vedic hymns to Agni.

So the talk switched on to A.G. (as he used to be known in those days).

“Where is he living?” I asked.

“There,” he pointed in the direction of the European quarters.

“I want to see him.”

“But now-a-days he is very much disinclined to see people. I myself do not meet him as often as I used to do before. Anyway I shall ascertain.”

“Please mention that I have come on a pilgrimage to him,” I pressed, as if on impulse. Indeed the pilgrimage had commenced somewhere and that long ago.

Bharati wrote out a brief note in Tamil — a characteristically humorous one — to Nagaswami who was attending on Sri Aurobindo at that time, and signed himself as Shakti-Kumar, and he sent me with an escort to the house where Sri Aurobindo lived.

It was 3 p.m. when we arrived there. Nagaswami was obliging. He took the note, went up to A.G. and was back within a couple of minutes. “He will see you at 6 p.m. today,” he said.

Dilemma of dilemmas! The hour for which I had looked forward with so much eagerness had arrived. But the timing was embarrassing. For precisely at 6 the meeting was also scheduled to commence at which the lecture was to be delivered. Neither of these could be missed. And yet both could not be fulfilled at the same time. “Was it the proverbial *sattva-parikṣa*?” I wondered. I thought for a while and sent word to the organisers of the function that the meeting could commence a little later [than]

the fixed hour.

At six, I was escorted up the stairs of the house of Sri Aurobindo. It is now known as the Guest House — which name it acquired after Sri Aurobindo shifted to another building now in the main Ashram block. As I went up the stairs and reached the threshold, there stretched in front of me a long hall with a simple table and two chairs at the centre. At the farther end was a room on the threshold of which stood Sri Aurobindo. Like a moving statue — such was his impersonal bearing — he advanced towards the table as I proceeded from my end and we both met at the centre. Like Rama, the Aryan model of courtesy and nobility held up by Valmiki, Sri Aurobindo spoke first, *purva-bhāṣi*. I had carried with me a lemon fruit as a humble expression of my esteem for him and after he sat down, I placed it on the table in his front and said: *sudinam asid adya* (a happy day today).

Sri Aurobindo leaned over to the youngster who was still there and seemed to ask him if I knew English. He was assured I knew and with what smattering of the language I had, we commenced the conversation. It would be an omission if I fail to tell here what happened the moment I stood face to face with Sri Aurobindo at the table.

The age is past when matters of this kind had to be kept to oneself and concealed from others for fear of scoffings from rationalists and sceptics. Man has come to realise that there are more things on earth and in heaven than are written in books and discovered in laboratories. Well, as soon I saw him, even from a distance, there was set in motion, all of a sudden, a rapid vibratory movement in my body from head to foot. There was a continuous thrill and throb. I seemed to stand on the top of a dynamo working at top speed and it was as powerful as it was new. It lasted for nearly four to five minutes. It did not really stop at all. In fact it continued ever since for long and every time I went to see him later, or for his Darshan after his retirement, the phenomenon tended to repeat itself.

A spiritual personality continually pours out spiritual emanations from within and it would seem that when any one with some secret affinity or even a point of contact somewhere in the being comes within the ambience of these vibrations, there is an attempt by something subtle in us to imbibe as much of these sustaining and strength-giving radiations as possible. But the physique not being so supple cannot support this occult commerce for long; it lacks the necessary nerve-force to keep up the flow and the physical palpitating movement is the result. Of course, I find this explanation now. All that I knew at that time and could not help knowing was that I was in the presence of an unusually mighty personality. Was it the sunflower turned to the sun, or was it the filings in a tremulous dance before a block of magnet or was he the mystic spider, ever watchful, taking his prey alive to preserve it within his web biding his hour?

I had three important questions to ask, two of them are not of moment here. The question of the country's future was naturally uppermost in my mind and I was

eager to know what Sri Aurobindo thought of it. I wanted to have a word of hope, if that was possible, from this statesman and prophet, from this rare gift of God to the nation, in regard to the prospects before the country and asked:

“What are the immediate possibilities of India?”

“Why possibility? It is a *certainty*,” he returned with emphasis.

The Hindu-Muslim problem was lurking in the minds of thinking politicians who were few; in spite of Tilak and the Lucknow Pact the fear was there. “We have to bargain and purchase patriotism from them,” I put in. He agreed it was a serious hurdle but hoped that reform movements would come on and influence the progressive sections of the communities. “A *larger* Hinduism could find a solution and it is a necessity,” he added thoughtfully.

It was seven o’clock now, the hour to which the lecture was postponed arrived and I rose to take leave. To a question of mine, while parting, he said: “You can come here tomorrow, but by this time.”

Did I part the same person who came at six o’clock? Apparently I did. But not for long. For, something had happened to me of which I was not fully mindful nor did I imagine the full significance of what took place in my first meeting with Sri Aurobindo.

Something had been set going which carried me on its wings — this is more than a figure of speech — shuttling me from and back to him with an irresistible intensity till at last I came back to him six years later (1923), in a different role this time, as a seeker seeking the feet of the Teacher, and exclaimed marvelling at the change in his appearance:

“What other proof is required, Sire! Then your complexion was dark-brown, now it is fair; today the hue is a golden hue. Here is the concrete proof of the Yoga that is yours.”

T. V. KAPALI SASTRY

(*Collected Works of T. V. Kapali Sastry*, Volume 2, published by Dipti Publications, 1979, pp. 231-36)

A VERY SPECIAL EVENT AT A VERY SPECIAL PLACE

Q: When did you come to the Ashram for the first time and when did you have darshan of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother?

It was in 1942 and I was eight years old. I came with my parents and I was so taken with the Mother's beauty, her love, the flowers everywhere and the quiet, nightly meditations under the service tree. I wanted to stay and go to the school that Mother was forming at that time, but there was not as yet a boarding facility and neither of my parents could stay with me there, so we had to return to Africa. I had darshan of Sri Aurobindo that August 1942 but I don't remember how he looked. I remember the garlands we carried for the Mother and the Tulsi (basil) garlands for Sri Aurobindo. The predominant feeling for me then was that of a very special event at a very special place where I felt that I wanted to be.

Q: When did you return for your final stay?

I returned in 1951 when I was sixteen. My father had sent me to the Ashram on a special visit specifically to ask the Mother if I should take up medicine or law for my further education. . . . The first day I went for the Mother's darshan she gave me a flower and smiled so sweetly. In the evening in the playground I stood with the visitors. As the Mother distributed prasad she asked me, "Don't you want to join the other children in exercises?" I said, "Yes, Mother, I'd like to." She said, "Tomorrow you give your measurements for shorts and shirts." That next evening one pair of shorts and a shirt were given to me and a new life began without my even knowing about it or deciding about it on my own.

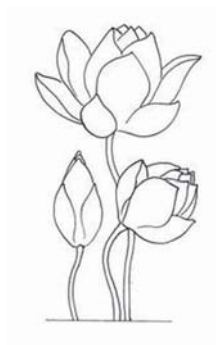
Q: Could you describe what it was like to be in the Mother's presence in those days?

