

# Collaboration

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# So Human

By Gordon Korstange

ONCE UPON A TIME I was sitting in a notorious Pondicherry watering hole with an decidedly inebriated American Ashramite devotee. It was Darshan evening and we had been part of the silent throng that had stood below the balcony to witness the Mother witnessing us. After recounting a personal darshan experience with her, he looked across the table at me and said, slurring his words, "She's so human."

At the time, living 15 miles from Pondicherry and working as a Peace Corps volunteer, I couldn't understand his words. The writings of Sri Aurobindo seemed so magisterial, so distant. The Mother's words were more accessible, but she herself kept to her room, emerging for only those few eagerly awaited moments, four times a year.

Then, hovering on the edge of the Yoga, I read *Twelve Years With Sri Aurobindo*, by Nirodbaran. It is an account of "... the most sublimely enigmatic Person of the modern Age, one whom thousands have felt to be a veritable God-Man ...." (probably the best one-sentence description of Sri Aurobindo in all Auro-literature). I gobbled the book up. Suddenly the author of supremely measured, interminable sentences and the thin figure, standing on her balcony staring out to sea, became two people working powerfully together and caring for each other:

Such trance moods (of the Mother's) were more particularly manifest at night during the collective meditation below, and in that condition she would come to Sri Aurobindo's room with a heap of letters, reports, account-books, etc., to read, sign or answer during Sri Aurobindo's walking time. But her pious intention would come to nothing for no sooner did she begin than the trance overtook her. Sri Aurobindo took a few extra rounds and sat in his chair watching the Mother while she with the book open, pen in hand, had traveled into another world from whose bourn it was perhaps

difficult to return. He would watch her with an indulgent smile and try all devices to bring her down to earth. When at last the Mother did wake up, Sri Aurobindo would say with a smile, "We haven't made much progress!" (*Twelve Years With Sri Aurobindo*, p. 76-77)

Nirodbaran (and I the reader) looked on at these "so human" (and yet not) goings-on with an immense curiosity about all the tiny details of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's lives, searching for clues to their real lives within. During cold weather, for example, Sri Aurobindo refused to wear anything on his feet. "Did it imply that at all moments, even at night, the feet of the Divine must be available as the haven of refuge to the needy and the devoted?" Nirodbaran wonders. "It may not be too fantastic to suppose that many beings came in their subtle bodies to offer their pranams at his feet." But when he asked Sri Aurobindo about it, the sublimely enigmatic answer was, "That is the Indian custom."

Yet there was enough in the book to satisfy my wavering yearnings. One passage I was never to forget:

... (from about 10:30 a.m.) there would be a long gap till 3 or 4 p.m. when Sri Aurobindo was all alone ... All that was visible to our naked eye was that he sat silently in his bed, afterwards in the capacious armchair, with his eyes wide open just as any other person would. Only he passed hours and hours thus, changing his position at times and making himself comfortable; the eyes moving a little, and though usually gazing at the wall in front, never fixed *rratak-like* at any particular point. Sometimes the face would beam with a bright smile without any apparent reason, much to our amusement, as a child smiles in sleep. Only it was a waking sleep, for as we passed across the room, there was a dim recognition of our shadow-like movements ... When he wanted something, his voice seemed to come from a distant cave ... " (pp. 47-48)

Somehow, this most un-human scene of Sri Aurobindo meditating (if one could call it that) became a tableau beckoning me to try the silence, as

though I couldn't believe all that I had read in *The Life Divine* and *Savitri* without verification from Nirodbaran. This was Sri Aurobindo at work, though Nirod. like most of us, can only say that, "How he was performing all these operations is beyond my grey matter!"

In our Guru-based Yoga, many of us need the personal inspiration of those like Nirodbaran and **Amal** Kiran who had such "human" contact with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. We cling, like kittens, to stories like the one **Amal** told me about receiving the first cantos of *Savitri* (see p. 12). And Nirod, in *Twelve Years With Sri Aurobindo* and in the voluminous correspondence, has cast himself deliberately as a yogic everyperson, asking the "dumb" questions that all of us would love to ask too. "I wanted," he says, "to show what kind of stuff we were that Mother and Sri Aurobindo had to fashion into a new race ... Most of us, in truth, were common people, and knew very little of yoga. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother took us as they found us." (Introduction to Nirodbaran's *Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*, p. xii).

It is Nirodbaran who graces us with this luminous sentence and ultimate comfort from Sri Aurobindo: "But within there is a soul and above there is Grace. 'This is all you know or need to know,' and if you don't, well, even then you have at least somehow stumbled into the path and have got to remain there till you get haled along it far enough to wake up to the knowledge. Amen." (ibid., xv)

The day that Nirod came to Auroville and gave the talk that is transcribed in this issue was one of high expectations. Official contact between the Ashram and Auroville is still somewhat circumscribed, even though years have passed since the troubles between the Sri Aurobindo Society and Aurovilians. His personal presence there made palpable that "so human" connection which is such a large part of this Yoga and which **Santosh** Krinsky feels so deeply in his memorial to M.P. Pandit (p. 16).

The yogic human relationships we have, whether it be to those who were physically close to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, or to each other, can, of course, be a substitution for our

connection with the Divine. That is the nub of the recurring debate over the content of the All-USA-Meeting: should it be sadhana or socializing? Discourses or discussion or discovery? Perhaps that is one of the reasons why

A.U.M. continues—so that we can find a way to communicate everything we need to say to each other using more and more silence.

In this issue, we honor some of our elders (including Seyril Schochen). In

their continuing presence and inspiration they provide signposts and caravanserais on our stumbling journey towards the Unknown. They are like Nirod's letters, "... a golden chain by which I am bound and drawn willy-nilly towards the destiny the Guru has foreseen."

# A Talk by Nirodbaran

Pitanga Hall, Auroville,  
August 14, 1993

**W**ELL, BROTHERS AND sisters, your invitation came to me as a mystic surprise, and I accepted it readily. I am very thankful to you, as well as grateful, for giving me this opportunity to meet you; thankful, because today, as you know, is the eve of Sri Aurobindo's birthday—a very auspicious occasion; grateful to you because your invitation has made me think of Sri Aurobindo very often, pray to him to give me inspiration, to make me ready and to prepare me so that I may truly convey to you something of what Sri Aurobindo was.

A constant remembrance for about a month is something which is a blessing. Most of the time we forget our gurus, but on these occasions you do remember, and, as you know, remembrance of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo goes a great way in our life. So I am grateful to you for giving me this opportunity, which I believe, has been ordained by Him... that's why I called it a "mystic surprise," not a human surprise: there was some touch of Sri Aurobindo behind. Whether I shall be able to communicate to you what I want to do, now depends on Him. If I fail, it is his failure (laughter); if I succeed it is his success; I have nothing to be proud of, and I have nothing to be ashamed of, because He has brought me here to serve His own purpose—I never thought of it. So the entire responsibility devolves on him alone: don't blame me (laughter), or don't praise me either.

## How It Began

My friend Mr. Franz has given you some background to this talk. I may

say something more to place in the context. It is a very short introduction, just to give you the necessary details, because some of you may not know what the Ashram life was like when we came here—in the thirties.

After Sri Aurobindo's great realization in the year 1926—we call this the descent of the Overmind in the physical—he went into seclusion, leaving the charge of the Ashram in the hands of the Divine Mother. This withdrawal was imperative for his farther sadhana; but in order to keep in touch with the world or earth, with the inmates, and in direct communication with them, correspondence was substituted; we, the inmates, were asked to write to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo about our daily condition of sadhana, all our troubles and difficulties, in mind, vital and physical, so that, by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo's help, directly or subtly, we could be benefitted.

Mind you, most of the inmates knew very little about spirituality or sadhana—one of them was myself. It was almost like an infant class. Sri Aurobindo used to spend eight or nine hours a day over this correspondence. We were free to write about everything in our inner or outer history, and he was going over it for 8 or 9 hours every day and giving his answers.

In addition, there were three silent "darshans"—Mother's birthday, His birthday, and His Realization-day. These were silent darshans - a time when the sadhaks could see the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and do their pranam, receive their direct blessings, and receive also experiences communicated to them through subtle ways.

## Correspondence Course

It was at this time I came. There were about 100 or 150 members in 1933; most of them were of the common literate class—only a few were cultured. I too began to write to him about my sadhana, about which I knew very little indeed. There were also cultural activities at that time—the literary, poetry part of sadhana, poetry as part of sadhana.

During this correspondence course, for some mysterious reason, I developed a personal intimacy with Sri Aurobindo. I asked him the reason for this intimacy; he said, "Look into yourself." He gave me the privilege of asking questions on various subjects—except politics. Politics was taboo. Still I was able to extract from him here and there something about politics. Anyhow, he used to address me at times, "My dear sir," "My dear fellow," etc. When I wanted to develop the literary faculty he not only gave me inspiration, but even corrected my infantile works, swearing at the same time at my wrong rhythm, metre, in English poems. He used to swear: "Damn it," "Devil,"—can you imagine Sri Aurobindo swearing like that?

In this way he made me a poet, saying, "Now a poet is born." But during the darshan, he was quite a different person altogether. There we saw him—it is my personal impression, others may have other impressions—as our god Shiva, impersonal Shiva, majestically sitting in simple grandeur, with an ineffable mien.

This is the background. Now I can start with the subject. The subject is: "Sri Aurobindo as I saw Him."



Nirodbaran at Pitanga Hall

## Sri Aurobindo's Accident

He went into seclusion in 1926 and remained in seclusion, corresponding with us in this way. But in 1938... During this time war-clouds were gathering in the West, most of you will know about it: Hitler was on the rise, he had become almost a maniac, he wanted to conquer the whole world, and he had become a terrible menace to civilization. So what happened? Sri Aurobindo knew that war was bound to break out, but for one reason or another, for his spiritual purposes, he did not want the war to break out immediately; and he has said, if you can believe it, that he pushed away the chance or danger of war breaking out in 1938—postponed it by one year. And it happened in 1939. But while pushing it back he had to pay a price—the accident.

The accident took place when he was going to his bathroom in the middle of the night. He fell down—broke his right thigh. His accident gave us the opportunity, at the cost of serious danger to him, to enter into His sanctum. That was an opportunity, a golden opportunity for us, to see him, to come in contact with him, and to speak with him. So now I come to my subject: what I saw.

I have seen him, heard his voice, have served him, received his grace, have lived with him day and night, for twelve momentous years. I have

observed in those days all His outerlife: steady, unshaking, poised, serene, everything emerging from a wide consciousness—that was my perception: an impersonal supreme Purusha. I had the firm conviction, or I had the great impression, that he was a wonder, something unique.

Now his entire life that we have seen over these twelve years can be roughly divided into two categories: the main one is the impersonal aspect, and then there is the personal, or personal-impersonal, aspect. I will explain to you why I say this. First of all, for the impersonal

aspect, I will tell you what I saw. I will not explain, I will give you some very living pictures, one after another, as we have seen them.

## Sri Aurobindo's Impersonality

The first picture that presented itself to us was this: Some of us were called after he had the accident, to help him, to serve him, medically or otherwise. It happened, as you know, on the darshan day, in the early morning. People had come from all parts of India, and even, as some of you may know, Miss Wilson, the daughter of President Wilson. She was somehow attracted to Sri Aurobindo and she had come to see him; and on that very day his accident happened. She was very much disappointed, she came with so much hope, however...

So when we were called, we saw him lying on the floor of his room like a helpless child. It was very pathetic. It came as a big shock to us. And he had been lying there for about two hours or more, for there was nobody else except the Mother on the upper floor, and the Mother was in the other wing. He did not shout, he did not call, he did not make any noise. He had been there, we were told, for about two hours, until the Mother came. How did she come? The Mother told us she had an inner communication—she felt that something was wrong with Sri Auro-

bindo, so she came, and then she sent for us.

But the picture that we saw—you can imagine; his body was rather massive and he was lying flat. High right thigh was fractured. No noise, no movement. So the Mother came, asked him... he gave only one or two monosyllabic answers: "Yes," "No"... like that. We were all surprised and shocked. This is the first thing. His body—I did not know for what reason, or whether it was an illusion—his body was glowing with something, I do not know what. And he was very beautiful to look at... as I said, he was lying there like a big baby, a big bonny baby. Before the doctors came, it took a long time, and for that long time he was lying on the floor, so the Mother was asking him, "Is it paining you? Where is the pain?" - putting him one or two questions.

Then the doctors came. He was removed to the cot... the cot some of you have seen there... (He was quite heavy. But he did not make any sound at all)... and he was confined to it for about two months. During this period when he was confined to bed, he was almost totally silent—no groaning of pain or anything: something like that (gesture indicating silent immobility), all the time—except for some natural calls. For one month - it was something mysterious—he hardly spoke at all, simply remained like that.

Later on, when he was all right and we were talking with him, he divulged the secret. If you can believe it, so much the better; if you can't, it doesn't matter. He said, "I was trying..." It was a terrible pain, as some of you may know bone pain is excruciating, particularly these big bones, so... "I was trying to transform this pain into ecstasy." Spiritually, Sri Aurobindo said, it is done, it is possible; but such an excruciating, severe pain, he said, he had not had before, so it was a big job, but finally he succeeded: that excruciating pain became transformed into ananda.

This is the first picture that he saw.

## His Writing

Afterwards, when he became all right, after two months or so, the Mother asked him, now, since he was all right, to start some work. She was always encouraging people to work. She did

not like people to lie inert. So she made everything ready and set him at a table. That is the Mother's way. Then he started writing. What did he start with? He composed some sonnets, then he started on *The Life Divine*—because there was a demand from the Calcutta Centre people: they said *The Life Divine* is in demand, so we should like to have from Sri Aurobindo, as a first book, *The Life Divine*.

So he started work on *The Life Divine*—rewriting, revising and writing new chapters, sitting on the bed, sitting at the table. And we saw a really wonderful way of writing: he has told us that he was not writing from imagination or thinking, and the Mother has also said that everything used to come down from a silent plane into his pen. He went on writing and writing like that until the three volumes of *The Life Divine* were finished—not looking up anything, not consulting any book, he went on writing and writing.

The Mother has said, as some of you may know, that in the beginning, during the period of the *Arya*, he used to simply sit at the typewriter and write, typing on, typing on... That is a phenomenon beyond our imagination, but that is what we actually saw with our own eyes. I had very much wanted to know how he wrote... so there was an example, an illustration before me.

After that he started work on his poetic magnum opus, his wonderful epic *Savitri*. He began to compose it in the same way—went on writing and writing. Those of you who have read *Savitri* will know the second book, "The World Stair"—13 or 14 cantos; all these he finished—as a first book—in that way, without consulting anything, his hand moving on and moving on as if a machine has been set in motion... This is a wonder—without any exaggeration, in all simplicity.

And he was impervious to all the reactions of the body. Heat did not affect him, food did not affect him... He was above the demands of the body. During the hot season - you know the Pondicherry heat, perhaps you feel something here—he was sweating, the whole body was wet with perspiration; and he was sitting on the bed, the bedsheets were all soaked; he was not aware of it. One could say that he was not living in the body at that time.

