

# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXIV

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*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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### CONTENTS

*Sri Aurobindo*

‘A FIRE SHALL COME OUT OF THE INFINITUDES . . .’ (Poem)	...	897
PART OF THE WORK	...	899

*The Mother*

‘THOU ART EVERYWHERE . . .’	...	900
A VISION (7)	...	901

*Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna)*

A VISION AND A CERTITUDE	...	903
--------------------------	-----	-----

*Manoj Das*

SRI AUROBINDO: LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MAHAYOGI		
CHAPTER VIII: A STEP TOWARDS LIBERATION	...	904

*“A ray returning to its parent sun”*

### Remembering Amal

A RECIPIENT OF THEIR GRACE	...	915
Selection from Amal’s correspondence with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother		

*Aster Patel*

FOR AMAL . . . GRATEFULLY . . .	...	934
---------------------------------	-----	-----

*P. Raja*

TO K. D. SETHNA WITH LOVE	...	935
---------------------------	-----	-----

*R. Y. Deshpande*

MY FIRST CONTACT WITH AMAL	...	939
----------------------------	-----	-----

*Anie Nunnally*

AN INTERVIEW WITH AMAL KIRAN	...	941
------------------------------	-----	-----

<i>Georges Van Vrekhem</i>	AMAL KIRAN: PSYCHIC GREATNESS, MENTAL VERSATILITY	...	946
<i>Satadal</i>	UPON AMAL'S PASSING (Poem)	...	951
<i>Sachidananda Mohanty</i>	AMAL KIRAN: SWEETNESS AND LIGHT	...	952
<i>Maggi</i>	A DEEP SILENCE OF HEART-FELT GRATITUDE	...	954
<i>Shraddhavan</i>	A TRUE FRIEND	...	957
<i>Narad</i>	AMAL KIRAN — A TRIBUTE	...	961
<i>Kireet Joshi</i>	MY SALUTATIONS TO AMAL	...	967
<i>Shyam Kumari</i>	HOW I MET AMAL: A HOMAGE OF GRATITUDE	...	969
<i>Suresh Dey</i>	"FACE TO FACE" (Poem)	...	973
<i>V. Ananda Reddy</i>	CLEAR MEMORIES	...	974
<i>Sunjoy</i>	WHO WROTE THAT APPRECIATION — AMAL OR I?	...	979
<i>Alok Pandey</i>	THE GREATNESS OF THE GREAT	...	981
—	DOCUMENT OF TIMELESS THINKING	...	984
<i>Aditi Vasishtha</i>	REMEMBERING AMAL WITH JOY	...	985
<i>Chandrakant Parmar</i>	WITH AMAL KIRAN WHILE RECORDING THE SAVITRI RECITATION	...	990
<i>Arun Vaidya</i>	AMAL KIRAN: A POET-PILGRIM OF INTEGRAL TRUTH	...	992
<i>Manoj Das</i>	MY EDITOR — MY TEACHER	...	999
<i>Nilima Das</i>	K. D. SETHNA — THE CLEAR RAY	...	1003

—	TRANSCRIPT OF AN INTERVIEW WITH AMAL	...	1011
<i>Anurag Banerjee</i>	WELCOME, NOT FAREWELL	...	1015
—	AMAL KIRAN AS I KNEW HIM	...	1016
<i>Richard Pearson</i>	A VALUABLE MEMORABLE TRAINING	...	1018
<i>Esther</i>	TRIBUTE TO AMAL	...	1019
<i>Ashalata Dash</i>	AMAL KIRAN: “EARTH’S DEAR AND HEAVEN’S NEAR”	...	1020
<i>Krishna Chakravarty</i>	“A STEP AND ALL IS SKY AND GOD”	...	1031
<i>Anandi (Elba Fernandez)</i>	DEAR AMAL KIRAN, TO LEAVE THE SHELL (Poems)	...	1032
<i>Aniruddha Sircar</i>	A TALE OF TWO FRIENDS	...	1033
<i>C. V. Devan Nair</i>	‘THE MASTER’ BY AMAL KIRAN	...	1038
<i>A. S. Dalal</i>	THREE REMINISCENCES	...	1039
<i>Gitanjali J. B.</i>	AMAL, MY BEST FRIEND	...	1041
	A LIFE-SKETCH	...	1049
	LIST OF BOOKS	...	1055

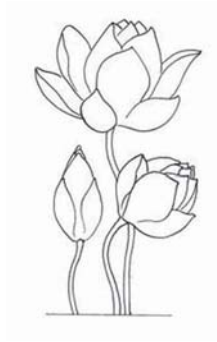
## ‘A FIRE SHALL COME OUT OF THE INFINITUDES . . .’

The world she has made is an interim report  
Of a traveller towards the half-found truth in things  
Moving twixt nescience and nescience.  
For nothing is known while aught remains concealed;  
The Truth is known only when all is seen.  
Attracted by the All that is the One,  
She yearns towards a higher light than hers;  
Hid by her cults and creeds she has glimpsed God's face:  
She knows she has but found a form, a robe,  
But ever she hopes to see him in her heart  
And feel the body of his reality.  
As yet a mask is there and not a brow,  
Although sometimes two hidden eyes appear:  
Reason cannot tear off that glimmering mask,  
Her efforts only make it glimmer more;  
In packets she ties up the Indivisible;  
Finding her hands too small to hold vast Truth  
She breaks up knowledge into alien parts  
Or peers through cloud-rack for a vanished sun:  
She sees, not understanding what she has seen,  
Through the locked visages of finite things  
The myriad aspects of infinity.  
One day the Face must burn out through the mask.  
Our ignorance is Wisdom's chrysalis,  
Our error wedd new knowledge on its way,  
Its darkness is a blackened knot of light;  
Thought dances hand in hand with Nescience  
On the grey road that winds towards the Sun.  
Even while her fingers fumble at the knots  
Which bind them to their strange companionship,  
Into the moments of their married strife  
Sometimes break flashes of the enlightening Fire.  
Even now great thoughts are here that walk alone:  
Armed they have come with the infallible word  
In an investiture of intuitive light  
That is a sanction from the eyes of God;  
Announcers of a distant Truth they flame

Arriving from the rim of eternity.  
A fire shall come out of the infinitudes,  
A greater Gnosis shall regard the world  
Crossing out of some far omniscience  
On lustrous seas from the still rapt Alone  
To illumine the deep heart of self and things.  
A timeless knowledge it shall bring to Mind,  
Its aim to life, to Ignorance its close.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 33, pp. 257-58)



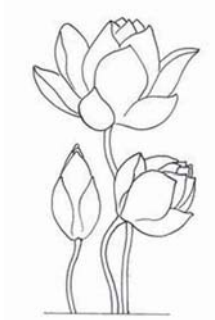
## PART OF THE WORK

I LOOK at these things from a more impersonal or, if you like, a personal-impersonal point of view. There is on one side my effort at perfection, for myself and others and for the possibility of a greater perfection in a changed humanity: on the other side there is a play of forces some favouring it but more trying to prevent it. The challenge I speak of comes from these forces. On one side it is a pressure from the pro-forces saying “Your work is not good enough; learn to do better”; on the other it is a pressure from the contrary forces saying “Your work? It is a delusion and error, — a poor mediocre thing, and we will trample and break it to pieces.” Part of the work was an attempt to inspire a poetry which would express first the aspiration and labour towards the spiritual or divine and afterwards its realisation and manifestation. There are many who write poetry in the Ashram under this impulse but in the languages which I know best (English perfectly — at least I hope so — Bengali a little), there were four here whose work seemed to me to contain already in a fairly ample way the ripe possibility of the thing I wanted — yourself [*Dilip Kumar Roy*], Arjava, Amal, Harin. (I do not speak of Nishikanta and others because they are new or emergent only). There are some Gujarati poets but I do not know the poetic language and technique in that tongue well enough to form an indubitable judgment. These four then I have encouraged and tried to push on towards a greater and richer expression. . . .

December 1934

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Letters on Poetry and Art*, CWSA, Vol. 27, p. 454)



## ‘THOU ART EVERYWHERE . . .’

**March 14, 1914**

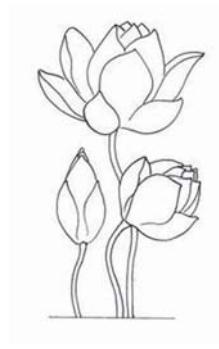
IN the immutable solitude of the desert there is something of Thy majestic presence, and I understand why one of the best means of finding Thee has always been to withdraw into these immense stretches of sand.

But for one who knows Thee, Thou art everywhere, in all things, and none of them seems more suitable than another for manifesting Thee; for all things that exist — and many others that yet do not — are necessary to express Thee. Each thing, by virtue of Thy divine intervention of love, is an effort of life towards Thee; and as soon as our eyes are unsealed, we perceive this effort constantly.

O Lord, my heart is athirst for Thee and my thought seeks for Thee constantly. In a mute adoration I bow to Thee.

THE MOTHER

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 1, p. 99)*



## A VISION

*(Continued from the issue of October 2011)*

(7)

*(In this issue we are publishing the seventh and final vision in this series)*

I SLEPT and now I am awake.

I am awake and I see a rider mounted on a splendid white horse. The rider wears a breast-plate of glittering gold and flourishes a sword, whose naked blade shines with a sapphire gleam. With one tremendous bound, the horse leaps across a chasm of darkness.

As I marvel at this vision, I hear a word, a single word pregnant with hope and promise: "Restitution."

Then suddenly a breach appears in the gloomy chasm and a great path is formed, like a dazzling rainbow. A white dove with crimson feet is ascending this path, and as I watch it on its way I behold a wonderful scene beyond the darkness.

In faultless hierarchical order, clad in sparkling light and armed with double-edged swords, an immense host is deployed, ready for battle. They await a signal from the leader at their centre, who is all radiant with iridescent light. But at once my gaze is drawn to a young man whose height and majesty tower above all the others. An ample amethyst cloak, lined with dazzling white, falls from his shoulders.

All stand still in rapt silence, for he is about to speak. He speaks, and his voice rises solemn and sweet. He speaks, and I understand what he is saying: "The time draws near. Let all prepare themselves, the host of earth and the host of heaven. Let those who work and endure lose neither courage nor patience. Though invisible to all but a few, the work is proceeding swiftly. On one side a growing order and harmony is driving towards the denser spheres whatever confusion and disorder still prevail. On the other hand, upon earth, the seed which has been sown is ready to rise amid a field of men of ardent and enlightened goodwill. The valiant host of evolving supermen<sup>1</sup> is making ready so that when the time comes its efforts may be joined to ours. Soon a hymn of joy shall ring forth, the paean of triumph and glory."

Rejoicing in these words, I make my way back towards earth, bearing the glad tidings, and in my descent I am followed by the white dove with crimson feet.

After passing the dark chasm, I look back and I see . . . Oh, what do I behold! . . . The dark heavy cloud is supported by a huge cross, and both cloud and cross are borne

1. *Psycho-intellectuels*: men evolving into the divine Supermen.



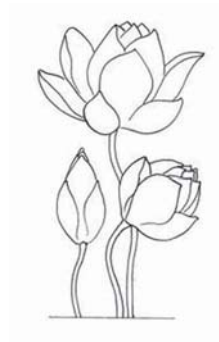
by a being of colossal size. The entire burden of iniquity and disorder weighs upon him, who leans over mankind like a wonderful and living protection. His long hair falls on either side of his beautiful face, which is turned towards earth with a look of infinite tenderness and pain . . .

Oh yes! all must work with ardour and energy to hasten the hour when the awesome effort of this sublime man will no longer be needed to hold the dark cloud in check and prevent it from crushing the wretched men of earth, unawakened and as yet unable to defend themselves!

Let all men of goodwill join together, let all efforts be united, let all living beings awaken to intelligence, let all in whom the light shines awaken to spirituality and love, the love that is harmony and order and supreme impersonality, so that soon may ring forth the hymn of joy, the paean of triumph and glory!

THE MOTHER

*(Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, April 1984)*



## A VISION AND A CERTITUDE

THE MOTHER once said to me: “I know I have come from above, but any praise of me makes my hair stand up.”

On a certain occasion in the 1930s, when everybody’s eyes were shut during meditation, I happened to open mine. To my amazement I saw the Mother rapt in a superb majesty of faint white light beyond all human conception. What I saw justified to me her assertion of having come from above. I said to myself: “Surely here is Maheshwari!”

The power of this vision also justified to me the invocation I had once chosen from the Mother’s *Prayers and Meditations* as the guiding principle of my life. The passage shows the Divine in a human form with all our disabilities accepted, invoking her own transcendent reality: “O divine and adorable Mother, with Thy help what is there that is impossible?”

These words gave me the assurance that even with all my defects and weaknesses she could raise me up to herself and make me a part of her divine world on earth. I have tried to live more and more in the light of this all-saving mantra. And I can say: “There is no depth so low from which the Mother cannot lift us up sky-high!”

AMAL KIRAN  
(K. D. SETHNA)

(First published in *Mother India*, April 1998)



# **SRI AUROBINDO: LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MAHAYOGI**

*(Continued from the issue of October 2011)*

## **Chapter VIII**

### **A Step towards Liberation**

London is pictorial in spite of details — from its dark green, misty parks, the way the light comes down leaking and filtering from its cloud-ceiling, and the softness and richness of tone which objects put on in such an atmosphere as soon as they begin to recede. Nowhere is there such a play of light and shade, such a struggle of sun and smoke, such aerial gradations and confusions. To eyes addicted to such contemplations this is a constant entertainment, and yet this is only part of it. What completes the effect of the place is its appeal to the feelings, made in so many ways, but made above all by agglomerated immensity. At any given point London looks huge; even in narrow corners you have a sense of its hugeness, and petty places acquire a certain interest from their being parts of so mighty a whole. Nowhere else is so much human life gathered together, and nowhere does it press upon you with so many suggestions. These are not all of an exhilarating kind; far from it. But they are of all possible kind, and that is the interest of London.<sup>1</sup>

THIS was the impression of the great city of London, the *de facto* capital of the vast British Empire, the well-known American author Henry James recorded in his *Portraits of Places*, published in 1883, a year before Sri Aurobindo and his brothers were led there by their guardian, the Rev. Drewett, or rather by his mother.

A report in *The Manchester Guardian* of 21 March 1881 says,

The Rev. W. H. Drewett, after a ministry of nearly ten years, has resigned the pastorate of the Stockport Road Congregational Church, in this city. The cause of this step, the rev. gentleman explained, at the close of the service last evening, was his disagreement with a resolution of the Deacon's Court with regard to the erection of a new infant school room and the beautifying of the present school church.<sup>2</sup>

The Rev. Drewett was not willing to put up with such changes as they, according to him, would disturb some projects adopted earlier. However, he stayed on in Manchester. Benoybhushan and Manmohan were already in school. We can presume that the Rev. Drewett devoted more time than earlier to help Sri Aurobindo learn Latin and History while his wife was teaching him French, Geography and Arithmetic. But in 1884 the Rev. Drewett, along with his wife, left for Australia, entrusting the care of the boys to his mother, the old Mrs. Drewett. While sailing for Australia, the Drewetts stopped in Kolkata and met Dr. K. D. Ghose who paid up the arrears he owed to them on account of his children. They must have discussed the education of the boys who probably had by then shifted to London according to Dr. Ghose's wish and his prior approval.

We will make only fleeting references to Sri Aurobindo's stay in England, as they have been presented at length by earlier biographers with all the information that inquiry and research have brought to light till date. Mrs. Drewett and the boys stayed in a rented flat at 49 St. Stephen's Avenue, Shepherd's Bush. The Rev. Drewett and his wife were catholic in their outlook regarding religion and they had never tried to influence their wards with their faith. But the case with old Mrs. Drewett was different. She made the boys read the Bible with her as a routine. But one day Manmohan's silent resentment burst out as an unholy comment and that drew the curtain on their coexistence. This fervently evangelical lady instantly decided that "she would not live with an atheist as the house might fall down on her".<sup>3</sup>

She left for some unknown address, to the great relief of the boys.

Manmohan and Sri Aurobindo had been admitted to St. Paul's School. Benoybhushan does not seem to have carried on his academic studies after leaving Manchester. He found a job at the Liberal Club, South Kensington Branch. That was possible because the Secretary of the Club, James Cotton, was the brother of Sir Henry John Stedman Cotton, I.C.S., a friend of Dr. K. D. Ghose. Incidentally, Sir Henry was an exception to the average attitude characterising the Civil Service officials of the day. He supported the growing Indian spirit of nationalism and was even elected the President of the Bombay session of the Indian National Congress, 1904.<sup>4</sup>

Though Benoybhushan received a miserably low salary from the Club, one benefit he brought to himself and his brothers mattered much. They were allowed to occupy the upper floor of the Club's building at 128 Cromwell Road. This was the most trying time for them. Dr. Ghose who was more or less regular in remitting the expenses of the boys during the first phase of their stay abroad, by and by became quite irregular and sent nothing for a considerable length of time. One can imagine the plight of the boys in the London winter without adequate winter clothes, without any heating arrangement in their room and, what was worse, no means even to buy the minimum quantity of food necessary. "During a whole year a slice or two of sandwich, bread and butter and a cup of tea in the morning and in the evening a

penny saveloy formed the only food”,<sup>5</sup> reminisced Sri Aurobindo.

Here is an account of his studies in those days:

Both at Manchester and at St. Paul’s Sri Aurobindo gave his attention to the study of the classics, but even at St. Paul’s in the last three years he simply went through his school course without labouring over it and spent most of his time in general reading, especially English poetry, literature, fiction, French literature, history of medieval and modern Europe. He spent some time learning Italian, some German and a little Spanish. This he could do as he was at ease in his school studies. Though some of his teachers used to regret his preoccupation with general reading he was able to win many prizes and secured an open scholarship to King’s College in his final examination at St. Paul’s.<sup>6</sup>

Replying to a disciple on a different question, Sri Aurobindo incidentally stated in 1933,

My education in England was badly neglected — though people say to the contrary.<sup>7</sup>

And, once he wrote to Nirodbaran in a lighter vein,

Never learned a word of chemistry or any damned science in my school. My school, sir, was too aristocratic for such plebeian things.<sup>8</sup>

King’s College, Cambridge, founded by King Henry VI (1421-1471),

was a peculiar college, partly owing to the very peculiar conditions of its foundation, and is felt to be so by its members and apparently also by some other people, though with widely different degrees of sympathy or antipathy. . . . Members of Oxford colleges seem to find it more akin to theirs than do most other Cambridge colleges.<sup>9</sup>

Sri Aurobindo sat for the Entrance examination for admission into King’s College in December 1889 and did marvellously well. His examiner, a well-known scholar and writer, Oscar Browning, said that he had never seen answer papers of that high standard as Sri Aurobindo had written. Browning would have felt far more surprised had he any idea of the financial and other hardships the candidate had to endure while preparing for the test. Sri Aurobindo was also getting ready for the I.C.S. It was common practice for all candidates to take help from private tutors before facing this most difficult of all the academic tests and trials. Sri Aurobindo simply could not afford that luxury. Yet he passed the highly valued Cambridge

Tripes in the first division and passed the fortnight-long I.C.S. examination with record marks in Greek and Latin — an arduous challenge which many students could meet only in their second or third chance.

Let us see what the authentic history of King's College, Cambridge, says about this unusual student of the institution:

The most extraordinary Indian to come to King's College was Sri Aurobindo Ghose (1890). His career is all the more remarkable for its abrupt changes. His father, a M.D. of Edinburgh University, wanted him to be brought up in the best British tradition. The son (then known as Arvinda Ackroyd Ghose) was sent over at the age of seven, went to school later at St. Paul's, and won a classical scholarship to King's in 1890. He got a First in his Tripes . . . The tutor Prothero gave him a glorious testimonial: "Besides his classical scholarship he possessed a knowledge of English literature far beyond the average for undergraduates, and wrote a much better English style than most young Englishmen . . ." He passed into the I.C.S., for which he had worked simultaneously, with record marks in classics; but disliking horses he omitted to take the obligatory riding test, so he became instead Professor of English, Lecturer in French and Vice-Principal at the Baroda College under an enlightened Maharaja.<sup>10</sup>

Incidentally, this highly informative work, *Kingsmen of the Century* by L. P. Wilkinson, a publication of King's College, Cambridge, speaks of a few others among its distinguished scholars who turned into mystics — including J. E. Nixon, later revered and remembered as Yogi Krishnaprem who lived in his Ashram at Mirtola in the Himalayan foothills, and adds, "Even Nixon's reputation pales, however, before that of Aravinda Ackroyd Ghose who as Sri Aurobindo is revered by thousands, perhaps millions."

Cambridge and Oxford were — as they still are — the two most outstanding seats of education. Between the two, however, at least in days gone by, Cambridge (the name derived from the bridge over the river Cam) was considered more sophisticated in terms of academic pursuits. Wrote the poet Joseph Start (1679-1747) when King George I donated the Bishop of Ely's library to Cambridge University:

The king, observing with judicious eyes,  
The state of both his universities,  
To Oxford sent a troop of horse, and why?  
To Cambridge books, as very well discerning  
How much that loyal body wanted learning.<sup>11</sup>

An epigrammatic reply of equal force was given to Start by Sir William Brown (1692-1774), but the general impression about Cambridge does not seem to have

changed for a long time, for even the well-known 20<sup>th</sup> century poet Rupert Brooke wrote, in a humorous vein of course,

For Cambridge people rarely smile,  
Being urban, squat, and packed with guile.<sup>12</sup>

But this widely prevailing impression notwithstanding, by Sri Aurobindo's time the atmosphere on the campus had begun changing towards a cultural and intellectual *laissez-faire*. A debating forum called Walpole Society was formed in 1891. The Kings and Trinity friends formed a club called T.A.F. (Twice a Fortnight) "at which cold supper was served followed by any activity anyone fancied — talk, reading, drawing, piano-playing".<sup>13</sup>

In this changing climate functioned the Indian Majlis, a debating society in which Sri Aurobindo participated quite actively. By then his father, Dr. K. D. Ghose, stood disillusioned about the myth of British benevolence in India. He even sent newspaper clippings to Sri Aurobindo carrying reports of the colonial maladministration. At the Majlis sessions Sri Aurobindo asserted India's right to freedom and the intelligence report of his speeches along with that of his membership of a secret society formed by some Indian youths in London, named 'Lotus and Dagger' dedicated to the cause of India's liberation, contributed to the decision of the authorities to exclude him from the I.C.S. While all the members of this romantically christened society took the vow to fight for the motherland's liberation with all their means, everybody, barring Sri Aurobindo, seemed to have forgotten their sacred vow.

Sri Aurobindo had no need for any tutor to help him to face the theoretical tests for the I.C.S. But anybody wishing to ride a horse of course needed a trainer at least to learn the preliminaries. Sri Aurobindo, thanks to his father's negligence in remitting money, could not afford one. This fact, however, is no more important than a simple fact, for Sri Aurobindo, by then, had already decided to get himself disqualified from the I.C.S. and did not report for the riding test, even when he was given a second chance: this came handy to bring about the extraordinary result he desired.

I appeared for the I.C.S. because my father wanted it and I was too young to understand. Later I found out what sort of work it is and I had a disgust for an administrator's life and I had no interest in administrative work. My interest was in poetry and literature and study of languages and patriotic action . . .<sup>14</sup>

he said answering some questions in 1938. He must have realised how this coveted position, barring rare cases, generally moulded the minds of men, even of brilliant ones like R. C. Dutt (1848-1909) who after his retirement became active in politics

and presided over the Lucknow session of the Indian National Congress in 1899. As a later Civilian writes,

Romesh Chunder Dutt himself regarded the British Empire as a ‘superb institution’. He and his contemporaries regarded the unsavoury features of British rule as no more than anomalies, in fact, ‘un-British’ in nature which could be cured by the true facts being brought to the notice of the British people.<sup>15</sup>

Thus Sri Aurobindo wriggled out of — rather liberated himself from — a situation which, if allowed to reach its normally expected end, would have caused an unfathomable loss to the prospect of humanity’s liberation from its bondage to ignorance. The hoary Indian wisdom says that education is that which liberates (*Sa vidya ya vimuktaye*). Sri Aurobindo completed his formal education and also got himself liberated from its formal outcome.

(To be continued)

MANOJ DAS

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*“A ray returning to its parent sun”*

*Savitri*  
(CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 79)

*Remembering Amal*



**Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna)**

**would have been 107 on 25 November this year.**

Much has been said and written about Amal, especially in the commemorative volumes brought out in 1994, his ninetieth anniversary, and in 2004, his centenary.

For the centenary,  
*Mother India*  
also carried a number of items during the year.

Much more has been said and written by Amal himself: the many books, talks, letters, interviews and conversations bear testimony to that.

In this issue we have not tried to survey his contribution in different fields, nor to assess his achievements.

We merely take this as an occasion to remember him.

More than a collection of tributes, this is essentially a sharing of golden moments, a fond remembrance of 'the wonder that was Amal'.

Amal .

Full name ~~अमलकिरण~~

Amal-kiran

( The clear ray )

3 September 1930 . Sri Aurobindo

## A RECIPIENT OF THEIR GRACE

### Grand old man of the family

*Amal wrote to the Mother after the passing of his grandfather, "Now I am the grand old man of the family!" Here is the Mother's reply.*

Amal,

Your letter reached today — You say as a joke "Now I am the grand old man of the family!" — but it is not a joke, it is true; for all in your grandfather that was turned towards good and right went straight into you when it left his body.

...

With my love and blessings

23.5.57

\* \* \*

### A Letter from Sri Aurobindo dated 8.8.34, with a note at the end from the Mother

Amal

We were very glad to hear that there were such good hopes for your knee and that in fact it was progressing well and we were likely to see you soon in Pondicherry. I trust the amelioration has kept up its swiftness and that we shall hear in a very few days of your departure from Bombay southwards. I think you have had a sufficient dose of Bombay; it is time to cut loose from Malabar Hill and the cinemas. As for the sea, you will get it here also, so that is only an exchange.

Your poem was very welcome. Its form would probably have been better if you had made it an ordinary sonnet, but the substance and working out of the idea are good.

SRI AUROBINDO

Expecting to see you soon.

With blessings

THE MOTHER

\* \* \*

## A Request for a message

*Sri Aurobindo —*

*Mother I'll be seeing to-morrow, but I must have some message from you also. Won't you please tell me something to which I can always turn for help and contact during my stay in Bombay? I pray that I may feel the presence of Mother and Yourself throughout those far days and come back safely to my home which is at your dear feet.*

*Amal*  
11.12.36

*P.S.: Please fill as much space as possible below!*

Remember the Mother and, though physically far from her, try to feel her with you and act according to what your inner being tells you would be her will. Then you will be best able to feel her presence and mine and carry our atmosphere around you as a protection and a zone of quietude and light accompanying you everywhere.

12.12.36

SRI AUROBINDO

\* \* \*

Sri Anubindo - Mother I'll be seeing to morrow,  
 but I must have some message from you also.  
 Won't you please tell me something to which  
 I can always turn for help and contact during  
 my stay in Bombay? I pray that I may  
 feel the presence of Mother and yourself  
 throughout these far days and come back  
 safely to my home which is at your <sup>dear</sup> feet.  
 Amal.  
 11/12/36.

P.S: Please fill as much space as possible below!

Remember the rolls and, though  
 physically far from her, try to feel her with you and  
 act according to what you may be told by her  
 with her will. Then you will be best able to  
 feel her presence, and mine and carry on elsewhere  
 around you as a protection and a zone of  
 quietude and light accompanying you  
 everywhere.

Sri Anubindo

12-12-36

### Sri Aurobindo's letter dated 22.12.36 and the Mother's note in the margin

Amal

We received your letter and were glad to hear that you are all right and inwardly keeping up. The little dullness was not quite unnatural under the circumstances. But all the more reason to stick to the programme of return within the given time. I trust that the marriage has gone off all right and that Minnie has happily begun the new phase of her life. We sent our wire of blessings in due time. We shall expect you at the time fixed and not later. As for what awaits you on your return, I mean the typing work — Hell and the Asuras have been dealt with in a sort of way, I am now labouring in the mental worlds and trying to negotiate a passage through the psychic regions — beyond that things are more easy.

The Mother's blessings and mine are with you and our love.

SRI AUROBINDO

*In the margin the Mother added*

à bientôt

The Mother

\* \* \*

### Stopping of correspondence

*Sri Aurobindo,*

*As your correspondence has closed now and at last you have time for important things, please don't forget to give a look to my essay! Perhaps it is not written in as publishable a vein as the others — owing to some references; but how is it as a piece of writing? And what about its substance? Nirod is waiting for you to point out the "fallacies" I have cleverly concealed in it. I, too, don't mind a good blow-up, if necessary though to-morrow is the Armistice Day.*

*Amal*

10.11.35

If I have stopped correspondence, it is not in order to have time to write literature or about literature. Your essay is certainly not publishable. I shall see about it at leisure.

\* \* \*



## Blank verse and the Victorian model

Amal —

I am afraid I cannot say much in praise of your blank verse. I notice that most Indians who write in English, immediately they try blank verse, begin to follow the Victorian model and especially a sort of pseudo-Tennysonian movement or structure which makes their work in this kind weak, flat and ineffective. The language inevitably suffers by the same faults, for with a weak verse cadence it is impossible to find a strong or effective turn of language. But Victorian blank verse at its best is not strong or great, and at its usual level it is weak, crude or characterless. Except for a few poems, like Tennyson’s early “Morte d’Arthur” “Ulysses”, and one or two others or Arnold’s “Sohrab and Rustam”, there is nothing of a high order. Tennyson is especially a bad model and a weakening and corrupting influence, and the “Princess” and “Idylls of the King” which seem to have set the tone for Indo-English blank verse are detestable. There is plenty of clever craftsmanship but it is all false and artificial and without true strength or inspired movement or poetic force — the right kind of blank verse for Victorian drawing-rooms, that is all that can be said for it. As for language and substance his influence always brings an artificial languid prettiness varied by an elaborate false simplicity and an attempt at a kind of brilliant, sometimes lusciously brilliant sentimental or sententious commonplace. I could point out to you any number of examples of these things from your Sakuntala — there is the pale ghost of Tennyson everywhere. The main fault however is in the verse itself — everywhere a languid weakness; all the lines, even when there is variation of structure, seem yet to have the same movement or absence of movement; the rhythm has no life in it, no swing, no power, no backbone.

SRI AUROBINDO

\* \* \*

## To go on steadily

*... today I seem to feel differently: the call of the Light remains and there is not a doubt about its authenticity, but I have lost the sense I had that in spite of everything I could answer the call — answer in the end, however gradually and with whatever lapses on the way. I am puzzled and bewildered, I lose the joy of the true vision, I am undermined by a great diffidence about my yogic capacity. I cannot, indeed, conceive how I possibly live without the proximity of the Mother and yourself, but neither can I imagine how my lower being is to be controlled and illumined. I almost feel that things do actually happen in spite of me — that there is a force more powerful than my response to the*

*Divine. I am filled with a hopeless sorrow and I see no issue out of it. Above me is the ecstatic light; below me is a voluptuous darkness: I strain my arms towards the high splendour but my feet carry me towards the frenzied deeps. The Mother is very dear to my soul — but that does not help me to make the obscure impulses to turn and follow her. You will tell me that I must do this and do that; you say that I can plunge into sadhana only if I get rid of certain desires. But what is the use of “musts” and “ifs” to a man too exhausted to move an inch in the right direction — exhausted by years of futile struggles and broken resolves? Have you any solution for me? The burden of past failures is too heavy to be cast away by my own strength and there is a lack of will to improve and succeed. I look into myself and find that quite a large part of me does not want at all to change. What’s to happen, then? My aspiration, my love for the Mother seem to be joys that have no radical effect on that rigid mass of human folly. How long am I to suffer being always wrenched away from my beloved Mother and you? Could it be my destiny to love you both only from afar and without doing yoga — at least for the time being?*

*Amal*  
2.3.37

The moral of the condition you describe is not that Yoga should not be done but that you have to go on steadily healing the rift between the two parts of the being. The division is very usual, almost universal in human nature, and the following of the lower impulse in spite of the contrary will in the higher parts happens to almost everybody. It is the phenomenon noted by Arjuna in his question to Krishna “Why does one do evil, even though one wishes not to do it, as if compelled to it by force”, and expressed sententiously by Horace “video meliora proboque, Deteriora sequor”. By constant effort and aspiration one can arrive at a turning point when the psychic asserts itself and what seems a very slight psychological change or reversal alters the whole balance of the nature.

\* \* \*

### **On a poem**

*Amal sent his poem ‘Disclosure’ to Sri Aurobindo with a note saying that the verses were perhaps “a little disjointed”. Sri Aurobindo replied:*

Very fine poetry. Blank verse rhythm very good. There is no disjuncture. Illumined Higher Mind.

\* \* \*

## On another poem

*On Amal's poem 'Violet Wisdom', Sri Aurobindo commented:*

Very fine. I think you have mastered the blank verse movement; the movement here is faultless and very skilful. A fine poem. . . .

\* \* \*

## A correction or two

Amal

I have gone through your article and made a correction or two —

(1) P.8. “colourful with”. The grammarians do not allow you to end a sentence with a preposition; some do it, but they are condemned as incorrect.

(2) “translations of Kalidasa”? I did translate the Meghdut, but it was lost by the man with whom I kept it — so mention of it is useless.

(3) One or two errors in the quotations from the poems.

I am afraid your last two or three pages will be a little hard for the readers to follow. Could you not simplify the style a little so as to make the meaning more clear? The rest is admirably written, but here you overshoot yourself a little.

SRI AUROBINDO

28.1.31

\* \* \*

## Inspiration of the “true poet”

Amal

I am afraid it is still much as it was, — the style too rhetorical, involved and inflated, the sense obscure — and only seizable after two or three readings. Besides, what is it you are trying to say in these pages? The character of the inspiration of the “true poet”? But Shakespeare and Homer were true poets and no one would think of applying the description to them. Or, as you say at the close “the objective set up by Sri Aurobindo for the poets of the future and for the poet in himself”? In the first place, I would not accept it as an exact presentation of the much more complex idea I have developed in “The Future Poetry”; and then, it was a possibility of the future I set forth there and it does not apply to the past — no more to my own past poetry than to the work of others. What then is its relevance in the review of this past poetry of mine? Reading it, it seemed to me like a fragment of some other

subject tacked onto the review. And it is quite different in style and in the character of its substance. You have written admirably both as to style and force of presentation of the thought, and at the end you try to do much better but by excess you do worse. A reader who had followed you with interest up to that point would be baffled and *dérouté* by this bewildering and unseizable close.

If you want to keep these pages, you would have to rewrite the whole thing in the same style as the rest of the article which, I repeat, is quite admirable. But why not drop this close altogether and substitute something brief and relevant to the past poetry you are reviewing and not to the future poetry which is lying unfinished in my drawers? That is what I should advise you to do — to repeat my simile, having hit the mark up till almost the last, don't go on to overshoot yourself at the close.

SRI AUROBINDO

1.2.31

P.S. I began an attempt to mend these pages for you, but I found it beyond me — it would have meant a wholesale recasting.

\* \* \*

### On a poem

Sri Aurobindo —

Is this mere rhetoric?

#### TRUTH-VISION

How shall you see  
Through a mist of tears  
The laughing lips of beauty,  
The golden heart of years?

Oh never say  
That tears had birth  
In the weeping soul of ages,  
The gloomy brow of earth!

Nought save your eyes  
Carry the blame  
For giving tearful answers  
To questionings of flame.

