

# MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

SPECIAL ISSUE  
24 NOVEMBER 2012

PRICE: Rs. 30.00

## SUBSCRIPTIONS

### INLAND

Annual: Rs. 200.00

For 10 years: Rs. 1,800.00

Price per Single Copy: Rs. 30.00

### OVERSEAS

#### Sea Mail:

Annual: \$35 or Rs. 1,400.00

For 10 years: \$350 or Rs. 14,000.00

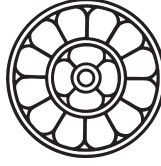
#### Air Mail:

Annual: \$70 or Rs. 2,800.00

For 10 years: \$700 or Rs. 28,000.00

All payments to be made in favour of *Mother India*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. For outstation cheques kindly add Rs. 15 for annual membership and Rs. 50 for 10-year subscription.

Subscribers are requested to mention their subscription number in case of any enquiry. The correspondents should give their full address in BLOCK letters, with pin code.



Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,  
A new light breaks upon the earth,  
A new world is born.  
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



All Rights Reserved. No matter appearing in this journal or part thereof may be reproduced or translated without written permission from the publishers except for short extracts as quotations.

The views expressed by the authors are not necessarily those of the journal.

All correspondence to be addressed to:

MOTHER INDIA, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry - 605 002, India

Phone: (0413) 2233642

e-mail: [motherindia@sriurobindoashram.org.in](mailto:motherindia@sriurobindoashram.org.in)

Publishers: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust

Founding Editor: K. D. SETHNA (AMAL KIRAN)

Editors: RAVI, HEMANT KAPOOR, RANGANATH RAGHAVAN

Published by: MANOJ DAS GUPTA

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM TRUST

PUBLICATION DEPARTMENT, PONDICHERRY 605 002

Printed by: SWADHIN CHATTERJEE

at Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, Pondicherry 605 002

PRINTED IN INDIA

Registered with the Registrar of Newspapers under No. R.N. 8667/63

# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXV

No. 11

*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

---

### CONTENTS

#### *Sri Aurobindo*

O LIFE, THY BREATH IS BUT A CRY (Poem)	...	865
SPIRITUALITY AND NATIONALISM	...	866
ADDITIONAL APHORISMS	...	868

#### *The Mother*

THE TRUE THOUGHT TO HAVE IN THE FACE OF AN ERROR OR BLUNDER	...	869
COMMENTARY ON ‘THOUGHTS AND APHORISMS’	...	870

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

“NIGHT’S CORE” — CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO	...	877
--	-----	-----

#### *Nilima Das*

TWO EXTRACTS FROM AMAL KIRAN ON THE AVATARHOOD OF SRI AUROBINDO	...	880
---	-----	-----

#### *Manoj Das*

SRI AUROBINDO: LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MAHAYOGI		
CHAPTER XVII: DIVINELY HUMAN, HUMANLY DIVINE	...	884

#### *Anilbaran*

ESSENTIALS OF INDIAN CULTURE (with Sri Aurobindo’s Corrections)	...	896
---	-----	-----

#### *Arvindbabu*

A LABOUR OF LOVE	...	900
------------------	-----	-----

#### *Janina Stroka*

A CAPTIVE OF HER LOVE	...	908
-----------------------	-----	-----

#### *Gautam Malakar*

THE CONSTANT JOYS OF THE OLDEST HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR	...	918
--	-----	-----

#### *S. G. Neginhal*

VISITS RELIVED	...	934
----------------	-----	-----

#### *Pramila Devi*

THE LUMINOUS PAST	...	938
-------------------	-----	-----

<i>Anurag Bannerjee</i>		
A GIFT TO CHERISH (Book Review)	...	942
<i>Alok Pande</i>		
WITH THE SIMPLICITY OF A CHILD — BRINGING US CLOSER TO SRI AUROBINDO AND THE MOTHER	...	944

## O LIFE, THY BREATH IS BUT A CRY

O Life, thy breath is but a cry to the Light  
Immortal, whence has come thy swift delight,  
Thy grasp.

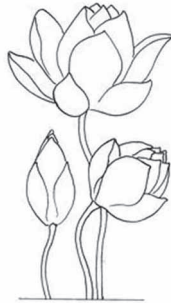
All things in vain thy hands seize;  
Earth's music fails, the notes cease  
Or rasp.

Aloud thou callst to blind Fate,  
"Remove the bar, the gold gate  
Unhasp."

But never hast thou the goal yet of thy race  
Neared, nor thrilled with the ineffable Face,  
The clasp.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 651)*



## SPIRITUALITY AND NATIONALISM

MANKIND have a natural inclination to hero-worship and the great men who have done wonders for human civilisation will always be the inspiration of future ages. We are Hindus and naturally spiritual in our temperament, because the work which we have to do for humanity is a work which no other nation can accomplish, the spiritualisation of the race; so the men whom we worship are those who have helped the spiritual progress of mankind. Without being sceptical no spiritual progress is possible, for blind adoration is only the first stage in the spiritual development of the soul. We are wont to be spiritually sceptical, to hesitate to acknowledge to ourselves anything we have not actually experienced by the process of silent communion with God, so that the great sages of antiquity were as sceptical as any modern rationalist. They did away with all preconceived notions drawn from the religion of the Vedas, plunged into the void of absolute scepticism and tried to find there the Truth. They doubted everything, the evidence of the senses, the reality of the world, the reality of their own existence, and even the reality of God. This scepticism reached its culmination in the teachings of Buddha, who would admit nothing, presuppose nothing, declare nothing dogmatically, and insisted only on self-discipline, self-communion, self-realisation as the only way to escape from the entanglement of the intellect and the senses. When scepticism had reached its height, the time had come for spirituality to assert itself and establish the reality of the world as a manifestation of the spirit, the secret of the confusion created by the senses, the magnificent possibilities of man and the ineffable beatitude of God. This is the work whose consummation Sri Ramakrishna came to begin and all the development of the previous two thousand years and more since Buddha appeared has been a preparation for the harmonisation of spiritual teaching and experience by the *avatar* of Dakshinেশwar.

The long ages of discipline which India underwent, are now drawing to an end. A great light is dawning on the East, a light whose first heralding glimpses are already seen on the horizon; a new day is about to break, so glorious that even the last of the *avatars* cannot be sufficient to explain it, although without him it would not have come. The perfect expression of Hindu spirituality was the signal for the resurgence of the East. Mankind has long been experimenting with various kinds of thought, different principles of ethics, strange dreams of a perfection to be gained by material means, impossible millenniums and humanitarian hopes. Nowhere has it succeeded in realising the ultimate secret of life. Nowhere has it found satisfaction. No scheme of society or politics has helped it to escape from the necessity of sorrow, poverty, strife, dissatisfaction from which it strives for an outlet; for whoever is trying to find one by material means must inevitably fail. The East alone has some

knowledge of the truth, the East alone can teach the West, the East alone can save mankind. Through all these ages Asia has been seeking for a light within, and whenever she has been blessed with a glimpse of what she seeks a great religion has been born, Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity, Mahomedanism with all their countless sects. But the grand workshop of spiritual experiment, the laboratory of the soul has been India, where thousands of great spirits have been born in every generation who were content to work quietly in their own souls, perfect their knowledge, hand down the results of their experiments to a few disciples and leave the rest to others to complete. They did not hasten to proselytise, were in no way eager to proclaim themselves, but merely added their quota of experience and returned to the source from which they had come. The immense reservoir of spiritual energy stored up by the self-repression was the condition of this birth of *avatars*, of men so full of God that they could not be satisfied with silent bliss, but poured it out on the world, not with the idea of proselytising but because they wished to communicate their own ecstasy of realisation to others who were fit to receive it either by previous *tapasya* or by the purity of their desires. Of all these souls Sri Ramakrishna was the last and greatest, for while others felt God in a single or limited aspect, he felt Him in His illimitable unity as the sum of an illimitable variety. In him the spiritual experiences of the millions of saints who had gone before were renewed and united. Sri Ramakrishna gave to India the final message of Hinduism to the world. A new era dates from his birth, an era in which the peoples of the earth will be lifted for a while into communion with God and spirituality become the dominant note of human life. What Christianity failed to do, what Mahomedanism strove to accomplish in times as yet unripe, what Buddhism half-accomplished for a brief period and among a limited number of men, Hinduism as summed up in the life of Sri Ramakrishna has to attempt for all the world. This is the reason of India's resurgence, this is why God has breathed life into her once more, why great souls are at work to bring about her salvation, why a sudden change is coming over the hearts of her sons. The movement of which the first outbreak was political, will end in a spiritual consummation.

*Bande Mataram*

Calcutta, March 28<sup>th</sup>, 1908

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Bande Mataram*, CWSA, Vol. 7, pp. 977-79)

## ADDITIONAL APHORISMS

541. I know that the opposite of what I say is true, but for the present what I say is still truer.

542. I believe with you, my friends, that God, if He exists, is a demon and an ogre. But after all what are you going to do about it?

\*

543. God is the supreme Jesuit Father. He is ever doing evil that good may come of it; ever misleads for a greater leading; ever oppresses our will that it may arrive at last at an infinite freedom.

544. Our Evil is to God not evil, but ignorance and imperfection, our good a lesser imperfection.

545. The religionist speaks a truth, though too violently, when he tells us that even our greatest and purest virtue is as vileness before the divine nature of God.

546. To be beyond good and evil is not to act sin or virtue indifferently, but to arrive at a high and universal good.

547. That good is not our ethical virtue which is a relative and erring light in the world; it is supra-ethical and divine.

SRI AUROBINDO

[Editorial note from CWSA:

The last two aphorisms (541-42) in the notebook containing the main series were not clearly intended for inclusion in the Karma, Jnana or Bhakti sections. The editors have placed them in a separate section along with five other aphorisms (543-47) that were written in a different notebook. The handwriting of these last five indicates that they were written somewhat later than 1913 — possibly as late as 1919.]

(*Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 500)



## THE TRUE THOUGHT TO HAVE IN THE FACE OF AN ERROR OR BLUNDER

March 24, 1914

THE result of all my reflections of yesterday is the finding that the only disturbance I experience comes from my fear of not having been or of not being perfectly identified with Thy law. And this disturbance comes precisely from the fact that the identification is not complete; for if it were, I could not ask myself whether it is so and, on the other hand, as I know from experience, all disturbance would become impossible for me.

But in face of an error or blunder, the true thought to have is not to say to oneself, “I should have done better, I should have done this instead of that”, but rather “I was not sufficiently identified with the eternal Consciousness, I must strive to realise better this definitive and integral union.”

Yesterday afternoon, during those long hours of silent contemplation, I understood at last what is meant by true identification with the object of one’s thought. I touched this realisation, as it were, not by achieving a mental state, but simply through steadiness and control of thought. I understood that I would need long, very long hours of contemplation to be able to perfect this realisation. This is one of the things I expect from the journey to India, if indeed Thou dost consider it useful for Thy service, Lord.

My progress is slow, very slow, but I hope that in compensation it may be lasting and free from all fluctuation.

Grant that I may accomplish my mission, that I may help in Thy integral manifestation.

THE MOTHER

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 1, p. 109)*

## COMMENTARY ON ‘THOUGHTS AND APHORISMS’

*(Continued from the issue of October 2012)*

The saint and the angel are not the only divinities; admire also the Titan and the Giant.

\* \* \*

The old writings call the Titans the elder gods. So they still are; nor is any god entirely divine unless there is hidden in him also a Titan.

\* \* \*

If I cannot be Rama, then I would be Ravana; for he is the dark side of Vishnu.

This means that sweetness without strength and goodness without power are incomplete and cannot totally express the Divine.

I could say in keeping with the kind of image used by Sri Aurobindo, that the charity and generosity of a converted Asura are infinitely more effective than those of an innocent angel.

11 December 1969

(CWM 10: 280)

\*

I have failed, thou sayest. Say rather that God is circling about towards His object.

*Why does God need to “circle about towards His object”? . . .*

Surely Sri Aurobindo did not say that “God” *needs* to circle about, because he is all-powerful; but his power is not an arbitrary one as men understand it.

To begin to understand anything about this, one must know and feel that in the

whole universe *there is nothing* which is not an expression of his omnipotent and omnipresent will; and only by consciously uniting with Him can one begin to understand this, not mentally, but through an experience of consciousness and vision.

In his ordinary consciousness, even with the widest intelligence, man can only grasp an infinitesimal part of creation and so he cannot understand it and still less judge it.

And if we want to hasten the transformation of the world, the best we can do is to give ourselves without reserve or calculation to That which knows.

28 December 1969

(CWM 10: 286-87)

\*

Do thy lower members still suffer the shock of sin and sorrow? But above, seen of thee or unseen, thy soul sits royal, calm, free and triumphant. Believe that the Mother will ere the end have done her work and made the very earth of thy being a joy and a purity.

Here, what Sri Aurobindo calls the soul is the Divine Presence in each one of us; and the certitude of this constant Presence within us will alleviate all our sorrow by convincing us of the ultimate victory which is certain.

10 January 1970

(CWM 10: 293)

\*

Purity is in thy soul; but for actions, where is their purity or impurity?

Sri Aurobindo does not use the word purity in the ordinary moral sense. For him, "purity" means "exclusively under the influence of the Divine", expressing only the Divine.

At present, no action on earth can be like this.

12 January 1970

(CWM 10: 294)

\*

There are many kinds of forbearance. I saw a coward hold out his cheek to the smiter; I saw a physical weakling struck by a strong and self-approving bully look quietly and intently at the aggressor; I saw God incarnate smile lovingly on those who stoned him. The first was ridiculous, the second terrible, the third divine and holy.

Sri Aurobindo tells us that to radiate love in all circumstances is a sign of the Divine who has equal love for the one who strikes him and the one who worships him — what a lesson for humanity!

*17 January 1970*

(CWM 10: 295-96)

\*

Be not deceived by men's shows of virtue, neither disgusted by their open or secret vices. These things are the necessary shufflings in a long transition-period of humanity.

\* \* \*

Be not repelled by the world's crookednesses; the world is a wounded and venomous snake wriggling towards a destined off-sloughing and perfection. Wait, for it is a divine wager; and out of this baseness, God will emerge brilliant and triumphant.

Sri Aurobindo tells us that man is a transitional being and that from all the sufferings of the world will emerge a being of light capable of manifesting the Divine.

Thus, all those who are not satisfied with the world as it is, know that their aspiration does not rise in vain and that the world is changing.

If consecration and effort are associated with the aspiration, things will move faster.

*22 January 1970*

(CWM 10: 297)

\*

Asceticism is no doubt very healing, a cave very peaceful and the hill-tops wonderfully pleasant; nevertheless do thou act in the world as God intended thee.

Sri Aurobindo shows us that one can be an ascetic by preference and not out of abnegation; and so he makes us understand that to be a servant of the Lord and to act only according to His will is a far higher state than any personal choice, no matter how saintly it may seem.

*26 January 1970*

(CWM 10: 300)

\*

Each man of us has a million lives yet to fulfil upon earth. Why then this haste and clamour and impatience?

\* \* \*

Stride swiftly, for the goal is far; rest not unduly, for thy Master is waiting for thee at the end of thy journey.

Here again, as always, Sri Aurobindo sees every aspect of the question and while preaching calm and patience to the restless, he rouses and preaches energy to the indolent. In the union of opposites lies true wisdom and total effectiveness.

*30 January 1970*

(CWM 10: 301-02)

\*

The communistic principle of society is intrinsically as superior to the individualistic as is brotherhood to jealousy and mutual slaughter; but all the practical schemes of Socialism invented in Europe are a yoke, a tyranny and a prison.

\* \* \*

If communism ever re-establishes itself successfully upon earth, it must be on a foundation of soul's brotherhood and the death of egoism. A forced association and a mechanical comradeship would end in a world-wide fiasco.

\* \* \*

Vedanta realised is the only practicable basis for a communistic society. It is the kingdom of the saints dreamed of by Christianity, Islam and Puranic Hinduism.

As Sri Aurobindo tells us so well, individualism is a kind of self-justified jealousy, the reign of each one for himself.

But the only true remedy is the exclusive and universal reign of the Supreme Lord, present and conscious in all beings, with a transitional government by those who are truly conscious of Him and entirely surrendered to His will.

*7 February 1970*

(CWM 10: 304)

\*

God's world advances step by step fulfilling the lesser unit before it seriously attempts the larger. Affirm free nationality first, if thou wouldst ever bring the world to be one nation.

\* \* \*

A nation is not made by a common blood, a common tongue or a common religion; these are only important helps and powerful conveniences. But wherever communities of men not bound by family ties are united in one sentiment and aspiration to defend a common inheritance from their ancestors or assure a common future for their posterity, there a nation is already in existence.

\* \* \*

Nationality is a stride of the progressive God passing beyond the stage of the family; therefore the attachment to clan and tribe must weaken or perish before a nation can be born.

Thus Sri Aurobindo reveals to us the great political secret whose realisation can lead us to the union of all nations and finally to human unity.

*11 February 1970*

(CWM 10: 307)

\*

Family, nationality, humanity are Vishnu's three strides from an isolated to a collective unity. The first has been fulfilled, we yet strive for the perfection of the second, towards the third we are reaching out our hands and the pioneer work is already attempted.

\* \* \*

With the present morality of the human race a sound and durable human unity is not yet possible; but there is no reason why a temporary approximation to it should not be the reward of strenuous aspiration and untiring effort. By constant approximations and by partial realisations and temporary successes Nature advances.

As Sri Aurobindo has predicted, things are moving fast, and the situation of humanity has changed much since Sri Aurobindo began to work in the subtle physical: the idea of human unity has made great headway and is more widely understood.

12 February 1970

(CWM 10: 307-08)

\*

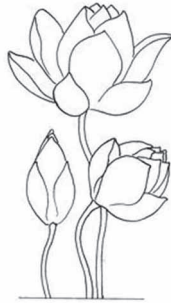
Only the soul that is naked and unashamed can be pure and innocent, even as Adam was in the primal garden of humanity.

*What is meant by “the soul that is naked and unashamed”? Isn’t the soul always pure?*

Yes, that is what Sri Aurobindo says. The soul does not wear any disguise, it shows itself as it is and cares nothing for men’s judgments, because it is the faithful servant of the Divine whose abode it is.

23 February 1970

(CWM 10: 311-12)





## “NIGHT’S CORE” — CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

Sri Aurobindo —

How do you find these stanzas, aiming just at suggestive beauty and melodious movement?

?

Night has a core  
Sense never knows —  
Neither through glow-worm wandering white  
Nor silver-calm tuberoses.

Aimless the cloud  
In half-light curls  
And the cool wideness of the breeze  
Unmeaningfully whirls.

Human eyes gain,  
Though long they pore,  
No mood of secret paradise  
From mutable foam-roar.

But when deep drowse  
World-vision stops  
Nor voices weave their weird design,  
A sudden vesture drops!

Ineffable  
The ecstasy  
That, stripping clamour-hue, divines  
Naked eternity . . .

Yet all too soon  
Earth-joys dispel  
The mute mysterious wonderment  
Of the Invisible.

Too soon the bright  
 Bird-rabbles sweep  
 With changing colour-cry across  
 The sanctuary of sleep.

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

It is very good — your poetry has recently taken a great step forward.

3 January 1934

---

[Version from *The Secret Splendour* —  
*Collected Poems of K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran)*, 1993, p. 21:]

### NIGHT'S CORE

Night has a core  
 Sense never knows  
 Either through glow-worm wandering white  
 Or silver-calm tuberoses.

Aimless the cloud  
 In half-light curls,  
 And the cool wideness of the breeze  
 Unmeaningfully whirls.