The Mother used to come with a

drink; you have seen the cot—she would be standing there; he was oblivious of it. Then suddenly he would notice her—

"Oh!" The Mother gives him the tumbler, he takes it, gives it back, the Mother gives a smile, and he goes on writing... not cognizant of anything. We were there, but he did not notice us. We were moving about like shadows—he had no recognition of anybody. He who had been so intimate with me, he didn't know me. He didn't know me.

So that was the impersonality of Sri Aurobindo. And that impersonality was the hallmark of his being or consciousness. We shall hear more about it later on. This was about his writing.

## Other Pictures

About his eating... The Mother used to take care of his physical needs. He used to eat while the Mother served Him, very silently—not a word, unless the Mother broached some subject—very quietly, very slowly. By the way, all his movements were very slow, very deliberate—even his speech: a few, simple things, as if he was thinking what to say; but it was not so at all, everything about him was conscious. Only I don't know yet how he fell down—but there he has given a reason; I don't think I need to go into that. If I start in that way, it will take two or three hours, and I myself will fall down.

So, just important pictures about his way of life: mind you, I had no inkling of his internal life; I can give only my external observations: "As I have seen him," as I said. So this is about his food, drink, way of life.

Then, other pictures now... war had broken out: Hitler had gone mad with power, ambition, destruction... over-running one country after another. So we were all calculating, wondering what would be next. One evening as I was going in to Sri Aurobindo, the news came: Hitler had invaded Holland; he knew that I had entered. He simply gave me the news: "Hitler

has invaded Holland—we shall see." Three words. Nothing more. "We shall see."

And that brings me to say, too, that in his words he was very, very reticent; conscious, and reticent. He wouldn't say one word more than necessary. So he simply said, "We shall see."

Then, in the early morning hours, he used to sit on the bed, quiet, calm, concentrated

into himself, looking in front, as if in meditation; those hours were for concentration, sitting simply without any fuss. At that time he had finished his writing... proofs were coming from the Press, he had to see them. So he told me, "I should be left alone during this time, unless there is something very urgent." These were his few words. Sometimes they would give an urgent red signal: "This is very urgent." Then I used to go very stealthily, softly, from behind. He would not look at me but ask, "What is it?"... I'm giving you some impressions of the impersonality that He was.

There were many other examples. After the war broke out, the Cripps mission came to India. Sri Aurobindo sent a message to the leaders of the Congress Party—of course uncalled-for, which he should not have done!—to accept Cripps' offer. I don't know what happened in Delhi. We had some news: they rejected Sri Aurobindo's advice. The news came to him. Sri Aurobindo said with a small smile: "I knew it." That's all. There was no other reaction: "I knew it. I have done some *niskama karma*." *Niskama* means without desire for fruit; that is the *Gita's* *karmayoga*. There was no reaction at all. Only a sweet smile at the corner of his lips. Impersonal... this is what we call impersonal: no reaction at all of any kind.

Then, the next picture: As I said, he had conquered or outgrown the body's needs. The Mother used to bring His meals. After the accident, the meal used to come quite early; but by and by it began to shift from 10 to 11, 1, 2, 3, 4 o'clock. But he had no complaint, he was waiting very silently, perhaps

I have seen him,  
heard his voice,  
have served him,  
received his grace,  
have lived with  
him day and night,  
for twelve  
momentous years

indrawn or concentrating-no sign of hunger, or of appetite. Appetite there was, perhaps, but it did not trouble him.

And again at night-we have seen it, we were working, we kept waiting-the Mother served his meal at 10, 11 o'clock, and he would go to bed at 1 or 2 o'clock; yet there was no complaint. So we too got a little *punya karma* by our waiting! These are some glimpses from the external side. A colleague used to say that Sri Aurobindo's yoga of surrender had been accomplished by only two people - the Mother and Sri Aurobindo himself: the surrender of the one to the other.

## The Personal Aspect

I think this is enough to give you a picture, a rough picture, of his impersonality, which, as I said before, was the hallmark of his being. So now I come to the personal aspect:

There were also times when he came out of his inner absorption; and these were the most beautiful times for us. He used to talk with us, to exchange views with us; and we could ask any question-he used to answer slowly with a very sweet smile, usually in a few words. But he would never look at us, and hardly ever called us by name. We were four or five people around him, one question coming from the back, another question coming this side-we were trying to target him with all these spears, with all these questions. He was smiling, taking them and answering in one or two sentences; but never for one second would he look at us. He would look in front or downward, and give a *smile*—a sense of *humour* was always playing on his lips-and cut jokes with us, made puns... quite a different person from what we have seen before. But again, impersonality in this: he would not look at us; he would hardly call us by name. I don't know why it was so, but it was so. So this is one instance of how personality and impersonality can be together. But one thing we must remember: he never lost contact with his higher consciousness even when he was most human.

I don't know much about philosophy, but he has said in his philosophy that the Divine is both personal and

impersonal. It tits him very well.

If you don't mind, I can repeat a joke... it is a little coarse, but for Sri Aurobindo, the Divine, there is no such thing as 'coarse' or 'refined'.

The war was going on, and everything had to be rationed; even for Sri Aurobindo, the Mother rationed: she told Champaklal, "He will be given two soaps, two cloths..." and this and that. Food was not rationed, luckily. At that time-now I am speaking medically-we had to watch over the clearance of his bowels. The bowels must be clear, otherwise there might be trouble. He also, after passing his stool, used to look at how much he had passed.

So one day we noticed that he had passed very little. "Sir," we said, "what is this? Please try harder-use your Force."

"It is war economy" he replied. (outburst of laughter) You see... we all burst out laughing! "It is war economy." That is Sri Aurobindo. He was not one of those stiff, hard and dry yogis like coconuts. Once I asked him, "Where do you get all this humor from? You are a great scholar, you are an intellectual, you are a great yogi... where does this come from?" His laconic answer was "rasawai sah." That means he is all *rasa*, delight.

So this is another picture of him.

The Mother has said he is the supramental avatar - the avatar of the Supermind. But from this account of him that I have given, you will at least admit that he is somebody wonderful, somebody unique.

## Sri Aurobindo's Equanimity

When we were talking about people, he never criticized anybody. We might discuss somebody, or a person's views, but personal criticism was never in his nature. He was always loving and generous, always vast, always conscious about what he was saying; there was never a moment when he criticized anybody in any way. He was above what we call ordinary human emotion. He was above, as it says in the *Gita*, all these attachments, absolutely free. He would not be troubled in the least even if the whole world went into *pralaya*. That was the *samata* he had acquired by his *tapasya*.

Mind you, it was not inborn. He has told us that from his very childhood, for whatever reason, he had a certain amount of equanimity-he never cared for positions, ambitions. So that equanimity he had. But he said, "I was not born perfect. I had many difficulties in my life, many faults, many failings, many weaknesses... but by sheer *sadhana*, *tapasya*, I have transformed my *nature*"...from what it was, to what he had become. It was all *due* to hard *tapasya* and effort, to change the nature. I never saw him lose his temper. He was always affable, always sweet, always very kind in everything. He said, "Anger was foreign to my nature." He was the *mukta purusha*, as we would put it.

Whether you accept him as an avatar or not, it doesn't matter. But according to my personal view at least... I have not seen him as *avatar*—with all the glow, all the beauty, all the largeness and splendor as Arjuna saw Krishna in his *vishvarupa*—but from my observation of his nature, of his daily way of life, of his unfathomable mind of knowledge, I am firmly convinced that he was a perfect man, above all frailties and foibles. He himself said, "I have nothing human in me."

There are many great men, but I think none of them could be called a "perfect man." You cannot become that by your own personal effort. You can become that only by the practice of yoga: by realization, becoming identified with the Divine, one with the Divine. Then only can you become a perfect man.

I suppose you know of many great men in our country; I can mention two: Mahatma Gandhi, and in Bengal, Rabindranath Tagore. Mahatma Gandhi had many other qualities, but I wouldn't say that he was a perfect man; because he was very subject to depression and other feelings... he himself said, "I have committed a Himalayan blunder..." And one cannot be perfect without being a yogi. So it comes to the same thing as what the Mother said... The Mother went one step further, saying that he was an Avatar, a supramental avatar. I must say that only such avatars can be perfect men. In our tradition Sri Krishna, Rama, Buddha, Christ, they are all perfect men, avatars. I don't

know, some people may differ. it doesn't matter. But where Sri Aurobindo says "One man's perfection can still save the world," he means much more. In this sense I consider him a perfect man.

## Sri Aurobindo's Passing

When Sri Aurobindo was passing away, in 1950, before he passed away he embraced and kissed his great *bhakta* Champaklal three, four, five times.

We saw it, we were struck with wonder-amazement! When he has been so impersonal even in his personality, what is this we see? How is it possible? But it was possible. When we were waiting for the end this one thing we have seen... his vast recognition of his *bhaktu* for his devoted service.

In passing I may also mention-not for any vain glory-that also, just three minutes before his passing, he called me: "Nirod..." he called me 'Nirod' directly for the first time. That thing is imprinted on my soul. He has written many things in the personal style-they are there in the book; but this was face to face... Champaklal got embraces, I got one sweet phrase: "Nirod, give me some water." That was the final reward for me, and it is equal to millions and millions! Those few words are imprinted on my soul forever.

Then perhaps you know what happened after he left his body... this was a touch of avatarhood that we saw with our own eyes: When he passed away at 1:20 in the early morning, we saw the whole body become **crimson-gold**. (Pause)

How can it be? Medical science is baffled. Scientists will be baffled... or if they are very clever, they will give some reason... But this is a fact. The Government doctors were called, they saw it; scores of other people saw it over the next few days: the whole body was crimson-gold.

And to again tell you an experience of my own: you can imagine, when he passed away, what our condition was: dejected, morose, very sad indeed. All my dejection and sorrow was washed away-washed away-by this wonderful vision.

That was my last experience. I don't

think I need to say anything about the significance of that. The Mother has said that in the last days, after he had decided to go away, he was bringing down the Supramental Light... He was in contact with it all the time, so when he decided to go away he was bringing it down: and finally, at the cost of this holocaust of his own body, he established this Supramental Light in the bodily consciousness.

And this supramental light is vigorously at work in the world. We may ask, "Why then all this trouble and...?" I don't need to go into it. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo are very near us, I can assure you of that, and they are acting on the whole world.

## Sri Aurobindo and India

Again, people say that India was made free by the leaders; but they don't know the truth behind. In 1935, when I was writing to him, I took the liberty of asking him, "Sir, in your scheme of spirituality, is there a place for India's Independence? Are you working for it?" Then he wrote back, "It is all settled. India will be free." Even before that he had made this promise to some of our friends, but this time he put it into writing. Then again, as I was impertinent and a little obstinate, perhaps foolish, I wrote again, "Settled or not, please do something positive, because things are very bad." And he wrote back a bit testily, "You are a very queer creature." (laughter) "I have told you that it is all settled. Why then should I bother about it? What India will do with her Independence, that is what I am bothering about." That was his botheration! "Will it be bolshevik-raj, corruption, **goonda-raj**?" That is what was bothering him. These are the three words he used.

India gained her freedom on the 15th of August-tomorrow. (Pause). On his birthday. Is it a coincidence? Is it fortuitous, or chance? He said, "It was not coincidence, nor a fortuitous accident." It was a seal and sanction on the work he had undertaken for India's liberation since his youth. Sri Aurobindo would never give any compliment to himself-just a broad hint: "I see it as a seal and sanction of the Divine on my work."

In giving the significance of Sri Aurobindo's birthday, the Mother gives

us a revelation. First she says in one word: "It is an eternal birth." Eternal birth ... it will be going on, it will stay on. Then, interpreting the meaning, she says:

The sentence can be understood in four different ways on four ascending planes of consciousness: (1) Physically, the consequence of the birth will be of eternal importance to the world. (2) Mentally, it is a birth that will be eternally remembered in the universal history. (3) Psychically, a birth that recurs forever from age to age upon earth. (4) Spiritually, the birth of the Eternal upon earth.

This is the meaning of his birth. It is an eternal birth, on the mental plane, on the psychic plane, on the physical plane ... this means that on this birthday every year there will be some influence of the avatar. It depends on your receptivity. I don't need to say anything more.

Friends, brothers and sisters, you are indeed lucky, I must say, to have come here to do their work. Through their force, through their blessing, Matrimandir and Auroville are going to be something very unique. There are many wonders, but I think this wonder will surpass all other vital, physical, mental wonders: it will be spiritual. And you are the instruments. Somehow you have come; it must be the Force that has brought you here, and you are extremely fortunate to be aware that you are doing your work, sacrificing yourselves, all your **labour**, all your goodwill, for the success of the Mother's work.

If you want to know his spiritual content, his avatarhood, read **Savitri**. Read **particularly** about Aswapathi's yoga. Aswapathi is none but Sri Aurobindo.

**Namaste**, brothers and sisters, till we meet again. You are making a bridge between the West and the East.

Mauna: And you have made a bridge at this moment between the Ashram and Auroville.

# An Interview with Amal Kiran

*When I walked in, K. D. Sethna, a.k.a., Amal Kiran ("the clear ray") looked up from his cluttered desk and bid me welcome. Almost ninety, he still edits Mother India and has many other projects going as well. It was a hot morning in early August, 1993. Sparrows browsed in the open area of the small house three blocks from the Ashram of which Amal has been a part since he dropped out of an M.A. program many poems ago. Naturally, we talked poetry.*

**Gordon:** Congratulations on the publication of your collected poems, Amal. I'm curious about the cover of the book. It shows two birds, a red one, perched on the branch of a tree, looking up at a larger golden bird, sitting on the topmost branch, with a halo around its head.

**Amal:** Long ago I had the idea of making a painting of every poem I wrote to bring out its symbolism, but I got down really to making only two pictures, and one of them was about a poem called "The Two Birds," which is a theme from the Upanishads.

There's a bird below on the tree of nature and there's a bird above. The lower bird eats of the tree and tries to enjoy himself by filling up with all the fruits, but still he falls short of happiness. His heart flutters for new things and still it remains unsatisfied. Then all of a sudden he looks up to the topmost bough: "This calm bird—aueroled, immense—/Sat motionless: all fruit he found/ Within his own magnificence."

Seeing that golden bird, the small bird flies upward and finds himself one with that glory, sitting there in trance, completely self-realised, needing nothing. I painted this picture, but it was so long ago that it became discolored and faded. My friends tried by computer means, or some other means, to revive it and in reviving it some of the expressive details were lost, but the general impression remains, and this picture will appear on the jacket and also as the frontispiece of my book.

**Gordon:** You used to show your paintings to the Mother, right?

**Amal:** The Mother liked both the pictures because she felt they had an atmosphere. They both have feeling in response to what has been depicted.

**Gordon:** When did you begin to work on this project of your collected poems? How long have you been working on it?

**Amal:** Several years ago. An English woman in Singapore,

Sonya Dyne, wrote to me that she would like to have on her shelf my collected works. It was her idea originally, and she was prepared to help them come out. From that time I started working and putting together whatever I had found, including the three or four books already out. The first was called *The Secret Splendour*, the name which I have chosen for the whole collection. The second one was *Overhead Poetry*, in which I collected those poems about which Sri Aurobindo had said that they had come from the overhead planes, the higher mind, the illumined mind, the intuition, with now and again a touch of the overmind, along with his comments describing in brief the work of each plane in poetry and comparing the various expressions.