What drew that film  
Across your sight  
Was only the great dazzle  
Of everlasting Light!

Frailty begot  
Your wounded gaze:  
Eagle your life, O spirit,  
To see the golden Face.

Amal  
13.11.35

*Sri Aurobindo's reply:*

It is exceedingly beautiful, one of the best things you have done.

Sri Aurobindo -

Is this mere rhetoric?  
*It is exceedingly beautiful, one of the best things you have done.*

TRUTH-VISION

How shall you see  
Through a mist of tears  
The laughing lips of beauty,  
The ~~the~~ golden heart of years?

Oh never say  
That tears had birth  
In the weeping soul of ages,  
The gloomy brew of earth!

Nought save your eyes  
Carry the blame  
For giving tearful answers  
To questionings of flame.

What drew that film  
Across your sight  
Was only the great dazzle  
Of everlasting Light!

Frailty begot  
Your wounded gaze:  
~~Eagle your life, O spirit,~~  
To see ~~the~~ golden Face.

*"mould"?*  
*Yes*

Amal  
13-11-35.

(In the 3<sup>rd</sup> line of the last stanza Amal had underlined “life” and in the margin put “‘mood’?”).

Sri Aurobindo had remarked “Yes”)

*I am surprised — of course, most happily, but very much all the same. I was aware of an original turn of idea in the poem and some drive in the language, but, as my question indicated, I was somehow missing the subtle secrets of sound. On re-reading now, I begin to appreciate the lines more: especially the words “questionings of flame” seem fraught with a multiple suggestion. But I shall be thankful to learn from you what qualities pleased you to such a great extent. If it is one of my best things, I hope you won’t mind my asking you for a little analysis.*

Amal

Sri Aurobindo’s reply:

Well, it is surprising that such a thing of beauty should have passed through you without your feeling its charm and power. But don’t ask me to analyse it. Things like that cannot be analysed, they can only be felt. It has throughout the perfection of simple inevitability about which no one can say “it is because of this that it is beautiful or because of that.” The more I read it, the more it grows upon me.

SRI AUROBINDO

*Well, it is surprising that such a thing of beauty should have passed through you without your feeling its charm and power. But don't ask me to analyse it. Things like that cannot be analysed, they can only be felt. It has throughout the perfection of simple inevitability about which we can say "it is because of this that it is beautiful or because of that." The more I read it, the more it grows upon me.*  
Sri Aurobindo

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## Almost chucking up writing poetry

*Sri Aurobindo —*

*I appreciate the justness of your comments and am glad you have pointed out my mistakes; but I am awfully disgusted with myself — almost enough to feel like chucking up this job of writing poetry. What has happened? Why this relapse on my part? Can you show me some light? Will this gift of expression always be so treacherously fluctuating? I try to silence my mind and feel your presence and your pressure: the result is a poem which rings brass instead of gold. If the instrument is such a bad one, what hope is there for it? I shall be grateful if you will analyse my case and tell me what exactly is wrong that makes relapses possible.*

*When they happen I feel terribly drawn towards the vital temptations. For the last few days I have been having my consciousness kept uplifted, stationed vaguely below the top of the skull, so to speak. I do not experience that sudden opening to things above-head any more; the aperture seems shut again and a hardening of the head has taken place, but the consciousness still is poised high. There is, however, a pull from below which I am afraid of.*

*Amal*  
20.4.37

*Sri Aurobindo's reply:*

Why so much depression? It is not a relapse, but an oscillation which one finds in almost every poet. Each has a general level, a highest level and a lower range in which some defects of his poetical faculty come out. You have three manners: (1) a sort of decorative romantic manner that survives from your early days, — this at a lower pitch turns to too much dressiness of an ornamental kind, at a higher to post-Victorian, Edwardian or Georgian rhetoric with a frequent saving touch of Yeats; (2) a level at which all is fused into a fine intuitive authenticity and beauty, there is seldom anything to change; (3) a higher level of grander movement and language in which you pull down or reach the influences of the Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Overmind Intuition. This last you have not yet fully mastered so as to write with an absolute certainty and faultlessness except by lines and stanzas or else as a whole in rare moments of total inspiration, but you are moving towards mastery in it. Sometimes these inspirations get mixed up together. It is this straining towards greater height that creates the difficulty, yet it is indispensable for the evolution of your genius. It is not surprising therefore that inspiration comes with difficulty often, or that there are dormant periods or returns of the decorative inspiration. All that is part of the day's work and dejection is quite out of place.

That you should be able to keep your consciousness uplifted is already some-

thing. As for the opening, its coming and apparent closing is a usual experience — it needs several openings before the thing is settled by a permanent poise of consciousness above and an increasing descent into the head and below. It is the pull from below that should get no indulgence — for that though most do indulge it is a wrong crabby way of doing it. One must be safely stationed above before one can descend without a tumble. Not that the tumble if it comes precludes going up again — it does not; but that is no reason for letting it happen.

20 April 1937

\* \* \*

### **Sri Aurobindo's observation on Amal in a letter to a sadhak**

Amal would be the last man to make such a claim for himself of anything like spiritual samata. Easygoingness is a natural quality with some, but they have not to do Yoga to get it — it is a gift of Nature.

\* \* \*

### **From Sri Aurobindo's letter to Amal**

There is only one truth in you on which you have to lay constant hold, the truth of your divine possibilities and the call of the higher Light to your nature. If you hold to that always or, even if you are momentarily shaken from your hold, return constantly to it, it will justify itself in the end in spite of all difficulties and obstacles and stumblings. All in you that resists will disappear in time with the progressive unfolding of your spiritual nature.

*There is only one truth in you on which you have to lay constant hold, the truth of your divine possibilities and the call of the higher Light to your nature. If you hold to that always or, even if you are momentarily shaken from your hold, return constantly to it, it will justify itself in the end in spite of all difficulties and obstacles and stumblings. All in you that resists will disappear in time with the progressive unfolding of your spiritual nature.*

\* \* \*



Fix upon your mind and heart the resolution to live for the divine Truth and for that alone; reject all that is contrary and incompatible with it and turn away from all lower desires; aspire to open yourself to the Divine Power and to no other. Do this in all sincerity and the present and living help you need will not fail you.

SRI AUROBINDO

*Fix upon your mind and heart the resolution to live for the divine Truth and for that alone; reject all that is contrary and incompatible with it and turn away from all lower desires; aspire to open yourself to the Divine Power and to no other. Do this in all sincerity and the present and living help you need will not fail you.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

\* \* \*

## Supramentalisation

*Sri Aurobindo,*

*I have been dipping now and then into the X-Y talks and reading your comments also. X is certainly, as you say, rational in denouncing big talk on the part of anybody who glibly claims the supramental without taking even a step towards the psychic. The psychic is, without doubt, our most immediate goal, and whether one wants what is called Divine Realisation or what you call Supramentalisation, one has to occupy oneself with psychicisation first of all. But there is another point which needs clearing up.*

*Your aim is to accomplish something special which has never been done, and to accomplish it not only in yourself but also in others who are willing to go with you. Is that a fair statement or not?*

*If it is, then provided one is sincere and faithful and filled with aspiration, is it not perfectly rational and perfectly practical to expect that one's sincerity, faithfulness and aspiration would lead one ultimately to get what you would like to give — namely supramentalisation? And when I say “ultimately”, I mean not after many lives but in this very life — granted, of course, that one is not too dilapidated in body or otherwise precluded from whatever minimum well-being may be necessary.*

*X doubts whether you intend to give anything special, any consciousness and its embodiment in life other than what has been given in the past. And he says that it is sober sense, not practical, to expect the supramental in oneself, however sincere and faithful and filled with aspiration one may be.*

*I hope it is understood that in this point at issue there is no question about big talk and no endeavour, or about the immediate and the remote. Supramentalisation cannot be immediate; but is it at present practical or not, to hope for it even as an ultimate result of one's truest endeavour to follow you? If, under another guru, it is, as X thinks, practical for a true follower to expect a divine realisation — that is, union with the spiritual consciousness, is it not practical to expect here something beyond that even, if you intend to give it and if one truly follows you?*

*The answer, I believe, depends primarily upon whether it is your intention to give the supramental to others after achieving it yourself. Surely if you say that you have not achieved it or else that it is uncertain that you ever will, it is not practical for anybody else to hope for it, or rather it is practical in proportion to the chances you have for it. But if you have it or are certain of it in the future and wish to impart it, then what about the practicality on the part of your true (and not too unhealthy) follower to look forward to it as the fixed consummation of his yoga of self-surrender to you?*

*Amal*  
20.4.35

I have no intention of achieving the supramental for myself only — I am not doing anything for myself, as I have no personal need of anything, neither of salvation (moksha) nor supramentalisation. If I am seeking after supramentalisation, it is because it is a thing that has to be done for the earth consciousness and if it is not done in myself, it cannot be done in others. My supramentalisation is only a key for opening the gates of the supramental to the earth consciousness; done for its own sake, it would be perfectly futile. But it does not follow either that if or when I become supramental, everybody will become supramental. Others can so become who are ready for it, when they are ready for it — though of course the achievement in myself will be to them a great help towards it. It is therefore quite legitimate to have the aspiration for it — provided (1) one does not make too personal or egoistic an affair of it turning it into a Nietzschean or other ambition to be a superman, (2) one is ready to undergo the conditions and stages needed for the achievement, (3) one is sincere and regards it as part of the seeking for the Divine and a consequent culmination of the divine Will in one and insists on no more than the fulfilment of that Will whatever it may be, psychisation, spiritualisation or supramentalisation. It should be regarded as the fulfilment of God's working in the world, not as a personal chance or achievement.

20 April 1935



25-11-61

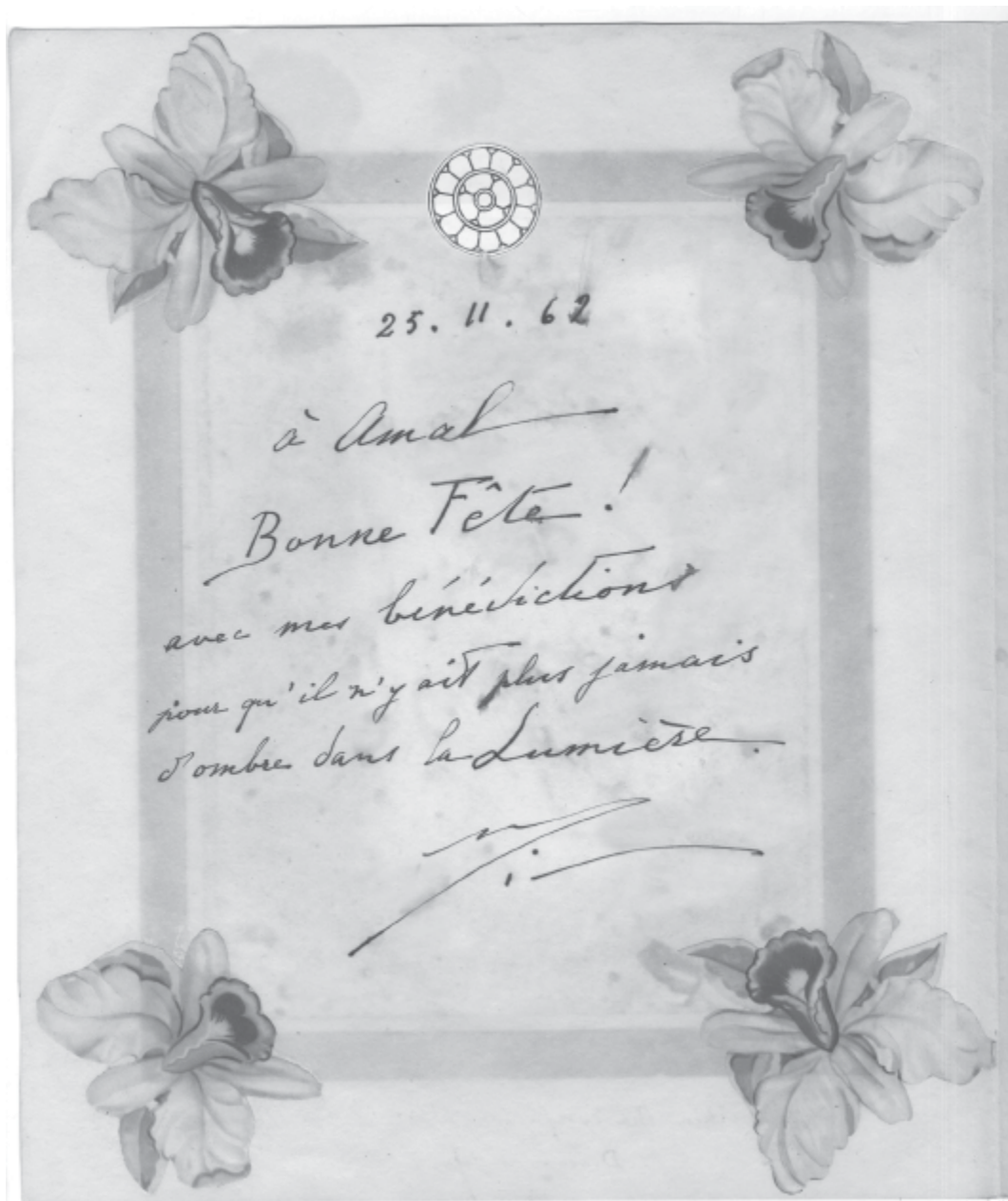
à Amal

Bonne Fête!

Il faut souvent renoncer.  
à comprendre pour pouvoir  
s'approcher de la Vérité.

avec mes bénédictions





25. 11. 62

à Amal

Bonne Fête!

avec mes bénédictions  
pour qu'il n'y ait plus jamais  
d'ombre sans la Lumière.

*[Signature]*



Bonne Tête!  
à Amal  
avec mes bénédictions  
pour une année de  
paix et de lumière



25.11.65

Bonne Fête!

to Amal

Is it not time to knock  
at the door and to  
enter the House of  
the Divine, this year?

With love and  
blessings

## FOR AMAL . . . GRATEFULLY . . .

IT WAS the morning of the AUM gathering in Lodi, Northern California . . . and we learnt of Amal moving on in this journey on earth . . .

The hours rushed past as images, impressions, experiences followed. The first clear impact was that the ‘work’ the Mother was doing in him is ‘done’ . . .

And, then, the images! Of one’s teen-age years . . . Mother playing tennis each evening in the courts by the sea in Pondicherry. And, Amal, like some others, seated on a stone parapet which ran along the farther edge of the courts. Absorbed in watching Mother ‘*at play*’, being with Her!

But the temptation to be with him, finding him alone and being there for a good bit of time — was too much to resist! One went and sat by him — and kept sitting through the hours of tennis. Also to speak to him, to ask questions. He entertained them and responded — with no sense of being ‘disturbed’, no hint did he give of perhaps wanting to be left alone! Evening after evening, one went and sat by his side, with Mother at tennis! Sometimes in silence too — sometimes with questions. One of which is specially remembered — What is free-will? And he patiently explained . . .

One was with him like a Friend — difference of age notwithstanding! That was Amal — with this sense of ease . . . the ease of ‘*being*’ . . .

Years pass, images roll on. The communications take another turn. The silence of the depths fills many spaces . . .

ASTER PATEL



## TO K. D. SETHNA WITH LOVE

DEAR SIR,

I am sorry I was unable to attend your funeral for I was hospitalised for a major operation. Yet I could have made it, but for the physicians in the private hospital who warned me not to move out of bed for a few days at least. I insisted on seeing you at least for a couple of minutes, but my sister who is an anaesthetist caring for me in the hospital room raised her finger and wagged it at me. It is good to have a physician in the family. But at times a big botheration too.

When did I see you last? Must be two years ago, if my memory does not fail me. When I entered your room in the Ashram Nursing Home sometime by sundown, the bed you usually occupied was empty. The nurse who was making your bed was kind enough to inform me that you were in your wheelchair in the hall facing the sea.

I tiptoed my way to the hall, my aim being not to disturb the many ailing men and women. I sat crosslegged on the floor by the side of your wheelchair, and directed my eyes to follow yours.

All poets love the sea. The ever rolling waves trying to gain a piece of land for themselves and the land refusing with a scowl and forcing them to retrace their steps . . . Ah, what a lovely sight the ocean makes! Who would not find time to stand and stare at the sea? That day we two, guru and shishya, stared at the Bay of Bengal without disturbing each other.

It was I who broke the silence, by clearing my throat.

“Hello, Raja! When did you come here?” you asked.

“I don’t know, Sir!” I told a lie. “How long are you here?” I asked.

“Who? Me? . . . I do not know. I do not know why I am still here. I do not know what I am going to do here,” you said. I knew what you meant by the word ‘here’. Tears threatened to trickle out of my eyes. How can a writer like me, a child of yours, who had the privilege of studying the art of writing under you, ever afford to lose you?

I guess you saw my tears . . . Then you said, “Perhaps my name is playing hide and seek with the Lord of Death and he is still in search of it in his mammoth register,” and made me laugh.

I know you are full of humour and your jokes are not meant to hurt anyone.

I still remember the day when I entered your house where you last stayed before you shifted to the Nursing Home. I saw a few foreigners sitting around you and having a chat with you. When I felt a bit hesitant to intrude, you smiled and welcomed me, “Come in, Raja, and join the lit-chit-chat.” You then introduced to me all the four foreigners who were all women and told them, “Here is Prof. P. Raja,

our star-reviewer for *Mother India*.” I felt elated for you have honoured me with such a nice certificate.

When I searched for a chair to sit in, your eyes roved all over your study-cum-office and finding all the chairs occupied you said without any hesitation, “No chairs! Then choose a lap,” and sent every one of us to rib-tickling laughter.

“When is it not a feast with Sethna around?” I heard someone comment there.

I was one among those blessed few who had the honour of laughing with you. And whenever you made me laugh, I thought to myself, “What a sincere disciple of Sri Aurobindo you were.” Was it not the Yogi’s Yogi who said, “Humour is the salt of existence”?

At a time when I began writing poems without knowing what really was meant by the word ‘poem’, and showed them to you for your comments, you were quite frank in passing your judgement. You said, “Don’t waste my time.” The next time I opened my folder before you, you asked me smiling charmingly as usual, “What? You have brought something for my bin?”

I laughed before I showed you a folder of seven poems. You went through them as an ophthalmologist would with an eye. You selected one and you tore the rest to pieces under my very eyes and threw them into your cane bin. The poem you selected for publication in *Mother India* was “One Aim — One Desire — One Goal”. Later you gave me a copy of the October 1979 issue of *Mother India*, congratulated me and said, “Follow the title of your poem in life too.” I took your advice very seriously and till today, Sir, I strictly follow it.

Out of the six hundred and odd poems I have written and published so far in various journals both in India and elsewhere, you have published less than a dozen poems in *Mother India*. But when those poems were reproduced in American journals and a few dollars rolled into my coffers, I recognised the worth of *Mother India* and understood your calibre as its editor.

I always wondered how at this ripe old age, you meticulously edited *Mother India*, which began with the approval of our great master Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Once when I entered your study, I saw you proof-reading the pages of the forthcoming issue of *Mother India*. You gave me a page of the proof and asked me to proof-read it. I felt extremely jittery and nervous. Yet you encouraged me to go ahead. I did what best I could do and showed it to you. You went through that once again and found more mistakes on that page than I succeeded in finding. “You need to be a bit more careful when you proof-read. It is like tight-rope walking. If you lose your balance then that paves the way for your fall. Mistakes in a magazine tell upon its editor. The editor should never allow his readers to look down upon him.” O Sir! You are a lofty personality. One can only look to you for help.

How can I ever forget the day I met you, my dear Sir? It was on February 21, 1979 . . . Mother’s birthday . . . Darshan day in our Ashram. It was around eleven in the morning. Mr. George Moses, (a retired Superintendent of Police, a voracious

reader and editor of a literary journal *Youth Age*) introduced me to you in your house at Rue Suffren, where you lived with your wife. It must be mentioned in passing that your wife became a great fan of mine when I began to write my creative short stories and also translated Tamil fiction for *Mother India*.

But the day I met you I was only a budding writer, a struggling writer with a very strong itch to write. I placed a cardboard file before you and spread it open.

“What is this?” you asked.

“A file of clippings . . . all my writings,” I answered with my hands shaking in fear.

“Oh, I see! What do you want me to do with them?”

“Go through them when you find time . . . If my writings could get me a chance to write in *Mother India*, then I would consider myself a blessed being,” I said in all humility.

“I see,” you said as you flipped through the clippings in the folder. You then banged it shut. I was disappointed because you didn’t even bother to read a single line.

“Can you review a book for *Mother India*?” you asked, looking at me through your thick glasses.

“Review? I have not written a book review so far.”

“Perhaps you were not given a chance so far. Then try with this,” you said, giving me a copy of *Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta* — Vol. 7. It weighed heavily both in my hand and on my mind. “Your review will speak for your literary acumen and will help me judge your writing abilities.”

“Life is full of challenges,” you said and added, “take this too as a challenge.”

You then advised me on the art of reviewing books. I had taken heart from your short lecture, took about a month to go through the book, wrote the review and submitted it to you. You went through the whole review making editorial changes. You beamed with joy and said, “You can write for *Mother India*.”

I jumped for joy.

By the end of April you gave me a copy of the May 1979 issue of *Mother India*, patted me on the back and invited me to write regularly for *Mother India*. Thus began our friendship and it continues till today. I am not ready to believe that you are no more here in Pondicherry.

Out of the three hundred and odd editors of magazines and newspapers both in India and elsewhere who published my writings so far, I think you are the only one magnanimous enough to devote several hundred pages for my literary effusions.

Is not the writer in me a blessed being who gained valuable experience and training under your tutelage?

A quarter century ago when my daughter was not even two years old, I brought her along to your house. That was the first time she came to your home. As we entered your study, the child saw you, stood spell-bound for a minute and then

whispered into my ears, “Appa! He is god.”

“What did she say?” you asked me, touching her chubby cheeks.

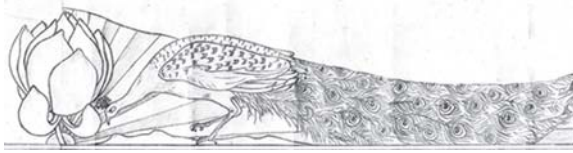
I repeated what she had whispered. And you said, “If her soul could see the god in me, then I have not lived in vain.”

It took a very long time for me to understand your statement. Yes sir! I got the message.

Do gods die?

Affectionately yours,

P. RAJA



## MY FIRST CONTACT WITH AMAL

My first contact with Amal goes back to 1951. At that time he was living in Bombay, and I was a student of Nizam's College, Hyderabad. I'd sent to him a set of my poems of the time and sought his guidance. He was prompt, and warm, in his reply, and even wrote that I'd a genuine poet in me. One of my poems was entitled, "Where do the Nebulae Go?" Its genesis was what our professor in the physics class had told us regarding the stars and the galaxies and the nebulae. According to the scientific ideas, they are constantly drifting away from us, drifting towards some far-off mysterious destination. The Red-Shift is a metaphor for the search of that Unknown. Amal liked a few lines and commented so, saying that they are "felicitous". But he also said it looks somewhat "nebulous". But I took this "nebulous" as a compliment, the adjective bearing the quality of the nebula itself, as if having a definite aim in its journey in the night sky. But what came to me as a wonderful surprise was he published one of my poems, of course with a lot of corrections, in the November 1952 issue of *Mother India*, which was coming at that time from Bombay. He said that it is a good sonnet coming from a student, and deserved all encouragement. But there was more to it than just encouragement! I was pretty happy, and also felt kind of important.

But the concrete "encouragement" came about a month after the publication of the poem. His office had sent by money order a sum of Rs. five, as was the custom in those days for *Mother India* to pay the authors. I did not know that I'd be rewarded this way also, and had least expectations. Promptly on receiving it I sent the amount to the Mother as my offering to her, an offering which you may call great or small depending upon how you look at it. The money order receipt came to me with her powerful and beautiful signature.

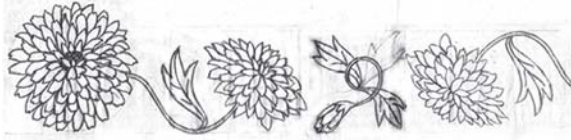
Here is the sonnet that had appeared in the periodical:

I am a student of Thy Infinity  
With a heart simple like a blossoming flower;  
Out of hushed caves there wakes an ecstasy  
In a blank breast to drink Thy endless shower.  
A god-will sprung from the rocky void of sleep  
In a stream of magic rushes through my being  
Of dumb nakedness to the soul's silent deep  
And all a light that is a flickerless seeing!

I am a student of Thy Truth's triumphing  
And I carry my heart to the dream-distant Sun

Where a giant wideness shall its wonder-wings  
Spread over my trance in a deathless union.  
Life shall new-glow in the lore of spirit-fire  
To clasp the Unknown in a white flame-desire.

R. Y. DESHPANDE



## AN INTERVIEW WITH AMAL KIRAN BY ANIE NUNNALLY

AMAL now calls home the Ashram Nursing Home on Goubert Avenue where he has resided since May 1999 after his hip was broken. He does not want to return to his house as he is well taken care of at the nursing facility and is freed from all the responsibilities of “housekeeping”, as he says. The monsoon rains were teeming on many days that I visited him, but there was always sunshine when I entered his room because of his warm, welcoming and sunny disposition. . . . He is given daily physical therapy sessions, receives many visitors and when I arrived he was often sitting in the sun room overlooking the Bay of Bengal, pondering the tireless waves and surf that pound the concrete walls along the boulevard. He seemed quite peaceful and contented.

Following are some of the questions I put to Amal and his answers:

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

**AMAL:** The first darshan with the Mother I had the impression of a radiance all around her. When I first saw Sri Aurobindo I had the sense of something leonine, as well as a mountainous calm. He leaned forward and blessed me with both hands about my head. The Mother kept smiling all the time as if to set me at ease in the presence of Sri Aurobindo. My turn to go to them was to follow an American couple that I overheard discussing whom to bow to first. They solved the problem by bowing between them. This way they touched the feet of neither but had the rare experience of being blessed by both of them at the same time. I looked at Sri Aurobindo and saw him gently moving his head forward and backward with an expression on his face as if he saw my inmost being. I felt afterwards a little disappointed with myself for having examined his look and general appearance. I liked the shape of his nose and the way he seemed to look deep within me. But afterwards, I did feel disappointed with myself for having concentrated on his outer appearance. When I met the Mother later on I asked her, “Mother, has Sri Aurobindo said anything about me?” She said, “Yes, he told me that this young man has a good face.” So it seemed to be “tit for tat”. I was a little disappointed but I told myself that to have a good face in Sri Aurobindo’s eyes cannot but mean a great deal — at least it meant that I could face the difficulties of the yogic life. Sri Aurobindo had a soft, very soft voice, I am told, but I never heard him speak.

**ANIE:** Can you describe the atmosphere of the Ashram when Mother and Sri Aurobindo were in their physical bodies and the difference since that time?

**AMAL:** The general atmosphere of the Ashram did not change radically. When both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had left their bodies, I could still feel their presence. Perhaps because their subtle physical was said to have extended a number of miles beyond their bodies. I remember being told that their subtle physical auras extended up to the Lake Estate, several miles away. So it may be said that they hold us close to them even at a great distance.

**ANIE:** In what way did your sadhana change after they left their bodies? How has the sadhana changed for you at this stage in life and what new forms has it taken?

**AMAL:** The sadhana has not fundamentally changed since my first experience which was the opening of the heart centre about six months or so after I settled in Pondicherry. I was persistently wanting this opening of the heart and several times I made the Mother touch me with her hand in the middle of my chest asking her to break me open there and at last there was an opening. At that time, I realised just how shut human beings are in their heart region. With that opening came the sense not only of a great wideness but also of a lovely atmosphere full of flowers and fragrances accompanying this happy warmth. Sometimes the sense of the opening was so intense that I felt almost breathless and prayed that this heavenly feeling would never go away.

**ANIE:** What changes do you see taking place in the Ashram in the future and will it be different, in any way, from what it is now?

**AMAL:** So long as a nucleus of sadhaks exists in the Ashram who are really doing the yoga, the Ashram will remain as it always has been.

**ANIE:** What do you see as being the strongest attributes and contributions of Americans to the work of Mother and Sri Aurobindo?

**AMAL:** Mother felt that external help for the growth of the Ashram would come imminently from America, but said there would be a sort of tantalising connection. I remember her saying that Ganesh, the Lord of Wealth, would always help her but often in a wayward way. There were times when the Ashram was almost desperately in need of money. The Mother had to sell her own saris to obtain the needed relief. There were some American followers who bought the saris and then offered them back to the Mother. A great deal of money began to pour in to the Ashram from America after the Mother's departure.

I always felt a special admiration for those who had never seen Mother or Sri Aurobindo in their physical bodies and yet could dedicate themselves to the Ashram life . . . especially those people from America and other countries. I know of some who had come here as fulfilling a part of their pilgrimage in India but having been here for some time dropped their idea of seeking elsewhere and stayed on in the Ashram. The first Americans to settle here were a couple named Mr. and Mrs. McPheeters. The husband went out to travel to various places and when he returned was not quite the same person. During his absence his wife became part of the small



group that used to meet the Mother in the Prosperity store room before the Soup Ceremony took place. Janet McPheeters would have stayed on if it had not been for her husband who wished to return to America.

**ANIE:** One difficulty occurring in the sadhana is straying from the path, doing what one knows not to do, becoming discouraged, etc. Did this happen in your sadhana? How to guard against this happening and what to do if and when it comes?

**AMAL:** Straying from the path and doing what one knows not to do are real obstacles in yoga. Becoming discouraged now and again is a very common phase but one can get over this condition by appealing again and again to the Divine for help. In any kind of difficulty the most powerful help lies in praying to the Divine to carry one safely through the dark periods. The Divine is always ready to pick you up whenever you fall. A certain passage in the Mother's *Prayers and Meditations* has been the chief support of my yoga. It begins, “O Divine and adorable Mother, what is there that cannot be overcome with Thy Help?” There is also the passage, “Thou hast promised to lead us all to our supreme destiny.” Not always to go on struggling but to appeal to the Mother to take up our struggle is one of the major secrets of success. Perhaps it is best summed up in the formula “Remember and Offer”. To practise this most fruitfully one must stand back inwardly from the invading impressions.

**ANIE:** Now that you are in your 90's, what has yoga done for you at this stage in your life?

**AMAL:** My paramount aspiration, as stated earlier, was to have the opening in the heart — what Sri Aurobindo called the Psychic Being. This gave me an intense feeling of joy that was self-existent. I was always afraid it would not last, but last it did, though not always at the same pitch. Ever since this first breakthrough there has always been a sense of a radiant response to the presence of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

**ANIE:** Could you explain what it was like to be Sri Aurobindo's correspondent for *Savitri*?

**AMAL:** A friend of mine with some literary accomplishment gave, on my invitation, his comments on *Savitri*. Mostly they were critical. I submitted them to Sri Aurobindo and he considered them by answering. He found them not sufficiently penetrating because the writer had no spiritual background, but as they were from an accomplished literary consciousness, Sri Aurobindo thought it worthwhile to enter into a discussion with him. When I sent a copy of Sri Aurobindo's answer to my friend he was rather apologetic and said that if he had known that Sri Aurobindo would read them, he would have been less “downright” in his tone. It was good that he was “downright” because thereby he gave Sri Aurobindo an opportunity to reply at length. Sri Aurobindo considered his comments as representative of a competent critical mind and he wanted this kind of mind to realise the newness of such poetry as *Savitri*, which was written from a yogic consciousness. Sri Aurobindo's answers

to various criticisms by me helped to make clear the level from which Sri Aurobindo wrote his spiritual poetry. Sri Aurobindo said my questions to him were based on some understanding of the kind of poetry he wrote and the plane from which He did so. Whereas, my friend's comments were lacking in sympathetic understanding. *Savitri* struck me as opening up an entirely new world not only of experiences but of literary expression. It was a great help to me because I was eager to write from what Sri Aurobindo called the overhead planes. Of course I aspired to participate in that consciousness but more directly my aim was to open myself to the influence and receive the direct utterance of poetry. It was possible to be receptive to it without myself getting stationed on those higher levels. Sri Aurobindo distinguished these levels as Higher mind, Illumined mind, Intuitive mind and Overmind intuition. He considered these planes as being communicated by us through our poems. The sheer overmind was difficult to tap and examples of the sheer communication could be found mostly in the Rig Veda, Upanishads and part of the Gita. It was interesting to realise that by silencing one's mind and keeping the consciousness looking upward, as it were, it was possible to write the highest spiritual poetry now and again without being stationed on those overhead levels. It is also interesting to note that one or two skilful changes in a poetic statement could mean a leap from the mental level to the overhead one. A striking example can be given by the small change made in one line like:

“A cry to clasp in all the one God-hush”

A sheer uplifting of the plane can come by transferring two words from the middle of the line to its end so that the line would read:

“A cry to clasp the one God-hush in all”

The first version suggests that this cry could be suggested by an effort to catch it while the other version transmits the plane directly.

**ANIE:** For many years you had been going to the samadhi for long meditations on a daily basis. Would you describe what you experienced in these meditations?

**AMAL:** There was a response from the samadhi towards me and from myself towards the samadhi. The presence of Mother and Sri Aurobindo became more intense during these visits to the samadhi. Afterwards the persistent feeling was that I carried the samadhi within myself, so I do not feel an acute need to be physically face to face with it any longer.

\* \* \*

Some days later I returned to the nursing home to visit Amal. It was Christmas Eve morning and he was dressed in a bright red shirt and was also wearing his ever-present bright and happy smile. On this day, the last interview day, I had no specific questions. We spoke of many things among them being that of feeling the Mother’s presence within . . . I stated that I felt Sri Aurobindo as a vast Presence looking down on me from very high above as the Purusha consciousness. Amal said, “Yes, Sri Aurobindo is too large to live within our hearts; we live within him!”

ANIE NUNNALLY

(Reprinted from *The Golden Path — Interviews with Disciples of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville*, East West Cultural Centre, Los Angeles, California, 2004, pp. 7-19)



## AMAL KIRAN: PSYCHIC GREATNESS, MENTAL VERSATILITY

### The author and editor

It is regrettable that, generally speaking, the inner greatness of a person is recognised and accepted only after he has passed on, while when in the body, life's strictures prevent seeing him in his true stature. Amal Kiran's extensive writings show an astonishing array of intellectual interests, always passionately suffused by the Flame within. They are variations on his central theme: Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

There are still many sadhaks and sadhikas in the Ashram who have lived with the Mother and even during the lifetime of Sri Aurobindo, but with 106-year-old Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna, born in 1904) disappeared the last of the first generation of disciples. As he named some of them himself in one of his books, they were "forceful Purani, gentle Pujalal, poised Nolini, sympathetic Amrita, diligent Champaklal, disciplined Dyuman, simple Rajangam, enthusiastic Dara, scrupulous Premanand, cordial Pavitra, dignified Anilbaran and courteous Doraiswamy . . ." <sup>1</sup>

The spectrum of his interests knew no bounds. "Both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother told me that most distinctly to their eyes I had been an ancient Athenian in a past life. My bond with Sri Aurobindo may have been close at that time too" (for Sri Aurobindo is supposed to have been Pericles). <sup>2</sup> But the influence of this experience from a former life was not the only one which resonated in Amal Kiran's life, leading him to write e.g. *Sri Aurobindo and Greece*. He studied Christianity in depth and wrote *Problems of Early Christianity, The Virgin Birth and the Earliest Christian Tradition*, and published his correspondence with the Catholic monk Bede Griffiths. Such knowledge also allowed him to write extensively about Teilhard de Chardin and his Omega Point, at the time often compared and sometimes opposed to Sri Aurobindo's vision.

