

MOTHER INDIA

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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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Amiyo-da

Amiyo Ranjan Ganguli, Manager of Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, passed away in the Ashram Nursing Home on 10 December 2008.

Born on 16 January 1924 in Kolkata, Amiyo Ranjan visited the Ashram in April '41 and August '42. He came back in 1943 — for good.

After working for some time at the Granary, he joined the Press at its inception in 1945.

During a visit to the Press in August 1961 the Mother appointed Amiyo as the Manager.

He continued to serve Her in that capacity.

‘A SEARCH OF DARKNESS FOR THE LIGHT’

His prow pushes towards undiscovered shores,
He chances on unimagined continents:
A seeker of the islands of the Blest,
He leaves the last lands, crosses the ultimate seas,
He turns to eternal things his symbol quest;
Life changes for him its time-constructed scenes,
Its images veiling infinity.
Earth's borders recede and the terrestrial air
Hangs round him no longer its translucent veil.
He has crossed the limit of mortal thought and hope,
He has reached the world's end and stares beyond;
The eyes of mortal body plunge their gaze
Into Eyes that look upon eternity.
A greater world Time's traveller must explore.
At last he hears a chanting on the heights
And the far speaks and the unknown grows near:
He crosses the boundaries of the unseen
And passes over the edge of mortal sight
To a new vision of himself and things.
He is a spirit in an unfinished world
That knows him not and cannot know itself:
The surface symbol of his goalless quest
Takes deeper meanings to his inner view;
His is a search of darkness for the light,
Of mortal life for immortality.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 33, pp. 70-71)

ON SUPERSTITION

It is quite true that the word “superstition” has been habitually used as a convenient club to beat down any belief that does not agree with the ideas of the materialistic reason, that is to say, the physical mind dealing with the apparent law of physical process and seeing no farther. It has also been used to dismiss ideas and beliefs not in agreement with one’s own idea of what is the rational norm of supraphysical truths as well. For many ages man cherished beliefs that implied a force behind which acted on principles unknown to the physical mind and beyond the witness of the outward reason and the senses. Science came in with a method of knowledge which extended the evidence of this outer field of consciousness, and thought that by this method all existence would become explicable. It swept away at once without examination all the ancient beliefs as so many “superstitions” — true, half-true or false, all went into the dust-bin in one impartial sweep, because they did not rely on the method of physical Science and lay outside its data or were or seemed incompatible with its standpoint. Even in the field of supraphysical experience only so much was admitted as could give a mentally rational explanation of itself according to a certain range of ideas — all the rest, everything that seemed to demand an occult, mystic or below-the-surface origin to explain it, was put aside as so much superstition. Popular beliefs that were the fruit sometimes of imagination but sometimes also of a traditional empirical knowledge or of a right instinct shared naturally the same fate. That all this was a hasty and illegitimate operation, itself based on the “superstition” of the all-sufficiency of the new method which really applies only to a limited field, is now becoming more and more evident. I agree with you that the word superstition is one which should be used either not at all or with great caution. It is evidently an anachronism to apply it to beliefs not accepted by the form of religion one happens oneself to follow or favour.

The growing reversal of opinion with regard to many things that were then condemned but are now coming into favour once more is very striking. In addition to the instances you quote a hundred others might be added. One does not quite know why a belief in graphology should be condemned as irrational or superstitious; it seems to me quite rational to believe that a man’s handwriting is the result of or consistent with his temperament and nature and, if so, it may very well prove on examination to be an index of character. It is now a known fact that each man is an individual by himself with his own peculiar formation different from others and made by minute variations in the general human plan, — this is true of small physical characteristics, it is evidently equally true of psychological characteristics; it is not unreasonable to suppose a correlation between the two. On that basis cheiromancy may very well have a truth in it, for it is a known fact that the lines in an individual hand are different from the lines in others and that this, as well as differences of physiognomy, may carry in it psychological indications is not impossible. The

difficulty for minds trained under rationalistic influences becomes greater when these lines or the data of astrology are interpreted as signs of destiny, because modern rationalism resolutely refused to admit that the future was determined or could be determinable. But this looks more and more like one of the “superstitions” of the modern mind, a belief curiously contradictory of the fundamental notions of Science. For Science has believed, at least until yesterday, that everything is determined in Nature and it attempts to find the laws of that determination and to predict future physical happenings on that basis. If so, it is reasonable to suppose that there are unseen connections determining human events in the world and that future events may therefore be predictable. Whether it can be done on the lines of astrology or cheiromancy is a matter of enquiry and one does not get any farther by dismissing the possibility with a summary denial. The case for astrology is fairly strong; a case seems to exist for cheiromancy also.

On the other hand, it is not safe to go too hastily in the other direction. There is the opposite tendency to believe everything in these fields and not keep one’s eyes open to the element of limitation or error in these difficult branches of knowledge — it was the excess of belief that helped to discredit them, because their errors were patent. It does not seem to me established that the stars determine the future — though that is possible, but it does look as if they indicate it — or rather, some certitudes and potentialities of the future. Even the astrologers admit that there is another element of determination in man himself which limits the field of astrological prediction and may even alter many of its ascertained results. There is a very tangled and difficult complex of forces making up any determination of things in the world and when we have disentangled one thread of the skein and follow it we may get many striking results, but we cannot rely on it as the one wholly reliable clue. The mind’s methods are too rigid and conveniently simple to unravel the true or whole truth whether of the Reality or of its separate phenomena.

I would accept your statement about the possibility of knowing much about a man from observations of a small part of his being, physical or psychological, but I think it is to go too far to say that one can reconstruct a whole man from one minute particle of a hair. I should say from my knowledge of the complexity and multiplicity of elements in the human being that such a procedure would be hazardous and would leave a large part of the Unknown overshadowing the excessive certitude of this inferential structure.

* * *

I suppose we cannot go so far as to deny that there is such a thing as superstition — a fixed belief without any ground in something that is quite unsound and does not hang together. The human mind readily claps on such beliefs to things which can be or are in themselves true, and this is a mixture which very badly confuses the search

for knowledge. But precisely because of this mixture, because somewhere behind the superstition or not far off from it there is very usually some real truth, one ought to be cautious in using the word or sweeping away with it as a convenient broom the true, the partly true and the unfounded together and claiming that the bare ground left is the only truth of the matter.

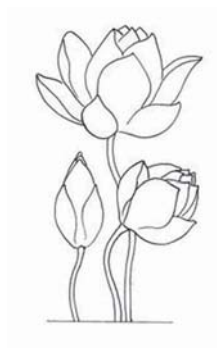
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When I wrote that sentence about “a fixed blind belief”, I was not thinking really of religious beliefs, but of common popular ideas and beliefs. Your feeling about the matter, in any case, is quite sound. One can and ought to believe and follow one’s own path without condemning or looking down on others for having beliefs different from those one thinks or sees to be the best or the largest in truth. The spiritual field is many-sided and full of complexities and there is room for an immense variety of experiences. Besides, all mental egoism — and spiritual egoism — has to be surmounted and this sense of superiority should therefore not be cherished.

P.S. A sincere, whole-hearted and one-pointed following of this yoga should lead to a level where these rigid mental divisions do not exist, for they are mental walls put round one part of Truth and Knowledge so as to cut it off from the rest, but this view from above the mind is comprehensive and everything falls into its place in the whole.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, pp. 226-29)



‘ . . . LIVE ONLY BY THEE, IN THEE, FOR THEE . . . ’

February 8, 1914

O LORD, sweet Master of love, Thou who bringest us out of the darkness to awaken us to consciousness, who deliverest us from suffering to make us commune within Thy eternal peace, every morning my aspiration soars ardently towards Thee, and I implore that my being, integrally awake to Thy knowledge, may now live only by Thee, in Thee, for Thee; I implore that more and more perfectly identified with Thee, I may now be only Thyself manifested in word and act; I implore that all those who come to us, all who are in contact with us, may awaken to the full knowledge of Thy divine presence, Thy sovereign law, and let themselves be definitively transformed by it; I implore that all men upon earth, in spite of their bitter suffering, may feel dawning in it the sublime consolation of Thy light and love, and the marvellous comfort of Thy peace; I implore that every substance impregnated more and more by Thy sovereign forces may put up an ever-diminishing resistance of blind ignorance against Thee, and that triumphing over all darkness Thou mayst transfigure definitively and integrally this universe of strife and anguish into a universe of harmony and peace

So that Thy law may be fulfilled.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed. Vol. 1, p. 68)

‘HOW CAN WE KNOW THE DIVINE WILL?’

ARE there any questions?

A: Yes. There have been some reactions about the little booklet that you gave us on religions, about the sentence which says: “Our search will not be a search by mystic means.”¹

They don’t know what mystic means are?

A: Maybe they don’t know, but perhaps what we do not know either is this: why not by mystic means? I have been asked the question.

By mystic means I mean the way of those who withdraw from life, like the monks, the people who withdraw into convents, or like the sannyasins here, those who abandon life to find spiritual life, who make a division between the two and say, “It is either one or the other.” We say, “That is not true.” It is in life and by living life entirely that one can live the spiritual life, that one *must* live the spiritual life. The supreme consciousness has to be brought *here*. From the purely material and physical point of view, man is not the last race. As man came after the animal, so another being must come after man. And as there is only one Consciousness, it is the same Consciousness which having had the experience of man will have the experience of a superhuman being. And so if we go away, if we leave life, if we reject life, then we will never be ready to do that.

But if you had read Sri Aurobindo, you would have understood, you would not have asked this question. It is because there is a lack of preparation from the intellectual point of view. You want to know everything without having studied.

(To A) Now, what else do you have to say?

A: That is all. Yes, there is something else, if you don’t mind. It is a letter from T. A letter from T who is here and who asked me to read it to you.

All right.

A: (Reading) “Concerning what you have written about religions, a prayer rises up towards you. We ask for the Divine’s Truth, fulfilled in the Truth of our being; we ask that our actions may manifest His Truth, that our minds and hearts may be exclusively moved by His Truth. We implore the full Light of His

1. “Our research will not be a search effected by mystic means. It is in life itself that we wish to find the Divine. And it is through this discovery that life can really be transformed.”

Truth on all that is still unconscious. With His Truth we want to know, through His Truth we want to act, and in His Truth we want to be. This is the prayer of Auroville to the Supreme. Be the triumphant Mother of our consciousnesses.”

It could be put up on the notice board. It is very good, very good.

(R indicates that he has a question to ask.) What do you have to say?

R: I have a question, Mother, a practical question.

Practical?

R: It seems very difficult to be able to want to achieve any specific aim and at the same time to love everyone. When we begin to want something and try to act with a particular result in mind, immediately we cut ourselves off from everyone who does not agree with that. In practice, how can we do both at the same time?

You cut yourself off from people who do not think as you do?

R: Really . . . all the time. . .

But not a single person thinks as you do!

R: Of course.

So how can you love anyone?

R: As long as I don’t want anything, it is all right.

Oh!

R: Yes!

(Mother concentrates for two or three minutes)

It is because when you want something, it is the ego that wants. So, the ego . . . must be ignored. The first thing to do is not to act for yourself but to act in obedience to the Divine, to express the divine Will. For your part, you have no orders to give. As long as it is a personal will, a personal desire, it is not the true thing, and you cannot . . . Not only is it not the true thing, but you cannot know the true thing!

That must be (*gesture of rejecting something forcefully*) . . . *that must be expelled!*

That is why alone, we are nothing at all. This is life. We do not act for ourselves. We do not act from our personal will and for a personal result. We act only by the divine Will and for the divine Will. So much so, that effortlessly, spontaneously, we can feel the greatest tenderness for our physical enemy. When you have felt that, you will understand. That is the whole limitation, the whole limitation.

When conflicts arise, and they arise all the time, for all of us — immediately it is as if one were drawing back into one's own skin. For that is what happens: each one draws back inside himself. But the difficulty is that even when one has relatively little personal will, if the person next to you expresses a personal will, it is exactly . . . First of all it creates a reaction and then too, if you are more or less in agreement with it, you take this will, you see, and you begin to reflect it all around. So you can see what happens. And that is going on all the time. First one person has a will, and then another, and so on, endlessly. That is happening everywhere; the strongest will prevails. It is worthless, worthless.

When we say, “We are at the service of the Divine”, it is not just words. It is He who should act through us, not we ourselves. The greatest objection is: How can we know the divine Will? But as a matter of fact, I tell you: if you sincerely renounce your personal will, you will know.

R: Yes, that is clear.

Yes, that's it.

(*Mother remains silent, concentrating on each person present, for about fifteen minutes. Then to A:*) So, you will explain that to them.

We want to change life — we do not want to run away from it . . . Until now all those who have tried to know what they called God, to enter into relation with God, they have abandoned life. They have said, “Life is an obstacle. We shall abandon life for that.” So, in India you had the sannyasins who renounced everything; in Europe you had the monks and the ascetics. Well, they can escape, even though when they are reborn they will have to begin all over again. But life remains as it is.

THE MOTHER

26 May 1970

(*Words of the Mother – I, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 13, pp. 330-34*)

‘A CONSTANT REMEMBRANCE’

Ups and downs of the sadhak in us are natural. Don’t worry about them. The progress towards perfection is never uniform until the whole of our being has been unified. The unification takes long but it is certain if the central self, the innermost psyche, grows more and more aware in all our movements. It has the master-key to open every part of us to feel what Wordsworth calls

A greatness in the beatings of our heart.

To aim at this unification is our immediate concern — the pervasive sense of the Divine within us. And as we move towards such pervasion an automatic concord gets created with our surroundings. But we must be patient. It takes long for the *grand finale* to be struck. With as much equanimity as we can muster we have to meet whatever wrong notes ring inwardly or outwardly. If we do this, they turn into stepping-stones towards the ultimate harmony. Of course, our equanimity has to be, as a phrase in *Savitri* goes,

A heart of silence in the hands of joy.¹

For we are offering our unwounded poise to the Holy Feet that are leading our pilgrimage to the *satyam-ritam-brihat* — the True, the Right, the Vast — the ideal set before the world from the beginning of our history by the Vedic Rishis. And we are doing the offering with a rush of rapture born of love: “hands of joy.” Our equanimity is not of an intellectual Stoic: it is that of a spiritual Epicurean. An Eternal Face whose eyes are depths of immutable bliss and whose mouth is a moulder of ever-new beauty is our goal.

Don’t tax yourself with the problem whether bodily divinisation will take place in this very life. Let all your inner self be a constant remembrance of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and let that remembrance shape your outer life to a consecrated strength which is at the same time a dedicated sweetness. Thus will you lay the foundation of a future, whether in this life or another, of a divinised body.

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

(*Life-Poetry-Yoga*, Vol. 2, published by The Integral Life Foundation, USA, 1995,
pp. 246-47)

1. *Savitri* I:2:15

WHERE IS THE WORLD HEADED TO?

THE world seems to have become a victim of frustration, fear and folly. It is immersed and inundated with serious problems of varying degrees across almost all countries. There are trouble-spots brewing everywhere.

We are living in violent times where deaths and destruction far exceed the holocaust of the Second World War. Dark clouds of uncertainty are hovering over us. No country can guarantee protection to its people. The fear of terrorists has created panic across all the major cities of the world.

Another equally serious upheaval is taking place right now. Large corporations have been driven to bankruptcy. This has left thousands of people jobless and many even homeless across the world. The outcome of globalisation now means that no country is spared the impact of a failure in another part of the world.

I began to wonder what Sri Aurobindo's plan is and how his Force will resolve these burning issues.

I was in the US a few days ago and I began to observe the effect of the Force. There was indeed a silver lining after all!

Three movements have taken place which are deeper than they seem on the surface.

The first movement is the unprecedented technological advancement. Knowledge has become everyone's birthright. This has empowered individuals as well as countries to seek and attain their full potential.

The second movement is the free movement of goods and services as well as human resources which are being shared between different countries. This has brought the world closer than it was ever before in history.

The third movement is the sudden realisation that no problem can be solved by mere human logic. Creativity has entered every single domain of our lives. A major shift has been made to the right side of the brain. Money has been replaced by creativity as today's currency. We are living in the world of ideas. The impact of this phenomenon is now being felt around the world. Every activity, be it medical science, development of products and even construction of buildings is now paying much greater attention and giving much greater importance to creativity.

I am emphasising on creativity, because without this, it is not possible to be either intuitive or spiritual.

Let me cite some examples from the US — perhaps one of the most materialistic countries in the world.

Robert William Fogel, the Nobel laureate economist calls this moment, "The fourth awakening". He feels there is some higher force at work. Abundance and material comfort, he states, have produced an ironic result. If you visit any moderately prosperous country, you will find that people everywhere have moved from focusing on the day-to-day text of their lives to the broader context. People may have enough

to live but nothing to live for. They have the means but not the meaning.

What was at one time considered esoteric practice, such as yoga and meditation, has now entered into and become a part of their mainstream activity. This is reflected in evangelical themes in books and movies. The pursuit of purpose is becoming an integral part of their lives.

A well-known molecular biologist, Eric Lander says, “Science is merely one way to understand the world. Across many different realms, there is growing recognition that spirituality, not religion, will address the purpose of life. Our capacity for faith, not religion *per se*, the belief in something larger than ourselves, may be wired in us.” As Sri Aurobindo wrote, “Only were safe who kept God in their hearts.”

I read a study done just after the 9/11 disaster. Almost 60% of Americans said they think often about the meaning and purpose of life. The scientists believe that the world is in the midst of a slow change in its operating principles, a gradual shift from ‘materialist’ values to postmaterialist values — the search for the meaning and purpose of life.

A neuroscientist, Michael Persinger, has conducted several experiments among all sorts of people and has come to the conclusion that spiritual and mystical thought and experience may be part of our neurology. He calls his field of research “Neuro-theology”.

All these scientists have come to the conclusion that spirituality must be taken more seriously because of its demonstrative ability to improve lives. For instance, some of the maladies of modern life — stress, heart disease and so on, can be allayed by attending to the spirit. People who pray regularly and meditate have been shown to have lower blood pressure according to researchers at Johns Hopkins University.

Another important field that has begun to take spirituality seriously is business. Some three years ago, a professor of a California Business School published a report called, “A spiritual audit of corporate America”. You have to excuse the pompous title.

After interviewing nearly a 100 executives about spirituality in the workplace, he reached some surprising conclusions. Most of the executives defined spirituality in much the same way — not a religion, but as the basic desire to find purpose and meaning to their lives. Those companies that acknowledged spiritual values and aligned them with the company goals outperformed those that did not. In other words, letting spirituality into the workplace did not distract organisation of the goals. In fact, it helped them to reach their goals.

We are being overwhelmed by the current situation. The Divine plan is in place. Perhaps, all that we see around us is also part of it.

Some 45 years ago, while I was working with Air India, I had asked the Mother what message should I give to the people who ask me about Sri Aurobindo. And this is what the Mother gave me in her own hand.

Si vous voulez savoir
quel est l'avenir de
l'homme et de la terre
et si vous voulez connaître
la vraie vie spirituelle.

Allez à l'Ashram de
Sri Aurobindo à Pondichéry
ou - au cas où ce ne serait
pas sans l'Inde

- Sri Aurobindo vous le
fera dans ses livres.

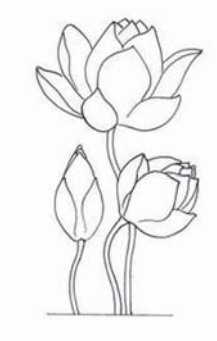
Si vous voulez savoir quel est l'avenir de l'homme et de la terre et si vous voulez connaître la vraie vie spirituelle, allez à l'Ashram de Sri Aurobindo à Pondichéry ou — au cas où ce ne serait pas dans l'Inde — Sri Aurobindo vous le dira dans ses livres.

La Mère

If you want to know what is the future of man and of the earth, and if you want to know the true spiritual life, go to the Ashram of Sri Aurobindo at Pondicherry or — in case it is not in India — Sri Aurobindo will tell it to you in his books.

The Mother

RAM SEHGAL



AGRICULTURE AND SADHANA — II

(The first part of this article appeared in the November 2006 issue)

FOOD is of great importance for all living beings. Therefore its cultivation has been an important occupation of man since man learnt the art of agriculture. With the growth in global population man has been trying his best to produce more and more from the soil with all the possible modern technologies. Since here too the onus is on agriculture to produce more food for the community, I have taken up the occupation of farmer. As for me, agriculture is the effort to cultivate in harmony with and respect of Mother Earth, I have been striving to identify myself with Mother Earth and Nature, to pray for her love and bounty.

It is through agriculture that my surrender also to the Divine Mother began and farming has become my karmayoga. For a farmer, the sky is his roof and the field is his classroom. The teacher does not teach him the alphabet but the basics of crop cultivation. Working with experienced people under the open sky brings me such a joy of learning that I learn not merely farming but also develop many other qualities and skills in work like care, sincerity, patience, tolerance, endurance, perseverance, keeping an open ear to listen to the secrets of nature, etc. And with all these opportunities of learning I feel extremely grateful to the Divine Mother who has been kind enough to grant me an occupation that suits my temperament.

During the day I work in the field and at night I dream of my field. In my dream I see my field full of healthy plants and crops that smile at me; it is a reality that has dawned after months of hard work.

Rizière is not only a simple field of earth, but a strong loving mother, a living goddess who guides my steps in my day-to-day work.

When I am on the farm, I get completely identified with Mother Nature and lose my little person. I feel I am lying in Her lap and working for Her. It is such an ecstatic feeling that I fail to describe it in words.

I started farming by learning paddy cultivation in the usual traditional method. Then I learnt the Japanese method of paddy cultivation. Subsequently I learnt the latest, most innovative system of rice intensification (SRI). In the succeeding years my growing experience and confidence have gradually led me to various other cultivations like flowers, vegetables, fruits, etc.