Human eyes gain,  
 Though long they pore,  
 No mood of secret paradise  
 From mutable foam-roar.

But when deep drowse  
 World-vision stops  
 Nor voices weave their weird design,  
 A sudden vesture drops!

Ineffable  
 The ecstasy  
 That, stripping clamour-hue, divines  
 Naked eternity . . .

Yet all too soon  
Earth-joys dispel  
The mute mysterious wonderment  
Of the vast Invisible.

Too soon the bright  
Bird-rabbles sweep  
With changing colour-cry across  
The sanctuary of sleep.

AMAL KIRAN  
(K. D. SETHNA)

*With what ardour the consciousness aspires to escape from the prison of material vibrations and soar towards Thee, Lord, in the immaculate heights!*

*But flight is impossible . . . it is against Thy Will. The consciousness must remain caught in the mud of this obscure and ignorant nature. That is all right; the joy of being and doing what Thou wantest surpasses all other joys, even the most sublime.*

*But the consciousness cries: “I want Thee, I want Thee; without Thee I am nothing, I do not even exist!” And the vibration of the call is so strong that even this heavy Matter is shaken by it. “I want Thee, I want Thee! Since Thou dost not permit me to spring towards Thee, leaving all behind to be with Thee, I shall call Thee from here; and I shall beseech Thee so very much that Thou wilt come down to infuse Thyself into a world that has finally awakened to the absolute need of Thy Presence.” And the vibration of this invocation was so intense that through the dark and amorphous mass passed the first quiver announcing the approach of the Beloved.*

8 March 1932

*The Mother*

(Words of the Mother – I, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 13, p. 40)

## TWO EXTRACTS FROM AMAL KIRAN ON THE AVATARHOOD OF SRI AUROBINDO

ON the occasion of Amal's birthday (November 25), I would like to share with the readers two passages from him on the important subject of Sri Aurobindo's Avatarhood.

The first is an explanation of the Mother's message of April 24, 1957, and the second, a reply to a correspondent:

### 1

This Message of the Mother —

In the eternity of becoming, each Avatar is only the announcer, the forerunner of a more perfect realisation —

has prompted in some minds the question: Is the work of establishing the Supermind on earth not the work of the culminating Avatar, not the fulfilment of earth-existence but only a step further, like so many earlier steps, on an endless path where every realisation proves to be imperfect in comparison to what comes after it?

Behind this question there are a number of misconceptions. It is indeed true that no end can be set to the Divine's manifestation on earth. If the Divine is the Infinite, then His manifestation can never be exhausted: depth after depth must keep disclosing itself. When the Supermind, the Vijnana-plane, has established its splendour amongst us, it will serve as the beginning of a movement towards establishing the wonder that is the Transcendent Bliss, the Ananda-plane. After that, other secrets of the Supreme will work out their revelation. But we must not overlook a great difference between the Supermind's manifestation and the manifestation of divine powers that have preceded it. And we must not omit to note that the Mother's Message, in its complete form, has a second sentence running:

And yet men have always the tendency to deify the Avatar of the past in opposition to the Avatar of the future.

*(The Vision and Work of Sri Aurobindo by K. D. Sethna, p. 157)*

\* \* \*

## 2

In the lines from *Savitri* (Centenary Ed., p. 537) you want me to clarify —

God must be born on earth and be as man  
That man being human may grow even as God —

the second line's "even as God" is equal to "even as God is" and not to your second alternative: "even as God grows." But with "grow" before these words what we are told is: "become like God." In the two preceding lines —

If one of theirs they see scale heaven's peaks,  
Men then can hope to learn that titan climb —

the sense seems to me to be simply the realisation of a superhuman or divine consciousness with whatever change it is bound to make in human nature. The specific idea of "transformation" such as Sri Aurobindo has put forth — namely, the permanent divinising of all our parts, ultimately even the body — is not directly there.

You have also asked whether the ascension of the heights has to be done only by "evolutionary avatars like Sri Aurobindo" or also by "accomplished avatars like Sri Krishna". No doubt, there is a distinction between the two types, but fundamentally every avatar has to do some ascension. If the Krishna, son of Devaki, who is mentioned in the Chhandogya Upanishad is the same as the Avatar Krishna of the later traditions, we see that he needed Rishi Ghora's illumined touch to realise his own divinity to the full. An ascension was made, however rapidly or even instantaneously. The Upanishad's Krishna was not born with the full divine consciousness: he was not, strictly speaking, "an accomplished avatar". Apart from the picture presented in Vaishnava legends, I don't think any avatar can be "accomplished" in the full sense. The veil of human birth has to be rent at some time or other, in one way or another.

The term "evolutionary avatar" has to be properly understood. It does not mean that avatarhood is achieved as something one was not born with. None can ever become an avatar. Avatarhood is preordained and is a state from birth. If we consider Sri Aurobindo an avatar, he was as much a born avatar as Sri Krishna. He did not evolve into an avatar. The born avatarhood gradually manifested in him a particular way attuned to the intended harmony of human and divine to be played out in his life. This playing out is the sense of the epithet "evolutionary" we apply to his avatarhood. Further, being "evolutionary" does not stop with scaling "heaven's peaks", nor does living as "one of theirs" confine itself to sharing the common consciousness of men. The evolutionary avatar goes through the entire gamut of

human experience. Some lines before those already quoted emphasise this:

The day-bringer must walk in darkest night.  
He who would save the world must share its pain.  
If he knows not grief, how shall he find grief's cure?

Then we have the stanza from "A God's Labour", which Sri Aurobindo cited to Dilip in a letter before the poem was published:

He who would bring the heavens here  
Must descend himself into clay  
And the burden of earthly nature bear  
And tread the dolorous way.

In this stanza we have a hint which goes beyond a pointing to "heaven's peaks". It points to the work of bringing "the heavens here". The phrase may be said to summarise the essence of Sri Aurobindo's avataric labour. It connotes much more than realising God, much more even than establishing a spiritual *sangha*, a communion of saints. It implies the transformation of human stuff into divine substance — the counterpart to the ascent to the Supermind: the Supermind's descent and the permanent change of earthly existence into a divine life. This counterpart holds the true significance of the epithet "evolutionary". A new species evolving from the human just as the human has evolved from the animal: such is the ultimate sense of the avatar's being "evolutionary". By his arduous manifold sadhana he exemplifies the supreme step of a process of Nature, which has, of course, always Supernature behind it. Sri Aurobindo is an evolutionary avatar in a spiritually scientific sense.

In the Age of Science — the post-Darwinian age, strictly speaking — the so-called "accomplished avatar" would be an anachronism. And though it may surprise you, the "evolutionary avatar" is missioned to do much more than simply bring down superhuman powers to establish a divine life by altering the human state, not only in consciousness but also in material terms. For, this alteration may be possible by *imposing* on embodied existence an all-pervading godlike state: what in Indian nomenclature we would call a divinisation by a miraculous *siddhi*, a supernatural power of the highest kind. But this would not be truly evolutionary. Earth would be colonised by divinity: it would not be divine by native means. The Aurobindonian evolution implies that at the base of matter, in the very heart of the Inconscient, the Supermind lies "involved". This involved Supermind has to evolve by its own push upward meeting the downward pressure of the free Supermind. When this co-operation between the concealed Truth-Light below and the unhampered Truth-Light above is complete, earth-life will be by its own right, as it were, godlike. And

a total security will be there. Colonisation from above may come to an end: there can be no inherent security and hence no intrinsic permanence under it. Genuine evolution takes place only if divinisation is accomplished not by an imposed unearthly power, *siddhi*, but by the earth's own divine *dharma*, natural law of being, emerging into action. To evoke this *dharma* would be yogically consonant with the *Zeitgeist* today. Sri Aurobindo is an "evolutionary avatar" exercising a Super-science which will bear total fruit one day from the supramental seed he has sown in a clay occultly in love with it and ready to make it germinate by means of the Eternal hidden in the hours

And Godhead pent in the mire and the stone.

P.S. Thank you for wishing me to live long. I may do so — at least in order to write long letters!

(16.5.1990)

(*Life—Poetry—Yoga*, Vol. 2 by Amal Kiran, pp. 49-52)

Presented by NILIMA DAS

*There is only one thing of which I am absolutely sure, and that is who I am. Sri Aurobindo also knew it and declared it. Even the doubts of the whole of humanity would change nothing to this fact.*

*But another fact is not so certain — it is the usefulness of my being here in a body, doing the work I am doing. It is not out of any personal urge that I am doing it. Sri Aurobindo told me to do it and that is why I do it as a sacred duty in obedience to the dictates of the Supreme.*

*Time will reveal how far earth has benefited through it.*

24 May 1951

*The Mother*

(*Words of the Mother – I*, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 13, p. 47)

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

*(Continued from the issue of October 2012)*

## **Chapter XVII:**

### **Divinely Human, Humanly Divine**

If to thought the Impersonal seems the wider and higher truth, the Personal a narrower experience, the spirit finds both of them to be aspects of a Reality which figures itself in both . . .<sup>1</sup>

\*

The personal and the impersonal become irrevocably one, so that to posit one as against the other appears as an act of ignorance.<sup>2</sup>

Sri Aurobindo

In the previous chapter we saw glimpses of some of the ideas and impressions of Sri Aurobindo about the political situation in India in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He was evidently not left in any doubt about what should be the political goal of the nation under the octopus hold of a seasoned colonial power. What is of no less significance, he was left in no doubt about the role he must play in the nation's struggle to reach the goal. He was also formulating a distinct programme that could give an effective shape to the amorphous situation.

Since it would be difficult to break away from the narration once we begin focusing on his brief but turbulent years in active politics, we devote this chapter to his personal life, as the term is popularly understood.

We know that the last time Sri Aurobindo had seen his father was when the latter took leave of him and his brothers in England. By the time Sri Aurobindo was back in India his mother, Swarnalata Devi, had grown mentally unstable. She resided for a while at her father's home at Deoghur and then in a spacious house rented for her by Dr. K. D. Ghose at a village nearby, Rohini.

It was in early 1894 that Sri Aurobindo paid his first visit to Deoghur. Rishi Rajnarain embraced him ecstatically, but we do not know if they discussed any matter of import. According to a statement (5 July 1940) made by Sarojini Devi, the younger sister of Sri Aurobindo, at the request of a Bengali biographer of the latter, Sri Aurobindo met his mother at her Rohini residence.



“But my Aurobindo was quite small, not so big!” observed Swarnalata Devi when her son was presented to her. But she remembered that the boy had a mark on one of his fingers caused by a broken bottle. She gave signs of recognition when that was shown to her.<sup>3</sup>

Basanti Chakravorty, the daughter Sri Aurobindo’s maternal uncle, Krishnakumar Mitra, editor of the *Sanjeevani* and a leading public figure, provides us with a meagre glimpse of Sri Aurobindo’s few visits to Deoghur. She refers to Sri Aurobindo as ‘Aurodada’.

I, of tender age, was in school and was curious about everything. Aurodada would arrive with two or three trunks. I wondered how many beautiful and costly suits and attractive items they contained. But what’s this! Only a few pieces of clothes apart, they contained only books and books. O Lord, Aurodada loved reading so much! We would love to use the holidays for chatting and playing, but Aurodada would pass those sweet days with his books! How could he relish that? . . . But this did not mean that he never joined us in our chatting and laughter. His talks and letters were steeped in humour.<sup>4</sup>

Needless to say, the most important event in the personal life of Sri Aurobindo — whatever of it was on the surface — was his marriage to Mrinalini Devi, born on the 6<sup>th</sup> of March 1888. She was the daughter of Bhupal Chandra Bose, a brilliant product of Calcutta University who, with a State scholarship, went to England. He returned as a degree-holder in Agricultural Science, a rare distinction in those days and, stationed at Shillong, rose to the position of the Director of Agriculture in the Government of Assam. For his commendable service and administrative acumen he was awarded the title ‘Rai Bahadur’ in 1912.

He had gone through the prescribed *Prayaschitta*, the atonement, on his return from England in order to be absolved of the sin amassed by his to-and-fro voyage across the sea. Sri Aurobindo of course refused to oblige the colossal orthodoxy of the time that demanded, on the eve of his wedding, the same penalty from him. But an indulgent priest exempted him from the fate of having to shave his head or gulp down a soft drink prepared with cow dung, in lieu of a monetary consideration.

Several distinguished people, including the celebrated scientist Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose and his wife, Byomokesh Chakravorty, barrister, industrialist and later one of the promoters of the National Council of Education, Lord Satyendranath Sinha, legal luminary and later the first Indian Member in the Executive Council of the Governor-General, graced the wedding ceremony with their presence.

One may wonder why at all Sri Aurobindo tied another life to his own unpredictable one. He has himself spoken about it and we can also draw our conclusion from our study of the course of their lives. But that will be possible only if we have formed some authentic impression of Mrinalini Devi as an individual:

[She was] of a fair complexion, a rosy hue seemed to be reflecting from it. Her graceful face was framed by a rich crop of dark curls. The palms of her hands and the soles of her feet had a ruddy tint like those of new-born children as if she had smeared *alta*. In her early days her friends used to tell her that her hands were stuffed with cotton. Feeling hurt at such odd remarks she would complain to her uncle, "Do buy me a good pair of hands." So simple she was! Sri Aurobindo's hands too were soft and warm like the downy feathers of birds. She was sent to a Calcutta Brahmo Girls' School for studies and there contracted a life-long friendship with one Sudhira Bose whose brother belonged to Sri Aurobindo's revolutionary party and later joined the Ramakrishna Mission as a *sannyasi*. Girish Chandra Bose, a very intimate friend of Mrinalini's father, almost like an elder brother, used to look after Mrinalini in Calcutta. He was the Principal of a famous college there. It was he who arranged the marriage of Mrinalini with Sri Aurobindo in a most unorthodox manner. . . .

Mrinalini, at 14, was married like Sati to Shiva, but had no idea about it. Her entire married life of 18 years was practically passed alone. Her husband was plunged in political work, later in deep meditation on the Supreme in the far South while the wife exiled from him in the North-East lived meditating on him, her single thought dwelling upon her Shiva who had made her his companion, but who could not give her company nor any safe refuge of her own. Her husband had heard the call of the Supermind and was to bring it down on earth, while she for eight long years passed her days of lonely sorrow in the hope that one day she will be called to his side.<sup>5</sup>

Soon after their marriage, the couple, along with Sarojini, proceeded to Deoghur and then to Nainital. The Gaekwad, Sir Sayajirao and his entourage too were there. From there the three came to Vadodara.

Those few weeks and the subsequent few months were probably the happiest time for Mrinalini Devi, so far as the concept of happiness normally applies to a fond wife. However, as we read of her attitude towards Sri Aurobindo in the later years of her life, we have reasons to think that though bereft of his company, after a period of agony and anguish, she could withdraw into a sanctuary of bliss within herself made of the memory of her husband.

One of her cousins, Shailendranath Basu recounts how Mrinalini Devi was always ready to serve the sick, without the slightest concern for her own comfort. Once when Sri Aurobindo took ill on a visit to Bengal from Vadodara and stayed at his father-in-law's house in Scott's Lane in Kolkata, she was seen nursing him with unparalleled devotion — massaging his feet, fanning him and zealously, preparing his diet herself. On his recovery, "Sri Aurobindo would keep sitting like a statue, lost in reading or writing. Mrinalini Devi would attend upon him with the regularity of a clock, reminding him when it was time for a wash and bringing him tiffin and tea on time."<sup>6</sup>



Mrinalini Devi



This was the major one among the few occasions when her parents had the chance for treating their extraordinary son-in-law sumptuously, to their hearts' content. Ingredients for what were believed to be Sri Aurobindo's favourite cuisine would be secured from the city's posh bazaar (now known as New Market). They would be cooked with great care by Mrinalini Devi's mother, assisted by Bhupal Babu's step-mother. Mrinalini Devi would arrange them on a table and Sri Aurobindo would be besieged by a posse of relatives. The elderly ones would coax him to eat more of this item or of that. Shailendranath thought that any cajoling was hardly necessary, for "with unbroken patience and calm immovability the guest would finish everything" devoting an hour to the programme. It appears from the description of the situation that Sri Aurobindo was somewhere else while religiously following the instruction of the venerable domestic mentors. His gratified father-in-law would say, "There is satisfaction indeed in entertaining Aurobindo to a meal."

Those endowed with the traditional right of teasing and kidding this shy object — brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law from the wider family of uncles and aunts — would do so enthusiastically. He would respond with smiles and silence. He regretted that he was unable to follow their Bengali well. But there were educated young relatives around who would translate their comments for him and then he would answer appropriately. Despite her own limited knowledge of English, Mrinalini Devi would often come to his assistance.<sup>7</sup>

Even though they could not live together for long, Sri Aurobindo always held her in deep affection and expected her to grow up enough to be a valuable support to him. He imparted to her lessons in living above the ordinary plane of human exchange not through pedantry, but making her strive for it amidst practical situations. Once when Sarojini Devi stayed with them and there was some discord between the two, Mrinalini would complain to him again and again about the rude behaviour of his sister and expect him to take the lady to task. But all he would say was, "Bear with it, bear with it." Nothing could disturb his poise. At last Mrinalini Devi lost patience and gave him the ultimatum that either he must give his sister a scolding for her unjust behaviour or she would forthwith stop doing any work at all!

It was then that Sri Aurobindo fixed his eyes on her and asked her if she believed that she or Sarojini's nature could change because of a rebuke from him. That would, he assured her, only aggravate the discord and she would find herself in a situation that was the opposite of the peace she desired. But should she follow the advice he gave her — endure — and things could magically change.

Mrinalini Devi put the advice into practice, obviously with great sincerity — enduring any tirade not only through silence but through inner calmness — and found that the law indeed worked like magic. All discords disappeared. "From that time onward I practised endurance — his advice to me — as my sadhana," she told her cousin.<sup>8</sup>

Sri Aurobindo was rapidly growing more and more absorbed in his inner life despite his growing preoccupation with external and mundane problems of politics and he wished Mrinalini Devi to derive strength from the same source. In his private letter to her from Vadodara (1905) subsequently made famous by the instruments of the alien government prosecuting him in the historic Alipore Conspiracy Case, he wrote:

You may say that you are an ordinary girl, you have no strength of mind, no intelligence; you fear even to think of them. Well, there is an easy way; take refuge in God, enter into the path of God. He will fill up all your wants. Or if you have faith in me, I shall impart my strength to you which, instead of reducing my strength, will increase it.<sup>9</sup>

No doubt Mrinalini Devi had her moments of deep *abhiman* — a feeling of wounded sensitivity — towards her husband, for she had dreams, ambitions and objectives natural to any young wife and they were imperilled by her husband's atypical ideals. But not for long. It is a relatively unknown fact that Mrinalini Devi had followed the advice of her husband contained in the passage quoted above. We see that she had realised what Sri Aurobindo was or at least what he meant to her. She revealed it to her trusted cousin Shailendranath while recollecting the moment when Sri Aurobindo was arrested:

I could not then pray to God; how could I? I did not know God outside my husband. I used to see God concretely revealing Himself to me in him. I would hear the sound of some supernal power flowing from far whenever he spoke; in his look I would feel luminous rays emanating from far remote and uplifting me. When the police snatched this unworldly person away from my world I felt sure that without him death was my only go. But I did not embrace death, for it was then that Sudhira took me in her embrace.<sup>10</sup>

Sudhira Devi, in her turn, led her into the divine embrace of Mata Sarada Devi, the consort of Sri Ramakrishna whose marriage too had nothing commonplace about it.

As Sudhira Devi introduced her to Sarada Devi, the latter told her, "Never be restless. Your husband is completely sheltered in the Divine. With the blessings of Thakur he will soon be proved innocent and regain his freedom." She then added significantly, "But he will never be a family man. Not for him is the world of puny self."