Amal Kiran studied the latest developments in physics and biology. The result was a difficult book on the theory of relativity and a knowledgeable use of the scientific arguments in his discussions of the relation between science and spirituality (e.g. *Science, Materialism, Mysticism*). His books and articles on the Aryan problem, among them *The Problem of Aryan Origins*, made him an authority on the subject. And all this is only part of his explorations and the well-founded formulations of his opinions concerning a wide range of matters. On the back-cover of the publication

1. Amal Kiran: *Aspects of Sri Aurobindo*, p. 98.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

from 1995 one finds a list of no less than 40 books by him. His writings on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and on the Integral Yoga in particular and spirituality in general, have been avidly read by Aurobindonians, while his scientific and historical studies have not met with the attention they deserve.

This man, intensely avid of the experiences of the Spirit, and thrilled by Sri Aurobindo’s vision and its concrete application to every aspect of the world, was the ideal editor of *Mother India*. He had to keep up high and extensive standards, for Sri Aurobindo considered this “monthly review of culture” to be his very own mouthpiece. In its issues one finds the same versatility as mentioned above, always inspired, always broad-minded. Amal Kiran’s editorship rendered his relation with Sri Aurobindo, whom he had to consult time and again, still closer. And it became a living illustration of the Aurobindonian attitude, which demands the largest possible mental outlook together with a one-pointed yogic concentration in the heart — a delicate balance not always easy to maintain.

Moreover, the title of the review had to be justified by its contents, constantly focusing on the glory and the problems of Mother India for which the freedom-fighter Aravinda Ghose had put his life on the line, and of which Sri Aurobindo and the Mother saw the soul and its future. Many of Amal Kiran’s articles on India were collected in books like *Evolving India: Essays on Cultural Issues*, *India and the World Scene*, *The Indian Spirit and the World’s Future*, titles which speak for themselves.

## The Poet

Amal Kiran was the most talented among the English-writing poets blossoming under Sri Aurobindo’s guidance and spiritual stimulation. Their writing of poetry was actually an exercise to open their access to the spiritual levels above the ordinary mind, “overhead”, and was therefore an exercise of yoga. Sri Aurobindo never tired of counselling them, correcting their poems, and sending them the force which gave them their inspiration. (The ease with which he identified in their poems the levels of the “overhead” inspiration, even of single lines, remains an object of wonder.) “It was interesting,” said Amal Kiran in a late interview, “to realise that by silencing one’s mind and keeping the consciousness looking upward, as it were, it was possible to write the highest spiritual poetry now and again without being stationed on those overhead levels.”<sup>3</sup> Most of his poems have been collected in *The Secret Splendour* (1993).

As an evaluation, Sri Aurobindo’s comment upon his poem “This Errant Life” says it all: “. . . a beautiful poem, one of the very best you have written. The last six

3. Anie Nunnally: *The Golden Path*, p. 17.

lines, one may say even the last eight, are absolutely perfect. If you could always write like that, you would take your place among English poets and no low place either. I consider they can rank — these eight lines — with the very best in English poetry.”<sup>4</sup>

Amal Kiran has written volumes on the poetry of Milton, Blake and Mallarmé. The main centre of his interest, however, was Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri*, by which he remained permanently spellbound, and of which he had received the honour, on 25 October 1936, of being sent the sixteen opening lines of Canto One (as they stood then). From that day onwards, a kind of dialogue about the poem had started, Sri Aurobindo sending passages of what he had written to the poetically most gifted and knowledgeable disciple close to him. These exchanges resulted in many of the revealing commentaries transmitted to us by Amal Kiran on a poetical and spiritual masterwork, written to confront the ages.

## The Yogi

“Amal told me that the Mother said if someone came to her even once she did two things: she linked their outer being to their psychic being and the other was that she put out an emanation of herself to go with that person for all of their lifetime.” Thus writes Anie Nunnally in her interview with Amal Kiran which took place towards the end of 1999.<sup>5</sup> In this interview he says that, from the very beginning of his yoga, it was his aim to have the psychic realisation. “. . . several times I made the Mother touch me with her hand in the middle of my chest asking her to break me open there and at last there was an opening”,<sup>6</sup> six months after he settled in Pondicherry in 1927.

Times were quite different then. This is so tangibly shown in an anecdote Amal Kiran relates from around the same time. “One morning, meditating in my room (which by the way had been Sri Aurobindo’s own room for nine years and was itself a gift of Grace), I felt a keen urge in the heart to go to the Ashram and up the staircase leading to the apartment on the first floor where all heaven seemed situated because the Mother and Sri Aurobindo lived there. I just went and stood on the landing between the two sections of the staircase and looked at the door upstairs. Suddenly the door opened and the Mother stood on the threshold. She looked down and softly said: ‘Would you like to come in?’ I was surprised beyond words for a second. Then I stammered out: ‘Oh yes. May I?’ She took me inside and let me do a pranam to her. She gave her blessing and a flower and saw me to the door. After this it became a daily event that after the general pranam I should go up to her. She would hold my hand and take me right inside to what used to be a small dressing-

4. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

room. She would sit down on a *pouf* and, after my pranam, do again the hand-in-hand walk and see me out.”<sup>7</sup>

His constant aspiration and experience in the Integral Yoga, together with the humility of his never-denied humanity, has resulted in Amal Kiran becoming a guide to his readers and to the many who wrote to him privately, looking for help and enlightenment. His writings on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and on their Yoga, based on his direct communication with them and on his own yogic effort, are a source of information and exploration for us, and will remain so for others after us. To mention a few: *Aspects of Sri Aurobindo*, *The Vision and Work of Sri Aurobindo*, *Our Light and Delight: Recollections of Life with the Mother*, *The Mother: Past-Present-Future*, three volumes of *Life-Poetry-Yoga*. There is also the refreshing *Light and Laughter: Some Talks at Pondicherry*, a series of talks full of humour he and Nirodbaran gave for the students and teachers of the Ashram School in 1970-71, and which I was lucky to attend.

### **An open mind**

Amal Kiran was a seeker for Truth, and when he was blessed to find it in Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, he constantly continued to explore this boundless domain in order to integrate it into his whole personality, in his physical body, his life force and his mind.

The term “Renaissance Man” has been used in connection with him, and his own characterisation of himself as “versatile” means in fact a largeness and flexibility of mind trying to capture as much as he found in the personalities, the sayings and the writings of his Masters. They carried in them the East and the West, the past, present and future. Amal Kiran was the example of a disciple who realised this and tried to live according to it, as he realised that the foundations, the Two-in-One, the double Avatar, had to be worked out in all their aspects. Few have been mentally aware of as much, hopefully many will follow his example.

The dangers of the Second World War brought many people to the Ashram, where some inmates, used to their tranquil daily routine, were not exactly happy with the new circumstances. About that situation Amal Kiran wrote: “At times an attempt seems to be made to lift some rules out of their old context and set them up as if intended for all periods. Any warning that neglect of them might have undesirable consequences strikes one as ill-conceived. To apply a practice from early days wholesale to living-styles very different would be unrealistic. Of course, discrimination as regards the outside world has always to be exercised by the Ashramites, but there is little room for doctrinaire restrictions which everybody knows to be obsolete

7. Amal Kiran: *Our Light and Delight: Recollections of Life with the Mother*, p. 31.

if not obstructive under present circumstances.”<sup>8</sup> In fact the world never stops changing, and with it the external circumstances of the Yoga, which have to be tackled ever anew.

I had the occasion to thank Nirodbaran on several occasions for his invaluable texts as a witness who gave us, eager for such information, glimpses of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother we otherwise never would have had. I saw Amal Kiran and his wife Sehra practically everyday pass by in a rickshaw in the years when they and I lived in the Rue Suffren, but I have had only a single conversation with him in connection with the first issue of *Next Future* which I was to edit. One of the dearest pictures in my memory is he and Nirodbaran, his “close friend”, the last two of the old guard, together at the Samadhi, talking in short sentences about mysterious things, perhaps of yesteryear, with long intervals of silence.

I express my homage and thanks here to a great Aurobindonian, to whose writings I have often gone, as shown by the references in my books, for information and understanding.

GEORGES VAN VREKHEM

8. Amal Kiran: *Aspects of Sri Aurobindo*, p. 99.





## UPON AMAL'S PASSING

A bright star has fallen  
From the sky physical,  
Into the eternal haven  
Of Mother's peace ethereal!

He loved me so much  
And I loved him no less,  
This on his passing,  
I confess.

SATADAL

## AMAL KIRAN: SWEETNESS AND LIGHT

THE news that Amal Kiran was no more came to us with a bit of surprise. Like many others, I too thought that Amal had [at least temporarily] conquered death and would live on much longer. Crossing the hundredth year is always considered a challenge for human beings, and Amal, like Nirodbaran, had done just that. Some of us had the good fortune to be associated with the volume *K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran): A Centenary Tribute* [The Integral Life Foundation, USA, 2004]. As editor of this volume, I had the singular good fortune to browse through the voluminous material concerning Amal — his life, his work and his times. I cannot say that I understood him completely. But working on the volume was an opportunity to know a little more about Amal the man and the versatile genius.

Like many others in the Ashram, Amal was for me, primarily, the editor of *Mother India*. In the ‘Higher Course’ [at ‘Knowledge’], I was a student of Kishor Gandhi who organised for us students, during the time of the Darshan, seminars under the aegis of the New Age Association; the topics for discussion were always approved by the Mother (till 1973). Some of our speeches in the ‘New Age Association’, in due course, appeared in *Mother India*, under the column ‘Students’ Corner’. This was an exhilarating experience, a first for me. It gave us students a sense of appreciation and encouragement.

In due course, I met Amal, the editor of the journal, and he turned out to be an extremely learned, charming and cosmopolitan conversationalist. He spoke with a stammer but his words came as polished pieces of rare stones, sparkling and radiant. One felt like collecting his expressions, full of scintillating wit and humour. [Sample: Telephone call: ‘Hello, is this *Aurofood*?’ Amal’s answer: ‘No it is *Amaldrink*!’] His face always had a glow. I would see him now and then, being taken in his hand-drawn rickshaw.

One afternoon, I saw Amal bend down from his rickshaw to peer at the film poster pasted [for some odd reason] on the road at the intersection of the Ashram Dining Room and the GPO. Curious, I followed Amal’s rickshaw, and after he left, took a look at the poster. It was a thriller, ‘Panic in Bangkok’ then being screened at the local Ratna Talkies. That was Amal for you! At home in popular culture [much before the term became academically fashionable] as well as the high-brow literature comprising Sufi poetry, English Literature, Philosophy, Archaeology, Physics and a host of other disciplines, Amal did not see and make distinctions among branches of learning. He was truly a Renaissance man who took up the whole world and the entire gamut of human experience as his province.

After I passed out of the ‘Higher Course’, I went for higher education in the outside world. Returning to Pondicherry during the semester break from Hyderabad

University was a special pleasure for me as I found in Amal an avid listener to my new-found learning. He would listen with eagerness when I spoke about the new developments in literary-cultural studies. I was struck by his intellectual inquisitiveness and *joie-de-vivre* without which scholarship would be dry as dust. I have noticed that, exceptions apart, the older one gets, the more rigid and dogmatic one becomes. Not so Amal! I have never seen him clinging to older modes of thought and action simply because they appeared to be haloed by time. Instead, Amal constantly tried to find meaning in new and newer developments in the academic domain. But here too, there was a discerning mind at work. And thus, while he took a keen interest in the theory of Deconstruction propounded by the French theorist Jacques Derrida, he found little of interest in the modern poetry of the Indian English poet A. K. Ramanujan. This poetry, and much of what passes off as ‘modern’ in the Indian context today, he told me, is merely cerebral and ‘clever’; it lacked depth and a deeper vision of life.

The same with the contributions I sent to *Mother India*. Some articles were appreciated and published, others were politely turned down. In the latter case, he wrote postcards explaining his reasons. In some cases, he explained that though good, the article was not appropriate for *Mother India*. I recall that one submission was especially critical of the French Imperialism in Algeria and Indo-China. I am sure he was aware of these dimensions of the French presence abroad, but for him what the Mother said of the French and French culture, was of paramount importance. That again, was a unique trait of Amal Kiran, his absolute loyalty to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in matters intellectual and spiritual.

Sri Aurobindo considered *Mother India* as his own paper. As is well known, the lead articles that Amal wrote on pressing political issues were read out to Sri Aurobindo and His approval obtained, at times by wire. Given this background, we contributors felt privileged to be published by Amal in the journal.

I have preserved some of the postcards that Amal had sent me. They are full of sweetness and light. To me that is the best that Amal symbolised in his life and work. It was indeed a life full of selfless dedication at the feet of his Gurus. Unlike most of us who regret lost opportunities, Amal accomplished whatever he wished to do in life, and it was time for him to go for a luminous birth, to carry out the soul’s journey on earth.

SACHIDANANDA MOHANTY

## A DEEP SILENCE OF HEART-FELT GRATITUDE

AMAL is no longer with us.

When the editor of *Mother India* sent me an e-mail asking me whether I would have something to say in tribute regarding Amal, my heart and mind at once assented. I would do my best. Surely I would have something to say about this extraordinary person who had played an important role in my life both as friend and mentor from my first days in the Ashram. His kind words and gestures no less than the generosity of his outpourings in prose, verse, and his touching epistolatory exhortations had been an inspiration. The honesty with which he shared his difficulties made it easier for us to have patience with ourselves.

Not so long ago I visited an old friend in "Care". He was reading Amal's book on the difficulties in Sadhana. He confided that it tired him to have normal communication with people, but, he said, he had been reading Amal's book on the difficulties of Sadhana for over an hour without its taxing him at all. I remember Kishor Gandhi saying that this book of Amal's was the best ever on the subject. Amal is still there for us, casting his clear ray.

Impressive as all Amal's erudite books on multifarious subjects are, it is as a brother, inviting us to walk the pilgrim's road with him, that he contributes most.

I have written once before on the occasion of *Mother India's* golden anniversary about how much the monthly arrival of this journal, *Mother India*, has meant to me, what it has stood for in my life over the years.

There is much more, overwhelmingly more, that one could say about Amal. But when I try and express it, my mind falls into a deep silence.

This is my tribute to him today: a deep silence of heart-felt gratitude that goes beyond words and tears.

Thank you, Amal.

\* \* \*

To readers of *Mother India*, Amal was (is) a brother sadhak, a brother ashramite, a brother devotee.

To me, he is all these and also very much a brother poet; I am moved to quote *in toto* his poem "A Poet's Yoga".

### A POET'S YOGA

Remember that my pulse is a poet's blood,  
A thick wild honey drawn from light and love:

Nothing save keener love and closer light  
Can shake it to a tune that is not earth.  
How shall my heart redden with mystic moods  
Unless your God comes forth a lustrous form  
Touching and taking me as if all earth  
Were swallowed up within a Sun of bliss  
Where every sight is dazzled, each thought burned,  
Leaving no universe but His sweet Self,  
A glory of infinitude enfolding me?

13.7.42

(*The Secret Splendour*, 1993, p. 528)

Even now I think of him in deeply silent converse with Sri Aurobindo who is transmitting a new epic of the descent of the supramental Gold to Earth.

It is not now in words but in a new poetry made of soundless waves.

One day, if we are in a silence absolute enough, some of these waves may wash over us with a sudden thrill of bliss.

\* \* \*

For long stretches of time you could set your watch by Amal's afternoon visits to the Samadhi where he used to sit, chin on chest, eyes closed. It would be impertinence to try and pry and probe into what was going on in Amal then.

But he has left us his musings in a poem about the Samadhi of Sri Aurobindo.

#### AT THE SAMADHI OF SRI AUROBINDO

1

Majestic master of the immutable Light,  
Love like a universe thronging within your heart:  
Brooding in silence across lonely years  
Of secret heavens a-dream in infinite hells,  
You found the hammer to break the Dragon's sleep  
And free from burying black the fallen stars.  
But for each throb of God kindled in earth  
You flung a human heart-beat out of Time:  
You shortened your sovereign life to greaten the dust.  
Your body, drooped from your spirit's hold on high,  
Lays the foundation of a clay-built sky!

## 2

Always the Light came down from the limitless blue,  
 Gold gushing through the head to a heart God-drunk.  
 Now from the soil's sleep rose one dazzling wave,  
 Uttering a secret of eternity locked  
 In caves dumbfounded with a vast black bliss.  
 It sang how sheer divinity grew dust,  
 The miracled Love which left the heart of the sun  
 And crouched with folded fires below Time's feet  
 To give huge wings to the atom's reverie.  
 The surge of light lifted our bodies up  
 As though, in laughing answer to heaven's leap down  
 Into the prisoning space of bone and flesh,  
 Earth now was ready to enter infinitude.  
 A blind snake that had swallowed all the stars  
 Unrolled a boundless mystery flecked with flame  
 And undulated shining centuries.  
 But none riding the rapture and the glow  
 Saw the still King of the new life's luminous realm,  
 Tamer and charmer of mortality's night —  
 One Heart whose deep on gold-dense deep of love  
 Measured the abyss whose cry is the whole world's death!

23.3.52

*(The Secret Splendour, pp. 561-62)*

\* \* \*

The e-mail said, "Amal is no longer with us", and that is true. We will never see his chair at the Samadhi any more. He has sent it spinning and flung away his crutches. But he is also very much with us in the same way that Mother and Sri Aurobindo are.

We shall meet again in another world when we all come back with Mother to continue until the work is all done.

MAGGI

## A TRUE FRIEND

I FIRST met Amal Kiran at the beginning of August 1971. After that, I would visit him almost every week for about 30 years. When we first met, I was in my late 20s, he in his late 60s. Now I am older than he was when we met, and he has left his body, just a few months short of his 107<sup>th</sup> birthday. Although over the last decade we have met less often, he has been a major influence in my life, in ways difficult to put into words.

He once commented to me that it would be interesting to know, while still alive, what people would say about you, once you were dead. Amal had the chance to read many tributes to him in his lifetime — two volumes were published at the time of his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, and another substantial one for his centenary. I have contributed on both those occasions. Now, when the time has come for an obituary tribute, I find myself somewhat at a loss for something fresh to add.

First and foremost, Amal has been a living example to me of what a follower of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother could be.

We have been told that in the integral Yoga there is no distinction between the sadhana and the outward life; it is in each and every movement of the daily life that the truth must be found and practised.

This is what I have seen in Amal: all the big and little joys and vicissitudes of life offered up to the Master and the Mother, sometimes smilingly, sometimes with an intense call for aid and understanding, but always with unfailing confidence in their solicitude and constant guiding presence, and a spontaneous surrender to their will.

Although increasing bodily difficulties gradually restricted his physical movements, they did not seem to limit the far-ranging integrality I have always found in Amal: mentally, in the vast scope of his interests; psychically and emotionally in the wideness of his sympathies; and spiritually, in the subtlety of his intuitive grasp of inner truths and circumstances. Practically, it always seemed to me, he was ready to take any and every aspect of life into his sadhana, whose keyword was, as he often told me, “Remember and offer”. I have seen that unobtrusive but persistent remembering and offering at work in big and little things day by day over the years, and I am convinced that it was this ever-renewed opening to the Mother and the Master that shaped his whole nature into such a wide warm flow of sweet strength.

Into this flow I often had occasion to pour various troubles and difficulties; and always felt that they were sympathetically seized and lifted up into the joint sunlight of Mother’s and Sri Aurobindo’s consciousness. The wideness and depth of Amal’s link with our gurus — established and enlarged over so many years of closeness and intense aspiration — enabled help from them to flow freely to those who appealed to him for assistance. He was always scrupulous in insisting that the

help came from them, while readily accepting to intercede on behalf of any troubled questioner. In this way, through his personal influence and example, as well as through his many writings on life and yoga, he helped to spread their sunlight brightly and broadly.

The mental and vital affinities that attracted me to Amal had much to do with his qualities as a poet. The adventurous intellect which I could not always follow into his explorations of Jewish or Egyptian or Indian history, into theological discussion or literary criticism, I could immediately respond to in his poetry. *The Secret Splendour* — his Collected Poems published in 1993 — is in my eyes a towering achievement, second only to Sri Aurobindo's own poetic oeuvre, although it seems that a new generation of readers will have to emerge before its true position and value can be widely appreciated.

I have been privileged to glimpse some of the 'juvenilia' Amal had written before he came to the Ashram in 1927, and I can attest that although he may have been born a poet, it was Sri Aurobindo who made him the great poet he became. Those early efforts were poor stuff compared to the masterpieces that started to flow only a few months later under Sri Aurobindo's guidance. In fact Amal told me that after coming to the Ashram he wrote only for Sri Aurobindo — no one else's assessment counted a jot for him. But from the Master he wanted to elicit the highest praise: Not satisfied with a "very good", he strove to deserve an "excellent" or "superb", and to reach the highest possible levels of poetic inspiration.

The remarkable thing is that he was able to sustain that high level of poetic achievement over more than 60 years — although of course there were variations in the rate and intensity of the output. His astonishing volume *The Adventure of the Apocalypse*, which was written over a few months in 1948 and which Sri Aurobindo immediately arranged to have published without alteration as soon as he had seen it, is a significant milestone towards the future poetry, which remains to be emulated.

It was not only the poems which appealed to me, but the personality of their maker. Qualities such as the spiritual artist's delight in varied forms of beauty, capacity for high intensities of feeling and vision, subtle richness of comprehension, discrimination and expression, which made him such a fine poet, also flowed out in Amal's daily dealings, enhancing his response to the people and ideas that entered his orbit. Perhaps too the almost reckless adventurousness which he showed in earlier life, muted later to a steady courage which helped him to sustain with cheerfulness the trials of the restricted life-style that marked the last decade of his life, also formed part of this poetic persona.

A photograph in my possession, taken in 1993, catches his outer features even better than the one on the back cover of *The Secret Splendour*: the wide brow, dreaming eyes, sweet sensitive smile, and serene presence of the sadhak-poet, who consistently aimed for



A wide unshaken look on time’s unrest.

The innermost state of Amal Kiran as he approached 90 was evoked by ‘Far’, a poem dated July 1, 1993, the latest to be included in his final collection (p. 662)

Far from his own heartbeat, his wakeful day  
Breathes a huge mountain-air’s lucidity  
And views a wide earth many-faced yet one.  
A calm conspiracy of signalling stars,  
An infinite mystery’s throb on silvery throb  
Of news from nowhere tingling everywhere,  
Is now his sleep. Within his fragile form  
Gods move with radiant smiles from hush to hush  
Of inmost heaven: an immortality  
Touches with healing hands the million shards  
Left round his stillness by the tramp of time.

While I could not fail to respect such a sadhak, and be attracted by such a fine poet, an equal open-heartedness on his side could not be taken for granted. Yet from our very first meeting he drew me, as he drew many others, into his circle of friends. In our friendship, some of his other qualities were revealed to me: for example, a simple and unassuming companionableness which dissolved formal barriers and allowed a spontaneous intimacy; an immense loyalty, ever ready to extend sympathy and understanding, even when, in anyone else’s eyes, we would not merit them; a capacity for wordless communication — it sometimes happened that he was occupied with someone else when I came, or that during our talk someone would come in who required his full attention; then a glance between us would say all that needed to be said, and I could withdraw without disappointment.

His humour is well known. I have heard (it was before my time, of course) about how, when he was giving his talks on poetry in the Ashram school, the whole building was shaken by gales of laughter from his audience, so that other teachers complained of the disturbance. Sometimes that humour took an unexpectedly playful form. I remember once taking an 8-year-old to visit him. Seeing that the child was somewhat overawed at first, Amal, as if absorbing some of the little one’s mischievous nature, began to demonstrate the extraordinary capacities of his polio-damaged left leg: lifting it high in the air like a ballerina and jiggling it around as if it were not properly connected to his body, he explained to the delighted child, whose shyness had all vanished, that Mother had promised to give him a golden leg one day. He also explained that it is very important to know how to fall without hurting oneself, and proved it by dropping to the floor like a plank!

Unfortunately Amal’s gift for falling and rising again did not prevent the

catastrophic breakage of his good right leg in his late eighties — as a result of which he was forced to ride a wheelchair, instead of the spirited white horse of his dreams. That did not banish the smile from his eyes, nor prevent him from tranquilly continuing to fulfil his many responsibilities as editor of *Mother India* for several more years, well into his nineties. Happily too, it did not prevent Amal and Nirodbaran from completing the tremendous labour involved in their detailed consideration of all the pros and cons of every alteration proposed for the definitive edition of *Savitri*.

His life became much more difficult after another fall again led him to the Ashram Nursing Home, which became his home for the last 12 years. Though he once told me that he was extremely happy there, in the later years another fracture — this time of his polio-stricken left leg — combined with failing hearing, eyesight and short-term memory, restricted his possibilities of movement and expression even further. I often wondered how he, who had been so active, physically and mentally, who had enjoyed so many contacts, but had also treasured his independence and his solitary nights, could endure the life that he was now obliged to submit to. Here his great inner resources must have sustained him. When asked what he was doing, he would respond ‘Mother and Sri Aurobindo’s work’; and many have continued to experience the very special atmosphere of his presence. Nevertheless, it saddened me to see him like that. When the news of his passing reached me, I felt a sense of release. I imagined his ever-youthful spirit, freed at last from the load of the body, joyfully winging to meet his beloved Mother and Master.

In the *Auroville News and Notes*, someone posted these wonderful words from Amal:

I have pledged my whole life to the great Beyond and the deep Within and longed to live in the wide Without with the ego-swamping light from on high and the ego-refining warmth from the secret psyche . . . I have the conviction that I am in omnipotent hands which at any moment will lift me out of myself and carry me where Time neighbours Eternity.

Surely this is what has happened to him.

The Mother has told us that our best friend is one who loves the best in us, and helps us always to live up to our best. This is what Amal Kiran has been for me, and for many others. He will be remembered with affection and gratitude by many many people whose lives were warmed and enriched by his clear and smiling Ray.

SHRADDHAVAN

## AMAL KIRAN — A TRIBUTE

THOSE who have known Amal Kiran know also that he was born K. D. Sethna and that Sri Aurobindo gave him his spiritual name, Amal Kiran, 'The clear ray'. My first contact with Amal was a most memorable one. When poems first began to descend in me in the late 1960's I wrote to Amal who was then Editor of *Mother India* and he told me Sri Aurobindo had said it was His journal. Although I knew nothing about prosody and my earliest attempts at receiving clearly the lines that were coming down were poorer than third class, a few caught something from the higher realms of mind. When I sent these to Amal, he not only praised them highly but wrote his comments on each poem and also marked as felicitous certain lines and published some of my poems in *Mother India*.

His inspiration, his cheerful and always positive encouragement — even when he gently criticised a poem — helped immeasurably to open me to reading hundreds, perhaps even thousands of poems, to seek for 'overhead' lines and immerse myself in their rhythm and music, leading in time, to the opening of the floodgates and the pouring down of more than fifteen hundred poems.

During the years of his residence at the Ashram Nursing Home, my relationship with Amal deepened even further and he shared his time generously, often with delightful humour. When I would enter his room he would say, in a booming voice, "What news, Narad?" I would then have to tell him the recent news as he would say that Narad is the bringer of good news. During the last few years I would bring him a supply of special vitamins to last him until my return to the Ashram, usually in October or early November. When he could no longer swallow the tablets, those who attended on him would powder them and mix the contents with some juice. He would say in a firm voice, "Too bitter, I won't take." Then, quietly, he was told, "But Narad has sent these for you," and he would relent, saying, "All right, I'll take." This scenario was repeated on a regular basis!

But I have fast forwarded too quickly; so let me go back in time about eleven years ago when Mary Helen and I asked him if we could interview him. He agreed readily but we didn't do a very good job as 'interviewers' and we had only two sessions, but these were recorded on a mini disc (which Amal liked, for he listened to his voice and it was very clear) which has been preserved.

Much more important was his invaluable help in areas of great importance. In the early 1970's I received a very clear inspiration to compile a dictionary of words and terms in *Savitri*. Madhav Pandit gave me his wholehearted encouragement and told me to complete the work as soon as possible as Mother's Force would be with me constantly. Although I began the 'Lexicon' and even wrote to my father (as we had no money in those early days of Auroville) who was, along with all of my

family on both sides, strongly against my leaving the Russian Orthodox Church and going to India, and asked him for one hundred dollars to purchase the *Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*. The work of beginning the Matrimandir Gardens Nursery to provide the most beautiful plants for the future Matrimandir Gardens (the Matrimandir structure had not been begun as yet) was so intensive that I could not find the time to continue the work on the 'Lexicon'. Yet, during the first twelve years of building the Nursery we did occasionally find time to go to Nolani and receive his illumined replies to numerous phrases in *Savitri*, as well as visiting Madhav Pandit with questions on various phrases. The title of the book is *Lexicon of an Infinite Mind*, taken directly from a line in *Savitri*. The greatest help, however, came from Amal when Mary Helen and I approached him in 2000 and asked him if he would help us. Week after week he wrote his replies by hand and passed them to Minna Paladino to give to us. When it is published, hopefully in 2012, those who read *Savitri* as a large part of their sadhana, will be moved by Amal's answers.

My love and gratitude flow to him for the questions he posed to Sri Aurobindo on lines in *Savitri* as well as general questions on poetry. Sri Aurobindo's replies give us an incomparable insight into the realms of poetry, the writing and recasting of lines, each from a higher plane as He ascended in his Integral Yoga until he brought down 'Overhead Poetry' in all its mantric force.

Amal wrote to me as well, in a lengthy reply and in his own hand, appended at the end of this article, on how one should read *Savitri*. I recall with great delight the times I had the honour of taking him to the Samadhi in his wheelchair, when we would recall lines from *Savitri* on the way to the Ashram.

I remember with a smile his wit and great sense of humour on many occasions. Once he said to me with a perfectly straight face, "Yes, Sri Aurobindo was great but He only wrote 34 books and I wrote 42!"

It was also a great privilege for me to be asked to find and send something to heal Amal's bedsores. I felt Mother guiding me in my search and when I sent a colloidal silver compound his bedsores healed rapidly.

There are two special remembrances I would like to share. The first is a question that I put to Amal when I asked him what one should do if one felt a line of poetry that came was not 'up to the mark'. How could it be improved, as Sri Aurobindo wrote that we should not use the mind to alter it with the intention of improving it. Amal said to me, "Appeal." Then he waited a few moments and said, "If you are patient there will always be an answer."

In closing, I wish to remember with gratitude all Mother's children who attended Amal for years with love and devotion and dedication that I shall never forget. Their offering has touched my heart.

Lastly, I include here a letter to Amal and an experience with Sri Aurobindo that took place on 9.9.99 and his reply.

Jan. 6, 2000

Dear Amal,

Last night as I looked at Sri Aurobindo and Mother I felt a voice say: “The time is now, the moment has come.” I concentrated on Their photos aspiring for a true and vast surrender that would carry all the disparate parts of the being and place them, along with my soul, at Sri Aurobindo’s feet. I prayed too for the annihilation of the ego, for the lasting descent of the peace and calm and for an ever-increasing love and devotion, sincerity and humility that would rend the veil.

I also mentioned to Sri Aurobindo that I had no special ‘urge’ to write poetry, asking only for a total and all-encompassing surrender. Amal, I am grateful for your kind and encouraging words and the time you have given to us (Narad and Mary Helen) and wanted to share the following experience with you.

Two times in the past twenty-five years Sri Aurobindo has granted me the blessing of visiting Him in his permanent home. I wrote these experiences to Mother and She confirmed that they were genuine. On 9.9.99, falling asleep, I found myself again in Sri Aurobindo’s room. In prior experiences I had seen Nolini and others with Him but this time I was alone. I knelt down before Him and He let me massage His feet.

In Mother’s Love,  
Narad

\* \* \*

Amal’s reply in his own hand:

Dear Narad,

I liked your letter very much. It has throughout an effortless inner touch — a sweet profundity such as always characterises the soul’s native speech.

Your latest dream holds, for all its brevity, a world of significance. It reminds me in general of Plotinus’s words: “alone with the Alone.” The difference is that he had found himself merged in a vast divine impersonality beyond human life. Your experience is intensely human and yet with a penumbra of what I may call the “intimately infinite”. My heart is deeply touched and goes out to you most intimately, most happily.

Love,  
Amal

\* \* \*

*Three letters from Amal to Narad on how to read Savitri.*

Read slowly with an awareness that there is a metre, i.e. long syllables, short syllables and a combination of them. Metre means that there is a design, a pattern and the fact that the poetry is divided into lines means that each line has to be felt in a certain shape. So there must be a short pause after each line even if the sense of the line continues into the next.

Poetry means there is metre. Metre means a certain pattern of long syllables and short syllables. It also means that each line stands by itself with a certain pause whether long or brief.

*Savitri* is special in its meaning and message. It has a certain rhythm which is at the same time like all other poetry and with a subtle difference. And its special character makes it what Sri Aurobindo calls Overhead Poetry — that is, poetry which comes from planes of consciousness above the mind. Sometimes the sense is dependent in a delicate way and with a subtle point on the way the line is read in tune with its distinctive character. An example:

A cry to clasp in all the one God-hush

Now mark the change which comes when the line is read as

A cry to clasp the one God-hush in all.

In the first example it is as if something is definitely said. But if one read the line as “A cry to clasp the one God-hush in all” it is as if in the first version we have to discover the one God-hush. In the other version, the one God-hush seems a self evident truth and it is a truth which is not to be found but as if it were self-existent.

When we scan the two slightly different arranged lines we feel that in the first case a definite fact is stated. In the other case we feel that there is a subtle revelation beyond what is actually stated.

*Amal*

Dear Narad,

What Huta told you about reading or reciting *Savitri* must be a directive from the Mother — or something mixed with it from what I may have said. “Slowly, clearly, precisely” is very fine advice but it can apply just as well to good prose. We must not forget that *Savitri* is poetry — generally of five metrical beats: that is, it is by and large iambic pentameter. One must have a sense of this fact and also of the variations played upon this base. Of course, it goes without saying that one must be

familiar with the usual stress in English words. The voice must not fall into any sing-song. English poetry is to be read and not sung, but since it is metrical in a marked way, some sense of the metre must come through. Then there is the matter of end-stopped lines and of enjambment. Enjambment means that the sense of one line runs over into the next. The end-pause in enjambed lines is much less than in end-stopped lines. But since poetry is cut up into lines the line-ending cannot be quite ignored. A very small pause must be there even in enjambed lines.

That is all I can say at the moment . . .

*Amal*

20.4.2000

\* \* \*

“Slowly, clearly, precisely” — this is a good formula but not sufficient. Poetry is cut up into lines which are either end-stopped or made to flow over. But the very *raison d’être* of the division into lines is the need to show each line in its own weight in the metre chosen. So, whether end-stopped or made to flow over, there must be in different ways a “delay” between line and line. The length of the delay is to be decided by the reciter’s sense of his subject. Thus there cannot be the same pause between line and line when we recite

“To be or not to be — that is the question —  
 Whether ’tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
 The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune  
 Or to take arms against a sea of troubles  
 And by opposing end them . . .”

and when we declaim

“If thou didst’t ever hold me in thy heart  
 Absent thee from felicity a while  
 And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain  
 To tell my story”

Apart from internal pauses, the run of the first quotation has to be a little quicker than that of the second. It may be noted that the third line of the second quotation —

And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain

— is so paced that our breath is almost drawn somewhat painfully on account of the stressed words — “this harsh world draw”.