Recently instructions came from the management to cultivate bananas on an experimental basis since bananas are served regularly in our Dining Room. As the Ashram had been buying bananas from local farmers at quite a high price, self-sufficiency in banana production became a real necessity.

But how to begin? By surrendering to the Mother, of course. I began cultivating bananas with a lot of love, positive visualisation and inventiveness. I responded to the challenge with complete sincerity and unswerving perseverance. Obviously with

the Mother's Grace, I succeeded in my attempt in this totally new field of agriculture. First, I started collecting basic information from experts and utilised their valuable instructions and advice. I planted suckers in three acres of land in place of paddy. The new crop began to grow and flourish in the land. The successful completion of cultivation and the exhilarating sight of the extraordinary crop transported me.

I now know that with sincerity and perseverance we can bring the Mother's presence in our work. Nothing is impossible to achieve. We see before our eyes the simple field after it has been ploughed, manured, transplanted, watered and then with sincere care has produced green and healthy plants with attractive green bunches revealing delightful finger-like golden fruits. We grow, as it were, in tune with the growth of the banana crop. We feel everywhere the presence of the four aspects of the Mother's Shakti — Mahalakshmi, Mahasaraswati, Mahakali, Maheshwari: in the soil, in the labour, in the manure, in the crops and finally in the knife that separates the bunch from the plant for it to be offered at the Mother's Feet. Is there any work where the Mother refuses to bestow Her Grace?

There is a concrete and joyous progress through this hard work in the farm. Then when the work is done one sits quietly under the patience tree and sinks into an effortless meditation. It is a miracle! The sweetest conclusion to all the labour is to be blessed by ananda. Words fail to express the joy and gratitude. We understand now that the Mother's karmayoga is a sure means of success in sadhana.

Before concluding this humble offering of a farmer, I would like to tell you in a nutshell about the banana fruit.

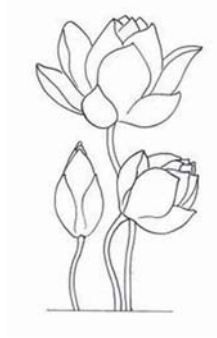
The banana was one of the earliest fruit crops grown by mankind at the dawn of civilisation. It is popular with most people and it is eaten by poor and rich alike, throughout the year, in all the seasons. Considering its natural value for health it can be considered the poor man's 'apple'. Developed with other fruits the banana has become part of any fruit basket in India. It is used in different functions, mainly during auspicious religious festivals and temple-rituals. In most functions no decoration is complete until full-grown banana plants with impressive bunches of fruits are placed at the entrance. The banana is used as fruit and as staple food. Some varieties are also used green as a vegetable. Even the banana flowers and cones or stem are transformed into mouth-watering dishes. In addition, chips, jams, jellies, wines, juice are made from banana. Banana leaves are used as healthy and hygienic plates for eating. The leaves when charred are used by washermen as bleaching agent.

It is a good source of carbohydrate, protein and other vitamins and minerals that are easily digestible and free from fat and cholesterol. The risk of heart disease is diminished with the use of bananas. Banana fibre is used to make sarees, napkins, money bags, sacks, mats, hats, paper etc. In short, the entire banana plant — leaves, flowers, fruit — serves us in various ways.

Owing to its multifarious uses and high economic returns, it is referred to as *Kalpataru* or a plant of virtues.

As a farmer of this *Kalpataru*, I have touched a whole world of hidden qualities and have been able to look a little within myself as well!

SURENDRA KUMAR MOHANTY



DORTOIR

(A Compilation)

(Continued from the issue of December 2008)

IV — Recollections of Kusum Nagda

My Early Life in the Ashram

My first visit to the Ashram, and therefore my first darshan of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, was in 1935. I was then seven. Having met THEM, my future was fixed.

A date is fixed in the calendar of the Unknown.

For this fixed future to become ‘present’, I had to wait seven more years. But the day did dawn when Mother said, “Now you are mine, and all you need you will have from me.” In between, I had the good fortune of many darshans — short visits when the contact with the Mother grew closer and closer.

As I was already here when the School started in 1943, I also joined it. All we beginners stood in a row between Bula-da’s and Pujalal-ji’s room, waiting for the Mother to come onto the terrace of Dyuman-bhai’s room to see us and bless us. She came, all glorious for this grand beginning. She showered on us Her grace and love, and dropped a bouquet of flowers into the hands of one of us. Someone lifted the child up to receive it. It was an experience!

I loved the school — the study, the teachers and all; but for me it did not last long. Soon, Mother put me somewhere else. In those days much importance was given to work, and She made us grow in inner and outer perfection simultaneously through work. Her presence was very much felt.

I remember that while I was yet a student we had to write essays on what we had read in the literature classes. I would take hours over it, unable to get into it; and during all that period I was feeling far away from the Mother, and that was painful. In this regard, one day I approached the Mother, expressing my condition. She said, “It is not important. We study only to develop the mind, the rest follows.”

So I had full studies for a year and a half at most, and I did part-time work in Golconde. Anu-ben also worked in Golconde, full-time. One day, Amrita-da came there as a messenger from the Mother. He said that Mother would like to see both of us together (Anu and Kusum) that evening.

What could that be? A feeling of mingled joy and wonder! We returned to our work awaiting this happy unknown moment.

The evening came. We met Her on the staircase. It seemed as if She too was eagerly awaiting us. Somewhere there was lurking an excitement, an anticipation of something beautiful and promising that She willed to create.

She was entrusting us with a new assignment: She had created Her first Dortoir in the Ashram, and we were to look after the children. As she instructed and encouraged us, She poured Her infinite love and enthusiasm on us. The instructions were many, and seemed not easy to fulfil, but so intense was Her enthusiasm that some of it could not but filter into me too.

However, I could not meet it with excitement. There were palpitations: though not panicky or painful because She was there, yet thoughtful indeed. I was then 17 and not an extrovert, timid by nature, a lover of solitude who hardly ever spoke and whose feelings would not easily find expression. All this was tickling inside, when the Mother came out with, "This is the right age for this work." Then again another instruction, a very touching one: "Now you will work like two bodies with one soul." Then again, "With children you should be like children, play with them." My nature-erected wall, that upon which I had been leaning so long, must crumble down it seemed — I must assume another nature!

There was yet another instruction which was to play a big part in our new life and work. This was: "Now nothing counts for you but the children." We tried to fulfil this to our utmost possible; and in trying to comply with it, gradually one by one I had to drop the classes. My school career soon ended.

Our new task was not easy. It was a very very difficult one – especially if we were to follow all that She wanted.

She had said that one should not touch or shake a child to wake him up, but just call him by name, and keep on calling until he awoke. Sometimes this would take as much as half an hour. Then, in a similar way, with all tenderness, we had to see to brushing, bathing, breakfast, etc. It was not at all simple, because often the children were not willing; a lot of cajoling was necessary.

What a lesson in love and patience every day! This was the first lesson for the beginning in the ART OF LIVING!

Anger was not allowed: "Never lift your hand, my child," were Her words, engraved in the heart.

If this was the manner of work to be followed, how could 8 hours a day be sufficient? I worked almost 18 hours, never knowing what fatigue was. Where did the energy come from? From Her smile.

Her kindly care was a sweet temperate sun.

We went to Her every morning. Every morning the greeting began with, "*Bonjour, mon enfant*" or "*Mon cher enfant*", followed by "*Ça va bien? Bien mangé, bien dormi?*" — Is everything all right? Have you eaten well, slept well? If sometimes in our answer, "Yes, Sweet Mother," She sensed some hesitation, with a few words, a caress, and Her ineffable smile, that hesitation was shaken away and the heart would burst open and feel that:

*In a haven of safety and splendid soft repose
 One could drink life back in streams of honey-fire,
 Recover the lost habit of happiness,
 Feel her bright nature's glorious ambience,
 And preen joy in her warmth and colour's rule.*

When we came away from Her, I felt uplifted, as if I could do anything She wanted, undaunted. So I worked for 18 hours untiringly, joy springing up from within.

It is also true that when She assigns some task, easy or difficult, in equal measure She gives Her help, in Her own way; and in fact that is what made anything and everything possible.

Harmony, beauty, perfection inner and outer in all we do — that was the ideal She set before us. We strove towards it. It is easier to reach when we have love for our work, and for the people around us too. Then we nourish a will to do the best, to give the best possible.

Thus when the children were asleep, or while Anu-ben was busy cajoling some child to wake up, (she certainly was better at it than I), I went down to see the maids washing clothes. They came early — by 5.30 or 6 a.m. Each washed cloth had to be lifted up and examined minutely, inside the collar, around the cuffs, to be sure that no stain was left. There were no washing machines then.

The food came from the Ashram Dining Room, but we all ate in the dining room of the Dortoir. It had the same set-up as our Dining Room: the small individual tables were set out and put away daily.

We loved the children, and wanted to make some extra dishes for them too; but we did not have much knowledge of cooking, nor the ingredients. What we had was love, and love of service. I have observed that these can serve as very good intuitive prompters to guide you in obtaining, inventing, creating something beautiful out of what is available.

This helped us to manage something out of Dining Room rice: rice altered into another kind of rice. The children cherished it and jokingly called it '*bhat ka chaval*', meaning 'rice of rice'.

Guided by the Mother, we made some sweet dishes out of bread too. One day I made some bhajis out of rice and sent them to the Mother — whatever we made was sent to the Mother, and She returned it in the evening as prasad. When She returned this plate to me in the evening, as She was giving blessings standing on the staircase, She put a couple of them in Her mouth and praised them. You can well imagine how I felt! I never saw Her doing this before. The good intention and sincere aspiration behind the work, even though it lacked absolute perfection, always met with Her deep appreciation and encouragement to do better and better.

Servants were there for the rough work, but all the finer details had to be attended to by us. Until the children went to school, we were with them; then there was all the household work, the careful dusting of the furniture, and many other tasks; then the food, and preparing the dining room with the tables set out ready so that when the

children came in hungry they did not have to wait.

After that was the time for some homework, studies, or rest — whatever the children needed to attend to and make ready for the next session of the school. When they left, I ironed the clothes. This took two to three hours. At 4 p.m. the children would return for tiffin: bread with a bit of butter, some cut tomato and cucumber, milk, or lemon juice with lethene. Lethene was very popular then, loved by the children more for its effervescence than its taste.

When the Mother received from France some chocolate, tinned olives, or cookies She would send them for the children's tiffin.

Then we had to prepare the children for the Playground. While they played, we prepared the dinner; and when they returned there was again bathing, dressing for the night, and eating.

Some time was spent with them for their homework; if there was enough time to spare, some amusement for them with Anu-ben's dancing. She was a very good dancer, a pupil of Uday Shankar, the only one then in the Ashram. She was now Rama, now Ravana, now Sita, now the deer — oh! it was thrilling. Anu-ben was excellent at narrating stories, and the children listened simply spellbound.

Then a lovely-sounding gong tolled. The Mother had instructed us how to strike it. There was one way for waking up, and another for bed-time. This was the bed-time gong — it was 9 p.m. All rushed to their beds. We went round to spend some moments with each of them with a story, a song, a prayer or recitation, as befitting. Soon their eyes started closing and with a soft caress we left them to enter the dream-world.

Then came a quiet moment free of interruptions. This was when we started looking into the cupboards, sorting out the clothes they would wear the next day, wrapping each set in their individual towels so each child could recognise his own and pick it up as he made his way to the bathroom in the early morning. Once this was over, we mended what needed mending, or took up some embroidery so that there would be surprises ready for approaching birthdays.

All through the day the consecration was felt. The energy, skill, inspiration, came through little communications with the Mother and Her love, and on our part, an utter willingness to serve. Her prayer had taken deep root in the being:

*Le corps est Ton instrument
Cette Volonté Ta servante
Cette intelligence est Ton outil
Et le tout n'est que Toi-même*

And then who works? Not we — and so

All grows beautiful because Thou art.

I learned everything through work and life, and found there the best book and a real guide for how to live. Of course the guide was the Mother – she had to do a lot of shaping and chiselling. Bearing in mind that

All can be done if the god-touch is there

it was easy to throw oneself headlong to where

*She wrestles with danger and discovery
In the unexplored expanses of the soul.*

As long as it was the Dortoir, where I worked for 7 years, and then Golconde for 8 years, not having gone up to Knowledge for studies and having little education did not bring in any complexes because what these two demanded could be answered to by my knowings; but then came Senteurs: from where to where!

Perfume-making involved measuring ccs., mls., litres, chemistry, costing, selling, discounts, correspondence, packing, phones! To start with, I did not even know how to pick up the phone. The Ashram in those days was very different from the present one. I knew nothing, nothing at all of all this, I had never learnt any of all this. I think that in those days, with the fond love of the Mother, and with Her children's zeal in serving Her, one did not doubt very much the fulfilment of the task set. She gives the work, one accepts it, and as if understood, it all gets done.

The news that I was to take charge of Senteurs was delivered to me by Udar Pinto. He had taken a list of names to the Mother, mine amongst them, and it was to this name that She pointed. I was still working in Golconde, so I would have to take care of two departments. I sensed the difficulty and wrote to Her, "Mother, I accept with joy, and at the same time I offer it to You to take the charge. With You I can do all, but without You, I can do nothing. Your help will be extremely necessary to be able to accomplish these two tasks."

She wrote back, "*Je suis toujours avec toi dans ton travail et tu peux toujours compter sur mon aide qui ne te manquera jamais.*"

Innumerable instances, day to day, hour to hour, year to year, all throughout my life, bear testimony to this: "*compter sur mon aide qui ne te manquera jamais*" — and in all walks of life, under crushing circumstances, it has been tangible and made the walk a sunlit path even when it meandered through darkest dark.

However difficult or easy, I walk the path and enjoy it. Where and when I arrive is Their concern. To fulfil Their will is my aim. Sri Aurobindo wrote in a sonnet

I do thy works and pass

Remembering this, I march on . . .

V — Recollections of Parul Chakraborty

Dortoir

“Let us work as we pray, for indeed work is the body’s best prayer to the Divine.”

THE MOTHER

“There must be order and harmony in work. Even what is apparently the most insignificant thing must be done with perfect perfection, with a sense of cleanliness, beauty, harmony and order.”

THE MOTHER

Dortoir, a haven created by the Mother for Her children, started on 15th January 1945 . . . My brother Badal and I found our way to Dortoir on 26th August 1949. We were immediately accepted into the loving and caring family. I was then 11 years of age.

When one lives in a collectivity, discipline, collaboration and obedience are qualities that help one to grow in a healthy and progressive manner.

Every morning a bell would ring at 5.30 to wake us up. In Dortoir the girls occupied the first floor while the boys lived on the ground floor. Our day started with the Mother’s Darshan — the Balcony Darshan, around 6.15 a.m. If one of us missed it, Mother would notice the absence and later enquire the reason for it.

During these early morning Darshans, She gave attention and help to every individual present there for his inner growth and development.

Mother always encouraged us to be self dependent regarding our personal work like making one’s own bed tidily before going to sleep and after waking up, and placing the mosquito net properly. Each of our belongings had to be kept in its respective place — the shoes on the shoe rack, clothes, cleaned and arranged neatly on the shelves. As we were students a cupboard for books was given to each of us which we had to keep in an orderly manner.

Mother visited Dortoir from time to time during the Playground hours and by casting just a glance at our shelves, cupboards and almirahs She knew how each one of us was progressing. She could judge a person’s nature and habits instantly by seeing the way he kept his things. On one of these visits She complimented me after She saw my cupboard saying that I was well organised, well disciplined, and that I had clean habits.

Not to take care of material things which one uses is a sign of inconscience and ignorance.

You have no right to use any material object whatsoever if you do not take care of it.

You must take care of it not because you are attached to it, but because it manifests something of the Divine Consciousness.

THE MOTHER

As we grew up we developed a sense of awareness and responsibility regarding our work, our material possessions and other things. We were taught to be grateful for everything, and to be respectful towards all.

Our Playground and School were in the same place in 1949. Sisir-da was our headmaster. At 8 a.m. the school bell would ring and we would line up. Then Sisir-da would call out a student who had to face us all and recite the morning prayer and the rest of us had to repeat it after him.

Here is the French version of that prayer:

*Douce Mère,
Permits que nous soyons dès maintenant et pour toujours, simplement Tes
petits enfants.*

Sweet Mother,

Grant that we may be, even from now and forever, simply Thy little children.

On 6th January 1952 our old school shifted to its present building.

One of my teachers to whom I will always remain deeply grateful is Pavita, a teacher during my childhood years in school. She not only inculcated in us the values and virtues of life, she herself was an example to us. She appreciated simplicity and straightforwardness, which she tried to bring out from within us.

At school in the morning she expected us to be in our classroom before the school bell rang. She laid stress on our personal cleanliness. She would check our nails, our teeth, our clothes and each of us had to have a handkerchief. She insisted that we develop correct posture, that we hold our pencils properly and practise good handwriting.

To us she was like a mother, a nurse, a friend and always a well-wisher. When any of us felt unwell she would make us lie down and rest. If any of us became sick and vomited on the floor she cleaned up the whole mess herself.

It was from her that I learnt flower arrangement. She taught us how to clean flower vases carefully and arrange fresh flowers in them attractively. We learnt to dust and sweep our classroom regularly and keep it clean.

She would always encourage us to learn, to do our work properly, and progress. She taught us to read well, to write well, to sketch, to draw and so many things that helped us to go forward in life with confidence and with the right attitude towards our aim and goal.

Our morning classes began at 8 a.m. After our 2nd period, that is around 9.30 a.m. we used to go to the Ashram for Mother's blessings.

Lunch break was from 11.45 to 12.30. Most of us didn't have the habit of having an afternoon nap. We would rest for a while and then begin our homework or read books. Afternoon classes were held from 2.15 to 4 p.m. Each one of us had a specific

duty to do between 1 p.m. and 2 p.m. The older girls — Lata Jauhar, Urmila R., Paru, Usha R., Aruna Pandya, and others used to go to the Ashram to help Ravindra-ji to prepare fruit juice or to cut fruits into small pieces to be served to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Then Lata would go to Harpagon to put plastic covers on books, while Aruna and Usha would proceed for work to “Prosperity”. Tara worked in P.E.D.

Others like Sumedha, Arunkant, Usha had to fill small cloth bags with groundnuts which the Mother distributed later on to everybody in the Playground after our group activities.

The boys too had different duties to perform. Arun Pandya used to go to Vishwanath-da to help him with radio repairing work. Narendra looked after the Playground equipment and watered the ground in the afternoons.

Chitra and I were given the task of making various sizes of envelopes out of paper that could not be used for any other purpose — waste paper. We got a lot of encouragement and appreciation for this work. These envelopes were used by the Mother and by some departments of the Ashram.

The Mother has said, “To do the work that one does with all sincerity, as perfectly as one can, is certainly one of the best ways to serve the Divine.”

From the early 50’s I began to work with Udar-da in Harpagon, — typing letters and filing them. I have always loved physical work, so I also took up the job of writing down the results on the notice board during the seasons of “group competition” organised by Udar-da .

Tara, Usha R., Aruna and I became captains at a very early age. We would lead our teams in various activities during group time at the Playground in the evenings.

Whether we were studying, working or playing or whatever, we were always enveloped in a beautiful atmosphere which inspired us to become better and better in everything we did. We were conscious of the fact that we had to become good instruments to serve the Mother.

We were encouraged to utilise our free time usefully. Whenever we had time on our hands we would either read or draw and paint, do some needlework, or dust and rearrange our bookshelves and cupboards. We had no time to sit and gossip. Mother told us, “Talk as little as possible, work as much as you can . . . the most important thing is to avoid useless talking. It is not work but useless talk which takes us away from the Divine.”

In Dortoir there was a sick room. Whoever fell ill was put in that room. Mother was always informed about it, and according to Her advice Nripen-da would attend to us and help us to get well. Once I was very ill. I had urticaria. My face and my limbs had swollen up to such an extent that I could hardly be recognised. I was put in quarantine. Owing to my unpleasant appearance I refused to meet the Mother. After six days of the attack Tara came and took me to the Playground to see the Mother in Her room. For a second, Mother could not recognise me. But at the very next moment I had a concrete feeling of certainty that Her glance upon me would work like a miracle.

And it did!

Within two days all the swelling subsided. The old skin got replaced by a new skin. I recovered completely and resumed my normal activities. It was all due to Her Divine Grace. Regarding an illness the Mother once said — “The illness has come like a test and gone like a purification carrying away all that was standing in the way of joy of an integral consecration.”

We only need to have faith, and offer ourselves entirely to Her. Whenever we think of Her or call Her we find that She is always beside us, helping us all in our endeavour to progress.

* * *

VI — Concluding words

Here are the names of some of the children who joined the Dortoir in the early years. The names are more or less in the sequence of their arrival.

Lata, Tara, Chitra on the first floor. Narendra, Jitendra, Biju Agrawal on the ground floor.

Later the following children joined: Urmila, Usha, Paru Patil, Arun Kumar, Aruna, Krishna Kumar, Nirakar, Arvind Prasad, Prabhucharan, Arunkant, Arvindbabu, Brajkishore, Urmila Pandya, Kokila, Parul, Badal, Asha and Sudha Umachigi, Tulsa, Mina, Vasudev, Savitri U., Ravibala, Madhusudan, Anjana, Ashok, Kaké, Victor (Chhoté), Hema, Prema, Kavita and others.

At that time the way of life in the Ashram was very simple. Compared to the present day it may even be termed spartan. These little kids away from their parents were left in the Mother’s care. She bestowed on them Her Grace and Love and guidance.

It is interesting to observe that these children were not only taken care of in their study, play, food and sleep, but each child was also given some work to do. Work fitted spontaneously into the child’s everyday routine. Thus there was love in abundance and there was also a discipline to be followed. They would often receive special gifts and food items from the Mother. She personally came to their Boarding on their annual day, 15th January, every year. This was no ordinary hostel. This was the Mother’s Dortoir.