The Mother used to dress in a long gown with matching scarf on her head. When she came out on the terrace outside her room the time was between 10 and 11 a.m. Her close companion, Chinmayee, carried a parasol to protect the Mother's head from the scorching sun. A crow would invariably come and hop onto the ledge of the terrace. Chinmayee would hand over to the Mother some biscuits with which she would feed the crow! I mostly looked at her lovely pastel-coloured clothes and matching parasols and her lovely smile. In the evenings, when she would give darshan at the head of the staircase, she was like a goddess from the scriptures. She wore saris and embroidered bands over her forehead. She looked taller than when I saw her during the mornings. She radiated light, light and more light. She received our flowers and we bowed down to her feet. She looked into our eyes and smiled

down on us as we looked up at her. Often her smile was like a silent laugh. She gave us some flowers and then we came down the staircase. I did not want to look at anyone because her image was in my eyes and I wanted to hold on to it for as long as I possibly could.

SUNANDA

(The Golden Path – Interviews with Disciples of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville by Anie Nunnally, published by East West Cultural Center, California, 2004, pp. 89-91)

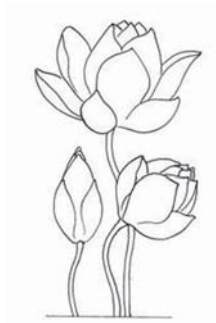


LUSTROUSLY WHITE

I WENT to Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry for the first time in February, 1949. I had the first darshan then. On my return my father asked me about Sri Aurobindo's complexion. When I said "lustrously white", he remarked that during his Bengal days, it was a bit darkish, but the complexion of yogis has been known to change. An uncle of mine also spoke similarly about him.

SHYAM SUNDAR

(*Darshan – Remembering Sweet Mother and Sri Aurobindo*, published by Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research, Auroville, 2006, p. 132)



MOMENTS THAT DO NOT FADE

I LEFT Belgium on the 17th of January 1970 — now 38 years ago. I flew via Frankfurt. 17th of January: the airport was white, under the snow. We flew through the night on a Boeing 707 of which the name was Lhotse, one of the high mountain tops in the Himalayas, I'll never forget that name. Then we landed in Bombay, 5 o'clock in the morning, 30 degrees centigrade — hot sunshine! Another world. Then Madras. There I had to take a bus. At that time, 38 years ago, there were not so many buses as there are today. Then I arrived in Pondicherry, in a state of shock. I did not even know whether my luggage was on top of the bus or not. But luckily it was there. Then I landed in a small hotel at the seaside that is no longer there, just next to the Ashram Press. And after I had put my luggage in my room, I threw my jacket over my shoulder and went out to see the Ashram.

In my head the Ashram was a white building with a palm tree next to it under a blue sky. Whether the Mother was there or not, I didn't know. So I started walking. There is a church nearby there, and in front of that church was a European lady talking with somebody. A very fashionably dressed lady, in shorts and well made up. So I asked her: "Where is that Ashram here somewhere?" She answered in English with an accent. I said: "Oh, you are French!" "Well, yes," she said. "See, you go on and you come to the Consulate with the French flag, and there you go to the left and you will see the Ashram." So I did. It was a Sunday afternoon, very quiet. You didn't see many people in the street at that time. I entered the School courtyard, the gate was open. And there I saw all those timetables signed by the Mother, with that very specific signature. I thought: "Where on earth am I!" All at once a voice behind me said: "Are you looking for something?" It was the voice of a young Frenchman, Jean Pierre, who afterwards became Guruprasad. He is still in Auroville — Goupi. "I'll take you to the Ashram," he said. But I understood '*La Chambre*' instead of '*L'Ashram*'. So I thought: "Oh, there must be a holy room here somewhere." And I went with him. He took me across the street, through a gate. There, on the chairs known so well by all of you, sat four old, grey-bearded people. It looked as if that was the entrance to heaven with St. Peter and other saints. Then Goupi asked somebody: "When can he meet him and where?" (I had asked Goupi to meet the only person whose name I knew.) Behind my back, somebody answered, the same woman's voice I had heard in front of the church. I turned around and there was that same lady, no longer in shorts and fashionably dressed, but in a long white robe, holding a plate full of flowers! I thought: "What is going on here?!" I didn't realise that I stood in the Ashram because I thought Goupi was taking me to '*La Chambre*'. (That impressive-looking lady in the long robe and with the flowers was, as I found out later on, none other than Pournaprema, then still called Françoise, the Mother's granddaughter.) "You can have an appointment with the person you are looking for at the seaside around five o'clock," she said, and disappeared around

the corner of the building.

I had the appointment, and afterwards I found a room in Goyle's New Guest House in the Rue Suffren. There I heard that the Mother was still alive and that one could meet Her. You had to put your letter to Her in the box that is still there at the Ashram entrance. I was told: "You go and put your letter to the Mother in that box." Unbelievable but true, for three days I turned around the central Ashram building, asking everybody: "In God's name, where is that Ashram?" Even though Prithwi Singh (I got to know who he was afterwards), who was sitting there in the balcony street, told me: "It is here," I didn't believe him! In my opinion the entrance gate was too small to be that of the Ashram of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. So when finally I found the box and was putting my letter in it, a miracle happened: behind me stood again that same Frenchman I had met that Sunday afternoon. I asked, rather vexedly: "Can you tell me at last: where is the Ashram?" He said: "But you are in the Ashram! Come with me and see." In a French magazine I had seen a photo of the Samadhi and behind the Samadhi a kind of tiled roof, the one in front of Nirodbaran's room. Therefore I had thought to myself: "If I see the Samadhi and that roof behind it, I am in the Ashram." And he took me to the Samadhi and I saw that roof and I knew that I was in the Ashram.

I dropped my letter to the Mother and She sent me in Her own handwriting an answer brought to the guest house by Suresh Joshi, who was Her messenger. The Mother's answer was — I still have the letter — : "You can come . . ." — it was in French — "You can come . . . *mais ce sera une entrevue silencieuse* — it will be a silent meeting." What did that mean? I had already had so much trouble to write my letter! For what should I write — 'Madame'? 'Mother'? I had strong inhibitions against writing Mother! I had had a mother and she was dead! I have kept that letter because the Mother had written Her answer at the bottom of it. She invited me to go and meet Her.

On the day I went to meet the Mother a kind of ceremony took place in Goyle's guest house. But see, a lot of flowers were laid out before me; from those I had to choose some to take them to the Mother. I was not a flower man, for me such things meant nothing but sentimentality. All the guests in the guest house were standing behind my back to see which flowers I would choose. I failed the test miserably. I had chosen some flowers which I had found very beautiful — but I had not chosen *Humility*, which to me looked more like a herb than a flower. Then Michou (the Canadian girl whom some of you may remember and whom I met 35 years later in Montreal) took me through the park to the Mother's room.