Some days later when Sudhira Devi asked Mata Sarada Devi if she would be pleased to initiate Mrinalini, the Holy Mother said that she did not feel it necessary. Sudhira Devi was a bit mystified. But the episode that followed should have provided



her with a clue to the Holy Mother's prognostic knowledge. That happened in 1912. Once again Sudhira Devi, Mrinalini Devi and a group of people including Shailendranath visited the Holy Mother. After each of them had been presented to her by an elderly lady, came the turn of Mrinalini Devi. The Holy Mother stopped the lady and said, "You need not introduce her to me. I know her better than you do. How can I be ignorant of the wife of the Mahayogi Aurobindo?"<sup>11</sup>

This author is not sure, but the Holy Mother was probably the first one to refer to Sri Aurobindo as 'Mahayogi'. It should be mentioned here that when Sri Aurobindo learnt about Mrinalini Devi's association with the Holy Mother, he was glad "that she had found so great a spiritual refuge".<sup>12</sup>

Mrinalini Devi spent the greater part of her life at the charming mountainous and sylvan town of Shillong where her father had built a beautiful bungalow at the foot of a high hill. Being an agriculturist he had created a handsome garden-cum-orchard around his house. Mrinalini Devi would pass many a silent hour amidst the flowering plants. Once when her cousin observed that probably of all the things in the world she loved flowers the most, she said, "Your Gurudev was like flowers. I used to get the fragrance of flowers in his presence."<sup>13</sup>

She used to refer to Sri Aurobindo as 'Gurudev' — who was rarely mentioned in the household as if the name was a secret and sacred hymn, mysterious and solemn. That is how Shailendranath felt about it.

He recollects how the ever-colourful, serene landscape of the valley often drove Mrinalini Devi into her inner world. Once while gazing at the majestic hill-tops she shut her eyes and was lost in a trance. Shailendranath who was with her, felt restless as time ticked away.

"Must you shut your eyes and be in the dark when such splendid beauty is outside?" he protested when she opened her eyes.

"Don't you understand?" she replied. "This splendid beauty outside made me plunge deep into its infinite source within. Do you know? There is a far loftier paradise inside your Gurudev." For paradise, she used the word *Indrapuri*, the abode of Indra, the monarch of the gods.<sup>14</sup>

This was Mrinalini Devi in brief — a character not to be measured by the law of the average.

To a question put by Nirodbaran as to why Buddha or Confucius should marry if the change in their life were to come soon thereafter, Sri Aurobindo said, "Perfectly natural — they marry before the change, then the change comes and the marriage belongs to the past self, not to the new one."<sup>15</sup>

Upon Nirodbaran focusing the question on Sri Aurobindo's own life — a question he thought was rather delicate, yet a puzzle, the matter-of-fact answer from the Master was simple and straight:

Why delicate? And why a puzzle? Do you think that Buddha or Confucius or myself were born with a prevision that they or I would take to the spiritual life? So long as one is in the ordinary consciousness, one lives the ordinary life. When the awakening and the new consciousness comes, one leaves it — nothing puzzling in it.<sup>16</sup>

“It is an ignorant psychology,” says Sri Aurobindo in one of his letters on some query regarding love, sex and marriage, “that reduces everything to the sex-motive and the sex-impulse.”<sup>17</sup> In the classical Indian vision, marriage was an institution that played a far wider role in the lives of the couple than its common concept limited to the laws that go with *Parivar-dharma*, principles governing the family life, and the urges that go with the need for procreation. But in an eclectic sense it helps each of them to grow within, each one’s small ego-self naturally or rather compulsorily expanding to accommodate the other’s. In the case of more evolved ones it can do much more. So far as Mrinalini Devi was concerned, it was as evident as daylight that the ordeals she encountered got transformed within her into her great spiritual benefit.

Despite his marriage, Sri Aurobindo himself, needless to say, had shot into a height of consciousness whence the biological factor involved in the institution had forfeited any authority and, from whatever little we come to know of Mrinalini Devi, she had achieved a state of love that transcended that bare and basic factor. Rightly does Nirodbaran assert “that Mrinalini herself would prefer a thousand lives of suffering with Sri Aurobindo as her husband to a life of earthly bliss with richer conjugal ties.”<sup>18</sup>

It can be clearly stated that sex had no place in their married life. Let us look into a rare Bengali book of reminiscences by Manomohan Gangopadhyay (1882-1926), a well-known author of works on archaeology and history and the planner of the Maha Bodhi Society of Kolkata. After Sri Aurobindo was acquitted in the Alipore Conspiracy Case, he once invited him to his house. Below is a translation of the relevant passage from his last work published posthumously:

He came with a shawl wrapped on his shirt. His beard was shaggy. I had got 30 items cooked for him by my sister and wife. I had not revealed to them who the guest was. We were discussing whether it was possible to remain celibate for people who were married. I was arguing that it was impossible. He was asserting that it was possible. I was greatly curious to know his personal experience, but could not muster the courage to ask him. After a while he told me, “I know what is in your mind. You wish to know whether I practise celibacy myself or not. Indeed, I do. Not even once have I deviated.” I was stunned.<sup>19</sup>



Mrinalini Devi was in correspondence with Sri Aurobindo and his letters to her must have been of invaluable guidance to her in her solitude and silent Sadhana. As destiny would have it, on the eve of her death she had instructed her near ones to immerse those letters, sealed in a box, in the Ganga and they had faithfully carried it out.<sup>20</sup>

Mrinalini Devi's end came on 17 December 1918, when preparations were afoot to bring her to Pondicherry. Recollects her sister:

In the evening after Mrinalini's expiry Sudhira took my mother to Sri Sarada Devi. She was at that time in deep meditation. When she opened her eyes and saw them, she said, "You have come? I was seeing in my vision my daughter-in-law Mrinalini. She was a goddess born as your daughter in consequence of a curse. Now that her Karma is exhausted her soul has departed." She often used to enquire about Mrinalini Devi's health.

A few days before her death when she had realised that her end was near, Mrinalini sold many of her ornaments and wished that the proceeds should be utilised in charitable works. The remaining unsold ones were kept in Sudhira's custody and with Sri Aurobindo's approval a scholarship was to be awarded to a poor girl-student of the Nivedita Girls' School out of the interest on the investment of the money realised from the sale of those ornaments. . . .

Though my sister led an outwardly simple life, people who came in contact with her had felt the aura of her extraordinary personality. Even her nearness was guarded by a zone of aloofness which could only be breached by her friend Sudhira and her mother.<sup>21</sup>

The following letter from Sri Aurobindo to Bhupal Chandra Bose written on 19<sup>th</sup> of February 1919 distinctly establishes the place she had in Sri Aurobindo's consciousness.

My dear Father-in-law,

I have not written to you with regard to the fatal event in both our lives: words are useless in the face of the feelings it has caused, if even they can ever express our deepest emotions. God has seen good to lay upon me the one sorrow that could still touch me to the centre. He knows better than ourselves what is best for each of us, and now that the first sense of irreparable has passed, I can bow with submission to his divine purpose. The physical tie between us is, as you say, severed; but the tie of affection subsists for me. Where I have once loved, I do not cease from loving. Besides she who was the cause of it, still is near though not visible to our physical vision.

It is needless to say much about the matters of which you write in your

letter. I approve of everything that you propose. Whatever Mrinalini would have desired, should be done, and I have no doubt this is what she would have approved of. I consent to the *chudis* (gold bangles) being kept by her mother; but I should be glad if you would send me two or three of her books, especially if there are any in which her name is written. I have only of her, her letters and a photograph.<sup>22</sup>

Bhupal Chandra Bose came to the Ashram in the thirties of the last century and did Pranam to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. He “heard from the Mother herself” that Mrinalini Devi’s spirit had descended into her, though he was reluctant to write down what the Mother stated because he was not sure if he would be able to reproduce the exact words.<sup>23</sup>

MANOJ DAS

(To be continued)

### References and Notes

1. Sri Aurobindo: *The Synthesis of Yoga*; SABCL, Vol. 21, p. 525.
2. Sri Aurobindo: *Letters on Yoga*; SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 81.
3. Girijashankar Roy Chowdhury: *Sri Aurobindo O Bangalay Swadeshi Yug* (Bengali), Navabharat Publishers, Kolkata 9.
4. Translated from Smt. Basanti Chakravorty’s Bengali article “Our Aurodada” in *Sri Aurobindo Smritikatha*, compiled and edited by Supriyo Bhattacharya; Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, Kolkata 71.
5. Nirodbaran: *Mrinalini Devi: A Talk on the Occasion of Her Birth Centenary*, Sri Mira Trust, Pondicherry.
6. Shailendranath Basu: *Sri Aurobinder Sahadharmini Mrinalini Devir Smritikatha* (Bengali), first published in the weekly *Yugvani* and later as a booklet by Sri Aurobindo Pathamandir, Bankim Chatterji Street, Kolkata.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. English translation of Sri Aurobindo’s letter in Bengali from *Mrinalini Devi* by Nirodbaran.
10. Shailendranath Basu: *Sri Aurobinder Sahadharmini Mrinalini Devir Smritikatha*.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Sri Aurobindo: *Autobiographical Notes*; CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 89.
13. Shailendranath Basu: *Sri Aurobinder Sahadharmini Mrinalini Devir Smritikatha*.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Nirodbaran: *Mrinalini Devi*.
16. *Ibid.*

17. Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*; SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1527.

18. Nirodbaran: *Mrinalini Devi*.

19. Manomohan Gangopadhyay: *Shruti-Smriti* (Bengali) published by Abanimohan Gangopadhyay (1927), Raja Rajballav Street, Kolkata.

20. Shailendranath Basu: *Sri Aurobinder Sahadharmini Mrinalini Devir Smritikatha*.

21. Nirodbaran: *Mrinalini Devi*.

22. Sri Aurobindo: *Supplement*; SABCL, Vol. 27, p. 422.

23. *Sri Aurobindo Archives and Research*, December 1978, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.

*Statement of Bhupal Chandra Bose, Ranchi, 26 August 1931:*

“the writer would rather say nothing about this. If the facts relating to the descent of Mrinalini’s spirit in the Mother which the writer heard from the Mother herself are to be published, it is proper that the Mother’s permission be taken by the publisher and she be approached for an authentic and firsthand account of the incident. The writer is greatly afraid that he might be guilty of grave mistakes if he were to narrate it from his own memory.”

*In the outer surface nature, mind, psychic, vital, physical are all jumbled together and it needs a strong power of introspection, self-analysis, close observation and disentanglement of the threads of thought, feeling and impulse to find out the composition of our nature and the relation and interaction of these parts upon each other. But when one goes inside as you have done, we find the sources of all this surface action and there the parts of our being are quite separate and clearly distinct from each other. We feel them indeed as different beings in us, and just as two people in a joint action can do, they too are seen to observe, criticise, help or oppose and restrain each other; it is as if we were a group-being, each member of the group with its separate place and function, and all directed by a central being who is sometimes in front above the others, sometimes behind the scenes. Your mental being was observing the vital and not quite easy about its vehemence, for the natural base of the mental being is calm, thoughtfulness, restraint, control and balance, while the natural turn of the vital is dynamism, energy thrown into emotion, sensation and action.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 23, pp. 1019-20)

## ESSENTIALS OF INDIAN CULTURE

[This article by Anilbaran Roy is of special interest as it has Sri Aurobindo's extensive corrections in several places. We reproduce the first few pages in two versions — the first indicating the changes Sri Aurobindo made, (~~striketrough~~ to indicate deletions and *italics* to indicate additions) then the final version after the changes.

We propose to serialise the article in small instalments.]

### Chapter I — The Ideal

~~Amongst~~ *There are some among* our own countrymen ~~there are some~~ who do not like that ~~they~~ *we* should *indulge in any* talk of the glorious past of India or *in any* building of visions about the future. ~~Their motto is~~ "Trust no future however pleasant" *is their motto*, "Let the dead past bury its dead." ~~It~~ *They tell us that* it is no use brooding over what India did in ~~the past~~ *a bygone time*; for our ~~present~~ fallen condition is a sufficient preoccupation and ~~we should devote our one duty is to turn~~ all our ~~heart and soul~~ *thoughts and energies* to ~~raise~~ *the deliverance of* the country out of its present ~~predicament~~ *evil plight*. ~~Some, again,~~ *Others* argue that ~~whatever~~ the merits of ancient Indian culture may have ~~had~~ *been* very real, but its ideals and ways are not applicable to the conditions of ~~the modern world~~ *existence*. ~~where, if~~ *If* we want to live and flourish, we must ~~adopt~~ *take over* the ideals pursued ~~so~~ *with* a ~~triumphantly~~ *success* by the vigorous nations of the West, ideals which are now being rapidly adopted by all the rising nations of the world. ~~We quite appreciate the spirit exhibited here of~~ *And certainly nothing can be more needed in India at the present day than the practical dynamic mind that* ~~faces~~ *faces* and ~~appreciates~~ *appreciates* facts, and ~~boldly confronts realities dealing with them so that a regeneration of India may be accomplished.~~ *and does not live in a jungle of words or only in a subtle air of dreams.* But ~~our condition is that~~ it is not possible ~~truly~~ to appreciate the facts and the forces ~~in India with which we have to deal~~ *of the present day India in their true relation to ourselves and our life and natures* unless we understand their origin and development in the past ~~life of the country race.~~ *We do not aim* *If we turn to the past of India, simply it must not be to boast idly of what our forefathers accomplished* *achieved* thousands of years ago but ~~only~~ *to understand correctly what we are; for it is on what we are that depends most vitally what we can or ought to do.* It is strange that these countrymen of ours who are so enthusiastic in their appreciation of the West and ~~the~~ *of* Western Science, fail to take note of the greatest generalisation at which the Western thinkers have arrived, ~~I mean~~ *the doctrine of evolution, — a doctrine that if it is true at all, must be true not only of mankind at large, but of each*

*country and race.* The life of every nation, every country as well as that of every individual has its roots in the past and is developing gradually, by the surge of its inner nature, towards a goal which is to be reached in the future. ~~We~~ I do not suggest for a moment that we should try to revive the forms of life that prevailed in ancient India. ~~But~~ What we must ~~understand~~ *seize* is the line of evolution India has followed in the past; ~~so for from~~ that we ~~may have~~ *can best start towards* a clear idea ~~as to~~ of what should be our goal in the future and accordingly determine ~~our~~ *the true* course of *our* action in the present. ~~Only~~ It is by standing on the truth of our own national life and not by *blindly* throwing away our energies in aimless activities or a vain pursuit of alien *and unsuitable* ideals and methods that we can ~~really~~ hope to bring about a real *and lasting* regeneration in India.

And ~~in~~ *if we would* understanding the true course of our national life, we must not ~~allow our attention to be diverted by the~~ *lose ourselves in a* confusion of accidents and details but keep ~~ourselves~~ to the central, living, governing things in Indian ~~culture and civilisation~~ *and culture*. Critics who attack Indian ~~culture civilisation~~ *civilisation* ~~generally fail to refuse to take note of~~ *constantly ignore* the essentials of our culture and ~~seek to~~ pass *their adverse* judgments *on the strength of* local customs or institutions, superficial forms or systems and accidental circumstances which do not ~~at all~~ touch the core of our national life. ~~and thus arrive at~~ *The conclusions at which they arrive by this false and superficial method,* are themselves necessarily ~~false and partial and false.~~ *In this chapter we* I propose *first therefore to explain briefly to dwell a little on* the essential spirit of Indian culture, *for it is in the strong central light of which its spirit that* we must try to understand the whole life of the people. In indicating here the essentials of Indian culture I have followed as closely as possible Sri Aurobindo's "A Defence of Indian Culture", often using his own inimitable language and expressions.

*(To be continued)*

ANILBARAN ROY

*(See next page for final version)*

## [Final Version Incorporating Sri Aurobindo's Corrections]

### Chapter I — The Ideal

THERE are some among our own countrymen who do not like that we should indulge in any talk of the glorious past of India or in any building of visions about the future. "Trust no future however pleasant" is their motto, "Let the dead past bury its dead." They tell us that it is no use brooding over what India did in a bygone time; for our fallen condition is a sufficient preoccupation and our one duty is to turn all our thoughts and energies to the deliverance of the country out of its present evil plight. Others argue that the merits of ancient Indian culture may have been very real, but its ideals and ways are not applicable to the conditions of modern existence. If we want to live and flourish, we must take over the ideals pursued with a triumphant success by the vigorous nations of the West, ideals which are now being rapidly adopted by all the rising nations of the world. And certainly nothing can be more needed in India at the present day than the practical dynamic mind that faces and appreciates facts, boldly confronts realities and does not live in a jungle of words or only in a subtle air of dreams. But it is not possible to appreciate the facts and the forces of the present day India in their true relation to ourselves and our life and natures unless we understand their origin and development in the past of the race. If we turn to the past of India, it must not be to boast idly of what our forefathers achieved thousands of years ago but to understand correctly what we are; for it is on what we are that depends most vitally what we can or ought to do. It is strange that these countrymen of ours who are so enthusiastic in their appreciation of the West and of Western Science, fail to take note of the greatest generalisation at which the Western thinkers have arrived, the doctrine of evolution, — a doctrine that if it is true at all, must be true not only of mankind at large, but of each country and race. The life of every nation, every country as well as that of every individual has its roots in the past and is developing gradually, by the surge of its inner nature, towards a goal which is to be reached in the future. I do not suggest for a moment that we should try to revive the forms of life that prevailed in ancient India. What we must seize is the line of evolution India has followed in the past; for from that we can best start towards a clear idea of what should be our goal in the future and accordingly determine the true course of our action in the present. It is by standing on the truth of our own national life and not by blindly throwing away our energies in aimless activities or a vain pursuit of alien and unsuitable ideals and methods that we can hope to bring about a real and lasting regeneration in India.

And if we would understand the true course of our national life, we must not lose ourselves in a confusion of accidents and details but keep to the central, living,

governing things in Indian civilisation and culture. Critics who attack Indian civilisation constantly ignore the essentials of our culture and pass their adverse judgments on the strength of local customs or institutions, superficial forms or systems and accidental circumstances which do not touch the core of our national life. The conclusions at which they arrive by this false and superficial method, are themselves necessarily partial and false. I propose first therefore to dwell a little on the essential spirit of Indian culture, for it is in the strong central light of its spirit that we must try to understand the whole life of the people. In indicating here the essentials of Indian culture I have followed as closely as possible Sri Aurobindo's "A Defence of Indian Culture", often using his own inimitable language and expressions.