As these children grew up, some of them shifted from the Dortoir to their parents when they settled in Pondicherry. Some others were given separate rooms by the Mother to stay in. Most of these stayed in the “Guest House”. The Guest House now became an extension of the Dortoir and was known as Dortoir Annexe. These children stayed in the Guest House but had their meals in the Dortoir. By this time some older ones felt that they were competent enough to look after the younger members of the Dortoir and they did not need any caretaker for them. Thus, in 1952, when Anu-ben

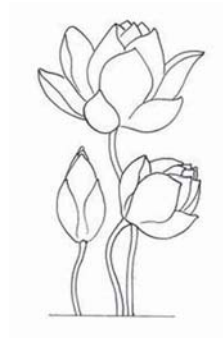
and Kusum-ben left the Dortoir work, the Mother gave the charge of running the Dortoir to Tara Jauhar and Aruna Pandya, both eighteen years old then. Tara had her room in the Guest House but the Mother had asked Aruna to stay back in the Dortoir and look after the very young ones. After December 1964, a new batch of children came to stay in Dortoir and Parul and Kokila were now given the charge of running the place.

In 1976 the children of this Dortoir were shifted to different buildings and the building was demolished for the construction of a new structure for Physical Education purposes. The new house where the girls were shifted is now known as the Dortoir.

Presently the students are accommodated in different houses. They are divided according to their age. A few students stay in each house with one or two caretakers looking after their needs. All of them go to the “Corner House” — a special kitchen-cum-dining arrangement for students and teachers.

(Concluded)

CHITRA SEN



WANDERING IN THE ARCHIVES OF MEMORY

(Continued from the issue of December 2008)

5. A Span of Jasmines

FROM my childhood, a span of jasmines has always been my favourite to decorate my plait. Time was when I had thick, dark hair which could carry even a load of three spans. Those days are now gone forever. My hair has grown very, very thin and most of it rivals the white of the jasmines. So the jasmines do not have a sharp, dark background to shine, even if I tuck in a few of these tiny flowers threaded together. Yet I cannot resist it, for which other flower is sturdy enough to stand the body heat for several hours and permeate one with the sweetest fragrance?

As a Tamil child, jasmines have been a part of my consciousness. While the flower with its innumerable varieties is found all over India, it is in Tamil Nadu that it marks a major presence. There is no town that does not have a stall or two selling jasmines. You can buy them by measure or by spans. The price of jasmine has gone on and on and up and up but we just cannot resist buying them. Even if you are in a hurry to go to the office, you toss a fiver to the jasmine seller at the bus stop, receive a span of the white blossoms and then relax in the seat placing it at the right angle on the crown of hair. By noon it would have started wilting and during the return journey it would be turning purplish. It is then time to remove it and toss it away on the roadside before going home. I watch this drama being enacted daily and wonder how the Tamil ethos has gathered the flower to its heart.

So close is the jasmine to the Tamils that even an eatable gets elevated by housewives when they say: “Today the *idli* has turned out to be like the jasmine flower. So soft, so white, so fresh!” All those household things which get compared to the jasmine crowd around my mind. “A dhoti shining white as jasmine.” Ah, who said it? Yes, my amma. “Purani Uncle’s dhoti is white as jasmine so be very careful when you iron it.” What, am I already fifty years older than that day when amma stood near me while my brother got ready to iron the dhoti of A. B. Purani? Such is the trick of memory’s casements when they open at the mention of an innocuous word.

That was way back in 1959. I had begun working for my doctorate at Andhra University and had chosen Virginia Woolf as my subject. My habit was ever to “play the sedulous ape” to father, and his doctoral subject in 1935 was Lytton Strachey. Hence I went for Strachey’s friend. I had fallen in love with the style of Mrs. Woolf though father’s gentle advice pointed to *Savitri*. It was true. Purani’s book *Savitri: An Approach and a Study* was a prized possession at home and was heavily marked by father in his repeated readings. But I felt I would never be able to understand the epic poem, in spite of this book or father’s ever-present help. So I had bought the set of Virginia Woolf’s writings covered with yellow jackets and published by the Hogarth

Press. They were set up proudly on my shelf and I felt very scholarly sitting down with one of them and a red pencil held between my fingers to mark a phrase here and a thought there. Father must have noticed all this and no doubt smiled to himself too at the 'intellectual' pose his daughter was trying to achieve, but he never said anything.

Purani-ji came to this household for a couple of days on his lecture tour, as father had arranged for two talks by him at Andhra University. Amma, my brother and myself awaited his coming almost breathlessly. Father had told us a good deal about how easily approachable he was and a great scholar too. And yet there was a sense of awe. Purani-ji had actually spent days and days with Sri Aurobindo! He could converse with the Master! When he came at noon with father in a horse-drawn carriage from the station, it was a pleasant surprise to find him talking with easy familiarity. The same day was the first meeting. It was to be in the Erskine Square within the building of the Zoology Department.

Things were quite under control in those days and there was no violence on campuses, but who could curb the mischievous catcalls and disruptions indulged in by the student fraternity! To our surprise, the Square was full as if the boys had all come to witness a drama. After all, hadn't we enjoyed Geoffrey Kendall's troupe, 'Shakespeareana' enact on this stage William Shakespeare, Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde only two years ago? Oh, those were wonderful days! Fifty years have not erased the scenario when the whole Square yelled watching Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. The way Canon Chausuble presented a funereal sense of righteousness about baptism: "The sprinkling, and, indeed, the immersion of adults is a perfectly canonical practice"! We roared!

How quickly the doors of memory open up one after the other, leaving me breathless! But back to Purani-ji at Erskine Square. But where is any drama here? Two stiff-backed chairs on the bare stage. Purani-ji in one of them, clad in pure white, not very imposing, probably because of his average height. Father comes to the mike, speaks for fifteen minutes on the close relationship of the University with Sri Aurobindo who had graciously accepted the Humanities Prize of the institution and the stirring message of the Mahayogi on the occasion: "It would be a tragic irony of fate if India were to throw away her spiritual heritage at the very moment when in the rest of the world there is more and more a turning towards her for spiritual help and a saving Light . . ." There is a natural transition to *Savitri* as the spiritual epic of our times, and then to Purani-ji who had wished to be a political activist but had turned to yoga on being told by Sri Aurobindo that India's freedom was an assured fact.

Father goes back to his chair while Purani-ji gets up and reaches the mike placed at the centre of the stage. A white shirt, a white mull dhoti worn in the conventional manner which flaps around a little in the breeze, for this is an open-air theatre. A yogi! Oh, he will now begin to speak on philosophy, Advaita, Visishtadvaita, Sanskrit quotes . . . the usual thing! There is a low buzz of talk among the students. We expect the guest speaker to begin: "Prof. Iyengar . . ."

Suddenly we sit up. What is this! The speaker is reciting! No, not Sanskrit or English, but Bengali! All I understand is the word 'Urvashi' which gets repeated now and then. There is a deep involvement and the figure on the stage is transformed, the hands executing gestures which are spectacular, and the facial expression is one of wonderment watching a vision. Perhaps there were half a dozen Bengali students, and one or two university staff members like Miss Ila Sen who understood the language and realised that the poem was written by Rabindranath Tagore. The rest of us had no clue. But when Purani-ji's recitation ended and he paused, there was spontaneous applause which thundered up to the skies.

Neither a mother nor a daughter
 Nor even a wife in an earthly home
 O fair Urvashi
 You are a denizen of heaven!
 Drawing a golden veil
 When evening descends on the meadows
 You do not light up a lamp
 In the corner of a home
 In the middle of a silent night
 With a tremulous heart and bashful eyes.
 In shy halting steps you do not go
 To the chamber of a groom
 For your first union.¹

Purani-ji had us all in his pocket by now. Presently he began to speak of father's biography of Sri Aurobindo and their friendship. Then gave his first lecture on Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, prefacing it with Tagore's poem on Sri Aurobindo:

When I behold thy face, 'mid bondage, pain and wrong
 And black indignities, I hear the soul's great song
 Of rapture unconfined, the chant the pilgrim sings
 In which exultant hope's immortal splendour rings,
 Solemn voice and calm . . . the spirit of Bharat-land,
 O poet, hath placed upon thy face her eyes afire
 With love, and struck vast chords upon her vibrant lyre.²

What Purani-ji spoke that day was not philosophy but sheer poetry. It was late when father and Purani-ji came home and we were told there had been spontaneous reac-

1. Transcreated by Kumud Biswas.

2. Translated from the original Bengali by Kshitish Chandra Sen (*Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual*, 1944, p. 2).

tions of delight from the staff members too. Now everyone looked forward to the second lecture which was to be on *Savitri*.

The reference to Purani-ji's dhoti being white as jasmine came on the next day. We had no regular washerman at home, and so my brother Ambirajan was the wizard with the iron that day. The clothes had been washed by the servant and folded but Ambi thought it would be nice if Purani-ji's clothes could be ironed as well. My mother's fears were unfounded and like Bharadhwaja taking the bark cloth to Valmiki as the great poet went for his bath in Tamasa, Ambi had the honour of presenting Purani-ji with his clothes, still shining jasmine-white, warm, neatly ironed. How come I remember this so distinctly? But then, how can I ever forget the details of this visitor from Pondicherry?

The second day's lecture by Purani-ji was all translucence. We never felt he was speaking to us of a symbolic, philosophical poem. The Erskine Square was overflowing and even the ever-busy registrar, K.V. Gopalaswamy had turned up. For an hour and a half we watched fascinated as Aswapati ascended and descended the ladder of the worlds; then came the nectarine passage, "One shall descend and break the iron law" . . . Purani-ji's right hand made imperious gestures as the Divine Mother's cosmic form filled the stage. Savitri came upon the rostrum carrying a plate of prasad and Aswapati asked her to go and choose her husband. Before we could recover from the deep thrum of the passage on Mantra delivered by Purani-ji standing still with eyes closed, he had become Rishi Narad, his eyes now wide open and making an arc for the whole audience, his right hand again pointing out a figure coming towards him:

Who is this that comes, the bride,
The flame-born, and round her illumined head
Pouring their lights her hymeneal pomps
Move flashing about her? From what green glimmer of glades
Retreating into dewy silences
Or half-seen verge of waters moon-betrayed
Bringst thou this glory of enchanted eyes?³

We saw the white-clad Purani-ji only when he came to the end of his lecture. There had been a deep dramatic strength in his recitation of the passages from *Savitri* which punctuated his talk at the appropriate places. Hence we had been seeing only Aswapati, the Divine Mother, Rishi Narad and Savitri by turns, not Purani-ji. Back home, after dinner we all sat together speaking of the day, what this professor said, how that professor had been overwhelmed, how the students had shown exemplary behaviour and so on. By now I had gained enough courage to sit near Purani-ji and he asked me about my work. I proudly told him I was doing research for getting a doctorate and

was working on Virginia Woolf. He was not amused when father told him that he had suggested *Savitri* but I had fled from it, saying, “I cannot understand the poem.” “As if she is going to understand Virginia Woolf,” he added and laughed.

Purani-ji also laughed but then grew sombre. “What is this? No, no. You must change your subject. If you do not take up *Savitri* when your father is all the time with you to explain it line by line, you would be rejecting Grace!” There was such intensity in his voice and he spoke once again on the personality of *Savitri* while we all sat fascinated in the small house surrounded by jamun trees. As father said later, it was like Rishi Narad singing as he came down to Madra in *Savitri*. So came about the Big Change in my life. I went to the Registrar’s Office and gave an application changing my subject. Through this remarkable disciple of Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri* had chosen me. No wonder jasmines have thus a special attraction for me as they replicate amma’s voice, my brother standing at the ironing table, Purani-ji turning to his right and calling out, “who is this that comes, the bride . . .” and father sitting alone on the stage, watching the speaker and the audience simultaneously. They are all gone to the Mother now but their memory remains as endearing as the scent that swirls around while I weave garlands of jasmine during summer.

As a TAMILIAN also the jasmine is close to my heart. For the ancient Tamils called their rich forest tracts as Mullai (a variety of jasmine) land. For them the jasmine signified chastity and was associated with the patience of a chaste wife who would not even question her husband’s misdemeanour. Apparently the ancient Tamils took it for granted that man’s roving eyes can never be controlled! The poem *Paripadal* has actually a scene in which friends console and control a lady who has found out her husband’s womanising and would rather deny him entry into the house:

Good woman! Be aware of the way of the world.
It is not possible for anyone to reject one’s husband
Because he goes in search of other women
Seeking enjoyment. Do not be angry! Do not be angry!
Can lust ever stop from crossing the line of control
It should respect?⁴

But I take a turn away from this world of male domination and wander in other spaces of memory where a Malligai (jasmine) Villa appears before me. That was the house in which father lived when he began his career as a teacher in Chithambara Vidyalaya in Valvettiturai, near Jaffna. I have heard him speak often with nostalgia about that building. He left Ceylon in 1931 and never went back. But he had a deep love for the place and the people.

The embattled Ceylon with the rise of the LTTE became the cause of a terrible

4. Verse 20. All translations from Tamil are by Prema Nandakumar unless otherwise stated.

anguish for him. In his 81st year, he was almost frozen by pain when he learnt of the massacre at Valvettiturai that had taken place on 2nd August, 1989 when the Indian Peace Keeping Force killed 63 Tamil civilians and burnt many houses. Compared by George Fernandez to the My Lai massacre in Vietnam by American forces, the detailed news that trickled down gradually to him was almost unbearable. Were the massacred the children of his students? Grandchildren? For, young and old were alike victims in this willful slaughter. Father's memories went back to a peaceful Valvettiturai where there was enough for everybody, a thirst for knowledge among the young and an unswerving religious consciousness in the old. His "Sorrowing Lies my Valvettiturai" was published in *The Hindu* and it was amazing how he could recall the names of many of his students and friends and the Malligai Villa. Even more amazing was the response from a Valvettiturai citizen who gave information about some of the names mentioned in the article. He had also made it a point to visit Malligai Villa and assure father that the building stood intact still!

A small flower with white petals and a green stem; how it holds me captive in memories sweet and harsh! It is a favourite blossom in Tamil hymnal literature. Perialwar recounts a heart-warming story of the domestic felicity of Sita and Rama not found in Valmiki. Hanuman meets Sita in the Asoka grove and submits marks of identification given to him by Rama so that she would believe him. One of them involves jasmines:

Lady wearing fresh blossoms in the hair!
I salute you and make a submission.
Listen to me. Lady who has eyes
That rival those of a gazelle!
Once when alone with Rama at night,
You had bound him with a beautiful
String of jasmines. This is a mark of identification.⁵

The royal couple must have had an argument in play or was Rama defeated in a game of chess? Sita might have removed the string of jasmines from her tresses and bound Rama and that must have been a delightful moment, now being savoured by Rama as he sorrows alone in Kishkinda. The incident must have come readily to his mind when sending a message to his dear, playful wife through Hanuman. The Eternal Lord and His Consort take on the human play for our sake, and experience joy, sorrow, calumny and despair. Who can understand this Divine Riddle?

This jasmine-incident would have had a natural attraction for a Tamil poet who loved his forests and the jasmine which was abundant in forest areas. The Mullai land is Arcadia, the presiding deity is Tirumal (Vishnu), and everywhere one experiences

5. Perialwar Tirumoli, 3-10-2.

the peace of cowherds playing the flute while the cows graze and rest in shade. Love and affection are in the air. And the jasmine scent is all over the place. The ancient Tamil anthology, *Kuruntokai* has a lovely poem on the subject. The lady-love is awaiting the coming of her Lord and finds time stretching as an endless evening of waiting:

There are those who hallucinate
And say: when the sun goes down
And russet grows the sky,
And the jasmine buds begin to open,
That is evening time. But for women
Who are separated from their Lord,
Even the dawn when the chaunticleer
Crows in the vast city, is evening;
The daytime also is the same.⁶

For is there anything purer in this world than unswerving love between two persons? Love is the hoop of the gods, as Sri Aurobindo says. A span of jasmines is indeed the hoop of the Divine to keep us sane and happy, I tell myself as I hold the small basket of jasmines I have just now purchased from a street vendor. Hundreds of fresh buds, plucked neatly and handed over as a measure to me. It is a joy just to stroke the lot. I wonder: How do they manage to pluck the blossoms so neatly from the bushes? Then I remember the children.

I have heard of the tragedy of tea-estate workers who pluck tea leaves with their fingers which has given us Mulk Raj Anand's classic, *Two Leaves and a Bud*. How about the workers in jasmine gardens? I am told they are all school-going children who rise at dawn and engage themselves in this job for two to three hours for earning their mite for the family. The owners need tender fingers to pluck the flowers, says a friend. Indu-ji says she has read somewhere that French perfumeries employ only women to gather the flowers meant for making perfumes. It seems women's fingers are the most soft and do least damage to the blossoms. Going into the subject, it is unnerving to find jasmine no more than a commercial, and worse, an export proposition. This drains all the poetry out of it! Fortunately I am heartened by a gleam of sanity to read the views of a jasmine farmer, K. Gopalakrishna Pillai of Vazhikulangara (Ernakulam) who does not consider jasmines to be just a money-spinner.

"Jasmine farming, whether in pots or plots, is not a money spinner. Tending plants like one's own children will fetch decent returns. An overkill is unethical and will be unrewarding sooner than later."

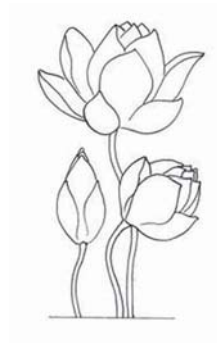
What did Sri Aurobindo say of children: "Children are flowers in the garden of god-consciousness." Jasmine plants, children, flowers, god-consciousness. Even as

6. Verse 234.

I hold the small basket in my hands, all the terms seem to educate me on the need to keep one's mind pure at all times. Never be tempted by moral turpitude! And we have the Mother's mantra on the jasmine: "True purity gives a lovely fragrance." Isn't it a wonderful aspiration to radiate purity throughout one's existence on the earth?

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR



IN MEMORY OF ANU-BEN

EXACTLY seven years ago, my Hindi teacher Ravindra-ji had passed away. In his memory I had written an article, a homage, on behalf of all his ex-students. Even then I had found it hard to pen my thoughts on paper, and I am finding it hard to do so now too, when I want to write a few lines on Anu-ben, to pay my homage to her too. The reason for this difficulty is the film of tears which mists my eyes when I realise that these two wonderful persons who had dedicated themselves completely to the Ashram are no more with us . . .

I knew them as teachers when I was in school, but my special bond with them continued even afterwards . . . It would be vain to say that I was one of their favourite students; I rather think that they gave me more attention because being the only non-Hindi-speaking person in the class, I was unsure of the language. The others had uttered their very first words in Hindi; so the genders came naturally to them. But for me it was a challenge as I had to think twice before deciding whether the word I was using was of masculine gender or feminine! Anyway, whatever the reason, I am grateful that those two special souls have touched my life. . .

On October 6, 2008, at about 9.30 p.m. Anu-ben breathed her last. When I went to her room the next day to pay my respects, I was struck by the radiant calmness of her face. She had had a fall in Udavi on the 25th August, and after that she was in tremendous pain for a month and a half. There were several broken bones and other medical complications. But there was not a sign of suffering on that serene face. In fact one would say that she had faced death with a smile.

Many people knew Anu-ben in many different ways. Hers was a multifaceted personality. Those children who had come here in the early days of the Ashram, knew her as the first Didi of Dortoir. They called her “Awwi” with affection. It is not known exactly why she was called by that name, but there is one story which does explain it. It seems that one of those children in Dortoir, who is of a respectable grandmother’s age today, had just arrived from Karnataka. Anu-ben was washing her hair, and by mistake the water she poured was too hot for the child. So in protest she screamed, “Awwi, what are you doing?” I suppose what she wanted to say was “Awwa” meaning mother in Kannada. But the name “Awwi” stuck, and all the children started calling her “Awwi” with affection. She had maintained a warm relationship with all the Dortoir children till the very end. She would take part in all their activities specially in the “Dortoir group”. This dedicated group cleans systematically one Ashram department every month. Although there is no spring in Pondicherry every month the ‘spring’ cleaning takes place with great gusto and dedication! I am sure Anu-ben’s absence will be deeply felt by all the members of Dortoir.

Anu-ben was a dancer, professionally trained by Sri Uday Shankar, the brother of the renowned sitarist Pandit Ravi Shankar. She was a dance teacher of the Ashram and the head of that department. As a child I remember having taken part in so many

of her dance dramas. I understood much later how much tolerance and patience she must have had to teach so many mischievous children!

When I grew up a little more, Anu-ben became my Hindi teacher. She and Ravindra-ji used to take classes together. She would tell us mythological stories. Her story-telling was not only with words but with expressive eyes and ‘*abhinaya*’ too. We would be spellbound. The classes became not only interesting but educative too, for this way we would learn about our culture and civilisation.

Anu-ben used to write stories and articles for the Hindi magazines *Purodha*, and *Agnishikha*. Apart from being a storyteller and a writer she was the editor of both these magazines. She bore so many responsibilities lightly on her delicate shoulders.

After I finished my studies at S.A.I.C.E., I had the opportunity to work with her for a couple of years in the translations of the Mother’s works into Hindi. She would translate a paragraph and then tell me to correct it. I would say, “But Anu-ben, you are the teacher and I am the student, how can I correct your work?” To which she would reply, “Here our relation is not that of a teacher and student. We are both children of the Mother. We have to work with sincerity and complete dedication.”

Anu-ben played a big role in “Udavi” where the Auroshikha factory was located. She would go there regularly and teach the children of the employees there, take dance classes for them and help with the administration of the school. She did full justice to the word, “Udavi” which means “help” in Tamil.