After some time Champaklal called my name and I went in. What was I to do? What do you do when you come in front of . . . I had no more than a vague idea of who the Mother was . . . what do you do when you come in front of such a Being? For in the meantime I had seen people meditating on the wall at the seaside, I had seen people on their belly at the Samadhi, I had seen people in all postures of

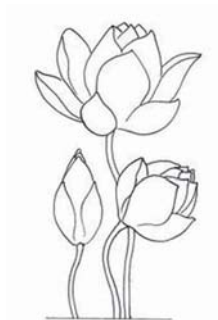
religiosity and meditation and all that — I felt very much disoriented and insecure. So I went through that door of the Mother’s room, known to all of you, and what did I see? I saw that very thin arm of the Mother resting on the armrest of Her chair. And I went in front of Her. . . and the rest I cannot tell, because I don’t know. And when I came to myself again, there was the face of the Mother, smiling, giving me one packet of blessings, and then a second one.

Some time after I had left the Mother’s room, “it” started working in the body, in the spine, in the subtle body. And since I didn’t want to be in the guest house with all those chattering visitors at that time, I walked by the seaside for some time, with tears in my eyes. Then I lay down, still with tears in my eyes. Something decisive had happened. I am such a naive fellow that everything that has happened in my life, spiritually, I have understood only afterwards. And I am happy for this because, if you try to interpret things at the very moment that they are happening, you distort them. You give them a fixed shape in your thought, which is how you will remember them.

You know where I got the explanation of what happened between the Mother and me on that 29th of January, 1970? I got it in a Temple of Freemasons in Ghent, a town in Belgium. I had given a talk in that Temple and after the talk I had conversations with many of those Freemasons. They were very interested. They were judges, professors, lawyers, priests, doctors. . . They were extremely open and interested. And when I told them the experience which I have just told you, one of them said: “Oh! That is the initiation.” Later I read what the Mother had said in one of Her conversations: “What I call initiation is when a person meets me and recognises me.” I suppose that in those seconds or eternities I have recognised something which I had known for a long time and which is always with me.

GEORGES VAN VREKHEM

(Remembering the Mother with Gratitude, published by Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research, 2003, pp. 95-99. Revised by the author)



MY DIARY-LEAVES

1928

August 13

Recently S. Doraiswamy gave a copy of *Uma Sahasram* for Sri Aurobindo's perusal who seemed to have deeply appreciated it. And the Mother expressed on her own: "If Ganapati Sastri is inclined to come for the August 15th Darshan he is welcome." It was communicated to Nayana¹ at Tiruvannamalai. Sri Ramana seems to have said 'When this suggestion by the Mother came unsought by Nayana, it must be a *Daiva Sankalpam*.'

August 15

Sri Aurobindo's birthday celebration in the Ashram — and all of us had the privilege of Darshan of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Nayana, though pessimistic at first, after he had the actual Darshan, expressed "*O, divya murtulu* — O, Divine Personalities!" so much so, he stayed on till September 1st.

August 16

Nayana's interview with the Mother for 30 minutes. They meditated together; Nayana felt spiritual current passing into him from all directions. Later on the Mother said to S. Doraiswamy: "He is the one man who immediately entered into my spiritual Consciousness and stuck to it to the end."

August 19

Nayana's second interview with the Mother for 45 minutes. He recited verses composed on the Mother. Talked of present Avatara. The Mother got into trance. Nayana perceived light passing through her toe and then a glowing halo around her entire being, the whole atmosphere surcharged with divine current.

K. S. VENKATARAMAN

(*Breath of Grace*, edited by M. P. Pandit, published by Dipti Publications, 2nd edition, 2002, pp. 343-44)

1. 'Nayana' means father in Telugu. That is how Vasishtha Ganapati Muni was addressed by his devotees and admirers.

A PRESENCE THAT WAS SOLID

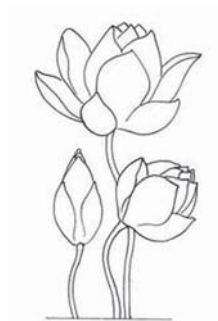
WITHIN months, more children came to the Ashram in twos and threes. All were about the same age. By the end of the year Mother said, “We will now start a school.” We were about twelve children, three teachers and one classroom and had barely any books. This was December 2, 1943. Our joy knew no bounds because it was a new adventure. She organised work for us with teachers who were disciples in the Ashram — Sisir-da, my mother and one other person. She guided the teachers as to how to teach — not the usual process of teaching. She organised the subjects and followed our work in minute detail and the teachers sent a report of the work and the children’s progress daily. She said at the time, “A teacher has to be in perfect control of himself if he is to guide the children.” More children came and more teachers too, who joined the Ashram as disciples, and new subjects of study were added. She followed very closely the progress and growth of students and teachers, the inner as well as the outer. At this time every month or two when we went to her she would say the following words like a direct communication and these words were, “Find your psychic being. Be conscious.” These words were like a concrete action from her. She acted on us little children with her power of consciousness, recreating our very beings. . . .

The four days in the year when we had the darshan of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, seated side by side, were of such power and presence that I would like to share how a growing young person experienced those moments. For days before each darshan the presence of Sri Aurobindo, of which we were conscious in our everyday lives, moved into a wider space and with greater intensity. It was felt all over the Ashram compound and the main Ashram building and flowed into the spaces of the streets around the Ashram. Our house was on a corner of one of those streets and one walked into this kind of presence that was solid and there was the feeling *of entering* something in a very concrete manner. This grew to its fullness on the day of the darshan itself. Sri Aurobindo was seated on a couch in the first room where he lived and the Mother was to his right; to one side was Nirod-da. In front of them was a large wooden box into which, as disciples approached them, they laid their offerings of flowers and garlands of Tulsi leaves (“Devotion”). We went up in a file standing only for a moment in front of the Divine Presence on earth and then moved on. As children we went with our parents. Soon I wanted to stand alone before Sri Aurobindo, so I started going on my own. I was about thirteen years old at that time. Sri Aurobindo sat with the majesty of the Divine, immobile and absolute. We looked into his eyes, into that vast, impersonal look. His eyes penetrated so deeply that one seemed to dwell only in the Immense. Even as a young person without understanding, without having the proper words to use, it came in very simple words that this was *it*. Whatever the “it” meant one did not

know and who can say that it is known even now or will ever be known. But the feeling remained that there was nothing beyond. . . that *this* was the Absolute. On one occasion I just happened to be in the line behind Dilip Kumar Roy. There he was. . . his being and his very body swaying in his love, devotion and bhakti for Sri Aurobindo. Lost to the world and only conscious of him. Peeking from behind the flowing robes I saw the vast, impersonal look on Sri Aurobindo's face. Also, focussed in a look of recognition, the impersonal changed to the personal and became a point of Light. That golden face, where never a muscle moved during darshans, creased into a smile. This is what something in me was looking for. I wanted to experience this more often. I would wait in the courtyard for Dilip-da to enter the Ashram gate on darshan days, swaying in the ecstasy of the meeting to be, and as he took his place in the file I used to slip in behind him. This way I had a few more moments to see Sri Aurobindo. I peeped to the right of Dilip-da in the front, to the left — no one else noticed, no one else was stepping out of the file. I could see Sri Aurobindo so many more times and then Dilip-da stood in front of them and I peeped to the right and could see Sri Aurobindo with that look and that smile and feel something of that moment between them. Untouched by time, those moments still hold their power and sweetness for me.