*Amal*

\* \* \*

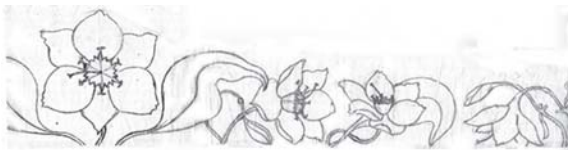
Amal, dear friend and elder brother,

Our souls can visit in great lonely hours  
 Still regions of imperishable Light,  
 All-seeing eagle-peaks of silent Power  
 And moon-flame oceans of swift fathomless Bliss  
 And calm immensities of spirit space.

*Savitri*

Here you have lived and breathed the atmosphere where the Lord abides. Now you return to Him after showering us with so many priceless gifts. I await in calm and with my love, our next meeting and the joy of seeing you again.

NARAD





## MY SALUTATIONS TO AMAL

I MET Amal for the first time in Bombay in 1952. At that time I was studying at the Elphinstone College of Bombay. My professor, Dr. Chubb, was a great friend of Amal's. It was at the suggestion of Dr. Chubb that I sought an interview with Amal at his residence. My meeting with Amal was extremely instructive and inspiring. He told me of his association with the Ashram and his apprenticeship of poetry under the direct guidance of Sri Aurobindo. During my conversation with him, Amal narrated to me a number of his experiences, one of which related to his consumption of an overdose of a medicine which had caused him a terrible pain in his heart. During the course of the pain he got an inner message to take up *Savitri* and read a specific passage from it. He said, as soon as he completed the reading of the passage, the pain had miraculously disappeared.

Another incident that he narrated to me was connected with his excursions into the vital world after coming out of his physical body. He said that on one occasion, when he came out of his body, he was attacked by some vital beings. To escape from the attack, he came back to the body, but before he could enter the body, he was already hit at the back. Consequently he felt the pain of the hit even when he entered into the body. Once again he took up *Savitri* and read a certain passage. Immediately thereafter his pain had disappeared.

He then told me of the worlds of the vital being and mental being, and he widened my awareness through his narration of supraphysical worlds.

All this was thrilling but this was not the end. He further narrated to me of the experiences of some of his poems, which he had seen before his open eyes and he had just to copy them out. I think that some of these poems are in his book, *The Secret Splendour*.

The interview lasted for more than an hour, and when I came out of his room, I felt myself greatly widened and deeply happy. I regard therefore Amal to be my first teacher in regard to the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Later on, it was in 1956, I met him again after he had come back to the Ashram. Just prior to that I had been graced by the Mother and she had granted me admission to the Ashram. Since we were both at the Ashram, I used to go to his residence from time to time and everytime I met him I felt a tremendous freshness and delightful impact of his humour. As we all know, Amal's sweep of scholarship was very wide and his research in literature, philosophy, history and science was greatly painstaking and I always benefited by his conversations. He once spoke to me of his struggles with the problem of free-will. His struggle was so great that he had actually felt a kind of intellectual pain. He told me that when he could not bear the pain he went straight to the Mother and asked her to tell him without any argument whether

really human will is free. The Mother replied to him, “Yes”, and that was the end of his struggle. Thereafter he wrote an article on free-will which he sent to Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo in his reply said that it was an excellent paper. Indeed that paper is exceedingly illuminating and metaphysically most acute and perfect. I think that this paper will stand out in the realm of metaphysics as an outstanding contribution to the knottiest problem of free-will.

I was also greatly interested in Amal’s research in ancient Indian history and the book that he wrote subsequently reverses a number of assumptions which have never been challenged. Amal’s book lifts us up into the intricacies of the ancient genealogies and sheds a new light and shows with convincing evidence that we have more adequate and authentic data to place Chandragupta I as Sandrocottus to which Megasthenes referred to in his memoirs. I believe that his book will receive in due course of time a large acceptance among the scholars of History, both Indian and Western.

When I was the Registrar of the Centre of Education (1958-76), Amal was one of the luminaries among the Professors of our Centre. His talks on English Poetry were extremely stimulating and one could always hear roars of laughter as one passed by his classroom. Fortunately his talks on Poetry have come out in book form and one could revisit those talks at leisure and derive from them both instruction and taste of the highest level of humour.

In 1961, our Centre of Education wanted to bring out a handbook describing the history of our Centre of Education as also a detailed account of our courses of studies. We also thought of including in the handbook some essays written by our Professors. In this connection I approached Amal and he gave me a lengthy essay which stands even today as a most competent introduction to the theme of Intuition in Science and the justification of the development of Intuition as a part of our educational programme. Subsequently the handbook turned out to be quite voluminous, and Amal decided to reprint that entire handbook as one of the issues of *Mother India*.

During these last months, in June 2011, I had a rare opportunity to meet Amal at the Nursing Home. Even though he had crossed 106 I found him to be as cheerful and jovial as ever and even at that moment my memories of his conversations with me crowded my mind and I made my salutations to him in my heart.

After his demise, when I went to the Nursing Home to have his last Darshan, I found him at rest but brimming with life.

My salutations to Amal, who will always remain for me unforgettable as my first teacher in regard to the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

KIREET JOSHI

## HOW I MET AMAL: A HOMAGE OF GRATITUDE

JUST now I returned from the Ashram Nursing Home after bidding farewell to a 106-year-young grand man Amal Kiran, the 'Clear Ray' as Sri Aurobindo named him.

Amal had the rarest talent to turn a cruel blow of life, a handicap, a polio-struck leg into an asset. Nothing could stop his genius and his élan from manifesting. People vied to get the privilege of serving this literary giant. But Amal's greatness was not only in his own stupendous creativeness but also in creating authors, poets and critics. He was the benevolent stream which watered generously other streams of creativity.

A multi-faceted genius, a bright star amongst the star-studded firmament of Sri Aurobindo's great disciples and an accomplished person, Amal was also truly generous. How much time and energy he could pour on a person, probably has no parallel, at least not in my life. To some people, one cannot be grateful enough. Amal was one such person in my life. It is he who put me on the path to become an author, a critic and a poet in English in spite of my diffidence about writing in English. Always encouraging me, Amal was a guide on the beautiful path of my literary creations in English.

The Mother planned it thus that I constructed my house at its present location and by Her Grace Amal moved to a house on the next street, which I passed several times a day, on my way to and from the Ashram. Thus the Mother made him accessible to me. And his doors were always open to those who needed him.

I might have never approached Amal and would have remained a stranger to him, and consequently probably all my English books might have remained unwritten but for an unforeseen event. Of course, having been an avid reader of *Mother India* for decades, I knew about Amal since long and upon joining the Ashram I had asked people to point him out to me. I was in awe of Amal, the great. One day I wrote some poems in Hindi and showed them to revered Parichand, who looked after the Ashram garden. He surprised me by translating them into English. I was impressed by his translations and thought they should be published in *Mother India*. One evening, when Amal was seated in his customary place in the Ashram, I shyly put those translations in his lap with a request to publish them in *Mother India*.

Once I had written some English poems and had sent them to the Mother who had graciously written "Blessings" on the notebook. Almost as an afterthought, I had also given that notebook to Amal. I still remember how Amal raised his eyebrows when I asked him to take special care of the notebook since it had been to the Mother. As if I needed to say this to a person who has received numerous letters from our Master and Mother!

Amal returned the notebook, with a note, “Shyam Kumari, surely you are a poet.” Thus started a relationship which made me write 14 published and many unpublished books in English. Since my school days I had drunk deep of English literature and had read almost all the classics. Actually, one day Amal had remarked, “Oh, you have read *Wilhelm Meister* also! You are one of the best-read persons in the Ashram.” Yet, in spite of my deep love for English literature, due to my diffidence I might never have written in English but for the encouragement Amal gave me by publishing numerous poems, stories, essays etc. in *Mother India*.

The many Latin and Greek words in the early poems of Sri Aurobindo and in his *Ilion* used to baffle me. One day, I requested Amal to grant me the privilege of reading the *Collected Poems* with him. He graciously agreed to do so once a week. It was early 1982. He looked much younger than his age. When I remarked on how young he looked, with his inimitable sense of humour he replied, “I can’t help it.” I bow to Amal’s indefatigable energy and generous self-giving.

After reading one of my letters, the Mother had once told Yatanti, “She has a poetic spirit. One can tell from the letter.” In the joyful creative atmosphere of the Ashram, with Amal’s encouragement, the poet in me blossomed and I wrote even up to four poems a day and Amal read and corrected and edited all of them every day. If it didn’t satisfy him, he asked me to change a word, an expression or a whole line even four times. If he commented “good”, “very good”, “excellent” or “charming” my day would be made; “fair” made me only moderately happy. I have preserved all those poems with Amal’s comments. The first poem ‘The Hush’ appeared in the December 1982 issue of *Mother India* and thereafter in the course of a decade nearly 200 poems appeared in *Mother India*, made more charming by Amal’s editing.

It is a wonder how Amal could give me his precious time and energy day after day, year after year, for more than a decade by correcting and editing my prolific English writings.

I was drunk with poetry. And for me it was frustrating not to understand the early poems of Sri Aurobindo with their numerous Greek and Latin terms. To clarify them to myself I wrote a series of essays probably beginning with, “Beauty in the Early Poetry of Sri Aurobindo”. All of these essays appeared in *Mother India*. When I was passing through great adversity and harsh trials, to counterbalance my gloom I read the comedies of Sri Aurobindo. In those days I had decided to read only Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Out of that gloom emerged the sunny series “Humour in the Plays of Sri Aurobindo”. Amal serialised this also in *Mother India*.

Nearly five years had passed since our first meeting. During this period I met Amal almost daily, to give and receive the things I wrote and then there was the eagerly-awaited weekly class of *Collected Poems*. After *Collected Poems* I requested Amal to read *Hymns to the Mystic Fire* with him. To this also he graciously consented.

One day I recounted to Amal some stories told to me by sadhaks about their wonderful interactions with the Mother. Amal asked me to write them for *Mother*

*India*. I was bubbling with enthusiasm and said without any thought, “No. I will publish them as a book.” Amal sent Shraddhavan to persuade me to write them for *Mother India*. Shraddhavan told me, “Shyam Kumari, you must never say ‘No’ to Amal.” I at once agreed because my remark about publishing them in book form was made on the spur of the moment. Thus was born the series ‘Vignettes of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother’. The first instalment appeared in the January-February 1987 issue of *Mother India*. Later on, this developed into a three-book series.

Another time I told him, “Amal, since my first visit to the Ashram I used to ask sadhaks, ‘How did you come to the Ashram?’ The marvellous thing was that except for one or two who declined, most people laid bare their lives in front of me. Also Nolini had told me once, ‘Story of each sadhak, how he came to the Ashram, is beautiful.’ Should I write these stories for *Mother India*?” Amal approved of the idea and thus was born the series, ‘How They Came to the Ashram’, which was later to be published in four volumes, *Vignettes* and *How They Came to the Ashram*. When they were published it was under the pseudonym ‘S’ and ‘K’, because for years I had been writing articles, poems and serials for *Mother India* and it didn’t seem right to me to publish four or five things in each issue in my name.

Years flew by. Then came the auspicious day, 6<sup>th</sup> August 1994, when I wrote my first “Musings” on the Mother’s *Prayers and Meditations*. I showed Amal the first three Musings and he liked them. The first one appeared in the November 1994 issue of *Mother India*. From August 1994 up to April 20 1996 I completed 308 essays on *Prayers and Meditations*. At the age of 90, with his numerous responsibilities, Amal read and edited every one of them. Hardly ever did he keep them pending for more than a day. I eagerly awaited his comment and approval. When I expressed my gratitude and wondered how he could give them so much time, he remarked that it was a joy to read them. The essays that form part of the first volume of “Musings” were also serialised in *Mother India*.

As I have noted in the beginning, the Divine Mother’s action is a marvel. She arranged our residences in a way so that I could visit Amal even several times a day. He always gave a patient hearing to my myriad problems.

Then our contact gradually faded. I wrote “Musings” while seriously ill and when hope for recovery seemed lost. Though I would make a partial recovery, after “Musings” the chapter of my English writing closed for some years because in a very concrete vision-experience, the Mother said to me, “Now you write in Hindi.” After coming out of the shadow of death, I started a Hindi quarterly magazine, *Swarna Hansa*, which I write single-handedly — it comprises of stories, poems, columns on defence, foreign affairs, women, environment, health, art of living, excerpts from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and stories from *How They Came to the Ashram* as well as *Vignettes*. Also I write about great deeds and miraculous escapes and a children’s section with stories and poems.

I brought the first issue to Amal and regret deeply that he could not read Hindi.

It would have gratified me if he could have read the magazine.

Due to my physical disabilities, except for a few times, I could not go to the Ashram Nursing Home to visit Amal. And when I visited and saw his condition it lacerated my heart. I have seen his brave spirit, how he never let a groan escape from his lips in front of anybody, even when in great pain. Amal used to take his lunch alone and one day I heard him groaning. He expressed his distress only when he thought that nobody was there. I was surprised. In the presence of others he always smiled and joked. In the Nursing Home to see him so totally dependent on others, was painful to bear.

Once Amal said to me, "You are a simple person." I treasured his comment, which I take for a compliment.

In the Ashram, an age of heightened literary activity, of opening to inspiration from higher planes, has passed with the passing of Amal Kiran.

Once Amal spoke of his death.

I had written then the following poem.

#### That Far-Off Day

The day you choose to depart,  
 The Lord Himself will descend  
 By the golden path  
 To gather in His loving arms  
 And to immerse in His divine calm  
 His poet son and trusted scribe.  
 The 'Clear Ray' will become immortal  
 And nestle in its parent Sun.

Now that Amal has left us, holding his smiling face in my memory, with deep gratitude I bow to him.

SHYAM KUMARI



## “FACE TO FACE”

Amal Kiran, the hero-warrior  
Who descended from Heaven  
At the behest of Sri Aurobindo,  
To play His literary-companion,  
Lived graciously as Poet, Critic and Sadhak.

His glorious, dazzling personality,  
Always radiating Peace and Love,  
Brought out the master’s generosity  
To remark, after the first Darshan,  
As revealed by the Mother, “he has a good face”.

Sethna, endearingly renamed Amal Kiran  
By Sri Aurobindo, withstood the deadly  
Buffets of Time and spiralling evolution  
For more than a long century,  
With humour-loving, care-free disposition.

Always true to the Spirit of adventure,  
Amal had a number of “face to face”  
Conversations with the Master and the Mother  
Even after They had left Their mortal frames.  
He promptly guided the puzzled Sadhaks.

Thus came out the significant words  
About Sri Aurobindo, while commenting  
On a seeker’s Vision, reported to Amal:  
“. . . the majesty, the grandeur, the sheer Power!  
Such is Shiva, such is Sri Aurobindo.”

SURESH DEY

## CLEAR MEMORIES

HAVING read the exhaustive essays written by several eminent sadhaks, close friends and colleagues of Amal in the book *Amal-Kiran: Poet and Critic*, edited by Nirodbaran and R. Y. Deshpande (1994), I realised that it would be no use writing another essay on Amal — it would, in fact, be otiose. The best way I could add my flower of gratitude and admiration for Amal to the bouquet of memories that are being published in remembrance of him would be, I thought, to jot down some of my personal moments with this gigantic personality!

When I joined the Ashram school in April, 1958, I was told by my father, the late Madhusudan Reddy, that the Mother is the Divine personality and that I should try to go as close as possible to Her on all levels! So, the first thing I decided to do on a daily basis was to go to the early morning balcony Darshan. Our care-taker at the Ganapatram hostel, Mausi-ji, was of no help in waking us up for being on time for the balcony Darshan. In spite of her, my roommate of the hostel and I would wake up early enough to reach the Balcony street well on time. In those days the first person who had impressed me with his poetic features and the intensity of a spiritual seeker was Amal Kiran. I surmised that this person must be quite a favourite of the Mother and if I stood next to him, I felt the Mother would surely take note of the little boy too! That was perhaps my childhood fancy, but I felt very comforted standing beside Amal. So, I stuck close to him when he stood under the balcony looking up ardently at Her — perhaps lost in poetic rhythms which crystallised into words of psychic prayer:

I merge in her rhythm of haloed reverie  
By spacious vigil-lonelinesses drawn  
From star-birds winging through the vacancy  
Of night's incomprehensible spirit-dawn.

My whole heart echoes the enchanted gloom  
Where God-love shapes her visionary grace:  
The sole truth my lips bear is the perfume  
From the ecstatic flower of her face.

(‘Madonna Mia’, *The Secret Splendour*, 1993, pp. 73-74)

Once the Mother withdrew to Her inner chamber, I got used to Amal's limping to his single-seated pousse-pousse and going towards his house, which was then beyond the central park. That perhaps was my first attraction to Amal and slowly, as



I grew up, I came to know more and more about his virtuosity.

In the following years I came to know about Amal the poet and started reading his writings in the journal edited by him, *Mother India*. But it was only when I listened to his talks in the Ashram school that my admiration for his insights into poetry became boundless. Normally he had a stutter in his speech, but I noticed that whenever he used to recite from Sri Aurobindo’s poetry there was no stutter whatsoever and he used to deliver the verses in an inspiring manner, as if he were listening to the rhythm of the poetic lines or as if he were visualising the grand imagery in Sri Aurobindo’s poems!

It was when I was in the Higher Course that I read most of his critical writings and gained so many insights into Sri Aurobindo’s poetry. I learnt how to go deeper into the meaning, the imagery, the rhythm, the symbolism of Sri Aurobindo’s short poems, sonnets and the mystical poems. His critical essay, ‘Sri Aurobindo — A New Age of Mystical Poetry’, which I had read in the late sixties is in my view quite unsurpassed in critical and poetic acumen. His mastery over details, over poetic expressions springing from different planes of consciousness is quite unparalleled.

Amal has been my silent mentor, like Dronacharya for Ekalavya! I owe him much for my present ability, at least to a certain extent, in appreciating and understanding the golden rhythms caught by Sri Aurobindo or by the members of his Poetry Department!

\* \* \*

During my Higher Course days, I used to go to his house and often request him to explain some verses from *Savitri* or the short poems of the divine *kavi* — Sri Aurobindo. What impressed me much was that in spite of his deep concentrated work, he never refused me an audience, after all a young school-student. He welcomed me into his room, made me feel comfortable and relaxed and then with great sympathy and love explained the verses wherever I had difficulty in understanding. He never gave me the feeling that I was wasting his precious time: he had such an extended love and warmth that I felt very welcome and when I came away I always felt fulfilled both on the emotional and mental levels. Such was his humility!

I was so privileged to have been welcomed by such a versatile genius who had excelled as poet, scholar, literary critic, historian, philosopher, artist and editor!

\* \* \*

After my Higher Course years when the Mother told me to join the Auroville school in 1971, I lost all contact with Amal. Later, when I was doing my M. Phil in English literature from the University of Hyderabad, I got reconnected with him. I had sent him my M. Phil dissertation as it was on Sri Aurobindo and T. S. Eliot, requesting

him for his opinion. Instead of giving any of his opinions, he started correcting the dissertation, for it had obviously kindled his interest. But alas, owing to his multiple activities, he could not go through it fully and returned it with warm encouragement to study Sri Aurobindo's poetry further.

Talking of poetry, in those years of my M. Phil and in later years as well, I took to sending Amal some of my poems for his comments. I knew that my poems were of no consequence, but I wanted to get his frank opinion, for I felt that there was no living Aurobindonian critic or poet who could guide me in my writing. Many of them received his comments while others received his approval for being published in *Mother India*. I conclude here giving two of my poems with his comments.

### A Bird

it caught just a drop,  
in its beak;

just a hop —  
it caught the sun  
in its eye.

a quick shuffle of wings  
and all is sky and song.

Amal commented, "A charming little piece."

### My Circum-centre

*Poised between two worlds,  
One, grinding away into dimness,  
The other impatient to impress,  
With no love-lap to lay my sorrow on;*

I await, nostalgic of that time:  
The very cells were quickened  
By that circum-centre of my life;  
Like a remembered dream's  
I gather the joy of a delicate Form.  
And in the mist of a growing past  
I can still see the lucent light.

Between the dream and the sleep I wander,  
lost even to my hopes.  
*My faith, like the Fisherman's*  
*Perforated, full of the net's eyes,*  
I am afraid to tell the world  
of my blasted dream,  
or of my melancholia  
for, they'll say that I am a betrayer.

Whither has withdrawn the Wonder?  
My disillusionment is fathomlessly deep;  
My body and soul restless in love's adoration  
None can solace or quieten in embrace  
The anguish of my betrayed heart.

Slowly, while the months mourn away.  
Silent my soul sits in stupor.  
Poised between the sun's twilight motions.

Amal remarked, “Some lines are promising [*here in italics*] — the rest is not steeped in the inner sense and rhythm of things.”

Then he would explain to me how to touch that *inner sense and rhythm* in poetry in detail. That is how he guided me through many of my writings and understanding in later years too. I am indeed extremely grateful to Amal for having given me some of his most precious time. I feel privileged to have his love and care. Like many of his admirers, I too miss him a lot — “miss the many-splendoured thing”.

He has become for all of us a clear ray of inspiration for the Truth of Sri Aurobindo and the Love of the Mother. In his passing he has left behind a clear beam of hope for all generations to come, a hope that gets crystallised in his poem which received the promise from the Mother:

#### Prayer for Perfection

Out of our darkness lead us into light —  
Out of false love to Thy truth-piercing height —  
Out of the clutch of death to immortal space —  
O Perfect One with the all-forgiving face!

From Thy pure lustre build the mind anew —  
From Thy unshadowed bliss draw the heart's hue —

From Thy immense bring forth a godlike clay —  
O Timeless One self-sought through night and day!

Dearest Mother,

May I hope that one day you will answer this prayer of mine, which begins with a reminiscence of the soul's cry in the past and goes on to our own aspiration?

Love,  
Amal  
30.12.1963

*The Mother's reply:*

One day is sure to come . . .  
Blessings

(Her signature)

*(Amal Kiran: Poet and Critic, p. 22 )*

V. ANANDA REDDY



## WHO WROTE THAT APPRECIATION — AMAL OR I?

It was in June or July 1973, I think, that Amal decided to have the cataracts in both his eyes operated upon at the same time. Before he left for Bombay he gave Lynn Miller, his assistant, the charge of seeing the issues of *Mother India* through the Press. He handed me the same charge, perhaps because though only occasionally helping him, I worked in the Press under Eknath-ji in the composing and Phani-da in the proof-reading sections. Oh, the lessons Lynn and I learned in harmonising our commissions ‘on the ground’ . . . .

Amal had also insisted that I write something and include it in the Darshan issue. It was not the first time he had asked: “Write anything that comes to your mind, I will see you through.” I would begin but never end usefully. My penchant for seeing everything and anything relevant to anything and everything was then at its peak, and he would have to begin decongesting my mishmash with “Oh, everything seems grist to your mill”, until we ended up deciding to put aside that adventure. And now he had let me loose on an unsuspecting readership . . . .

Sitting in the tiny, hot and humid two-room *Mother India* office in the south-east corner of the building on Lal Bahadur Shastri *bis* Romain Rolland, I assiduously churned out ‘An Appreciation’ of “The Lost Child”, a short story by Mulk Raj Anand, on the office typewriter once used by Amal. It was one of the hundreds of short stories that Manoj Das-da had picked out for our class (in the ‘big’ Library in those days) from the dozens of anthologies in his library. I think Mulk Raj was the only Indian writer in that prestigious publication — that famous.

When published in August 1973, my essay covered just a page and half. Amal, of course, was happy he had ‘discovered’ a contributor — though I never contributed anything else in his time. Dear Manoj-da never did believe it was entirely my own work, but was interested enough to see that I posted a copy to Mulk Raj Anand at the address he (Manoj-da) provided. And Mr. Anand replied promptly! It so happened, he wrote, that he was recently asked to make a documentary on this story; and would I *kindly permit* him to use it to *explain what his story* meant to those who would be making that film!!!! Evidently, he did not know he had put a failure on a pedestal but the failure had it made.

Now, the crux of this story: How did a nobody like me end up writing something so successful, one who never could or did write anything ever again for dear old Amal?

I have two answers: First, it was typed on Amal’s old typewriter which, evidently, had successfully imbibed some of Amal’s fabulously successful mental-intuitive faculty. Second, in those days I used to sport a moustache and Amal’s wife Sehra admired it. But sometimes I’d shave it off, and then she would exclaim, “I can

hardly recognise you! You must inform me beforehand so I know it is you!” On one of those moustache-less mornings, Amal joked, “See? How you and I look exactly alike!” And we had a photograph taken of us sitting at his table. Now you see? Something in Amal’s upper-lip influenced something in mine and, when I typed *my* ‘Appreciation’ on *his* machine — it had supervised and guided my fingers. Honest!

SUNJOY



## THE GREATNESS OF THE GREAT

FEW persons are true to the name they have been blessed with. Amal Kiran is surely among them whose name went hand in hand with his personality. Bringing the clarity of a greater light wherever he turned his eyes, Amal Kiran is not the name of a person but of an institution. Poet, critic, historian, writer, humorist, all rolled into one, yet his many-sided rainbow-hued personality carried one common element in all these manifold activities — the clarity that comes not by thought but by the transcending of it. To whatsoever field he turned to work and serve His Master he brought this clarity, a light that, as if suddenly seized his body of clay and used his pen and breathed immortal words through instruments proper to mortal speech. And why not, — since behind the greatness of this great mystic-poet stood the Greatness of the Divine Himself. The embodied Divine shaped his mind and heart till it could bear the burden of this Clear Ray. But could it have been done without a willing consent from the instrument that was being shaped? And herein lay the true greatness of the wonder that is Amal Kiran. He lent himself to this moulding and remoulding with the suppleness of a child.

No wonder his personality radiated that child-like quality and the warmth and sweetness of the soul-substance entering the most outward material sheaths. For something of that sweetness could be felt by anyone who came near him. Like a flower this sweetness and warmth enfolded all into his embrace without any distinction and with an equal love born of a deep and long-standing engagement with the source of all-love, the Divine Mother. It is an extraordinary quality, the sign and hallmark of a bhakta as described by the Gita:

A universal love dwells in his heart, a universal compassion flows from it like an encompassing sea. . . . a spirit of calm by whom the world is not afflicted or troubled, nor is he afflicted or troubled by the world, a soul of peace with whom all are at peace. (*Essays on the Gita*, CWSA, Vol. 19, p. 404)

It is hard to say what was the predominant mode of his nature — the Light that was expressed through his writings or the love and delight that poured through his talk? Perhaps it was the unique synthesis of these two powers, reason and emotion, the head and the heart, that mark him out as someone different from the rest. His intellectuality did not carry the dry-as-dust coldness of the mere mental philosopher but the beauty and rhythmic grace that draws inspiration from a high and crystalline source. Nor did his beautiful heart carry those weak undertones of sentimentality that turn into dark moods but was always suffused with the breath and light of a higher sphere. This wonderful meeting of the two rivers — the head and the heart,

light and love created the magic spell on all who approached him.

But there was another river flowing as an undercurrent in his life, one not often visible since it lay deep hidden as some secret stream buried in the depths. It was not so much his intellect but his will that held on to the yoga, steadfast despite all the upheavals, the trials and tribulations that all must undergo on the upward path. A glimpse of this comes through in his book, *The Mother: Past-Present-Future*:

*Amal: Pardon my writing to you without any specific reason; but I felt like telling you that you are extremely dear to me. In spite of my thousand and three imperfections, this one sense remains in me — that you are my Mother, that I am born from your heart. It is the only truth I seem to have realised in all these years. A very unfortunate thing, perhaps, that I have realised no other truth; but I deeply thank you that I have been enabled to feel this much at least.*

Sri Aurobindo's reply:

It is an excellent foundation for the other Truths that are to come – for they all result from it.

(17-9-1934)

The Mother:

My blessings are always with you.

(p. 72)

\*

The Mother:

You have a strong will that has carried you through a lot of things. Keep that will going.

*Amal: I can't say I am a man of strong will, but the will in me can at times be made to act strongly — as it has been on many occasions in the past.*

The Mother:

Yes, you must set this will, which is capable of strength, against all troubles physical and spiritual.

(p. 109)

Such is Amal-da whose heart once set aflame by the fire of Her Love would refuse to give up, the many imperfections of our human nature notwithstanding. In the end that is what counts. The worth of a man is not measured by the size of his shadow but by the opening to that Light which dissolves all shadows and creates Peace and



Joy and Love and Light amidst the trouble and tumult of human nature. Such is the solid foundation of a Divine Life, a first victory of Spirit over matter, a betrothal of Heaven with Earth, a pitching of God’s camp in human time amidst all the darkness and strife. Amal-da has been such an exemplar of walking the sunlit path. Therein lay the greatness and beauty of his life. Even if he had written nothing, done nothing more than having loved thus, he would still be great and his life an example worth emulating for a generation that has run short of Ideals. His life is the perfect example of the transformation of a carefree youth whose spirit of adventure would often land him in difficult terrains into one wise and widely loved, who crossed all barriers inner and outer by the sheer power and force of love, for it was no ordinary love but love directed towards the very Source of All-Love, — the Divine.

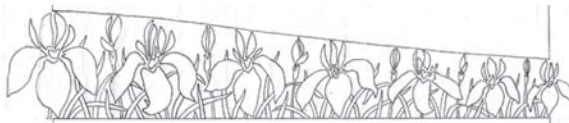
Let me close this with a small anecdote that I never tire of recounting since it touches the very core of what Amal-da is. On his 104<sup>th</sup> birthday, someone asked him to tell us the secret of his long and happy and healthy life. We waited with bated breath to see the pearl of wisdom drop before our eyes. Seconds passed like long minutes while Amal-da seemed withdrawn as if unmindful of the question. But before the questioner could revert again, he woke up as if from some deep far-off trance and remarked, as naturally as if he were revealing something that he has carried with every breath of his, — “Love for the Mother”. All was summarised in this one short phrase. Never did a phrase bear so much deep mystic truth in so few words.

Such persons never die. They live forever in the heart of the Divine Beloved, *śāśvatam padamavyayam*, as the Gita says:

. . . he attains by My Grace the eternal and imperishable status.

(*The Gita*: Ch. 18, *śloka* 56)

ALOK PANDEY



## DOCUMENT OF TIMELESS THINKING

LIVING in the feeling that there is God's inscrutable Will and a wonderful guidance at the same time, my thoughts go back to the relation I had with Amal, also with Paru — I'm still alive, around 70 years old, and things are peaceful because there is complete trust. One lives as HE wants, I hope so. And Amal-da was a special being who was quite close inwardly to Mother and Sri Aurobindo, with a great enthusiasm for beauty in literature, an exceptional quality to formulate or be inspired and an advocate for what Mother and Sri Aurobindo want. He also had a tendency to embrace inwardly many (and there was also psychic discrimination).

Between his 106<sup>th</sup> and 107<sup>th</sup> life-years he left us now.

I would like to share with the readers a small yet significant thing noted down by him, in his own handwriting.

There were some lines which were haunting me. I wrote to him on a small piece of handmade paper the words I could recollect and asked him for the context and the source:

“no other  
learning will  
bring us to our rest”

from where is it?  
How is it, completely?

He wrote out the answer on the back of that slip of paper (I have it with me still):

Save willing the thing God wills,  
no other learning  
Shall bring us to our rest.

—

Last lines of Malherbe's French poem translated by Arjava.

And he added this too:

E'n la sua volontade è nostra pace (Dante)

His will alone is our tranquillity.

And I feel it is his soul who speaks to us through it.

## REMEMBERING AMAL WITH JOY

Then felt I like some watcher of the skies  
When a new planet swims into his ken

said John Keats in his sonnet, ‘On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer’. I felt the same when I first met Amal. He came, blazing in a new light, the light of Sri Aurobindo. He was Sri Aurobindo’s own poet, like his own son, groomed, loved and nurtured by him.

Amal was a totally conscious man, conscious of his self. He would say, “I live in the distances . . . I hear a silent music within me, the song of the universe . . .” He writes:

. . . I hear in my best and calmest moods, a low universal croon, a far-away rhythm with a deep monotone overlaid with small variations . . . some ultimate Mother Spirit seems to be gently singing to her child the cosmos. . . .<sup>1</sup>

The Universal Life Energy rejoiced flowing through him. Whatever the harsh difficulties of physical life, Amal accepted all with an oceanic calmness. Nothing took away the glow from his ever blossoming face.

To me he appeared like a highly evolved soul come from some heights, some Devalok, as part of Sri Aurobindo’s and Mother’s entourage, come to participate in the cosmic dance of this earth, to take forward the Yoga of the Earth.

All in his hands turned new, into something poetically divine. Once in the morning I asked him, “What’s happening?”

“Bird-stirrings and flower-quiverings all around me,” he quipped.

A known poet, but a hidden artist, he loved to paint. At one time he drew flowers and sent his drawings to the Divine Mother. Once while showing some of his sketches, he said, “Try to be Divine Mother’s Flower redolent, coruscating, delectable, immeasurable in joy and beauty! . . .” Master of the English language, Amal was unmatched in his choice of words.

At times Amal could be like a child. Suddenly one day he said, “Very sad news.”

“Why? What happened?” I was concerned.

“The mixture is over” — he laughed aloud.

My mother used to send him as also to Ravindra-ji some home-made fresh mixture, which Amal, in small measures, had at teatime!

1. K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran), *The Secret Splendour*, p. 222.

Amal was surrounded by love and grace and care from all sides.

The poet in Amal was always smiling. Half his conversation was poetry. We quoted a great deal of Shelley, Wordsworth, Keats, Tennyson etc. "Our talk is like a duet," he would say with warmth of affection. A burst into laughter, to the poet in him, was like jingling of bells or as he would say "Tintinnabulation!"

It was always a deep pleasure to talk to this unusual human being, who made his visitor sit in the rocking chair in his home. And as one rocked, he filled your ears with rhythmic poetry.

In 1991, he had a fall and suffered a fracture of the right thigh. When I met him in the Nursing Home, he sat like a mountain of peace with a smile on his lips "I have followed my Master, I too have fractured my leg," he said with a low laugh.

When the visiting medical doctor asked Amal if he was comfortable, while his fractured leg hung in traction . . . Amal laughed and responded, "I am uncomfortably comfortable!"

Amal was fiercely independent, wanting to do all his works himself. A few hours in the afternoon he rested in silence and freedom! In 1999, unfortunately, trying to shift from his bed to his wheelchair all by himself to open the door, the chair slipped and he hurt himself and landed in the Nursing Home again!

Once when he sat in the sea-view hall of the Ashram Nursing Home, enjoying the silvery shimmering ocean before him, I sat by his wheelchair, during a brief visit to Pondicherry. Just then Nirod-da came and stood behind his chair. I said, "You know, Amal, yesterday we met Nirod-da at Auroville under the Banyan tree and we all lay on the green grass."

"How romantic!" called out Amal with a thrill in his voice! Nirod-da laughed aloud and there was pure joy in the air.

In the early days of the Ashram, Nirod-da was the Ashram doctor. "What kind of doctor was he?" I cajoled Amal into conversation.

"Nirod was very effective, but always angry with his patients for being ill," laughingly said Amal.

Amal was constantly in silent inward conversation with Sri Aurobindo, gazing deeply at His photo in front of his bed. He said, "I speak to Him and gain strength. He is my ALL."