Sri A. B. Purani, Anu-ben’s father was a well known personality. He was a freedom fighter and a man of action. Even today the *akhadas* that he started several decades ago are actively functioning in Gujarat. He came to the Ashram in the early days during Sri Aurobindo’s time. How he came here has been narrated beautifully in the September 2008 issue of *Mother India*.

When Purani-ji came away, his wife Smt. Lilavati-ji followed suit with their baby girl.

I have written about every aspect that I knew of Anu-ben — as the Didi of Dortoir, dancer and head of the dance section, as a Hindi teacher, writer and editor of *Purodha* and *Agnishikha*, a well-wisher of Udavi and my colleague in the Hindi section. If we look at page 673 in the August 2008 issue of *Mother India* we will know that she had set out on the path of Sadhana even before she learnt to walk! She would crawl into Sri Aurobindo’s room, climb into a comfortable chair and settle down. When her father came looking for her, he would apologise to Sri Aurobindo and ask her, “What are you doing here?” and she would reply, “jeu . . . jeu . . .” trying to say, “meditation”!

One night she got into Sri Aurobindo’s room and was heard repeating “dh . . . dh . . .”, trying to repeat the word, “Sadhana”!

On the 6th of October that long journey on the path of Sadhana, as shown by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, came to an end. Maybe ‘end’ is not the right word. In fact we can say that on 6th October 2008 Anu-ben set out on another journey, her soul’s journey on another plane towards the Light!

KANISHTHA

ANU-BEN AS I KNEW HER

ON the 6th of October 2008 at 9.20 p.m. Anu-ben breathed her last in the Ashram Nursing Home, where she had been devotedly attended by Aruna, Rupali, Vandana and others. Apparently it was the result of an accident sustained a month earlier when honouring a promise she had made to go and bless the new house and the new baby of one of the teachers at Udavi. But for such as Anu-ben there could be no accident in the manner of leaving the body. Indeed she had, not very long before, had a dream in which Sri Aurobindo was calling her. She found it specially noteworthy since her dialogue and dreams were mostly with Mother. In another dream Ravindra-ji was calling her. "What are you doing there?" he asked and told her that Sri Aurobindo was calling her and that she belonged *there*. So she was prepared and not at all afraid. She spoke of these dreams when in PIMS where she was being treated for a broken arm and a blow to her head. She had lost a lot of blood. It was found that there was a crack in the knee which was causing pain. She was later moved to the Nursing Home.

These were the outer circumstances which her soul had chosen in order to be released from the body. Anu-ben was so active until the last that this must have been much preferable to a long and drawn-out end.

Calculating from Pujalal's testimony that Anu was one and a half years old when he accompanied her and her mother Lilavati to the Ashram perhaps in 1925, Anu-ben was 85 when she left. She never spoke about her age and had a healthy disregard for it. Indeed there was something ageless about Anu. Not only was she active until the last, going out to Udavi Gentillesse School to teach but she had all her lessons in the Ashram School and her work as editor of the Hindi quarterlies *Purodha* and *Agnishikha* for which she wrote editorials. She still taught dancing and was in the fruit room at 6 a.m. every morning for the fruit distribution. Hers was a long life of dedicated service.

But quite apart from the amount of energy and activity, there was something youthful about Anu-ben. She had a special sort of purity and an innocence in spite of her wisdom which always made me think of a young girl, specially when she laughed and she was always ready to laugh. There was a lightness about her. And there was of course the grace of the dancer when she moved.

In her last years it could still be seen in her measured, harmonious movements when, for example, she distributed gifts to the children or accepted something in her hands.

But now I want to talk about my own relationship with Anu-ben. She was a soul-sister. I admired her very much and learnt so much from her and though I am consoled by the knowledge that she is with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother there is a big space in the physical.

I left home in 1959 to make a pilgrimage to Sri Aurobindo's Ashram. I had the great good fortune to be here for the unforgettable first anniversary of the Supramental

descent and for my soul to make contact with the Mother once again . . . and also with Anu-ben.

There was a radiance in the Ashram in those early weeks of 1960. People had come from all over the world and all over India to celebrate the Golden Day. Everyone was busy with special programmes as Anu-ben must have been, so it was without much hope of success that I approached the ‘dancing teacher’. I was mad about Indian dancing. There was very little to be seen of Indian dancing on television in the 50’s. It was in the late 50’s that Ravi Shankar introduced Indian music to the West. It was only on my way to the Ashram that I saw an exhibition of Indian dancing in Manila.

I was to be in the Ashram for 3 months before going back home to settle my affairs prior to returning to the Ashram forever. So when I asked Anu-ben if I could join her class I expected her to say that she couldn’t teach me much in such a short time and that it would be difficult to fit me in with other students. At best I thought she’d say, “Come and see me when you come back.” But no. She said that as there wasn’t much time she’d have to take me privately and as I remember she gave me two lessons a week! She asked me what kind of Indian dancing interested me and I said the one where they wear those wide skirts. The movements had impressed me as being particularly graceful.

“Oh, the Manipuri dance. All right,” and we went straight into the dance. It was like Sri Aurobindo teaching beginners a language by going straight into reading the classics. Anu-ben taught me enough for me to pacify my family on my last visit home when they asked, “But what did you *learn* in the Ashram?”

What I didn’t know was that I had the great good fortune to be taught by a pupil of Uday Shankar, Ravi Shankar’s brother. It was only later in our friendship that Anu-ben told me of how much she was in love with dancing when she was a little girl and how she would catch hold of any visitor who knew dancing, begging to be taught. Eventually, her dream came true and at twelve she went to the Kalakshetra in Madras and when she was 16 to Uday Shankar for training; but the artistic vital world into which she found herself plunged appalled her and she ran back to the Mother who sent her back again saying that she must finish her training and keep herself centred in her psychic being. Which brings us to Anu-ben’s many dance dramas and stage productions at the Ashram and Udavi. Uday Shankar was an innovator in Indian dancing and introduced many new concepts. Anu-ben too was creative in her approach and while she taught strict classical *bharatanatyam* she was also innovative. Mother explained to her what she wanted her to express and how to express it so that even when Anu-ben staged or taught episodes from the Ramayana or Mahabharata they had something special and as her pupil I can say that her teaching was always inspiring. She was endlessly patient too and encouraging and never raised her voice.

It was not only I that she accepted so generously to teach. Anybody who felt they wanted to learn was given a chance no matter how little gifted or awkward. Anu-ben managed to impart some degree of Indian feminine grace to anyone. I remember

coming upon a class comprising mostly of foreigners one day. There was one very tall, awkward American lady and an equally tall and angular German lady with a flower pinned to her short blonde hair. Anu-ben was teaching them with as much dedication as she would have her most gifted students, and they were responding with big smiles.

So it shouldn't have surprised me when she agreed to come and teach the Udavi children. At that time Udavi was still an extremely poor, and one could almost say, wretched village. The children came from underprivileged homes. I expected her to enquire about all sorts of things but she merely said, "All right, but I only have Saturday morning free," and that was the beginning of a great love affair between Anu-ben and Udavi. She used to say that she always felt Sri Aurobindo was waiting for her in Udavi.

Around the Saturday dance class grew a cultural programme morning. Not only were there the dance classes but for a year we had musicians coming to play and explain their instruments. Suzanne came to play the cello, an Indian girl played the violin, I demonstrated the lyre, Gordon Korstange the flute. They knew the difference between a wind instrument and a string instrument. Mohan of the golden voice (as I always call him) sang and played the harmonium. We even had a soprano from the Milan Opera one Saturday which made the children suppress some giggles. Various visitors came to give recitals of their national dances including a girl who did the Egyptian belly dance. And people from all walks of life and from all countries came to give talks. A few years ago Markandeya spoke of what it meant to be a fireman in America. And all this grew around Anu-ben's Saturday classes. There was always a party atmosphere.

In fact, I who avoided gatherings of any sort would go just about anywhere if Anu-ben asked me to go with her: teachers' weddings and engagements, visits to newborn babies and visits to the village. She had a big heart for the villagers. After all she was Purani-ji's daughter and he had set the example with his rural upliftment work. This dainty little lady never showed any disdain in the poorest of village houses.

Once a teacher asked her, "But why do you want to go to the village, Anu-ben?" And she answered, "So they know that we love them." "But they do know," said the teacher. But it was Anu's love that they felt and when she walked in the village, right up to the end, the mothers and the old grannies would embrace her and crack their knuckles to their temples. Anu-ben's involvement didn't stop at dance classes. She was soon teaching English and organising Christmas parties and programmes. She became the soul of the school and re-organised it. She became the director.

Like in every school, there were sometimes differences among teachers and dissatisfactions. So once it was decided that each teacher would find the good quality or qualities of other teachers and write them down anonymously.

A good percentage of the remarks against Anu's name said that she was a mother. When Nata left his body, the school faced a crisis. There was a decision to be

made. The school had reached Standard 5. Should it stop there or should it go on to Matriculation level?

There was no money. Nobody seemed to want to finish the school. Did the village really need more than to read, write, do some elementary math? Anu-ben and I knew that they did. If you throw an eleven-year-old child back into the village he will forget his hygiene and tidiness. Besides the children were bright and eager to go on. So sustained by little more than faith we decided to go on. Mother has said of the children, "*Il faut les suivre.*" (There must be a follow up.) And Nata on whom the school had rested, took this very seriously; some classes were now being held in *keet* huts.

And here I have to explain something about our story, Anu-ben's and mine.

Two years before Nata's leaving his body, we had returned from Europe, where we had gone for reasons of his health, determined never ever to leave the Ashram again. Being away was just too painful. So when during the last months of Nata's illness I received an invitation to go to read a paper at a Congress in America, it had nothing to draw my attention other than some blank pages of very beautiful paper between the printed matter which is why I didn't throw the whole thing into the WPB at once.

Nata left his body at the end of March 1985. I think it was in August '85 that we wrote to the Foundation for World Education asking for help to finish the school. Somebody said that their annual meeting would be held in New York at the end of October and that if I went to explain what we were doing they would probably give us the money — but I had no intention of leaving the Ashram again specially on the off chance of help which might mean spending a fortune on air tickets besides which my whole being said "NO!"

One day when I was sorting papers I came upon this mysterious invitation for the Congress. Mysterious because it came in my passport name, Marguerite, which I had not used for more than a quarter of a century. I didn't know the people involved. Then I saw that the date of the Congress was two days after the annual Foundation meeting, in New Jersey just two hours away from New York by special Congress bus, all expenses paid from the moment one left Pondicherry plus luxury accommodation for ten days for anybody accompanying me as well as myself. Vishwajit had told me I would have to travel again at which I had scoffed. (!)

Even though it all looked like the hand of the Mother it was a huge wrench and I'm sure I would not have gone if I hadn't known that it was a first step to enable Anu-ben and me to go on with the project together. Yes, I'm quite sure it was only the knowledge of Anu-ben by my side that gave me the courage to pack my bags once again and to take off for New York. New York! not even Nata's Tuscan hills. So with my daughter Ishita holding my hand we took off.

This is no place to talk of the kindness of the Foundation and of its secretary Anie Nunnally who hosted us. (New York can be a frightening place.) My great joy apart from now feeling that Mother was behind us was to be able to give the good

news to Anu-ben and to know that Nata's work would continue and to look forward to finishing the project.

It was only a first step. We still had to buy more land. The FWE grant wasn't enough but more money came in and we finally had enough. And in line with the string of miracles the land adjacent to the school was for sale. Here again at this stage without Anu-ben I would have tried to hand the whole project over to somebody else because we had to go to the registry office in Cuddalore eight times to sign papers. But actually riding along in the car with Anu-ben was rather stimulating because she was so optimistic and so full of a certain positive quality of gaiety that it communicated itself to me.

Still it had to be faced. There was no money for the buildings.

Well about this time Anu-ben had organised an exhibition of Udavi's arts and crafts at the Ashram. The children under the guidance of Ashoka-di, a Shantiniketan graduate, who works now at Bibha-di's batik department did beautiful work. But Anu-ben had been given the big, long room of the Exhibition Hall and had not enough material to fill it with, so together with the teachers and some of our friends we cut out designs and pictures out of cloth which the children worked at to finish stitching in time. Ashoka's students were wonderful little needlewomen. When the various motifs were finished and framed and hung up the hall looked impressive, sparkling with silk and sequins and people wanted to buy these wall hangings as they came to be called. Anu-ben was as ever hopeful and optimistic and riding on these two qualities a wall hanging project developed, successful beyond our wildest expectations.

And so our collaboration went on in a hundred ways. Whenever I had a problem of any kind to solve, I would think of her first. Once a Western acquaintance asked me to find a wife for her son who was a devotee(!) I was about to withdraw from the honour she showed me when I thought of my collaborator who, in a relatively short time, found a girl. The couple are now living happily in Auroville. On other occasions she helped teachers who wanted to get married. Yes, she was a mother.

On two occasions Anu-ben asked me to write children's plays for her. We sat together as I typed and she was a wonderfully playful inspiration. One of the plays she wanted to be about a little boy who flies off on a peacock's back into a land of fantasy. I can hardly remember the play. What I do remember is the joy of creating together and as I write I realise how blended in Anu-ben were the worlds of creativity and art and that of disciplined work. The fruit room, the magazines, the lessons were not neglected in favour of dance and drama. Her yoga was truly integral.

It was at this time that I began calling Anu-ben my Farishta, (angel); she was also my Hindi teacher, and she, now believing what Mother said of my fairy capacity to perform small miracles, began to call me Pari, fairy.

But when I speak of our collaboration, let me say at once that Anu-ben was always a person who gave more than she took.

Sometimes, when we were sitting on the bench just outside Ravindra-ji's room,

planning and discussing school problems she would talk of the time before I knew her, when Mother had given her together with Kusum-ben (of Senteurs) the responsibility for a children's boarding. At first her work was ironing the clothes. She spoke of how Mother had guided them at every step down to small details, how when she told Mother that the children wouldn't eat their tomatoes Mother had told her to make them appetising by frying them in butter and then the children did eat them and so in a hundred small ways and many bigger ways she was guided. Mother also told her what it was she wanted her to express through her dancing.

And sometimes she spoke of her father. Purani-ji's story is so well known that it need not be spoken of here but she was immensely proud of him and had inherited from him a pride in India and a passionate interest in her destiny; also his courage and determination. I remember her dignity when she stood calm and silent beside him when he left his body. She said that when he had had his first heart attack she had not been so accepting but that by the time he left, Mother had made her ready. He left her with a huge inheritance of wisdom and culture.

And so little by little, in between speaking of practical matters, sitting there above the enclosure outside the fruit room some of her life came together for me in bits and pieces. From above the courtyard, the champak tree and the pond had a magical quality. Sometimes we would spread a mat to see it from the side from which one got a better view. I wouldn't have been surprised if Krishna had suddenly materialised beside the tree to play his flute for Anu-ben to dance.

Anu-ben told me so many things about herself, about her relation with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. One noteworthy thing she didn't tell me and it is noteworthy that she didn't. I learnt it from Sunanda; once when the Mother saw a photo of Anu-ben in a dance pose she said that the spirit of Beauty had been wanting to come down into the Ashram and that it had found its vehicle in Anu-ben.

Ravindra-ji was as patient as he could be with us but sometimes when Anu-ben came home to discuss things and we forgot the time, the phone would ring and she would jump up. I could hear him complaining that she was exhibiting symptoms of *Maggi-itis* again. And she would hurry away agitating her head in mock panic with her usual grace.

There are so many incidents to illustrate her qualities throughout the building of the school, but this is an article and not a book. There were many ups and downs before the buildings were fully ready. We started building with an Auroville architect before all the funds were in. We knew that faith was what would bring the funds in if we had the courage to start. That was how Dr. Nripendra started the Nursing Home and how Ganapatram started Cottage Guest House.

And when friends saw that it was happening they helped. Elio left a sum of money in his will for the library. People from all over the world were buying the wall hangings which were becoming more and more intricate and beautiful. An Italian family who a visionary had seen had been friends and helpers in Roman times gave

their enthusiastic financial backing.

So the school was built and it was to onlookers a miracle. Many had thought these two old ladies were crazy dreamers and that it could never happen.

But inside all of us more important miracles were happening and since this is Anu-ben's story, I will speak of hers. For this I have to go back to her childhood. When her mother came to settle in the Ashram where Purani-ji was living, Anu-ben came too as a tiny child. She was the first child in the Ashram, but after a while she was sent to her grandparents on account of her health where an aunt took the place of her mother. She came back to her mother and the Ashram by the age of five but by then her aunt was the only mother she would recognise. She was unable to open to her own mother. Something in her had closed up. At the age of twelve she went to Chennai, so there was a little gap in her emotional life and according to her, it made her a closed person. Though she was always gracious it was difficult for her to open up.

Well, it was in Udavi that this changed. Something was there that made the unexplored place blossom. She fell in love with the children, with the place, with the whole atmosphere. She was to say that she could now express emotions in a way she had not been able to before, that an unexpected change had taken place in her. She poured her love on the children and gave them of her best. She brought them to the Ashram for exhibitions and for the 2nd December programme. She arranged excursions and Christmas parties, plays and puppet shows and arranged with Tara Jauhar — who had been one of her charges in the boarding — for a fortnight's excursion to Delhi, Agra and the foothills of the Himalayas for the Std. 9 students each year. The teachers were drawn into her ambience. They became caring and conscientious. The students who came out of Udavi had something special about them which everyone recognised, a special stamp. It was simply that Anu-ben had stamped her love on them.

On the 10th day after her passing, a meditation was held at Udavi under a huge photo of a smiling Anu-ben that one of her Udavi ex-students had enlarged. After the meditation there was a charming dance offering by the pupils and then the children of a junior class each said something about Anu-ben in French. Several said she loved Sri Aurobindo and the Mother very much or that she had taught them many things, or that she was very loved. Then one little boy said, "*Elle adorait les enfants.*" She adored children. *Oui, c'est vrai.*

The children had seen true. She was a disciple, a worker for the Divine, a dancer, a teacher and also a mother, but above all, she was the child of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

MAGGI

RECOLLECTIONS

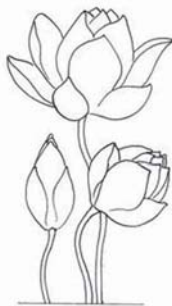
ONCE Mother asked me to dance and in the story I had to conquer the asura [evil power]. The asura was attracted to me and he wanted to conquer me. I found this to be so difficult. Nothing seemed right in the way of dance movements. Usually I hear a sound within my head indicating the correct choreographic movement. It is like a bell inside me. But that bell never rang. I went to the Mother and I started to cry. She then showed me the correct movements herself. So, I repeated them in front of her and she said, “Yes, that is it!” She would come to see the dress rehearsals and she saw me on the stage. She asked me to dance again and I thought that was the greatest compliment anyone could receive, so I happily danced for her again.

Upon returning to the Ashram from the Himalayas I had many significant meetings with the Mother. It is very difficult to describe them. I remember trembling all over when I saw Mother and Sri Aurobindo on darshan days. Once the Mother asked me, after one of the darshans (Sri Aurobindo was still here at that time), “How was the darshan? For what do you ask?” I said, “Mother, I do not ask anything.” She said, “Every step you take you may always ask for something.” So, one day I asked her if Sri Aurobindo was pleased with me. She said, “Yes.” I asked, “Why doesn’t he smile at me?” Mother said, “He doesn’t smile, but he is pleased.” This would be the last darshan that I would have of Mother and Sri Aurobindo together.

I could see that Sri Aurobindo was uneasy and uncomfortable. I felt like going quickly. Then he looked straight at me and smiled. His look completely stopped me and I began to cry and cry. Something told me that I would not see him again. This was November 24, 1950 and of course he withdrew from his body on December 5, 1950.

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. 190-91)



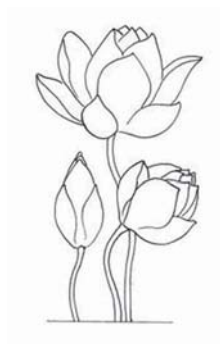
FIRST DARSHAN OF SRI AUROBINDO AND THE MOTHER

[About the first Darshan in August 1937:]

THERE were very few people in the Ashram in those days so there was no long queue When I saw Sri Aurobindo for the first time I got a shock. I had seen kings and emperors in Europe, England and Asia whose clothes were majestic but the person inside quite ordinary. Here was a man wearing only a dhoti and chaddar (shawl) sitting bare-chested and looking like a king. I said to myself, “At last I have seen royalty and majesty.” After that darshan we were very much drawn to the Ashram.

UDAR

(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. 29-30)



A DIVINE INTERVENTION

Q: When did you learn of Mother and Sri Aurobindo and when did you come to the Ashram to live? Can you describe your darshans with the Mother?

I WAS introduced to the Mother (and Sri Aurobindo) in 1971 while I was posted in Calcutta. We were preparing for the war with Pakistan that resulted in East Pakistan becoming an independent country — Bangladesh. I have given a comprehensive account of this in the book I have written under the title *A Soldier's Voyage of Self Discovery* in two chapters under the titles “War for the Liberation of Bangla Desh” and “Divine Intervention in 1971”.

It happened while the crisis was building up before the actual war and after I had been told of the top secret plans. I was deeply involved in the preparation for war with limited resources at my disposal. One morning in my office, I must have been in a reflective mood in the light of the immensity of these impending operational challenges, when one of my officers, a Lieutenant Colonel who worked in the same headquarters, came to me and asked with a smile, “Sir, why are you so pensive these days, which is so unlike you?” I told him in a friendly tone, “Chum, you would be more pensive if you had some of the problems I am facing these days which I cannot share with you at present.” He had come prepared (I had no idea that he was a long-time devotee of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother) and he promptly said, “Sir, you are my old instructor and I should not be advising you, but I have a humble submission; whatever your problems, write to the Mother for her blessings.” I hesitated for a couple of days. I had heard of Sri Aurobindo but knew little about the Mother in Pondicherry. Then I wrote a few lines just to seek her blessings for some problems I was facing in my work which I could not specify. I received her blessings in a few days and the rest is history. Most of the top brass at the Eastern Army HQ had received the Mother's blessings prompted by the same source. It is amazing how successful the operation against Pakistan was when over 93,000 regular Pakistani army soldiers surrendered to the Indian Army.