Amal at his desk

**Gordon:** Are some of his comments in your *Collected Poems*?

**Amal:** Yes, yes. The whole book will be reproduced. Some of the poems which appeared there and which also appeared in *The Secret Splendour*, the first book I brought out, will be in only one place.

The second book was called *The Adventure of the Apocalypse*. It sounds (laughing) like a story of Sherlock Holmes. Behind it lies a story of its own. I was trying to get to the bottom of the thought structure of modern physics on the one hand, and on the other, researching various other things. Oh, I'm sorry, not researching, I was trying to make some money at the stock exchange (laughter). Both these were tremendous strains, and I became exhausted.

I remember one afternoon going up to my house. I lived on a small hillock, and I was going up step after step, trying to breathe, and I could barely catch my breath. When I went up I was absolutely finished. I had to lie in bed, cold sweat all over me, and the feeling of a tremendous sinking in the heart

region. It was such an awful thing. I thought that I would pass away.

Then, somehow, with home remedies and the doctor who came and gave me an injection, there was a kind of relief. The injection was actually meant to put me to sleep. It must have been morphine and atropine, something like that, but instead of making me feel sleepy it made me extra awake, as it were, and in that condition it seemed as if the whole universe was a divine being. It was a very wonderful experience. In my own room, the chairs and tables looked like gods and goddesses, and I wanted to get up and bow down to them. Of course I couldn't do it, I was so weak.

The day passed and all night lines of poetry were passing in front of my closed eyes, as if they were already there and at the same time getting composed by me. In the darkness I tried to jot them down on back pages of those booklets of *Savitri* cantos which I had by my side. In the morning when I got up, I saw the whole script, line after line written over other lines, and from them I extricated two short poems. The inspiration continued for the next three months that I had to be in bed with heart trouble. Poetry began to come with such a rush that I could hardly follow the doctor's strict advice—that I should not even lift my head from the pillow. I used to sit up, excited, all the time, the heart running like a race horse and so much inspiration pouring into me that I would make gestures as if I was seeing things above me and before me. A doctor would have condemned such activity as a sure suicide! It was against all medical rules. Every morning the doctor would come and examine me and say, "Yes, you're improving, you've been a good boy," and I knew what a good boy I had been (laughs).

It went on and on. I never had poetry rush into me in such a way in all my life, not even when I was young. And all the poems I would post at once to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother.

At the end of my treatment Mother wrote to me: "There's a power more powerful than that of the doctor's, and the medicines, and I am glad to see that you put your trust in it. Surely it will lead you throughout all of difficulties and in spite of catastrophic warnings, keep your faith intact and all will be all right." Then when Sri Aurobindo went through the poems, he liked them very much. He said they were very powerful and had occult significances. He also said they should come out immediately, and so the book was published. It was a new kind of poetry for me actually.

The third book came out much much later. An American lady from Virginia, Martha Orton, brought out the book of mine called *Altar and Flame*. There are some poems which seem to be to readers more "human." They're not altogether

## A Poet's Yoga

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

on spiritual themes. There are some love poems. So I suppose this book must be the most popular of all my publications. It will be included in this collection, and there will be at the end a section called "Images From Earlier Moods." It will contain a miscellany of poems, some spiritual, some even rather powerfully sensual also. Since the opportunity was there to bring out all the poetry, I included this miscellany towards the end. There are about

50 of these poems.

**Gordon:** Well, some of Sri Aurobindo's poetry is rather sensual too.

**Amal:** It is true—the narratives *Urvashi* and *Love and Death* are pretty sensual or at least sensuous. Something of a Kalidasian element, yes.

Oh, by the way, there will be a section just before the end which will contain all the comments of Sri Aurobindo. In the section "Overhead Poetry" I did not think it fit to put a comment under every poem. I left the reader to make his or her own estimate.

I have written an introduction on the nature of poetry in general and how by its very nature it would leap toward some kind of spiritual and mystical verse.

**Gordon:** I have another question. I know that when poets look back on the work that they wrote long ago they sometimes have a certain kind of experience. They wonder, did I write this? Or it seems somehow that once the poem escapes from you it's there on its own. I just wonder what experiences you had as you were collecting this. Anything like that?

**Amal:** Most of the poems are on spiritual subjects. I did not feel any kind of disassociation.

**Gordon:** Did you find poems that you had sort of forgotten, as though you were reading them for the first time?

**Amal:** Yes, there were several poems which I had to fish out from my drawers. They had been shoved in there a few of them I really had forgotten I had written. That's quite true. Some of them I rejected outright, as being too inferior, but some were all right to read.

**Gordon:** I've had that experience too, that sometimes I'll write something and at the moment of writing it, I'll reject it completely and then looking back I think, 'well . . .

**Amal:** .... there's something to it.' Most poets' experience just the opposite. Sri Aurobindo himself wrote to me that in his own experience he used to write a poem, think it absolutely tops, and then later on find it so full of faults.

**Gordon:** One of the problems today, especially in the United States, is people publishing too quickly. There's a tremendous amount of bad poetry.

**Amal:** In the *Times Literary Supplement*, which comes from London, and which is the most literary paper at present in England, the poems are such trash, such as you can't imagine. Only rarely you come across a well-turned phrase with some sort of rhythm in it, but otherwise it is so prosaic, and about subjects in which nobody would really be interested. I mean nobody like me would feel interested, but evidently there must be a public for this stuff.

**Gordon:** Well, I don't think there really is. Most of the public is other people who write poetry. If you go to a poetry reading you'll find that the poet who's reading is reading to other people who are trying to write poetry like this person. Poetry has gotten a lot broader. There's a lot more people trying to write it.

**Amal:** It's at a very low point indeed. I am rather pessimistic as to whether there'll be a revival of really inspired stuff.

**Gordon:** There is a movement now in the United States called "The New Formalism," people writing in meter, and there is an attempt to get back to writing in meter. I think it will swing around.

**Amal:** There is a poet in America whose name is Wilber or something like that.

**Gordon:** Richard Wilber.

**Amal:** Yes—and he's a genuine poet often enough.

**Gordon:** He's always written in meter.

**Amal:** There are fine things in him. He's the only published poet who has some real inspiration and a gift for turning a phrase beautifully. You know his work?

**Gordon:** Oh yes.

**Amal:** I published in *Mother India*, our periodical, an article on his poetry, which I had come across some years ago, in an American paper.

**Gordon:** Getting back to your book. Did you revise your poems as you were including them?

**Amal:** A few things. I tried to modernize certain elements. The use of 'thou' and 'thee' for instance, as far as possible, unless these words formed rhymes or delivered part of the cadence, I tried to substitute by 'you' and 'your'—and I avoided the apostrophe which one used to put in 'o'er' and 'ne'er.'

**Gordon:** Most of your poems are fairly short, right?

**Amal:** Yes, except the *Apocalypse* volume poems. They sometimes run into two pages even. After them, I thought I might be able to write a long poem, but I haven't done so.

**Gordon:** It's very difficult to write a long poem

**Amal:** And besides, long poems are absolutely out of fashion these days, and people can't read them. Even Herbert Read, a well know English author and art critic, wrote to my friend Purani that now to read a great poem like *Savitri* is almost impossible. People have no patience. And *Illion* too, which he praised very much—that also is too long. But still I see that long things do come out, even now. Novels especially.

**Gordon:** People read novels, but they don't read poetry.

### Consummation

Immortal overhead the gold expanse—  
An ultimate crown of joy's infinity.  
But a king-power must grip all passion numb  
And a gigantic loneliness draw down  
The large god throbbing on a silver hush.  
Nought save an ice-pure peak of trance can bear  
The benediction of that aureole.

(Sri Aurobindo's Comment: It is very fine—it is the Higher Mind vision and movement throughout, except that in the fifth line a flash of Illumination comes through. Intense light-play and colour in this kind of utterance is usually the Illumined Mind's intervention.

**Amal:** But people are forcing themselves to read these long novels because publishers have paid a record price to a highly praised novelist—like Vikram Seth, who wrote *A Suitable Boy*.

**Gordon:** The trouble is that in the west, poetry once would include long narratives. There were poems about science. Poetry included everything in it, and now prose has usurped most of it. So poetry has been reduced to this very personal kind of thing, almost the kind of thing that people write in their diary, and poets don't want to tackle big themes.

Maybe we can talk about the state of Aurobindonian poetry today. Would you like to comment?

**Amal:** Aurobindonian poetry would be what Sri Aurobindo himself has called the future poetry. That is, certain trends which are already there, especially in English poetry, would become the natural expression instead of being a fine freak. They occur in an English poem as if by accident, you know, while the rest does not conform to those lines.

Such lines becoming natural and continuous would constitute what Sri Aurobindo calls the future poetry—overhead poetry, all the mystical poetry from the subtle worlds behind the physical. The overhead poetry comes from beyond the mind, but even otherwise too, poetry can be very genuine and very mystical. For instance, poetry from the psychic plane, which is a very rare case of occult verse—from the vital plane even—but of course it would be the inner vital—whenever you go to the inner side of a plane, you touch mysticism. So all that poetry too is part of the future composition.

**Gordon:** When you wrote your poetry, how did you write? There are some poets who sort of wait for inspiration and then when inspiration comes they're ready. There are other writers who sit down at a certain time every day in order to write—it's like meditation. You're either in the mood, or you put yourself in the mood. Do you have any particular writing habits?

**Amal:** Yes, I used to look out at things or read something and feel a sort of a shock in the heart region, and the spark was found. As soon as I had that experience, I knew that a poem would come out somehow. As a result, sometimes the lines and even stanzas would come without any proper sequence. What turned out to be ultimately the last stanzas of a poem would come first, and from there I would try to concentrate and trace back what should be the preceding expressions to reach that kind of climax. At other times the whole poem would come, though that was really rare. But in the days of the Apocalypse poems, it was from start to finish. That was a very new experience for me.

**Gordon:** So you were trying to write a poem, or you were reading something or you were looking at something and it just.....

**Amal:** No, I was always in a ready condition, ready for that part to come from somewhere or other. But in the beginning I had no idea of writing overhead poetry or anything of that sort—it was only when Sri Aurobindo began to say certain things in his comments that I wanted to write overhead poetry and concentrate on that. I once wrote to Sri Aurobindo: "I would like to have from you eight lines of pure overmind manufacture." He said, in effect, "Good heavens, how could you demand a thing like that?" Then I said, "If you can't do it,



who can do it? You should do it." Then he said, "Good heavens" again. "It is impossible to write to order like that, but I can send you some things which are already there, and if you are lucky you will find something overmindish in them."

It was then that he began to send me *Savitri*. Morning after morning I received the opening part of *Savitri*. Each night he would write it out and in doing so he would revise also the old drafts and send me, say, about 20 lines or so every day. That is how *Savitri* began to come out to me. But he said it was a dead secret, and that he was giving it to me because I was trying to write what we call overhead poetry.

Every day Nolini used to bring me my *Savitri* in a sealed envelope, and he was very curious about it, because when The Mother was putting sheets in the envelopes, he would be there, and she would give the envelope to him to pass it on to me. When he came to me and gave me the envelope, he would wait a few seconds more than he would ordinarily do and raise his eyebrows in a sort of silent interrogation.

Then, when he began to do it too much I wrote to Sri Aurobindo that one of these days he was going to ask me what came in the envelope, so what should I say. He replied, "Let's hope he won't ask." Then after a few days I wrote to him that it had become very, very critical now and I was sure he would ask—what was I to say? Should I show the poem to him or not. Then Sri Aurobindo said, "All right, you can show it to him, but tell him that it's absolutely hush-hush." So it remained a secret for nearly ten years, and then when I wrote my book, *The Poetic Genius of Sri Aurobindo* I wanted to quote passages from *Savitri* to show Sri Aurobindo's overhead inspiration. Finally, I had his permission to do it.

Thus, *Savitri* really appeared for the first time in an article of mine contributed to one of the Ashram periodicals, the *Sri Aurobindo Circle Annual*, published from Bombay. That is how *Savitri* really saw the light of day.

**Gordon:** What advice would you give to people who are

attempting to write overhead poetry, or even just getting started in writing poetry?

**Amal:** The first thing is to read whatever overhead poetry is there before you. In reading such poetry you get a sense of it, especially the rhythm. The rhythm is the most important thing. I'll give you an example. There's the line: "A cry to clasp in all the one God hush." This line according to Sri Aurobindo comes from the Higher Mind. Now if you take the two words "in all" from the middle of the line and put them at the end ("A cry to clasp the one God hush in all"), some sort of liberation of the rhythm takes place—it goes out into a wideness. And there is a skipping to a plane two grades beyond. The Intuition plane, which is above the Illumined Mind and just below the Overmind, becomes vocal now. The rhythm means such a great deal. When you read poetry which is said to be overhead—mostly Sri Aurobindo's or that of others which Sri Aurobindo has certified as overhead—attend to the sound of the thing. Of course the words have also to be attended to.

**Gordon:** When you speak of rhythm, do you think it's necessary to write in formal rhythms, like various kinds of pentameter and that kind of thing? Do you think that rhythm has to be in those forms?

**Amal:** Not necessarily. It could be tetrameter or any meter. Do you mean whether it should be metrical or not?

**Gordon:** Metrical, you start writing iambic then you continue writing...

**Amal:** I think that even free verse could have the overhead rhythm, though the overhead rhythm falls more naturally into metrical verse.

**Gordon:** So if someone wants to begin this path, they should learn the basics of writing in metrical forms?

**Amal:** Yes, it would be helpful.

**Gordon:** How did you do that?

**Amal:** I don't know. It came naturally at the start, but I did read books on meter, like *Metres of English Poetry*, by Edith Hamer. It's a very good book. I myself fall into metrics very easily, because I've never even attempted free verse except, perhaps, once or twice.

**Gordon:** Did you write poetry before you came to Pondicherry?

**Amal:** I wrote a few things that were not up to very much, but I have salvaged one or two of them. They're in the book toward the end.

**Gordon:** Is writing poems a form of yoga?

**Amal:** Yes, to some extent. Especially if you want to express spiritual truths or experiences or intuitions in

poetry, it would help.

**Gordon:** One of my problems is that I never know whether I've written a decent line of my own or whether it's an imitation of Sri Aurobindo.

**Amal:** Yes. Our own work is difficult to assign marks to, as it were.

**Gordon:** You had the master .

**Amal:** Of course, he trained me up quite severely at times, rejecting things outright: "This is no good; it shouldn't be like that," and so on. People send me poetry to do the same. If I criticize, I always give reasons and encourage whatever manages to be fair, so that the writer won't feel rejected.