Though his legs did not function, Amal's upper body was strong like that of an athlete. He said that he did a great deal of horse-riding in his early days in Matheran near Bombay! He had received the Divine touch and abundant love of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo resulting in an alchemic change in him. Ever glowing with hardly a wrinkle on his face even when he was 106 years of age, — he was truly young!

The poet in him was ever wakeful. Once after doing pranam to the Mother at night and taking leave of her upstairs, Amal passed by Sri Aurobindo's room. The door was a little open. Sri Aurobindo sat inside writing at his table in the light of the table-lamp. Amal paused for a few seconds, sensed eternity in the moments, and

passed by. He said it was a glorious view. He felt the Muses of Poetry kneeling around the Lord of Poetry, begging for existence through His running pen in that dim, hazy, golden light of some magical ethereal world. He returned home in a hush. At that time he lived where we now have the Mother’s Embroidery department. While being allotted that place he had told the Mother, “Mother, please give me a room with a window so I can gaze at the sky and the stars!” That night Amal composed the two poems: ‘A Peep at Sri Aurobindo Writing’ and ‘Sri Aurobindo the Poet’.<sup>2</sup>

After reading the magnum opus *The Life Divine*, Amal noted on the last page of his book: “The author of this book seems to be the author of the Universe.”

Stretched over years, innumerable were the letters Amal received from Sri Aurobindo. But one letter of Sri Aurobindo, Amal loved the most.

“Which one?” I asked genuinely curious.

He said that while he was in Bombay he had regular correspondence with Sri Aurobindo, seeking his guidance in the publication of *Mother India*. The 89 poems he wrote in 1948 which formed the book: *The Adventure of the Apocalypse*, he said, came to him from some Universe of Poetry. In his own words, “. . . A flood of poetry raced through my mind. Line after line, charged with spontaneous vision and symbol, ran before my shut eyes . . . the vivid phrases glimmered out . . .” And Amal was sending these ‘outpourings from heavens’ to Sri Aurobindo almost everyday! Sri Aurobindo’s letters always came in reply to his. But there was one letter Sri Aurobindo wrote not in answer but on his own to enquire how Amal was when there was a long silence from Amal’s side. This letter Amal said moved him deeply, reassured him that he was not forgotten and the limitless love of Sri Aurobindo poured on him as from a father to a son.

Amal-Kiran — a complete man was touched by the magic wand of Lord Sri Aurobindo’s Light and Sweet Divine Mother’s Love!

My heart would leap with joy when I read his articles in *Mother India* or heard his resonant, powerful, kind voice over the phone, a voice that contained a touch of our Mother and Master. His voice, his words contained a rare power of Love that worked wonders on the attentive and receptive listener!

On the passing of a dear friend, I once broke down over the phone while talking to Amal. He said, “Never cry except for the Divine.” His words were always filled with his luminous consciousness. They filled me with peace and joy. The richness of his voice was ever comforting. He softly said, “You must never get upset.” I must say there was a magical effect of calm, quiet and repose in his words.

When my beloved father, Dr. Santoshananda, passed away in 1995 at the age of 95 in peace reading *Prayers and Meditations*, I was shattered. Amal comforted

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 608-09.

me over the phone: "Now, you must seek the Self-Existent Happiness." His words were balm to my wounded heart.

Like the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo, Amal's mind was integral and all-embracing. Filled with intellectual brilliance of the finest and highest kind, he was a poetic genius of unfathomable depths and unreachable heights. He was simple to the core, zestful in all fullness, and always had the touch of a sweet and subtle empathy with all.

At moments, the physical pain turned into bliss.

He wrote to me from the Nursing Home:

The rainbow's self of seven fold  
 Magic leaps down to earth  
 All my heart is now sun-gold  
 A heavenly new birth!

Another time he wrote:

In every heart burns a light  
 That never was on sea or land . . .

His poetry had depths and heights, tones and hues beyond the ordinary human range.

I shall quote Shelley, Amal's favourite lines, an appeal to him to return to us along with Mother Divine and Sri Aurobindo, to sing again 'a triumphal chaunt' of Their Glory and Beauty.

The stars will awaken,  
 Though the moon sleep a full hour later,  
 Tonight;  
 No leaf will be shaken  
 Whilst the dews of your melody scatter  
 Delight.

Though the sound overpowers,  
 Sing again, with your dear voice revealing  
 A tone  
 Of some world far from ours,  
 Where music and moonlight and feeling  
 Are one. <sup>3</sup>

3. Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'To Jane: The Keen Stars Were Twinkling', (Stanzas 3 and 4).

Amal-Kiran, the Golden man, would say:

“Aditya Varnam, Mahant Purushah!”  
Sun-garbed is the Man of Truth.

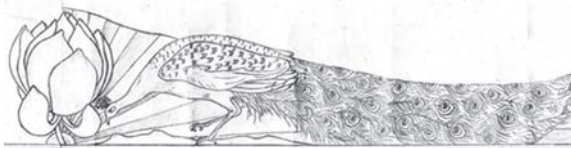
His was

Bodies of fire and ecstasies of line  
Where passion’s mortal music grows divine — 4

One and only, most cherished friend, incomparable in his all-enveloping warmth,  
it was a great fortune of life to have known him: the clear Ray of our Lord Sri  
Aurobindo.

ADITI VASISHTHA

4. *The Secret Splendour*, p. 110.



## WITH AMAL KIRAN WHILE RECORDING THE SAVITRI RECITATION

CHINMOY-DA (Debashish Haldar's father) and I used to read *Savitri* and listen to the music composed by Sunil-da for *Savitri*.

One day, Chinmoy-da expressed a wish that it would be wonderful if there were a recording of Amal Kiran's recitation of the whole of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*!

So I went to Amal Kiran and conveyed Chinmoy-da's wish. Although Amal Kiran was busy with his many responsibilities and research projects, and expressed a certain reluctance, he finally consented.

While talking to Amal Kiran, I found that he had a slight stammer. I told Chinmoy-da that because of this impediment, I wondered how he could complete the recitation of more than 23,800 lines of *Savitri*. But to our surprise, we found that there was no difficulty when he recited the lines of *Savitri*.

Thus, in April 1985 the recording work started, with the understanding that Chinmoy-da would provide the cassette recorder as well as the required 34 audio cassettes. When a cassette was completed, Chinmoy-da would listen to it and label the sides marking out the first and the last lines recorded on each side of the cassette.

The recording sessions continued till 1989.

After beginning the work we realised that the recording machine we had was not up to the mark. It was then that we approached the Projector Room (the recording section) in the Playground. They agreed to lend the required equipment. Thus, I would borrow the machine from them before every session and return it to them after the day's work.

After two years, when the recording of the whole of *Savitri* was completed, some friends who heard the recitation found that the lines had been read a bit too fast.

I reported this to Amal Kiran who readily consented to re-do the whole reading more slowly.

Well, this second round of recording was a bit funny. Amal Kiran tried to recite at a slower pace, but after a few lines, being a real poet, he would be carried away by his emotions and the pace of the recitation would immediately increase. I would try to signal to him that the speed was not correct. At first this happened quite often; soon, though, I realised that this kind of restraining was effecting the emotion in his reading. But he, being a gentleman, never complained of my silly attempts at restraining him. Later I realised how painful it must have been for a real poet to be restrained when he is sailing away on the winds of such a great work as *Savitri*. So I stopped my interference. He always behaved with a real humility and gentlemanliness and never made us feel that he was a senior sadhak and a renowned poet!



While reciting, if he was not sure of the pronunciation of a particular word, he would say, “Stop!” and look up the same word in at least two of the well-known dictionaries he had. I could see that he was not only a gentleman but also a perfectionist.

One day, around noon, when the recording session was in progress, he stopped casually and after a while he requested me to fetch him some water from the fridge. After sipping from the glass, he resumed the interrupted session. But once again, after he had read a little more, he inquired if we could stop. So we did.

When I went back to him in the evening, he asked if we could postpone the next session by two days.

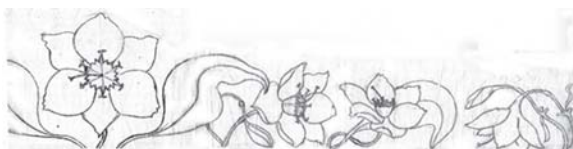
When I met him two days later, it was only after I inquired about his health did he tell me that when he had requested me to fetch him some water, he was having a severe chest pain! I was surprised at the tremendous inner strength of his faith in the face of the most critical moment when life itself was at a great risk! And he did not make the slightest fuss.

Later on, when some of his admirers came to know of the recordings, they joined the Sunday noon recording sessions and even ask him some questions. Amal would also amuse us by cracking jokes, telling us about his childhood and youth, about his loving parents who did everything to cure his limping leg and took him to England, his passion to learn horse-riding, his falls, his classes in the School, how he amused the students with his jokes, and how the teachers in the next classrooms would complain of the roaring laughter caused by his jokes. Amal Kiran mentioned a lady who was very particular about each and every movement of her sadhana, and who used to attend his classes, who asked the Mother whether laughing was good for her sadhana.

Thus Amal Kiran was very friendly and helpful to whoever approached him and one could feel his universal love.

After completing the recording of *Savitri*, we requested Amal Kiran if he could read out some of the poems from Sri Aurobindo’s *Collected Poems* in an anthology, *Light of Lights*. He consented to it. He also read out Sri Aurobindo’s epic in quantitative hexameter, *Ilion*. And we recorded these also.

CHANDRAKANT PARMAR



## AMAL KIRAN: A POET-PILGRIM OF INTEGRAL TRUTH

SRI AUROBINDO gave him the name ‘Amal-Kiran’ — The clear ray on September 3, 1930 when he was almost 26 years old. He was a poet of life-transforming spirituality in search of the truth of his being and his deepest aspiration for infinite beauty and eternal bliss could only come from the Supreme. He knew this while in his twenties. In an early meeting with the Mother, he told Her, “I have seen everything in life. Now I want only God.” Upon learning of his age, the Mother advised him, “At twenty-three you have seen everything of life! Do not be in a hurry to make any decision. Stay here for some time and look around. If the life here suits you, join the ashram.” He arrived in the Ashram on December 16, 1927.

Amal Kiran’s decades of stay in the Ashram seem to indicate that the life there did suit him! Even when Amal Kiran was not physically in the Ashram, as he worked from Bombay, his mind, heart, and soul remained in the Ashram. From Bombay he edited *Mother India*, a magazine that Sri Aurobindo had proclaimed to be ‘My paper’.

Amal Kiran belonged to a select group of sadhaks whom Sri Aurobindo encouraged to write poetry as a part of their spiritual growth. This group, besides Amal Kiran, consisted of the likes of Dilip Kumar Roy, Arjava (J. A. Chadwick), Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, Nishikanto Roy Chaudhuri, Nolini Kanta Gupta, Nirodbaran, Jyotirmoyee, Sahana and Pujalal.

His poems are indicative of his aspirations, his quest, and pursuits in his sadhana. Humbly, he has talked about himself in his private letters: “I may honestly testify that if I have any more-than-ordinary proficiency in any sphere it is Sri Aurobindo’s creation out of whatever little potential I may have had to start with.”<sup>1</sup> His life of 106 years is indeed a vivid marvel of the Divine’s work on humans. Amal Kiran was 28 when he wrote his poem, *Pilgrim of Truth* on July 31, 1933,

Each moment now is fraught with an immense  
Allure and impulse of omnipotence;  
...  
Now all my sleep is one huge mountain wrought  
With height on far height of ineffable thought  
    Touching the spirit’s rapture of calm sky.  
And all my waking grows a fathomless force,  
    An ocean-hearted ecstasy am I  
Where time rolls inward to eternal shores.<sup>2</sup>

Amal Kiran had lofty expectations of the Aurobindonian poets — that is evident from his initial writeup of May 11, 1930, which he revised in August 14, 1965:

. . . the Aurobindonian poet recognises within himself the Lord of the Flame into whose creative beatitude he incessantly steps his imagination by surrendering his conscious being to the spontaneities of mystical love and by contacting through the intuition of the aesthetic unity of the world a common spiritual foundation, to himself and his environment, of a multiple yet unified glory presiding over the inferior phenomenon of the Spirit’s hide-and-seek with Itself. . . .

. . . the Aurobindonian poet will be not merely . . . an instrument of forces which will work through him by passing inspirations. It will be a commentary on the consistent sainthood of his personality, on the divine way he will carry himself, the godlike way he will repose, the inexpressible way he will be silent.<sup>3</sup>

In the case of our Aurobindonian poet, his sadhana of self-surrender finds a poetic expression bringing him ever closer to the divine.

Amal Kiran could dream dreams supernal, he could write rivetingly about the pursuit of his unquenched thirst for the Absolute, and he eloquently expressed it in his poetry. One of his favourite poems, *This Errant Life* is a poetic milestone.

This errant life is dear although it dies;

. . .

If Thou desirest my weak self to outgrow  
Its mortal longings, lean down from above,  
Temper the unborn light no thought can trace,  
Suffuse my mood with a familiar glow.  
For ’tis with a mouth of clay I supplicate:  
Speak to me heart to heart words intimate,  
And all Thy formless glory turn to love  
And mould Thy love into a human face.<sup>4</sup>

Sri Aurobindo had commented: “. . . a beautiful poem, one of the very best you have written. The last six lines, one may say even the last eight, are absolutely perfect.”

Amal Kiran’s on-going dialogues recorded in the series, “Life-Poetry-Yoga” with his friend PR do reveal a lot about Amal Kiran’s genius in expounding his enlightening views and intuitive insight. In addition, his interaction with PR also offers a glimpse of him as a Bhakta — an aspirant of the divine Love. He had confided to PR about his inner prayer, which he poignantly described as an echo in his depths:

Voice of Infinity, sound in my heart, —  
 Call of the One!  
 Stamp there thy radiance, never to part,  
 O living Sun.<sup>5</sup>

It is self-evident that Amal Kiran as a poet-pilgrim of the Integral Truth was an Aurobindonian poet and as such he became a shining example of the Mother's message: "Let your life be a constant search for the Truth and it will be worth living."

Over the years, I came to know Amal Kiran as a very affectionate person, enriching me beyond my expectations. Our encounters became "Amal Rasa" to me.

He fascinated me in my younger days because of his keen intellect and incisive analytical prowess. Being a polymath, his discourses on Integral Yoga encompassed literature, philosophy, science, history and spirituality in a very natural and harmonised way. He stimulated my interest in those subjects and illumined my limited mind. He was my hero when it came to pursue spiritual journalism to advocate, elaborate, elucidate and to counter criticisms of Sri Aurobindo's work by people with partial knowledge, preconceived notions, and limited ability to see things holistically. Yes, all these and more explain why I was drawn to Amal, in the first place. However, what kept me coming to him time and again, and what enabled me to strike a stimulating and ever-growing friendship with him, was his engaging affection and his eagerness to welcome me wholeheartedly with a genuine soul-beaming smile.

I lived in USA from 1969 to 2009. It was in our personal encounters during my visits to the Ashram over the years that our friendship evolved and he showered his boundless affection on me. Many years back, he asked me to promise him that whenever I came to Pondicherry, I would visit him everyday before noon. I told him, "This is a dream come true for me, what is there to promise?" As our friendship grew, I found to my amazement and initially somewhat to my disappointment that he preferred that I talk to him instead of me listening to his lucid and immensely enjoyable discourse. His explanation was brief and to the point: "You have no idea how refreshing it is for me to listen to you!" I was concerned that my thirst for knowledge and intellectual pursuit would not be quenched. But who was I to argue my case against the grand-old-man-of-reasoning!

Fortunately, gradually and eventually, it dawned on me that the opportunity accorded to me was to experience the Rasa to fill the soul with delight and not the mind with vast and dazzling information. It was a special privilege for me to be accepted as his companion during my visits to the Ashram. I am glad that I was not rigid and not too inert to disregard his wish and miss out on a wondrous opportunity that ensued. Maybe the Grace is working even at my individual level to uplift me in spite of all my ignorance! Amal always responded engagingly to my queries and comments.

For me, it was a divinely humbling and humanly transformative enchanting

experience! The inscriptions on his books that he gave me are to me glimpses of the gradually evolving Amal Rasa.

Interestingly, after giving me his last three books, he said, “Hope you are getting the drift!” I recognised that an exceptional gift of God was coming through Amal Kiran. For me the pursuit of Truth has been commingled with learning of the majesty and mystery of love. I recalled C. V. Devan Nair, who had so wisely said, “It is not knowledge which fulfills all. It is Love which is the fulfilment of knowledge, and of all else besides.”<sup>6</sup> I also remembered Goethe’s revelation, “We are shaped and fashioned by what we love.” Thanks to the insights of such luminaries, I did not miss out on the rare gift of Amal’s tender affections in my blind pursuit of knowledge! Time and again, I have received the Divine’s blessings in life, guiding me on the path, and bestowing on me the transformative encounters with the likes of Professor Indrasen, Dyuman-bhai, Nolini-da, Nirod-da, and Amal Kiran, — full of affection through His representatives. The Mother’s message of 1952 indicates:

Never forget that you are not alone. The Divine is with you helping and guiding you. He is the companion who never fails, the friend whose love comforts and strengthens. Have faith and He will do everything for you.<sup>7</sup>

It is the Divine love through his representatives that I experienced and I came to recognise that the splendour and mystery of love is a transformative aspect of the many-splendoured thing that is the alchemic action of Divine Grace. Sri Aurobindo has revealed:

Love must not cease to live upon the earth;  
For Love is the bright link twixt earth and heaven,  
Love is the far Transcendent’s angel here;  
Love is man’s lien on the Absolute.<sup>8</sup>

The soul can recognise its answering soul  
Across dividing Time and, on life’s roads . . .  
There is a Power within that knows beyond  
Our knowings; we are greater than our thoughts,  
And sometimes earth unveils that vision here.<sup>9</sup>

A miracle of the Absolute was born;  
Infinity put on a finite soul,  
All ocean lived within a wandering drop,  
A time-made body housed the Illimitable.  
To live this Mystery out our souls came here.<sup>10</sup>

To live, to love are signs of infinite things,  
Love is a glory from eternity's spheres.<sup>11</sup>

I enjoyed immensely my interactions with Amal Kiran, but then who would not? These precious encounters often reminded me of my childhood's favourite poem of Tagore:

Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life. . . .

Thy infinite gifts come to me only on these very small hands of mine. Ages pass and still thou pourest, and still there is room to fill.<sup>12</sup>

It is worth noting that Amal Kiran's birthday is a rare spiritual occurrence as 25<sup>th</sup> November is sandwiched between Siddhi Day — 24<sup>th</sup> November (1926) and Immortality Day — 26<sup>th</sup> November (1926).

The Siddhi Day is the descent of the Overmind Krishna Consciousness, to pave the way for the next higher level — Supermind. In the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo, the transformation of the physical consciousness and the physical substance will happen by the action of the Supermind and that was revealed on Immortality Day — November 26.\* Considering that on a birthday one is most receptive, Amal Kiran's soul must be basking in the most amazing influences of the two monumentally sacred spiritual events during this period. He was indeed blessed! Furthermore, most amazingly, the Mother had also blessed him by appearing in the subtle body to announce to him the descent of the Supramental consciousness on 29<sup>th</sup> February 1956.

The journey of our life is an experiencing of the Transcendent — the Supreme Reality and internalising it through our inner calling and sadhana; Sri Aurobindo identifies a sure way to fulfil our highest aspirations:

I aspire to infinite force, infinite knowledge, infinite bliss. Can I attain it? Yes, but the nature of infinity is that it has no end. Say not therefore that I attain it. I become it. Only so can man attain God by becoming God.<sup>13</sup>

The golden key of heavenly existence here on earth is thus presented to us: To find God, one has to become God.

However, this notion of oneness of an individual self with the Universal Being is not new. It is the very essence of India's ancient enlightenment. As I understand it, it means that the Existence — Sat is integrative and consequently It is a unified,

\* *Mother India*, February 21, 1976 and *Path to Perfection*. Compiled from the Writings of the Mother by Keshavmurti (Dipti Publications, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1967), p. 79.

seamless whole with infinite perspectives. This theme is proclaimed by the ancient seers of the Vedantic time to be the ultimate reality transcending all the apparent worldly contraries as it is inherent in the trinity of Sat-Chit-Ananda and also the trinity of Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram (Truth, Bliss, Beauty). Sri Aurobindo has unravelled the paradox of life, our existence, and revealed it to us in *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol*:

A secret splendour rose revealed to sight  
 Where once the vast embodied Void had stood.  
 Night the dim mask had grown a wonderful face.<sup>14</sup>

Here, astounding as it may seem, the “secret splendour” is none other than Yama, the God of Death who is also “Hiranyagarbha”— the golden-seed, the Lord of Life. The duality of death and life is but a unified universal and eternal reality. The duality of an individual self and the Supreme Being is but an unfolding reality of a mortal transitional being through the soul’s progressively transforming pursuit as depicted in Rig Veda in the story of Kutsa Angirasa in the oneness of divinity, via cycles of death and life. This transformational relationship of man and God is depicted in the two-bird metaphor in Mundaka Upanishad, which derives its origin from the two-bird parable in Rig Veda. The sweet surprise (or maybe, it is not a surprise but an inevitable milestone in a spiritual journey) is that Amal in his pursuit of Integral Yoga internalised this realisation and expressed it in his poem, *Two Birds*:

. . . “Where hangs the marvellous fruit I seek?”

Then suddenly above his head  
 A searching gaze of grief he turned:  
 Lo, there upon the topmost bough  
 A pride of golden plumage burned!

Lost in a dream no hunger broke,  
 This calm bird — aureoled, immense —  
 Sat motionless: all fruit he found  
 Within his own magnificence.

The watchful ravener below  
 Felt his time-tortured passion cease,  
 And flying upward knew himself  
 One with that bird of golden peace.<sup>15</sup>

Sri Aurobindo's comment on the poem is, "It is very felicitous in expression . . ." Amal Kiran seems to have captured the blissful theme of unity in the duality of Nara-Narayana (man-God) relation exalted in the Vaishnava path. Man, an evolutionary being, may find his life's fulfilment and his spirit's immortality in oneness with the Supreme. Amal Kiran's 106 years of life journey could be seen as an earnest pursuit of the envisioned future portrayed by Sri Aurobindo.

It may be of interest to note that Amal Kiran painted *Two Birds*. It became the beautiful cover-jacket to his magnum opus, his collected poems, *The Secret Splendour*, 1993 edition. Although I never asked Amal Kiran, I have often wondered if the title *The Secret Splendour* has its genesis in the *Savitri* reference above.

ARUN VAIDYA

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13. Sri Aurobindo, *Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 5.
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## MY EDITOR — MY TEACHER

IN 1963 the main building of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and its environment breathed silence and presented an austere sight. Sometimes the noon and a couple of hours that followed were desolate but serene and once in a while I chose to sit somewhere inside, for enjoying the sheer sweet music of silence, punctuated by the equally sweet swish of Manoj-da (Das Gupta) sweeping the ground along with one or two others.

And it was as if I tasted a drop of nectar each time I saw one of those great servitors of the Mother — today our most precious legendary memories — gliding by, Nolini-da throwing a subdued but compassionate smile at me in which even his moustache seemed to participate, Amrita-da muttering an appreciative word or two in French (in which I was illiterate) towards those holy sweepers and their brief exchange enlivening the atmosphere, some hymns emanating from Pujalal-ji's room, Nirod-da bending upon the Samadhi, his hands resting on it, or Purani-ji or Pavitra-da passing by quietly.

I had talked to all of these blessed souls during the first year or two of my stay in the Ashram as occasions demanded. The only one of this exclusive club left was Amal-kiran. And when the occasion arose it was about to go awry, thanks to my arrogance which at the time appeared to me a matter of prestige. I do not remember after so many years what made him choose me for reviewing Satprem's *Sri Aurobindo or The Adventure of Consciousness*. Probably he had read some of my writings in newspapers and magazines and thought — could I call it an intuitive thought that came to him so naturally? — that I could do justice to that remarkable book. Hariprasad Poddar was then in charge of the management of *Mother India*. He brought me a copy of the book with Amal-kiran's request to me. I was most happy to write the review and hand it over to Hariprasad-bhai. The next day Hariprasad-bhai met me and conveyed the editor's deep appreciation of the piece, but also his suggestion for changing only one word or a phrase.

“Oh no,” I said, almost rudely, “either you publish it as it is or don't publish it at all.” The more the gentle Hariprasad-bhai tried to persuade me to agree to the editor's suggestion, the more obstinately I refused to do so. “Well, well, I'll report your stand to Amal. Let him decide,” he said with a sigh and left.

I felt sure about the decision: it was going to be negative. It was always the author — until he had earned the status of a prize contributor — who yielded to the editor's wish and not otherwise. No average editor was expected to put up with such impertinence of a new author who had been given a chance, almost a favour.

But a beaming Hariprasad-bhai informed me the next day that Amal-kiran was ready to comply with my stand. I still remember Amal-kiran's observation as cited

by Hariprasad-bhai: “I value the man more than my opinion about a word or a phrase.”

My temporarily active ego got a crushing snub. All that I knew about Amal-kiran — his wonderful poetry, his delving deep into the little-explored phases of our history, his critical analysis of contemporary issues that had appeared in *Mother India* of a different format when published from Mumbai (then Bombay) earlier to its Pondicherry phase, and to top them all, the most glorious of all his achievements — his correspondence with Sri Aurobindo on the epic, *Savitri* — all this together conjured up a Brobdingnagian before me and I shrank in my own vision to the size of a Lilliput.

I learnt what dignified humility was.

My review was published in the May 1965 issue of *Mother India*. I believe several other reviews followed. Courtesy Hariprasad-bhai, Amal-kiran read one of my stories entitled “Sita’s Marriage” and told him, “Any editor would be happy to publish it.” And he published it in the issue of July 1966 with an editorial note which I reproduce here at the risk of seeming to flatter myself, but without which I cannot establish how noble he was and how grateful I am to him. Also, the note is an example of a great editor providing his readers with a clue to appreciating a piece of creative writing:

Renowned in Oriya literature, the author Manoj Das who has joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and is on the teaching staff of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, is making his mark in English also. We have already published him as a skilful book-reviewer; but he had distinguished himself in various periodicals as a short story writer. With “Sita’s Marriage”, he makes his debut in this role in our pages. We find the story a piece of great beauty, at once delicate and deep in its probe into a child’s mind. But the child concerned is an unusual one — and, dealing with her, the author brings a background touch of insight into a certain aspect of Indian mysticism — the perception that souls too-developed for ordinary surroundings find often an unexpected short-cut out of the disharmony between their inner “dharma” and the outer life whether of common misery or of conventional happiness.

The main part of the Park Guest House consisted of a row of dormitory-like halls, the southern-most one of which served as the managerial office of the *Mother India* as well as of the SABDA. If I remember correctly, it was there that we met for the first time. I had known several highly gifted persons, but never one like Amal-kiran who could be so unassumingly profound, so convincingly affectionate and so spontaneously and sparkingly witty. I adored him and he loved me.

Before long he wrote to the Mother that he would like to have me as his editorial associate. The Mother’s response was highly encouraging. My name appeared in

print as Assistant Editor. That must have been in 1967. It was in 1970 when Udarji surprised me by getting the Mother’s sanction that I edit the proposed journal *Sri Aurobindo’s Action*. I requested Amal-kiran to relieve me from the nominal responsibility I bore as his assistant. In fact, I found it embarrassing that my name should appear in two publications.

Willy-nilly he obliged me. In those days the Ashram press was too busy to print the *Action*. The computer age was years away. I used to take a public transport bus to Chennai (then Madras) carrying the manuscript and get it printed at the *Indian Express* and bring the copies to Pondicherry in the same way after two or three days. Then, in 1971, I went to the U.K. for a few months during which Kireet-da (Prof. Kireet Joshi, then the Registrar of our Centre of Education) kindly agreed to edit the *Action* and the Ashram press kindly agreed to accommodate it in its printing schedule. And then came the Master’s Centenary Year. I became involved in a variety of activities and programmes and by and by lost my invaluable personal contact with Amal-kiran.

Today I realise what a big loss it had been for me. The brief period of my association with him had been a period of unflinching learning for me. Through numerous anecdotes and reminiscences he unfolded to me aspects of human nature and their significance; he spoke of his detective-like investigation into the past lives of two or three veteran lieutenants of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. I observed that whenever he spoke about the Mother, his voice vibrated gently with reverence and love. Let me recount one episode. There was a truly talented poet in the Ashram who had the rare good luck of getting a warm review of his first book by Sri Aurobindo in the *Arya*. Amal-kiran and he were friends, but the latter had carried to the Ashram some undesirable habits he had developed earlier. At the Mother’s loving exhortations, he would promise to give them up, but would never do so. When he proved incorrigible, the Mother sent word through Amal-kiran asking him to leave the Ashram.

“But I will never go!” shouted the poet with a gesture of finality. Amal-kiran came and reported his friend’s defiant decision to the Mother.

Gravely but calmly said the Mother, “How can he be here when I do not wish him to stay?” She, however, did not pass any instruction to Amal-kiran to tell his friend anything more or do anything about it.

But by the time Amal-kiran went back to his friend, the latter had already packed up. The Mother’s will obviously had overpowered his own, without Her having to say a word more.

Each time I met Amal-kiran — though it had become infrequent — I felt a ray of light and delight flooding my mind. But whom did he deprive of that reward?

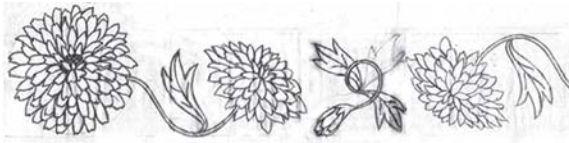
Let me conclude my piece with one of the innumerable sweet little souvenirs of this kind he had left for us — one I have just heard from Dr. Dilip Datta. As we know, Amal-kiran spent the last phase of his life at the Ashram Nursing Home. One

day Dilip-da felt disturbed at hearing him announcing repeatedly, “I want to die!”

“What is this, Amal-kiran? How can you — the faithful messenger of the Supramental — say or even think of that?” protested Dilip-da.

“I want to dye my hair!” was the grim decision the genius pronounced!

MANOJ DAS



## K. D. SETHNA — THE CLEAR RAY

K. D. SETHNA was born in a respected Parsi family on 25<sup>th</sup> November 1904. His full name was Kaikhushru Dhunjibhoy Sethna and his father was a specialist in Ophthalmic Surgery (M.D. Bombay, M.R.C.P. from Dublin, Ireland). K. D. Sethna writes of a mysterious account given by his family:

The moment I was born the big lamp in our drawing-room flared up. My father had to answer the frightened servant's cry and run from my mother's side to prevent a fire. The English lady doctor in attendance on my mother took the flaring lamp as an omen and said, "This boy will be a great man".<sup>1</sup>

His early education was at St. Xavier's School and College, a Roman Catholic institution managed by foreign Jesuit priests. In his Intermediate Arts examination in Bombay University, he won both the Selby Scholarship in Logic and the Hughlings Prize in English. Later he passed B.A. in Philosophy Honours but even then he was so proficient in literature that he won the much-coveted Ellis prize for English. Before he left college he made his literary debut with a group of poems marked by their piercing psychical and intellectual passion. He also became a popular reviewer. After his father's death he published a book of critical essays titled *Parnassians* where he gave his assessment on the work of four eminent persons, namely: H. G. Wells, G. B. Shaw, G. K. Chesterton and Thomas Hardy. K. D. Sethna's article on the first named was titled *H.G. Wells: The Arch Progressive* and is of interest for two reasons. First it is written by a young man aged barely 19, who was both appreciative and critical of Wells at a time when he was at the height of his career. Secondly, it was sent to Wells himself by an older friend of the author — A. S. Wadia, considered to be one of the best writers in the Parsi community. Wells wrote back: "Your young man will go far."<sup>2</sup>

Amal Kiran was an extraordinary genius with a propensity towards beauty, art and mysticism. In his childhood he dabbled in verse-making and created poetic rhythms in his student days and later became a proficient poet and critic.

When K. D. Sethna was studying M.A. in Philosophy, he read about Sri Aurobindo and learned that he was a master of the English language, as well as several other languages. In addition he was a Mahayogi. But K. D. Sethna was surprised that this spiritual figure sitting in his room was able to transcend the common laws of space and time. Whilst his analytic mind pondered over the truth of spirituality, his atheistic mind acted as the devil's advocate. In order to ascertain the Truth he searched and met a few Gurus and Saints but none satisfied him. Finally he met an art critic, a Theosophist, and expressed his predicament about his spiritual quest.

The Theosophist replied that nobody but Sri Aurobindo could satisfy him. Sethna was then convinced that Sri Aurobindo would be the person to meet.

Soon after, he left a prospective brilliant career to join the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in December 1927, with the intention of practising the Integral Yoga under the guidance of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. K. D. Sethna was named Amal-kiran — ‘The clear ray’ by Sri Aurobindo on 3 September 1930 and he proved to be an outstanding disciple of his.

Later, his creative and writing ability was fully utilised when Mother and Sri Aurobindo appointed him as the editor of a newly introduced journal called *Mother India* which was launched on 21<sup>st</sup> February 1949, the auspicious day of the Mother’s birthday, after gaining the approval and the blessing of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. *Mother India* started in Bombay as a fortnightly and was soon recognised as an esteemed journal for its political commentaries, cultural reviews and its intellectual essays. Nirodbaran commented:

Sri Aurobindo had made Amal a political thinker and a commentator as well. When *Mother India* was started in Bombay with Amal as its editor, he used to send his editorials for Sri Aurobindo’s perusal and sanction. I used to read them to Sri Aurobindo. The Mother found one editorial too strong and brought it to his notice. But he approved of it. He considered *Mother India* as his paper, as did the Mother consider the *Bulletin* as her paper.

During the twelve years when all correspondence was stopped only Dilip and Amal were made exceptions.<sup>3</sup>

K. D. Sethna chose the name of *Mother India* because:

India is a country whose very birth-cry, so to speak, was for the Superhuman, the Divine in concrete experience. The Vedas and the Upanishads are not primarily artistic creations, structures of speculative thought or manuals of morality and religious injunction. No doubt, they are masterpieces of poetic beauty and sublimity, embalm enormous audacities of the thinking mind, fountain forth a myriad wisdom of noble living. But, first and foremost, they are scriptures of God-realisation, word-embodiments of mysticism and spirituality, testimonies of union with the Infinite and the Eternal. India, therefore, essentially represents the luminousness that is the Truth of truths.<sup>4</sup>

In the first editorial of *Mother India* K. D. Sethna wrote:

We have named our paper *Mother India* with a purpose. There is a tendency among us to regard India as just a collection of human beings with certain common racial and cultural characteristics. But India is more than a collection

of human beings. India is a living entity, a presiding genius, the one self of all these human beings and the one consciousness that is at work in them. You cannot make a nation with a mere aggregate of individuals. A nation is a single being . . . The sense of India as the living Mother is what we are aiming to kindle everywhere in this country. . . .<sup>5</sup>

K. D. Sethna then writes that prior to printing, the articles were submitted to Sri Aurobindo for his perusal:

When the main articles for the first issue — written by the Editor and Albless — were sent to Pondicherry, not only Sri Aurobindo but also the Mother listened to Nolini’s reading out of them. Both the Gurus sent words of praise and total sanction. . . .<sup>6</sup>

It was decided that *Mother India* would be launched on 21 February 1949 though the office was set up only 6 weeks earlier. There were materials in reserve only for two or three issues and they were warned by journalists that they were heading for disaster unless they had matter in hand for six months. K. D. Sethna was in a quandary and sought Mother’s advice. On 27 January 1949 he received a telegram:

Stick to the date. Live on faith. Blessings — Mother.<sup>7</sup>

K. D. Sethna also received encouragement from Aldous Huxley at the difficult time during the launch of *Mother India*. Mr Huxley wrote on 29<sup>th</sup> January 1949:

. . . I can only wish you all success in your venture. You will, of course, be a voice crying in the wilderness. But if a few individuals pay attention, something will have been accomplished.<sup>8</sup>

Another aspect of K. D. Sethna was his love for poetry. He had dedicated himself to poetry of the new age to find the illuminating beatitudes of the inner depths of poetry, thanks to the grace of Sri Aurobindo. In effect he moulded himself to a new model for the future poetry.