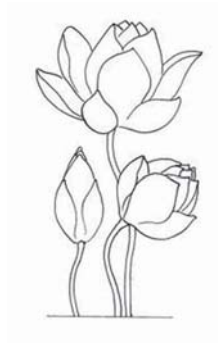
From my point of view, it was clearly a Divine Intervention. The Mother had shown a great deal of interest in the developing situation in West Bengal. So, as soon as I could, I travelled to Pondicherry with my family. On February 22, 1972 we were granted a very powerful and special audience by the Mother. One by one we sat at her feet and gazed into her eyes as we were told to do. Not a word was uttered as each one of us received her blessings. She looked deeply into our eyes pouring her Force into us. She put her hand on our heads and gave each of us a rose and a blessing packet.

This meeting is what brought about the major change that was to take place in my life. Independently all the members of my family — my wife and our three daughters and I — decided to settle in Pondicherry in the Ashram and we moved there permanently in November 1976 after my retirement from the Army.

The biggest regret in my life has been that I never went to Pondicherry to see Sri Aurobindo during the intensive training we did in South India. It was in 1943, before we were sent to war in Burma. We were involved in exercises within close proximity to Pondicherry but I never even thought of going there to receive Sri Aurobindo's darshan. Perhaps I was just too involved in the preparation for war.

KRISHNA TEWARI

(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. 224-26)



A KIND OF ELECTRIC CURRENT

. . . I SUBSCRIBED for the weekly *Bande Mataram* and afterwards — after his release from jail — for his *Karmayogin* and the *Dharma* (Bengali). Evidently I entertained a soft corner for Sri Aurobindo. . .

Sri Aurobindo left for Pondicherry in 1910. I completely lost touch and got engrossed in my mundane life for years together. It was only by the end of the 30s that I awoke again to Sri Aurobindo. That was occasioned by my younger brother visiting the Ashram and staying away there itself. I began to hear of Sri Aurobindo, the Ashram and the Mother. About the Mother I could not reconcile myself to how a European lady could establish herself as the Mother in Pondicherry Ashram and even more as the Divine Mother. I remember I once questioned a woman pilgrim on her way to Pondicherry whether Sri Aurobindo was greater or the Mother. This was my mental attitude at that time.

However, as I wished to see my brother I thought of paying a visit to the Ashram in 1943 and seeing things for myself. But that was not to be. I thought of it again the next year, in 1944. I had heard that for the necessary permission one had to write directly to the Mother. I had heard also that the Mother was being addressed as the Divine Mother. I was in a fix when I took the letter pad to write for permission. I simply wrote “Mother” and added: “I want to go to Pondicherry for Darshan but I have no devotional heart; a Darshan may have a salutary effect on me having a yearning to get a true knowledge of things.” Writing so far I stopped and thought to myself what an audacity it was to write thus. Then I felt that these words had come out through the pen without my thinking and so I had better let them remain as they were, whatever the consequences. I am glad to say that I received the permission.

I came to Pondicherry on the 6th of August 1944, early morning. I saw the Mother at about 11 a.m. the same morning walking on the terrace along with Chinmayi and looking at the devotees assembled in the Ashram courtyard. I was also in the crowd. Mother had worn a silken gown and Chinmayi had held a silken umbrella over the Mother’s head. I was not happy to see the Mother at that moment.

During those days Mother used to come on the terrace of Madhav’s office at dusk every evening and stand there for a short meditation. In the courtyard below mats were spread and sadhaks used to join the meditation. When the Mother appeared on the terrace I looked at her and immediately a kind of electric current passed through my body; I saw my own mother’s face appearing on the Mother’s but immediately that face changed into the image of Goddess Jagaddhatri of our conception. This set me seriously thinking. I felt that as I did not want to recognise the Mother as Mother, she had appeared before me first as my own mother and then showed her divinity.

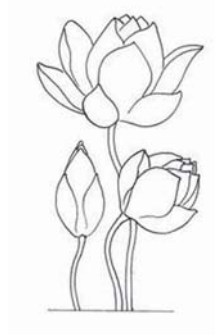
I stayed here for full 24 days and on three occasions I saw a bluish halo over the head of the Mother when she sat for meditation in the Meditation Hall at night.

My first Darshan of Sri Aurobindo along with the Mother was on the 15th of

August 1944. Since then I have had 10 Darshans but the impression formed at the first Darshan is still vivid in my mind although each subsequent Darshan was fruitful for me.

RAKHAL DAS BOSE

(*Breath of Grace*, edited by M. P. Pandit, published by Dipti Publications, 2002,
pp. 89-91)



PRANAM

THE daily march of our life every morning began after bowing down to our Mother and with her blessings. She used to come downstairs at about 6.30 in the morning in one of the rooms on the eastern row of the courtyard. It is here that Bula, the sadhak in charge of the Electric Department is lodged now. A raised seat with velvet covering was placed for her. Just beside her in a tray were heaped flowers of various kinds. One by one as we approached to bow to her, she gave each one of us a flower after placing her hand on our heads. It was through these flowers that she gave her directions. We too took the flowers with an ardent effort to divine what she meant. With the flower in hand we used to come out of the room, except a few who sat in meditation there. Every living moment in those days was eked out in an attitude of becoming aware of the reason why life here was bound to something other, never to be forgotten, and why one was here. That which we felt seemed to open out a new line giving a fresh turn to everything — a change of one's point of view, as if we were learning things anew in a new light. Life was stirring to a new dream. Something within seemed to become alive rendering intensely concrete our asking and receiving.

There was a time when the Mother used to distribute soup every evening at eight o'clock in the reception room of the Library House facing the main gate. It was a ceremony rendering the atmosphere deep and intimate. She used to sit on a chair placed on a raised dais and all the lights, except a dim one, were put out. Just in front of her on a small table the large receptacle containing the soup was placed. She first meditated for a while keeping both her hands stretched full length over the container invoking Sri Aurobindo's power into it. The meditation over, the container was moved to the right side for her to begin the distribution. The disciples sat, each one at his place appointed by the Mother herself. Each one, an empty cup in hand, approached her and handing the cup over to her bowed down in pranam at her feet. As he or she got up the Mother gave him or her the cup. The cups received, the disciples, one by one, would leave the room. The distribution of soup took about an hour, and was accomplished in perfect silence; all were merged in a deep inner feeling in that dim light, a feeling of a different world, an impressive far-off existence pressed upon the consciousness of all and slowly spread all around the room surcharging the atmosphere as if a tangible influence was at work consolidating all that was external and inner in a seeming vagueness of one's personal existence. We hardly understood where we were but became aware of all kinds of feelings of many worlds. How enchanting the Mother appeared then to our eyes! Also, it was at that hour that diverse divine expressions used to manifest from her. If one looked into her eyes, one became aware of a look in them, not quite human, a look that penetrated into the inner depths of our physical body, observing all, into the farthest corners. Her smile was beyond comparison. Often she entered into trance with the cup in her hand, motionless as a

statue. But as soon as she returned to her bodily consciousness the distribution went on as before as if nothing had happened a short while ago — utterly simple and natural as ever.

At the time when I came here, Sri Aurobindo along with the Mother granted three Darshans every year — once on his birthday on the 15th of August, once on the Mother's birthday on the 21st February and once again on the 24th November. It was on this date in 1926 that there happened the “Descent of the Overmind” and from that date he withdrew into seclusion. He later wrote to Nirodbaran — “It was the descent of Krishna into the physical. Krishna is not the Supramental Light. The descent of Krishna would mean the descent of the Overmind Godhead preparing, though not itself actually bringing, the descent of Supermind and Ananda. Krishna is the Anandamaya, he supports the evolution through the Overmind leading it towards Ananda.” “It was also proclaimed that I was retiring — obviously to work things out.” A few years later, from 1939 onwards — on the 24th April, the day of Mother's final arrival, another Darshan was granted, making four Darshans every year.

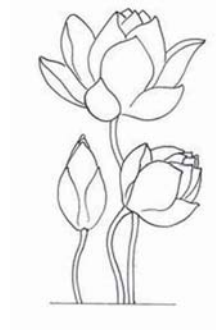
Let me relate here what it was that occurred, ushering in the Darshan in April as also of our painful feelings. Sri Aurobindo could be seen only on the Darshan days and no other. Therefore to get his Darshan was something to eagerly look forward to — to wait from one Darshan to another with a thirst in the heart beating eagerly but not easily appeased. Can one ever have his expectations fulfilled, having seen Sri Aurobindo only once? Just seeing him cannot be called a Darshan of Sri Aurobindo. Each Darshan in our life was an experience, nearly a supra-realisation. It brought to us the golden opportunity to reach out to the unattainable. He instilled into us something that no one else could. Thus as the Darshan day approached our minds too leaned to a self-gathering, with a view to receiving rightly; this occupied the whole of ourselves. Darshan was to start at seven o'clock in the morning. I had a room, those days, in a small one-storeyed building across the road, opposite to the Darshan room. I lived alone. The room where Darshan used to be is the very next one to the Mother's room, just above the gate of that building, easily visible from my room. The decorations of the Darshan room began usually from the previous night. From my room I could hear the hum of those engaged in the work and see the arrival of flowers in abundance and other paraphernalia. The awareness of all this gave rise to waves of joy in me to feel that as soon as the morning broke I would see Sri Aurobindo, approach him and receive his touch — things of such wonderful feelings. As I was proceeding for Darshan on the morning of 24th November 1938, someone told me, “There will be no Darshan today.” I was shocked and promptly said, “What rot are you talking?” The speaker with a pale and hurt countenance said, “Please inform yourself,” and moved away with his head lowered. In the meanwhile I had recovered myself enough to realise that I had been unnecessarily rude. I approached Nolini to find out what the matter was, meeting on the way many who had come for Darshan loitering with dejected mien. What I heard was that as Sri Aurobindo got up from his chair after replying to

our letters, he stumbled on the stuffed head of a tiger skin. The fall was the cause of fracturing the bone above the knee. One could easily surmise the mental anguish of the ashramites at this news. A dark dejection enveloped me, I felt as if all daylight had been extinguished. I can hardly recollect how the day passed. In the evening the Mother alone gave Darshan in the hall just in front of Amrita's room. Her compassion flowing in a hundred streams began to wash away the dejection from our minds. She filled all the profound emptiness in our hearts with her incomparable heavenly smile. We were uplifted by her inspiration and strength and we found our feet to rise again. Still I must admit I could not bear for long to see her giving Darshan alone. The next Darshan was to be on the 21st February 1939, but this too did not take place. Then after these two lapses the first Darshan was on the 24th April 1939, which has become since then a regular one.

Another page of the chronicle of the Ashram was turned, a new era started: Sri Aurobindo's correspondence with the disciples came to an end as also the intimate interviews with the Mother. She gave her own room as well as the one where she used to grant interviews, for the attention and service needed for Sri Aurobindo.

SAHANA

(*Breath of Grace* edited by M. P. Pandit, published by Dipti Publications, 2002, pp. 114-17)



THE GRACE

(Some Reminiscences)

THIS is not a polemic or an abstraction on the reality of the Divine Grace which the materialist might frown upon or [which might] draw the devotee to wax into high-sounding eulogy. What I recount is factual without a grain of fiction. Yet these might seem impossibles. Why? Take for example the capacity for literary or musical creation I am supposed to possess. From where did I imbibe them — from my family! Good heavens! No. None in our past generations had either been a poet, a critic or a musician. They were hard-boiled materialists bent on the utilitarian pastime of earning and producing wealth. And yet I would be all these though I must confess if left to my own I could not turn out a single piece of music or a single line of poetry.

Perhaps I am putting the cart before the horse.

From the very early childhood I have a faint recollection of my parents meditating before some photographs all bedecked with flowers. I was strangely attracted by the perfume of flowers and incense. From that time I learned to associate incense, flowers and photographs with things sacred.

I came to the Ashram as a visitor in November 1929. But I was not allowed either to enter the Ashram or for pranam. But I had darshan of the Mother going out for a drive everyday at 4 p.m. in the afternoons. Also she went every Thursday to Duraiswami's place on foot, passing in front of our house, when once I offered a box of chocolates to her and rushed back into the house. I felt so shy. That was my first contact with the Mother. This shyness I have never been able to overcome.

My most significant darshan and the turning point of my life came on the 24th of November. I went with my father and bowed down to the Master and the Mother. I came home in a daze. Later, my father and Barin-da asked me how I liked the darshan. It was a casual question, more to humour a child than anything else. How could a child of nine feel the greatness of this stupendous spiritual personality which even to the adults was an enigma? Yes, neither my mind nor my heart was awakened enough, ready to seize the import. But I felt a great vastness, a height in Sri Aurobindo which to my childish mind seemed as great as the Himalayas.

There and then I made up my mind that I must stay on. What exactly attracted me, I cannot say, for there were no children (incidentally I was the first child admitted), no school, no games; only about a hundred men and women with serious faces moved about, met at pranams, meditations and withdrew to their homes. They were distant and uncommunicative, except for Purani whom I nicknamed the policeman, and Barin-da.

My father was not prepared for this strange decision, for I was brought here more or less on an experimental basis; for my mother had died three years earlier and I had none to look after me; my father being a touring government official had no fixed establishment. My father had hesitatingly put everything before the Master who replied to say that though children were not admitted in the Ashram he could bring

his son. "Let us see what can be done," he added.

Again my father wrote to the Master when I told him my resolve to stay on. Sri Aurobindo advised me to go back for a few months and return after learning some English "so that he could talk to the Mother". Accordingly I left.

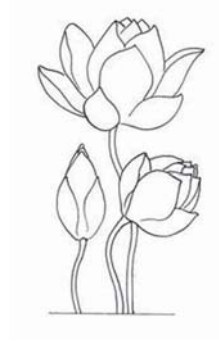
I returned in July 1930. My father stayed for a month and half. But he did nothing to arrange for my stay. And what could be done? There were no "homes", no people eager to keep boys. But the Divine Grace intervened in a strange way.

The wife of one of the first disciples of Sri Aurobindo agreed to look after me, while I stayed in an adjoining room vacated by her husband Bijoy Nag. All this happened almost without the knowledge of my father.

And I stayed on . . .

ROMEN PALIT

(*Breath of Grace*, edited by M. P. Pandit, published by Dipti Publications, 2002, pp. 92-95)



LONG BACK

I USED to read the *Arya* when I was living in the Victoria Hostels in Madras. I was sixteen then. I found in those pages just what I needed and I intensely wished to obtain what was there. Small booklets like the *Uttarpara Speech* also came into my hands and appealed to me very much. I wanted to see Sri Aurobindo very much. The opportunity arrived on the 7th of April 1921 when I came to Pondicherry and stayed for fifteen days.

I first saw Sri Aurobindo in the verandah of the Guest House upstairs. He was quite different from the figure in the familiar pictures. He had a big body; the colour was golden, particularly there was a golden light on the head and in the feet which was perceptible to my intense vision. I offered Pranam to him.

SRI AUROBINDO: What have you been doing?

I: I have read the *Ideal of Karmayogin* and have been practising it. I look upon the body as the chariot and Sri Krishna as the charioteer. I pray to Him.

SRI AUROBINDO: All right, continue.

After I left and returned to my host's house I had an experience in which I lost the body consciousness. I found myself moving in the air, to distant places like a bird. I felt myself a bird. It was all light and delight.

Later when I reported this experience to him, Sri Aurobindo said:

It is a symbolic vision; promise of the Light to come. Bird is the symbol of the soul.

As he was saying this I felt highly gratified that I had achieved something special. That very moment he added that it was a common experience.

While leaving he told me to write to him though I was not to expect replies. Accordingly I used to write to him every week. What is remarkable is that even before posting the letters I used to feel the effect.

It was in 1923 that, after passing out from Medical College, I could come away to stay with Sri Aurobindo permanently. At that time Purani was functioning as the manager of the household. And I learnt that referring to my coming Sri Aurobindo had said to him "Yoke him when he comes."

And I was yoked blissfully. I was put in charge of purchases etc. Sri Aurobindo used to give me fifteen rupees per month for each of the inmates (for Mess expenses) plus Rs. 40/- p.m. for house rent.

I used to get opportunities to meditate in Sri Aurobindo's presence along with one or two others. At times there would be loud noise downstairs of opening wooden cases etc. When one of us complained to him that the noise was interfering with the meditation, he answered:

You must be able to meditate on the battlefield.

Naturally I used to get different experiences during these sittings. There would be extreme delight which the body could not bear. There would be great peace. When

I asked him about this peace Sri Aurobindo said:

Mental peace is different from spiritual Peace. Spiritual Peace is unaltered by anything.

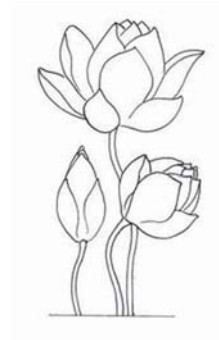
I also spoke to him of the Light that I used to feel descending into me. He remarked that what came from above was grappled by the mind and at times there was a mixture. I interrupted and said that there was no mixture in my case.

SRI AUROBINDO: After thirty years of sadhana I find there is a mixture. And you . . .!

In those days it used to be a common sight to see Sri Aurobindo sitting amidst others but he was really somewhere beyond, unreachable.

RAJANGAM

(*Breath of Grace*, edited by M. P. Pandit, published by Dipti Publications, 2002, pp. 85-86)



THE GAZE OF A GOD

IN 1928, inspired by Krishna Shambhu, our manager Garde went to the Ashram for the November Darshan. He had a deep respect for Sri Aurobindo as a political leader but knew nothing about Yogi Sri Aurobindo. He returned from the Ashram with an unshakable faith in the divinity of Sri Aurobindo. One day he narrated his experiences at the Ashram. This is what he told us:

I reached Pondicherry on the morning of November 23 and was taken to an Ashram house. In the afternoon a sadhak came to me and said, “Come for the Mother’s Darshan.” The man further informed me, “We make Pranam at the feet of the Mother and she blesses us by putting her hand on our heads.” I was from an orthodox Brahmin family. Also, I hardly knew anything about the Mother. I thought, “I have come here for Sri Aurobindo’s Darshan. It would be better if the Mother didn’t bless me.” Thinking thus I reached the Ashram. In those days the Mother used to see people in the Library Room. When I bowed to her she didn’t bless me and when I looked at her she said, “Sri Aurobindo will give Darshan tomorrow.” I wondered, “Why did the Mother say this?” She must have known what was in my mind and heart because she didn’t bless me, and also understood that I had come only for Sri Aurobindo’s Darshan.

In those days every person had a fixed time for Darshan. While somebody went in for Darshan and Pranam, the next person awaited him on the stairs. No one was supposed to see another person doing Pranam. On the next morning while I was awaiting my turn, out of curiosity, I peeped from behind the door and my gaze settled on Sri Aurobindo. At the same moment Sri Aurobindo looked at me. Suddenly I saw a serious and frightening form of Sri Aurobindo — the Upanishadic words *bheeshanam bheeshanam* flashed into my inner being. Frightened I drew back and thought, “I did something forbidden and so it had to bring this retribution.” Meanwhile my turn for Darshan came. After Pranam when I looked into the eyes of Sri Aurobindo I felt as if Sri Aurobindo’s eyes were telling me, “If you want to know me you can know me through the Mother.” And with this message some Power turned my neck towards the Mother. My eyes fell on the Mother who was looking at me with eyes full of infinite compassion. I did Pranam to the Mother and came out.

In late 1932 I received a letter from Krishna Shambhu. He suggested that I go to Pondicherry for the November Darshan.

...

In those days at 6 a.m. the Mother used to come to the Meditation Hall and

receive the Pranam of the disciples. In the beginning there would be a meditation for five minutes and then everyone did Pranam. The seating arrangement of the sadhaks and the order in which they made Pranam was fixed. On the morning of November 17 I went to the Ashram with Krishna Shambhu. For a long time I sat and observed how the people made Pranam and how the Mother blessed them. This scene made a great impact upon me. When a soul offers its whole being at the feet of the Supreme Lord and when that Divine Being leans down and accepts its own individual manifestation into Itself, that impressive and luminous event is beyond description.

When my turn came I stood up and with a palpitating heart knelt in front of the Mother and placed my head on her feet. When she put her hand on my head in blessing I raised my eyes and looked at her. Oh! What is this! In front of my eyes was a large living image of the Mother made of white marble. She had very large penetrating eyes. I felt she was looking at each atom of my being inside and outside. "The Gaze of a God," — I remembered this description from a Bengali story. For a long time I felt as if something had touched all my limbs.

On November 24, at the fixed time, I went for Darshan. After offering Pranam, when I looked at Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, I saw two living images of white marble sitting on the throne. Both had large soul-touching eyes of Gods. My being filled with great faith and a divine light and something within said, "Uma, Maheshwar".

From my very first day in Pondicherry I felt as if I had entered a different world. Whole days passed in a strange yet felicitous way.

CHANDRADEEP

(How They Came to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, Volume 3 by Shyam Kumari, published by Mother Publications, Bombay, 1990, pp. 113-15)



‘YOU ARE MY ALL’

IN 1920 I heard Sri Aurobindo’s name for the first time. I heard that Sri Aurobindo, a political leader, was doing yoga and always remained six inches above the ground! Naturally I was impressed by this. But slowly the memory faded. Then I heard his name again. In our school we had several boy-scout troops. Each of them was named after some great person — Vivekananda Troop, Tilak Troop, etc.; our troop was called “Aravinda Troop”.

...

