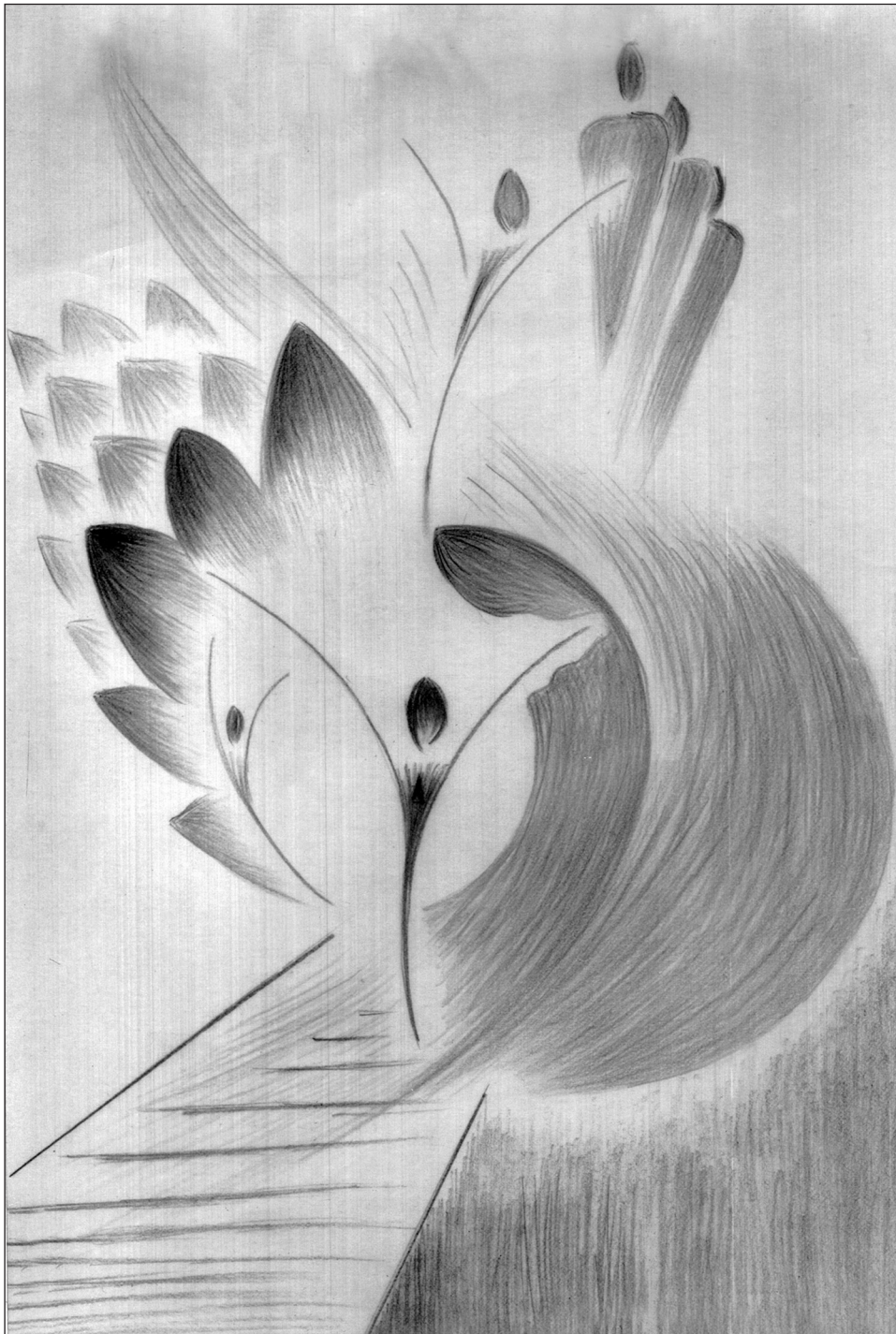


Collaboration

Spring 2013

Journal of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Vol. 38, No. 1



**Zackaria Moursi: Preparing for the winter journey • Ritam: The New World •
Beloo Mehra: Search for a group-soul: The case of Indian-Americans •
Ruth Lamb: Individuation: Activating the four powers •
Richard Pearson: On the passing away of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother •
Pravir Malik: Personal transformation and power •
Current affairs • AV almanac • Source material • Poetry • Apropos**



About the cover

Title: Psychic joy in the U.N. This is a greyscale reproduction of a color painting (pencils with watercolor) by Mirajyoti (mjyoti@auroville.org.in) who has lived in Auroville since 1989 and formerly lived in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. It is part of a collection in soft pastels which has been set to music on a DVD which is available from the artist (mjyoti@auroville.org.in). Mirajyoti is also an editor and she coedited the popular book *The Hierarchy of Minds* with Prem Sobel, among other works.

The authors and poets

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Beloo Mehra (beloome@gmail.com), originally from Delhi, lived in the US for 14 years and then returned to India where she works at Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research in Puducherry.