Here is one of K. D. Sethna’s Overhead poems with Sri Aurobindo’s comment.

#### THIS ERRANT LIFE

This errant life is dear although it dies;  
 And human lips are sweet though they but sing  
 Of stars estranged from us; and youth’s emprise  
 Is wondrous yet, although an unsure thing.

Sky-lucent Bliss untouched by earthiness!  
 I fear to soar lest tender bonds decrease.  
 If Thou desirest my weak self to outgrow  
 Its mortal longings, lean down from above,  
 Temper the unborn light no thought can trace,  
 Suffuse my mood with a familiar glow.  
 For 'tis with mouth of clay I supplicate:  
 Speak to me heart to heart words intimate,  
 And all Thy formless glory turn to love  
 And mould Thy love into a human face.

Sri Aurobindo commented:

. . . a beautiful poem, one of the very best you have written. The last six lines, one may say even the last eight, are absolutely perfect. If you could always write like that, you would take your place among English poets and no low place either. I consider they can rank — these eight lines — with the very best in English poetry.

To Dilip Kumar Roy he wrote:

Amal's lines are not easily translatable, least of all, I imagine, into Bengali. There is in them a union or rather fusion of high severity of speech with exaltation and both with a pervading intense sweetness which it is almost impossible to transfer bodily without loss into another language. There is no word in excess, none that could have been added or changed without spoiling the expression, every word just the right revelatory one — no colour, no ornamentation, but a sort of suppressed burning glow; no similes, but images which have been fused inseparably into the substance of the thought and feeling — the thought itself perfectly developed, not idea added to idea at the will of the fancy, but perfectly interrelated and linked together like the limbs of an organic body. It is high poetic style in its full perfection and nothing of all that is transferable. . . .<sup>9</sup>

This is a letter from Kathleen Raine to Amal:

Dear Friend,  
 What a happiness to hear news of you after so long. . . . I have been reading your poems — what a beautifully produced book, with the Golden Bird (one of Rimbaud's?) on the cover. I at once read your introduction, most of the first section, and then, with great interest, the poems with the comments by Sri Aurobindo, whose insight into the different levels from which poems originate



is so true and so valuable. As you know I share AE’s view about all those abstract words and superlatives that Sri Aurobindo himself uses, and which he encourages you to use, but the aspiration of your life-work as a poet has been a yoga, as Blake would say a use of one of ‘the three powers of conversing with Paradise’ and Blake would surely applaud and delight in that vision you share with him. And there are some lovely poems, I agree with Sri Aurobindo’s judgment of ‘This Errant Life’ and especially of those beautiful lines:

Speak to me heart to heart words intimate,  
And all Thy formless glory turn to love  
And mould Thy love into a human face.<sup>10</sup>

One of the defining moments of Sethna’s poetry is when he got the poetic inspiration to compose *The Adventure of Apocalypse*. He had a sudden collapse on 8<sup>th</sup> May, 1948. When he reached home he felt breathless and very weak. He felt so sucked in that he thought he would die. He wrote:

. . . Yet a terrible sinking increased. It struck me that the only decisive help could be drawn by inwardly appealing to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother . . . With all my power of faith and aspiration I kept outstretching invisible hands to them, calling and calling. I pulled at the saving and healing light that is their Yogic consciousness and when I thought a blue sheen and a gold glow enveloped my heart I sensed a subtle supporting strength gradually taking outward effect.<sup>11</sup>

He continued:

. . . After a time a flood of poetry raced through my mind. Line after line, charged with spontaneous vision and symbol, ran before my shut eyes. I had the sense that I was composing and yet it would be equally true to say I was reading off the lines as they themselves appeared . . . I have never in my life had such a flow of inspiration sustained through such a length of time. . . .<sup>12</sup>

He wrote later:

. . . In fact I was writing to her [the Mother] every day and sending poem after poem. I was sure I was on the right lines in doing what I did and in believing that she would look after me and anyhow put me again on my feet. Her reply to one of my letters set the seal on my own conviction. She wrote: “My dear child, I quite agree with you that there is a power other and much more powerful than that of the doctors and the medicines and I am glad to see that you put your trust in it. Surely it will lead you throughout all difficulties and in spite of all catastrophic warnings. Keep your faith intact and all will be all right.”<sup>13</sup>

These poetic experiences continued for three months after which the poems were collected into a book called *The Adventure of Apocalypse*.

I would also like to highlight his close friendship and intimate bonding of 70 years with fellow-poet Nirodbaran. In a talk of 1970, Nirod-da introduced Amal to the students as follows:

Well, he is our distinguished, (*Amal covers his ears — laughter*) renowned, celebrated Amal Kiran, poet, critic, philosopher, journalist, historian, etc., etc., whom I am sure, you have seen hopping about with his stick in the Ashram (*laughter*) most conspicuously, and whom I have the privilege to count as a cherished friend. He can talk Relativity with an Einsteinian like Jugal, he can talk politics and communism with my colleague Manoj Das, he can talk history with my friend Sisir, and certainly he can perorate on philosophy with Arindam and Kireet, and even with Dr. Agarwal he can hold his own (*laughter*) — and with me on Supermind. (*laughter*). . . .<sup>14</sup>

On a personal note, my long association with Amal started from 1974 till he passed away. I am giving below some of my reminiscences of him.

To have known Amal Kiran was a grace and clearly an undeserved benediction. An opportunity to meet him arose when I started to compile my book *Glimpses of the Mother's Life*. When I completed the book I went to André-da to get Mother's approval for publication. The Mother agreed on the condition that I find a good English editor to check the manuscript. It was then that André-da was kind enough to suggest the name of K. D. Sethna, a fine scholar of Sri Aurobindo's works. I was initially nervous to meet such an eminent personality, so close to Sri Aurobindo. However one day I approached him at the Samadhi and told him that André-da had sent me to him to enquire if he would check the manuscript of the book. To my delight, he gladly accepted my request. At the time of publication many difficulties arose but he kindly solved them with his guidance and editorship. There was a lot of opposition to my project but Amal Kiran stood firm and sided with me. Finally the book was published in two volumes. I was keen to bring out a third volume but due to some difficulties was unable to do so. Amal then guided me and said: "What have you come to the Ashram for? Do you want to become an ambitious writer or a sadhika?" Immediately my desire to publish this book vanished.

Due to my association with him on publication of the book I later got an opportunity to join *Mother India* in 1977. I was assisting him in all possible ways. In 1989 he appointed me as the Manager of *Mother India*. I tried to work sincerely for him and once he encouraged me by saying, "Nilima you are an able manager."

He encouraged me to write many articles such as 'Sri Aurobindo — The Soul of India' and trained me to review books of eminent disciples of the Ashram. He also enlightened me on various aspects of the sadhana.

In 1991, he fractured his right thigh and was admitted to the Nursing Home and I had to attend on him. Along with some others I volunteered to do the night duty. Despite being in traction at considerable inconvenience to himself, he continued his editorial work. During this time I asked many questions which he unfailingly answered. Once I asked him: “Have you experienced your psychic being?”

He answered something along this line: “I am in contact often but it has not settled permanently.” Once when I asked him from which plane does he write poetry he replied: “I write from above my mind.”

On 5<sup>th</sup> May 1999 he fell down and fractured his hip bone and again had to be admitted to the Nursing Home where he stayed the next 12 years till his demise. Dr. Dutta assisted by Dr. Salila, Dr. Gayatri and all the nurses were very benevolent towards Amal with a reverence befitting one who was a close disciple of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. After the recuperation Amal did not want to shift back to his residence, as the Nursing Home had become like a home, thanks to everybody’s care and dedication. During his twelve-year stay there were mishaps but due to Mother’s grace he survived. On two occasions there were major crises when he was not expected to survive. On one occasion he said to me: “Don’t worry, I am not going.”

During his last two years he was a bit restless and at times forgetful but stoic; for when he suffered pain he lightly brushed it away by joking: “O pain, go to Spain and never come again.” He would even banter with the nurses: “O sister, Prime Minister, come to me.” Even during this difficult time he was by and large alert, remembering all his past experiences and events of history or reciting *Savitri* and other poems from memory. His attachment for the Samadhi was such that daily (except on rainy days and when unwell) when 4 p.m. approached, there was an anxiety due to his eagerness to reach the Ashram. Once he closed his eyes when lying down; I later asked him what he was thinking. He replied: “I am in meditation.”

On 26 June 2011 he contracted a chest infection accompanied by high fever. On 27 June he was reluctant to eat and was put on drip. Early on 29 June at about 7 a.m. he told me: “I can’t hold on. Where is Udar, where is Nirod, where is my papa?”

When I told him they are in heaven he replied: “Then what am I to do here.”

Later I said: “Let us chant *Mother and Sri Aurobindo, Sharanam Mama.*” Then the nurses and I felt he was withdrawing.

Subsequently, he passed away at 12.15.

At that moment, I felt a deep calm in the atmosphere.

I conclude by expressing my deep gratitude to Amal for always being kind to me and supporting me. He was a wonderful person, ever smiling with a childlike simplicity and humility.

1. *K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran) A Centenary Tribute*, Ed. Sachidananda Mohanty, pp. xvii-xviii.
2. *Mother India*, October 1966, p. 16.
3. *K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran) A Centenary Tribute*, Ed. Sachidananda Mohanty, p. 62.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
8. *K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran) A Centenary Tribute*, Ed. Sachidananda Mohanty, facsimile.
9. *K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran) The Secret Splendour — Collected Poems*, pp. 70-71.
10. *Amal-Kiran: Poet and Critic*, Ed. Nirodbaran and R. Y. Deshpande, p. 36.
11. *K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran) The Secret Splendour*, p. 220.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 220-21.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 225.
14. *K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran) A Centenary Tribute*, Ed. Sachidananda Mohanty, p. 483.



## TRANSCRIPT OF AN INTERVIEW WITH AMAL

[The date of this interview and the name of the interviewer could not be ascertained. The first question has not been recorded. —Ed.]

**Amal:** Many pictures of the Mother represent aspects of her with which perhaps you are not familiar or with which you are not always in tune, that may be one of the answers. Another answer is that the pictures which you do not appreciate are those which the Mother grants to certain people who are very particular about them and who appreciate them very much.

**Q:** As editor of *Mother India* you had the chance of expressing something about the future poetry, especially as you had the rare opportunity of intimate correspondence with Sri Aurobindo.

**Amal:** I don't know whether my being an editor qualifies me to answer this question but perhaps I became an editor or was chosen by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to be one, because something in me had opened to Sri Aurobindo's inspiration from the overhead planes, which is the chief part of what he calls the future poetry.

**Q:** Now, Amal, why does the Mother give so much freedom to us instead of pushing us forward or stopping our wrong movements.

**Amal:** This Yoga is said to be evolutionary. Nothing can evolve and become a part of one's nature unless it is developed in perfect freedom and is not something superimposed. The whole universe, the Mother has said, was created in freedom and it can fulfil itself also if all those who are cooperating in its development are perfectly free.

**Q:** Looking at people here, don't you feel they are about to create a new religion?

**Amal:** There is a certain tendency in people here to be exclusive and to say this Yoga is superior to all other yogic paths. But by and large, I think that people do understand that neither Sri Aurobindo nor the Mother intend to create a new religion, religions all belong to what they have called the Overmind, the world of the great Gods. What Sri Aurobindo and the Mother want to manifest is the world of the Supermind which is above all religions and I think they are succeeding fairly well in spite of old habits and conventions lingering in the minds of certain disciples.

**Q:** That was wonderful! Compared with Ramana Ashram the atmosphere here is not peaceful. On Darshans the place is rather unpleasantly crowded. What is still the secret of attraction?

**Amal:** I think the peace here has to be understood in a special way. It is a peace that must exist simultaneously with activity. In Ramana Ashram, the stress is on peace; here, the stress is on a new life whose basis is peace but with a new

activity radiating from that source. I would add that here you have two atmospheres; there is the vast pervading atmosphere of the presence of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and there is also an atmosphere which is a bit of a hotch-potch, made of the common movements of so many people's minds and it is very necessary that one should stay in contact with that luminous spiritual atmosphere and not get easily caught up in the other.

**Q:** That was rather wonderful, Amal! Now, Amal, is it necessary to stay here [in the Ashram] for the transformation? This refers to the experience you had in the train in connection with the Supermind's manifestation.

**Amal:** In order to be inwardly in touch with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, it is not necessary to stay here all the time but there is a concentration of spiritual power here and time and again one has to come to the source to drink the essential nectar. Also, when the work of transformation comes down to the very physical, it is absolutely necessary to be near the physical being of the Mother which is undergoing transformation. As regards my experience in the train, I think its background is my long stay here, because without it I would not have been in such intimate contact with the Mother, that she could remember a promise given to me about 18 years earlier, that when the Supramental manifestation took place she would immediately inform me in some way or other.

**Q:** Now, Amal, what is the meaning of OM on the foundation stone of the Matrimandir? Could you tell us that?

**Amal:** I couldn't be sure of my answer but I would venture to say OM is the living spiritual vibration of the Universal Divine. Auroville is meant to be a universal phenomenon, it is open to all people of goodwill and idealism. And OM would be a core to the whole wide world. Again OM, representing the universal vibration, is naturally connected with the creative action of the Mother, the Mother who is also the World Mother no less than the Transcendental Supracosmic Shakti.

**Q:** Amal, can you tell us what is the value of a Yogi for humanity?

**Amal:** A Yogi is valuable to humanity to the extent that he does not dehumanise himself by his Yoga. He does not merely divinise himself by his Yoga but brings the fruits of his Yoga to all mankind.

**Q:** The Ashram is centred around the Mother. What is left without her?

**Amal:** I don't think there can be anything left without the Mother, but I don't understand why we should at all think of an Ashram with the Mother left out. The Mother's work is to complete and fulfil what Sri Aurobindo has wanted to do and that is a complete divinisation of her very physical being and one of the results of the divinisation would be the ability on her part to continue living as long as she wants and she thinks is necessary for her work.

**Q:** Now, in this connection I would ask, are there higher developed personalities to continue her work?

**Amal:** There are personalities in the Ashram who have a pretty high develop-

ment but at present I don't think anybody could stand by the side of the Mother; but what they can do more and more, is to be her instruments, her radiating centres in the world. But that does not mean that the Mother will leave the Ashram and any of them will take over. Such a thing cannot be thought of and it is not necessary to be thought of because it is no part of the work of Sri Aurobindo. The Mother will be with us.

**Q:** That was wonderfully explained, Amal. Now, Amal, is the flame child born? Could you explain this?

**Amal:** It is a very poetic question but it emerges from the spiritually realistic poetry of *Savitri*. I understand by the flame child the psychic being, the soul of all the world getting radiated with its fountain light which is the Supermind and I believe that after the 5<sup>th</sup> of December 1950 when, as a result of Sri Aurobindo's strategic sacrifice, the Mother realised what he had called the Mind of Light in herself, and after 29 February 1956 when the Supramental manifestation took place — after these two great events we can say that the flame child has certainly taken birth and is fast growing

**Q:** What does the Ashram mean for the world?

**Amal:** The Ashram is the nucleus of a new humanity, the first place where an experiment is being carried on to bring about the next step in evolution, just as a mental race came about millions of years ago. Similarly, a race of supermen or rather men who have given themselves up to the Supramental Light will develop into a new race, which will mark a tremendous progress for the whole world because the power to solve all the problems which the human mind cannot solve will be there available at all times.

**Q:** Now, one last question, Amal. Why is the Ashram not doing social work?

**Amal:** Social work is not the be all and end all of all existence. It is an important part of life but everybody is not called upon to do social work. If a Shakespeare or a Dante or even a Goethe were to be compelled to do social work as a duty, the world would be a great loser because all that creative work will suffer. Besides, social work by itself has never solved the fundamental problems of the earth and there are hundreds and thousands of people who are really called by something in themselves to do social work. We in the Ashram are called to solve the problem of humanity by some sort of a radical cure, which is a complete change of consciousness. When the complete change of consciousness comes about, there would be no need of social work, all the social evils will be abolished.

**Q:** The last, the very last question: Would you be so kind as to read out your favourite lines from *Savitri*?

**Amal:** There are many passages in *Savitri* which are my favourites. I think I shall pick out just the one which was my first favourite, it occurs in Book One, Canto Two. It is a description of Savitri and in this long description there is a passage which seems to me the very heart of the revelation of a true being. It goes like this:

As in a mystic and dynamic dance  
A priestess of immaculate ecstasies  
Inspired and ruled from Truth's revealing vault  
Moves in some prophet cavern of the gods,  
A heart of silence in the hands of joy  
Inhabited with rich creative beats  
A body like a parable of dawn  
That seemed a niche for veiled divinity  
Or golden temple-door to things beyond.

(*Savitri*, Book 1, Canto II)





## WELCOME, NOT FAREWELL

The voice that overpowered the waves is silent now —  
The pen which made us ponder and laugh has stopped forever.  
The beatific smile which captivated hearts will no longer be seen;  
The paragon of Integral Yoga — the “Clear Ray” — has merged into the Divine Light.  
Seated on your wheeled throne you radiated a strange bliss and peace —  
Your presence caused Time and Eternity to embrace in a joy divine  
And re-reveal life’s long-forgotten mission to ignorant self-lost souls.  
A dynamo of wisdom, delight and wit who transformed grief into perpetual happiness  
And explained the deep-rooted causes of misery; thus, leading us to Light,  
O Amal! Will life ever be the same when you are not around us anymore?

But have you really gone away from us forever? Nay —  
Death has freed you from the shackles of all handicaps  
And made you an integral part of our inner lives.  
Hands have been raised not to bid you mere farewell  
But welcome you in the kingdom of our inner worlds  
Where seated on a throne of love in the temple of our hearts  
You will reign forever as the sovereign and supreme emperor.  
Death has not caused an eternal separation;  
It has only brought you infinitely closer to us.

ANURAG BANERJEE

## AMAL KIRAN AS I KNEW HIM

EVER since my coming to Pondicherry on the 13<sup>th</sup> of August 1948, I have known Amal Kiran. That was sixty-three years ago. He must have been, I presume, forty-four or forty-five years old at that time. In spite of his physical disabilities, he was very active. He had a cycle at his disposal. I saw him move about in the town, on his bicycle, on his own, as and when he liked.

I understand from one of his relatives that he had to give up cycling as his legs were getting weaker and weaker; I presume that he must have found pedalling a hard job.

Amal's next mode of moving about in the town was a rickshaw. But as far as short distances were concerned, he was on his own when going in and out of his house and in the Ashram, joining the queue to receive the Mother's blessings in the Meditation Hall. He walked with the help of two extremely light aluminium sticks with cycle-like handle-grips at the top. Behind the handles there was something that went round Amal's wrists — they gave the impression of bangles — as a precautionary measure, so that even if the hand slipped from the handle, the stick would not fall from his hand.

This process continued for a fairly long period, probably till 1991, when Amal had his first serious fall, breaking his right thigh bone. He was admitted in the Nursing Home but after recovery, he returned home.

What happened after this is not very clear on the screen of my memory, whether he walked with the help of sticks as mentioned earlier or whether he was in a wheelchair. He lived at home from 1992 to 1999.

In that year, 1999, one unfortunate afternoon, his door bell rang. Amal wanted to let in his visitor. So he tried to get up from his bed. He was alone and could not negotiate the balance of his body and perhaps fell sideways (not on his back or stomach). It is immaterial in which angle he fell. The fact is that he fell on one of his knees, which bore the full weight of his body. This deprived him of his free movement, even for short distances. I asked Amal how he fell and he described to me the whole process himself. After that fall he was in the wheelchair till the end and the Nursing Home became his permanent abode.

From around 1975, I came very close to Amal when I joined the *Mother India* office. I would see him almost everyday, taking to him some of his personal mail as well as the *Mother India* mail, etc. till he shifted to the Nursing Home for good. As I was in close proximity to him, I observed many things. He had an extremely cool head on his broad shoulders. I did not see him lose his temper even once. Waist upward, he had a big chest, big biceps and strong forearms. Criticism of others was something foreign to his nature, something which I envy. At times, I did raise a

point of criticism, but he would not participate in it actively. He would listen quietly and give his opinion. If he agreed with me, he would say, “Yes, it should be done like that,” with a smile; and if he did not agree, he would quietly convey it through the expression on his face, meaning, “Let us agree to disagree.”

One day, as I entered his room, he was scanning what appeared to me to be foolscap papers (loose, not bound). Looking up at me, he said, “These are the papers Sri Aurobindo used to send to me regularly.”

I saw them — Sri Aurobindo had written them by hand, they were not type-written.

The subject was *Savitri*.

As I sat down, looking at one of the sheets he said, “See here, Sri Aurobindo is describing how Overmind appears from Supermind.”

And the line he read out was, “Like a faint star bordering the night”. I hope I am quoting the line correctly, since I heard this line from *Savitri* quite some time back from Amal.

Now, after reading Sri Aurobindo’s reply to a sadhak pointing out the difference between Overmind and Supermind, I have some idea of the two lofty spiritual planes. Sri Aurobindo says,

It is only the supramental that is all-knowledge. All below that from overmind to Matter is Ignorance — an Ignorance growing from level to level towards the full knowledge. Below supermind there may be knowledge but it is not all-knowledge. (*SABCL*, Vol. 22, p. 19)

As a requiem for Amal Kiran, I would like to say: There lived on earth a man with impeccable manners, a true gentleman, till he silently passed away — to abide in the memory of his friends and admirers — on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June, 2011 at 12: 15 in the afternoon.

As if a torch held by a power of God,  
 The radiant world of the everlasting Truth  
 Glimmered like a faint star bordering the night  
 Above the golden Overmind’s shimmering ridge.  
 Even were caught as through a cunning veil  
 The smile of love that sanctions the long game,  
 The calm indulgence and maternal breasts  
 Of Wisdom suckling the child-laughter of Chance,  
 Silence, the nurse of the Almighty’s power,  
 The omniscient hush, womb of the immortal Word,  
 And of the Timeless the still brooding face,  
 And the creative eye of Eternity.

(*Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 41)

## A VALUABLE MEMORABLE TRAINING

THE sixth of January, the anniversary of the School, was approaching and a few of us were asked to recite Sri Aurobindo's poem *Descent*. Manoj and Jhumur, perhaps Paru, and myself had gathered in the Registrar's office to practise at eleven-thirty.

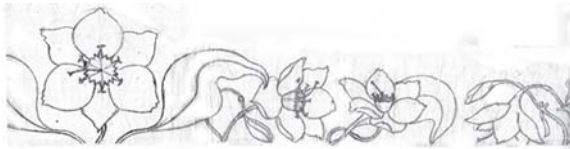
I cannot quite remember who gave the suggestion of inviting Amal to guide us; I believe it was Arati-di. Well, next day Amal came along and after hearing us read the first stanza, he told us to stop. He then began to recite the lines in a very sonorous voice stressing the metre in a forceful way.

Of course, it was quite different from what we were used to, for we had been rehearsing in our usual dramatic manner, trying to bring out the meaning rather than to follow the rhythm.

As we began to read, trying to copy him, I must admit we found it difficult to break away from the old habit of the stage recitations we were so used to.

Let me tell you that we did learn to undo our old customary ways. For Amal stuck to the metre like a musician following faithfully the notes, and we were the mini-orchestra he was conducting.

RICHARD PEARSON



## TRIBUTE TO AMAL

MINNA, Amal's assistant and caregiver for over three decades, and I appreciate *Mother India* asking us to share some reminiscences of Amal in this issue dedicated to him. We both had been closely associated with him, his work and *Mother India*. It was our endeavour to do so in an unobtrusive way: had not the Mother said that when there is work to do, the less one talks about it the better it is?

We feel the moment has not yet come to put our memories in print. A friend of Amal's, and ours, has expressed his thoughts to Minna. We both find that his words honour Amal's life. We would like to share them with you.

Our world in this land of the undead cannot be the same again after the passage to the Other World of our very dear friend, Amal Kiran on 29.6.11: the best tribute we, I think, owe to him is to become more gathered in our energies, be more intense in our aspiration and more ardent and absolute in our faith — and, in short, like him, to be more earnest towards / in our urge for perfection, an integrated completeness of living.

May we ceaselessly continue to ascend to the Truth and Divine Love — and may we uninterruptedly increase our love for the Supreme Mother and the Lord, Sri Aurobindo.

And, like Amal, who had written in a “prayer” dated 14 March 1930: *Mother mine, it is my one prayer that I be worthy of the supreme love You and my Lord have for me*, may we always try and be worthy — and be worthy also of Amal's love.

ESTHER



## AMAL KIRAN: “EARTH’S DEAR AND HEAVEN’S NEAR”

A GREAT man is always great by his own innate greatness whether ordinary mortals acknowledge it or not. Amal-kiran was a multi-faceted genius—cum—Aurobindonian yogi. I have been asked to write something as a memoir about one to whom the Mother said one day, “If I told you what Sri Aurobindo and I think of your mind, you would get puffed up.” It was he who has reshaped the lives of many with his psychic disposition along with his intellectual brilliance. It was a great privilege to come into his aura; but I feel deeply that I have squandered his invaluable gifts. He was a person with whom all gaps, including generation gap, communication gap, cultural gap and so on could be bridged without much difficulty because of his blithe and benign spirit. But the gap of consciousness always remained. Being a sure guide and friend, he perhaps left part of our sadhana to us, to rise higher and higher and to go deeper and deeper in our consciousness.

My rapport with Amal Kiran started as a student of poetry through correspondence during 1992. Over the years he was kind enough to go through two hundred and twenty of my poetic jottings, adding his varied comments on them. By and by, this rapport took a more rapturous turn. When I settled here in the Ashram in August 2000, I was given work in *Mother India* office for some time along with the responsibility of attending on Amal Kiran in the Ashram Nursing Home. The work of attending on him seemed quite challenging at the outset and I was nervous to be near this Aurobindonian-yogi-cum-rogi who was bedridden. Anyway, the Mother came to my rescue at each step. This continued for a period of more than a decade till the last day of his earthly life i.e. 29<sup>th</sup> June 2011. In the beginning, he, being the editor of *Mother India*, would see all the final proofs of the monthly. I have also seen him reading bulky books, either on Napoleon or on Einstein or the collected works of Elizabeth Browning.

I had to face numerous tests from him and from the environment, both physically and psychologically, — these helped me indirectly to grow in an attitude of self-analysis and sadhana. Amal Kiran himself was to me a veritable barometer of the spirit with his motto of “Remember and offer”.

He used to test my vocabulary as well as my exposure to English literature, especially English poetry of various ages and sometimes as regards its nuance and niceties along with my exposure to Sri Aurobindo’s works. His poetry-packed memory, along with his yogic perception, were ever ready to test me both outwardly and inwardly. It was a tough period, no doubt, but quite an enjoyable one. I had to attend to his tea and also his dinner. As usual, he was very fastidious and would not let me go without fulfilling his conditions i.e. answering his questions correctly. For

instance, he would say, “Unless you tell me the name of Don Quixote’s attendant, I won’t have my dinner.” Whatever be the condition, his questions had to be attended first. In that hurried mood I could not recollect the exact name but only recollected that it started with an ‘S’. I told him that it was on my lips but I could not catch it. He wanted it urgently as it was on his lips too. Without taxing my memory further, I just prayed to the Mother to prompt my memory. Lo! After a second or two that name seized my lips and the name of “Sancho Panza” was told to him. His memory was revived too and he himself recollected the name of Sancho’s horse as Rosinante. He was so happy, like a child, and he thanked me while I observed gratefully his ever-renewing memory. That brought us closer to each other.

On another occasion, he was reciting to himself some lines from *Antony and Cleopatra* but he got stuck with, “Age cannot wither her. . .”. He wanted to recollect the next line but could not. He called loudly, “Sister! Sister! Is anybody there?” He told the nurse, “Call Asha.” When I came to him, he asked me the same thing, and when I prompted him, “Nor custom stale her infinite variety”, he was very happy and there was a glow on his face. He then asked me to tell him from where these lines were, “Life is but a poor player / Who struts and frets his hour upon the stage/ And then is heard no more . . .”. Hearing from me the right answer, *Macbeth*, he seemed to be pleased with my attendance on him.

At my request, he once read out his favourite passage in *Savitri* (pp.14-16, “All in her pointed to a nobler kind . . . The strength, the silence of the gods were hers.”) which had a magical charm and force. After that I, being over-enthusiastic pronounced “Savitri” hurriedly without pronouncing “Sa” as it should be with a long vowel of ‘a’. He did not like me pronouncing it so fast and told me in a stern voice, “Don’t murder poetry like that. If you utter ‘Sa’ like this, how will you read the line where Sri Aurobindo has used ‘Savitri’ three times? Can you quote me the exact line?” Luckily, I was familiar with that line and replied, “Savitri, Savitri, O Savitri, / Lean down, my soul, and kiss me while I die.” Thank God! Somehow that eased the situation.

I remember another occasion, when I misquoted Shelley’s famous lines, “I can give not what men call love, / . . . From the sphere of our sorrow?” He was annoyed with me saying, “Do not murder a poet and his poetry when you are a poet.”

He taught me to be very careful and open-eyed to poetry, literature and everything. That was his sincere-most instruction to keep me in the stream of poetry and poetic creation. Likewise, my time with this living encyclopedia became mostly an animated academic interaction. When I could not answer him properly he used to say, “Dig it out from your memory,” and helped me to get the right answer. That became almost a routine during my time with him. Besides, it was somehow like a laughing club which deepened our intimacy and both of us equally reposed in each other with mutual trust as well as witty interactions. For example, if I said, “Please, drink water,” he would say, “Drinkwater I don’t like, I prefer Masefield.” Sometimes

he asked for food but when the food was served to him, he would say, "I don't want it now." One day I asked him desperately, "Why are you contradicting yourself?" He replied, "Because I contain multitudes" — referring to a line from Whitman.

I asked him numerous questions which he appreciated as evocative and intelligent and he answered me promptly. These questions and answers, some of which are presented below were retrieved from my tape-recordings of the conversations as well as my diary notes. They have been arranged more or less topic-wise.

**Me:** Your reading of *Savitri* is so perfect that it penetrates my whole being. But we can't read *Savitri* like you. We are using our own accents and we have no sense of its metrical quality. Do you think that *Savitri*, sheer Mantra, will still have its effect on us?

**Amal:** It can have its effect in spite of the difficulties of reading. But of course, if the reading is correct, according to both the rules of the English language and the rules of metre, its effect is greatly enhanced. I would advise you to always read *Savitri* a little aloud. Allow your ears to read *Savitri* along with your eyes. *Savitri* should not be read or recited as a song, because no English poetry is read as a song.

**Q:** What actually is Overhead Poetry? *Savitri* is from the Overhead plane of consciousness.

**Amal:** Overhead Poetry is that poetry which comes from planes of consciousness above the ordinary mind, or even the most cultivated mind. It carries with it a breath of natural vastness and a depth of significance beyond the mere words, because it comes from planes of consciousness which transcend the mere medium of words with their own vastnesses and own secrecies in their natural force. Of course, among the Overhead planes there is a gradation and *Savitri* is indeed from the highest overhead plane which is nearest to the summit that poetry can ever envisage.

**Q:** Sri Aurobindo has categorised your poetry as Overhead poetry. How did you achieve it?

**Amal:** Not all my poetry. But many passages of my work he categorised as Overhead. It was my aspiration to write continuously from the Overhead level. Besides, an exercise of reading Overhead poetry, i.e. Sri Aurobindo's own poetic works was required. My poetry came from several levels: inner and higher. My aspiration and aim was always to combine the two, an intimacy and an intensity of inwardness with the wideness and freedom of the Overhead level. How far I achieved that can be guessed from the remarks that Sri Aurobindo made about my poetry.

**Q:** Does Overhead poetry contain the ingredients of psychic poetry and mystic poetry?

**Amal:** There is a difference between these three kinds of poetry. Psychic poetry comes from the deepest emotional centre in man. Mystic poetry or occult poetry comes from realms of consciousness behind the ordinary human intelligence. The



Overhead poetry sweeps down, as it were, from some realms of consciousness which is above mind and even the most cultivated mind.

**Q:** When did you start writing poetry? Was metrical poetry inborn with you or did you develop it?

**Amal:** I started writing poetry quite early in life in a spirit of rivalry to my cousin who used to write poems and recite them to me. Then I did not know what was metre or rhythm. I used to think if I made all the lines equal in length on the paper, they would be metrical and constitute true poetry. So some lines I wrote in small script in order to accommodate them with other lines. Afterwards I developed metrical knowledge by reading the poetry of great poets and also increased the sense of poetic value of great poetry by reading them and humming them again and again to catch the outer rhythm and also the secret of the mood.

**Q:** When did Sri Aurobindo discover the poet in you ?

**Amal:** Sri Aurobindo discovered the poet in me quite early in our relationship. Because the poem, ‘This Errant Life’ which Sri Aurobindo regarded as one of my best poems and one of the best in English poetry was quite an early work during my Ashram life. I sent it to him. He discovered the poet in me then and kept on encouraging me with quite frank opinions from his own vast understanding consciousness.

**Q:** What led you to choose ‘The Secret Splendour’ as the title of your book of collected poems?

**Amal:** It, ‘The Secret Splendour’, came to my mind after a long search to find the right title for my book.

**Q:** Do you think the book *The Secret Splendour* reveals the secret splendour of Amal Kiran, or in other words, is it the quintessence of Amal Kiran, the poet, yogi, lover, and disciple?

**Amal:** Yes. It does.

**Q:** Sri Aurobindo must have been very much impressed by your work “Sri Aurobindo — The Poet”.

**Amal:** Yes. He considered my long article, “Sri Aurobindo — The Poet” as a very good and competent essay. I gave the title: “Sri Aurobindo, as a poet” but Sri Aurobindo himself suggested its change to “Sri Aurobindo — The Poet”.

**Q:** Would you please recount your first darshan of Sri Aurobindo? Did he smile at you?

**Amal:** I had my first darshan of Sri Aurobindo on 21<sup>st</sup> Feb. 1928. He blessed me and the others with his two hands. Both the Mother and Sri Aurobindo blessed me. I was examining Sri Aurobindo’s face, his moustache and beard, his nose and eyes while he was examining my face too. I told myself, what an impressive Guru! Quite fit to be accepted by me. He too observed me and later remarked, “He has a good face.” He did not smile at me but kept on looking at me till I disappeared. The Mother was smiling all the time to make us feel at ease in the presence of her godhood. For me Sri Aurobindo is a combination of the Himalaya and a lion. That

means he is grand, austere, calm and still like the Himalaya and forceful and dynamic like a lion. The most divine being I could ever hope to meet and also the most human person I ever met in my life is Sri Aurobindo.