The aunt of our Kamalaben, Bhaktiba, was fond of me. I worked with her, as a volunteer works for his leader. In January 1924 Bhaktiba returned from a visit to Pondicherry and went to stay at Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel’s house. One afternoon I was spinning cotton in my hostel, for it was my day to do twenty-four hours’ non-stop spinning. Bhaktiba sent Sardar Patel’s nephew to me with a message, though it was four miles away from Sardar Patel’s house. He came and said simply, “Bhaktiba has come from Pondicherry. She wants to see you.”

I was spinning. The word “Pondicherry” went on re-echoing in my being. And in one moment everything else dropped away. . . . Everything was obliterated from the canvas of my consciousness. Only one thing remained: Pondicherry.

In this state of mind I went to meet Bhaktiba. She knew of my inner aspiration and my way of life. I would have done anything for her. She said, pronouncing my old name, “Chunnibhai! your place is not with us. Your place is with Aravinda Babu. Go to him.”

I was only a youth. She was telling me to go to Aravinda Babu, but how should I go? Bhaktiba got permission for me from Sri Aurobindo and arranged everything for my trip. On 11 July 1924 I reached Pondicherry with my wife Kashibai — we had been married at the age of eight.

We arrived at the Ashram and sat at the place where the gate-keepers sit now. Amrita, then a young lad, came and said, “Chunnibhai, go upstairs. Sri Aurobindo is waiting for you.” We both went up.

Dark-complexioned and lean, he was sitting in a massive chair. He asked, “Why have you come?” I answered, “For yoga.” “What do you know of yoga?” he asked. But before I could answer he started speaking about yoga, and continued for almost an hour. He said many things, but I remember only this: that my heart simply became his and has remained his up to now, even after sixty-five years. People have questions and doubts, but no doubt ever arose in my mind, my heart never questioned. I felt, “You are my all. This is my life, this is my home.” I did not call it “the Ashram”, I called it “home”. I had this unshakable conviction: “Sri Aurobindo is my Lord and Pondicherry my home. Whatever they have belongs to me. So I do not have to think of anything.”

Kashibai offered her gold bangles to Sri Aurobindo. He asked, “What shall I do with them?” I replied, “You decide. If you want, sell them.” And that one Darshan changed everything. Everything was settled.

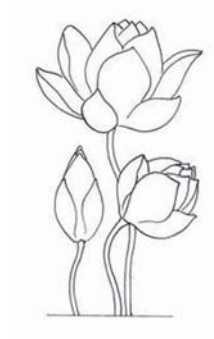
. . .

For me, even before I came here, Sri Aurobindo was more than Lord Krishna.

Sri Aurobindo named Mirra Alfassa as the Mother in November 1926; but for me she had been the Mother since my first visit in 1924, even though I had not seen her then. In 1924 she was living in seclusion and people had to take special permission to see her. To some it was a question, “Who is the Mother?” but never for me.

DYUMAN

(As recorded by Shyam Kumari in *How They Came to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother*, Volume 1, published by Mother Publishing House, Bombay, 1990, pp. 1-3. The text was drafted by Shyam Kumari and seen and approved by Dyuman.)



THEIR PRESENCE: VAST AND UNFATHOMABLE

I BEGAN my journey to Pondicherry, arriving on 11 August 1932.

In those days the main gate of the Ashram remained always closed. Outside the Ashram British spies kept constant vigil. Only in 1935 did this spying stop, due to the intercession with the Government by one of Sri Aurobindo's disciples, Duraiswami.

When I knocked at the Ashram gate, a sadhak serving as a watchman opened it and allowed me to enter. Then he asked, "What do you want?"

"I have come for the Ashram."

"Is anyone in the Ashram known to you?"

"No, but is Anilbaran Roy here? Could you see if he has received a letter about me?"

...

I asked the watchman for a piece of paper and a pencil and wrote a note to Anilbaran Roy which I gave to the watchman. I was told that Anilbaran did not see anyone or go out. Still the watchman told me to wait

At last Anilbaran Roy arrived and spared me about two minutes. I told him I had come to join the Ashram and requested his help. He told me I could write to Sri Aurobindo praying for permission for Darshan on August 15 and that he would deliver the letter and that the question of joining the Ashram would come later.

...

Darshan started. One by one sadhaks went upstairs. They were carrying flowers and garlands and many of them had envelopes in their hands. I thought that they were taking letters for Sri Aurobindo.

...

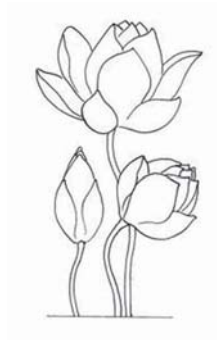
Anilbaran had earlier completed his Darshan and upon returning had assured me that he would come to take me upstairs when it was my turn. He came and gave me some flowers for offering. When he saw the letter in my hand, he told me that he would send it in the afternoon as now was not the proper time. I asked him, "What should I do in front of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother during Darshan?" He advised me to do whatever came from within.

On reaching upstairs I saw Sri Aurobindo and the Mother seated on a sofa. Their Presence was so vast and unfathomable that the whole of my being became submissive with reverence and gratitude. There was a Silence everywhere — so dense and complete that nothing could penetrate it. My inner being felt an indescribable glow of happiness. Somehow I was able to gather myself and move forward and surrender myself at their lotus feet. I felt the Mother was Parvati Uma and Sri Aurobindo was Lord Shiva blessing us upon the earth. I am a tiny human being, a small fry. How can I contain Sri Aurobindo — great like the Himalayas, vast like the ocean. But Sri Aurobindo was looking at me with divine compassion and the Mother was smiling

with so much love and benevolence! It is beyond my capacity to express the feeling I had on that day.

YOGANANDA

(How They Came to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, Volume 3 by Shyam Kumari, published by Mother Publications, Bombay, 1990, pp. 245-50)



WE ARRIVE

[The following account is based on Champaklal's diary.]

AT last, Natwarlal, Kanti and myself arrived at Pondicherry at 6 a.m. on April 1, 1921. Feeling that it was not proper to sit in rickshaws pulled by human beings we did not hire one. We walked the distance from the railway station to the residence of our host Narandas in Mary Street. Though it should have taken only ten minutes, it took us half an hour as we did not know the way. On reaching Narandas's house, we presented to him the letter of introduction given by Motilal Mehta. After we had our bath, we were blandly informed that there was a measles case in the house and so no meals could be served to us. I cooked my own meal, as I always did, and my companions went to *Amanivasam* [a popular restaurant in town].

My mind was impatient to see Sri Aurobindo and, though I attended to the daily chores, my attention was fixed there. But when we got ready to set out we were told not to go outdoors between 11.30 a.m. and 3.30 p.m. as it was scorching hot. Even dogs were not allowed to run about in the streets during that time, as it was believed that heatstroke caused rabies. We were told that unless they carried a proper collar, dogs found in the streets at this time were killed by government order.

However, we could not remain confined to the house for long and started out at 1 p.m. and came to the Guest House, where Sri Aurobindo was then staying. There we met Amrita and informed him that we had come from Bharooch in Gujarat. "Babuji is sleeping," he replied (Sri Aurobindo was addressed as 'Babuji' in those days) and told us to come back a little before 5 p.m. We said we would sit there and wait. But he told us that we couldn't sit there and must go back and come at the specified time. We felt dejected.

Then we went to the seashore and, in spite of our depression, found the place beautiful. We sat under a tree and passed some time thinking about Babuji. But we were forced to get up because of ants and went to the pier. Then with our minds still on Sri Aurobindo we went back and sat under another tree. In the cool breeze and peaceful atmosphere we were overpowered by sleep. We woke up at 3.45 p.m. and with our attention once more focussed on Babuji, came back to his temple. We sat in the verandah inside and asked Amrita for some water to drink. It was given and we eagerly quenched our thirst. I may mention here that though it was true that we were thirsty due to the climate, what made us ask for water was the desire to taste the *tirtha* in Sri Aurobindo's house. After Amrita had gone back we sat on. Some time later he came back and said, "Babuji is busy; I will call you." The call came at ten minutes to five.

Before that, as we were sitting in the verandah, we heard someone coming down the stairs. As soon as his foot touched the floor I spontaneously ran forward. I felt it must be Sri Aurobindo. I touched his lotus feet and prostrated myself in *sashtanga*

dandavat pranam [with feet, trunk, shoulders, palms and head touching the floor like a rod — signifying surrender of the whole being]. Then he proceeded to the courtyard. Later I was to learn from the Mother that it was at a corresponding spot on the first floor that she had first seen Sri Aurobindo; that was at 3.30 p.m. on 29th March 1914. And I had, rather I was granted, the good fortune of meeting him just at that spot.

When we went upstairs Sri Aurobindo was seated in the verandah. I saw nothing except him and when I prostrated before him I lay there for one full hour. I just could not get up. No one disturbed me. At the end of that hour Sri Aurobindo placed his hand on my head, blessed me and said, “Tomorrow.” Then I got up.

A number of chairs had been placed near the table in front of Sri Aurobindo’s chair. We were asked to sit there but we squatted on the floor by his side. He asked us our names and enquired about Dikshit-bhai and Punamchand-bhai; then he asked me: “Do you know English?” I said I did not. He began in Hindi and asked how we all had come.

C: “A group led by Dikshit-bhai walked down from Bharooch to Bilimora and thence we three were sent by train.”

Sri Aurobindo: “How long do you wish to stay here?”

C: “As long as you will permit us.”

He looked around and smiled. Then he told us to come the next day and added that he would receive us after 4.30 p.m. He got up and we too stood up. He did namaskar and we did the same. Then he started towards his room and we remained standing till he entered it. When Amrita asked us to leave it was almost 6.10. When we left we were in a trance-like condition, our eyes could hardly remain open. No wonder we lost our way. Somehow we reached home, cooked our meal, ate it and, after some polite conversation with Narandas, still thinking of Babuji we fell asleep.

You ask me what were my reactions on my first darshan of Sri Aurobindo. Well, after getting up from my *sashtanga dandavat pranam* at his feet upstairs, I felt that I had nothing more to do in my life. This feeling itself was evident proof of our having ‘arrived’.

The next day (2nd April), we went through the morning duties, had our afternoon rest and got ready to leave around four o’clock, but throughout, our thoughts remained centred on Babuji. We reached his house and sat in the verandah downstairs. It was 4.30 but nobody came down and we became impatient for Babuji’s darshan. Finally, at 4.55 p.m. Amrita came and escorted us upstairs. As soon as we approached Sri Aurobindo we prostrated and our eyes touched his lotus feet. For about fifteen minutes we sat quietly, then the following conversation took place.

Sri Aurobindo: “How many people are there at Kashi-bhai’s?” He stopped after uttering Kashi-bhai’s name. The ashram was known as Dikshit-bhai’s, not Kashi-bhai’s.

C: “Twenty, and a family associated with the ashram there.”

Sri Aurobindo: “What are Dikshit and Punamchand doing there?”

C: "Why do you ask that? You know everything."

Sri Aurobindo smiled and almost whispered: "Yes, I know." Then looking round at all sitting there he laughed heartily.

Sri Aurobindo: "What are you doing in yoga?"

C: "I don't know what is yoga. I am practising something taught by Dikshit-bhai and Punamchand-bhai."

Sri Aurobindo: "What is the practice you are doing?"

C: "Whatever work I do I offer to the Lord and I offer through you."

Sri Aurobindo: "How many practise yoga there? Give me their names."

I gave the names.

Sri Aurobindo: "Do you feel anything during this practice?"

C: "Yes, sometimes peace; I see at times light also."

Sri Aurobindo smiled very sweetly. Then he asked: "Yes, but has Dikshit explained to you how to dedicate everything?"

C: "No. He has only told us that we must be complete instruments."

Sri Aurobindo: "How?"

C: "I don't know."

Sri Aurobindo: "You see, the peace which you feel shows that God is near you. The Light you see suggests that you will be able to meet him in that peace and light. Gradually you will be able to stay in this state."

C: "Sometimes I feel that the light is inside me."

Sri Aurobindo: "It means God is within you. Are you practising this?"

C: "Yes."

Sri Aurobindo remained silent for some time. Then asked: "What made you come here?"

I answered in some detail.

Sri Aurobindo: "Do they read any papers there?"

C: "I don't know."

Sri Aurobindo: "Do you read the *Standard Bearer*?"

C: "At times. When I find there something that ought to be practised I note it down."

Sri Aurobindo: "How long did you stay in Bombay?"

C: "Four days."

Sri Aurobindo: "Where did you stay?"

C: "Near Motilal Mehta's bungalow."

Sri Aurobindo: "Now what are you going to do at your place?"

C: "We have not decided yet. We are thinking of doing some farming."

Sri Aurobindo: "Someone went to Chandernagore with Dikshit. Who was that?"

C: "Dwarkanath Harkare who lived in Gandhi Ashram."

Sri Aurobindo: "Who is he?"

C: "A Maharashtrian." (Harkare had once stayed in our study-home in Patan

and taken a keen interest in me.)

It was 6.05 p.m. by now and Sri Aurobindo went into his room saying: “Now, tomorrow.”

Now the third day. We got up at 6 a.m. After the day’s routine we sat waiting for 4 o’clock. Our hearts were full of expectations and ardent for Babuji’s darshan. Today, my mind had decided, there must be a long discussion with Sri Aurobindo; specific questions needed to be asked, and if time was too short, at least one particular one was indispensable. Joy seemed to be overflowing. But time refused to move! A thought came that we could pass the time in sleep! But today that too became difficult; finally, since we were determined, the goddess of Sleep enveloped us. After waking up we got ready quickly and set off. We went to the seashore and after a brief walk reached Babuji’s temple at 4.10 p.m. Several times we sent word to Amrita. He would only say: “Babuji will see you at five. You will be called.” Thereafter we tried to spend the time in japa and meditation, but it was very difficult to keep waiting. Finally we were called at 5 p.m.

After pranam when Sri Aurobindo started speaking, I said: “Please indulge us by speaking in Gujarati.”

He laughed and said: “I knew Gujarati when I was in Baroda but now I have forgotten it.”

C: “You know everything.”

He laughed and laughed.

C: “You can speak at least in Hindi.”

Sri Aurobindo: “That too I don’t know.”

C: “You certainly know Hindi.”

And then he spoke in Hindi explaining what is meditation.

During our stay of eight days, several other things happened. Sri Aurobindo asked me to try to see the Divine Shakti of the Lord that is at work everywhere, in everything. When I asked him what books I should read, he told me to read *Prakriti Rahasya* (Secret of Nature) in Gujarati and Shandilya’s *Bhakti Sutra*. He explained the subject dealt with in *Prakriti Rahasya* and told me that it was written by a disciple of Motilal Roy of Chandernagore who lived in Navsari. When I read that book I experienced the awakening in me of something that perceived beauty everywhere.

Once I asked Sri Aurobindo: “When will I have realisation?”

In reply he told me the following story of Narada:

Two devotees were doing their sadhana in a forest for many years. Once when Narada passed by, one of them asked him, “Bhagavan [a form of addressing holy and venerable souls], you are regularly visiting the Lord. Would you kindly ask Him on my behalf when I shall be able to get His darshan?” A little further Narada met the second devotee. He too entreated him to ask the Lord the same question. On his return Narada told the first devotee, “You will see the Lord after as many births as there are leaves on the tree under which you are doing your tapasya.” The devotee was utterly

disappointed and gave up his sadhana. When Narada met the second devotee and told him the same thing, he felt unbounded joy and began to dance in delight: “Oh, after all I am certain to see the Lord!” The promise filled him with such an intense joy that he lost all sense of self and realised the Lord that very instant.

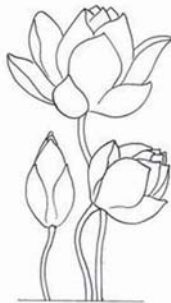
Thus Sri Aurobindo described to us how the time when we will realise the Divine depends on the one-pointedness and intensity of our aspiration.

When I asked Sri Aurobindo if we could see his room, he smiled, said “Yes”, and pointed towards his room. The three of us went inside unescorted. There, on his table, I saw an old pocket-watch. A thought crossed my mind that if I had the means I would get a better watch for his use and request this one for myself. The thought arose and disappeared like a sudden wave. (It had an interesting sequel. One day, after I had settled here and started working with the Mother, she brought that watch and asked me if I would like to keep it. I was amazed but did not answer because I had firmly decided never to take anything from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, but to offer whatever I could. All the same she gave it to me.)

We had not decided on which day we would leave Pondicherry. On the eighth day we all felt it to be the last day; for every evening, when we took leave of Sri Aurobindo after being near him for an hour, he used to say, “Now, tomorrow.” But this time he said, “Whenever you meet with a difficulty, remember me”, and after a pause, “Write to me.” So we understood it was the last day. The wonder was that all that we wanted to ask Sri Aurobindo, all that we had to tell him, was over in the first two or three days, and yet every day, when we were leaving he used to say, “Now, tomorrow.” This shows how he showered his infinite grace to keep us in his presence for some more days.

CHAMPAKLAL

(*Champaklal Speaks*, by Champaklal, edited by M. P. Pandit, revised by Roshan, published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2002, pp. 6-14)



‘FIRST EXPERIENCE OF HER FORCE’

IN the preceding chapters I kept the Mother somewhat in the background because to the superficial view hers must appear a personality very distinct from that of Sri Aurobindo. But one who has won to the deeper vision and tried to follow the phenomenal growth of the Ashram cannot but be persuaded that without her dominating presence, superhuman patience and genius for organisation (not to mention her ineffable personality of light and grace and courage) Sri Aurobindo’s Synthetic Yoga would never have found the convincing shape it has: in other words, his gospel could not have found an adequate medium of expression in the practical field. But even this is by no means the whole story. For none can hope to understand Sri Aurobindo fully without a basic understanding of his estimate of the place of the Mother’s divinity in his Yoga. One of his oldest and staunchest disciples, Rajani Palit, wrote to him (in August, 1938): “There are many who hold that the Mother was human once upon a time — to judge from her *Prayers* — but has outgrown her humanity through her *sadhana*. But, to my psychic feeling, she is the Mother Divine herself, putting on the cloak of obscurity and suffering in order that we, humans, may be delivered out of our ignorance into knowledge, and out of our suffering into bliss.”

To that Sri Aurobindo replied categorically: “The Divine puts on an appearance of humanity, assumes the outward human nature in order to tread the path and show it to human beings, but does not cease to be the Divine. It is a manifestation that takes place, a manifestation of a growing divine consciousness, not human turning into divine. The Mother was inwardly above the human even in childhood, so the view held by the ‘many’ is erroneous.”

It will serve no useful purpose to go into the why and wherefore of it all. For after all the recognition of the Mother’s greatness or her Yogic Force is not like the posting of a scientific hypothesis to be ‘assumed and accepted tentatively’ subject to revision and modification as new data come to light. Still, as one of the major aims of my reminiscences is to testify to Yogic truths and experiences as I and others have realised them in the Ashram, a personal impression of the Mother may well be recorded here as germane to my purpose. Naturally, I hesitate to deal with a personality such as the Mother’s in such a summary fashion, but she will, I hope, pardon such babbling tributes knowing that even in our inspired moods we can hardly expect to express more than a fraction of what we owe to her.

I shall describe in brief my first experience of her Force since it may help my readers to glimpse in her what we ourselves did intermittently in the course of our day-to-day struggles with our obstinate egos opposing her will.

When I met her for the first time in August 1928, I was struck by her sweet personality and felt a deep exhilaration which I could not account for. The joy left a cadence of music in my heart though, of course, there could be no question of surrendering my will to hers. The first question I asked her was whether what Sri

Aurobindo called Yogic Force acting through her personality could achieve anything “tangible”.

She gave me an amused smile.

“What do you mean by ‘tangible’?”

“You see, Mother,” I answered, “I have been praying daily before Sri Ramakrishna’s photograph for years — since my adolescence. But though I have often felt an upsurge of *bhakti*, I have never yet felt anything else, far less seen any gardens of gleam, letters of light, figures of flame etc. I have therefore come to the conclusion that I am too opaque to the inward ray of the spirit. I know really less than nothing about Yogic Force. Let me add that though my interest in life as it is, is fast petering out I cannot yet make up my mind to take the plunge — breaking away from my moorings. To cut a long story short, I would ask you if you could possibly initiate me in your Yoga — for I understand I have to obtain initiation, first and last, from you. I can accept to wait till I feel more sure about your Yogic Force being a living reality. My position is this: I can stake everything I still cherish — but only for something real and concrete, *not something vague and apocryphal*. In short, I cannot take a leap blindfold into the unknown. So I have come to ask you very simply — but trenchantly — whether you can possibly give me a trial so as to convince me about the reality of your Yogic Force. But mind you, I want the Force to speak to me in a way which cannot possibly be explained away as auto-suggestion, wishful thinking or hallucination.”

Mother smiled once more.

“I can try,” she said simply. “You are at the Hotel? When do you retire for the night? At nine? Meditate at that hour in your room — try to open yourself to me and I will concentrate on you from here. Maybe you will get something which cannot be explained away even by such impressive names scientific or otherwise.”

(I have of course given here, as usual, only the gist of our talk. But as we did not talk of anything very profound I can claim to have given a fairly faithful description of what passed between us on the 16th August, 1928.)

The experience came in a most curious way. As, after dinner, I went up to my room in the Hotel, I sat down on the floor. It was quite cool with the fan whirling at top speed. I must here inform the reader that I have never been timid by nature, nor had I, hitherto, ever experienced anything eerie or even strange during my meditations. An old disciple had indeed once advised me, casually, to take the Mother’s name should anything ‘untoward’ happen. But I had only smiled at the word. How could anything untoward happen to me when I only wanted Krishna? Besides, ghosts and spirits were too fantastic to be able to exist except, of course, as vapours of a heated brain.