**Gordon:** Will you read a poem of yours to close this interview.

**Amal:** Yes, I'll read "This Errant Life." It's really a *cri du coeur*, you know.

### This Errant Life

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

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

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

# Early Days in the Ashram

*(Editor's Note: These reminiscences are from Jaya Devi who lived for many years in the Ashram and died there at a ripe old age. Those who knew her in Pondicherry remember her in the end as a frail old lady with a most angelic face, through which the very soul of devotion to the Divine seemed to come out in a soft radiance. Jaya Devi wrote originally in Bengali. This version is based on an English translation by Dr. Sisir Kumar Ghose published in Mother India in 1970.)*

**F**AR BACK IN 1926, I HAD AN urge to visit Rameshwar (Rameshwaram, the temple town in south India from which Rama launched his invasion of Lanka in The Ramayana). My younger brother Upen (Dr. Upendranath Banerji) casually said to me: "Sister, let's go to Pondicherry; you'd be able to see A.G. there." The initials stood for Aurobindo Ghose. "Let us," I replied.

We decided to leave in June (Bengali Asharh). Expecting to meet A.G. at Pondicherry, we came here. The day after reaching Pondicherry, at about 8 in the morning, we went towards the Ashram to have A.G.'s darshan. While going up the stairs I was so upset, thinking: "How shall I look at him?" But again the thought followed: "Why are you so worried at the prospect of meeting a great soul?"

On the verandah of the house where Anilbaran was later to stay, A.G. was sitting on a chair. What a wonderful sight! It was as if light was flooding out from all sides. He was engaged in reading a newspaper. Holding the leg of his chair I sat down on the floor. With a smile he asked me: "From where have you come?"

"Sir, we are from Calcutta."

"What brought you here?"

"I had a desire to visit Rameshwar."

But Upen said we should go to Pondicherry because a Mahapurusha lives there and I would be able to see him. I agreed and so I have come to see you."

"Won't you be going to Rameshwar?" he asked.

"No. I shall not go there any more. Having seen the living Rameshwar, I have no need to see an image of stone."

"Well, this human Rameshwar that you have seen, do you have faith in him?"

"Oh yes, I have full faith," I answered.

Hearing this, he placed his hands on my head and gently said, "Then you may stay here."

"I have planned to stay for only three months. How shall I stay longer than that?" I asked.

"Have you no attachment to the world and are there no obstacles ahead? Better not to return to Calcutta. Stay and see how things develop," he said.

There was some more talk, about the nature of my sadhana and my chosen deity (*ishta devata*). I answered frankly and fully. Yet I had a feeling that all had not been told.

## The Chairs

Those days there were no Bengali ladies staying in the Ashram. I used to visit him every day. He would make me sit near him and listen to everything carefully. After four or five days I asked A.G.: "Why are these chairs here?"

"They are for people who listen to my words and practise meditation—they sit in these chairs."

Somehow I didn't like the idea. So I said: "Lord, this doesn't look proper. That the sadhaks, your disciples, should be sitting in the chairs along with you doesn't look nice. Better to have mats or carpets on the floor. While you sit in the chair, the rest can sit below." He only smiled a little and kept quiet. Two days later, I noticed that the chairs had been removed and a durree spread out on the floor.

In those days the Ashram was less crowded, and I used to go and see him every day. One day I asked him: "Lord, why do they call you A.G.?"

"A.G.? Who says A.G.?" he counter-questioned?

"These sadhaks speak like that; I have heard it."

Then he said with a smile: "Well,

it's a good idea of yours." Seven or eight days later, I found on the notice-board: "Sri Aurobindo." I was told the Mother had given that name. This made me rather happy.

After two days, I went to see him with a pair of garlands which I had woven with my own hands and rolled inside a handkerchief.

Looking at the hidden object in my hands he asked: "What is it you have brought?"

"A pair of garlands," I answered.

"What will you do with the garlands?"

"One I shall place round your neck and the other at your feet," I chirped gaily.

Pleased with my reply, he said, "Well, give me one, and there within the house, is your Mother. Go and give her the other garland."

"Lord, where is the Mother? In which room? I do not know anything; please guide me a little."

He then explained: "As you go up the inner staircase you will find a room in front. The Mother lives there. You will give the garland to her."

"Lord, permit me to go there," I said.

Smilingly he agreed: "Yes, go now."

I came down, wondering with whom to go. But, I also thought, what was there to worry about in going to the Mother? 'Oh my mind, take me there. When the Lord has said so, I will certainly be able to meet her.'

Going downstairs with this thought, I found Purani's wife Lilavati standing at the bottom. I said to Lila: "Dear sister, please accompany me a little."

"Where to?" inquired Lila.

"First let us go up the inside staircase. Then I shall tell you," I said.

"Then let us go," she answered.

After we had gone up the stairs we

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saw a room in front of us. I went inside with the garland in my hand. There I saw the Mother standing, in a red-bordered sari. She came a little closer to me, and I offered the flowers and made my pranam to her. The Mother had a veil on, and when I gave her the garland she was smiling, but since I didn't know any English I couldn't speak with her. After a while, I came away. Lilavati followed suit. When she had come we went to our respective places.

Next day, at darshan, I said, "Lord, I was able to meet the Mother. She was standing inside the room. But since I didn't know English I could not talk with her. So I came away after giving the flowers to her. Lord, I wish I were independent and could learn many languages and move about freely from place to place. Make me a man. I have no wish to stay a woman any longer."

He smiled and said: "Very well. What's the worry? You'll be free, men and women will become equal. What is there to be afraid of?"

"Let me go now," I said.

"What will you do when you go down?"

"Oh, someone becomes angry. He says, 'You talk with him too long and I don't get any chance.'"

"Who is the person that speaks to you like that?"

These words from the Lord made me uneasy. "No," I hurried to add, "he isn't quite angry, he just says . . ."

"No, you do as you are doing," the Lord said.

Since the Lord put it like that, I stayed on a little longer before going away. On the other hand, X was quite angry. Barinda (Sri Aurobindo's youngest brother) and he wanted to know what had happened.

"The Lord asks me to stay on, and he makes many enquiries. It all takes time. This inconveniences X and he gets annoyed," I told Barinda.

"A.G. loves to hear Bengali. So he goes on talking with you. What's there to get upset about?" said Barinda.

## Sri Krishna

One day in the early hours I was sitting near the window of my room on the upper story of the Guest House (at present, the Children's *dortoir* behind the Playground). All of a sudden I

noticed a young person, seventeen or eighteen years of age, near the window below. But how handsome and radiant! The entire road seemed to be lighted up. A small stick or baton in his hand, he was tying up a number of beautiful white cows to the window below and running and playing with them. I saw it all so clearly. The night was nearly gone, and a faint light was trickling through the dark. A little afterwards it all brightened up, but there was nothing more to be seen.

At the time of darshan I asked: "Lord, what is the significance of this that I have seen? And oh, how beautiful!"

"How did it strike you?" he asked.

"I thought it was Sri Krishna; who else can have such beauty, such radiance?"

"Who could that Sri Krishna be?" he asked.

"Who else but you?" I answered.

"You think it was I?"

"Yes, of course."

Then he said: "What you have seen is true and good," and he put his hands on my head, adding: "Good, good."

Another day at the time of meditation I saw a vision that I had gone to a big hall full of lotuses, out of which flames of light rose up. My eldest son was blowing them out, but the lights would come up again. Next day I asked him: "Lord, why did I see that during meditation?"

"Within you the light has shone. Your son is trying to put it out. He will not succeed. Nothing to cause worry."

It was the month of Asvin in 1926. At the time of Sri Aurobindo's daily darshan I said: "Lord, the month of Asvin is here. Every year I celebrate Mahastami puja. I am wondering what to do now; shall I return home or what?"

"Why won't there be puja here?" he asked.

"Yes, it's possible: the worship of Shiva-Durga. If I can perform your worship and the Mother's, then perhaps I need not go from here. That is why I am wondering . . ."

"Well, you can do that."

On the day of Mahastami Sri Aurobindo and the Mother sat in two chairs side by side. With the usual offering I performed puja. I put garlands around them both. Oh, it was as if Shiva and Durga had come down

to accept the worship! It is impossible to describe all that I felt; it was ineffable, beyond thought. After the puja he left the room.

The next day he asked: "Do you have to go now? You have done your puja."

"Yes, my Lord; it was a puja such as I had never dreamed of."

"Well, well," he said.

## The Sadhu

One day a sadhak from Chandernagore came to Pondicherry for Sri Aurobindo's darshan. He had set out on a pilgrimage and expressed a desire to see Sri Aurobindo en route. The next day I went to the darshan at eight in the morning. I told Sri Aurobindo, "Lord, a sadhu from Chandernagore is here for your darshan. He will come today."

"Have you seen him? What sort of sadhu?" he inquired.

"I don't know anything, Lord. But he didn't seem to be quite open and pure. You will see," I said.

After I had come away the sadhu said to me: "Didi, I am going for darshan but I have a feeling of fear about it."

"What is there to fear in visiting a holy person? Go," I said.

The sadhu left. But he could hardly walk up the stairs, his heart was trembling so. Reaching the door near the upper veranda he saw a luminous glow emanating from Sri Aurobindo's body. His eyes were dazzled and he was unable to have the darshan.

Somehow he reached the house where I was staying. There he fell into a kind of fit. After lying on the ground for a while he got up and said to me: "Didi, I didn't have a darshan of Sri Aurobindo; I could not bear so much power. I am going away."

When I narrated the sadhu's experience to Sri Aurobindo, he said, "He is like a chest, so tightly closed that he has only been wasting his energy. He has not gone round the four quarters . . . except for that egoism, there is nothing in him."

"Lord, why didn't you give him something?" I queried.

"One needs strength to receive strength. One cannot have that merely by speaking of it. It will be a long time before that sadhu can go round the four quarters. It is doubtful that he can do it in this life."

## Mahashakti

November came along. A strange feeling of joy took possession of all the sadhaks present. The whole of Pondicherry was fragrant with incense, a great delight seemed to be at play. There was a feeling one has during the time of Durga Puja, but this was more intense. I told Bijoybabu and Barinda: "Brothers, I am feeling so happy inside. Such peace! Why is it like this?"

"Indeed sister," answered Bijoybabu, "What feelings of peace and delight!"

At the time of Sri Aurobindo's darshan I explained my feelings.

"You are able to feel this?" he said smiling.

"Not only I but all the sadhaks are able to feel this great wave of peace and delight. We are dancing with inner joy. Why, O Lord?"

"Wait and see, there will be more delight to come," he said.

On November 24, a little before evening, all the sadhaks were asked to assemble. One after another we trooped to the upper hall. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother blessed us all with both hands. I was told, "Mahashakti, the Supreme Consciousness-Force, has descended into Sri Aurobindo." I could myself see light and glory bursting out of his body.

Next day when I was carrying with me two garlands of tulasi leaves, I heard that Sri Aurobindo would not come out again but stay in his room. Disappointed, I placed the garlands on the door of his room and turned back. A chapter of our life was over.

*Jaya Devi's story is taken from the book Vignettes of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, compiled by Shyam Kumari and published by the Ashram Press.*

## A Tribute of Tears

### A Eulogy for Sri M. P. Pandit

By Santosh Krinsky

**I** AM REMINDED OF THE famous story in the Mahabharata when Dronacharya tried to teach the Pandava and Kaurava princes the lesson "not to become angry." Each of the princes was asked by Drona what today's lesson was, and each replied, "not to become angry." And each agreed that he had learned the lesson. Except Yudhisthira, the wise.

For several days, Drona repeated this question to Yudhisthira: "Have you learned the lesson, not to become angry?" And Yudhisthira replied, "No." The other pupils snickered and joked about Yudhisthira's obvious stupidity.

Finally, Drona could not take it any longer. His lesson plan disrupted, one of his star pupils obstinately refusing to learn the lesson and allow him to proceed. The anger issued forth from him, and he forgot himself and his

station—he struck the Pandava prince with a slap across the face in anger.

And at that moment, in the heat of passion, knowing that he could have Drona put to death for the disrespect shown to a future king in his own person, Yudhisthira calmly replied, "Now I have learned the lesson."

I am reminded of this because our wisest teachers will counsel us on the foolishness of the emotion of grief, and tell us we should not experience grief. And I am sure we have all, at some time or another, agreed with this and given the intellectual arguments as to why grief is an un-evolved emotion that yogis and sakhaks should not experience. And I know that some of

us have even smiled inwardly, even while we showed compassion and goodwill, at the grief of friends or relatives or strangers that has been displayed before our eyes over the years, because we knew that this was an ignorant emotion, that it was based on the falsehood of attachment to the material life, and that from a truer perspective there is no cause for grief. And of course, it is true, and our teachers have taught us well this lesson.

But when have we ever had the occasion to test this knowledge against reality? We are so comfortable in our philosophy, and we think we have learned. And yet . . . have we really "learned" the lesson of grief, as Yudhisthira learned the lesson of anger?

I am reminded too of the moving passages of *Savitri*, in Book Six, Canto Two, "The Way of Fate and the Problem of Pain," where Sri Aurobindo directly addresses this truly human problem. Savitri's mother, herself a fit

wife and consort to the yogi, Ashwapati, mother to Savitri herself—certainly no "ordinary" mortal—understands the immensity of the fate before her daughter, and she wails out her pain when she is forced to confront the apparent death-struggle with grief

that lies before her daughter.

What is grief? Is it the tears that well up in our eyes spontaneously for no apparent reason when we wake in the middle of the night? Is it the heaviness that weighs down our hearts? Is it the tiredness of spirit that pervades us as we spin through our daily routines? Is it that heart-wrenching pain that we feel when we dwell on an event that has left us devastated and empty emotionally?

How can we know whether we have truly learned this lesson of overcoming grief, if we do not know what grief in fact is?

It was Panditji's great power of love which allows us now to directly face

Maybe this is the secret of Panditji, that while he gave us peace and understanding and love, within his heart he was grappling with these forces which cause human pain and suffering

the problem of grief. It is a Grace to us. We know we are here for a purpose. We will all find ways to carry on and continue our daily routines and live out our destinies. Some of us will bury the grief deep within us and exhibit a stoic strength that refuses to give in to this corrosive force within us. Some will carry this pain openly in our hearts and in our lives for a long time. Some, I am sure, will conquer. Some will fall before its onslaught. Some will avoid the struggle. Some will accept the struggle and face this grief constantly and try to find a way to truly understand its necessity and continue to act in spite of it.

Sri Aurobindo has given us light on this struggle in the words of Narada, the divine singer, in *Savitri*, Book Six, Canto Two:

He who would save the race must  
share its pain:  
This he shall know who obeys that  
grandiose urge.  
The great who came to save this  
suffering world  
And rescue out of Time's shadow  
and the Law,  
Must pass beneath the yoke of grief  
and pain:  
They are caught by the Wheel that  
they had hoped to break,  
On their shoulders they must bear  
man's load of fate.

For we are not here simply to learn philosophy and be able to repeat the lessons as parrots. We have chosen a destiny of sadhana, the practice of yoga. No matter how humble our role or station in life, each of us has that connecting link that we understand and accept the need to work out the human condition in our own souls, to practice the sadhana of the yoga, with whatever strength has been given to each of us to do so.