ASTER PATEL

(The Golden Path – Interviews with Disciples of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville by Anie Nunnally, published by East West Cultural Center, California, 2004, pp. 200-03)



KNEELING BEFORE HER FOR AGES

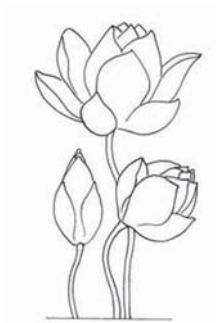
I MET the Mother first in the summer of 1971. She had already agreed to our staying (after seeing our black and white photographs taken in Pondy). Not having had any experience with which to measure our first darshan, we felt an out of this world, spacey experience; afterwards, sitting at the Samadhi, we were unable to leave.

Waiting on the sun drenched terrace before being admitted, I felt light and awkward at the same time in my red earth-stained first sari. Mother looked me intently in the eyes; it seemed I kneeled before Her for ages. She mumbled, “*Ah, ma fille, c’est très bien que tu es venue.*” In retrospect that was probably the time I unconsciously decided to stay, which was not our plan.

I met Mother several times after that, mostly on birthdays and in the public darshan: down in the crowded street when an intense silence fell as She came out on the balcony, Her absolutely powerful presence pervading everybody and everything.

LISBETH

(Darshan – Remembering Sweet Mother and Sri Aurobindo, published by Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research, Auroville, 2006, pp. 204-05)



LIKE A DREAM

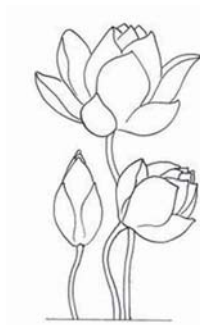
I SAW the Mother for the first time when I was 13 years old, in 1959. I came from the Delhi branch of the Ashram. The day was the 1st of December, and the Mother was distributing Prosperity to all the Ashramites in the room above the Reception hall, which is the one you see just as you enter the Ashram. When I went to her, she smiled and gave me a small soap cake as *prasad*. To the rest of the students she gave a delicate pink rose flower to each.

The first memory and impression that I have of the Mother is something very ethereal because she was fully clad in a spotless white sari. Light in various hues through the tinted glass panes of the upper part of the large middle door — especially violet — were reflecting on her white sari and somehow it seemed like a dream to me. It did not feel as though I really met and saw the Mother whom we had been worshipping at home for so long!

We all came out and down to the courtyard, did *pranam* to the Samadhi and started walking towards the playground. [. . .] As we came out, my friends were curious to know what the Mother had given me. When I said that it was soap, first they got quite upset as they all got a rose each. As one can expect, kids did not have much value for the rose initially. After a while one of them said, “You know the Mother is God, is she not? She knows very well that you do not bathe properly daily. So she gave you a piece of soap. We do not need it.”

DEEPSHIKHA REDDY

(*Darshan – Remembering Sweet Mother and Sri Aurobindo*, published by Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research, Auroville, 2006, p. 57)



MOTHER AS AT FORTY

AN interesting visitor is brought to me — Malcolm D’Cruz.

He relates how he and a friend of his arrived here on 21st to meet a girl friend who had told them that she would be in Pondy that day. He did not know anything about the Ashram. While searching for the girl, they saw a crowd waiting and a number of foreigners in that assembly. Thinking that their friend might be found there, they joined the crowd and asked someone what it was all about. “We are waiting for Mother’s Darshan,” was the reply. “Who is the Mother? What is Darshan?” were his queries. He learnt that Mother was 95 and would be coming on the balcony.

After the function, he exclaimed that the whole thing was a hoax. On being asked why, he replied that there was no 95-year-old lady there, the lady who came was just about 40, graceful and beautiful! The people who had talked to him took him inside the compound and showed him the recent photos of Mother. He was adamant that the lady who came on the balcony was not that person at all!

He was quite exercised about it. The common American friend who spoke to me of him brought him to me to convince him!

I explained to him the nature of the yogic action going on in Mother’s body and told him that what he had seen was her subtle-physical form. He said he started feeling better after our talk and was getting convinced.

27.2.1972

*

Spoke to Mother re. Malcolm D’Cruz. She was pleased, laughed and asked me to show him the photo taken in 1950 by Cartier Bresson. She confirmed that he had seen her subtle-physical form.

He said he had seen her looking still younger and pointed to the picture taken in Japan — somewhere before 1920 — in which she is holding a flower in her hand.

“For the first time in my life,” he told me, “I understand what is beauty, what is grace.”

M. P. PANDIT

(*Mother and I* by M. P. Pandit, published by Dipti Publications, 1984, pp. 210-11)

A FEELING OF CERTITUDE, OF STABILITY

To begin with, how did I meet Sri Aurobindo?

There are several ways to meet a person; it can be as I am meeting you now, personally; or else one can meet a person through his works. Well, it so happened that I met Sri Aurobindo without realising how.

One day in Paris a very good lady-friend who was interested in India and who had been there and, knowing I was also interested, spoke to me of a young Indian who had just arrived in Paris to study science: would I like to introduce him to people and allow him to work with me at the University? Naturally I said “Yes”. He was a charming young man born not far from Madras, whose name was Ramaya Naidu. We both gave our Physics examinations at the Sorbonne at the same time. He was actually from Pondicherry. He invited me to his house and there introduced me to a big, magnificent man named Paul Richard whose wife, I was told, had remained in Pondicherry and would stay there for the rest of her life. Though I was greatly surprised I did not doubt for a second that this was the Mother. Some time later the lady who had introduced Ramaya to me said, “ You know that a journal was brought out in Pondicherry in French called the *Arya*.” Then she lent me all the numbers she had. I was fired with this literature, and not long ago I found the Notes I had made while reading *The Secret of the Veda*. I never doubted what Sri Aurobindo was to be for me later. I had completely forgotten that reading, which was my first contact with him.

Many years passed. . . .

The first time I came down a lady whom many of you know, Suvrata (Madame Yvonne Robert Gaebelé) said to us, “You know, there are two absolutely extraordinary people in our town, and I must introduce you to them.” She took us to the Darshan of November 24, 1935. That was the first time I saw Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

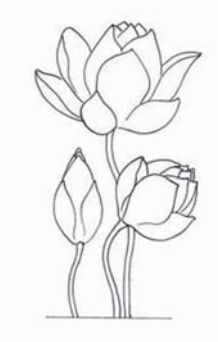
I see on this paper that the questioner would like to know what my first impression was. It is very difficult to say in a definitive manner what it was. When I saw Sri Aurobindo seated next to the Mother I had a feeling of certitude, of stability — an impression I had received often before on seeing a huge mountain. . . . At the first glance I had the surety that what I had so long searched for, the solution of my problems, was there. I did not know why, there was no logic in it; but it was an absolute certitude which has never since changed. At that time I did not know any of his works; I began studying them from that period on: that is, 1935-36.