So, naturally, I sat down to meditation in a flawlessly confident mood. I did indeed expect to see so many things, lights, colours, some figures, with luck maybe even a radiant form — who knows? But then, I told myself, I must be on my guard: strong desires and expectations might very well take shape as forms in one’s meditation

and auto-suggestion must, above all, be staved off — and so on. In short, in my wise folly, I was unwittingly arming myself with vigilance against my Gurus.

Suddenly I found my body stiffening and I started perspiring profusely; then — to complete my discomfiture — my heart beat so fast that I got scared. What is all this? Suddenly I remembered and took the Mother's name. At once the palpitation ceased. But I was wet all over with perspiration, and the tension in my body increased till my muscles became so stiff that I felt a positive pain.

As soon as the palpitation ceased, my fear left me but not my astonishment. For, palpably, some extraneous force *was* acting on my body — a force the like of which I had never experienced so vividly before! Also, obviously, it had nothing to do with auto-suggestion since I had never even imagined that an invisible Force could so convincingly twist the live, material muscles of a strong sceptic — healthy, wide-awake and normal to his finger-tips! So I did not know what to make of it all: what came to pass was too outlandish to be true and yet wasn't it too concrete to be dismissed as fanciful!

* * *

But that was, alas, all. I saw nothing — not even a grasshopper, to say nothing of a benevolent deity — felt no joy, no peace, no strength, no *bhakti*. Most disappointing and yet in a way so utterly, overwhelmingly impressive! For a person almost inaccessible to fear was here getting scared, a heart which had never palpitated was fluttering causelessly! And last, though not the least, profuse perspiration, in a cool room, attended by the sensation of one's muscles being actually manhandled all over the body! I was convinced that a definite Force was taking liberties with me — albeit in an almost impertinent way!

Next morning, after relating to Mother the whole gamut of my curious experiences, I asked her why she had so oddly wanted to cause me this kind of meaningless pain when she could well have given me peace and joy and so many other things worthwhile.

"But I didn't want to cause you pain at all," she laughed, vastly tickled. "Only, you were resisting, so my Force could not give you the peace and joy which you would have felt if you had not opposed it tooth and nail, with all the weapons of your wise scepticism and assured ignorance. One must have trust in the Divine."

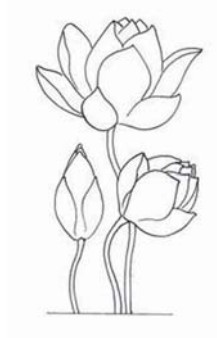
"But you need not worry," she added, mollifyingly, "for I have found you quite receptive. I will say no more now. Go on with your meditations: my help will always be with you. The tension and pain will disappear after a week or two — or perhaps sooner if you can manage to trust the Divine grace which brought you to Sri Aurobindo."

* * *

What she had foretold came to pass afterwards, in due course. I was impressed, naturally. So there were, *really and literally*, “more things in heaven and earth” than could be dreamt of by the “philosophy” of reason and science!

DILIP KUMAR ROY

(*Sri Aurobindo Came to Me* by Dilip Kumar Roy, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1952, pp. 424-30)



THE MASTER AS I SEE HIM

It is not for the first time, in this life, that I see my Master. From age to age, through lives innumerable, have I known him and loved him and served him. As father, as lover, as friend, has he appeared unto me, again and again, and blessed my otherwise purposeless journeys on this planet. Now and then, clouds have obscured my vision, and I have failed to recognise my pole-star, but this has never been for long. Never has he, in his infinite compassion, forsaken me, a weak half-blind and insignificant creature pursuing his solitary path of self-seeking. His Shakti has lifted me out of the mire, led me out of the gloom, and taught me the art of seeking him, of seeing him, not in a heaven above, but in this ever-changing universe that surrounds me. Thus have I tasted of his grace, thus have I had glimpses of the Truth, again and again. I have my lapses into the semi-obscurity of my mental horizon. But these trouble me no longer, for has not the Master shown me the radiant face of the Sun of suns!

In fact, my mortal body and life and mind are ceasing to be a burden to me, for I know now that they are but the abode of my true and immortal Self. And my true Self, it is the Self of all, it is my Master's Self, it is the *one* Self in the universe and beyond. This body then, this life, this mind, is to me, not a prison as the illusionist wails, but the tabernacle of Him, the One without a second, the One that has become Many in his own infinite self-delight.

Lest I forget this, O Sovereign Lord! Thou hast appeared unto me in Thy dual personality, Purusha and Prakriti, Master and Mother, with Thy message of peace, peace over all the earth, and oneness of all with Thy eternal Self.

Long, very long, has man remained forgetful of his luminous self and his bright destiny. He has lost sight of the radiant gem in the lotus of his heart, and has been travelling along the devious paths of egoism, preying on his fellows and living on his environment. Messengers from on high have appeared, from time to time, to remind him of his true nature. He has listened to them for the while, but has, alas! forgotten it all again. Inspired individuals have come and achieved their own liberation and passed away. But the bondage of the world has continued. Nature has her own strides in the path of evolution, she will not be hustled.

Man, however, is her cherished product. It is through him, through her favourite child, that her evolution has to proceed. In the Master's words, the individual is the key of evolution. Starting as a speck of cosmic dust he has stage by stage progressed through the ages, arriving finally at manhood. Then began his serious trials. He did not mind. Through tangled forest and over arid plains, across mighty rivers and over lofty mountains, in fair weather and foul, he travelled, but ever going forward. Today a terrible tempest, a blinding blizzard, has overtaken him as he is struggling along in a deep morass, the deepest bog he has had to negotiate so far. He is up to his neck in group egoism, power lust and blood lust.

Yet, man can get through if he wills it, if he realises the divinity in himself. For

it is only by the light of the gem within that he can see his way. He may choose to persist in his ignorance and leave his bones to rot in the slime of the marsh. He has the right to choose, for has he not been endowed with reason and intelligence! But in any case he cannot stop nature's evolution. If he drops out of it, nature will choose another medium. This is the Master's solemn warning.

"Unless therefore the race is to fall by the wayside and leave the victory to other and new creations of the eager travailing Mother, it must aspire to this ascent, conducted indeed through love, mental illumination and the vital urge to possession and self-giving, but leading beyond to the supramental unity which transcends and fulfils them."

This warning does not trouble me, so sure am I of His love, of His infinite compassion. He will not allow man to perish by the roadside. Krishna's assurance to Arjun in the Gita was,

"For whensoever there is the fading of the Dharma and the uprising of unrighteousness, then I loose myself forth into birth. For the deliverance of the good, for the destruction of the evil-doers, for the enthroning of the Right, I am born from age to age."

Such crises, however, have always a spiritual seed or intention. Merely for an outward action, however great, the special manifestation of an avatar is not needed. Even such epoch-making events as the Reformation in Europe or the Revolution in France required a change in the general consciousness that was merely mental and dynamic, not spiritual, and consequently did not require the direct guidance of Divinity incarnate.

Before the battle of Kurukshetra a crisis with a deep spiritual significance had undoubtedly come upon India, and the Lord out of his immeasurable love for humanity came down to the earth, destroyed the wicked, delivered the good and established the kingdom of righteousness. Today, the crisis that has overtaken humanity is an infinitely more serious one. It seems as if all that man has achieved so far has gone into the melting pot. His ideals, his standards, his sense of values, everything appears to have gone awry. Unrighteousness is rampant and Dharma is fading away. The moment is propitious for the descent of the Lord, and He has so descended. Blessed are they that have bowed down at His feet!

Such is the Master I seek to serve. He has not yet declared Himself. He has not yet said, — The ignorant and the deluded do not recognise me in my human guise, they do not know me as the great Lord of all existences. But it matters not. Those eyes, what do they show but ineffable peace and supreme bliss! That face, every line of it indicates almighty might and infinite compassion! Through the transparent frame shines soft yet bright the Divine light of the One Eternal that transcends both Knowledge and Ignorance, both Heaven and Earth.

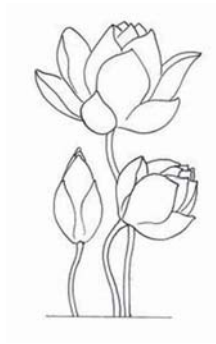
Lord, Thou hast, I know, come down to destroy the evil-doer and to deliver the righteous. But very much more hast Thou come down to show me what I can rise to become, to demonstrate to me that the humblest of men can become God in his

terrestrial body. Thy descent into humanity will raise man into the Godhead. Thy descent is my ascent.

Such is the full significance of the Master's advent. May a distracted world realise this, and with the completest submission to Him take boldly the leap upward into the region of the Supermind.

C. C. DUTT

(*Sri Aurobindo Mandir* Annual Number 50, 1991, pp. 175-78)



SRI AUROBINDO AND THE MOTHER AS I SAW THEM . . .

“DIFFICULTIES come not single, but in battalions”, came true in my case, even at the age of fourteen. But they were a blessing in disguise; for they turned me Godward. I was seized with the spirit of renunciation, and more so after I came into contact with the works of Shankara, Vivekananda, Ramatirtha and the Vairagya school of philosophy. Ascetic life is only a preparation for something higher, which I did not envisage clearly. There was a deep yearning and aspiration to know the Divine. But there was no guide to lead me towards the goal. Mantra and Japa helped me to a great extent. Pranayama I practised without anybody’s guidance. Shyness to approach others was a drawback in me. And having approached some who could not give me the necessary help, I became desperate and depressed. At last I resigned myself to fate.

It is said that an earnest seeker after Truth will be taken to the Divine Guide or the latter himself will go to the seeker and help the aspiring soul. The former happened in my case. On one Christmas evening, in 1920, I suddenly started for Pondicherry to see the Great Master Sri Aurobindo. A friend of mine also followed me, though for a different purpose. Though there was an initial disappointment in not having the Darshan of the mighty Master, I had his Darshan the second day. I was also fortunate enough to meet the gracious Mother before I saw the Master.

How to describe these divine personalities? This is possible only to those who have dived deep and gone very high up and become wide and luminous. The serene, sweet and beautiful divine personality of the Mother touched me even at the first sight of her. I did not know then that she was destined to lead thousands of persons to Purity, Light, Strength, Peace and Perfection in future.

Sri Aurobindo appeared to me like the great Shiva whom I had been worshipping for a very long time. He was all golden, not figuratively but actually. In the ancient Hindu spiritual works, gods and goddesses and great Rishis are described as golden (*hiranya varnam, hiranmayam*), the supramental colour. With a smooth golden body emitting light and flowing locks over his shoulders glowing bright, and shining eyes penetrating deep into everything, Sri Aurobindo was majestic in his appearance. His gait was royal and when he was pacing to and fro in the verandah, he appeared to be drawing force and using it according to his divine will. Sri Aurobindo’s touch was magnetic and awakened the slumbering cells into life and activity.

About four months after I had the first Darshan of the Master, I went to him again for a few days’ stay. Afterwards, from July 1921, I stayed with the Master for three years. It is not possible to record here all the innumerable experiences I had due to the grace of the Master. As a matter of fact, everybody got experiences according to his nature, opening and aspiration and surrender. In an integral yoga, multiple ways are opened to multiple personalities to know the Integral Truth. I shall describe

here some aspects of the Master's personality as it appeared to external man. For to know him or judge him fully is impossible for anyone, unless one is able to reach his level which was supramental and far above it. The common man is interested to know how a spiritual person acts, talks and how he deals with others. Even here we cannot judge him according to our standards, for the ways of the divine person are mysterious.

Sri Aurobindo lived a secluded life, confined to his room. But this did not mean that he did not speak to anyone or was always silent and grave. On the other hand, he used to meet persons, sadhakas and outsiders both in the morning and evening for about an hour. In the mornings, between 9 and 10 a.m. he used to see visitors and sadhakas also. I was going to him now and then in the morning to narrate my experiences and clear some doubts. At that time, I used to feel the aroma of lotuses in his presence. In those days there were no flowers kept on his table and much less lotuses. When I told some friends about this, they said that it was my psychic sense and nothing more. They could not explain the phenomenon. But I read in some books on Rajayoga later on that great yogis emitted this lotus fragrance from their divine bodies.

When explaining things Sri Aurobindo used to raise his palm and the lines in his palm which were prominent could be seen well. I was curious to know about the significance of these lines according to Western palmistry. I could see well separated the life line and the head line and the heart line which were all deep and well-marked in a royal palm as it were. Apart from these, the line of fate was well marked and could be seen rising from the wrist and going straight up the centre of the palm to the mount of Saturn. This line indicated success, fame and brilliance in the path chosen by the Master. The heart line was deep, clear and well coloured. The line of head not too widely separated and one end of it commencing on the mount of Jupiter or with its main branch from the mount of Jupiter is one of the most brilliant marks of all according to Cheiro. A deep cut and fine head line could be seen which indicates a brilliant mind. Sri Aurobindo had artistic fine philosophic fingers with a firm thumb and bright shining nails. An elementary study of the lines mentioned above characterises the person possessing these as having a balanced head and heart and great will power, noble affection for others and being a man of destiny. If a great palmist had taken the palm impression of this mighty person he might have given more interesting details. I have mentioned what everybody could see easily when Sri Aurobindo raised his palm when talking to people.

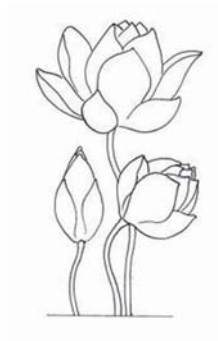
Sri Aurobindo was pacing to and fro fast in his room and verandah for six to eight hours a day, meditating on persons, things and events and on himself. When doing so it appeared as if he was in a high state of consciousness and gave the impression of a Shiva or Mahakali with dishevelled hair moving about willing great things.

When the Master sat on his chair for conversation he was sometimes very silent

and serene and other times quite jovial and laughing and cutting jokes and mixing with one and all. Often his gaze was upward as if he was stationed high above and came down to the level of ordinary persons when talking to them. He was always alert and never in the so-called samadhi state with closed eyes at the meditation time. Clad in a dhoti in all seasons of the year, he was equal to heat and cold. With regard to food, he was never punctilious about taste or richness or delicacies of food. Whatever was given he tasted with equal rasa . . .

T. KODANDARAMA RAO

(*Breath of Grace*, edited by M. P. Pandit, published by Dipti Publications, 2002,
pp. 43-46)



HOW AND WHY I CAME TO PONDICHERRY

WHILE I was at the Navsari Ashram, I was in correspondence with my school teacher, Sri Rambhai who was living in Pondicherry. After the establishment of the Ashram in Pondicherry in November 1926, I wrote for permission to join it. The Mother asked for my photograph and it was sent to her. I was accepted as one of the sadhakas and left Navsari for Pondicherry in the last week of December 1927.

When I alighted at Pondicherry station, my schoolteacher Sri Rambhai, who had come to receive me, told me that Sri Aurobindo had retired into complete seclusion and the Ashram was being run by the Mother. This was news to me. I was both surprised and pained. But Sri Rambhai added that I was to meet the Mother at 11 a.m. the next day in the library-room of the Ashram and that she had got a room cleaned and furnished for me. During the very first night of my stay in that room, I had a wonderful experience. I dreamt as if a wonderful golden sun was shining in front of me and I became a small flame with my gaze fixed on it. I spent the whole night in indescribable bliss. The next day was the 31st of December and, when I met the Mother on that day, I saw shining over her the same sun which I had seen in my dream the previous night. Spontaneously I bowed down to her and obtained her blessings.

I got my first opportunity to see Sri Aurobindo on February 21, 1928. It was a great experience and I felt that the decision I had made while at school to accept Sri Aurobindo as my guru was perfectly right. I, therefore, surrendered myself heart and soul to him and felt reassured that he would save me from all my sins in the same way as Sri Krishna had promised Arjuna. When I had my second darshan of Sri Aurobindo in the August of 1928, he was satisfied with my yearnings for sadhana and progress in it and conveyed his satisfaction and had sent compliments to me through the Mother. After that day my spiritual bond with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother continually grew stronger and my gurus helped me in my sadhana with all their spiritual powers.

In 1929 Barindrakumar, the younger brother of Sri Aurobindo, left the Ashram without informing the Mother or taking her permission. Next morning the Mother sent a note asking me to shift to that room vacated by Barindrakumar. This room was situated [behind] Sri Aurobindo's room, on the first floor of the office of the building department of the Ashram where I was working. A road was running between the Master's residence and my room.

In this way, the Master's grace granted me the boon of physical nearness, when I was striving to understand the real meaning of the word "yoga", and the significance of the retirement of the Master. One day during meditation, the Master made me understand that the meaning of the word "yoga" is to unite, to establish inner relation. "It is for teaching the sadhakas the way to establish the inner relation that I have withdrawn, so that I can help them in a better way."

In 1931, I felt the longing to withdraw from the outer world, to hark to the music of the inner Self, who was calling me. I informed the Mother of my feeling, Sri

Aurobindo replied immediately: “You can withdraw if you are feeling so. The Mother will make all necessary arrangements for you.” When one accepts a guru, and the guru takes him to his heart; when their relation is deep and intimate enough, the disciple approaches and identifies himself with the Master; the Master receives him with all love and makes him sit in his great heart and he takes his seat in the heart of the disciple. They remain no more separate entities, but begin to live in union.

It was for this reason that I was granted the physical nearness. It was the Master who had suggested me to retire, so that he can teach me how to establish intimacy and union. In this way, he started sadhana within me and gave me hundreds of experiences and wrote hundreds of letters to explain them. During meditation, when I rushed to him, entered his heart, united and identified with him . . . he would . . . tell me . . . “I am with you.” I can see his majestic form standing there to respond to the call of his devotee, defying all rules and breaking all bondages . . .

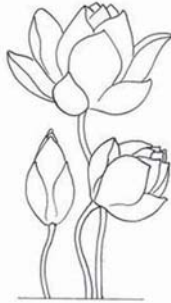
Here is the graceful bounty of the Divine Master . . .

“A mutual debt binds man to the Supreme:
His nature we must put on as He puts ours;
We are sons of God and must be even as he:
His human portion, we must grow divine.
Our life is a paradox with God for key.”

Savitri

GOVINDBHAI PATEL

(*My Pilgrimage of the Spirit* by Govindbhai Patel, published by Gift Publication, Ahmedabad, 1974, 1977 2nd ed., pp. 5-7)



THAT TOUCH I COULD NEVER FORGET — A REMEMBRANCE FROM CHILDHOOD

I AM Ardhendu. I live in Aspiration and I am in Auroville since 1970, when I was just ten years old. I would like to start with a quotation from Sri Aurobindo which is about Mother: “The one whom we adore as the Mother is the divine conscious force that dominates all existence.”

This is actually my mantra or . . . everything. I begin the day with this prayer and end the day with it. It’s a continuous process. And in the middle of the day also, anytime when I feel that I need to take the name of the Mother, I use this — the same thing, these few lines of Sri Aurobindo about the Mother — and it gives me so much of strength, joy and happiness that I really cannot express it. It is just wonderful.

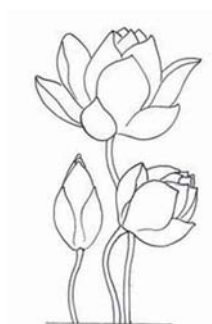
I had come to Pondicherry, from West Bengal, at the beginning of 1970 and visited the Mother with my family, — that is, with my parents, and my sister and brother. I have a sister who is working now and others are no more, excepting my aunty. Parents have passed away. It was on my mother’s birthday that we visited together. People waited in a long queue and were called in one by one. I just saw the Mother and felt, “Okay, this is the Mother. Okay.” At that time I did not have much feeling. We just did *pranam* like this, our Indian way, and came out. That was my first visit. Of course on darshan days we saw Mother at the balcony. But the occasion to see her individually again came on my birthday on 7th November 1970. I got the permission card from Nolini Kanta Gupta, the secretary, and joined the queue. I was carrying a bouquet of flowers and was sitting down with twelve or thirteen devotees who had their birthday on the same day. I was just ten years of age and watched as everyone went, one by one, to the Mother for darshan and *pranam*. When I saw that everyone had gone and being left out I felt, “What happened? Won’t the Mother call me?” Then the last call came. There was a loud cry: ‘Ardhendu!’ I was trembling and felt, “Who is this?” and got up. That was also my first meeting with Champaklal. With his long beard and huge body he was standing at the entrance and said, “Come, come, come.” Then I did not even know one word in English; I knew only Bengali. So when he said, “Come, come,” I asked, “What?” He showed his hand towards the Mother and asked me to go. As I entered, I turned left and saw her sitting on her armchair, dressed in blue. I did not know what to do. I was alone in the room with Champaklal. I slowly took a step, turned and looked at her. It was totally different from what I saw the previous time when I visited with my parents. I was just looking at her because I did not know what to say, because I did not know English, French, Tamil or any other language but Bengali. I just told, of course in Bengali, “O You!” (*tumi* in Bengali). Her feet were not visible. So without hesitating I dropped my head on her lap. I knew that because I was the last person, nobody was going to ask me to get up and go. I decided to stay, even for the whole day. With her right hand she touched my head. Oh! That touch I could never forget. Her hand was so soft, the

softest I ever felt. Even today, I freshly remember and have the same feeling her touch gave me. Wherever I am, whatever I am doing, I just have to remember it and I get the feeling. I almost slept or went into a sleep state. It lasted for seven or eight minutes. I had a small box of toffees. Then slowly another ‘Ardhendu’, Mother called. I was trying to touch her feet, but I could not because they were drawn inside. Then I said, “Yes.” “You, open your box.” It was repeated in Hindi and English. I could not understand. Then Champaklal told in Bengali. Then I realised and opened and held it for her like this (the speaker shows his hand). She just touched it. I am still holding it.