It is Panditji's example to us, over a career that spans an entire lifetime, that has won for him the devotion and love that turns to grief at the time of his passing. For above all things, Panditji represented a dedication to the sadhana of the yoga, to the inward practice and working out of each of humanity's difficulties, and to the inward sympathy with the human condition that comes only from true

shared experience.

Many will remember Panditji's achievements: his writing, his oratory, his moving spiritual concentration that uplifted us, his calm advice in our struggles. Those closest to him will recall his deep understanding and love as they shared with him their daily tragedies and triumphs. He was so far removed from those daily cares, and yet, he had that sympathy and understanding that was based on real experience. Some will recall his idealism and work for world unity and his call to the evolution of a Universal Man. Some will reflect on the wideness that characterized his goodwill towards all paths and teachings and philosophies, that refused to be limited by the narrow walls of fanaticism, even while he himself remained dedicated to the teachings of his Masters.

For myself, these things seem somehow distant, as I have to struggle daily with the reality of the feelings that perniciously eat away at my heart and my spirit, as I now begin to truly experience and understand the human emotion of grief. And somehow I know that this is a part of Panditji's great work and perhaps, his parting gift to me and others, his transformation of our philosophy, acquired with great study over the years, into something real, into a sadhana.

How long will it take us to truly face and overcome this grief? What methods of philosophy or yoga will we remember to apply to this struggle? Which ones will truly succeed for us? I don't know.

And yet, when we look around us at the suffering in the world at large, that world which Panditji believed could find unity and harmony, we see that the problem of grief and suffering is not one that we can legislate, not one that we can philosophize away, but truly one that needs to be experienced first-hand and responded to in a very personal, inward way. It is truly a field of sadhana, not philosophy.

Sri Aurobindo shows us the issue when he continues:

But when God's messenger comes to  
help the world  
And lead the soul of earth to higher  
things,  
He too must carry the yoke he came  
to unloose;  
He too must bear the pang that he  
would heal:  
Exempt and unafflicted by earth's  
fate,  
How shall he cure the ills he never  
felt?  
He covers the world's agony with his  
calm;  
But though to the outward eye no  
sign appears  
And peace is given to our torn  
human hearts,  
The struggle is there and paid the  
unseen price;  
The fire, the strife, the wrestle are  
within.

Maybe this is the secret of Panditji, that while he gave us peace and understanding and love, within his heart he was grappling with these forces which cause human pain and suffering. Maybe this is what widened

his understanding and gave him his boundless compassion for us and which consoled us in our need.

Here was a soul ready to sacrifice everything to the Spirit, but at the same time, always ready to

carry out a life of practical value and guidance to all those who came within the scope of his influence. What deep inner struggle pitted his soul against the forces of suffering and grief that he saw everywhere in the world around him?

Life's evil smites, he is stricken with  
the world's pain:  
A million wounds gape in his secret  
heart.  
He journeys sleepless through an  
unending night;  
Antagonist forces crowd across his  
path;  
A siege, a combat is his inner life.  
Even worse may be the cost, direr  
the pain:

In his passing, Panditji  
has left us a gift of  
incredible value, and that  
is the gift of grief. We now  
can understand, at least to  
some degree, the true  
meaning of sadhana.

His large identity and all-harbouring  
love  
Shall bring the cosmic anguish into  
his depths,  
The sorrow of all living things shall  
come  
And knock at his doors and live  
within his house;  
A dreadful cord of sympathy can tie  
All suffering into his single grief  
and make  
All agony in all the worlds his own.

Can we ever see behind the outward  
inspiration, peace and comfort he gave  
each of us? Can we ever realize the  
immensity of the sacrifice, the battle  
that went on within as he enfolded all  
our cares, all our fears, all our sorrows  
into his heart? Can we understand the  
vast amount of suffering and pain he  
confronted when he embraced the  
suffering of humanity? Panditji was  
not a man solely tied down to his  
narrow daily round of existence. He  
had vision. He had universal longings.  
Is it possible that he had to internalize  
all of humanity's suffering, secretly,  
silently, in his inner heart?

He is lashed with the whips that tear  
the world's worn heart;  
The weeping of the centuries visits  
his eyes:

That intensity, that spiritual depth,  
that peace given to our souls, could it  
be that these things result from the  
alchemy of our emotions as we truly  
face them and learn how to overcome  
them?

In his passing, Panditji has left us a  
gift of incredible value, and that is the  
gift of grief. We now can understand,  
at least to some degree, the true  
meaning of sadhana. We have an  
example of a life before us to give us  
hope and guidance along the way, as  
we face our own inner struggle, as we  
wake up each morning and have to  
CHOOSE, even when our hearts are  
heavy and our spirits are oppressed.

It is our most fitting tribute to Sri  
M.P. Pandit if we can choose as he  
chose. If we can choose life and hope  
over death and despair. If we can  
choose wideness and understanding  
over fanaticism and narrow philosophi-  
cal myopia. If we can choose compas-  
sion and sympathy over coldness and  
hardness of heart. If we can choose  
constant effort over lassitude or weak  
surrender. If we can choose honesty  
over self-image. In other words, if we  
can mold our lives by the example he  
gave and truly practice the sadhana that  
he idealised for us with his life.

For Panditji, above all things else,  
represented the practice of sadhana.  
He understood, perhaps more truly  
than we will ever know, the advice of  
Sri Aurobindo:

The human mass lingers beneath the  
yoke.  
Escape, however high, redeems not  
life,  
Life that is left behind on a fallen  
earth.  
Escape cannot uplift the abandoned  
race  
Or bring to it victory and the reign

of God.

It is not wrong to recognize and  
admit our grief. It is a tribute to our  
friend and teacher if we can do so. It is  
our entrance into the human mystery  
that we must touch the root of pain and  
expose it in our own flesh. Our grief is  
a reflection of that enormous human  
grief that tears at the heart of humanity.  
Our grief is a reflex of the struggle and  
the pain that Sri Aurobindo describes  
as the field of the sadhana, when he  
writes of the soul and mission of  
Savitri, the Mother:

It sits apart with grief and facing  
death,  
Affronting adverse fate armed and  
alone.

Alone with death and close to  
extinction's edge,  
Her single greatness in that last dire  
scene,  
She must cross alone a perilous  
bridge in Time  
And reach an apex of world-destiny  
Where all is won or all is lost for  
man.

We should not hide our grief. We  
cannot pretend that it is not there,  
gnawing at our hearts. We can learn to  
understand the inner mystery and begin  
the process of alchemy, of transforma-  
tion, and thereby provide a fitting  
tribute to a great soul who has touched  
us all deeply and inwardly.

*Santosh Krinsky lives in Wilmot,  
Wisconsin.*

I was nineteen when I came here. When I first saw the Mother my soul  
wept and wept, so much that all those in the hall where the *pranam* function  
was going on were moved and asked my mentor what had happened. He  
had a job explaining things to them. But that was the last time I wept in that  
way, thereafter my soul felt happy and started smiling. Suddenly I realised  
that laughter, cheerfulness and joy were more natural and brought one more  
into proximity with the Divine than all the solumn seriousness that I could  
cultivate or summon.

M.P. Pandit, *The Yoga of Love*, p. 72

# Is There Life After Auroville: On Joining the Eternal's Wonder-Dance . . . In Time

By Seyril Schochen

**C**OLLABORATION'S EDITOR has an endearing sense of humor which turns out to be uncannily provocative. Even penetrating. Like his question to Aurovilians-in-exile, i.e., those who have been working residents of Auroville, presumably "willing servitors of the Divine Consciousness," in our "past lives." He asks us, tongue-in-cheek, cheekily, "Is there life after Auroville?" Exquisitely teasing!

But upon further reflection I discover the question (to my surprise) to be exquisitely useful. Particularly at this time of the apocalyptic Earth Changes prophesied by all the ancient spiritual traditions to the contemporary scientific environmentalists, from the Hopi and Mayan Indian and Vedic-Puranic Indian predictions, through the Judeo Messianic to the Christian Revelations of a New Heaven and a New Earth following the great destruction - time of the Tribulation... End times of the Kali Yuga, our Iron Age. Opening of the New Golden Age, Dawn of the Supramental Age of the Third Millennium.

And I had been living there in the City of Dawn! Working on what Ruud (Lohman), the Prophetic, has called "A House for the New Millennium."

What was my life all about those "mystic 7" years spent helping to build the City of ---???---

---Dawn---

There was a clue!

I scurry (as always) to my once tattered bible-print copy of *Savitri* infinitely precious as a gift of love from Diane at the time of her daughter, AurAlice's, birth in AV. Recently and beautifully restored to readability by British Aurovilian, Robert Orton, faithful Matrimandir worker for so many years of our "past" lives, I wonder as I open to "The Symbol of Dawn" if he too is asking himself the same question. Having settled in historic Charlottesville, VA, with queenly wife Martha and their knightly young son Arthur, does Robert the Faithful indeed find there is life after AV in the States?

## But --States-- of What?

And why had Gordon the Quixotic, fellow veteran of those marvelously horrendous early years of warring with the elements, our past selves and too present egos amid the gruelling demands of a camp of God pitched in a most taxing time and place, asked the question at all? Surely, first of himself. A memory of him sitting on the rickety front steps of the first and ramshackle Matrimandir Office in the area Mother named "Peace" comes before my mind's eye making me smile. Exhausted physically (and no doubt emotionally as we all were at one point or another by the fiery heat of a tropical sun and our no-less fiery fellow laborers in

the quarries and pebble pits of the gods), one could almost read the former Peace Corpsman's disconsolate thought:

"The Peace Corps was never like this!"

Actually, nothing ever was like that.

Grimacing, I return to "The Symbol Dawn," my own unshaped consciousness desiring light. And light upon the passage:

Arrived from the other side of boundlessness

An eye of deity pierced through the dumb deeps:

A scout in a reconnaissance from the sun...

Calling the adventure of consciousness and joy.

Of course! That's what life in the City of Dawn was all about! The adventure of consciousness and joy was the promise made to all of us who were choosing to become "adventurers into a mightier day."

A new creation from the old shall rise...

Beauty suppressed burst into paradise bloom...

The Eternal's wonders join the dance of Time.

## The Dance of Matrimandir

We were building our Mother's "House of the Spirit and the New Creation" and it was truly the Eternal's wonder-dance. Awaking at dawn of a concreting day in Matrimandir Workers Camp, we would hurry to dress in our canvas dancing shoes and shorts - or better, cement-stained jeans - gulp porridge in Unity Kitchen, and pirouette hastily to the dancing ground in answer to the call of our dance-master, the already grinding cement mixer.

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master, the already grinding  
cement mixer.

No mistaking it. There was "a rhythm of beauty" to the most menial movements of the dance. But nothing could be "menial" in our service to the Divine as we joined His dance of wonders. The passing from hand to hand of chetties containing heavy cement mix had to be rhythmic, received with grace and tossed on as gracefully or we'd be tossed out of the ascending line... to wait like wall flowers huddling against a bit of scaffolding for our next

chance to rejoin the dance. Or else to join the tea servers who came to revive the swingers with the caffeine-loaded brew being passed up in the tea dance from a chorus line below.

Before our smarting eyes and under our cement-stiffened hands, the House of the New Creation was slowly rising. In the process of our joyous service, the Eternal Thaumaturge was transforming our own sand and pebble mix nature into a "matter lit by spirit's glow"... we hoped... aspired and perspired to...

A new creation being built in us. Our own selves housing the Illimitable.

Hadn't Mother told us in April of '72, "For centuries and centuries humanity has waited for this time. It is come. But it is difficult... We are here to prepare the way for a new creation... do what you can, my help will be with you. All sincere effort will be helped at the maximum. It is the moment to be heroic. Heroism, not as commonly known -- but to be fully united... the Divine help will always be with those who have resolved to be heroic in all sincerity.

"You are here at this moment, that is to say on the earth, because you have chosen it at this time... you yourselves don't remember anymore, but I know it. It is for that that you are here. Well, it is necessary to be at the height of the task. It is necessary to make an effort, to conquer all the pettiness and all the limitations, and above all say to the ego, 'your time has passed.' We want a new race which does not have ego. That is what we want, the Divine Consciousness which will allow the race to develop itself and give birth to the Superman."

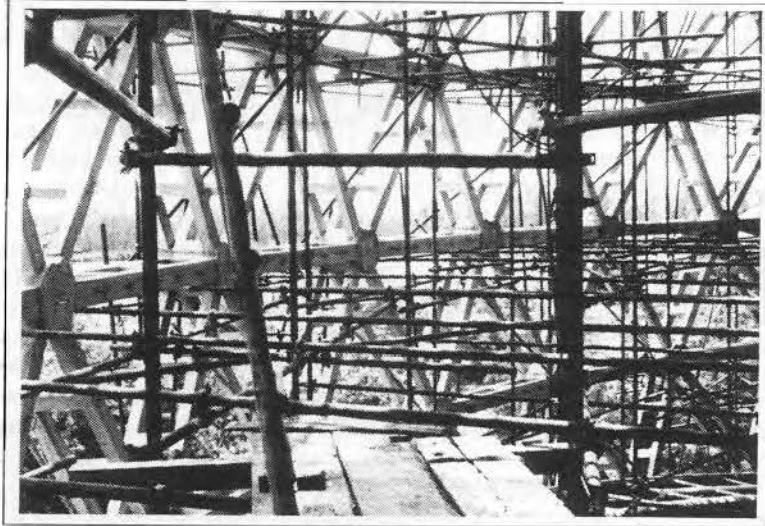
And the way to the birthing place of a new species? In our time-made bodies? "I am absolutely in the process of cutting a path through the jungle!" Mother exclaimed in the *Agenda of the Supramental Action Upon Earth*. Her account, recorded by Satprem over 19 years of Her exploration in the cellular consciousness of the human body, unsealing our evolutionary future, is her gift to those who love her. At the age of 90 she founded Auroville as "a center of accelerated evolution."

"A local and momentary manifestation is not possible, but a collective transformation of some magnitude is necessary to create a new species on earth... that fact is certain," she had concluded the year before.

Oh, that *Agenda*! How avidly, after a day's broiling dance over the grill of binding wire mesh work on Matrimandir, we would pounce upon her gift to us! The latest volumes of both the French and newly translated English editions were always available to the visitors' section of Matrimandir office. Each of her new experiences in the course of those 23 years of experimental evolution begun in 1951 would bring vividly alive to us Sri Aurobindo's vision of the New Creation in *Savitri*, where

None was apart, none lived for himself alone,  
Each lived for God in him and God in all;  
Each soleness inexpressibly held the whole.  
There, oneness was not tied to monotone;  
It showed a thousand aspects of itself;  
Its luminous immutable stability  
Upbore on a changeless ground forever safe...  
The ever-changing incalculable steps,  
The seeming reckless dance's subtle plan  
Of immense world forces in their perfect play.

So step by step in the dance's subtle plan we found clues to



Scaffolding on the Matrimandir

the meaning of life in the City-to-be of Human Unity. Its Founder was our own Mother. All contraries were preparing her harmony, a field of small beginnings, asking for a mighty end. In her confirmed, because transformed in her, our life would find not only the boundless hushed beatitudes above, but the wonder of the divine embrace below... in our Oneness. Unity's supreme delight in "a commonality of the the Absolute."