One used to see the Mother pretty frequently then. I was very friendly with Pavitra and in order to see him without bothering anyone I used to go and have breakfast with him in the room he occupied above the Atelier. Later it became a big office. I had the opportunity of seeing the Mother there, who often needed to see Pavitra. She had the look of a kind, gentle, affectionate grandmother. She would come in her dressing gown, with her grey hair pulled back; it was extraordinarily

comforting because one felt to what extent she was human, direct, and one could tell her anything, ask her anything. Naturally one avoided questioning her at that moment, but in other interviews I was able to ask for explanations on Sri Aurobindo's works that I was then getting acquainted with.

G. MONOD-HERZEN

(‘A Talk to the Students of SAICE’, *Mother India*, August 1972, pp. 496-97)



MEETING SRI AUROBINDO

Q: Dikshit-bhai, in which year did you come here first and how did you come in contact with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother?

I came here in 1920. At that time I saw Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

[Later, Dikshit-bhai added a written note to the answer.]

We met Sri Aurobindo in the upstairs verandah of the Guest House. Sri Aurobindo came out from the western door of the room near the terrace. He came out at the given time to see us. He was dressed in a dhoti, part of which was used as a scarf to cover the upper body. We offered pranam at his feet. After pranam, he sat down on a chair. There was a table near the chair and he sat down facing south. I sat on his right, Punamchand in the front and Champaben on the left. After we were seated, he signed to me to ask what I wanted. I asked him three things. The first — I wanted to see the [Divine] Mother. He asked me, “What do you do?” I replied, “I try to remember Her. When I forget Her, I try to remember Her again.” He said, “The Mother is above the head. Offer all your actions to Her.” The second thing I said was, “I love knowledge.” He told me, “There are two ways of acquiring knowledge. One is by the laborious method of studying books. The result is poor and uncertain. The second is to open oneself to the higher consciousness and receive the knowledge from there.” The third thing I said was that I love education. He spoke for some time on education. What he said was pleasant and agreeable and I was lost in the joy of listening. Later, I remembered the substance of what he said and made some notes, covering about 16 points. They were shown to Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo showed them to the Mother. Both approved of them.

KESARI NANALAL DIKSHIT

(The Golden Chain, May 2004, p. 27)

CAPTURED BY HER EYES

THE words — “God, Light, Bliss, Freedom, Immortality” — found a responsive chord within me. I knew I had found my Guru who promised me all that I was seeking and more: the Delight of Existence on this very earth.

...

I asked for permission to see Him for November 24th darshan in 1950. But I was told that He was not well, and I should wait for the February darshan. But He left His body on the 5th December 1950.

...

I wanted to pay my homage. So I decided to fly to Madras. . . . I got my ticket for the 8th. . . .

We arrived by train in the evening [*of 9th*], when the body of Sri Aurobindo was already interred. . . . I joined the line of people at the head of the Samadhi. . . . Tears uninterruptedly rolled down, but my aspiration became stronger and my prayer as intense. It was all offered to Him, my Guru and the Lord.

...

People told me: “You can see the Mother. For She has the same Consciousness as Sri Aurobindo.” I did not understand, nor did I know anything about the Mother.

. . . The Mother gave darshan on the 12th December. I waited in the queue not knowing what awaited me, but aspiring as intensely for that golden moment. When I stood before the Mother, my eyes were captured by Her eyes. Neither of us blinked. I knew nothing else. I was transfixed. I could not move till the Mother nodded with a smile and handed me the card with Sri Aurobindo’s last photo. I moved on still looking into Her beautiful eyes as if they followed me wherever I went. . . .

KAILAS JHAVERI

(I am with you by Kailas Jhaveri, published by Aditi-Utsang, Balasore, 2004, pp. 2-6)

MY FIRST CONTACT

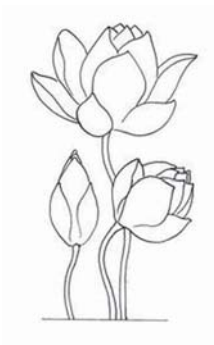
My first contact with Sri Aurobindo took place in a strange way. I was thirteen. One afternoon I was idly browsing among books in the office-cum-library of my brother who was an advocate. The dusty book-shelves were full of old leather bound volumes of All-India Law Reports. Among them was a big green book which excited my curiosity. I pulled it out and found it was entitled “Alipore Bomb Case”. I opened it and my eyes fell on a photograph with the words ARAVINDA GHOSE beneath. The name acted on me like a *mantra* and I found myself repeating it with obvious delight. It was something sweet and melodious. Later I spoke to my brother of this experience. He wrote about it to my mentor Sri Kapali Sastry who told me that the meaning of my finding the photograph in the book would become evident as I grew up. And it did.

For soon my childhood impulses towards God grew into a hunger and I devoured the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, the works of Swami Vivekananda and so on. I asked Sri Kapali Sastry whether I could go to Pondicherry and join him there. He was definite that I should continue my education and prepare myself for the Quest in the meanwhile. By that time *The Bases of Yoga* by Sri Aurobindo had been published. It was a beautiful bound volume costing three rupees and it became my companion.

Within a couple of years, in 1937, I had my first Darshan of Sri Aurobindo on August 15. It was overwhelming and I felt the only thing comparable to him was the Himalayas. I still remember the slight smile on his face moulded of compassion.

M. P. PANDIT

(*Selected Works of M. P. Pandit* Volume One, edited by Rand Hicks, published by Integral Knowledge Center, U.S.A., 1993, p. xi)



TWO POEMS

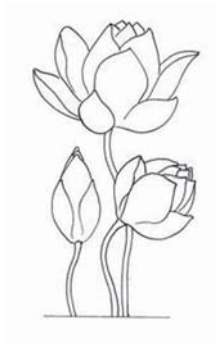
She

She comes down to our little globe
Enfolds us in the healing robe
And patiently prepares the ground
Sowing it with golden grain
And with Her laugh the worlds resound
Her slightest touch dissolves our pain
And opens the gates of hope again.

Her Transforming Face

Behind this tortured world a golden dawn
Prepares the hour of man's transcendent flight
And all our sorrow, suffering and sin
Shall disappear in radiant delight.
Prometheus and Atlas shall be freed
And evil overwhelmed by puissant grace,
Persephone released from Hades' grasp
And the world transformed by Her transforming face.

NARAD



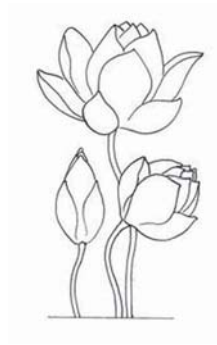
THE ABSOLUTE IN HUMAN FORM

Q: Can you speak to me about your impressions of Sri Aurobindo. What do you remember?

Sri Aurobindo was a magnificent sight. He was gold coloured and looked the embodiment of majesty and grandeur. We saw the Mother every day but only saw Sri Aurobindo four times each year. I never saw him stand up but his grandeur seemed to me, at so young an age, to be a combination of all the kings of the world in one form! I always tried to get a good look at him before standing before him for darshan. I just immediately knew from within that he was the Absolute in human form. There was no talking, no words, only the offering of garlands to him.