Again there was a shout from Champaklal, “Mother, take a toffee from it.” Mother looked at me and at Champaklal and put her three fingers in the box. She did not pick up the one at the surface but took one from the bottom and she nodded like this and said something in French or English which I don’t remember now. Then she smiled again. Again with my box I put my head on her lap. Like this I was there for another two to three minutes. Then Champaklal, again speaking in Bengali, told me, “Ardhendu, this is the time now.” There was nothing I could say so slowly I asked her, “Please?” and again I kept my head on her lap. Three times I did that. That was a wonderful thing I had with Mother. I cannot forget that. Never. Even in my next birth, I would be able to remember it. It was wonderful, her hand so soft and her smile. I have never seen a smile like that. This is how I met the Mother.

ARDHENDU

(*Darshan – Remembering Sweet Mother and Sri Aurobindo*, published by Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research, Auroville, 2006, pp. 199-201)



A SOLID PEACE

THE MOTHER has said, “We have all been together before.” And I feel convinced that it was She who called me here. For it was on the most auspicious day of 21st February in 1946, that I touched the sacred soil of India.

My father, when he was in India during the war, had time to read books on spirituality: books of Vivekananda, Ramakrishna. He came across *The Life Divine* of Sri Aurobindo. Later, in 1943 he had the Darshan of Sri Aurobindo on 15th August and was so impressed that he decided to settle in the Ashram after the war was over.

So, when my mother asked me if I wanted to go to India, I jumped at the idea. It was arranged for me to travel with Norman Dowsett’s family and we came by ship to Bombay, where my father received me.

It was on the train from Bombay to Madras that my father showed me the photos of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and said: “We are going to the place where these two great persons live.”

On arrival we were given an appointment to meet the Mother. After breakfast, Udar took us and the Dowsett family to Pavitra’s room. My father told me to say: “*Bonjour, Douce Mère*,” with folded hands and to touch Her feet.

As we were waiting, a dog called Goldie suddenly entered the room and as quickly went out. At that very moment, the Mother swept into the room like a gust of strong wind, saying, “Good Morning, everybody” and shook each one’s hand in a true English way. She asked us if we had a pleasant journey, a nice breakfast and whether we were comfortable where we were staying. I was so much taken by surprise by all that happened that I forgot to say or do what I was supposed to. I was only eleven.

I would like to tell you my impressions of the Darshan of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. We had a three-day holiday from the school: the day before the Darshan, the Darshan day and the day after, when the Mother would distribute the garlands received on the Darshan day. Our line on the Darshan day started in the Meditation Hall.

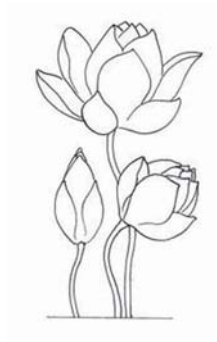
When we entered the Darshan Room, I felt something like a solid peace, as in a dense forest. Even on the steps of the staircase, one could feel it. As one came nearer, one could see Sri Aurobindo sitting majestic but impassive, and the Mother sitting next to Him seemed so regal and radiant. But when She was in trance, Sri Aurobindo looked gracious and smiling, one felt always an atmosphere of peace and light so tangible and yet inexpressible.

The Darshan days were quite different from other days. One felt serenity in the atmosphere and came away with a feeling of warmth and sweetness that lasted for quite some time.

The Mother said that Darshan is a culmination and a fulfilment of a great deal of work done. One had to prepare oneself to receive Their blessings. It is the inner preparation that makes Darshan so special.

RICHARD PEARSON

(Remembering the Mother with Gratitude, published by Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Studies, 2003, pp. 78-79)



‘LIKE THE SUN CASTING ITS RAYS UPON ALL THINGS ALIKE’

By the time I arrived at the Ashram in 1967 the Mother had already withdrawn since several years to Her high room. As all the time thousands wished to visit Her, newcomers to the Ashram — especially if they were a nobody like me — were allowed but a very short time with Her on our birthdays. In those times I had still the mental idea that a real guru had to be *Indian*, so I was studying only Sri Aurobindo’s books and thought of Her as some wise old lady, whose main point was that She had lived close to Him for so many years. So when my birthday came I went to see Her without expecting anything much, out of mere curiosity.

Of what I saw when Her door finally opened to me, I could never say but only give the vaguest of hints: a *body* was there wrapped in golden silk or seemed to be in a certain light, and yet it was so *magical*, as if . . . *transparent*, glowing from within, like a window to infinite, endless wide open dimensions . . . My first impression was of *infinite, multidimensional spaces* opening in front of me, and I felt as if I had lived my whole life in a matchbox . . . *Eyes* were there which looked into my utmost depths like I was utterly naked within, which saw all I ever was and every event of my life, saw even the most shameful and terrible things I ever did but *without any judgment or condemnation at all*, like the sun casting its rays upon all things on earth big or small alike, be they dirty slums, battlefields or mountain peaks.

A mouth and a warm *smile* were there, and suddenly I became aware of a rising tide, wave after wave of Her infinite Love engulfing me, and I felt then that I would be forever safe in Her . . .

But at the same time I felt so ashamed of being myself, still existing and being nothing. Like never before, I became aware of all my shallowness, of being so terribly *unworthy* of Her Love, and something in me cried out then, “Mother, see all the darkness in my heart, all the violence and lust in my heart, how I am deeply crippled in my spirit and inwardly blind; You know how I did hurt even some who loved me. *Please forgive me for having defiled Your spaces with my presence, for Who You were, I knew not . . .*”

But She just kept smiling and smiling to me with infinite love for a time which seemed to have no end.

I put my head on Her feet, and received a red rose from Her hand, kept looking at Her in immense wonder, but then She seemed to recede from my vision until I could see Her no more — I found myself outside Her door and could not understand how it had happened. Champaklal was speaking to me, I could hear each word he was saying yet somehow all together they made no sense at all Only the next day when it was explained again I understood that when they had told me that my allotted time with Her was over and that I should leave I could not emerge from my trance, and even remained unaware that they were shaking my shoulder. Eventually they had

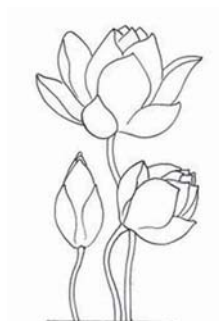
to carry me, lifting by my legs and my back, away from Her . . .

Of what I saw when Her door finally opened to me, I could never say but only give the vaguest of hints . . .

On my next birthday I wanted to bring Her a rose, as it was the custom, and asked Richard for one. (Richard was a Bengali — She often gave Westerners Indian names and to Indians Western names, like in my case). Richard gave me the most magnificent rose from his garden, a red rose with pinkish hues, but by the time I thought of asking him for something to cut away its thorns he had already left. I tried to break them off by hand but they were very strong and I was unable to. So, in the end I cut a long strip of green raw silk from my little temple, — which was just a small low table with Their photos and an incense holder on it, — and carefully wrapped it all over the stem of the rose. Then I made two very strong knots, one on top and one at the bottom to ensure that it would not get undone and no thorn would prick Her hand. When I presented it to Her and She saw what I had done She laughed and laughed and She laughed some more and it seemed to me that She appreciated it very much, although it was such a little thing. Then She brought the rose very, very close to Her eyes, and began to open the knots. This took Her quite a while, and it turned out to be the longest time I ever spent in front of Her. After She finished opening both knots She put the rose in a flower pot next to Her and then She rolled up that strip of green raw silk and put it in my hand . . .

VIJAY

(*Darshan – Remembering Sweet Mother and Sri Aurobindo*, published by Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research, Auroville, 2006, pp. 194-96)



IT IS STILL THE SAME

IN January 1972, I with some of my friends from our Hatha Yoga class was going by taxi from Bombay [Mumbai] to Pune. I heard them discussing about their trip to Pondicherry in February. Since I had heard from friends and family about the Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, I was curious. I asked them if I could also join them. So, on 19th February, 18 of us from Bombay came to Pondicherry. On 21st February, being Mother's Birthday, She gave 'balcony darshan'. That was my first glimpse of Her and I must confess: I was not much impressed.

As one of our group members knew most of the Ashram Trustees, we managed to get Her darshan though Mother had stopped giving darshans. So, on 24th or 25th or 26th (I don't remember exactly) the 18 of us went up to Her room, in a queue. There I saw an old lady sitting on a chair, bent [. . .] When my turn came and I stood in front of Her, I was transfixed by the expression. It was compassion personified; no other details. We had been advised by our friends that after kneeling and placing our head beside Her we should look into Her eyes as long as possible. This I did; the expression changed: She opened Her eyes, and the face looked like Mahakali's. It was frightening and I had the urge to run away from the room. But then I remembered the advice and kept gazing into Her eyes. They turned into a vast ocean. Then a small thing like a periscope appeared at the edge, moving towards the centre. In the middle, it sank and became one with the ocean like a drop of water merging. At that time I felt I was no more, nothing left of I, 'Me' or 'Mine', just a minute part of that vast ocean. After some time, — I do not know how long, — the face again became gentle and compassionate. The darshan was over. When I was leaving the room, I became conscious of a small voice repeating like a record "I need you, I need you" in English which is not my mother tongue.

When I went down to my friends, I found them with tears in their eyes. When I asked them they pointed to my face which was also wet.

I was completely captivated. It was like 'I came, I saw and I was conquered'. After 30 years it is still the same. I am in Auroville, not in Pondy — not that it matters. I am still Her willing slave.

NERGEZ

(Darshan – Remembering Sweet Mother and Sri Aurobindo, published by Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research, Auroville, 2006, pp. 181-82)

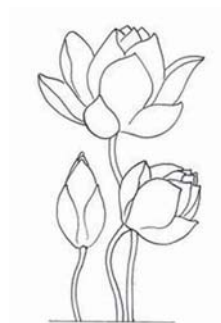
A PERSONIFICATION OF COMPASSION

Q: What was your earliest recollection of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo? What were you told about the Mother in early childhood and when did you realise she was someone special, not like everyone else?

WHEN we used to go for the balcony darshans when I was still very small I would say, “Big Mama is coming, Big Mama is coming.” I was brought up essentially with no religion. I was very close to nature and animals. When I thought of God I saw Sri Aurobindo’s image. Also, I did not think of the Mother as a human being. It wasn’t planned out for me that she would appear as a Goddess, but that’s how it was in actuality. The Mother told my mother that I was a very old soul. When we would go up to see Mother on Darshan days she was like a mother to all of us. She taught us children so much. We would sit down before her and she would pat us on the head. We would go to the Mother and have lunch with her. The queues were long waiting to see Sri Aurobindo. We would see him four times a year. I saw him up to the age of thirteen at which time he left his body in 1950. He was for me the personification of Compassion. There was always so much light around him. I always saw this light around him and a loving, compassionate smile on his face.

GAURI PINTO

(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, p. 51)



AN EMBODIMENT OF LOVE

WHEREVER I could find literature on Sri Aurobindo or translations of his books I read them avidly. At this time I came to know that one disciple of Sri Aurobindo called Purani had translated all the books of Sri Aurobindo in Gujarati. Mangatrai who was with me knew Gujarati and he ordered a full set from Anand where the books were said to be available. The books arrived soon and we helped ourselves. For this purpose I also learnt Gujarati.

All these days I had the faith that the Guru would call me when things were ready. So I had not made any attempt to go to Pondicherry. But somehow Mangatrai had — it turned out — written to Purani (without my knowledge) asking whether our party could come for Sri Aurobindo's Darshan. It appears the letter arrived rather late but permission had been accorded and a telegram and letter from Purani were received by Mangatrai.

Accordingly we arrived in Pondicherry in time for the Darshan of August 15, 1934.

*

On arrival we were met at the station by Krishnalal and Vishnu on behalf of Purani. We were a group of five or six. And though all of us had not got the necessary permission, we were permitted here for the Darshan.

We stayed for a week. The Darshan itself was a great event. When I stood before the Mother I saw her looking at me, an embodiment of Love. I was lost in her. I was often seeing a Light in the Ashram compound. Twice or thrice I even wondered if I was imagining things and satisfied myself that it was not so. I was told later on by one or two inmates that the Mother said: Among this group Ganapatram has got yogic possibilities. Someone even came to ask me if I was Ganapatram.

While here I developed the conviction that my place was here and that I could not live elsewhere. When I sent word to the Mother to this effect the Mother replied that I could do so.

But I had to go back for a while to fulfil some of our political commitments.

Back in Punjab I was there for hardly four months and left the place in January 1935 without informing my colleagues.

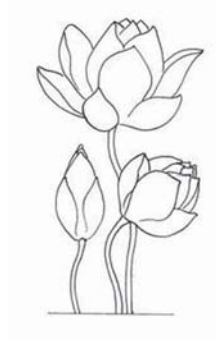
I sent a telegram from Madras informing of my arrival. But when I came here the next morning I found that the wire had not yet reached. Understandably Purani was annoyed at my unscheduled arrival. But within a few minutes of his report to the Mother early in the morning word was sent to me that the Mother had graciously arranged for my stay in Duplex House. A little later I was given work in the Library — of cleaning things — a work which I did for full fourteen years. My day used to start at 4 a.m. and I am happy to record that some of the best spiritual experiences I

have had were during these early hours.

We used to meet the Mother a number of times during those days. Shortly after my joining here, it so happened that the Mother suspended meeting people due to some eye trouble. Myself and Mangatrai (who joined me shortly after I came) felt this absence of physical sight of the Mother very acutely. And when we couldn't bear it any further after two or three days we went to Nolini and requested him to inform the Mother of our condition. The moment she came to know of this she called us both — even in that state. I said something, I do not remember it exactly. But I certainly remember and still hear her words ringing in my ears. She said: The Divine does not show itself in an imperfect condition. That is why I do not meet.

GANAPATRAM

(*Breath of Grace*, edited by M. P. Pandit, published by Dipti Publications, 2002,
pp. 20-22)



‘A PEACE AND A BLISS THAT DID “PASS ALL UNDERSTANDING” ’

BUT it is one thing to be conscious of one's congenital handicaps and quite another to get rid of these. The first step, however, is to grow conscious. This I learnt from the Mother herself who told me, the very first thing, that in Sri Aurobindo's Yoga one had to aspire intensely and sleeplessly to the consciousness of what we were in every strand of our being — to become keenly aware, that is, how far we were from what we had to become. She told me also what I had never heard before I met her — that the very act of consciousness was in a way a movement in the direction of transformation. It sounded to my ears a little queer albeit strangely convincing because I took her to mean (by a simile which occurred to me) that it was as if the right diagnosis itself brought automatically the right medicines! But that is another story.

. . .

I saw and talked to Sri Aurobindo for the first time in 1924. I have given a faithful record of my conversations with him in my *Among the Great*. I have described there the magnetic pull I felt directly I came in contact with his radiant personality. But I did not adequately describe something else: he induced in me often enough a peace and bliss that did “pass all understanding”. I remember how I simply sat alone in silent causeless ecstasy for hours and hours, especially after a contact with him however fleeting. To think that even a momentary glimpse of him, after standing in a long weary queue, could father such spells of the most marvellous bliss! It was years ago but I can even today recapture my first experience of the kind as if it happened only yesterday! I may as well say something about it in a few words though I wonder if it will mean anything to those who have never had *the experience*.

Let me own at the outset that I have never visioned anything out of the common while or after seeing him or even talking with him — as has happened with many another. And how often have I bitterly regretted that he did not (as I put it to him ignorantly then) grant me so much as a glimpse of a miracle star or a flash of light or some form of ether and flame, as had fallen to the lot of so many and so frequently! I could almost see my fat self-esteem melt away under my nose as, time and time again, they came — these who were not even his disciples — and recounted to me in thrilled voices, what they had seen! Could I, after such repeated discomfitures, help bearing him a grudge as it were for having conjured up nothing for me to glimpse as I contemplated his marvellous face of calm and light? Nothing of the sort I had looked forward to ever happened, I saw nothing in full consciousness, then or afterwards, which I could sing hallelujah to in a triumphant accent.¹ Nay, I was no authentic

1. I must qualify this statement. After Sri Aurobindo's passing — with Mirabai's advent — things did indeed begin to happen to me which I may well characterise as apocalyptic-phenomena which, like Mira's speaking to me, though miraculous, are so concrete as to be compelling. But of these the time has not come for me to speak.

mystic, I said to myself with a sigh, not even a clairvoyant, woe is me!

But mystic or not, I did feel something, sometimes, which might have been acclaimed by me as equally startling if not miraculous had not my preconceptions led me to focus my expectation on something entirely different — something I missed and therefore regretted, regretted and therefore repined, repined and therefore blamed myself till, at the end of the logical sequence, I decided, with a pang in my heart that I was a fellow too matter-of-fact by temperament to be declared passport-worthy to the Treasurer of the apocalyptic thrills of Yoga.

But something did come through — something at least as unforgettable as what my Guru humorously dubbed “yogic miracles”. What happened was that I felt that wherever I looked dripped bliss — sheer, unqualified, flawless bliss and what amazed me was that I could not trace its genesis in any shape or form. And once it was so intense and unwaning, this all-pervasive bliss, that I could not help feeling a little intrigued in the midst of my causeless rapture and asked myself how I would describe it if a friend were to drop in and cross-examine me as to its exact nature. A curious question formulated itself instantly (I was sitting intoxicated on the beach alone), “What is it that a human being loves most in life?” The answer burgeoned at once equally from nowhere, voiced by my heart in ecstasy: “Air and light.” And startled, as though my heart had suddenly developed a tongue, I heard it say to my imaginary cross-examiner in a voice deep with intoxication: “Well, what I feel is something that can enable me not to miss even light and air, supposing somebody kept me in a dark underground cell for the rest of my life.”

A strange question and a strange answer! And what is perhaps stranger still is that the experience was repeated several times in my Ashram life though it did not last as long as it did when it possessed me for the first time: for full two days and a half.

But miraculous though it may sound to believers, hard-baked rationalists are unlikely to be impressed by this response which culminated so often in ecstasy. But as Gurudev has shown us by his luminous life how to live up to the supreme teaching of the *Karma-yoga* of the Gita: “You have right to works but not to fruits thereof,” so without taking cognisance of the rational explanations of omniscient psycho-analysts who would explain it all away by word-spinning — like auto-suggestion, wish-fulfilment, hypertrophy of human or religious sensitiveness and what not — I would just recapitulate here a vivid experience I had on the 15th of November, 1928 in Lucknow: in other words, the antecedent call whose cumulative effect invoked the subsequent response. Those who have never experienced “a call”, as mystics put it, may not find it convincing, but those who know something about spiritual verities will not, I am sure, find my description uninteresting in spite of the inadequacy of my penmanship. I only regret that I will have to put it briefly because to tell it as I should would require too much space . . .

When I left Sri Aurobindo in 1924 — as I have described in my *Among the*

Great — he did, in effect, reject me calling my seeking a mere “mental” one. I was indeed cut to the quick but I simply had to wait till I might develop in me the strength I then lacked to cut the Gordian knot, to exploit a vivid if a well-known metaphor.

But, as it turned out with me, I did not find that mere waiting helped; rather it increased my deep reluctance to take refuge in him unconditionally. Besides, I had felt anything but at my ease in the silent atmosphere in and about the Ashram. I was still too social and merry and free-lance to relish the prospect of capitulating overnight to the grim Judiciary of Yoga, as I often put it in my care-free irreverence. I knew indeed that I was a seeker, but a seeker still vowed to reason as his conscience-keeper. The motto of the great Paul Valerie still rang in my ears: “Bacon dirait que cet intellect est un idole. J’y consens, mais je n’en ai trouvé de meilleur.”²

At the same time, my father’s mysticism recurred to me: the devotional songs he had composed towards the end of his life I often sang now in a moved voice and with a deepening nostalgia (I translate here the closing lines of one of these):

My day is done . . . a truce to chaffering . . .
My debts are paid . . . I hear footfalls of Night . . .
World-weary now, to thee, O Mother, I cling:
Grant me thy lap where the dark dissolves in white.

My grandfather also: had he not turned eventually from agnosticism to God-reliance? Had he not said on his deathbed that he did not want to be consoled, since the One who had provided for him so well in this world would surely take equal care of him in the next!

But, unlike them, I was in a peculiar position, a dilemma: on the one hand I was called to cut away from my moorings here and now while, on the other, I had not yet won anything which I might hold on to; so I hesitated and suffered till, in the end, I blurted it out to a friend who has since departed this life. He gave me a quizzical smile and said: “I will buy a ticket for you tomorrow; make straight for your Guru’s Ashram where you belong. Surrender all you have and are to him.”

“It’s all very well to suggest remedies,” I demurred ruefully. “But are you sure of the diagnosis?”

Being a medical man he smiled appreciatively. Then he looked straight at me and asked: “What is the trouble?”

“I wish I knew,” I answered bitterly. “I only know that I am groping and suffering in deep darkness. My Guru has not given me anything tangible yet. Surely you don’t expect me to give up everything for nothing?”

His face fell.

“Dilip,” he said, after a pause, “you have been weighed and found wanting. You

2. Bacon would say, this intellect is an idol. I agree, but I have yet to find a better one.

are *bargaining* with the Divine! *Quid pro quo?*³ This is not the spirit which had moved those who staked their all in the past for the All-in-all. I was mistaken in you.”

The shaft went home The whole night I could not sleep: I was bargaining! . . . bargaining! . . . bargaining . . . I felt small in my own eyes And yet I could not take the plunge.

The next morning I sat down to meditate. I prayed to Gurudev as never before. Suddenly, when I found the pain in my heart unbearable, something happened. I cannot explain what it was but I felt that this time it was *he* who came to me.

I got up and took the next available train — in twenty minutes — to Bombay en route for Pondicherry after despatching him a telegram.

* * *

Mother told me, on November 22nd, that I had had a sudden psychic opening and so I had heard his call.

DILIP KUMAR ROY

(*Sri Aurobindo Came to Me* by Dilip Kumar Roy, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1952, pp. 26-33)

3. Something for something.