*(To be continued)*

ANILBARAN ROY

*And although the supreme Ananda comes with the supreme fulfilment, there is no real reason why there should not be the Love and Ananda and Beauty on the way also. Some have found that even at an early stage before there was any other experience. But the secret of it is in the heart, not in the mind — the heart that opens its inner door and through it the radiance of the soul looks out in a blaze of trust and self-giving. Before that inner fire the debates of the mind and its difficulties wither away and the path however long or arduous becomes a sunlit road not only towards but through love and Ananda.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 24, pp. 1630-31)*

# LABOUR OF LOVE

*(Continued from the issue of October 2012)*

## **Part 2 — Preparation and Sadhana** *(Continued)*

### c. Integral Identification with the Lord

TIME and time again the Mother prays to the Lord of her aspiration to be integrally united with Him, and that her heart, mind, vital and body should move and act according to His Will:

Let Thy Light be in me like a Fire that makes all alive; let Thy divine Love penetrate me. I aspire with all my being for Thy reign as sovereign and master of my mind and heart and body; let them be Thy docile instruments and Thy faithful servitors. (November 3, 1912)

But the desire for personal salvation alone is an ‘egoistic aspiration’:

To know Thee first and before all else, yes; but once Thy knowledge is acquired there remains all the work of Thy manifestation; . . . He who wants to be perfect in Thy manifestation cannot be satisfied with that; he must manifest Thee on all the planes, in all the states of being and thus turn the knowledge he has acquired to the best account for the whole universe. (June 13, 1914)

To be constantly and integrally at one with Thee is to have the assurance that we shall overcome every obstacle and triumph over all difficulties, both within and without. (May 11, 1913)

In fact, the *Prayers* are the records revealing the Mother’s intense sadhana, encompassing both her inner and outer life. She is not satisfied to have only an inner contact with and realisation of the Lord. She wants all her outer life and its multifarious activities to participate in the progressive development of her inner life. In her prayer dated November 28, 1912, the Mother says:

. . . the daily activity is the anvil on which all the elements must pass and repass in order to be purified, refined, made supple and ripe for the illumination which contemplation gives to them. . . . Very modestly we must take advantage of all the minute opportunities offered to knead and purify some of the



innumerable elements, to make them supple, to make them impersonal, to teach them forgetfulness of self and abnegation and devotion and kindness and gentleness . . . but truly to attain the goal none can escape the need of innumerable experiences of every kind and every instant.

The Mother wants to involve all the minutest of activities and movements of the day-to-day life in her *Prayers* so that by constant contemplation she can bring all the countless divergent activities of the outer life in tune with her inner life, and that all of her exterior life reflects the divine Truth, Light, Love and Delight. She constantly prays for the transformation of her whole being. All the physical acts and movements, all the vital feelings and emotions, all the mental thoughts and ideas must have one and only one goal and that is to act and feel and think according to the dictates of the Lord. All the activities of life, however trivial or commonplace they may seem to be, (i.e. performing the household chores etc.), must be performed in the light and guidance of the divine Law. Let us see what the Mother has to say in her prayer dated December 2, 1912:

So long as one element of the being, one movement of the thought is still subjected to outside influences, not solely under Thine, it cannot be said that the true union is realised; there is still the horrible mixture without order and light, — for that element, that movement is a world, a world of disorder and darkness . . .

The same idea is reflected in the following three prayers:

In all the states, in all the modes, in all things, all worlds, all the elements we must discover Thee and unite with Thee and if one element is left aside, however small it may be, the communion cannot be perfect, the realisation cannot be accomplished. (July 12, 1914)

. . . in the silence of all thought, that is, of all conscious formulas, something in my being, deeper than words, turns to Thee, O ineffable Lord, in an ardent aspiration, giving Thee in offering all its activities, all its elements, all its modes of being, and imploring for all these the supreme illumination.

(August 20, 1914)

O Lord, I implore Thee! Grant that I may be perfectly conscious and master of all that constitutes this personality, so that I may be delivered from myself and Thou alone mayst live and act through these multiple elements.

(March 1, 1914)

The Divine's Grace and Love have a potent power to dispel all darkness and illumine the dark ignorant elements, modes and parts of a sincere aspirant:

It is Thou that makest the experience fertile, Thou who renderest life progressive, Thou who compellest the darkness to vanish in an instant before the Light, Thou who givest to Love all its power, Thou who everywhere raisest up matter in this ardent and wonderful aspiration, in this sublime thirst for Eternity.  
(November 26, 1912)

I am athirst for Thy consciousness, I am athirst for an integral union with Thee, not in inaction and a flight from physical activity but in a complete, absolute, perfect accomplishment of Thy Will. (August 9, 1914)

\*

#### d. Basic Requisites in Yoga

The *Prayers* are a practical guide in Yoga. They show to all mankind how to go about the sadhana of integral perfection and transformation. We find in them all the basic requisites required for the practice of Yoga: Faith, Aspiration, Sincerity, Perseverance, Surrender and Simplicity. The Mother's faith in the Lord and His Grace is unshakeable. The *Prayers* make amply clear her intense single-minded aspiration to achieve the missioned Work. We can repeatedly hear in them a sincere persistent cry imploring the Master to mould her into a perfect instrument through whom He would accomplish His Work of integral divine manifestation upon earth, and her surrender is total and complete. The other divine quality that the Mother aspires to have is 'simplicity'; to be like a child untouched by all the complexities, anxieties and problems of life, he is just happy to live:

. . . I present myself before Thee, O my divine Master, with all the simplicity, all the nudity of a child. . . . (April 10, 1914)

She prays to be simple as a flower:

As soon as all effort disappears from a manifestation, it becomes very simple, with the simplicity of a flower opening, manifesting its beauty and spreading its fragrance without clamour or vehement gesture. And in this simplicity lies the greatest power, the power which is least mixed and least gives rise to harmful reactions. . . .

Simplicity, simplicity! How sweet is the purity of Thy Presence! . . .  
(February 12, 1913)

\*

e. Abolition of Egoism and Ignorance

A flower spontaneously offers its beauty to one and all, and spreads its fragrance all around. There is no demand, no preference, no desire for anything. Simply to give, to offer. Desire creeps in into man as he loses simplicity and becomes a slave of his lower nature. He becomes ego-bound, selfish. His whole existence revolves round himself; he becomes the centre of all he thinks, feels and does. The Mother shows us how to pray in order to come out of this materialistic and egoistic thinking and living:

May the “I” disappear for evermore, . . . (May 3, 1914)

. . . deliver me from myself! (April 7, 1914)

O Lord . . . dispel this feeling of the “I”. . . . At no moment, in no circumstances must we forget that our “I” has no reality outside Thee. (April 17, 1914)

It is as though I were stripped of my entire past, of its errors as well as its conquests, as though all that has vanished and made room for a new-born child whose whole existence is yet to be lived . . . I feel that if I learn how to surrender without any resistance to this state, if I do not try to know or understand, if I consent to be completely like an ignorant and candid child, some new possibility will open before me. I know that I must now definitively give myself up and be like an absolutely blank page on which Thy thought, Thy will, O Lord, can be inscribed freely without danger of any deformation.  
(April 3, 1914)

Oh, I would be before Thee, Lord, always like an absolutely blank page, so that Thy will may be written in me without any difficulty, any mixture.  
(November 20, 1914)

Break, break these chains. . . . this “I” must be Thy “I” and there must be only one single “I” in the world. (May 9, 1914)

Unfortunately man has kept all the doors closed. He has kept himself engrossed with his selfish ‘I’ to such an extent that he does not feel the need to break open the dark prison-house and come out into the regenerating Light and to breathe the invigorating fresh Air. The Mother comments in her prayer dated June 18, 1913:

What a strange thing is ignorance, that source of all suffering! How miserable that obscurity which keeps men away from the very thing which would bring

them happiness and subjects them to this painful school of ordinary existence fashioned entirely from struggle and suffering!

The Mother prays for all:

. . . may ignorant egoism be overcome, darkness be suddenly illuminated by Thy pure Light . . . (April 8, 1914)

O Lord . . . Liberate us from all ignorance, liberate us from ourselves that we may open wide the doors of Thy glorious manifestation. (February 5, 1914)

O Thou inconceivable splendour, Thou conqueror of all ignorance, victor over all egoism, Thou who dost illumine all hearts and enlighten all minds, Thou who art Knowledge and Love and Being, let me live constantly in the consciousness of Thy unity, let me always conform to Thy Will.  
(April 28, 1914)

May our mistakes, acknowledged and rectified within us, be no more than vain mirages powerless to bring any consequences and, pressing our foot down firmly upon all that no longer should exist, on all ignorance, all obscurity, all egoism, may we take our flight boldly towards wider horizons and intenser light, a more perfect compassion, a more disinterested love. . . . towards Thee.

(December 29, 1913)

. . . break the barriers of egoism, scatter the obstacles of ignorance, shine resplendent as sovereign Master of the earth. (Karaikal, April 13, 1914)

The Mother ardently implores the Master to help her, as well as the entire humanity, to pull out of “the dead wood of egoism and the black coals of ignorance” (December 16, 1913). An egocentric person is a ‘dead wood’, devoid of the sap of life; no growth, no progress, leading to stagnation, suffering and death. He imprisons himself in utter darkness, ignorant of Light, Beauty and Delight.

\*

#### f. Peace, Silence, Equality

Man is tossed about here and there like a cork on the vast ocean of life. He lacks orientation, he cannot decide which path to follow, what aim or goal to choose. He is disturbed, agitated, perplexed. But once he chooses the path of Yoga he must first

learn to be quiet, silent, peaceful. Pinning his faith exclusively on the Divine's Grace, he must make sincere and persistent efforts to bring peace and silence in his otherwise rioting lower nature, because

In Peace and Silence the Eternal manifests; allow nothing to disturb you and the Eternal will manifest . . . (December 5, 1912)

There is a constant conflict and quarrel between our mind, vital and body, and to bring harmony and peace between them we must always keep the Supreme at the centre of all our thoughts, feelings and actions, because He is "the key of the synthesis of my being" (January 6, 1914). Time and again the Mother prays for 'Peace', for 'Silence'.

Secondly, to keep our conflicting nature under control we must develop

. . . perfect equality in face of all and the Eternal will be there.

(December 5, 1912)

To keep a balanced state of mind in the face of all circumstances — in favourable or in unfavourable situations and conditions. ". . . to regard all events with serenity." (March 23, 1914) Nothing should upset us. All our negative thoughts and emotions arise because of our lopsided and adamant mental preferences and opinions, vital demands and desires; we get angry and disturbed if someone opposes our way of thinking or does not agree with our opinions, and, we are simply dejected and miserable if our demands and desires are not fulfilled. We must learn to think, feel and act dispassionately, in a detached manner, with an equal state of mind, explaining to the mind not to 'torment' itself. The Mother prays:

O Lord, deliver me from the mental influences which weigh upon me, so that, completely free, I may soar towards Thee. (May 17, 1914)

O my sweet Master, in peace, serenity, equanimity, I give myself to Thee and merge in Thee, my thought calm and tranquil, my heart smiling; Thy work will be done, I know, and Thy victory is certain. (May 13, 1914)

The Mother is addressing us all when she says:

Why torment oneself and suffer, why this bitter struggle and painful revolt, why this vain violence, why this inconscient, heavy sleep? (July 7, 1914)

And she encourages us to

. . . Awake without fear, appease your conflicts, silence your disputes, open your eyes and your hearts: the Force is there; it is there, divinely pure, luminous, powerful; it is there as a boundless love, a sovereign power, an indisputable reality, an unmixed peace, an uninterrupted beatitude, the Supreme Benediction; it is self-existence, the endless bliss of infinite knowledge . . . which is already at work in the higher worlds beyond thought as the power of sovereign transfiguration, and also in the inconscient depths of Matter as the Irresistible Healer. . . . (*Ibid.*)

But unfortunately we do not feel the need for a change, we lack that intense overwhelming urge to come out of this stifling dark ignorant prison-house. The Mother simply cannot tolerate to remain imprisoned in the ordinary materialistic consciousness. In her prayer dated January 5, 1914, she writes:

. . . so much is all within me mediocre, worthless, insipid, hopelessly commonplace. . . .

*I am a veritable zero in the world.*

How hopelessly insufficient she must be feeling! She has willingly accepted the responsibility to help the Lord in His Work. With all sincerity she is trying to prepare herself integrally for the great mission; in her thoughts, feelings and actions she endeavours her level best to carry out the Lord's wish and orders. But yet, at times, everything seems to be at a standstill; no progress, no growth. She feels dejected and an overwhelming feeling of suffocation overpowers her:

. . . nothing is more tiring than materialistic thoughts, and the mind, worn out, suffers like a caged bird which cannot spread its wings and yet longs to be able to soar freely. (January 4, 1914)

And she implores the Lord:

Break, break down the last resistances, consume the last impurities, blast this being if need be, but let it be transfigured! (January 23, 1916)

If she so wants, the Mother can soar freely into the infinite skies and merge with the Supreme, but she has descended here upon earth for a specific purpose and mission. She has accepted by choice all the difficulties, problems, sufferings and resistances that the dark inconscient earth presents; she has come to show us the way, how to face the adverse circumstances and fight the hostile forces, and move forward towards the final goal of total transfiguration. She demonstrates how to do Sadhana in order to achieve the goal, and she cites a number of her experiences and realisations.

“There can be no Sadhana without realisations and experiences.” — clarifies Sri Aurobindo. “The *Prayers* are a record of Mother’s experiences”. (*Prayers and Meditations*, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Vol. 1, p. 383)

*(To be continued)*

ARVINDBABU

*I have said somewhere, or maybe written, that no matter how great your faith and trust in the divine Grace, no matter how great your capacity to see it at work in all circumstances, at every moment, at every point in life, you will never succeed in understanding the marvellous immensity of Its Action, and the precision, the exactitude with which this Action is accomplished; you will never be able to grasp to what extent the Grace does everything, is behind everything, organises everything, conducts everything, so that the march forward to the divine realisation may be as swift, as complete, as total and harmonious as possible, considering the circumstances of the world.*

*The Mother*

*(Questions and Answers 1956, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 8, p. 250)*

## A CAPTIVE OF HER LOVE

*(Continued from the issue of October 2012)*

1.1.1958

TODAY Mother played the harmonium<sup>1</sup> — for half an hour, from 10.30 till 11. She does it every year. The loudspeakers are of good quality and it was wonderful. She played in Her room — what came to Her. Now, at 14.30 She will hand us what we need for January. Everybody writes on a special piece of paper at the end of the month what he needs and on the first of each month we get what She judges is right. I shall get things for the Nursing Home. At present I do not yet need anything for myself. This evening She will also as usual give a class in French for schoolchildren, which whoever wants attends. I always go. So, Grace is just raining on us today! And in the morning there was darshan as usual too.

The week looks so: Monday, 6 p.m. till 7 — *Synthesis* Class (translation); 7.30 — marching before Mother; 7.30 till 8 — adult physical exercises; 8 — concentration (Mother comes out of Her room which She has at the playground and there are a few minutes concentration on the body; She takes the fatigue away, I also feel it). Then She works again in Her room at the playground and after a time She comes again and there is the evening meditation. I made a mistake in my letter: the half-hour evening meditations are on Thursdays and Sundays. Now before I go on with the week's plan I must make it clear that the conception I had of the playground before is wrong. Playground is the name for a big compound of yards and rooms and one big playground. But the life that is going on there far exceeds the physical training and the physical training itself far exceeds what we normally call it. Mother plays tennis every afternoon from 4.15 till 5. Then She goes by car to the playground where She just is the Headmistress, controls things, gives lessons, talks with the sadhaks whom She calls — She just organises the life. After the marching She retires to Her room, but She probably works; later between concentration and meditation She receives people from outside and sadhaks who have their birthdays. Pavitra is also often there, although at the time of the physical exercises he and a few others run along the beach (two minutes from the playground). Now the most important thing is that thanks to the transforming quality of the Divine all these occupations lose their human, lower meaning and everything is embraced by Mother as the way upwards (so I experience it). I do not think that all the sadhaks are clearly conscious of it, but many are.

1. The organ.



Oh! I relax, I relax. I had been doing it with you after those years in Poland, but now it seems that all the strain of centuries or ages of ignorance is being — with unspeakable Love — slowly removed from me. I have so much time for everything and all the life here goes so smoothly. I shall soon write you more about my work but here it is so completely different from Europe, or rather outside the Ashram. There is not much work to do, but then the work must be as perfect as possible. I am so thankful that I can relax. I just give myself and give myself and it gives me such a rest.

\* \* \*

2.1.1958

Yesterday She distributed the New Year's Message.<sup>2</sup> On such occasions people from outside come. Oh! I have so much to describe to you! Would it not be better if you came? Half an hour ago I got from Her the things for the Nursing Home. And I am so happy. I live in a stream of Grace these last days. But do not think there are no difficulties! Probably even awful ones may come. The New Year's message made a great impression on the sadhaks.

\* \* \*

7.1.1958

The most wonderful thing here is, that everything gets another meaning — another vibration — as the Divine lives here in a body. Maybe it is most for those whose psychic has opened and who go on deepening their self-giving and surrender, but it is so. For example the word adoration gets completely another sense when you just thrill in a state of Love for the Highest that exists and this Highest smiles and sighs and translates with you the *Synthesis* and touches your hand and gives you a sweet and arranges the flowers on the desk in the class. We usually put into adoration some distorted elements. What else can there be, when a particle of dust looks face to face into the Infinite? This is the most normal state in such a situation, I should say.

And as to the climate; it is now the best time for Europeans to come, there are nice showers, cool evenings and during the day no more than 30 to 32 degrees. But the sunshine is strong. Until now I have not put anything on my head and I do not wear glasses. Nobody does, they have umbrellas, but not everybody. So I will see;

2. "O Nature, material Mother, thou hast said that thou wilt collaborate and there is no limit to the splendour of this collaboration." (The Mother)

I will try to live as normally as possible. For me nothing else matters now but She. And this is not a state of excitement but peace.

My letters have not given you until now an idea of the most inner process that is going on — the deeper and deeper self-giving. It is as if I was continuously being broken by overpowering Love, Her Love; it is clear that the ego hidden in all the corners must disappear and I experience it as being broken, the body too, and the body kneeling prostrates itself with its forehead almost on, or on, the floor. This movement comes spontaneously and a vibrating force moves the body. It is just natural and it is a delight too, there is no strain in anything. And all this process is connected with X.<sup>3</sup> In Europe we would talk about asuras and forces and try fervently to remain positive. Here, Mother has given me X that I may give myself more and more to her as if she were Mother Herself. All these orders I get during Darshan. And X is Mother Herself. So I often prostrate myself inwardly during my work with her. I often kneel near her (understand me well, I am very matter of fact!) because she is the Highest with a mask. And then when I do it with enough surrender and purity I feel Mother working through me. I do not know what She does but now I have experienced that if we give ourselves to Mother in the evil, as if for being eaten up, She can really do the work, Her work. But all this comes just naturally, there is no tension, only happiness and gratitude and pain and suffering mixed together in a state that I cannot describe yet. And every day during Darshan She fills me with what She wants. Today She was as if not satisfied. She wanted still more surrender and stepping aside, but I go on. And I begin to love X with a force that just overwhelms. I have understood that Mother wants my Darshan adoration and surrender to widen into a permanent darshan towards Her in all things.

And now about Sri Aurobindo. If you could see some of the faces here when they kneel near the Samadhi or just lean closely and almost caress it, you would feel that this is a Living Stone. And if you could come to Him and kneel and put your tired head on this Stone, your worries would disappear and peace would enter into you. There is such a loving tenderness vibrating and such Power that I always get strength to go on when, after my work with X, it seems sometimes that I can no more go on — and when I come to Him and put my head on Him, this is not adoration as we understand it in our ignorant way, this is just Love for the Living Lord. Allow me to write as it comes. The time for things that will interest Heinz will come too. But I must remain natural in my writing.

When we, or rather She is translating the *Synthesis*, I sometimes think that a time will come when She might no more stay with us in the body (when She chooses it so) — and that so many human beings will never come in touch with the indescribable glory of Her presence; many will not even know that at that time Heaven was on earth. Oh! I am so grateful, that my being has really no more room

3. The name of Janina's helper has been replaced by "X".

to contain all these feelings that fill me. When we read about the Highest Universal Energy (She reads aloud in French — Pavitra and another French sadhak prepare their own translation in advance) and one knows that She is this Energy — I just cannot describe what I feel.