How? "Through self-finding by divine self-loss."

I ponder the sun-track clues in "Book of the Divine Mother." Self-finding. By divine self-loss. Aye, there was (is!) the rub! The new race does not have ego. Yet so many fellow Adventurers like my own adventurous strong-egoed self had battled their way from wherever to join the dance of time in Auroville. For some of us, the journey from the old world of death to the promised land had been not unlike the biblical flight of desperate slaves from bondage in Egyptian darkness. We brought with us in our very bones the old vibrations of desire along with the burning need for freedom.

Mother had instructed Savitri in "The Book of Yoga" to find out her soul, recover her hidden self; then could her mortal nature change to the Divine. I look back with wry amusement to my early days in the wilderness seeking my hidden soul... and (o mortal frailty) a more nutritious manna than was served in Unity Kitchen. "The Book of Exodus" as Divine Comedy! Or rather, the too-human comedy.

That is, when I was wrapped in the Mystery of Matrimandir. Learning of Mother's incarnation in ancient Egypt and her vision of the exact dimensions of the Great Pyramid's inner chamber corresponding to those of the Matrimandir, I became obsessed with its meaning for my individual being's inner chamber. The obsession turned into a sonnet to Mother:

#### Matrimandir: Your Mystery

As we were with You in that time and space  
called Ancient Egypt, and its Mysteries  
at Your command were open histories  
for us to read, and following, to trace  
Your steps of Light in heart and mind, again  
to build Your sight of Truth into our Real,

so now we mould it in cement and steel,  
Your body of this Earth, our house of pain  
transforming into pyramids that heal.  
What wonder it evokes our living past  
in spirals of aspiring now to cast  
a dwelling for the New, Your sign and seal  
O Sphinx whose silence speaks Eternity,  
whose wings enfold the future's Mystery.

## Back in the Dance of Time

As I sit in awe before her photographs and Sri Aurobindo's in my Savitri House study I ponder the Hieroglyphics of the Sphinx's riddle, the meaning of this my life after Auroville. An answer begins to form, the riddle's secret, to speak.

The seven years' dance in Auroville was, in effect, an initiation. A crossing of thresholds, a passing of their guardians' challenges in order to enter a new life in a newer world. I am reminded of the Traveller of the Worlds' vision of "The World Stair" in *Savitri*:

As climbs a storeyed temple-tower to heaven  
Built by the aspiring soul of man to live  
Near to his dream of the Invisible,  
Alone it points us to our journey back  
Out of our long self-loss in Nature's deeps;  
Planted on earth it holds in it all realms;  
It is a brief compendium of the Vast,  
A summary of the stages of the spirit,  
A ladder of delivering ascent  
And rungs that Nature climbs to deity.

An infant soul who had toddled through fire to the bottom rungs of the hundred levels to the Unknown hoping to reach its being's goal in Sri Aurobindo's ville, found itself climbing iron scaffolding ladders, and even glimpsing from summits beyond the precarious **topwalks** of Mater's house, beyond **self's** walls, its own limitless self.

At least sometimes.

Looking back I marvel at the tenderness of the Divine who waited until that infant soul was strong enough to join the dance of Time in the West it had fled those mystic 7 years ago.

The summons to return to the States came as news of my parents' illness in Ohio. It became a nightmare chaos of cables, trans-Atlantic and Pacific calls that could not connect, frantic hours of waiting in unfamiliar **Pondi** police and civil authorities offices to obtain an exit visa from Auroville (from which I didn't want to exit!), anguished days of trying to obtain plane reservations in order to fly back to a life I had flown from in tears...

I shudder even now as I try to recall with the serenity of surrender those times that tried the still-toddling initiate soul. Back I was again in the disunited States of -- Unconsciousness -- I so blithely imagined had been left behind forever in this life.

It was then I discovered myself going through the long dark tunnel associated with the near-death and **after-physical**-death experience. What a shock after life in the feisty exuberance of Auroville's "youth that never ages." Even **AV's** adolescent moodiness was a memory to cling to like Ariadne's clue... gripped close as one wandered a-"mazed" through a labyrinth of dyings in Ohio, USA. Euphemistically called

"life," it was indeed a winding, stifling tunnel of endless hospital corridors. Darkness. Dis-ease. Bitterness. Long pent-up anger against the once cherished daughter who had deserted parents, husband and grown son, given up friends, relations-in-law, even her professional career in theatre, to disappear -- where? Into a benighted country that **wor**-shipped strange gods and goddesses :) who danced on human skulls in heathen temples!!!

Lost and bewildered, I groped down the tunnel of deaths. Of parents. Of a marriage. Of family structures. Beliefs. Hard-won aims. Aimless aims. The Eternal's dance of wonders had become in that Time, a Danse Macabre.

## Memories... Memories...

Trying to turn down the ghostly **clamour**, I turn up the music of a tape I'd brought back from my past life in AV, one of Bill the Unsullied's favorites, "The Fairy Ring." When we began building our solar home units in the new community "Verite," Eleanor, the Elegantly Evolving, and I would attempt to help our old comrade Adventurer and fellow Matrimandir worker, now with C.S.R., install the solar equipment. When we were (rather, I was) as baffled by the new **fangled** hookups as our Tamil Aurovilian helpers, I'd bow out of the sunny scene and "crash" on my (bumpy) old mattress listening to the enchanted Ring dance.

Even the bumpy mattress memory evoked by the music is filled with nostalgia. When I was moved out of Matrimandir Workers Camp into my new Community "Verite" quarters by **oxcart** and John the Blessed Harper, the change was unexpectedly emotional. That old Vital acting up! No longer could I see Mother's Mandir rising from my keet-thatched hut "window" at dawn - I had to cycle the dusty roads to the work-dances instead of walking in the cool of the mornings - take my Night Watches as day patrols, thus missing my favorite 4 A.M. "Hour of Brahman" Watch.

But the Divine Grace had smilingly answered my search for a better diet in AV with Dhanya the Darlin's organic Dutch-seeded garden. His beautiful voice, golden-rich as his garden, comes back to me as I enter "The Fairy Ring" of its devas. Other voices too of my past life in "Verite" murmur through the music... Those of community members making meals together in close comradeship, swapping Yoga hints with new recipes in our small intimate **kitchen-cum-dining-cum-music** room. Building and singing along with the **concreters** and stone masons the new Yoga Hall. And best of all, Mother's voice reading *Savitri* passages to us at sundown time as we listened to Sunil's music before going rapt to bed. Homesick.

I hurry to change tapes. Among the riches of Sunil's *Savitri* music gifted to Savitri House by French-American Aurovilian now Savitri the Generous of New Creation School, I am guided to the "Descent into Night" tape, Canto 7 of "The Traveller of the Worlds." How appropriate. Recollecting Dr. Raymond Moody's study of "Life after Life" encounters with the worlds beyond our present apparently "real" life world, I hear instead Traveller Sri Aurobindo's experience of the world of Death as one of Falsehood:

Then from the sombre mystery of the gulfs  
A fatal influence upon creatures stole  
Whose lethal touch pursued the immortal spirit...

A hostile and perverting Mind at work,  
In every corner esconced of conscious life,  
Corrupted Truth with her own formulas...  
Its power could deform divinest things...  
On life was laid the haunting finger of Death.

Strange to see life, as lived in our supposedly real present, in reality lived in the falsehood of Death. Here? Where each friend might turn enemy or spy? Where all lived for themselves alone? And Truth was exiled lest she dare speak, bringing her knowledge to blaspheme the settled anarchy of the establishment.

Yes, from life here and now the Traveller of the upward way must ascend, "A prayer upon his lips and the great Name... For daring Hell's kingdom winds the heavenly route."

In revealing to us our roles in the great battles with Rudra's hostile hosts both within and without, Mother exhorts us to become "Heroes and soldiers of the army of Light"... "Savitri's" very words. "Only are safe who keep God in their hearts; though Hell claims rule, the Spirit has power."

Courage must be our armour, faith our sword, as further descent into this night-life brings us into an inhuman greater darkness. Here are "the savage slums of Night" and their "neighboring proud palaces of perverted Power" -- only too familiar to us as we read the news day after deathly day. Or see, in Sri Aurobindo's prophetic words, "televised from the gulfs of Night" the fierce glad deeds of ogre violence... "Force and its acolytes greed and hate armed with the aegis of tyrannic Power, Signing the edicts of her dreadful rule, and using blood and torture as a seal."

On our home TV sets. In the twilight of the West.

But the gatherine apocalyptic night is falling in the East too. It is Old-World-wide. Two days before Auroville's 25th birthday, Dr. Karan Singh spoke movingly to Ashramites in Pondicherry of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's labors in the unseen worlds to bring their Yoga to humanity as "something that cannot be described because they are beyond description... Two great lights illuminating the higher spheres of our consciousness laboring day and night in order to bring a new consciousness, a new power to bear upon terrestrial life so that humanity could rise to a new level in its evolutionary process."

Dedication of the completed Inner Chamber of Matrimandir to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on February 28, 1993, was to be a sign of readiness to make a decisive breakthrough into the higher consciousness. But Dr. Singh warned his Indian audience:

"We are facing today in this country, and in many parts of the world, a situation of extreme conflict and danger... as if the asuric forces of division and destruction are gaining the upper hand... What has become of Sri Aurobindo's vision -- "India is rising... to shed the light of the eternal dharma that she has nurtured in her breast for the welfare of humanity?"

Continuing with Sri Aurobindo's Independence Day message of August 15, 1947, Dr. Singh quoted the dream of India's spiritual gift to the world... her spirituality entering Europe and America in ever-increasing measure. "That movement will grow amid the disasters of the time. More and more eyes are turning towards her with hope, and there is even an increasing resort not only to her teachings, but to her psychic and spiritual practice."

With sadness, Dr. Singh concluded, "... I agree that Indian

spirituality is entering Europe and America, but it also seems to me that India's spirituality is leaving India! Sinking in a morass of corruption and violence and hatred... is this

the way we will be pathfinders to the future?... When ancient hatreds which we thought were long since dead are arising again with renewed vehemence, and when the whole structure of the Indian spirituality seems to be in danger?... Certainly more people are practicing yoga in California than in India. And certainly both Hindu and Buddhist meditation techniques are becoming very popular in the West... But in India... with exceptions like the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, we ourselves are fast losing touch with the inner Spirit. And this is where the whole question of education and of getting our younger generation exposed to the rich and varied cultural and spiritual tradition of the country comes in."

Dr Singh's lament in the East is echoed in America by none other than the First Lady of the land. In a remarkable speech given recently at the University of Texas, Hillary Rodham Clinton called on all Americans "to be willing to remold society by redefining what it means to be a human being." Speaking of our national "sleeping sickness of the soul" the First Lady declared, "We lack some core level meaning in our individual lives, and meaning collectively - that sense that our lives are part of some greater effort, that we are connected to one another."

A dream of US as "a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual human unity"?! Is there, in truth, Life After Auroville? Light at the end of the dark tunnel of sleep that is death?

I look out of my Savitri House study window at the light dancing on the snow-capped Sangre de Cristo mountains. In the Eternal's wonder-dance of splendours sparkles the answer, I feel sure, as a sudden rush of gratitude fills my heart.

And I cover the little Olivetti portable that served me so faithfully during my life in Auroville... and go out to join the dance of wonders in Baca Grande, Crestone, Colorado.

Greetings of love from Savitri House,  
Seyril



Seyril Schochen at AUM 93

## Sri Balkrishna Poddar

The news came, recently, of the passing of Balkrishna, the head of Sri Aurobindo Books Distribution Agency (SABDA). He was only 61.

To think of SABDA is to think of Balkrishna. He was one of those people, like Joe and Muriel Spanier, who made a sadhana of the distribution of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's books. Every place he went and every person he met were opportunities to make friends and distribute books. I say "distribute," not sell, for Balkrishna was clear about the goal and it wasn't monetary.

I remember meeting him in his office just off the shaded courtyard in the SABDA building beyond the park in Pondicherry. I was there ostensibly to talk about jazzing up the covers of Sri Aurobindo's works so that they would sell more in the USA. He patiently explained that the Mother had forbidden photos on the covers or anything else that might detract from what was inside. She wanted people who were drawn by what was in the books, just as she wanted people who came to her because of what was in them. Still, he was open. If Americans needed something flashy to pique their jaded curiosity, then perhaps, if the book was printed in the USA, it could be arranged. The books must go out.

I continued to visit him on trips to Pondy. He arranged to store and ship a set of the Sri Aurobindo Centenary library for me. It was some time before I could pay him the costs, but I knew that he would never ask.

Last July I found myself in that cool, quiet office again, sipping a lime soda and exchanging pleasantries. We had no pressing business—I just wanted to hear him speak again about the books in that reverential, dignified tone he had, as though they were beings to be protected, nurtured and then carefully sent out into the world. He gave no hint of any health difficulties.

His wife, Sunandaben, writes: Balkrishna is no more with us physically. But in his work for the Ashram publications and SABDA he continues to live on."

Gordon



Balkrishna, daughter Sachala, and wife Sunanda

## Book Review: *The Integral Yoga: Sri Aurobindo's Teaching and Method of Practice. Selected Letters of Sri Aurobindo*

Compiled by Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives and Research Library; 401 pp. Lotus Light Publications, Box 325, Twin Lakes, WI 53181; \$14.95

By Kay Lisseck

**I**T IS ONE THING TO STUDY the philosophy and process of Sri Aurobindo's yoga and still another to understand just how the teachings of the yoga will translate into my own life.

At every turn there are questions. How do I proceed? What attitude should I adopt? How shall I respond to this difficulty or that obstacle? As I aspire to a more enlightened attitude, what is my next step from here? How do I best approximate that which I am not yet able to accomplish?

I have found some answers in this book, *The Integral Yoga*. It contains a wealth of information, inspiration and practical advice, all contained in a comprehensive selection of letters by Sri Aurobindo. Together they provide a description of his yoga in his own words, including the philosophical basis of the yoga, the stages in the experience of transformation, and teachings on practical issues of life and the difficulties we must overcome.

Although I generally prefer to read books straight through, cover to cover, I can see that this book will also be useful as a reference or a guide and an inspirational book whenever a specific question or difficulty arises. It is compiled in such a way, with a detailed table of contents, that it makes Sri Aurobindo's teaching accessible to shed light on a particular topic. For example, chapter topics such as "Planes of Consciousness and Parts of the Being" and "The Triple Transformation" are balanced by "Difficulties in Transforming the Nature" and "Human Relationships in Yoga."

My greatest reservation about the book is the fact that the letters have been assembled after the fact out of their original context. As a student of human development in context, I am keenly aware of this fact. Since the *Integral Yoga* is very individual in nature, can we truly understand Sri Aurobindo's intended meaning from these letters written for someone else in a different time and place? Included in the publisher's note is a caution from Sri Aurobindo himself on this point.

However, as I don't have him here as my personal guide, and until I am advanced enough to receive all guidance from my own enlightened voice, I will glean what I can from these letters to others and apply them as best I can to my own circumstances. Happily, I have found that the skillful job of compilation, done by Peter Heehs and Bob Zwicker of the Ashram Archives and Research Library, makes this process of adaption much easier.