JHUMUR BHATTACHARYA

(The Golden Path – Interviews with Disciples of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville by Anie Nunnally, published by East West Cultural Center, California, 2004, pp. 147-48)



FIRST DARSHAN

IN 1959, I started living at a place called Acharya House on Chetty Street where the main Ashram is located. This housed the Blind People's Association and Mr. Acharya, who was himself blind, was Secretary of the Association and lived in one of the rooms downstairs. There was a Gujarati family who lived in the other rooms on the ground floor. I rented the upper floor which had three tiny rooms, but it also had a wide terrace, which was a boon in the climate of Pondicherry. But the greater boon was that it was close to the main building of the Ashram. Those days the Mother used to give her 'Darshan' to the devotees every morning from the balcony of this building.

At that time, my attraction towards the Ashram was mainly by reading material on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The writings of Sri Aurobindo were too difficult for me to understand — particularly his book 'Savitri' and 'The Life Divine' — so I left them for a better period of my life when I hoped to become a little more mature. But his essays were not so difficult. However, the Mother's writings were simple and fantastic. In her simple way, she explained the most intricate of subjects. The added attraction was her Darshan every morning, which I received by standing on the road behind the main building and admiring her wonderful, peaceful and loving countenance.

Now as everyone knows, the Mother used to bless individuals on special occasions. I too desired this "personal" Darshan.

It was 15th August, the birthday of Sri Aurobindo. We lined up in a single file and entered in an extremely peaceful and quiet manner to obtain her blessings. I also went and knelt before her and she laid her hand on my head and blessed me. This was my first encounter. I found an extremely impressive, rather old figure, frail but fairly strong and her deep eyes, looking directly into mine. People — particularly some sadhaks in the Ashram — had told me earlier, "She passes spiritual power through her eyes when she gazes into yours. So do not be surprised and keep looking into her eyes till she herself will indicate that your turn is over." "Imbibe as much as you can," was the consistent advice.

Alas, being what I was, although I saw love and attraction, I did not feel the passing of any power or any supernatural feeling. But one thing was clear — she had absolutely clear, deep and beautiful eyes; very rarely have I seen (in my medical profession) such lovely eyes at that age! There was only a feeling of benevolence and I was tremendously fascinated.

I came back with a deep sense of respect and a sort of attachment, just like a small child for its mother.

The second Darshan came in December. By this time, I had made many friends in the Ashram — I was their physician and it was natural that we often talked about the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. As always, everyone started getting ready for Darshan.

However, I had been going daily for her Darshan from the balcony. Those days I was the lone senior physician and work often kept me busy from morning till late in the evening or sometimes even at night. But that day, I was free. My Ashram friends were surprised that I did not go for this ‘special’ Darshan. They were not happy that I had avoided it and were even annoyed that I missed it, especially since I was free. When asked, I had to explain to them why I had done so.

I asked them, “Do you love Mother?”

They nodded, “Yes.”

“Okay, then sit here, in the chair and move your hand two thousand times. How do you feel now? I cannot be the one to create such a strain for her — my mother. By not going, I am reducing the number of times she has to raise her arm and hand. I can close my eyes and easily imagine seeing her today or else go to the balcony tomorrow and have her Darshan.”

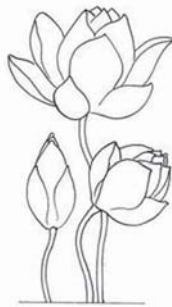
Needless to say they were dumbfounded.

One of them said, “But the Mother likes it. She loves to bless her children!”

Smiling, I told him that he may be right but I strongly felt I was also not wrong.

D. B. BISHT

(*Mother and Me* by D. B. Bisht, published by Sri Aurobindo Society, 2004, pp. 20-22)



AT THE FEET OF MOTHER AND SRI AUROBINDO

THE “Library House” was the name given to the building in front of the main gate. I saw Anilbaran living in the room which Sri Aurobindo had once occupied. The Mother’s room on the north was now Champaklal’s. Since then we have been seeing Champaklal as the most devoted servant of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. The library was set up on the ground-floor, and in the adjacent room were kept newspapers spread on mats. It was named “Reading Room” and visited by the sadhaks in their leisure hours.

The front courtyard had a kind of shed where the milkmen brought their cows to be milked after the udders had been washed with potassium permanganate. The sadhak-supervisor of this work used to filter this frothy milk through a clean piece of cloth (one cannot but wonder at the meticulous cleanliness and tidiness observed here in everything). The sadhak was named Dara by Sri Aurobindo. The affluent Mussulman family of Hyderabad to which he belonged had settled here a few months before me. There were three brothers, two sisters and their step-mother. They were very handsome people.

At the end of the large courtyard of the Library House was another house called by the Mother “Rosary House”. You crossed a small yard to enter this house and on its left side was a thatched cottage — the Ashram kitchen. The maid-servants did the cooking and the sadhaks served the dishes. The sadhikas took up the cooking job a year or two after my arrival and I used to cook twice a week. The entire cooking work had to be done by oneself. No servants were available to help us. As I was a little liberal in the use of oil and ghee, Sri Aurobindo once jokingly said, “If Sahana were to cook, the Ashram would turn insolvent in three months.”

The sadhak who had the sole charge of the cooking and the Dining Room was named “Dyuman” by Sri Aurobindo, his former name having been Chunibhai. The marketing and other supplies were in his hand. He lived on the top floor of the Rosary House from where began the building which lodged the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

I had my first Darshan in this house and all the Darshans were given in the same room where the Mother and Sri Aurobindo used to take their seat side by side. It would be futile to describe to a layman what Darshan was — what the Two gave and what we received. The last joint Darshan was on the 24th November 1950.

SAHANA

(At the Feet of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo by Sahana, translated from the original Bengali by Nirodbaran, published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 1985, pp. 6-7)

FIRST CONTACT

It was in the first week of January 1930.

At about 3 p.m., I reached Dilip K. Roy's place. "Oh, you have come! Let us go," he said, and cutting a rose from his terrace-garden he added, "Offer this to Mother." When we arrived at the Ashram he left me at the present Reading Room saying, "Wait here." My heart was beating nervously as if I were going to face an examination. A stately chair in the middle of the room attracted momentarily my attention. In a short while the Mother came accompanied by Nolini, Amrita and Dilip. She took her seat in the chair, the others stood by her side. I was dazzled by the sight. Was it a "visionary gleam" or a reality? Nothing like it had I seen before. Her fair complexion, set off by a finely coloured sari and a headband, gave me the impression of a goddess such as we see in pictures or in the idols during the Durga Puja festival. She was all smiles and redolent with grace. I suppose this was the Mahalakshmi smile Sri Aurobindo had spoken of in his book *The Mother*. She bathed me in the cascade of her smile and heart-melting look. I stood before her, shy and speechless, made more so by the presence of the others who were enjoying the silent sweet spectacle. Minutes passed. Then I offered into her hand my rose and did my pranam at her feet which had gold anklets on them. She stooped and blessed me. On standing up, I got again the same enchanting smile like moonbeams from a magic sky. After a time she said to the others, "He is very shy."