\* \* \*

8.1.58

Yesterday I grasped what She wanted from me. For two days already I felt from time to time as if a mountain or huge waves were coming on me and pushing me back. She wants me to step back this time, as completely as I can — and to make room for Her. And I feel how foolish it is to push oneself into a place which God wants to occupy. But I grasped it with my heart rather. It was yesterday evening during the French talk for children. Among other things She was explaining how Sri Aurobindo used to free people from an obsessing thought or illness. And She was moving Her hands and fingers showing how He just took the thought out and removed it gently — the fact of His and Her Almighty Love became so overwhelming to me that I at last experienced that I cannot exist in God's Presence — I have to annul myself, just to become nothing. And now the time will come to practise it and persevere and persevere in this way. But my happiness is so great, so great. . . .

I asked Nahar to send you the calendar. It is wonderful: Mother during the Morning Darshan. I stand always just below, a bit to the right in the second row with my head bent backward and with folded hands. God is descending there every day and She always appears silently as if a wild bird coming to its nest where children with wide opened beaks wait for food. I always feel it like this and She is feeding us through Her eyes. And it is all so real! Her vibration is felt usually after a few moments, after She has looked at me. I feel it in me and it works in me.

I want to write you a bit about my work. There is so much Love in the arrangement of this house. All my "wounds" can now be healed here because all I longed to realise in Poland, in my home for the mentally deficient — but could not — will be now realised by Mother through me, here. I know it. When I came there was one patient. . . . I work with Dr. Sanyal, the one who was Sri Aurobindo's doctor during His last "illness". Dr. Sanyal is one of the best Indian surgeons. He settled here a few months after Sri Aurobindo's death. Before he was not a sadhak. He has written something about his experiences. Tell me if you have it. On the fourth of January the second of my patients was operated upon in the open rooms downstairs (there are walls only on three sides). We put white screens. On a truck come all the furniture and equipment (!) already sterilised; we disinfect the place and when everything is ready and the patient is on the table we meditate. After the operation the furniture and everything disappear again. The patient is carried by

four strong sadhaks to his room and I and X do the nursing. There was a lady doctor, an Indian visitor from Bombay, and she came to see this nursing home. When she heard that the next day such an operation would take place and that I just two weeks ago arrived from Europe, she could not grasp it quite well.

\* \* \*

19.1.58

My second patient left the Nursing Home the day before yesterday and as there are at present no candidates for operations, we have a holiday! Is life not wonderful? I stay alone in this beautiful house in which at last I feel really at home. All the life of the Ashram and my own circulate round the Mother. This is like a magnetic point, or rather the magnetic All. Because She is really everywhere and I begin to feel it as one feels the breeze from the sea or hears the murmur of the waves. This feeling is becoming more and more concrete and realistic. In the work this presence is often overwhelming. Being in charge of an institution, I at once came in touch with almost all the heads of different departments. Pavitra is the general secretary — for foreign problems mostly — and the director of the University Centre. To me he is also a friend and being far on the path (as I feel) he seems to be one of the main channels for Mother's Power. This is my own impression. I do not talk with people about such things. Amrita is the head of the financial department and organisation of the work of the Ashram and the purchasing of buildings, etc. To him I go for advice in matters of supplies for the Nursing Home, the problems of servants, etc. Nolini Kanta Gupta is the first secretary and handles most of the correspondence of the Ashram and all the material from the life of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. He is the only one left of the collaborators of Sri Aurobindo from the time of His public activities. But he was a young boy at that time. He was also the first one who recognised the Divine Incarnation in the Mother in the period when around 1926-1930 She began to organise the Ashram, and when many sadhaks, even the nearest to Sri Aurobindo (among them His brother) left the Ashram not being able or not wanting to give themselves to Her. Nolini has an assistant secretary (Madhav) who helps also with visitors, supplying photos, etc.

All these offices (each one in its own room) are in the main Ashram buildings built around the Samadhi area, or rather the Stone has been put in the middle of the courtyard in the centre of these premises. In the main buildings Nahar has also his publication department with shelves and shelves from the floor to the ceiling. Here we also get our letters, there is also a small reading room, the fruit room (where we get fruits in season — besides our main meals) and the office called "Prosperity". Each institution like my Nursing Home and each sadhak get a "Prosperity book". On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of each month we write down in this book what we need for the next

month. On the last page of the book articles are named which we can get and it is written for how long they have to last. Prosperity supplies also thread, Vim, linen and other things after Amrita's decision and Mother's sanction. In a way nothing here is being done without Her sanction.

People like Pavitra, Amrita, Nolini and Nahar seem to be able to see Her freely or almost so and they often help sadhaks by acting as intermediaries in different matters. So Pavitra asked Her now if I may join the physical exercise group. This is not always necessary as there is a special box for letters to Mother, but we rather use these people as channels as it seems to be easier for Her and She can immediately give the answer. There are also many other departments and workshops with which we come in touch, like Electricity, Sanitary service, Furniture department, Domestic service (Amrita's department), repairs, upkeep of buildings, chief gardener and other gardeners, flower room, where we get flowers every day, Dairy, and two shops (called Honesty). Nowadays sadhaks may have their own money if they want. There is also a Cottage Industry Centre where poor Indian boys are taken in to learn weaving, shoemaking, carpentry, etc. A few sadhaks run the place. I have seen it already. From there I can get for the Nursing Home and for myself some furniture, mats, baskets, incense, bedcovers, etc. Here they also weave the bedsheets. We get enough through Prosperity.

\* \* \*

20.1.58

It is like being flooded. She pours and pours in and spreads Herself to all the corners, holes and caves of the being. And it is a continuous fever of self-giving and a continuous imploring and calling Her to come. The self-giving seems to be so insufficient and so poor when it faces the Grace. And when She comes, She becomes so near that I at last begin to feel free with Her, to talk to and adore Her in Her manifested body as She is here. I did not yet do it and this is also so wonderful how every tiny movement of life is being harmoniously arranged. There are already many threads connecting me with Her — not only the darshan and classes — although I have never talked to Her yet. Only once when She distributed sweets and I asked Her for one for our patients who could not come. But the threads are there: the doctor who reports to Her every day, Pavitra, Nahar who wants to create these connections, asking for photos of Her for our Nursing Home, telling Her probably about me, etc. . . . Here we are all captives of Her love. This is not an abstraction or a sentimental expression. This is as realistic as anything can be. And it is just sheer delight, the life here. Anyway that is how I feel it. In the morning I awake and there is no inertia or coma, the first thoughts and my heart's beat are She and it is just love, and love. And Her vibration is in me, it often comes with great force and this

makes it also possible to be able to face Her during the day — the love is this bridge between the drop of sea-water and Infinity.

Eating in the Dining Hall is a delight — She is present, really present — I feel Her and I offer my food to Her. (I always feel like telling you that I am very matter of fact, do not think that it is my Polish imagination!) The most wonderful thing is Her Love for us. I come near to Her only during distributions. There have been six such distributions since I came. The first on the day I came, when Her eyes' Vibration broke a crust in my eyes into my soul which felt as if somebody had made with an instrument two holes in a screen or wall. On Christmas day, She flooded me with a vibration of such sweet Love that I did not know how I could possibly bear it. On the 31<sup>st</sup> of December there was the distribution of the New Year's message and on the first of January distribution of the calendar and Prosperity. The fifth time was on the 14<sup>th</sup> of January when She touched my hand with a purpose (I knew it) and all my being went aflame. Yesterday there was the distribution of sweets after which I am again a different human being and nothing else matters but She. Now, each time the waves work with such a strength, I just try to withdraw into a corner and sit still. I know that not everybody here is open and surrenders to these waves strongly, but I write you what I have experienced. Anyway there are many who do — and probably much stronger than I. And this problem of more or less is no longer important to me. I do not compare. After a time She will probably widen my consciousness by flooding it more and more — and I will be all these sadhaks who do not surrender and all those who surrender — because She is all these sadhaks together.

But I wanted to write about the Love for us. She surrounds me with care and loving Force and thoughts although She does not speak to me. My French is improving with such speed that I can follow the translation of the *Synthesis* without difficulty. And She gives me all the ideas about how to make the Nursing Home harmonious and beautiful. And She gives everything I ask for. Yesterday I asked Madhav for Mother's signature to hang on the wall in the Nursing Home. You know Her signature is wonderful when large and framed. I did not know that that needs Her sanction. In answer She told Madhav that She will sign in the middle of the paper Herself, if I make a frame for it — not a real frame, but just a drawing around the paper. And this will be framed later. My gratitude is so great! You know how my being needs to be relaxed, loosened and how I would love to be in painting and drawing only Her pure instrument! And She is just doing it, because now each smallest line and dot on this drawing I shall try to draw with such love that it almost annuls myself and then She will come and draw. She said to Madhav: "Janina is an artist and when she draws it I shall sign it."

\* \* \*

27.1.58

My instructor in physical training lives in the Ashram with her family. They are members of the Ashram. I stress this because there are various categories of people. Besides the visitors who come for a few weeks or days there are single people or families who come for a few months. They sometimes hire or even buy a house, but are not sadhaks. Officially they are not members of the Ashram. They disappear for a time and then come again.

It is wonderful how our instructor works with us. You see, it is individual work for people like me, whose body has been allowed to stiffen for a long time. There is so much of Mother's Love in all these arrangements and being with such consciously living people helps to awaken the physical consciousness. My mind always tries to mediate between the Power that moves the body (nerves and muscles) and the body. I should just abandon myself completely, directly in my physical to Her. But it will come too. Maybe it is already coming. Sometimes it is too much happiness.

Half an hour ago She finished playing tennis. As I want to draw and sculpture Her I come and, always praying to the Supreme Grace and adoring Her as the Supreme Grace and the Supreme Truth, I look at how She moves and plays. The air is transmuted, packed with Grace, the sea murmurs and the fresh wind disperses the heat. The tennis ground is on the beach, just above it. It is glorious. Now I am sitting on the beach with all the small creatures crawling around me on the sand and in a few minutes I shall go to the playground for the *Synthesis* Class. We have finished the introduction and now we are making corrections in the French translation. In general there are very few corrections.

On Fridays we have the text of the "Dhammapada". Mother reads one or two sentences and talks a bit.

I remember that I wanted to correct another expression which I used in one of my letters in connection with my inner life here. I felt the body to be broken — only on the first day of this experience. Later it changed into a wonderful feeling of being bent by a Power to which this body was responding with self-giving and now I feel it as a kind of liberating wave that makes the body more and more plastic. I am sure that our body needs this expression of bowing before the Highest and I believe more and more that we have to take the words of the Gita in their *exact* meaning when it says, "Thou wilt bow to me . . .", of course I do not mean it as a rule, but spontaneously.

Today one part of our house is being whitewashed and I have to watch and supervise exactly as I would have to do it in Tantour or in Poland. Oh, they are lazy, I tell you!

Soon I shall send you a few pamphlets about the Ashram. There are so many visitors nowadays and so many books are being sent abroad that they have to be reprinted. Mother's work with people outside is growing so much that as a conse-



quence She is cutting progressively Her contact with the sadhaks. One year ago She used to see personally each sadhak every day, if not for talking, then at least to give a flower or a sweet and of course to send a Power through it. But now it does not even happen once a week. But it proves, I think, how tremendously the connection with the Supermind, established last year (I mean in 1956) has influenced the world. Every day there are new people from India or other countries. Sometimes early in the morning crowds of simple people arrive for the Darshan, which reminds me of the pilgrimages of Catholic people in Poland to holy places. But one of the most wonderful things is the freedom I experience here. Each pure wave, each intention can be realised. There are infinite possibilities of creating. There is only one thing to do: to persevere — and to feel that all these waves and intentions, all this, is just She living in us and creating. Yesterday She gave me so much during Darshan that I live on it continuously. She wants to expand in me a universal wave, a universal vibration — and more, just with my soul; to give myself, not to think, not to want. I learned it today. There are hours (even when I do other things) when I repeat: “*je me donne, je me rends . . .*”<sup>4</sup>

Next time I shall write about my work with the departments — now there is no more room. I just discovered that when a lower wave wants to drag me down I inwardly dash to Mother immediately (even if I have already done something wrong, hiding for a long time) — without being ashamed — and I bury myself in Her outstretched, loving arms. This brings a solution to so many previous “problems”.

The new worker and those doing the whitewashing are very slow, but it is She who is working through them also and I try to realise it as much as possible — in my heart mostly. These are just grades of deeper and deeper realisation of the same things that first in thought started years ago in my consciousness. And this realisation now seems to be so simple, when one comes nearer and nearer.

Now the workers have left, half an hour before their time, so of course the servant wants to go earlier too! And I am going in half an hour to the *Synthesis* Class and later to March Past. The evening meditation is about 8.15, or later, when many visitors are there, but I do not go home in the meantime. I read in the class or walk on the shore. I went twice only to the tennis court. She “told me” that that is not the way. I have to turn to people, see Her directly in them and give myself continuously to each one. So I stopped going to the tennis court. And there is also a very subtle, but essential difference during the morning Darshan. I used to wait with tension, at least with expectation, for Her to look at me. Now there is real peace in me — I do not want even Her looking at me and Her giving me a Force to work in me. I am so grateful. Something has fallen again from me. It is the same — if She gives to me or to others — I really experience that now.

This morning I have prayed to Her after breakfast and Darshan: “My Divine

4. “I give myself, I surrender . . .”



Mother, oh, that I may give myself still more and more. I feel that my surrender is deepening but before Thee it looks so small and weak. I know what Thou wantest now, that I give myself so completely to each human being I see and so continuously that at last the time might come when Thou wouldst be giving Thyself through this being. The urge, the longing to give myself when I meet anybody is beginning to be so strong that at this moment it seems that I could no longer live without it. Allow that it may remain so, allow that I may become '*l'amour qui se donne toujours et toujours*'.<sup>5</sup> I am grateful that She always brings me back on the safe path from any deviation. In this tennis ground business sentimentality was mixed and now all is sound again. It is so wonderful how "nüchtern" [sober] She wants us to be. Not with shut eyes meditating in a corner of the playground for hours without end, but with open eyes and at the same time in Her — but in Her in all people. It is again a new liberation, being freed from the overconcentration on Her alone as She is transcendently and individually. Now it is: discovering Her again and again, not theoretically as before, but really Her in each human being. I am just thanking Her without end after having rebelled for some hours.

And as to my letters you must drop immediately all the stupid things in them coming from my ego. So there will never be any inhibitions in our correspondence.

Our food in the Dining Room is not purely Indian. For lunch we always get rice and different kinds of vegetables, but they are not so spicy as in Bombay. We also get twice a week lentils with vegetables. And this we mix with rice. I always get a lemon so that things can be made more sour if I want it. We always get two bananas and a wonderful yoghurt, just a dream. As we have sugar in our boxes I can prepare a glorious dish: rice, cut bananas, yoghurt, sugar and lemon, as a dessert. I can also eat yoghurt with vegetables, just as I like. I discovered also that this attitude of giving myself — if applied to *food* (I just give myself to Mother in food) or *heat* (I surrender to Her in the heat) or other conditions — creates a completely new way of living. Before I used to face the condition, now I give myself so completely that I feel it deep, deep in my inner heart. Maybe this will become the general attitude? Anyway until now it makes it possible to live in the heat and eat this food and enjoy it.

(To be continued)

JANINA STROKA

(A *Captive of Her Love* by Janina Stroka edited by Michèle Lupsa,  
Published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1998)

5. "The love that gives itself for ever and ever."

## THE CONSTANT JOYS OF THE OLDEST HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR

**A message of love, harmony, beauty, joy and gratitude**

ALICE SOMMER HERZ is a remarkable woman. Aged 108 — the oldest known holocaust survivor — she lives independently in a small London flat, is fully conscious, has an excellent musical memory, practises the piano three hours a day, entertains a stream of well-wishers and occasionally performs with other visiting artists. She is able to stand up and walk on her own, answers the phone, reads books and enjoys music. Until she was 97 she went swimming every day.

However what is really fascinating about this woman is that though she was imprisoned for two years, undernourished in a miserable oppressive Nazi concentration camp, in filthy, cramped and humiliating living conditions, she has no bitterness towards her ex-captors. Even more extraordinary is the fact that she tragically lost her mother, husband, many in her extended family and most of her childhood friends to the Nazis in concentration camps and yet this does not evoke any acrimony or resentment in her. She philosophically states, “I am looking for the nice things in life. I know about the bad things, but I look only for the good things”, and insists that she does not know the meaning of hatred or evil.

An internationally accomplished pianist, she surmounted the horrors of the concentration camp in transcending herself by creating a world of music and beauty within her, thanks to her deep love for classical music, sustained by the piano concerts that she was allowed to perform for her fellow prisoners and the SS.

Keen that her six-year-old son who was with her should have a happy childhood despite the difficult and depressing conditions in the concentration camp, Alice often laughed during her internment so that her child could grow up normally. She created a positive atmosphere within her by a powerful imagination transfixed in the beauty of classical music, which in turn helped her child. Alice realised that no subjugation, humiliation or suffering could take away this beauty from her. It helped her maintain her dignity.

As the Mother has said:

... the more optimistic your imagination, the greater the chance of your realising your aim.<sup>1</sup>

1. *Collected Works of the Mother*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 3, p. 156.

The Mother also spoke of the power of positive imagination in creating one's inner life, making progress and in contacting the Divine:

If one knows how to use it, as I said, one can create for oneself his own inner and outer life; one can build his own existence with his imagination, if one knows how to use it and has a power. In fact it is an elementary way of creating, of forming things in the world. I have always felt that if one didn't have the capacity of imagination he would not make any progress. Your imagination always goes ahead of your life. When you think of yourself, usually you imagine what you want to be, don't you, and this goes ahead, then you follow, then it continues to go ahead and you follow. Imagination opens for you the path of realisation. People who are not imaginative — it is very difficult to make them move; they see just what is there before their nose, they feel just what they are moment by moment and they cannot go forward because they are clamped by the immediate thing. It depends a good deal on what one calls imagination.

...

Certainly if you succeed in imagining the Divine you have the contact, and you can have the contact with what you imagine, in any case.<sup>2</sup>

At the age of 98, Alice was the star of a prize-winning film, *We Want the Light*, that won her a following in many parts of the globe and five years later, she gained wide international fame through a best-selling book on her life, published in seven languages. Subsequently BBC and many others have made documentaries on this spirited aged lady. All her interviewers have found her to be a fascinating subject and the most optimistic and lovable of persons. When asked about the secret of her long life, she said:

In a word: optimism. I look at the good. When you are relaxed, your body is always relaxed. When you are pessimistic, your body behaves in an unnatural way. It is up to us whether we look at the good or the bad. When you are nice to others, they are nice to you. When you give, you receive.<sup>3</sup>

In a recent interview she was asked about her attitude towards the Germans in the light of the tragic events and the horrors she faced during the war. She replied:

I don't hate the Germans. [What they did] was a terrible thing, but was Alexander the Great any better? Evil has always existed and always will. It is part of our life.

2. *Collected Works of the Mother*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 7, pp. 229-30.

3. Ofer Aderet, *Haaretz*, 21 January 2010, [www.haaretz.com](http://www.haaretz.com)

... I have pity for the entire German people. They are wonderful people, no worse than others.

When questioned further if she truly believes in this conviction, considering she lost her loved ones, she reaffirms:

Yes. I would not be alive without pity. That is the reason I am still alive: I think about the good. That takes a lot of practice.<sup>4</sup>

The Mother has said:

But a bad thought is a bad deed. There are people who do not know it, but truly a bad thought is a bad deed and if one thinks and wishes harm to someone, well, one is responsible for the misfortunes that come upon him just as much as though one had acted. ... But even without speaking, if one has a strong thought and thinks ill of people, one does a bad deed.<sup>5</sup>

Mother emphasises the power of thought:

... Sri Aurobindo says that all that one thinks one is, one can, by the very fact of that thinking, become. This knowledge of the fact that *all* that one thinks one can be, is a very important key for the development of the being, and not only from the point of view of the possibilities of the being, but also from that of the control and choice of what one will be, of what one wants to be.