*The Integral Yoga* is comprehensive in scope yet designed in such a way as to be useful as a primer for Sri Aurobindo's yoga as well as a reference guide. This is an ambitious effort well executed, and I look forward to reading it often.

Kay Lisseck lives in Brattleboro, Vermont.

*The Integral Yoga* is available from either Lotus Light Publications or The Sri Aurobindo Association. Add \$2 for shipping.



projector bulb suddenly burned out and Richard stepped forward with a moving description of his first meeting with Mother.

## Saturday, July 2

On Saturday morning Prapanna, of the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetam, led a rather strenuous hike up to the cliffs above the valley, while, down below, Joan Tomb spoke about her recent experience in Auroville and Daniel Kealey about "ETs and The Supramental." A workshop in creative expression, using music, dance and drawing, was led by Paula Murphy, Mira Nakashima-Yarnell, Tom O'Brien, and Lucy Barbera. Linda Lester and Suzanne MacDonald also gave a session on writing and life stories.

In the afternoon, and also during most of Sunday, Theresa Steinberg guided adventurous conference-goers through Holotropic Breathwork sessions. There was an Auroville roundup (American Cultural Pavilion, Center for Human Unity, Nakashima Peace Altar) presented by Eleanor Lovitt, Joan Tomb, Mirra Nakashima-Yarnell, Seyril Schochen, and Kailash Jhaveri.

In the evening Sam Spanier spoke to the entire group about his two darshans with the Mother and how they inspired the vision of Matagiri. This was followed by square dancing.

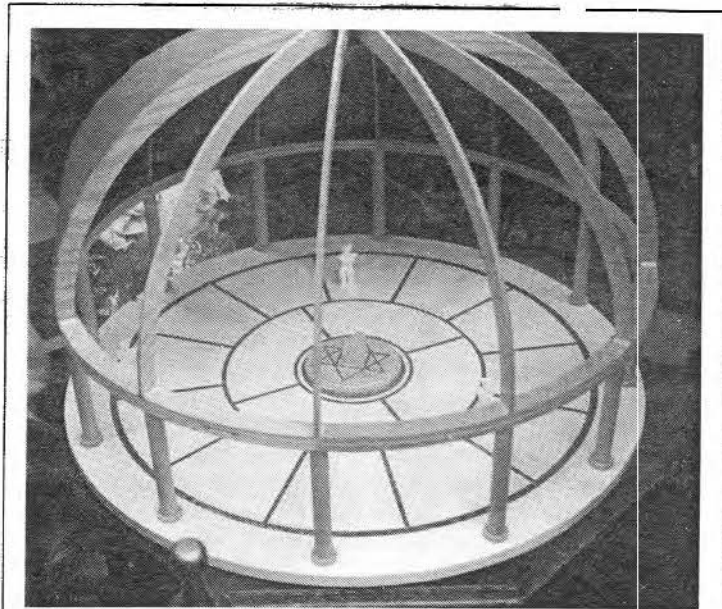
presentations by Wayne Bloomquist and William Moss, along with Bessie Neild and Rusty Selhorst on the theory and practice of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga.

In the evening there was a slide presentation and talk by Dr. Venkatasamy, from Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India, about the Aravind Eye Hospital which he founded originally in his brother's house and which has now grown to over a thousand beds. Dr. Venkatsamy has been a devotee of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother for many years and attributes the success of his work in curing blindness through cataract operations to their force.

Following his talk, Ram Dass spoke about how the SEVA organization, of which he is a board member, got involved with Dr. Venkatasamy's efforts and also about his own path of karma yoga.

The conclusion of the evening was to be a slide show by Kailas Jhaveri and Richard.

However, the



Model of the proposed meditation building at Matagiri

## All-USA-Meeting, 1994

NOT SINCE THE FIRST TWO A.U.M.'s, held consecutively at the Merriam Hill Center in New Hampshire, has the annual meeting returned to an original site. But from June 30 to July 4, A.U.M. took place once again at the Pathworks Center in Phoenicia, New York.

Many of the participants were drawn to the meeting because of the memory of the beauty of the Pathworks Center, nestled in a narrow valley deep within high hills. A stream sang its way alongside the main road where we walked to workshops at Carey Hall; a solitary, young deer grazed fearlessly behind the building; and each morning brought only the sound of birds calling from the forest.

## Friday, July 1

Members of the Yoga family began straggling in Thursday and Friday and volunteering their ideas and services, so that, with the help of Vijay Ragavan and Liz Inglis and Julian Lines' laptop computer, an agenda could be put together. What follows is a brief bare-bones description of the items on the agenda that does not include any of the interaction or atmosphere that is the real stuff of A.U.M.

On Friday afternoon there were

## Sunday, July 3

In the morning many A.U.M.ers carpooled to Matagiri to attend a memorial gathering for Muriel Spanier. After several people spoke, Joe Spanier scattered her ashes under a newly planted tree. Then, Rudy Phillips introduced the Future of Matagiri Project, a plan to build a road up the mountain to a meditation hall and, potentially, a retreat center. Alex Stark unveiled models of the meditation hall and other buildings. This was followed by lunch and, afterwards, a Tom O'Brien-Miriam Belov-led walk up part of the mountain.

Back at Pathworks, Prapanna was leading another hike to the source of the creek that flows through the valley. In the late afternoon, back at Pathwork Center, Gordon Korstange played Indian bamboo flute and led bhajans,



Joe Spanier speaking at the memorial gathering for Muriel Spanier

dance of Yienan Song and music by Mark Pritchard, followed by songs by Amy Fraedon and Leslie Ritter.

## Monday, July 4

After the usual meditation and bhajans in the sanctuary, Lok Tung exercises with Rachael Walker and breakfast,

A.U.M.ers began clearing their rooms and made preparations to leave. Before the closing circle at 11 a.m., Joan Tomb and Ariel Browne led a session on "The Many Faces of Mother in Our lives, Kailas Jhaveri gave an "Introduction to *Savitri*," and Rachael Walker did a "Clutter Workshop."

Participants then began to wend their way home from another successful All USA Meeting.



Dr. Venkataswamy (L) and Vijay Ragvan

while Nenette Nogues presented on math education and Julian Lines led a conference call to AVI-USA and demonstrated computer e-mail. In the evening there was a performance of a new play by Seyril Schochen, *Our Mother of Radiances*, featuring the



Lynda Lester and Bill Moss

# A.U.M. Notebook, 1994

By Lynda Lester

Thursday, June 30

Tom Cowan rescues me from the urban assault of JFK international airport. We drive over the river (Hudson) and through the woods, talking nonstop about the Divine in Manifestation, Truth in Multiplicity, Burger King, etc., until we reach "The Phoenicia Zone," where we fall into a recursive drive loop. Finally we escape and find our way to the Pathworks Center and AUM.

We slip into Carey Hall about 9 p.m., just in time for Richard's slide show on the spiritual significance of flowers. I can make out people sitting in the dark whom I haven't seen for years; I can make out Ram Dass, whom I haven't seen for a week. When the lights go up, there is Julian Lines, welcoming late arrivals; there's Suzanne MacDonald, looking like a northern spring. There also are Will Moss, Ariel Browne, and a multitude of well-met faces from far and yore. Toward midnight we all wend our way to our respective lodgings--to snooze, perchance to dream.

Friday, July 1

I make it to breakfast at the crack of 8:45, having missed early meditation; I'm awake in time for the Opening Circle. Vijay Ragavan and Liz Inglis preside as people discuss workshops they'd like to lead or attend; afterwards, pursuant to divine anarchy, everyone runs to the front of the room to sign up for time slots. During lunch, the coordinators resolve scheduling conflicts and distribute the first Real A.U.M. Schedule. The system works remarkably well, providing for maximum flexibility, creativity, and end-user satisfaction.

Kailas Jhaveri from the Ashram leads off with a substantive talk on Sri Aurobindo's life and yoga. In Wayne Bloomquist's workshop, we practice



Memorial gathering for Muriel Spanier at Matagiri

various types of meditation. "Did you notice the difference?" Wayne asks, after each exercise. I don't. What I do notice is that the Force kicks right in: rich, dense, full of delight. We discuss aspiration, rejection, and surrender. Ram Dass asks questions; people share experiences. I note that a good way to activate the overhead *purusha* is to listen to the Smithereens on your car radio.

Mid-afternoon I gaze out the windows and see cascades of swallowtail butterflies. The trees are tall and their trunks are narrow. Sunlight dapples the forest. I feel the onset of a large *ananda*, fueled by the presence of people with awakened psychic beings.

Later, I attend a talk by the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham (SASP), in which Dakshina, Prapanna, and Vishnu share their aspirations. Theirs is a real ashram, a serious practice; the audience is receptive, I am touched . . . yoga lives. At A.U.M., and at SASP, it's OK to admit that you're in love with the Divine, and that the purpose of your whole life is God.

That evening we hear about SEVA and the Aravind Eye Hospital in Madras. I'd seen Ram Dass the Sunday before in Boulder, holding court before a sold-out crowd of 1,000; at this conference, he is maintaining a low profile. Here we are, an Aurobindo

audience who (as he acknowledges) knows more about this particular yoga than he does--what can he tell us? He begins: "My original impression of Sri Aurobindo was that . . ."--we hold our breath--"his sentences are very long." Laughter.

He gives a modest talk. Occasionally he shows his charismatic power, and the fire flashes from his eyes, but he holds it down. He explains that SEVA was looking for an appropriate cause to serve, when Dr. Venkataswamy appeared seeking funding for the Arvind Eye Hospital; it was a perfect match. Ram Dass visited the hospital (*Aravind* means Aurobindo in Tamil), where he saw pictures of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and asked about these two spiritual figures. Dr. V pointed him to the books and suggested *Savitri* readings . . . thus began Ram Dass's exposure to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Dr. V gives an in-depth talk on the hospital, and I realize how clearly its manifestation has been Shakti in action.

Kailas and Richard are scheduled for another slide show, but I'd seen the one the night before and am fading fast--so I decide to bug out and get some tea instead. Because of this, I miss one of those great A.U.M. moments. The bulb blows in the slide

projector; Julian apologizes and says that instead of showing slides, Richard (who came to the Ashram at age ten) will talk about his experiences with Mother. He does. People are in tears. Afterwards Julian gets up and says, "I rescind my apology."

But I go down to the dining hall for tea with Paula Murphy and Suzanne. Will joins us, then Ram Dass, and we have a nice chat. In the end, I am moved to see how genuine and true Ram Dass appears to be, throwing off the distortions of celebrityhood like a stain-resistant Scotchguard carpet.

We break up about 11:30, and I sneak into my room late.

## Saturday, July 2

Breakfast at the crack of 8:50, having skipped meditation. I forget to check the latest version of the Real A.U.M. Schedule, which keeps changing, so I go to the wrong place

and miss Prapanna's hike to Cliff View, in which Dakshina bounds like a gazelle up a 45-degree incline.

Suzanne and I facilitate a writer's workshop. To my surprise, there is a descent; six of us share experiences and several of us weep. I walk back the long, high road to lunch, enveloped in goldehaze.

That afternoon I attend the Auroville discussion on the porch: maps, updates, pictures, politics, pavillons.



Eleanor Lovitt of Auroville

By late afternoon many AUMers are congregating in front of the dining hall, trading "How did you come into the yoga?" episodes. Connie Buckley, Rudy Philips, Tom O'Brien, and Anie Nunnally show up—and Sam Spanier and Eric Hughes from Matagiri, whom I haven't seen for ages. Gordon Korstange and I take a walk down by the pond, where the water is green and cool, and talk about *NexUS/Collaboration*, the next fu-ture, and writing in the present tense.

That night Sam tells the stunning tale of the founding of Matagiri—he can give Ram Dass a run for the money any day as a master yarn spinner! His account of Mother's darshan, coupled with other A.U.M. grace notes, increases my *shradda* 500 percent. I end up staying for

the square dance. First I take off my jacket, then my socks, sashaying and prancing across the floor with everyone else as the room temperature grows hotter and hotter: "Cross the line to Arkansas, gents to the left and back to yer Taw!"

Eventually people start leaving, decimated by exertion, but the band spurs us on. Finally only six of us remain. "Requests? Requests? We can play requests!" they call. "Do you know 'Feelings'?" I ask.

When the last of us limp out the door, they are playing "Stairway to Heaven."

Tea in the dining hall; I sneak into my room late.

## Sunday, July 3

Breakfast at the crack of 8:55, having missed meditation. I hitch a ride to Matagiri, where I haven't been since 1980. That year held profound changes for me; as I see the place again, every nook and corner brings a poignant, psychic recollection.

An altar has been set outside with flowers and a picture of Muriel Spanier. Joe Spanier reads Muriel's letters, and others give testimonials, remembering. I start



On "Mother's Mountain": Dakshina, Mira Nakashima, Miriam Belov, Gap (Ghislaïne Aarsse-Prin), Wendy Roy, and Dennis Hargiss

to cry. Jeanne Korstange gives me Kleenex and holds my hand. It is sad and beautiful: so many complex emotions, so much consciousness moving, it blows the human circuits.

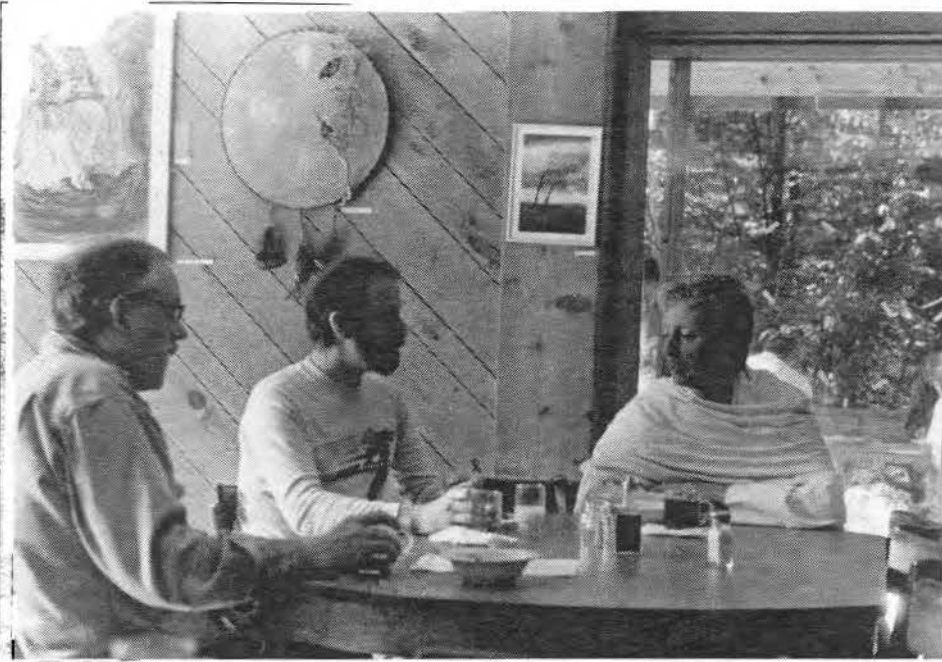
Joe leads a procession across the way to the magnolia tree and spreads Muriel's ashes, sowing the rest of them at Lookout Point, where many people over the years have gazed into the wooded distance.