She had been informed that I had taken a degree in medicine.

"When are you going and where do you intend to practise?" she asked me softly. I found my voice and replied that I would settle down in my native town. It was an impromptu answer, for I had not made up my mind at all. She approved and said, "Yes, that would be good." Then I did a second pranam and we came away. All the way home, I was in a trance-like condition, wrapped in that beatific vision. The Mother's radiant look and smile, mingled probably with a tinge of amusement, had such an indefinable sweetness that I could not imagine how I, an utter stranger of a young man, could be the recipient of this rare boon. It was so divinely human!

We shall see, later on, how after a good deal of wandering I had to return to my native place, thus carrying out the plan that had obtained the Mother's approval.

How did this extraordinary meeting take place? Well, many surprises overtake us in a manner strange to our outward eye, and "exceeding Nature's groove", life voyages on an uncharted sea. This is particularly true for those who are meant to embrace a spiritual life. At least, it was so in my case. When I look back, I cannot rationally explain some decisive turns my life has taken without any preconceived plan. And yet, as I string together these disparate events, the culmination I reached seems inevitable and predestined.

To mention one or two such inexplicable events. My going abroad with my niece for medical studies and not, as I had desired, for Law was a sheer desperate

venture. For, my education had been non-scientific by deliberate choice. I did not like cutting human bodies dead or alive, besides other unaesthetic adjuncts of Medical Science. Further, people dubbed my ambitious project a Don-Quixotic adventure because of my young age and inadequate financial resources to cope with a long six-year course. But that I should go abroad, was my adamant resolve. And there in Europe our meeting with Dilip Roy sealed my fate for a final renunciation — another Quixotic dash.

Most unexpectedly my niece and I met him in Paris. He had come on a tour after his celebrated interview with Sri Aurobindo. He stayed a few days with us in Edinburgh and we came to know from him something about the Mother, Sri Aurobindo and the Ashram. But it was my niece who, being some sort of an idealist, was attracted by the idyllic picture of life in the Ashram while the picture of human bones and human cells loomed before my eyes and made the quest of Matter dearer than that of the nebulous Spirit. My physical crust was impermeable — “too thick”, to quote the Guru’s later words. A seed was sown in the fertile emotional soil of my niece and it sprouted so fast that on her way back to India she visited the Ashram. Dilip who had made the Ashram his home welcomed her with a warm heart. He had hoped that she would come one day for good. She had the exceptional privilege of meeting the Mother at Dilip’s place more than once and fell under the spell of her divine beauty. She wrote to me a glowing account of her unique experience and of her complete conversion to a new mode of life. At the same time she urged upon me to visit the Ashram when I returned to India.

After taking my degree I arrived all on a sudden at Pondicherry and presented myself to Dilip, like a European with a stick in my hand, but no hat on the head. For an instant he gaped in wonder. When recognition dawned on him, he cried, “Oh, it’s you! I could never imagine. . . . Come, come, sit down.” He was as affable as ever. He arranged an interview with the Mother, though she seemed to have remarked that I had not written to her anything about my visit. As I had no dhoti with me, he spared me one of his own and asked me to come to his house the next afternoon at the right hour. I felt quite embarrassed and did not know how to face the new test, even after passing so many tough medical examinations. My niece had given a very gracious picture of the Mother to allay my fears. Still, I felt extremely ill at ease, particularly because I had no idea of spirituality at all, nor had I much love for it. Suppose the Mother asked, “Do you want a spiritual life?” What answer would I give? Before starting, however, I thought I must take a bath. I felt even like praying a little. As soon as I sat down, my eyes closed and something startling happened of which my medical science had not dreamt even. I saw the upper part of my body suspended in the air for a few seconds and the lower part non-existent. Frightened like a child, I opened my eyes and the thing vanished! In a dazed condition, I started for the Ashram, from my hotel. Dilip received me with his affectionate smile which helped me regain my composure. “Come, let us start,” he said.

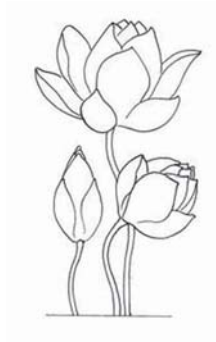
This is how the interview took place with its rapturous vision.

Her look, her smile awoke celestial sense
Even in earth-stuff, and their intense delight
Poured a supernal beauty on men's lives. . . .

To-day I understand how I had that strange experience. The Mother must have put some Force on me in order to test my receptivity and when, at the meeting, she found that the *ādhāra* was not bad, she was happy. This is the explanation I offer to myself of the divine action. Perhaps there was more to it than I could sound. Probably it was also a form of initiation.

NIRODBARAN

(*Memorable Contacts with the Mother* by Nirodbaran, Sri Mira Trust, 1991, pp. 1-5)



A RADIANT PERSONALITY

AT that time I was athirst for light — especially light on his yoga. I was then on a musical tour gleaning data on different styles of our music in different provinces. But somehow my work didn't grip me although it still interested me. So I grew more and more eager to meet him once face to face.

At this time I was drawn and yet scared by the idea of yoga or rather by my fanciful conception of the conditions of yoga. This was partly because mine had been pre-eminently a social temperament exulting in the sunlit soil of travel, music, laughter and robust optimism which, in Sri Aurobindo's language, support the "vital egoistic life" of worldly activism. Be that as it might, it cannot be gainsaid that all I had stood for outwardly had been utterly out of tune with what the authentic yoga with its life of one-pointed aspiration and uncompromising self-surrender demanded. No wonder I was scared by what I then thought yoga had in store for its devotees: a life of awful austerities, desiccating discipline and withering solitude, all of which meant for me an utter stultification of life.

Yet I was so attracted by Sri Aurobindo's analysis of our world and his idea of evolution from the spiritual point of view, that I sincerely wished I could somehow practise his "integral yoga". I particularly liked his teaching arrogant reason its place, for I was deeply dissatisfied with the arid view of science that Life was an accident. I was growing sceptical of the learned ignorance of the reasoning mind which, in the end, led nowhere. . . .

. . .

So I wrote to him asking to see him. He consented. I made immediately for Pondicherry.

It was in January, 1924 that I saw him for the first time. I had the privilege of having a long talk with him on the 24th. The next day the duration of the talk was shorter. I kept an elaborate record of all that had passed and this report I sent him subsequently for revision. He approved of it substantially and made only a few minor corrections. But as these two interviews were not published then and as I received from him after I had come to live in his Asram permanently as his disciple in 1928 numerous letters throwing further light on his yoga, I have thought fit to add some extracts here and there from these letters written in answer to my deeper and more obstinate questionings. This device will, I hope, serve as a partial corrective to my own (necessarily) inadequate representation of his replies to which no penmanship can ever contrive to do justice. These subsequent explanatory notes, whether added to his talk or substituted for my original report of it, I have placed inside double brackets "(())"

* * *

It was about eight in the morning. Sri Aurobindo lived then in the house which stands at the main entrance to the Asram. He was seated in a chair in the front verandah. I made him my *pranam*, and took another chair in front. An oblong table stood between us.