This makes us understand the necessity of not admitting into ourselves any thought which destroys aspiration or the creation of the truth of our being. It reveals the considerable importance of not allowing what one doesn't want to be or doesn't want to do to formulate itself into thought within the being. Because to think these things is already a beginning of their realisation. From every point of view it is bad to concentrate on what one doesn't want, on what one has to reject, what one refuses to be, for the very fact that the thought is there gives to things one wants to reject a sort of right of existence within oneself. This explains the considerable importance of not letting destructive suggestions, thoughts of ill-will, hatred, destruction enter; for merely to think of them is already to give them a power of realisation. Sri Aurobindo says that thought is not the cause of existence but an intermediary, the instrument which gives form to life, to creation, and the control of this instrument is of foremost importance if one wants disorder and all that is anti-divine to disappear from creation.<sup>6</sup>

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Collected Works of the Mother*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 5, pp. 144-45.

6. *Collected Works of the Mother*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 8, pp. 396-97.

Several German journalists have visited Alice but before entering her house sought permission in trepidation, asking, “Do you not hate us?” Alice responds by saying, “I never hate and I will never hate. Hatred only brings hatred.”

Alice’s unceasing sense of optimism is blended with gratitude. She rejoices that life is beautiful and is very thankful for everything and that everything is a present. On the beauty of life she observes:

The world is wonderful, it’s full of beauty and full of miracles. Our brain, the memory, how does it work? Not to speak of art and music . . . It is a miracle.<sup>7</sup>

When asked if difficult circumstances early in life make one more resilient, she responded, “It enriches you.”

Indeed the Mother had said:

If the Lord wills for you a hardship, do not protest. Take it as a blessing and indeed it will become so.<sup>8</sup>

Alice was born in Prague, then still part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, on 26 November 1903, along with her twin sister Mizzi. Strangely, the twins were temperamentally almost opposites: Alice a born optimist whilst Mizzi the pessimist, always seeing the darker side of things first and at times attracting difficulties as she anxiously expected catastrophes.

Alice started playing the piano at five. Making chamber music as a child was the best thing about her childhood. Her mother had instilled in her the importance of constantly learning and progressing. Though Alice had a happy childhood she became painfully aware of a distinct dislike and discrimination against Jews. There were frequent outpourings of anti-Semitism in the multi-racial Hapsburg Empire and at times they were mocked by Czech boys. On the other hand, she recalls Prague as a melting pot shared by Czechs, Germans and a large Jewish population. She considered her family to be “Jewish without religion”, and was proud to assimilate and embrace German literature and music as their own heritage. Gustav Mahler was her mother’s friend. There were several cultural get-togethers at her family home where writers, scientists, musicians and actors congregated. One of these, author Franz Kafka, was a family friend. For her, attending concerts was bliss. She became an accomplished pianist and performed on stage and on radio.

In 1931 she married Leopold Sommer, also a musician. Six years later their only son, Raphael, was born. Things took a bizarre turn in March 1939, when Hitler occupied Czechoslovakia. Alice’s two sisters fled to Palestine, boarding the last

7. Alan Rusbridger, *The Guardian*, 13 December 2006, [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)

8. *Collected Works of the Mother*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 14, p. 115.

train that left Prague on March 14, 1939, the day before the Germans entered the country. Alice made the sacrifice to stay back to care for her ailing mother.

The Nazi occupation was a poignantly painful and humiliating time for the Jews. They lost their jobs, were banned from public parks, trams, theatres, concert halls, swimming pools, sports clubs and were forbidden to have jewelry, cash or their own telephones. Nearly all family possessions were confiscated by the Nazis. The Nazis forbade Jews to perform in public, and so Alice stopped holding concerts. At first she was still able to make a living by giving piano lessons, but when the Nazis forbade Jews to teach non-Jews, she lost most of her pupils. Most Jews were sent to a ghetto. On the Nazi occupation, she speaks of her humiliation, but with a touch of irony and acceptance:

This was a hard time for Jews. Nothing was allowed. The food was very poor. We could only buy things for half an hour in the afternoon. We had to give away all our belongings. We were poor, we had nothing. For me the greatest punishment was having to wear the yellow star, here on the left side. When I went on the street my best non-Jewish friends didn't dare to look at me. I didn't know if I should go and speak with them. It was a very, very, very hard time, this I must say.<sup>9</sup>

In the summer of 1942 Alice's mother was deported to a concentration camp. At the time of their final goodbye Alice was in shock and ruefully wondered, "How was it possible to tear an old lady away from her world with nothing more than a rucksack on her back and send her to a concentration camp?"<sup>10</sup> Looking back on her life she considered this the lowest point of her existence, a catastrophe, since she deeply loved her mother and had a special bond with her.

A year later, Alice, her husband and her son were deported to the Theresienstadt concentration camp, a transit camp prior to extermination. She sadly reminisces about the day before the deportation,

The evening before this we were sitting in our flat. I put off the light because I wanted my child to sleep for the last time in his bed. Now came my Czech friends: they came and they took the remaining pictures, carpets, even furniture. They didn't say anything; we were dead for them, I believe. And at the last moment the Nazi came — his name was Hermann — with his wife. They brought biscuits and he said, "Mrs Sommer, I hope you come back with your family. I don't know what to say to you. I enjoyed your playing — such wonderful things, I thank you." The Nazi was the most human of all.

9. Alan Rusbridger, *The Guardian*, 13 December 2006, [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)

10. Melissa Muller, Reinhard Piechocki, *A Garden of Eden in Hell*, p. ix.

When you know history — wars and wars and wars . . . It begins with this: that we are born half-good and half-bad — everybody, everybody. And there are situations where the bad comes out and situations where the good comes out. This is the reason why people invented religion, I believe.<sup>11</sup>

Theresienstadt was the camp where the Jews of Czechoslovakia were assembled, especially the intelligentsia and prominent artistic figures, prior to transportation to the gas chambers. Alice's only consolation was that word had reached her that on arrival at the camp she would be giving a piano recital. She thought if she could keep in touch with music it would help her overcome the rigours and pains from the oppressive Nazis.

The conditions at the camp were gruesome. The barracks were gloomy, filthy and the air was stifling. Often the rooms were intolerably hot in the day and freezing cold in the night. They were so crowded that there was barely any space. Further, bad smell and the unhealthy condition of the inmates created a most unpleasant atmosphere. Even the stables and corridors were used to house the prisoners. There was a shortage of toilets which meant standing in long queues before one could access one and they always had a foul stench. The prisoners were underfed and were always hungry. Mouldy bread, rotten potatoes and insipid watery soup were the staple diet. The conditions were so horrific that on an average 80 people were dying each day due to sickness or infectious diseases. It took weeks for Alice to come to grips with the dreadful conditions that she was obliged to live in. Further, there were strict oppressive regulations in the camp, for instance, it was forbidden to send letters home (smuggling of letters was punishable by death), forbidden to speak to the non-Jewish population, all prisoners were to have their heads shaved, there was to be no walking on the pavements or singing in the streets and prisoners had to hand over all money and possessions. Small misdemeanours were punishable by 10 to 50 hard strokes by the cane while the more serious ones meant several months in the dungeons. A wife visiting her husband for a private conversation or a prisoner sending a secret report to his mother were given the death penalty.

Periodically thousands were surreptitiously sent to the extermination camps. Few inmates believed they would survive the war as executions took place regularly.

Alice's main concern was to care for her son, to see him happy and protect him from any suffering. Thanks to music she always remained very positive with him. Her main concerns were to overcome his boredom and his hunger, for there was never sufficient food. At times she earned a little bread and margarine from a concert and gave it to her son. Often Alice suffered from thirst in Theresienstadt which was worse than hunger. They were given black watery coffee for breakfast, white watery soup for lunch and, in the evening, black watery soup. Music was her

11. Alan Rusbridger, *The Guardian*, 13 December 2006, [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)



only solace and indeed her refuge. Speaking on the power of music she said:

We were hardly given any food in Theresienstadt. We lost weight. We scavenged for potato peelings as people starved to death around us. People ask, “How could you make music?” We were so weak. But music was special, like a spell. Music was my food. There were excellent musicians there in the camp orchestra, really excellent. Violinists, cellists, singers, conductors and composers.<sup>12</sup>

In another interview she said:

Whenever I knew that I had a concert, I was happy. Music is magic. We performed in the council hall before an audience of 150 old, hopeless, sick and hungry people. They lived for the music. It was like food to them. If they hadn’t come [to hear us], they would have died long before. As we would have.<sup>13</sup>

A young violinist in the camp remarked about Alice’s cheerfulness, “She was a breath of fresh air and joy in Theresienstadt . . .” She had none of that “depressed mood of the normal, so-called ghetto-inmate”. Indeed her talent for music providentially opened out avenues for her as she gave more than a hundred concerts to her fellow prisoners.

Music gave heart and cheer to many of the prisoners, albeit temporarily. However for Alice, music strengthened her resolve. She states:

In retrospect I am certain that it was music that strengthened my innate optimism and saved my life and that of my son. It was our food; and it protected us from hate and literally nourished our souls. There in the darkest corners of the world it removed our fears and reminded us of the beauty around us.<sup>14</sup>

Out of 15,000 children who were sent to the camp, Alice’s son, Raphael Sommer was one of only 130 to survive. Decades later he expressed his profound gratitude to his mother:

. . . In the middle of hell [the Nazi concentration camp], my mother created a garden of Eden for me. She built a strong wall around me out of love and gave me such security that I could not find anything extraordinary in our lives, and in retrospect I can say with good conscience that my childhood was wonderfully

12. Tom Gross, ‘A True Survivor’, [www.tomgrossmedia.com/mideastdispatches](http://www.tomgrossmedia.com/mideastdispatches)

13. Ofer Aderet, *Haaretz*, 21 January 2010, [www.haaretz.com](http://www.haaretz.com)

14. Melissa Muller, Reinhard Piechocki, *A Garden of Eden in Hell*, p. x.



happy. How my mother managed it I cannot say. She says it was the obvious thing to do. For me it remains a miracle.

My mother has a gift which, I believe, is given above all to Jewish and central and eastern European women. Without any self-pity they make their own requirements secondary to those of their families. I lived under the protecting veil of my mother and so cannot describe the darker side of our lives in the concentration camp. I was a child and I understood events as they seemed to me; I naturally believed everything my mother told me. Not once did she allow me to see the humiliations and insults she had to suffer. With inner strength and inexhaustible reserves of love she concentrated on just that: me, her beloved son and the creation of a joyful and 'normal' environment around me that had little to do with the reality in which we lived. With her attentive care my mother managed to shift the terror away from my gaze and provide me with the most valuable of gifts — a happy childhood. That this was possible behind the wire of a Nationalist Socialist concentration camp must, in all truth, be called a miracle.

He then concludes:

For all that my early childhood, which for all those close to me seemed to be horror and nightmare, seemed to be happy and utterly normal. For this I thank my mother — she performed miracles.<sup>15</sup>

Alice equates music with the divine and how its meditative power helped her overcome her ordeals:

Life gave me the talent to play the piano and to inspire happiness in people through music; and I am just as grateful that it gave me a love of music. Music makes us humans rich. It is the revelation of the divine. It takes us to paradise.

Since my childhood music has been my real home. It provided me with security when I had to confront my first inner torments and through it I found support, when death robbed me of my loved ones. Its meditative power provided me with the determination to cope first with the fascist and then the communist dictatorships that declared me and others like me subhuman.<sup>16</sup>

The Mother too loved music and spoke about it on several occasions. She, too, has spoken about the spiritual element in music:

15. *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

16. *Ibid.*, p. ix.

Music too is an essentially spiritual art and has always been associated with religious feeling and an inner life.<sup>17</sup>

In 1939 there were 118,310 Jews in Czechoslovakia of whom only 8 per cent survived the Holocaust. Of the 89,000 people deported to Theresienstadt, only about 3000 survived. The camp was home to a remarkable array of renowned Czech musicians, composers and theatrical artists, writing and performing as they and their fellow Jewish inmates awaited an unknown fate in Auschwitz. The SS had a special interest in some of the artists and were in the process of making a propaganda film on how well the prisoners were being treated. This was why Alice survived the Holocaust. The Red Cross made inspections and noted the cultural activity, unaware that simultaneously tens of thousands of inmates were clandestinely shipped off to their deaths in other camps.

Finally, on May 9, 1945, the Russian army arrived to relieve the camp. On her freedom she ironically reminisced:

When I came back home it was very, very painful because nobody else came back. The whole family of my husband, several members of my family, all my friends, all the friends of my family, nobody came back. Then I realised what Hitler had done.<sup>18</sup>

Reminiscing about her husband, who effectively saved her life, Alice said:

In 1944, my husband was among thousands who were sent away. His last words to me were, "You mustn't do anything voluntarily." I didn't understand what was in his mind. This was on Monday. Three days afterwards, again thousands were sent away, mothers and children of the men who had already been sent. In the second transport the women went voluntarily because they wanted to meet their husbands. They never met them. So my husband saved our lives.

He was sent to Auschwitz first and then sent to work in Dachau and, six weeks before the end of the war, he died from typhus. I brought up my son alone.<sup>19</sup>

Sadly, the discrimination against the Jews did not completely end after the war. In 1946 the Czech government decided that all Jews who had been in German schools, had read German newspapers or belonged to German associations would not be granted Czech citizenship and this directly affected Alice for since childhood

17. *Collected Works of the Mother*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 3, p. 110.

18. Tom Gross, 'A True Survivor', [www.tomgrossmedia.com/mideastdispatches](http://www.tomgrossmedia.com/mideastdispatches)

19. Alan Rusbridger, *The Guardian*, 13 December 2006, [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)

she had culturally looked up to Germany, the land of Goethe, Schiller, Bach and Beethoven.

Finally, in 1949, Alice along with her son immigrated to Israel to join her sisters. She was determined not to focus on the negatives and decided not to speak about her husband's death or about Theresienstadt or about the extermination of the Jews. She didn't want to look back, but to live in the present and to keep looking forward. This was Alice's philosophy and she passed it on to her son. In the past year neither of them had spoken about the camp. She later reiterated:

I never spoke a word about it because I didn't want my child to grow up with hatred because hatred brings hatred. I succeeded. My son had very good friends in Germany and they invited him to play and [they] appreciated him. And I never hated either, never, never.<sup>20</sup>

Although Alice was happy to be in Israel, she was dreading the first evening with her family as she did not know how she would react when they asked her about the occupation, Theresienstadt, Auschwitz and Dachau. Alice was relieved and amazed that no one spoke about the World War and the Holocaust but rather the talk centred on the new state of Israel, its victory in the war of independence and the present threat to the Jews. Everyone was concerned about the future and the building of Israel rather than the atrocities in the war. Her greatest feeling, though, was of freedom. Alice was very happy to be in Israel for it gave her a sense of freedom and space:

I must say, when I moved to Israel there was not a day without political tension, but [to experience] democracy! After Hitler and Stalin, you feel what it means. You can read, speak, trust everyone. It was a beautiful life in Israel, inspiring. Musicians, scientists and writers — they all came and lectured. It was a cultural centre. I was very happy.<sup>21</sup>

Alice was particularly struck by two things in Israel. The first was that Jews did all the jobs in the country. Never had she seen Jewish bus drivers, dustmen or postmen in Prague. The other was how modest and cramped everyone's lives were. Even people in important positions, with high incomes, lived in what were generally small flats. The spartan lifestyle was obvious everywhere.

In May 1960 the Israeli Secret Service captured Adolf Eichmann in Argentina and clandestinely brought him to Israel where he was tried for the slaughter of millions of Jews. In effect Eichmann was the murderer of her mother and husband.

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*

Though she never discussed the holocaust, in this instance she visited the courts a few times where Eichmann was being tried. Although the sight of this mass murderer evoked a feeling of shock she was less affected than other witnesses who experienced the extermination camps and had lost almost everything. She was surprised that she pitied Eichmann, for he lacked human feelings. Indeed it must be miserable for those whose hearts could never love nor their minds experience culture. Her overwhelming reaction from attending this trial was to feel that “We must not hate! Man must not learn to hate.”<sup>22</sup>

For almost 40 years Alice lived in Israel, making a living by teaching music at a conservatory in Jerusalem. She was already fluent in four languages — German, Czech, French and English — yet she learnt Hebrew, though it took time as the script was different. Alice was free from prejudices; she took no interest in Jewish orthodoxy and loved the Arabs. She had Arab pupils and their parents came to visit her. She felt sad that a peaceful political solution could not be found between the Arabs and the Jews.

In 1986, aged 83, Alice changed residence from Israel to London, to be near her son who had already moved to England. She was then diagnosed with cancer and had to be operated and miraculously continues to live. In 2001, Alice had to endure the grief of losing Raphael. She found solace in playing the piano. Indeed till this day she loves playing the piano; it gives her a sense of liberation. She speaks of boredom being the worst of sufferings and feels that one should be constantly learning, irrespective of one’s age. She says:

I love work. Work is the best invention, the best. Playing the piano is still a discipline. It makes you happy to have something. The worst thing is boredom. Boredom is dangerous.<sup>23</sup>

Alice loves people and is interested in the life of other people. When asked if she had any advice for people who are sad or depressed, she said that it was important to have the satisfaction of doing things well.

Alice always had an affinity with philosophy and considers herself as a spiritual person. In an interview Alice spoke of wealth being an inner phenomenon, underlining material riches as being hollow:

I think that great art can only come from tribulation and suffering, and that wealth is something of the spirit. Rich people are ridiculous — they think they have everything, but they have nothing! We who survived the ghetto have our suffering, and the music which lifted us out of suffering, and that makes us richer than any wealthy man.<sup>24</sup>

22. Melissa Muller, Reinhard Piechocki, *A Garden of Eden in Hell*, p. 314.

23. Alan Rusbridger, *The Guardian*, 13 December 2006, [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)

24. Ed Vulliamy, *Observer*, 13 June 2010, [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)

At the age of 103, Alice, after some persuasion, finally accepted the proposal of a book being written on her life. The book, titled *A Garden of Eden in Hell*, made her an international celebrity. The book is Alice's story and how love and the power of music helped her to overcome her inner torments and the adverse circumstances during the war. In the foreword of this book she writes of detachment, modesty and beauty:

People are often breathlessly pursuing their next goal in life without looking around them. They become attached to material things, and are incapable of circumspection or far-sightedness, because they lack the necessary material detachment. Detachment from possessions also creates detachment in oneself, and teaches us the modesty that makes it a pleasure for us humans to live and work together. In my opinion people take themselves too seriously as a rule. Culture and politics both suffer from this, so does humanity. Modesty brings happiness. Is that not so? Whoever is ready to understand this should absorb the greatness and dignity of a work by Beethoven or Bach. I have never learned to give up hope.<sup>25</sup>

The Mother has spoken on how some pieces of Beethoven and Bach have an inspiration and power that can produce effects in a few seconds which may take many years of arduous sadhana:

... There are certain passages of César Franck, certain passages of Beethoven, certain passages of Bach, there are pieces by others also which have this inspiration and power. But it is only a moment, it comes as a moment, it does not last. You cannot take the entire work of an artist as being on that level. Inspiration comes like a flash; sometimes it lasts sufficiently long, when the work is sustained; and when that is there, the *same effect* is produced, that is, if you are attentive and concentrated, suddenly that lifts you up, lifts up all your energies, it is as though someone opened out your head and you were flung into the air to tremendous heights and magnificent lights. It produces in a few seconds results that are obtained with so much difficulty through so many years of yoga. Only, in general, one may fall down afterwards, because the consciousness is not there as the basis; one has the experience and afterwards does not even know what has happened. But if you are prepared, if you have indeed prepared your consciousness by yoga and then the thing happens, it is almost definitive.<sup>26</sup>

25. Melissa Muller, Reinhard Piechocki, *A Garden of Eden in Hell*, p. xii.

26. *Collected Works of the Mother*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 5, pp. 75-76.