**Q:** What is the role of mind in Overhead poetry? What is the role of heart in Overhead poetry?

**Amal:** The role of mind is there but mind is moulded by the higher force. Heart also is taken up and moulded by it — everything is moulded by the higher power. The role of the heart is there in all poetry, otherwise it would be philosophy. The emotional part is kept aside and the psychic part is in action in this poetry. It is expressed through the heart.

**Q:** From where do you draw your inspiration for poetry?

**Amal:** I draw my inspiration from the Illumined Mind generally. Sometimes even from beyond it, from the Intuitive Mind. It is all ready-made.

**Q:** Then what do you consider to be a poet, and what is the function of the poet in this matter?

**Amal:** A true poet is an instrument of the revelation of the Divine. The poet's function is to reflect those ready-made things and each poet has his own terms of transmission. If he opens himself fully to it, the transmission will automatically be done.

**Q:** What is your observation about the present trend in poetry, will it take a step forward towards the Future Poetry as envisaged by Sri Aurobindo?

**Amal:** Doubtful, except when it has the intuitive touch. Modern poetry is not properly formulated. It is partly chaotic, like modern life. Mostly, it is a cerebral ingenuity. People try to be clever but cleverness is the last thing in poetry. One must be natural and spontaneous, that means to feel in the heart and feel in the mind and express things as they come but not formulate your answers.

**Q:** Do you think that I am a poet and is there any originality in my poetry?

**Amal:** Yes. Oh, yes. Otherwise I would not have bothered to read them. You are writing original poetry in free verse. But you should appeal to Sri Aurobindo to take possession of your heart and hand.

**Q:** My poetry is too simple, with simple diction and style. It is too ordinary and commonplace.

**Amal:** Simplicity should not be confused with ordinariness. Some of the best poetry is simple and natural. In your poetry simplicity is trying to express its beauty.

**Q:** From which region does my poetry come usually?

**Amal:** From your individual region but influenced by your Psychic being.

Regarding my poetry Amal-kiran remarked finally on 8<sup>th</sup> April 2007:

In spite of my severest probing, the poems of Asha have proved their worth in a lively and original way. The psychic and the vital are equally voiced there

with wingedness in a subtle ether.

There is an appeal to the deep soul here and there — a possible opening to a great future.

**Q:** Nowadays I cannot write poetry. The afflatus of the pre-Ashram days is completely gone, I feel poetry is dead in me. What is your observation?

**Amal:** It is dead, preceding a new life.

**Q:** I suppose poetry has its own dialect. It is beyond language, so what is the dialect of poetry?

**Amal:** Babblings of the heart.

**Q:** Can you read such babblings? Can you articulate it?

**Amal:** Yes, I can read it but not articulate it.

**Q:** Can lyrical poetry be Overhead poetry and poetry welling up from the heart be Mantra?

**Amal:** Yes. It comes to the heart from the Overhead. Mantra starts at the intuitive Overmind. Mantra is both a form and content. A certain rhythm is the distinguishing sign of the Mantra. Some poetry is overhead in substance but not in form, that is to say, not in rhythm.

**Q:** What do you consider as your greatest achievement in life?

**Amal:** The realisation of the Presence of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo within my heart.

**Q:** What is your contribution to humanity, the aspiring humanity?

**Amal:** If any, mental exposition of Sri Aurobindo’s Supramental Truth-Light.

**Q:** Are you satisfied with your long stay in the Ashram? Tell me, please, what is the secret of it?

**Amal:** Yes. The secret of smiling at life in its various shades and the supporting love of the Mother.

**Q:** Don’t you feel that you would have excelled yourself in the outside world as regards your literary talents or genius?

**Amal:** Now I am too old for it. At one time it was there to some extent.

**Q:** Do you have any regret for it?

**Amal:** How can one regret one’s closeness to Sri Aurobindo?

**Q:** Some people say that you could not fully blossom in the Ashram. The outside world would have recognised you better and you might have been an immortal poet like Shakespeare by now.

**Amal:** Absurd, complete nonsense and an exaggeration. The only way to be more than Shakespeare is to remain here. If Shakespeare were here, he would have out-Shakespeareed himself.

In this connection I am reminded of some events that I would like to share with others.

One day Amal Kiran was very composed with a gesture of prayer with frequent

utterance of, “O Lord”. After a while, I asked him, “Are you praying?”

He smiled sweetly and nodded his head positively.

I asked him, “For what?”

He said, “Thankfulness for being accepted by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.”

I told him, “You deserve to be accepted by them.”

Hearing me, he nodded his head negatively and said emphatically, “The pride of all these days is the undeserved Grace of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.”

Another day, wishing me, “Hello”, he coughed violently. I expressed my anxiety for his suffering and tried out some simple remedies. Seeing me worried, he said, “No suffering. I am a honey-eater in the heart of things.”

**Q:** Why are you suffering from this or that, is something wrong with us, the attendants?

**Amal:** No, no. Somebody has to suffer who has the capacity to suffer and win over suffering.

**Q:** I think you are suffering because you are fighting with the adverse and ugly forces.

**Amal:** Yes, but I will win.

Then he said it in the second person, “You will go on fighting with the certainty that you will come out on top.”

**Q:** Where are you now? I mean in which consciousness are you dwelling at present?

**Amal:** Very near the highest —.

**Q:** Are you there all the time or coming and going?

**Amal:** I am trying my best. I always have Sri Aurobindo’s hands on my head.

**Q:** At times I feel that I am wasting my time here without doing anything substantial for yoga.

**Amal:** All these so-called unsubstantial things when put together would make a big substance.

**Q:** I feel dry, discouraged and even despondent. What is my future and what am I doing here?

**Amal:** Bright — doing sadhana here. Because I am a passage to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

**Q:** Sadhana? I don’t find any progress in me; rather, the condition worsens day by day.

**Amal:** How would you know your sadhana? It is being done for you but you are not aware of it. Progress is always slow with everybody but non-progress is faster. To stay here is to do sadhana.

**Q:** What sort of sadhana?

**Amal:** Emergence of the psychic being.

**Q:** Could it not be done outside?

**Amal:** Maybe. But here it is faster. Because you do not do sadhana here, sadhana is being done for you as for everybody. The whole atmosphere, the sky, the sea and the soil here is doing sadhana, above all the Mother and Sri Aurobindo (*with a confident and emphatic voice*). You have simply to be carried by the stream of sadhana. Then you will realise the whole charm of your stay here. You are stumbling towards the Divine because of your doubts. Doubt about your spiritual destiny is a stumbling-block in sadhana. This sort of doubt comes from the surroundings. Ignore it, turn your face away from it. The soul's smile is the best weapon against all difficulties that beset us on the way by the hostile forces.

**Q:** Are you doing sadhana at present?

**Amal:** Nowadays I am not doing sadhana. Oh, sadhana carries me along (in peaceful trust).

**Q:** We all want you to live still longer after your centenary. What is your wish?

**Amal:** Not to fall short of what Sri Aurobindo expects from me.

**Q:** You had a glorious period in the Ashram life when real sadhana was done in building up the Ashram and fortifying it. What then is your observation about the present Ashram life?

**Amal:** The present Ashram life is also glorious but in a hidden form. All will come in time. Remember always that it is Sri Aurobindo's Ashram, the creation of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Never ours.

**Q:** What is the future of the Ashramites here?

**Amal:** That depends on each individual Ashramite. Those who are living for their ideal and clinging to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo are safe. It is a great privilege to be on the side of the Divine.

During the night of 7<sup>th</sup> August 2010, during my attendance, I asked him as usual, “How are you?” He said in a Shakespearean way, “I am happy. Because nothing has crossed the genial current of my life.” He explained that it meant, “Nobody has proved unfaithful to me.”

Some time in September 2010, a sincere Ashramite was fed up with the present Ashram life and had decided to quit the Ashram but would stay here in Pondicherry clinging to the truth of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. In spite of the advice of all the well-wishers the decision to leave the Ashram was firm. Amal Kiran was not well at that time and was resting silently. When I related this thing to him, he paused for a while and with great concern spoke slowly, pausing after each word, “This Ashram is Sri Aurobindo's creation, to quit this Ashram is to quit Sri Aurobindo.” This single sentence changed the whole scene. That sincere person was moved by this sentence and shed tears of surprise and gratitude with a resolution to cast aside this evil suggestion for good. This is our revered and very dear Amal Kiran. It is noteworthy how he was always helpful to the aspirants as well as to the dilemma-stricken ones and seemingly wayward stumbling ones, even in his worst bedridden condition.

On 1<sup>st</sup> November 2010 evening he was unusually impatient and tense, repeating these words: “Open the door and welcome Sri Aurobindo. Appeal to him (*with a humble gesture*) for peace, beauty and utility.” He dictated these words to Minna and also to me when I came to him. He repeated it non-stop with an order to do something without wasting his time. Again and again he dictated the same thing to me practically with a sob. He told me, “A big crowd is waiting outside to see me. Open the door and call them all, I would like to address them.” When he asked me what step did we take, I said, “Yes, yes, we are doing what you want us to do”, he remained still unconvinced, doubting any step from me and asked me, “Are you a born fool or a fool made?” Somehow after this impasse was over, I asked him on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2010: “Why did you say all these things to us four days ago? Are you fighting with something or what?”

He said clearly and categorically, “Yes, I am fighting for Sri Aurobindo.”

I asked him, “You said, ‘Appeal to Him for peace, beauty and utility.’ Why utility, I cannot make out.”

He replied to me clearly, “Sri Aurobindo should be the urgent need of our lives. We should need Him always. But nowadays it is not so. I am always fighting for Sri Aurobindo.” So whenever he was frantic or unwell, I could understand that something was happening somewhere to which he was reacting so vehemently.

I had witnessed his ultra-sensitivity to some happenings or intentions or even gestures. One day when he was suffering from malaria in 2002, he was very irritable and abhorred food. There was always a dim light in the room when he was sleeping. I was attending him that time. I felt like reading *Savitri* and opened a page of *Savitri*, and read it silently sitting on the attendant’s bed. Amal shouted, “Stop, stop.” I could not make out what he intended me to do and I told him that I was not giving him any food. But he repeatedly shouted, “Stop, stop.” Suddenly it struck me that I was reading the pages where Death’s vainglorious voice was uppermost. When I closed the book, he was immediately silent. After two hours, I opened *Savitri* again and read silently from “The book of the Everlasting Day” but sitting beside Amal Kiran’s bed. After some time he opened his eyes and smiled at me in a very composed manner, saying, “Thank you, dear.” I was really surprised to see him thanking me for nothing. But somehow I could relate his thanks to my reading of a glorious chapter of the future, i.e. Love’s victory over death and apprised him that it was from the aforesaid book. He nodded his head in appreciation and a feeling of comfort. Thus he made me aware of his inner opening to vibrations. Without knowing or seeing anything he could clearly feel or know something and respond accordingly.

I had seen many cases over the years how he used to identify himself with some dying persons and he became as though dead but revived after the death of those persons. Some months before his passing, a patient was dying and without knowing anything about it he was as though dead at that time. He wanted to drink something but could not swallow and spat it out. When I was reluctant to give him

anymore, he asked for it on his own and said coolly, “I don’t want to die now.” I was completely stunned by it and asked him again to direct me clearly what his wish was. When he told me that he would like to drink, I gave him the same drink and he finished it and got over the ordeal. Only afterwards could I correlate it with that very occasion and came to know that when it was time for a patient to die, he, perhaps, was identifying himself with the dying one.

In spite of his dependence on others owing to his being bedridden he maintained his regal and undefeated spirit retaining always his luminous and jovial spirit of surrender to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. He was like a happy spring of delight, wisdom and sweetness even when in pain and inconvenience. Yoga was natural to his personality; added to that was his “song-fruitful hand” and his “song-impetuous” mind. This made him and his life a beautiful and harmonious song. His life as well as his death were tied in one string of love and loving remembrance of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. He told me one day, “What is wrong with depending on so many people, I am still happy?” When I congratulated him for it, he continued, “There is a quiet happiness all the time deep within me that does not begin with one life or finish with it but runs like a gleaming thread on which life after life of various shades are hung.”

His mind was clear till the last and in the night of 28<sup>th</sup> June he stated clearly that he was going to die. I was his night attendant then. I witnessed his laboured breathing and tried to give him some comfort. How consciously he appealed to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo again and again with a slurred but clear voice and also spoke to himself about his death! He was feeling a discomfort owing to a high fever of 103/104<sup>o</sup> F. and also he was stating his exact condition step by step, i.e. “feeling a little better”, “not much difference, if any, very little”, “Is anybody there?”, “make me sit up/make me lie down”, “there is a cramp in my left leg, do something” etc. with frequent utterances of “O Lord!, Mother, Mother, Maa, Maa , take me”, sometimes, “O papa, I want to see you”. He even recited very nicely, “All can be done, if the God-touch is there.”

Early in the morning of 29<sup>th</sup> June 2011, he wished me “Good morning” after my greeting to him. But he said, “I am so tired, I’m tired of life.” When I prompted him to pray to the Mother, “O Mother, cure me,” he said only, “O Mother, O Lord, *saranam mama!*” but not “Cure me”.

When I asked him to do so, he said consciously, “Not needed. Leave me alone.” He was glowing with the spirit of surrender and his room was highly charged through and through with the presence of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

I was not with him when he breathed his last.

Afterwards I heard that he put his two hands together joined in a gesture of pranam during his last breath at 12.15 p.m. as if with a silent prayer of his:

Make me a worship-vigil everywhere,  
 Slumber and wakefulness one memory  
 That You are God: O let each pore of me  
 Become a mouth of prayer!

*(The Secret Splendour, p. 459)*

The yogi thus being, “Earth’s dear and Heaven’s near”, passed away, saying a quiet ‘Hurrah’ and bidding “Farewell” to his sweet earth silently with a sure summons from the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, “Your time is up.”

His poem “Farewell” ever rings in our ears with its prophetic note:

Farewell, sweet earth, but I shall find you sweeter  
 When I return  
 With eyes in which all heaven’s farnesses  
 Intimately burn.

Then you will show in all I once held dear  
 The cause of my keen flame:  
 The holy hush my poet tongue miscalled  
 Name on poor mortal name.

*(The Secret Splendour, p. 751)*

He bade farewell to this sweet earth with an Aurobindonian fortitude and an ardent hope to see her sweeter with burning eyes of all heaven’s intimacy when he would return. Because

Earth is the heroic spirit’s battlefield,

and also

Earth is the chosen place of mightiest souls.

*(Savitri, CWSA, Vol. 34, p. 686)*

ASHALATA DASH



## “A STEP AND ALL IS SKY AND GOD”

YES, the climb continued — undaunted with determination and perseverance. The magic shoes that determined his destination and the purpose of his life at the age of twenty-three and brought him to his destined place, made him cross the centenary of his life, still glowing and all smiles with no trace of age, his spirit was still soaring in the light of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The year before, at the age of 106, he received the Auro Ratna award; all calm and composed, he looked radiant; a serenity from his presence pervaded the Nursing Home and surprisingly with no trace of aging. But the serenity gave the impression that his being was indrawn, as if pulled by some invisible string, though his voice was strong and vociferous, conveying the impression of a person who is master of his being and also his surroundings.

The year 2011 brought a change in him. He was more indrawn, forgetful and talking as little as possible. The magic shoes could understand his condition and slowly, with patience, made him climb the World Stair. Later on he would enquire about his friends as he found none on the higher rungs of the stair. “Where is Papa?” “Where is Nirod?” “Where is Udar?”

And the answer given was “They are in heaven.”

“Where am I?” he would question.

“You are in Pondicherry.”

“What am I doing here?”

“You are doing your yoga.”

That reply satisfied him.

But the questions were often repeated. He then had fever and cold, the treatment was given. A few days later he started making a very “un-Amal Kiran-like” statement, the day before his passing: “My body is not happy.”

For a man who was crippled by polio from the age of three, whose constant companion was a walking stick, who fell and broke his leg many a times, but undaunted lay on his bed, went on with his work of proofreading, least bothered about his leg in traction, for that person to say his body was unhappy, was indeed “un-Amal Kiran-like”.

There must have been something really wrong in the body to make it feel uncomfortable and unhappy.

That day he talked but partook of very little food and the magic shoes still continued to make him climb slowly with precaution and care and made him cross the last tenebrous brow and finally he took

“A step, and all is sky and God”.

KRISHNA CHAKRAVARTY

## DEAR AMAL KIRAN

A gift to have met you,  
A gift to have known you,  
A gift to have found you every year  
In Sri Aurobindo's room  
On the 25<sup>th</sup> November —  
Your birthday and my birthday —  
Your warm smile,  
Your child-sweet look, a darshan.

Thanks just for being.  
Thanks for being so close to Sri Aurobindo and to us.  
Thanks for being my sister soul.  
You will be with me every year  
In Sri Aurobindo's room  
On the 25<sup>th</sup> November.

## TO LEAVE THE SHELL

To leave the shell to become One  
One with the sea  
One with the wave  
One in each limitless pore  
and the whole flesh.

To become One  
Eternity  
Ocean.

ANANDI  
(ELBA FERNANDEZ)

## A TALE OF TWO FRIENDS

AMAL KIRAN is well known as a great poet, critic, historian and eminent scholar, in fact, a veritable treasure house of knowledge, but a very important facet of his nature may not be known to many of the present generation who have not had the good fortune of seeing him from close quarters: he was a great charmer! Anybody who had come in close contact with him was just bowled over by his sparkling wit and humour. There was a story doing the rounds in the olden days that when Amal Kiran came to Pondicherry for the first time he paid a visit to the Ashram Library which in those days was located in the Ashram Main Building, in the area then known as the Library House. (For the information of the uninformed, this area consisted of the present Reading Room, Reception Department, Fruit Room and the Publication Department.) As he was browsing through the book cupboards, to his great delight and no less surprise, he chanced upon a whole collection of the works of the famous English humorist, P. G. Wodehouse. This, for him, was most unexpected in a Yoga Ashram. He asked the librarian, Premanand, "Who reads Wodehouse here?" Premanand replied, "Oh, those books. They are Sri Aurobindo's." Amal Kiran is said to have exclaimed, "Sri Aurobindo enjoys Wodehouse! Then he is the right Guru for me!"

It was this charm, perhaps, which had attracted another young man, a few years his junior, to him. How the two became intimate friends is a mystery, (in this context a divine enigma, because Amal Kiran would be the unsuspecting instrument to bring to the Mother her future lieutenant!) for the other young man, Laurence Marshall Pinto, was completely different from Amal, "alien of end and of aim" and they moved in totally different circles. Whereas Amal Kiran was a Parsi scholar and a poet who, as a spiritual seeker had come to Pondicherry in search of a Guru and having found him, had settled down in his Ashram to do intense *sadhana*, Laurence Pinto, a Goan aeronautical engineer with a degree from the University of London, born and brought up a Roman Catholic but not particularly religious, also not much interested in spirituality, had come to Pondicherry with the sole aim of starting a business to make enough money to bring his beautiful English fiancée to India, marry her and lead a happy and comfortable life. Pinto did attain his earthly goal, made money, married his intended, had a daughter, but sometime during that period became friendly with Amal Kiran who persuaded him to come for the *Darshan* of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. What happened after that is another story. Suffice it to say that that *Darshan* completely changed the life and mission of not only Laurence Pinto who, renamed Udar by Sri Aurobindo, became a pillar of the Ashram, but of his wife and daughter too who closely followed in his footsteps.

Here are two letters written by Amal Kiran bearing upon this episode:

## 1

Part of a letter to Sri Aurobindo:

P.S. Laurie Pinto seems to be taking a markedly good turn with regard to the Asram. Of course he was always well-inclined, but the reading of the “Conversations” produced a profound impression. On the darshan day he bought from Premanand nearly nine rupees’ worth of your books and has gone through them. As one result, he has given up smoking. Last night he was asking me whether I thought he would be staying long in Pondy. After I had given a vague general answer he said: “I do have somewhat better prospects outside — but I am getting more and more interested in the Asram.” The darshan has definitely been an event of great significance to him as well as to Mona. What do you and Mother think of them now?

A, 29-8-37

*Sri Aurobindo’s reply:*

They both made a very good impression on us.

## 2

Laurie and Mona Pinto’s daughter was born on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1937 and was christened Judy Anne, which name, later at her own request, Mother and Sri Aurobindo changed to Gauri. On the occasion of her first birthday, Amal Kiran penned this letter to her. This letter, though addressed to a little baby, is sheer beautiful poetry shot through with scintillating rays of wisdom and has a perennial message in it for all mankind.

November 14, 1938.

My dear Judy Anne,

I am sure this is the first letter you have ever got. Of course you’ll realise the fact many years later, but what I have to say now will not have grown old by then. I wish you an extremely happy birthday: the wish, however, is superfluous, since you are so drenched in happiness every hour that your birthday can be no exception. I don’t mean that you do not cry: you do that quite lustily, I hope, for it helps you to develop your lungs and throat-power. What I mean is that these howlings, even if due to temporary stomach-ache or some such other calamity, are really lost in the general flood of joy which is your life-blood at present. You are a baby; your contact with the miraculous secret source of all being is still strong: the superficial layers of

consciousness have not formed their hard and dry crust on your simplicity of soul. It is wrong to call you an animal, as many students of childhood do, in a deprecatory way; for, your animal nature is free from the egoisms of greed and malice which too soon make its bright smiling flame an instrument of tortured and torturing purposes. With its ignorant spontaneity is now mixed the innocent loveliness of the divine spark in you. That is why you radiate happiness. And I hope that, as you grow, you will not forget to grow in your soul side by side with the development of your vital and mental powers. To help you do this, I should advise your parents to surround your childhood with two great miracles which are within the reach of everybody. They must put you always in the midst of beautiful flowers. Let there be always a sense of petal and perfume near your bed. And when you are out of your bed let them move you about between green shadows and among gay blossoms. For flowers are the little smiles of paradise that break out of the sleep of Nature. They have in them at the same time a deep delicate peace and the brave sparkle of colour. They are not sitting in sackcloth and ashes but neither are they carried away by their own pomp. Rich they are without being proud of their wealth, for theirs is a natural poise which is not either vain or, on the other hand, too humble: they do not refuse themselves to plucking fingers nor do they clamour to be plucked. Nothing can add to their perfection and nothing can take away a jot from it. This is the consciousness of the psyche, because its hold is on something infinite hidden behind things. May you, my dear little friend, always feel that your eyes are like flowers, that your face is like a flower, that every part of you, however earthy, bears roots in it of an ever-flowering delicacy and quiet and colourful fragrance.

The other miracle which must mingle with your growth is great music. I wish that everyday some master musician would tune your pulse. You will not know what is happening to you, but, as the strains of the world's wonders of sound float about you and gain soft entry into your being, you will become a citizen of a strange land which waits for all those who are not in love with the dust and heat of the common world. Slowly you will realise that though you may not always see fairies dancing under the moon or angels bathed in an ecstasy of sun, you can listen to the melodious flutter of dream-diaphanous wings and the laughing gold which drips from the motion of the limbs that are unfettered by mortality. Words, articulate words, may mean nothing to you; but these sounds delightfully linked together as if by magic will fuse with the wordless rhythms of your own living body and make harmonious all the instincts of your nature. The Greek children grew in the midst of sublime sculpture and architecture: we do not exist in an age of builders of beauty, but we can raise around you palaces not made by hands, palaces of supreme music, and invisible movements of Gods and Goddesses heard for us and repeated to us by Chopin and Mozart, Bach and Beethoven. Live, Child, in these palaces, and find yourself, when you are no longer a child, one in spirit with those divinities.

I can never wish you anything better on your birthday.

Yours, with love,  
Amal.

\* \* \*

Within a year or two Laurie Pinto joined the Ashram with his beautiful English wife and their infant daughter. Almost immediately they were fully absorbed in the massive work then in progress in the Ashram — the building of the Golconde, conceived by the Mother as a dormitory for the ever growing number of the *sadhaks* of the Ashram. Laurie, or Udar as he came to be known from then on, started the famous Harpagon Workshop from scratch to manufacture the specially designed nuts and bolts and other brass and metal fittings for this unique piece of architecture and Mona was engaged with a group of ladies to make ready simple unbleached cotton bed linen and hand-embroidered bed covers for the future occupants.

Even after the completion of Golconde, Udar remained equally busy, if not more, starting and running many projects such as business concerns and industries with the aim of making the Ashram financially self-sufficient.

On the other side, unavoidable circumstances obliged Amal Kiran to return to Bombay. He kept in constant touch with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo through letters and telegrams and towards the end of the forties, with Sri Aurobindo's blessings, assumed the editorship of the newly launched fortnightly *Mother India*. The geographical distance as well as the totally different fields of activities which kept both of them extremely busy brought about a separation between the two friends. Even after Amal Kiran rejoined the Ashram in the early fifties, he remained fully occupied editing *Mother India*, now a monthly; teaching college level students at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education; and writing and publishing his own volumes of poems: *The Adventure of the Apocalypse*, *The Secret Splendour* and his many, many scholarly books on such diverse subjects as Poetry, Literary Criticism, Philosophy, History and Culture, namely, *The Poetic Genius of Sri Aurobindo*, *Blake's Tyger — A Christological Interpretation*, *Sri Aurobindo and Teilhard de Chardin*, *Karpasa in Prehistoric India*, *The Problem of Aryan Origins*, *The Beginning of History for Israel*, to name just a few of his more than fifty published volumes.

Then after almost three decades the two friends came together again, this time through their intense love for Sri Aurobindo's *magnum opus*, the epic poem, *Savitri*. Udar, who loved to memorise and recite *Savitri*, often dropped in at Amal Kiran's to discuss many complex points of poetry.

At this time Udar introduced a young aspirant, Chaitanya, to Amal Kiran. This young man too was promptly snared by the inescapable charm of the poet.

Here are some of the impressions and anecdotes which Chaitanya wishes to share with us:

I still remember my days in the Ashram when I was a 21-year-old youngster who used to go to Amal Kiran every Sunday when he returned home from the Park Guest House. It was Udar who introduced me to Amal. On that first occasion when I was leaving, Amal asked me to come to him whenever I felt like it. I was deeply moved that such a great man should be willing to give of his precious time to a nobody like me! I think that kind of consideration for others, by itself, is the mark of a great soul.

We used to talk on all kinds of subjects. Although I did not have the learning to measure even a fraction of his vast erudition, I used to listen to him with rapt attention for he always came down to my level and talked to me as one friend to another. And it was a delightful experience. He taught me so many things of which I knew absolutely nothing and all that in such a casual manner, punctuated by wit and humour! But always we ended up talking about the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

Once he recalled a story of the Mother. While learning painting from Her he had remarked to Her that the smell of paint was very appetising. On hearing this, the Mother was quite annoyed and told him not to speak of food in front of Her.

During his second stay in the Ashram, after he returned from Bombay to settle down in Pondicherry permanently, he used to wait for the Mother when She had Her lunch in the afternoon. One day he told Her that for a second he forgot that he was doing Yoga. Mother looked at him very sternly and exclaimed, “Can you imagine a soldier in the battle field forgetting that he is engaged in a battle?”

In the course of a conversation Udar once mentioned to me that the Mother had told him that there were people to whom the path was shown and they progressed accordingly, but some people progressed very widely and, She told Udar, he was one of them. When I spoke to Amal about it, he remarked very humbly, “You know, I think that I too fall in that category.”

In addition to everything else that I received from him, I am grateful to Amal Kiran for an invaluable piece of advice he gave me. He advised me to learn to laugh at myself and always have a sense of humour. “It is this capacity,” he said, “which has saved me. And Udar too.”

*(Compiled and edited by ANIRUDDHA SIRCAR)*

## ‘THE MASTER’ BY AMAL KIRAN

[*The following is an extract from a talk by C.V. Devan Nair — “Sri Aurobindo and the Tomorrow of the Earth”, given at the Savitri Solar Dome, Creston, Colorado, USA on August 15, 1994.*]

I HAD greatly regretted not having had Sri Aurobindo’s personal darshan. I had been busy nurturing a political revolution in the years when he still walked our planet.

Nonetheless, a wonderful poem by Sri Aurobindo’s foremost poet disciple, K. D. Sethna (whom he had named Amal Kiran — the clear ray), came as a near substitute for the actual darshan. It is simply titled —

### The Master

Bard rhyming earth to paradise,  
Time-conqueror with prophet eyes,  
Body of upright flawless fire,  
Star-strewing hands that never tire —  
In Him at last earth-gropings reach  
Omniscient calm, omnipotent speech,  
Love omnipresent without ache!

Does still a stone that cannot wake  
Keep hurling through your mortal mind  
Its challenge at the epiphany?  
If you would see this blindness break,  
Follow the heart’s humility —  
Question not with your shallow gaze  
The Infinite focussed in that face,  
But, when the unshadowed limbs go by,  
Touch with your brow the white footfall:  
A rhythm profound shall silence all!

When I first read this poem, a profound gratitude welled up in my deepest heart. It was as if Amal’s lines gave me the much-coveted darshan of the ‘Time-conqueror with prophet eyes’, and I felt a benediction on my brow from that white footfall.

And I said in my heart: “Thank you, dear Amal, thank you!”

C.V. DEVAN NAIR

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## THREE REMINISCENCES

FOR quite some time during the nineties of the last century, when Amal Kiran used to take homeopathic treatment from me from time to time, I used to pay him regular home visits. During these visits, Amal used to chat on diverse topics, frequently narrating general as well as personal anecdotes in which he abounded. Three reminiscences from these visits which stand out particularly in my memory are shared here.

### A Quiet Mind

A quiet mind as described by Sri Aurobindo<sup>1</sup> implies a state in which one is stationed in one's inner consciousness, experiencing the thoughts as coming and going, without regarding oneself as the origin of the thoughts. I used to feel discouraged that I had not attained such a state even after years of sadhana, though the state of a quiet mind is deemed as one of the very bases of the Integral Yoga and a part of the very foundation of sadhana. Then one evening — I do not remember the context — Amal remarked to someone who was present during my visit, “I don't have a quiet mind.” This remark, characteristic of Amal's candidness and humility, has since significantly helped in allaying my feelings of discouragement about my sadhana.

### Working on the Body Cells

Many years ago I met someone who sincerely believed in her ability to work on the cells of the body for promoting inner growth, and also to help others in doing similar work. I did have some acquaintance with the work that the Mother had been doing for transforming the body cells. The Mother said many times that in order to control or change anything in oneself, one must first be *conscious* of it. To be conscious is to know *with consciousness*, not just intellectually with the mind. We human beings hardly begin to realise how profoundly unconscious we are even of our mental and vital movements, not to speak of what lies below the vital — the physical and the subconscious. And bodily cells constitute the most material part of

1. . . . by a quiet mind I mean a mental consciousness within which sees thoughts arrive to it and move about but does not itself feel that it is thinking or identifying itself with the thoughts or call them its own. Thoughts, mental movements may pass through it as wayfarers appear and pass from elsewhere through a silent country — the quiet mind observes them or does not care to observe them, but, in either case, does not become active or lose its quietude. — *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 636.

our physical make-up, which is closest to the subconscious. To be able to work directly on the cells so as to change their functioning, one needs to be conscious of the cells, of their action and of their response to forces exerted on them. For this one must have advanced quite far in becoming conscious of and obtaining mastery over the mental, vital and physical parts of one's being. By doing sadhana to change our physical, vital and mental consciousness, we do influence the cells of our body in a general and indirect way. But this is quite different from acting *consciously* and directly on the cells in order to bring about a *conscious* change in them.

All this was in mind as I considered this woman's claims about the work she was doing. I felt that for us kindergarteners of the Integral Yoga, trying to change consciously the body cells is a far cry from what we can hope to achieve even with our best efforts in sadhana. So I asked Amal about his opinion. His laconic reply was, "I don't even know if I have cells!"

Of course, even a school student knows that the body is made up of cells. But it is not this kind of intellectual knowledge that Amal denied having.

### **Contact with the Psychic**

The phrase "contact with the psychic", used by Mother, generally means discovering, becoming conscious of, uniting or identifying with the psychic being, and feeling the psychic, rather than the outer self of the ego, as one's true being. In this sense of the term, a contact with the psychic is something definitive, that is, when it is once done, it cannot be undone. But before attaining a definitive contact with the psychic, one can have what the Mother describes as "momentary contacts" which come and go. Amal once described to me one such momentary contact with the psychic in eloquent terms. Everything around becomes sanctified, he said, everything one sees, one touches feels sanctified.

I do not remember all that he said, nor his exact words. But the ring of a deep personal experience with which Amal's words resonated has remained unforgettable.

A. S. DALAL

## AMAL, MY BEST FRIEND

*The 'Light and Laughter' of my Life*

Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord,  
and our hearts are restless until  
they find their rest in thee . . .

— St. Augustine

“AMAL is no more,” whispered a friend, in a muted voice, at the other end of the phone. “He left a few minutes ago.”

A long silence followed. The words that I had been dreading for decades had been uttered. Ever since I had met Amal, exactly two decades ago, and had made him my best friend, I had wanted him to live forever. I could not imagine a world without him. He had made me who I was. He used to call himself the Pygmalion who had chiselled the Galatea out of me. I was eighteen and he eighty-eight when we met for the first time. But, from the very start, we got along like long-lost friends. The friendship seemed rooted in ages. In response to the letter I had written to him after our first meeting, he wrote, “Just as I am present to you the moment you close your eyes, so also you are fixed in my memory in a most vivid way. The accompanying feeling is as if you have emerged into recognition from some depth in me where you were quietly nestling.” These lines filled my heart with warmth adequate for a lifetime.

Being with him made me feel completely secure, understood and loved, as if I were cherished and held in the hollow of his hand — the care, attention and affection showered by him was unsurpassed and unparalleled. I used to often wonder — if Amal had not been there, how could I have ever found such complete understanding and support? How could I learn and grow and live? Such thoughts would result in an overflow of gratitude in my heart towards him. Along with it would also come the fear of losing him.

And now it was happening right in front of me. Amal had gone. How come the world had not collapsed? How come it was still carrying on its petty business of living, as if nothing had happened? How come nothing was changing? How come I was still alive and breathing, the sun still shining, the breeze still blowing, and the flowers still blooming?

Though Amal had been bedridden and indisposed for a while towards the end, his lustrous face and his ageless countenance had made us feel that he, like Bhishma, would live forever. Even while his body was being lowered into Mother Earth, I felt

that he would sit up, smiling, at any moment and give us a happy surprise. So it took some time for the unbelievable news to sink in. And when it did, memories of a lifetime were relived in an instant. It is strange how the entire past can distil itself into one feeling, one sensation — in this case, that of an irreparable loss, not felt to be of a personal nature alone, but as if the whole world was going to miss something forever — the sweetness and strength of the inmost psyche, which radiated out in every thought, word, and action of Amal's.

I had first met Amal at the Nursing Home in 1991. A meeting that was supposed to have been scheduled for 15 minutes extended to two long hours. Time had, as if, tiptoed silently past, unnoticed. In the course of the conversation against “the flush of crimson across the sky” outside the window, I had mentioned to him that I do not have a best friend in this world. Immediately, he had offered, “You can make me your best friend.” I did not accept it very enthusiastically because I had thought then that there would be a gap of a few generations between us, and being old, he would not be able to relate to me. But as the friendship progressed, I realised that there was a generation gap, no doubt, but it was the other way round; he was ahead of me in his thinking, more modern in his outlook, and I was the old-fashioned one!