Then Rudy announces plans for the next phase of Matagiri, and a sacred-space architect named Alexander unveils the models he's built: a meditation hall, a library, a seminar building, and residence facilities, to perch high on the mountain.

At lunch Vishnu is kind to me as I wait in line, sniffing. We eat our pita breads with Dakshina and talk shop (yoga).

That afternoon a bunch of us "walk the land"—i.e., hike the mountain. Robert and Ghislaine Aarsse and Margo MacLeod feast on blueberries. I find an eagle feather; it seems to mean something. After 45 minutes we reach the top. In a clearing at the perfect center of the summit is a tiny burrow. I think it must be the home of an enlightened, furry little mammal: a magic Matagiri marmot mascot.

Miriam Belov leads us in a meditation. When we come down, I feel like every spiritual seeker who has ever climbed a peak and returned, pregnant with light.



Wayne Bloomquist, Bill Moss, and Ariel Browne at breakfast

Back at Pathworks, we gather on the lawn for bhajans—Gordon on flute, Dakshina on tamboura, and Man Ravikant on harmonium, giving proper Indian cadence to the vocals. There is incense, there is chanting . . . the chanting lasts a long time, I hear it afterwards for days.

Around 8:30 that night on the trail, I meet Wayne. He missed dessert at supper, so he's just raided the kitchen. He couldn't find the

light switch, but he found the cake, which he had to eat in the dark. And he had more than one piece!—More than two! It strikes me as hilarious.

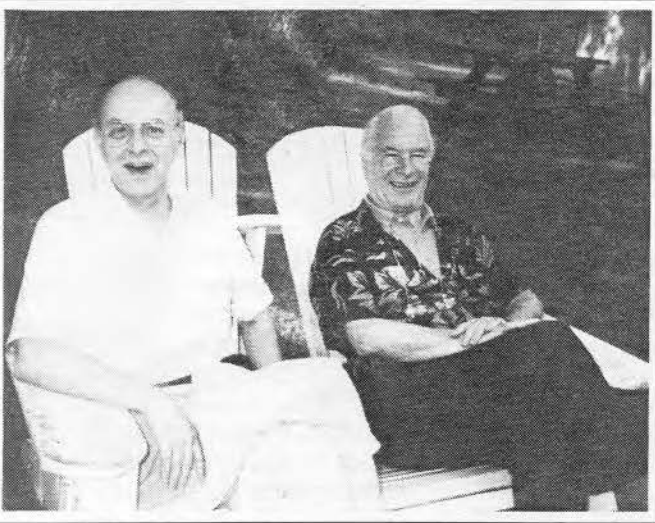
I go to the Sanctuary to see Seyril's play, for which she has gathered a fine array of local talent—including Richard, who doubles for an ethereal Ricardo Montalban (though in his oratorical noblesse he recalls Olivier). The play includes a special appearance by Kwan Yin, alias Yienan Song, who performs an eastern dance that leaves people amazed.

I'm tired, so I don't stay for the musicians—I go and have some cake in the dark. More than one piece! Then I go outside, look at the galaxy, and wish on a falling star. Paula comes; we muse. Back in the dining hall for tea, I am filled with a desperate sense of waning: time is running out, and we will soon have to reenter the hard, compressed consciousness of the JFK airport world.

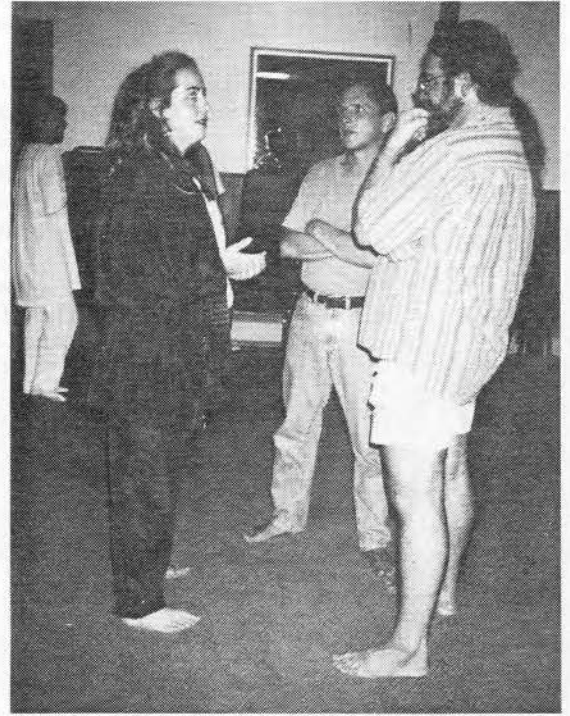
Will intercepts me near Hill House, and we realize we are related. I sneak into my room at midnight.



Julian Lines waiting for the his son Alexander's pillow to drop while Wendy Roy watches



Eric Hughes and Sam Spanier



Theresa Steinberg, Peter Plunkett and Prapanna

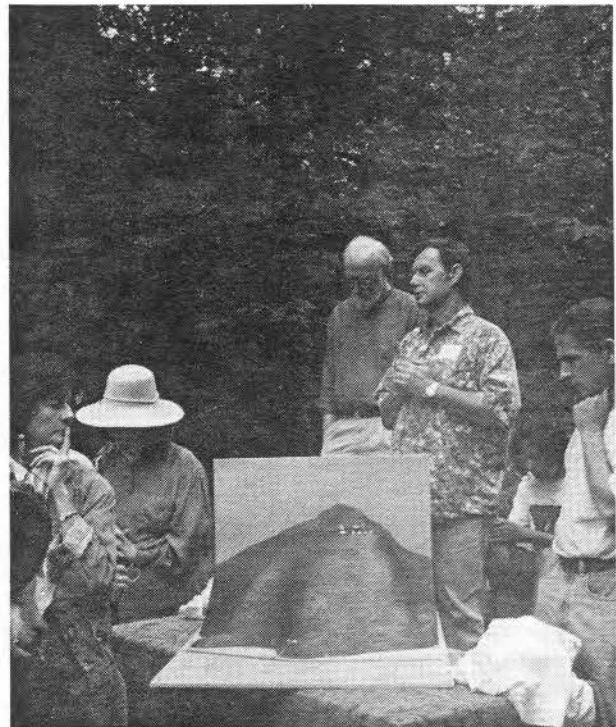
## Monday, July 4

Late, missed, etc. . . . Tea with Prapanna on the porch talking about doctors of philosophy and aspects of yoga; packing up. Everyone meets in Carey for the Closing Circle. Mother's blessingpacket passes from hand to hand, and whoever holds it can speak. Sam speaks, and passes it on; then he runs out and grabs it back. Will says, "The lower harmony dissolves as the higher harmony descends." Eleanor Lovitt from Auroville says, "We're pretty hands-on in AV, but here, my aspiration has been rekindled."

Then it's hop in the car, wrenched away to catch the shuttle to JFK, and onto the plane, which is boarding as I arrive--whew! But the Mother told me it would be OK.

Back in Colorado that evening, riding the Airporter from Denver to Boulder, I watch fireworks in the sky, all the way home.

**Lynda Lester** is the editor of NexUS and lives in Boulder, Colorado.



Rudy Philips speaking about the Matagiri project while (from L.) Jackie Swartz, Arya Maloney and architect Alex Stark listen

# The Aravind Eye Hospitals

By Vishnu Eschner

**D**R. VENKATASWAMY spoke humbly and eloquently about the Aravind organization's goal to eliminate blindness in the world, and especially to provide free cataract operations and lenses to those unable to pay. Without government funding, the hospital has been able to treat sixty percent of its' patients without payment, helping to make the Aravind Hospitals in Tamil Nadu a model for others in developing countries around the world.

The hospital organization was named for Sri Aurobindo and is host to a meditation hall enshrining his relics. Doctor V, as he is affectionately called by those who know him, maintains that Sri Aurobindo has constantly inspired his work, from the inception of the first hospital with ten beds in his brother's house in 1976, to its current status as a world renowned Institute of ophthalmological education and service which in 1993 alone performed over 54,000 cataract operations, the most of any hospital in the world.

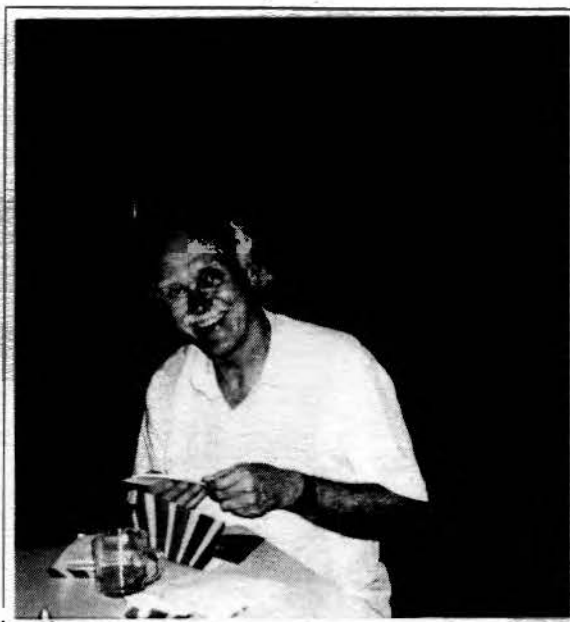
Because Dr. V is so unassuming, it took Ram Das to later point out the non-stop labor of love which this kind of organization requires in order to survive. In fact, Dr. Venkataswamy is unmarried and receives no salary for his work, considered some of the world's finest in graduate education and lens development.

Ram Das's SEVA foundation, which has brought some of the 1960's most influential idealists and thinkers together with medical specialists, supports organizations like Aravind around the world, has been especially helpful in making an expensive state-of-the-art lens available to those in need in India for \$8.00.

Ram Das emphasized the proper spirit of giving necessary to help those in need without "poisoning" the gift with ego. He shared his own experience as a bhakta of Hanuman who rejected the Lord Ram's attempt to bring him into His Self in order to re-main separate and able to continue to serve.

The audience was most appreciative and inspired to hear of the dedicated work of these two men who have come together from disparate worlds on opposite sides of the globe to try to lessen the suffering of humanity.

*Vishnu Eschner is a member of the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Pitam in Pomona, California.*



Ram Dass

## Ram Dass on the Difference Between Revolution and Evolution

*Interview by Lynda Lester*

**Note:** One night at AUM, several of us had a conversation with Ram Dass over tea. Ram Dass was observing how the freedom-loving sixties had sown the seeds for the reactive, conservative eighties. The next night, notebook in hand, I asked him to summarize his concept of revolution vs. evolution. The brief interview follows.

**Ram Dass:** There's a kind of rhythm and timing in change. But oftentimes, when the mind gets ahead of the intuition, you hold the vision of where you're going and try to manipulate the environment to bring it about; you treat other people as objects to be manipulated. There's no subjective "us-ness;" you're cutting yourself off from them. When people feel cut off that way, and when they feel threatened by your vision, there's a separation that occurs. They get frightened, they start to contract, and ultimately, they become violent. That process often happens between generations. And that's revolution.

Evolution, on the other hand, follows the rhythm of change. It's a process in which there isn't somebody doing something to somebody else. Evolution is where you achieve movement in harmony with the intuitive mind as it's unfolding. Because you're in the intuition, you're open to the collective feelings of the situation . . . and so your response harmonizes with things, rather than acting against things.

*Ram Dass lives in San Anselmo, California.*

# 'AUM' Namo Bhagavate!

By Naren Bhatt

*Note: This selection was excerpted from a longer piece of writing that Naren distributed at A.U.M.*

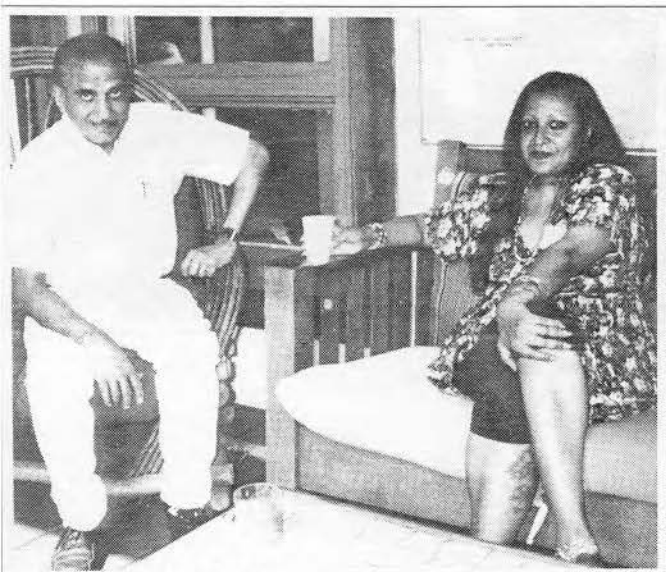
**E**VERY NIGHT EACH ONE of us "dies," withdrawing from life during sleep; each morning, we are "born" again to begin a new life of the next day. Year after year, we live and die and are reborn, performing a more or less identical routine. We acquire knowledge of how to obtain food, houses, clothing, cars, spouses, children. We learn to live more leisurely or more lazily. We pursue biological and mental objectives most of the time, seeking the grace of God for satisfying our demands or desires. We rarely offer ourselves to the Divine—continually suppressing the Presence, postponing for later what the Divine wants us to do. We respect and honor what the "great beings" or saints or our guru did when they were living in this world, but always have enough excuses for not being able to follow the examples set by them.

Every night, before we retire, are we ready to ask, "What is to be done next, Mother?" Every morning, are we ready to ask, "What is to be done now and today?" That is what A.U.M. is supposed to inspire us for.

Let us coordinate our actions together—with Auroville, with one another, with the Divine: for next month, next year, next decade . . . for the next age.



Robert Aarsse-Prin



Man Ravikant and Chitra Neogy-Tezak



Suzanne MacDonald, Rashmika Mehta, and Joan Tomb



Meditation Room at the Sri Aurobindo Association Center, Berkeley, California

### ***Collaboration and NexUS to Merge***

After discussions with *NexUS* editor Lynda Lester and the board of the Sri Aurobindo Association, we have decided to combine *Collaboration* and *NexUS* into one publication that will be distributed four times a year beginning in 1995. This publication will still be called *Collaboration*, the Mother's name for the original newsletter begun by Eric Hughes and Muriel Spanier, and will incorporate the best features of both, including articles, interviews, letters, poetry, etc. that focus on personal responses to and experiences of the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

The new *Collaboration* will be co-edited by Gordon Korstange and Lynda Lester through the magic of E-mail and will continue the use of themes to provide a center for some, if not all, of the issues. The theme for the first issue of 1995 is "Music."

Submissions can be sent to Lynda Lester or Gordon Korstange at the addresses on the bottom of page 2. We hope you will join our *Collaboration*.

**Sri Aurobindo Association**  
***Collaboration***  
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**Berkeley, CA 94704**

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