“A radiant personality!” sang the very air about him. A deep aura of peace encircled him, an ineffable yet concrete peace that drew you almost at once into its magic orbit. But it was the eyes that fascinated me most — shining like beacons. His torso was bare except for a scarf thrown across.

“The greatest living yogi of India!” — my heart beat fast! Hitherto I had seen but a few *sadhus* and *sannyasis* but a real yogi, who lived thus for years in seclusion and yet took some interest in my doings.¹

He appraised me with his soothing yet penetrative gaze. It would be impossible adequately to portray my reactions. . . . After a time I pulled myself together with an effort.

“I have come,” I stammered out, “to know . . . to ascertain rather . . . if I can be initiated . . . I mean I want to practise your yoga to start with, if possible.”

He simply said: “You must tell me clearly what it is exactly that you seek, and why you want to do *my* yoga.”

I was lost. Why? Did I know myself? How then to put it all clearly and cogently. I strove hard to find some light in my bewilderment.

“Suppose,” I found tongue at last, “I suggested — or rather suffer me to ask if you could help me in attaining, or shall we say discovering, the object of life?”

“That is not an easy question to answer,” he said, “for I know of no one desideratum which is cherished equally by all, any more than I know of an object of life equally treasured by all. The object or aim of life cannot but vary with various people, and seekers, too, approach yoga with diverse aims. Some want to practise yoga to get away from life, like the (illusionist) *mayavadi*: these want to renounce life altogether, since, this phenomenal life, they contend, is an illusion, *maya*, which hides the ultimate reality. There are others who aspire after a supreme love or bliss. Yet others want from yoga power or knowledge or a tranquil poise impervious to the shocks of life. So you must first of all be definite as to what, precisely, you seek in yoga.”

1. It was years later that I came to know that this had been more than a passing interest. He wrote then about this meeting of ours (I can't quote the whole of it — it is too personal):

“It is a strong and lasting personal relation that I have felt with you ever since we met and even before. . . . Even before I met you for the first time, I knew of you and felt at once the contact of one with whom I had that relation which declares itself constantly. . . .and followed your career with a close sympathy and interest. It is a feeling which is never mistaken. . . . It was the same inward recognition that brought you here.”

Another disciple of his told me years later that he had told them then that I was destined to come to him. He wrote, too, in a letter of his already published in my *Anami*: “Your destiny is to be a yogi and the sooner your vital Purusha reconciles itself to the prospect the better for it and all the other personalities in you.”

“I want to know,” I proffered desperately, “if yoga could, in the last resort, lead to a solution of the anomalies of life with all its native sufferings and humiliations.”

“You mean transcendent knowledge?”

“If you like — but then no — for I want bliss too, crowning this wisdom.”

“You can certainly get either from yoga.”

“May I then aspire to an initiation from you?”

“You may, provided you agree to its conditions and your call is strong.”

“Couldn’t you give me an idea about the nature of these conditions. . . and about this call you speak of . . . may I ask what you mean exactly?”

“I gathered from your booklet *Yogic Sadhan*,” I pursued before he could reply to my question, “that you called yourself a Tantrik who believed in *lila*, and not a follower of Shankara believing in *maya*. You have written for instance: ‘To fulfil God in life is man’s manhood.’ And if my memory doesn’t fail me, you said in your *Life Divine*: ‘We must accept the many-sidedness of the Manifestation even while we assert the unity of the Manifested.’ ”

“It is true that I am a believer in *lila*,” he nodded. “But why exactly do you refer to that?”

“I wanted to make sure whether you really meant what you wrote in your *Yogic Sadhan*. I hope, too, that your yoga doesn’t make it binding on one to live like a cave-dweller who disowns the many-mooded, active life or, shall we say, like a passive pensioner whose day is done? This hope, happily, has been fostered by your repudiation of *mayavada*.”

“I see what you mean,” he said, giving me an indulgent smile. “Well, yes, I am not a *mayavadi*, happily, for you as well as for me. But, incidentally, I am not the author of the book *Yogic Sadhan*.”

“How do you mean?”

“Haven’t you heard of automatic writing?”

“Planchette?”

“Not exactly. I merely held the pen while a disembodied being wrote off what he wished, using my pen and hand.”

“May I ask why you lent yourself to such writing?”

((“At the time I was trying to find out how much of truth and how much of subliminal suggestion from submerged consciousness there might be in phenomena of this kind.”))

“But let that pass,” he added. “To return to your main question. You asked about the active life. Well, it isn’t binding on you to renounce all that you value in your active life. What you must be ready to renounce is attachment to *everything* on that plane whether you live within or outside the wheel of karma, action. For if you keep these attachments, the Light from above will not be able to work unhampered to effect the radical transformation of your nature.”

“Does that imply that I must forego, say, all human sympathy and true friendship,

all joy of life and fellow-feeling?”

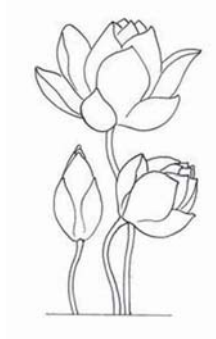
“It doesn’t.” (“Absence of love and fellow-feeling is not necessary to the Divine nearness, on the contrary a sense of closeness and oneness with others is a part of the Divine consciousness into which the *Sadhaka* enters by nearness to the Divine and the feeling of oneness with the Divine. An entire rejection of all relations is indeed the final aim of the *Mayavadin* and in the ascetic yoga an entire loss of all relations of friendship and affection and attachment to the world and its living beings would be regarded as a promising sign of advance towards liberation, *moksha*. But even there, I think a feeling of oneness and unattached spiritual sympathy for all is at least a penultimate stage, like the compassion of the Buddhist before turning to *moksha* or *nirvana*.”)²

(To be continued)

DILIP KUMAR ROY

(Among the Great by Dilip Kumar Roy, published by Jaico, Bombay, 1950, pp. 201-08)

2. Sri Aurobindo wrote once to me in 1934: “. . . nor is friendship or affection excluded from the yoga. . . . Only we seek to found them on a surer basis than that on which the bulk of human friendships are insecurely founded. It is precisely because we hold friendship, brotherhood, love, to be sacred things that we want this change, because we do not want to see them broken at every moment by the movements of the ego, soiled and spoiled and destroyed by the passions, jealousies and treacheries to which the vital is prone: it is to make them truly sacred and secure that we want them to be rooted in the soul founded on the rock of the Divine. Our yoga is not an ascetic yoga; it aims at purity, but not at a cold austerity.”



When in your heart and thought you will make no difference between Sri Aurobindo and me, when to think of Sri Aurobindo will be to think of me and to think of me will mean to think of Sri Aurobindo inevitably, when to see one will mean inevitably to see the other, like one and the same Person, — then you will know that you begin to be open to the supramental force and consciousness.



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THE MOTHER

4 March 1958

(Words of the Mother – I, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 13, p. 32)