This meeting changed my life. I was a mere child when I first met him. I had many questions about the aim of life, the purpose of living, and the eternal questions like ‘Who am I?’ Not only did he put me on to the path of finding answers to these deep questions of the spirit, but he was also my finishing school in matters of the world, for, to him, they were not mutually exclusive. In fact, one seamlessly complemented the other. He made a lady out of me, as it were, correcting my pronunciation, my ‘Indianisms’ and other incorrect idiomatic expressions in English, and teaching me general etiquette and table manners. On one occasion, while having lunch with him, when I bent slightly over the table to have a bite, he corrected me, “Always sit straight while having food. Remember, you should never go to the food, it is the food that should come to you.” And with that, he downed a perfect spoonful with a perfectly straight back as a demonstration of the lesson.

After I finished my MBA, I opted for a career in Chennai because I sought to combine the best of both worlds this way. Work during the week in Chennai and visit Pondicherry in the weekend. I used to start on Saturday mornings and, after a quick darshan at the Samadhi on reaching Pondicherry, rush to Amal's house, where he would be waiting for me for lunch. One day, my vehicle broke down on the way. Since mobile phones had not come of age then, there was no way I could inform Amal about the delay. Instead of 12 noon, I reached Amal's house at 2 p.m. And what did I see? He was sitting in his wheelchair, near the door of his house, with the front gate open, waiting for me, without having had his lunch. When his friends and neighbours, on seeing him there, had asked him what he was doing, he had told them, “I am waiting for Gitanjali.” He refused to have lunch when they asked him to do so and told them that he would wait till I came. When I reached and saw him

there at the door, I was humbled beyond words. I wheeled him inside and served him food. Then I asked him, “Amal, what have I done to deserve so much of your love and care? I am so small and insignificant in every way. Why do you lavish so much of your attention on me?” Without answering me directly, he remarked instead, “On the contrary, I often wonder how you can bring yourself to enjoy so much the prehistoric company of this fossil. The fossil, of course, feels highly flattered on being brought so charmingly up to date.” It was this self-effacing humility that endeared him to one and all.

Though I was a student of physics and mathematics in my undergraduate days, it was Amal who instilled in me the love for literature. And he did it more by example and influence and less by instruction! He used to say that, one should, in order to write great poetry, also read great poetry because then one creates an atmosphere around oneself which is conducive to the flow. He would keep quoting from Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri* and the rest of His collected poems, especially His sonnets, from Shakespeare, Shelley, and every now and then, from his own collection of poetry, and end his recitations with a question, rendered musically, “Who said that?” This quizzing improved my knowledge of literature tremendously because not only would he reveal the name of the poet, but also the deeper meaning and symbolism of the verses, comparing and contrasting them with similar or differing verses by other poets. He would also teach me how to recite *Savitri*, how to differentiate the pronunciation of the words which began with a ‘v’ and those that began with a ‘w’ by making me repeat ‘very well’ after him. It was also amazing to see him win hands down repeatedly in a game that we used to play, a game in which one opponent says a word and the other recites a poem containing that word in the first line. One day, out of sheer admiration for him, I said, “Amal, I want to become like you,” and he began to recite from his poem, “At the Foot of Kanchinjanga”:

Become like thee and soar above  
 My mortal woe  
 And to the heavens passionless  
 And mute, from dawn to dawn address  
 Thoughts white like snow.

The lines flowed absolutely flawlessly, and I asked him, surprised, “Amal, how is it that when you speak, you sometimes stammer, but when you recite poetry, you don’t?” He said, “How can I when, instead of blood, it is poetry that flows in my veins.”

I once asked him who he would have liked to have been in his last birth, and promptly came his reply, “Dante,” the famous Italian poet, whose *Divine Comedy* is considered the greatest literary work composed in the Italian language and a masterpiece of world literature.

It was his book *Light and Laughter* that drew me to him. The book had such a deep impact on me that I went to SABDA and picked up all 14 copies that they had and distributed them among my friends. A few years later, when I went to pick up some more copies, I was told that the book was out of print. Then and there, I vowed that of all the things that I would do in this life, one would be to have a publishing company that would keep Amal's books always in circulation! Though the task was taken on instead by The Integral Life Foundation in 1993, which later became the Clear Ray Trust, that thought of mine perhaps became the seed for founding Helios Books, several years later.

Once, when I reached Amal's home, I found a few people there engaged in some intense discussion. Since Amal was not a participant, he could welcome me and spend time with me. After some time, when I asked him out of curiosity what those people were discussing, he said that they were exploring the possibilities of nominating him for the Nobel Prize for Literature! "Why are you not participating in the discussion then?" I asked him, surprised. "Who cares for the Nobel Prize," he said dismissively, "when my poems have been seen and appreciated by Sri Aurobindo Himself!"

Our favourite topic of conversation was always the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. For those of us who have not had the chance of meeting Them physically, it is always a royal treat to hear about Them from the fortunate ones who have. I would ask him about how They looked, how They spoke, how They smiled, how he felt when he was with Them and so on. My biggest regret in life was this: that I had missed meeting Them physically. Amal sensed this unspoken sadness and remarked one day, "One cannot but love Them after having met Them. It is easy. But to have this love for and trust and faith in Them without having met Them is something remarkable." This thoughtful consolation did bring a smile to my face. When I asked him how he had felt on first meeting the Mother, he said, "She was Beauty incarnate," and his sigh at that time, like St. Augustine's, was, "Too late have I loved Thee, O Beauty so ancient and so new, too late have I loved Thee!" And Amal had been only 23 at that time!

Just as Einstein could explain *The Theory of Relativity* effortlessly to a child, Amal could explain the deepest of metaphysical truths easily because he had assimilated them so integrally, not only in his mind, but in his entire being. Recently, when I asked him to explain *Sat*, *Chit* and *Ananda*, he replied, "*Sat* is that which never changes; *Chit* that changes all the time, and *Ananda* is that which expresses both." How beautiful and succinct, I thought! Encouraged, I delved further, "What is Reality or Truth?" He replied, "God realising his own dream." It is this poetic touch and his lucid expression of original research on the most difficult topics that make Amal's books my favourite read.

"What is my *swadharma*?" I asked him once. "A combination of Brahmin and Kshatriya," he replied, "because, like me, you not only seek the Truth, but, if required,

can fight for it and lay down your life for it.” Surprised, I asked, “You, a Kshatriya? I thought you were a Brahmin through and through.” He replied, “The moment I was born, the big lamp in our drawing room flared up. My father had to run from my mother’s side to prevent a fire. The English lady doctor who was attending on my mother considered the flaring lamp as an omen and said, ‘The boy will be a great man.’ She perhaps went beyond her brief and should have just said, ‘The boy will be a fiery fellow’ because, from the very start, I displayed a very hot temper. It is quite possible that I might have become a soldier or a man of action had my steps not been dogged, literally, by misfortune that came in the form of infantile paralysis.” The samurai-like spirit with which he used to defend Sri Aurobindo’s works and His philosophical ideas in his letters to people who had misunderstood Him was ample evidence of this aspect of his temperament. Whenever I would display a similar streak, he would fondly and lovingly call me “pocket Amazon” — the miniature version of Penthesilea, the notable queen of the Amazons, the women warriors of classical antiquity.

Amal broke all moral and conventional stereotypes and looked at the real thing instead. For instance, he used to tell me, “What is so spiritual about getting up at 4 am?” What he meant was that just the act of getting up early means nothing, especially if it is accompanied by a sense of pride and a superiority complex. The most important thing was the attitude of surrender, of equality, and of remembering and offering, at every moment in one’s life. He always emphasised being free, even from the so-called ‘virtues’. Born in a vegetarian family, I was averse to the sight and smell of non-vegetarian food. Not only could I not stand its sight, but its smell made me feel nauseated. One day, when I was having lunch with Amal, he asked me to have a piece of chicken. I was surprised at his request. But he explained to me that, in yoga, repulsion or aversion is as bad as slavery or attraction. And one should be free in the mind with regard to everything. Since, by then, I used to follow every advice of Amal blindly, I just closed my eyes and ate a tiny piece of the chicken. The taste was nothing to write home about; it reminded me of soya chunks — fibrous and rubbery. But the after-effect was that I became absolutely free from it; the repulsion had vanished. It helped me a great deal because, when I lived in the hostel during my MBA days, fellow students sitting all around me at the canteen dining table would be having non-vegetarian food and I could bear it. Had I not overcome the aversion, I would have starved. He told me once that this freedom and wideness of mind was perhaps the reason he never had a headache in his entire life.

Similarly, when I wrote to him once that I was unable to attend get-togethers and parties as I could not bring myself to do the ‘small talk’ that is required, he wrote back, “I don’t advise too much seclusion. Books, no doubt, are fine companions, but some touch of common things is healthy and necessary in the conditions under which you live at present. To be cut off from people calls for great inner

resources if one is not to become morbid. A bit of frivolity, which is not lost in a swarm of triviality, can be accepted:

A little non-sense now and then  
Is relished by the wisest men.”

One day, I wrote to him: “Amal, I always feel a kind of push from within to be better than what I am, to improve, improve and improve. Is it ‘vital’ because it sometimes leads to impatience?” He replied, “This push you feel is not ‘vital’ but ‘psychic’. Its giving rise sometimes to impatience does not necessarily imply that it is vital. Face to face with

The heavy and weary weight  
Of all this unintelligible world

the aspiring soul is occasionally apt to exclaim: ‘How long, O Lord, how long?’ The suspicion of personal ambition enters your mind because you are not always aware with absolute acuteness that something in you pushes you forward to exceed not only your present self, but also altogether your own self, for the sake of an unknown greatness.” I do not know if these were my aspirations when I wrote him those wishes, but after Amal’s affirmation, they certainly had become so. Amal was an alchemist who, with the power of his words, could transmute baser impulses in others into their divine counterparts.

Amal always used to concentrate on the positives in everyone. He said, “Always keep your focus on the positives and the negatives will take care of themselves.” This is reflected in the Mother’s saying,

Always be kind, stop engaging in bitter criticism, no longer see evil in anything, obstinately force yourself to see nothing but the benevolent presence of the Divine Grace, and you will see not only within you but also around you an atmosphere of quiet joy, peaceful trust spreading more and more.<sup>1</sup>

Once, when I went to say goodbye before leaving for Balasore, he said, “I hope to survive till you return.” The word “survive” made me very sad and I wrote to him that I did not like its use. He replied,

When you so seriously think about mutability in general and even of your own death in some far away future, why do you go at me hammer and tongs because I used the word ‘survive’ about myself. At my age, it is natural that now and

1. *The Spiritual Significance of Flowers*, Part 1, p. 826.



then the idea of the great transition should occur. As I have told you, Einstein felt himself so much a part of the universal flow that he had no particular self-regard in the face of possible death. I feel utterly a part of Sri Aurobindo's world-vision and world-work so that I am certain he will dispose of my life according to his will; I have no concern over how long I shall live. I am ready to go tomorrow as well as prepared to continue for years and years, savouring the immortal ambrosia of their inner presence and striving to let something of its rapture and radiance touch the hearts of all who are in contact with me. At my age, I cannot have absolute confidence that I shall definitely continue; so it is natural for me to have said to you: “I hope to survive till you return.” Along with a streak of jocularity, a teasing tinge, there is bound to be a vein of seriousness here. I understand and appreciate your pain at the word ‘survive’, your anxiety that I should not pop off soon and your deeply held wish for me to go on and on to help people remember and act on Sri Krishna's great words: “You who have come into this transient and unhappy world, love and worship Me.” Yes, I cannot blame you for chiding me: your affection is perceived warm and vibrant behind your protest, but neither should you take me to task for being realistic. All the same, let me tell you that my heart is ever young, my mind is always ready for adventure, and although my legs are not very cooperative these days, they are out of tune with a face which — if I am to believe my friends — has no pouches below the eyes and no marked wrinkles and has, even at the age of 88 years and 5 months, all its own front teeth (9 lower and 10 upper). If my head has lost most of its hair, can't this condition be regarded as symbolic of the spirit of youth as caught in the slang expression ‘Go bald-headed’ for things, meaning ‘proceed regardless of consequences’? I hope this picture of me makes you happy.

While handing me a copy of his book of poetry, *The Secret Splendour*, Amal told me, “This is quintessential Amal, who will always be with you.” While he was there, other than glancing through some of our common favourite poems, like “This Errant Life”, “O Silent Love”, “Equality”, “Out of my heart”, “*Pranam* to the Divine Mother”, to name a few, I had not delved into the book deeply, because I could always go to him, the source, and he would recite either from the book or from memory. But after his passing, I began reading a poem a day from the book, which not only kindles the sense of sweetest Amal all around me, but also conjures up the atmosphere of

Life that is deep and wonder vast

which Amal lived and exemplified. Amal is around here somewhere. He had promised me: “Even after I go, my soul will be hovering about you — frequently, if not

always.” And Amal always kept his promises.

Now I know why the sun continues to shine, the breeze continues to blow and the flowers continue to bloom, because Amal has not gone. He is right here,

He is not dead, whose glorious mind  
Lifts thine on high.  
To live in the hearts we leave behind  
Is not to die.

GITANJALI J. B.



## A LIFE-SKETCH

**Name:** Kaikhushru Dhunjibhoy (“Kekoo”) Sethna  
(Kaikhushru is the Persian equivalent to the Latin ‘Cyrus’. Dhunjibhoy is literally the Gujarati for ‘Brother Opulence’)  
Also called “Cooverji”

**Father’s name:** Dr. Dhunjibhoy Pestonji Sethna (Specialist in Ophthalmic Surgery)

**Mother’s name:** Bhikaiji D. Sethna

**Community:** Parsi

**Date and place of birth:** 25 November 1904, Bombay, India

**Renamed:** Amal Kiran, “The clear ray”, by Sri Aurobindo on 30 September 1930

LITTLE KEKOO grew up in an environment conducive to literary as well as artistic inspiration. In the 4<sup>th</sup> standard a cousin of his introduced him to the major poets. The two of them had had an intense competition writing verses, trying to outdo each other in the number of lines composed.

K. D. Sethna (KDS) was educated at St. Xavier’s School and College, Bombay, with Latin as Second Language. Year after year he won the prize books in English Composition, History or Latin. Each book had a label stuck on its cover with the motto, in Latin: “In everything look at the end.” In the Intermediate Arts he took the Selby Scholarship for Logic and the Hughlings Prize in English. He passed his B.A. with Honours in Philosophy, and won the Ellis Prize in English, which is normally won by a student of Literature, not of Philosophy. After graduation his family advised him to take up law; he, however, decided to go in for M.A. studies (Philosophy). During his college life he regularly contributed essays to the St. Xavier’s College Magazine.

Before leaving college he brought out his first venture in the poetic field: a volume of poems published under a pseudonym by the *Times of India*. The poems were “modern” in their psychology and marked by “intellectual paradox, with mystical touches towards the end”; the volume caused a bit of a stir and was eventually out of print.

At about the same time he published a small book of four essays on Wells, Shaw, Chesterton and Hardy. He named it *Parnassians* as he considered these authors, at that particular time, the most prominent denizens of Mount Parnassus — the home of the Muses. Later on he described the four essays in these words: “All of them have a young man’s enthusiasm and drive, and imaginative kindling to new ideas, to the spirit of the age in its various aspects. Readers may find them interesting as bright curiosities, reflecting the intellectual tendencies of Westernised youth in the India of 1923.”

After *Parnassians* and before joining the Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry KDS had five books ready in manuscript-form. “But in a fit of discontent with all that was not in tune with the immense hunger of Yoga which came over me I actually destroyed them. Sometimes I wish I had not, for they were a very thorough picture of my mind and life and as good as, if not better than *Parnassians*.”

\*

KDS joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram on 16 December 1927 while he was still studying for his M.A. His wife, Lalita (Daulat Panday), also a Parsi, accompanied him. Absorbed in the Ashram life, he did not submit the expected thesis. On 3 September 1930 he was renamed Amal Kiran (“The clear ray”) by Sri Aurobindo. He remained in the Ashram for 10 years. During this period he not only endeavoured to practise the Integral Yoga, but also cultivated the literary life under Sri Aurobindo’s inspiration and guidance.

From 25 October 1936 to almost the end of February 1938 passages from *Savitri — A Legend and a Symbol* were sent to Amal privately by Sri Aurobindo. Amal would type them and raise various points. Then Sri Aurobindo would write his comments. After Amal’s departure for Bombay, towards the end of February 1938, Sri Aurobindo still wrote to him “about the poem, mentioning its progress, but no passages were sent”. The correspondence on *Savitri* went on, with breaks, almost until the end (*Sri Aurobindo: Letters on “Savitri”*, 1951, 2000; a compilation made of Amal’s private correspondence with Sri Aurobindo).

A selection of his mystic poems from the hundreds of poems written in Pondicherry was published in 1941: *The Secret Splendour — “Poems seeking a new intensity of vision and emotion, a mystic inwardness that catches alive the deepest rhythms of the Spirit.”* (95 pages) As Amal was very active in Bombay’s literary circles, *The Secret Splendour* drew a good number of reviews. Later on, in 1943, Kishor Gandhi also reviewed it in *The Triveni Quarterly*.

During his stay in Bombay Amal helped in resolving certain social problems within the Parsi community. He interacted directly with those concerned, attending meetings, functions and discussions.

He called himself a “free-lance Aurobindonian” and “Aurobindonian journalist”. His articles, essays and reviews touched upon a large number of subjects and appeared in various periodicals, scientific and literary, as well as newspapers; e.g. a running column in *The Atom* called “Sermonettes for the Times”; a series of articles during the Bombay racing season, week after week; the essays and articles in *All India Weekly*, a popular literary magazine, many of which were collected and published, much later on, in his book *The Thinking Corner — Causeries on Life and Literature* (1996); “Is Logical Positivism Logical and Positive?” in *Thought*; and “Aurobindo: Master Spirit of Modern Age” in *The Sunday Standard*.

In 1944 after a divorce from Lalita, he married Sehra, also a Parsi.

In 1945 he helped in shaping, editing, bringing out and contributing to the *Sri Aurobindo Circle — First Number*, printed by Keshavdeo Poddar (Navajata) in Bombay. As he put it, the journal had “a certain artistic atmosphere and a certain lack of the forbidding academic and professional look”. Apropos this first number, Sri Aurobindo wrote to Amal on 18 March 1945: “Don’t wait for any poems for your Annual ...” as “poetically I am very much taken up with *Savitri*. . . .”

In 1947 two more books of prose writings came out: *Evolving India: Essays on Cultural Issues* and *The Poetic Genius of Sri Aurobindo*. Another book of poems, *The Adventure of the Apocalypse*, was published in 1949 by the Sri Aurobindo Circle, Bombay.

In February 1949 he was appointed editor of *Mother India*, a fortnightly review, with the purpose of dealing with all important life problems in every field, including politics, from a standpoint based essentially on Sri Aurobindo’s world-view. The journal was the brainchild of Keshavdeo Poddar and approved of by the Mother in consultation with Sri Aurobindo. It was printed and published by Poddar in Bombay. Matter intended for publication was sent to Pondicherry for approval. “*Mother India* had, as part of its aim, the object of plunging into political problems with a spiritual vision. It strove to look at national and international situations from the height of Sri Aurobindo’s thought. In the hubbub of political slogans it brought a standard of judgment that was non-political. In general this standard may be summed up by saying that in every field of activity the aim was to criticise whatever mitigated against humanity’s instinct of an evolving divinity within itself and to give the utmost constructive help to all that encouraged that instinct. Without flinching, *Mother India* spoke forth on many political subjects in direct contradiction of official or popular ideas.”

In 1952 *Mother India* became a monthly: a monthly review of culture and changed from newspaper size to magazine-form. In 1953 the editorials on cultural themes were collected in book-form, *The Indian Spirit and the World’s Future*. (It may be mentioned here that in 1997 the Sri Aurobindo Research Institute in Social Sciences, Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry, published a companion volume titled *India and the World Scene*, a compilation of the political editorials.)

In 1953 the Mother shifted the *Mother India* office from Bombay to Pondicherry and had the journal printed at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press. Amal continued to edit *Mother India* from Bombay until the beginning of 1954 when he, along with his wife, returned to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram for permanent residence. Throughout his stay in Bombay Amal remained in contact with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, carrying on a vast correspondence and consulting them on many subjects. Visits to the Ashram took place on a regular basis.

When ‘Extension Lectures’ were held at the International University Centre Amal gave a course of lectures on English Literature for teachers and senior students

twice a week from 18 December 1956 on.

Amal was appointed lecturer in poetry, a class given twice a week to a group of students of the higher course soon after the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (SAICE) had been founded. These very popular talks were serialised in *Mother India* from February 1959 to December 1962 and, in 1989, many of them appeared in book-form as *Talks on Poetry*.

The Vice-Chancellor of Annamalai University invited Amal to deliver the opening and the closing talks in a symposium celebrating the 400<sup>th</sup> Birth Centenary of Shakespeare in 1964. (In 1965 an expanded version of one of the talks appeared in book-form under the title *Sri Aurobindo on Shakespeare*; an expanded version of the other talk appeared in 1984 “Two Loves” and “A Worthier Pen” — *The Enigmas of Shakespeare’s Sonnets*.) In June 1965 another invitation followed, this time for the symposium celebrating the Birth Centenary of W. B. Yeats (“W. B. Yeats — Poet of Two Phases”, *Mother India*, July 1966).

In 1970 Amal gave six talks to the students of SAICE and one talk in 1971 to the Youth Camp; they too were serialised in *Mother India*. In 1972 they were published in book-form (*Some Talks at Pondicherry*) combined with two talks by Nirodbaran given in 1971 at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. The second edition of these extremely popular talks was renamed *Light and Laughter — Some Talks at Pondicherry*.

In September 1974 he gave a talk to the students and teachers and other members of the Ashram on “Blake’s ‘Tyger’”. (*Mother India*, October 1977)

The Sri Aurobindo Society in collaboration with the Department of Culture, Pondicherry, organised an ‘Orientation Course on Indian Culture’ at the Academy House in December 1978. Amal delivered two talks on “Indian History: Its true meaning and its light on the Future”. (*Mother India*, April and May 1983)

From 1985-1989 the recording of his reciting the entire *Savitri* was done at his residence.

In 1993 a new edition of *Savitri* was brought out by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust. Amal was part of the group devoting much time to intensive research work and careful study of the original manuscripts.

Amal spent the period of 15 October 1991 to 17 March 1992 at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Nursing Home: a fractured right thighbone, near the knee, had to be set right by traction. He thereafter was confined to a wheelchair. From 5 May 1999 to 29 June 2011 he spent the last years of his life again at the Ashram Nursing Home due to a fracture of his right hip on 5 May 1999. During his stay there he suffered a fracture to his left thighbone.

Over the years Amal contributed many articles to literary, philosophical and historical journals and periodicals both in India and abroad. His output of over 50 published books and pamphlets speaks for itself. His interests have ranged from literature, poetry, philosophy, mystical and spiritual as well as scientific thought to

topics of Indian history (Indian prehistory and antiquity) and international no less than national questions. Above all he was an exponent of Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy and yoga, never failing to take up arms in defence of Sri Aurobindo and his spiritual system.

Last but not least Amal was always ready and willing to give time to those who wished to see him, providing clarity on umpteen topics; especially in the spiritual field he proved to be of help to many seekers. His three volumes of *Life-Poetry-Yoga: Personal Letters* were once described by him as being his “life’s work”.

Only a few of his books have been mentioned in the above write-up. For detailed information refer to “List of books and pamphlets by K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran)”. The same goes for the talks and Amal’s other activities: they cannot be squeezed into a short life-sketch.

Let us conclude with Amal’s thought written in longhand in his copy of “*Overhead Poetry*”: *Poems with Sri Aurobindo’s Comments*

Who cares for what the world says when these great wide eyes, deeper than oceans, fell on these poems and accepted them as fit offerings to His divinity?  
The Lord’s look, the Lord’s smile — that is what I have lived for.

23.8.1972

as well as the inscription, also in longhand, in one of his copies of *Savitri* (1984 edition)

If this poem becomes a part of your life, it will make you a part of the Poet whose heights have sent this call to our lowlands.

17.6.93

ESTHER

## ADDENDUM TO ‘A LIFE-SKETCH’

### Awards conferred upon K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran)

1994 — **Devavrata Bhishma Award** by the International Institute of Indian Studies, Ottawa, Canada for K. D. Sethna’s “contribution to international peace and world order on the basis of universal Vedantic values”.

1998 — 125<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary of Sri Aurobindo: The Government of Pondicherry presented K. D. Sethna [as well as Nirodbaran and others] with a

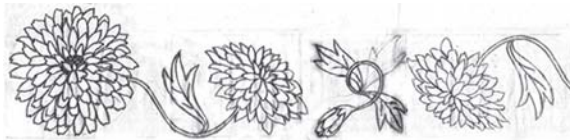
memento in “honour of his association with Sri Aurobindo”; function held at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Theatre.

1998 — **Sri Aurobindo Puraskar** by the Sri Aurobindo 125<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary Committee at Calcutta as “a mark of respect and regard” of K. D. Sethna as a “sadhak, poet, literary critic and a thinker”.

2009 — **Certificate of Merit** by the Government of Puducherry, Department of Information & Publicity for K. D. Sethna who “has excelled in the field of literature”.

2010 — **Auro Ratna Award** by Overman Foundation, Calcutta for K. D. Sethna’s being “a true child of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother” and “to recognize his invaluable contribution in the Aurobindonian Movement”.

“E”





**LIST OF BOOKS AND PAMPHLETS  
BY K. D. SETHNA (AMAL KIRAN)**

**BOOKS EDITED BY K. D. SETHNA, COMPILED VOLUMES, BOOKS ON K. D. SETHNA**

[An \* indicates a further edition (editions) by the same or another publisher]

- 1923 *Parnassians* (4 Essays).
- 1941 *The Secret Splendour* (Poems), Bombay: Published by K. D. Sethna.
- 1947 *Evolving India: Essays on Cultural Issues*, Bombay: Hind Kitabs Limited.
- 1947\* *The Poetic Genius of Sri Aurobindo*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.  
Revised 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1974.  
Pondicherry: Clear Ray Trust, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition 2008.
- 1949 *The Adventure of the Apocalypse*, Bombay: Sri Aurobindo Circle.
- 1950 *The Folly of Recognising Red China (Mother India makes out a case of vital significance to civilisation)*, Bombay: K. D. Sethna for *Mother India*.
- 1951 *The Passing of Sri Aurobindo: Its Inner Significance and Consequence*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.
- 1952\* *Life-Literature-Yoga: Some Letters of Sri Aurobindo*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.  
Second revised and enlarged edition 1967.
- 1953\* *The Indian Spirit and the World's Future*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.  
Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Institute of Research in Social Sciences, Sri Aurobindo Society, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2004.
- 1965\* *Sri Aurobindo on Shakespeare*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.  
2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1991.
- 1968\* *The Vision and Work of Sri Aurobindo*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.  
Second revised and enlarged edition 1992.
- 1970\* *Sri Aurobindo — The Poet*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (SAICE).  
2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1999.
- 1972 *“Overhead Poetry” : Poems with Sri Aurobindo’s Comments*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (SAICE).
- 1972 *Some Talks at Pondicherry* by Amal Kiran and Nirodbaran, compiled by K. L. Gambhir, Jaipur: K. Gambhir.

- 1973 *Teilhard de Chardin and Sri Aurobindo: A Focus on Fundamentals*, Varanasi: Bhāratiya Vidyā Prakāsan.
- 1974\* *Light and Laughter: Some Talks at Pondicherry* by Amal Kiran and Nirodbaran, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.  
Pondicherry: Clear Ray Trust, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2004.
- 1975 *Altar and Flame* (Poems), Charlottesville, U.S.A.: Aspiration.
- 1977\* *The Mother: Past-Present-Future*, Jaipur: Kamal Gambhir.  
Pondicherry: Clear Ray Trust, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2004.
- 1980\* *Our Light and Delight — Recollections of Life with the Mother*, Pondicherry: Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna).  
Pondicherry: Clear Ray Trust, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2003 [with list of errata].
- 1980 *The Problem of Aryan Origins: From an Indian Point of View*, New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan.  
Second extensively enlarged edition with five supplements 1992.
- 1981 *Karpāsa in Prehistoric India: A Chronological and Cultural Clue*, New Delhi: Biblia Impex Private Ltd.
- 1981 *The Spirituality of the Future: A Search Apropos of R. C. Zaehner's Study in Sri Aurobindo and Teilhard de Chardin*, U.S.A.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.
- 1981\* *The Sun and the Rainbow: Approaches to Life through Sri Aurobindo's Light (Essays, Letters, Poems, Short Stories)*, Hyderabad: Institute of Human Study.  
Pondicherry: Clear Ray Trust, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2009.
- 1984 "Two Loves" and "A Worthier Pen": *The Enigmas of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann.
- 1986 *The English Language and The Indian Spirit: Correspondence between Kathleen Raine and K. D. Sethna*, Pondicherry: K. D. Sethna, Sri Aurobindo Ashram.
- 1987 *Poems by Amal Kiran and Nirodbaran with Sri Aurobindo's Comments*, Pondicherry: Amal Kiran and Nirodbaran, Sri Aurobindo Ashram.
- 1987 *The Obscure and the Mysterious: A Research in Mallarmé's Symbolist Poetry*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (SAICE).
- 1989\* *Ancient India in a New Light*, New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan.  
2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1997.
- 1989 *Talks on Poetry*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (SAICE).
- 1989 *Blake's Tyger: A Christological Interpretation*, Pondicherry: K. D. Sethna.

- 1993 *The Secret Splendour — Collected Poems of K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran)*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.
- 1994 *Indian Poets and English Poetry: Correspondence between Kathleen Raine and K. D. Sethna*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.
- 1994 *Life-Poetry-Yoga: Personal Letters*, Vol. I, Waterford, U.S.A.: The Integral Life Foundation.
- 1994 *The Inspiration of “Paradise Lost”*, Waterford, U.S.A.: The Integral Life Foundation.
- 1995 *“A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal” : An Interpretation from India*, Waterford, U.S.A.: The Integral Life Foundation.
- 1995\* *Aspects of Sri Aurobindo*, Waterford, U.S.A.: The Integral Life Foundation. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2000.
- 1995 *Inspiration and Effort: Studies in Literary Attitude and Expression*, Waterford, U.S.A.: The Integral Life Foundation.
- 1995 *Life-Poetry-Yoga: Personal Letters*, Vol. II, Waterford, U.S.A.: The Integral Life Foundation.
- 1995 *Mandukya Upanishad: English Version, Notes and Commentary*, Waterford, U.S.A.: The Integral Life Foundation.
- 1995 *The Beginning of History for Israel*, Waterford, U.S.A.: The Integral Life Foundation.
- 1995\* *Science, Materialism, Mysticism*, Waterford, U.S.A.: The Integral Life Foundation. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2006.
- 1996 *Adventures in Criticism*, Waterford, U.S.A.: The Integral Life Foundation.
- 1996 *The Thinking Corner: Causeries on Life and Literature*, Waterford, U.S.A.: The Integral Life Foundation.
- 1996\* *A Follower of Christ and a Disciple of Sri Aurobindo: Correspondence between Bede Griffiths and K. D. Sethna*, Pondicherry: Clear Ray Trust. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2004.
- 1997 *Life-Poetry-Yoga: Personal Letters*, Vol. III, Waterford, U.S.A.: The Integral Life Foundation.
- 1997 *Classical and Romantic: An Approach through Sri Aurobindo*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.
- 1997 *India and the World Scene*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Institute of Research in Social Sciences, Sri Aurobindo Society.
- 1998 *Problems of Early Christianity*, Waterford, U.S.A.: The Integral Life Foundation.
- 1998 *Sri Aurobindo and Greece*, Waterford, U.S.A.: The Integral Life Foundation.

- 2000 *Problems of Ancient India*, New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan.
- 2000 *Teilhard de Chardin and our Time*, Waterford, U.S.A.: The Integral Life Foundation.
- 2001 *The Virgin Birth and the Earliest Christian Tradition*, Waterford, U.S.A.: The Integral Life Foundation.
- 2002 *Is Velikovsky's Revised Chronology Tenable? — A Scrutiny of Four Fundamental Themes*, East Lyme, U.S.A.: The Integral Life Foundation.
- 2003 *The Development of Sri Aurobindo's Spiritual System and the Mother's Contribution to It*, East Lyme, U.S.A.: The Integral Life Foundation.

### BOOKS EDITED BY K. D. SETHNA (AMAL KIRAN)

- 1951\* *Sri Aurobindo: Letters on "Savitri"*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2000.
- 1978, *Glimpses of the Mother's Life*, compiled by Nilima Das with the help of
- 1980 Shraddhavan, Vols. I & II, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, *Mother India*.
- 1997 *Sri Aurobindo and the New Age — Essays in Memory of Kishor Gandhi*, Editorial Board: Sachidananda Mohanty, K. D. Sethna, Nirodbaran. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (SAICE).

### COMPILED VOLUMES

- 2010 *On Sri Aurobindo's Savitri — Writings by Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna), Part One: Essays*, compiled by Shraddhavan. Pondicherry: Clear Ray Trust. [Part Two to appear later on]

### BOOKS ON K. D. SETHNA (AMAL KIRAN)

- 1994 *Amal-Kiran: Poet and Critic*, edited by Nirodbaran and R. Y. Deshpande, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.
- 1994 *The Wonder That is K. D. Sethna alias Amal Kiran*, by Jugal Kishore Mukherjee, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.
- 2004 *K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran) — A Centenary Tribute*, edited by Sachidananda Mohanty, Pondicherry: Clear Ray Trust.
- 2005 *K. D. Sethna (An Introduction through Interaction)*, by P. Raja, Pondicherry: Busy Bee Books.

Compiled by ESTHER

14 | iii | '30

Mother mine, it is my one  
prayer that I be worthy of  
The Supreme love You and my  
Lord have for me.

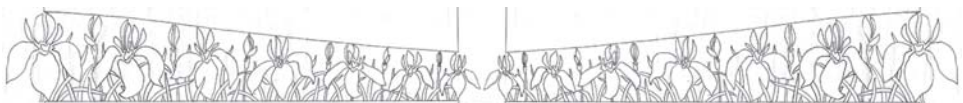
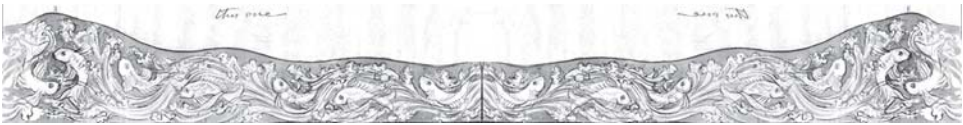
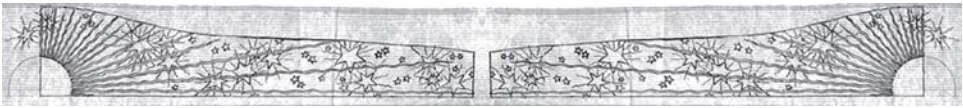
of this poem becomes a part  
of your life, it will make  
you a part of the Poet  
from whose heights ~~we~~ have  
sent this call to our  
lowlands.

17. 5. 93.

Who cares for what the world says  
when those great wide eyes,  
deeper than oceans, fell on these  
poems and accepted them as  
fit offerings to His Divinity?  
The Lord's look, the Lord's smile  
— that is what I have lived for.

23. 8. 1972

KJS  
(Amal Kiran)



Designs for the Mother's headband (crown) — by Amal