Thanks to her musical concerts Alice travelled to different parts of the globe. She now says, “Although I no longer travel any more, through music I can see the world.”<sup>27</sup>

She speaks of old age and its accompanying deterioration of sense organs coupled with aches and pains as being a difficult business but in her heart she is happier today than when she was young. Evidently a joy blended with a certain peace and wideness has settled in. She feels that she is one of the luckiest people alive and is grateful for this wonderful life and emphasises that every moment is a gift:

In any case, life is beautiful, extremely beautiful. And when you are old you appreciate it more. When you are older you think, you remember, you care and you appreciate. You are thankful for everything. For everything.<sup>28</sup>

In a conversation the Mother said:

And yet, of all movements, the one that gives perhaps the most joy — an unalloyed joy, untainted by that egoism — is spontaneous gratitude.

It is something very special. It isn't love, it isn't self-offering. . . . It's a very FULL joy. Very full.

It is a very special vibration unlike anything other than itself. It is something that widens you, that fills you — that is so fervent!

It is certainly, of all the movements within the reach of human consciousness, the one that draws you the most out of your ego.

And when it can be a gratitude without motive, that vibration (basically, the vibration of what exists towards the Cause of existence) . . . then a great many barriers vanish instantly.

When you can enter that vibration in its purity, you realise immediately that it has the same quality as the vibration of Love: it is directionless. . . .<sup>29</sup>

Alice makes a very interesting case study. We have had the benefit of Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's guidance and teaching towards a divine life, the help of the Mother's Grace whilst living in their atmosphere. Alice was not so fortunate yet figured out things for herself and did not let the adverse and humiliating circumstances of the war to embitter her. On the contrary she has, even at this age, a constant sense of optimism, joy and gratitude coupled with the ability to see beauty in everything and this pervades almost every moment of her life. She is an inspiration to countless people across the globe and many in the media still approach her for an interview or

27. Melissa Muller, Reinhard Piechocki, *A Garden of Eden in Hell*, p. x.

28. Alan Rusbridger, *The Guardian*, 13 December 2006, [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)

29. The Mother's conversation with Satprem on 21 December 1963.

to make a documentary film. A documentary film that was made when she was 98 years old stated:

Alice Sommer Herz is thought of with affection by hundreds of thousands of people in the world as both a sage and a saint. Her wisdom is evident in almost everything that she says. Her saintliness is seen in her almost unique tolerance and her compassion. She has the true gift of forgiveness. "Life is beautiful, love is beautiful, nature and music are beautiful. Everything is a present."<sup>30</sup>

On the subject of forgiveness and compassion, I would like to share two incidents relating to two dedicated sadhaks of the Ashram. The first event was when I approached Pranab-da for some advice on the best attitude to keep in a situation of continued hostility, after having been harassed over a period of time by a certain person. Pranab-da's answer took me by surprise or rather shocked me, for he responded, "Give love." I was swept off my feet and there was a minute's hushed silence and whilst I tried to absorb the import of the statement, I felt a grace had descended into the atmosphere, partially liberating me from my resentment. Once, years earlier, when I had asked on how to react to a person who is jealous of oneself, he had answered then too, "Give love."

The second incident is related by Amal-kiran:

. . . A situation had arisen in which I had felt extremely harassed by a certain person. I did not know what step to take. I went to the Samadhi and sent up my prayer to the Mother to guide me. I fervently asked her: "What should I do to check this harassment? I would like to follow your will and your way." Suddenly there was an exquisite explosion, as it were, in the occult heart-centre in the middle of the chest and, through the opening made there, an intense love flowed out towards the person who had been considered an enemy. Here then was the Mother's unexpected answer to my appeal. This was the Mother's mode of dealing with the hatred I had felt to be pouring against me. The psychic being had come forward to solve the problem. It spontaneously saw the Divine within everyone and strove to pierce to that reality behind all masks and to dissolve the obstacles of the outer consciousness of both myself and the other party. The great saying of Buddha occurred to me: 'Hatred does not cease by hatred; hatred ceases by love.'

When I met the person whose behaviour had affected me as harassment I said quite simply: "When I looked into myself I could find nothing except love for you." The effect was magical. Gone was all that had seemed hostile. A new turn of conduct was immediately apparent. The wide warmth that had issued

30. [www.allegrofilms.com](http://www.allegrofilms.com).



from my soul was no mere word-woven sentiment: it was an elemental force of luminous sweetness and could immediately kindle a light and a love where it touched.

I do not say that a complete lasting change can always be established. One may fall back into the old consciousness and the problem can recur. But the golden key was disclosed to me in that surprising moment. If we could command this key at all times, it would resolve every deadlock.<sup>31</sup>

About these lines from the *Dhammapada*

*For, in truth, in this world hatred is not appeased by hatred; hatred is appeased by love alone. This is the eternal law.*

the Mother says:

This is one of the most celebrated verses of the *Dhammapada*, one of those most often cited — I would have liked to be able to say, “one of the most obeyed in the world”; unfortunately that would not be true. For people speak much of this teaching but do not follow it.<sup>32</sup>

The Mother has also spoken about the transforming power of love:

... But if you want to know or understand the nature of the Force or the Power that enables or brings about this transformation — particularly where evil is concerned, but also with ugliness to a certain extent — you see that love is obviously the most potent and integral of all powers — integral in the sense that it applies in all cases. It is even more powerful than the power of purification which dissolves all bad will and which is, as it were, the master of the adverse forces, but which has not the direct power of transformation. The power of purification first dissolves in order to allow the transformation afterwards. It destroys one form in order to be able to create a better one, whereas love need not dissolve in order to transform; it possesses the direct power of transformation. Love is like a flame that changes what is hard into something malleable and even sublimates this malleable thing into a kind of purified vapour — it does not destroy, it transforms.<sup>33</sup>

I conclude with the Mother’s talk on selfless admiration, which, it seems, Alice epitomises:

31. Amal Kiran, *Our Light and Delight*, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., pp. 181-82.

32. *Collected Works of the Mother*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 3, p. 186.

33. *Collected Works of the Mother*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 10, p. 72.



The Divine, manifesting itself for the work on earth, appears to act as men do but really does not. It is not possible to evaluate it by such standards of the obvious and the apparent. But men are utterly in love with their own inferiority and cannot bear to submit to or admit a higher reality. This desire to find fault, this malicious passion to criticise and doubt what something in oneself tells one is a higher reality is the very stamp of humanity — it marks out the merely human. Wherever, on the other hand, there is a spontaneous admiration for the true, the beautiful, the noble, there is something divine expressed. You should know for certain that it is the psychic being, the soul in you with which your physical consciousness comes in contact when your heart leaps out to worship and admire what you feel to be of a divine origin.

The moment you are in front of what you feel to be such, you should be moved to tears of joy. It is the mean creature who stops to reflect: “Yes, it is something great but it would be worth admiring if it fell to my lot, if I were the happy possessor of this quality, the instrument of this superior manifestation.” Why should you bother about your ego when the main concern is that the Divine should reveal itself wherever it wants and in whatever manner it chooses? You should feel fulfilled when it is thus expressed, you should be able to burst the narrow bonds of your miserable personality, and soar up in unselfish joy. This joy is the true sign that your soul has awakened and has sensed the truth. It is only then that you can open to the influence of the descending truth and be shaped by it. I remember occasions when I used to be moved to tears on seeing even children, even babies do something that was most divinely beautiful and simple. Feel that joy and you will be able to profit by the Divine’s presence in your midst.<sup>34</sup>

GAUTAM MALAKAR

*Awakened from the mortal’s ignorance  
Men shall be lit with the Eternal’s ray . . .*

*Sri Aurobindo*

(*Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 34, p. 699)

34. *Collected Works of the Mother*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 3, pp. 158-59.

## VISITS RELIVED

### **(Reminiscences of the Mother and the Ashram based on personal notes and letters)**

*(Continued from the issue of October 2012)*

WE were at Pondicherry for the 15<sup>th</sup> August 1974 Darshan. We went to the Lord's room in a long queue, and had darshan. Dyuman-ji gave us the Darshan messages. Again, from 15<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> November 1976 we were at Pondicherry. We had darshan of the Mother's room on the 17<sup>th</sup> November and darshan of the Lord's room on the 24<sup>th</sup>. In the Lord's room Champaklal-ji gave me a special blessing packet, which was rather unusual.

The year 1978 was the Mother's Birth Centenary year (1878-1978); the celebrations began on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1978 and continued till the end of the year. For the Mother's birthday celebration we went to Pondicherry on the 19<sup>th</sup> February. We went to the Mother's room in the forenoon of the 21<sup>st</sup>, followed by a visit to Sri Aurobindo's room. On this occasion a beautiful memento was given to all, on the cover of which was printed the Mother's symbol with the petals in different colours, and inside the cover were two tiny pieces of the apparel of the Mother and the Lord. What a prized gift!

We have not missed the 29<sup>th</sup> February, the Golden Day Darshans at Pondicherry right from its inception by the Mother from 1960 onwards in all the leap years. We also made it a point not to miss the Lord's and Mother's birthday Darshans. Of late, since the last two years we have not been able to go for the Lord's birthday Darshan. But invariably we have been going for the Mother's birthday Darshans.

On the 29<sup>th</sup> February 2006, the Golden Jubilee of the Supramental Manifestation upon Earth (1956-2006) was celebrated at the Ashram. On this occasion we were given a beautiful folder, wherein the experience of the first Supramental Manifestation upon earth (29-2-1956), was narrated by the Mother. This also contained a picture of two birds 'Heralds of the Supramental world', painted by Promode Kumar.

Whenever we went to Pondicherry for Darshan, we used to call on Nirodbaran to pay our respects. He never allowed us to touch his feet to pay our respects. I have read all his books, they are so informative and interesting. He was the one who wrote authentically on the Mother and the Lord, and gave to the world the firsthand information about our Gurus. On an earlier visit I had asked him a long searching question about how to find the 'psychic being' to which he had replied, "The very fact you have come here is on account of your psychic being." He had autographed

his book, *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo* for us saying, 'To Ram Neginhal and family with Sri Aurobindo's blessings — 16-8-02'. During the Darshans he was present in the Mother's room, guiding the movement of the visitors.

During our 29<sup>th</sup> February visit, we wanted to call on Nirodbaran, but found him in ill health. He was not recognising anybody. He left his body later on the 17<sup>th</sup> July 2006. What a blessed great soul.

During our various visits we came in contact with M. P. Pandit-ji, Dyuman-bhai, Parichand-ji, Prof. Manoj Das-ji and other disciples of the Ashram. We also used to see other important disciples like Nolini Kanta Gupta, A. B. Purani, K. Amrita, Champaklal, Sethna and others, but from a distance.

Pandit-ji was instrumental in getting us the Mother's darshans in her chamber on a number of occasions, for which we are ever grateful to him.

Dyuman-bhai was a great karmayogi. During our various visits to Pondicherry, we came in close contact with him on account of his keen interest in agriculture. He took us to the Gloria Estate on several occasions with a view to have my technical suggestions in planting useful plants and further developing the estate. My suggestions for developing the estate were adopted by him, and got executed through his field workers like Manindra and others at the estate. Thus he helped us in getting nearer to the Mother in our karmayoga and used us to develop the Gloria Estate.

I had proposed to him to plant lemon trees as the peripheral cultivations so that the Ashram may not need to purchase lemons for the Dining Hall. I had also proposed to grow bananas for the supply of bananas, which would also meet the requirement of the Dining Hall. Raising coconut palms on a large scale was also suggested. In addition suggestions were given to grow sapota (chikku), mango and other fruiting trees. These suggestions were also implemented. We had brought with us and given to him some special varieties of banana suckers of Rasabali and Mitka from Uttara Kannada District for planting at Gloria. Sandalwood, *Leucaena*, and Bamboo seeds also were sent for raising these species in the uncultivated marginal lands of Gloria. Through our association in developing the Gloria Estate, we had the rare privilege of coming close to Dyuman-bhai.

A number of letters received from Dyuman-bhai, some of which are quoted below, show his keen interest in plants and in developing the estate at Gloria. Dyuman-bhai's letters were very brief and to the point, and sometimes as jottings.

In Dyuman-bhai's letter dated 20.11.80 he wrote: "20.11.73-20.11.80 — seven years since we put Her with Sri Aurobindo."

He had further enquired about the availability of seeds of some fodder species like *Leucaena* for raising plants at the Gloria Estate, which I sent to him.

Dyuman-bhai wrote to me, dated 22.2.1981, saying: "*Leucaena* seeds — received with literature. Lake Estate coconut seedling is growing in a pot. You will carry it with you when you come." (We had requested Dyuman-bhai for a coconut fruit to be brought from the Lake Estate, get it germinated after duly getting it blessed

by the Mother, in her room, to take it to our native place for planting.) “Your coconut seeds” (‘Tiptur’ variety, which we had sent from our place for growing at Gloria) “are seedlings, growing. Banana suckers” (which we had sent from our place) “are growing. Our cattle are growing nicely. First week of March our Vijaya and . . . will go to Yercaud for 10 days to get acquainted with bee-culture. We are moving towards the bee-culture in a scientific way. Then we may think of Mercara, Coorg for two months course. Ashoka is ok with cattle and herbal medicines if needed with Mother’s blessings.”

His next letter is dated 19.3.82, wherein he says, “Dear Seturaman, ‘Tree for survival’ a nice slogan indeed. Unless man restricts the growth of population, nothing will survive, neither the tree nor the wildlife. Man shall devour everything; whatever it is I leave it to the future.”

In his letter dated 27.8.83, he wrote to say, “My dear Forester, May I report to you then that on a barren land in 12 years we have grown trees. Gloria Land was barren — waterless. Now it has water. 100 acre land. The West is all neem and some bamboo on border. The North is mango. The East, neem. South, neem — rain tree. 1000 coconut palms, 100 mango plants. Series of neem and other trees. In thousands *Leucaena* and other trees. Total varieties about 50. Sandal plants 100 cm in height some eight survived. Now what do you offer, dear Forester? If banana is considered an ecology 20 acres banana. 1) Sanskrit name is *Arjun* — a big tree — beautiful to look at. Medicinal value is great. 2) Rosewood 3) *Mahuva* 4) *Jamun* 5) *Chikkus*. Like to add these trees also. When you come next let it be a visit in a helicopter — but an easy ground walk — a quiet one. See, visualise something fine. In 5 years Gloria Land becomes a fine productive paddy land, banana, milk, honey, fruits, flowers. Let this Land have your remembrance. This season we are adding 500 coconut plants, and whatever tree planting we can, we do, and dear beautifier” (I was then in charge of greening Bangalore metropolis), “share your beauties here too. With Mother’s blessings. Coming month comes the Director of Andhra Horticulture. Let the Mother inspire him to do what he can. Dyuman.”

In his next letter dated 9.9.83, he wrote, “Dear Seturaman, Yes, beautify Bangalore. Invoke Lakshmi goddess of beauty. She will come and be with you. *Subabul* is wonderful. I.C.A.R. is mad after Gloria’s Glory of *Subabul*. A special research is being put up now. Dr. S. C. Ray came to me. Saw Gloria Land, cattle, workers team, workmen — He decided to help with the Gloria Land. He is now one of us working hand in hand. He is convinced his life mission shall have fulfilment here on the Gloria Land. I fear *Lavang*” (a clove seedling which I had given him for planting at the Gloria) “is gone. Yes, what you propose you bring. Let us have the Bangalore contribution on our Gloria Land. As Bangalore shall remember Gloria with *Leucaena*. For cattle feed nothing excels *Leucaena*. You can tell your various departments. Dr. G. Satyanarayan the head of Horticulture A.P. will be with us in Gloria. He comes specially for Gloria. Yes, I will write to Baburao” (my elder brother,

who was sick) “to rest more and to exert less. For the material world — I wish you have PhD. in forestry. Let us try and work for it. So that you have more powers to work efficiently and will be more effective also. By the way, a pharmacologist of Ananda — Gujarat Agricultural College is asking for the seeds of *nagalingam* flowers — Cannon Ball Tree for some experiments. If available then can you get and send by post to: Dr. J. V. Anjaria, a/4 Veterinary College, Ananda 388001. With Mother’s blessings. 2 kg seeds of Cannon Ball Tree or available.” (I sent these seeds later).

His letter dated 12.3.86 says, “Dear S.G., It was a great joy for me to hear. Ramesh, All India . . . , (*not clear*) was speaking to me. Neginhal has planted flower trees on every road and byroad in Bangalore. It is all green. From Bhavan,” (Aranya bhavan, my office) “he gives out seedlings people want. Mother blesses you. Dyuman”

In his letter dated 30.1.89 Dyuman-bhai wrote, “Dear Seturam, Sandalwood trees are growing, flowering, fruiting. We eat the butter fruits. Neginhals are with us forever on Gloria farm. Gloria is growing your alphonso mango” (a famous variety of mango seedlings sent by us) “plant is flowering. The atmosphere is not suitable for that variety. Local varieties are best. About 100 mango trees are growing. *Chikkus* yes. Jackfruit, yes, in a large way. Thus slowly steadily we are moving onward forward. With Mother’s blessings. Dyuman. I remember all Neginhals”.

In his letter dated 26.2.90 Dyuman-bhai wrote, “Dear Sethuraman, We were missing Baburao” (my brother had expired in January 1990). “His Soul rests in peace where the Mother has kept him. With Mother’s blessings. Dyuman. I have always, I always feel Neginhal family is our family.”

On our visit to Pondicherry for the 29<sup>th</sup> February Golden Day Darshan, we tried to call on Dyuman-bhai in his room. But I was shocked to see him in ill health. He did not recognise anybody. He was lying down, unconcerned about all visitors. This was my last homage to him. He left his body on the 19<sup>th</sup> August 1992. A great karmayogi he was.

(Concluded)

S. G. NEGINHAL

*But knowledge dwells not in the passionate heart;  
The heart’s words fall back unheard from Wisdom’s throne.  
Sri Aurobindo*

(Savitri, CWSA, Vol. 34, p. 615)

## THE LUMINOUS PAST

(Continued from the issue of October 2012)

ON 27<sup>th</sup> July, 1962, at 8 o'clock in the morning, taking in my hands a big framed photograph of Sri Aurobindo's *Mahasamadhi*, I bade goodbye to Jatin-da. As soon as I entered the Ashram I went straight to the Samadhi, and offered flowers and incense, then did my *pranam*. After this I went to the Meditation Hall. There used to be a photograph of Sri Aurobindo where there is the Mother's couch now. I went and did my *pranam* there too. I prayed for their blessing so that I would be able to do this new work successfully. When I turned round after finishing my *pranam* I saw Nolini-da standing there. With a smile on his face, he gave me a blessing-packet from the Mother and said, "Yesterday in the evening, all the children of Jhunjhun Home came to me and said, 'We want only Pramila-di.'"

In this way Nolini-da kept encouraging me. Amrita-da came out and said, "I will remember this auspicious date."

I asked them to come to the boarding and have a look. Both of them said together, "We would have come even if you hadn't called us."

I looked at Nolini-da's feet with the intention of bending down and doing my *pranam* when he said, "How will you do *pranam* with the photograph and the blessing-packet in your hands. You had better go now, there is no time."

\*

I entered Jhunjhun Home at half past eight. Rama-di welcomed me with a radiant smile. With great care, she took out all the keys of the boarding, and having counted them handed them over to me. She had decorated her room beautifully for me. Just then her husband came in a car. They told me, "We are leaving our three children with you. You are now their elder sister, guardian and teacher. We are giving you their responsibility and leaving without a worry. Don't hesitate to be strict with them." As she was taking her leave, Rama-di gifted me a cookery book. By looking at me she had understood that I knew nothing about cooking, so I was happy to receive her thoughtful gift.

\*

When they had both left I suddenly felt a strange sort of loneliness. I entered my room and did *pranam* before the photos of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. I went around the house and had a good look. Quietly I entered the kitchen and saw that

two young maidservants were standing there, waiting for me. After getting to know their names I got down to cooking. They too began to help me. As it was my first day in the boarding, Pavitra-da had given me the day off from the School. At ten o'clock Jatin-da came to see the boarding with a tin of cake and biscuits in his hands. I bowed down to him and offered him a seat in my room. Then I gave him a glass of lemonade. Jatin-da was very pleased to see this beautiful boarding. He said, "I will make arrangements to get some earth from the lake to put in your lily pond." Not only did he get me some earth for the lily pond but he also brought red, blue and yellow water-lilies and planted them there. A month later, on my birthday, I could offer to the Mother the water-lilies that had flowered in that pond.

Every morning I used to send all our dirty clothes to the Laundry. In the evening, a worker would come and deliver the washed and ironed clothes. On 27<sup>th</sup> July Nolini-da wanted me to inform him if I was managing with the kitchen work. I went in the evening and told him, "This afternoon, I gave them *dal*, egg curry, fried brinjals, cake, yogurt and bananas."

Nolini-da told me, "You will be able to do this work."

\*

Two days after my coming to the boarding, the two Tibetan girls, Diky and Pema, came back from the Playground in the evening and told me excitedly, "Didi, today Dada (Pranab-da), wanted to know, by looking at our clean and ironed shirts and shorts, how this sudden transformation had come about. We told him about you. He used to complain everyday about our dirty clothes. He used to say, 'The smell from your clothes is awful.' Today he was happy to know that you had come."

I told them, "You should think a little before speaking. You must say that your clothes are being washed at the laundry now, so you don't have to wear dirty clothes. I do not want to take any credit for this."

Just at that moment we heard Pranab-da's own voice and we were astonished. He called me and said, "Pramila-di, today when I saw Diky's and Pema's spotless clothes I was very happy and came to know about your taking charge of Jhunjhun Home. This is good. Here you are — a tin of sweets. When one is promoted to a new post one must celebrate with sweets."

Holding in my hands the enormous tin of sweets I said, "I can see that you have no idea how few children there are in the boarding. There are only nine of us to eat all these sweets. Why don't you sit down and we can all share these with them and celebrate." He was very happy but he didn't have the time to sit down because after having his wash he had to go and eat with the Mother. He left promising to come back another day.

\*



Later on, the Mother used to send Pranab-da on the first of every month for some work or the other. He would come with games like ludo and teach the little children how to play them in his free time. Everyday he would come down from the Mother's room with bunches of roses, and on his way to his office people would stop him and ask him to give them one as a token of the Mother's blessing. Very generously and with a smile he would distribute them. By seeing the others, some children of Jhunjhun Home also started bringing the roses given by the Mother from him. What a great good fortune it was. As I arranged these flowers given by the Mother in front of the photographs of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo I felt gratitude rise from the depth of my heart.

\*

On Sundays the boys and girls used to go for picnic to the lake. As they used to often come back late, Pranab-da had asked them to make sure that they returned by twelve o'clock. But once they came back at one o'clock. I was worried about them and waited with their lunch served on the table. As soon as they came back they went to see Pranab-da who forbade them to go to lake anymore on Sundays. I felt relieved. In this manner he did a lot for Jhunjhun Home. I will come to all that afterwards.

\*

One Sunday afternoon I was sitting with the children and talking to them about Nolini-da. Suddenly Jayshankar, a seven-year old South Indian boy took me aside and told me, pleading with all his heart, that he wanted me to take him once to Nolini-da. That evening I took him and we arrived at Nolini-da's door. At that time Nolini-da was about to go to the Playground. When he saw us he called us in. I said, "Jayshankar wants to see you."

Nolini-da stood up. Jayshankar went up to Nolini-da and started talking to him in Bengali.

Nolini-da said, "Look at me."

Jayshankar replied, "Wait! It's a bit difficult."

"Why?"

"There isn't enough light in your room. I can't see very well."

"Let's go to the hall outside where it is brighter."

"Yes, let's go."

Nolini-da stood under the light. Jayshankar looked at him. After a while he said, "Now I want to see you from the back." Nolini-da turned around. Then Jayshankar turned and looked at the right side and at the left side. I made a sign asking him to stop. He said, "It's all right, Nolini-da, I have seen you properly."



“Have you seen me very well?”

“Yes, I have seen you very well.”

“So, what did you think? Was it all right?”

“I find you very handsome. I really like you.”

“Is there anything more you would like to see?”

“No, there is nothing more. Now you can go.”

“All right, let me go then. Both of you should also go to the Playground for the meditation.”

“Yes, we will. I like going to the meditation.”

As we were coming away Nolini-da said with joy, “Within eight months he has picked up Bengali very well. Can he read?”

I said, “No, he can’t read, he has only learnt to speak.”

It was this spontaneous way that Nolini-da had with children that touched me so much.

\*

By the Mother’s blessings my life in the boarding continued without any difficulties. The well-wishers of the Ashram would come to visit from time to time. After Pranab-da it was Bharati-di who came. She gave us a beautiful tray, which was made in Paris, for keeping fruits. It was covered with a cloth embroidered with flowers. Rishabhchand-da gave a beautiful cane table and four cane chairs for the children. Uday Singh was so happy that he gave a new Usha<sup>1</sup> machine and an old fridge. All of them informed the Mother before donating these things. Pavitra-da would come to convey to us the Mother’s instructions and advice. Since there were two Tibetan girls here, the Mother was in touch with the Dalai Lama. Pavitra-da often came with matters regarding these girls. The very first day when he came he smelled the aroma of the spices which I was using. With a smile he said, “*Quelle bonne odeur!*” (What a delicious smell!)

(To be continued)

PRAMILA DEVI

(Translated by Sunayana Panda from the original Bengali “*Ujwal Ateet*”)

1. Translator’s note: A sewing machine made by a reputed company.

## A GIFT TO CHERISH

*Smriti Tirtha: Places That Echo The Stormy Days of Sri Aurobindo's Brief Stay in Bengal* by Anshu Banerjee. Number of pages: 168. Publisher: Dipak Gupta, Puducherry.

THE period 1906-1910 is undoubtedly one of the most notable periods of Sri Aurobindo's life. After observing the political condition of the country and the activities of the leaders of the Indian National Congress ever since his return to India in 1893 as well as participating passively in the freedom struggle for more than half a decade, Sri Aurobindo decided to plunge into active politics in 1906. After obtaining a privilege leave from the Baroda State Service, Sri Aurobindo arrived in Bengal to participate in the Barisal Conference and also to tour extensively in many parts of the land. In June 1906, he returned to Baroda, took a year's leave without pay with effect from 18 June 1906 and came back to Bengal in July to devote his time to serve his motherland. From July 1906 to February 1910 Sri Aurobindo resided in Calcutta at various locations. In the book under review, the author, Anshu Banerjee, has presented in great detail a faithful account of those places which have been blessed by Sri Aurobindo's presence.

The book begins with the house where Sri Aurobindo was born, that is, 8 Shakespeare Sarani (which now houses Sri Aurobindo Bhavan of Calcutta) and ends with the residence of Motilal Roy at Chandernagore. Apart from these two addresses, he stayed at 12 Wellington Square (the palatial house of his friend Raja Subodh Chandra Mallik), Choku Khansama Lane, 23 Scott's Lane, 48 Grey Street (it was in this house that he was arrested on 2 May 1908 for his suspected involvement in the Muzzaffarpur bomb outrage, the trial of which came to be known as the 'Alipore Bomb Trial') and No. 6 College Square (the residence of his uncle, Krishna Kumar Mitra). Apart from the said addresses, a number of other locations like 191/1 Boubazar Street, 164 and 166 Boubazar Street (which housed the National College and School), 2/1 Creek Row (which served as the office of the *Bande Mataram* journal), Baithak Khana Road (where Sri Aurobindo was married to Mrinalini Devi on 30 April 1901), Serpentine Lane (the residence of Sri Aurobindo's father-in-law Bhupal Chandra Bose, where Sri Aurobindo had stayed from October to December 1907 during a serious illness) and No. 4 Shyampukur Lane (the office of *Karmayogin* and *Dharma*, the journals which Sri Aurobindo edited) have also been graced by his presence.

The author has incorporated the histories of these places as well as the notable incidents which occurred in the aforesaid locations and presented them remarkably well. The historical significance of these houses is immense since they "echo" — as

aptly stated in the subtitle of the book— “the stormy days of Sri Aurobindo’s brief stay in Bengal.” These houses have witnessed the creation of history. For instance, at 12 Wellington Square — which served Sri Aurobindo as his political headquarters — a number of decisions relating to the administration of *Bande Mataram* were taken; several meetings of the Nationalists were also held in this house. With the exception of the Alipore Jail where Sri Aurobindo stayed as an undertrial prisoner for a whole year, it was at 12 Wellington Square that Sri Aurobindo stayed for the maximum period of time. It was at this same place that Rabindranath Tagore arrived to congratulate Sri Aurobindo when the latter was acquitted in the *Bande Mataram* Sedition case in September 1907.

Each house has a story to tell and such stories have been well narrated by the author. He should be thanked and congratulated for endeavouring to collect all the stories and gifting them to us through this book. Though this book is mainly based on secondary sources like A. B. Purani’s *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, Dr. Amalendu De’s *Raja Subodh Chandra Mallik and His Times*, Charu Chandra Dutt’s *Purano Kothar Uposonghar* and the *Sri Aurobindo Archives and Research* journals, there is no lack of freshness in it. This book is a beautiful reminder to every inhabitant of Bengal, especially Calcutta, of the historical significance of each of the buildings where Sri Aurobindo had stayed. In this book, the reader can also have a glimpse of Sri Aurobindo’s political life and activities. Three chapters have been devoted to his jail-term as well.

Another special attraction of this book is a translation of the poem *Mrinale Aurobindo* which was composed by the bride’s relatives on the occasion of Sri Aurobindo’s marriage. The original poem — which is also included in this book — is a rare treat to researchers for in none of the biographies of Sri Aurobindo does one come across this poem.

This book is truly a gift to cherish.

ANURAG BANERJEE

*What gives most the feeling of inferiority, of limitation, smallness, impotence, is always this turning back upon oneself, this shutting oneself up in the bounds of a microscopic ego. One must widen oneself, open the doors. And the best way is to be able to concentrate upon what one is doing instead of concentrating upon oneself.*

*The Mother*

(*Questions and Answers 1950-51*, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 4, p. 364)

## WITH THE SIMPLICITY OF A CHILD — BRINGING US CLOSER TO SRI AUROBINDO AND THE MOTHER

*Champaklal Speaks*. Published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, First edition: 1975. Edited by M. P. Pandit. Fourth edition: 2011. Revised and enlarged by Roshan. Pages 437. Price Rs 245/-.

CHAMPAKLAL-JI needs no introduction to those familiar with Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Having come to Sri Aurobindo in 1921, he is among the very first foundational pillars of the Ashram life and Sri Aurobindo's work of terrestrial transformation. Just around the Siddhi Day (24<sup>th</sup> November 1926), the Mother noted that there are four pillars needed to bring down immortality. Of them she remarked, 'Aspiration is Champaklal.' In fact his life is so inseparable from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother that to think of Champaklal is to think of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. He had the rare privilege of Grace to be in the personal attendance of both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Quite naturally, not only was he privy to many subtle and profound mysteries of the workings of the Avatars but by the force of his intense devotion and dedicated one-pointed service, he grew into yoga as naturally as a flower blossoms by the touch of the sun. No wonder the Mother complimented him by saying that he was her lion and had inwardly arrived at the status of a demi-god. Sri Aurobindo is reported to have once observed that he did not need thousands of disciples for the accomplishment of his work. It was enough if there were one hundred sincere samples of humanity ready to give themselves completely for the work of terrestrial transformation. On one of his birthdays, the Mother remarked that Champaklal was indeed one of the hundred that Sri Aurobindo needed! No wonder, Sri Aurobindo bestowed upon Champaklal the exceptional grace of repeatedly embracing him moments before leaving his body, a special Grace indeed and a sign of the extent to which Champaklal had grown intimate with the being of Sri Aurobindo.

Quite naturally then, when Champaklal speaks, it is They who speak through him. As M. P. Pandit-ji summarised it so beautifully: "For what Champaklal speaks is nothing but Mother Sri Aurobindo, Mother Sri Aurobindo." Indeed there are many books written on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother by way of reminiscences and each discloses a unique facet of Their life. But few have this rare distinction of such closeness, both physically and psychically, giving to the accounts an authenticity that is not easy. But Champaklal is not just a keen observer of whatever happens outside — for that, he of course is, — but even more importantly he is one who is

blessed with a psychic vision and an intuitive understanding of the ways of the Divine. And of course he had the unique privilege not only to have observed and learnt by experience the complex ways of the Divine dealings with our humanity but also on many occasions actually asked and received the inner sense and purpose of the Divine *lila*, even in the seemingly smallest details of Their action. For instance, on page 169, Champaklal recounts the Mother's way in moulding a person's inner attitude through the seemingly simple act of handing a flower to a boy who would come to see Her. One is filled with wonder as one recognises the ways of the Divine even in the smallest of actions. For truly for the Divine there is nothing small or big, He pours Himself equally in the burning of galaxies as in the formation of a tiny little dew-drop. But each one receives according to his capacity and readiness. And Champaklal is ever ready to receive and to serve or rather to serve and to receive. It is this selfless giving of himself in all his entirety to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo that made him ready to receive the very special grace, one coveted even by the gods, a closeness to the embodied Divine, a privilege not easy even for the saints and sages.

But Champaklal's generosity and unselfish self-giving does not end here. He also goes on to share his gifts with other kindred and aspiring souls. He shares the joy and the smile of the Lord that is ever overflowing from his childlike heart. But behind his childlike heart there lies the deep wisdom that comes through a vast surrender. Yes, though the countenance and bearing of Champaklal-ji always reminded one of the ancient *tapaswis* of Bharatbhoomi, yet his strength lay in an absolute and complete surrender to the Divine Mother. The Mother once remarked that 'the Being who wants to manifest in you (Champaklal) demands complete surrender.' We may in fact say without any exaggeration that Champaklal epitomises the spirit of true surrender that in itself demands an effort that is not less exacting than any austerity. The two were so beautifully intertwined within his personality that sometimes it was difficult to distinguish whether one was meeting a great *tapaswi* emerging straight from the hoary past of India or if one were in the presence of a child, divinely simple, divinely smiling, full of trust and an innocent candid heart unaware of the cares and anxieties, crookedness and cunning of the ways of the world. Perhaps it is this quality that helped him most to stay close to the embodied supramental Sun. For it is not easy to be so close to the sun. No wonder when someone prayed to the Mother that he wants to serve Her like Champaklal, She replied: "If you want to become like that you must undergo a very hard discipline. Ask him how hard a discipline I have given him." Much later She was to tell Champaklal: "When people ask for work and want to live with me, I give them your name and say, 'First you become unselfish like Champaklal.'"<sup>1</sup> When Champaklal speaks the world had better listen for never will this earth see in the near future

1. *Champaklal Speaks*: preface: p. xv.

another Champaklal and for a long time to come never will we be able to witness the profoundest of joys that the earth experiences when it comes in contact with the embodied Divine. Champaklal brings a little of this joy closer to us, if we know how to listen, with a heart as of a child and the will sincerely turned towards the Lord and Master of Yoga, ever keen to understand and know His ways so that we too can serve Him, in our own little way.

\*

The book will appeal to a wide variety of readers. First and foremost, it will appeal to those who love the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, since this book brings Them so very close to us, physically so to say. It is as if one were witnessing once again the Divine's earthly *lila* in front of one's eyes, a *lila* that truly no words can capture and no eyes recount. And yet this impossible task is done by Champaklal surely by Their grace. What volumes of spiritual philosophy and intellectual deliberations cannot do and what even books on sadhana cannot easily achieve, that *Champaklal Speaks* does with the simplicity of a child, that is to bring us closer to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. For indeed, is that not the goal of all our intellectual strivings and spiritual efforts? Thus seen we can truly say that the book is not just stories about the Mother and Sri Aurobindo as recounted by Champaklal, but a kind of spiritual action, one that leads us quite unsuspectingly into some inmost *sanctum sanctorum* of our inner being where we begin to witness in the heart's secluded shrine 'the signals of eternity', to borrow a phrase from *Savitri*.

\*

But if that were the only or even the main value of the book, then it may not appeal to the wider audience. The book however serves many a different category of readers. To those who aspire to do the Divine Work, the book offers many useful insights. To those who seek to understand the occult side of the Divine action there is enough in the book to reflect and ponder. Then there is also a lot of precious material for someone who wishes to know about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's outer and to a certain extent the inner side of Their life. We have for instance this simple observation that Champaklal makes about the Mother's "sleep" that is confirmed by the Mother: "People think that I am sleeping but I do not sleep. I go deep deep inside. But all the while I know all about my surroundings. I hear even the ticking of the clock." Champaklal further recounts on the same page that "even when in trance she remained fully conscious. Outwardly it seemed that she has gone within and was unaware of all that was going on around her. It often happened that after coming out of her trance she astonished us by relating what was going on outside during that period." In fact such books as this are the only authentic biographies of Sri Aurobindo and

the Mother for they bring out that aspect of Their life that any mere superficial and casual or a pretentious biographer is bound to miss for it has not been on the visible surface for men to see, except of course for some privileged souls like Champaklal who not only felt and saw but also chose to share what others cannot see because they either do not have the eye to see it or were simply not there when the great *lila* was going on right before them. Champaklal is the seer who is sharing with earth's blind children the sight granted to him by Their infinite grace. And we too, reading this book are filled with wonder and joy and even if for a while feel awake to the nostalgic fragrance of the days when God moved among men and lived with them as one of them.

\*

Though it is more than evident that the book could not have come out without the Mother's express sanction and Will, for nothing happens in Champaklal's life that is not the direct expression of Their Will or has not been sanctioned by Them, yet one cannot thank Shri M. P. Pandit-ji and Roshan enough for taking the lead and doing this labour of love for all of us. Not only is the material neatly arranged but also the addition of some rare photographs and, towards the end, much interesting material such as spiritual games played by the Mother, Birthday Messages, Correspondence, Notes and memos as well as remarks and observations of the Mother add to its value. To say that the book is a must for all who aspire to understand the ways of the Divine through simple stories and recollections of one of the most memorable spiritual personages of the past century would be an understatement. To say that it ranks among the finest of spiritual literatures, like the *Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna*, will be closer to its true worth, but not enough. All that one can say is that the book is not only a priceless treasure but also a timeless one, the like of which we are not likely to see in at least the next few centuries and possibly the millennium.

ALOK PANDEY

*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.*

Sri Aurobindo

(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 5)

*Few are those from whom the Grace withdraws, but many are those who withdraw from the Grace.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 613)*

With Compliments from Well-wishers



Equality is to remain unmoved within in all conditions.

Sri Aurobindo

*(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 661)*



[www.heliosbooks.com](http://www.heliosbooks.com)