Zackaria Moursi (zmoursi@gmail.com) resides at the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham ashram in Lodi, CA. He has started to translate some of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's writings into Arabic.

Richard Pearson, a member of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram since childhood, is an expert on flowers and plants, and a contributor to the book *Flowers and Their Messages* (RichardKailas@gmail.com).

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From the office of Collaboration

In this issue we have a quite a large assortment of articles. In our Current Affairs section, we bring news from several of our US centers. This is followed by AV Almanac, which includes two articles which are based on interviews with two dynamic Aurovilians—Chandresh Patel, who lived in the US for many years, and Gijs Spoor from the Netherlands. Both are creative entrepreneurs seeking to develop sustainable business activities in Auroville.

We follow with two feature articles in our Chronicles section. The first is by Zackaria Moursi, an Egyptian by birth who has also lived in Auroville, Germany, and the US, and now resides at the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham in Lodi, CA. In this series of vignettes from his life he reviews the significant events through which he was being guided in his spiritual development, with a theme, he says, “of love, and how it can be transformed from the merely human into a more divine form.” The second chronicle is by Ritam, a talented Russian nature photographer, poet, and translator of Sri Aurobindo’s and the Mother’s works, who is a regular visitor to the Ashram in Pondicherry. In this article he writes of his spiritual journey, his work, and their interconnection.

In our Essays section, we have a deep and introspective analysis by Beloo Mehra about the Indian-American identity, and of Indian-Americans’ search for their group-soul. Beloo, who is from Delhi, lived in the US for 14 years before returning to India to reside in Pondicherry, where I have been fortunate to have her as a colleague for the last five years. Here she examines her subject in the light of her own observations and experiences, as well as in the light of Sri Aurobindo’s writings.

We next feature an interesting essay by Ruth Lamb on the process of individuation, which she defines as “moving beyond ego,” but requires as its foundation the development and integration of the ego until the point is reached when it can be transcended. In this chapter from her recent book, *Human Becoming: A Guide to Soul-Centered Living*, Ruth focuses on the development of four powers of the nature: knowledge and intelligence, force and strength, harmony and adaptation, and work and service. She also discusses the inner being and the witness consciousness and their importance in moving beyond the ego. Her work is squarely based on Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual psychology.

We follow these with two shorter essays. The first is by Richard Pearson, who has lived in the Ashram since his childhood, about his first-hand reminiscences of the passing away of both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The second short essay is by Pravir Malik, who is an organizational management expert who bases his work on Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual philosophy. Here he discusses the need to shift from the false and limited egoistic perspective of things to a more integral outlook in order to achieve personal transformation and power.

In Source Material, there are several related selections from Sri Aurobindo’s *The Life Divine* that describe the integral Knowledge and the integral Reality that we are in our essence and towards which we are evolving. Together, they complement the articles by Ruth and Pravir and help to put them in a more comprehensive context. We then have a selection from *Mother’s Agenda*, in which the Mother describes her own physical experience of the Reality, the divine Presence which is everything.

The Poetry Room includes a mantric highpoint from Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri*, and two poems by Ritam which were included in his exhibition: one on the fane (i.e. temple) of the Himalayas and the other on the spiritual muse. There follows a short five line poem by Angelo Salerno in the Japanese ‘Tanka’ form, and a longer poem by Kailas Jhaveri related to her experience of the passing of Sri Aurobindo. The issue closes with *Apropos*, a selection of revealing quotations about the spiritual journey on which we are all fellow travelers.

The Photographers

We have included in this issue several photos from Ritam’s exhibition at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram which was entitled “The Beauty of India,” and featured panoramic views the Himalayas, as well as close-up shots of flowers and butterflies. Admittedly, these small greyscale reproductions do not do justice to the large, exquisitely colored photographs in the exhibit. Please see his website for color reproductions of his photographs: <http://www.savitri.su/>

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About SAA: The Sri Aurobindo Association distributes information about Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, and Auroville, and supports projects related to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Auroville, and Integral Yoga activities in America. Current members: Lynda Lester, president; John Robert Cornell, secretary; Kalpana Patel, treasurer; Margaret Phanes and Angelo Salerno, directors. *Collaboration* Associates include Lucie Seidlitz.

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Current Affairs

New study guides and e-books

by Santosh Krinsky

The Institute for Wholistic Education (www.wholisticinstitute.org), in collaboration with Lotus Press (www.lotuspress.com), is continuing its development and publishing of study guides for Sri Aurobindo's major writings. *Readings in Rebirth and Karma* by Sri Aurobindo is now in final preparation and is expected to be available by 1 June 2013. As a special offer to Sri Aurobindo study centers located in the USA, we are offering one copy to each center that requests one from us for your library and potential use as a study guide. The book is available through distribution for sale as well. Kindle versions are being made available through Amazon for those who use either a Kindle Reader or Kindle APP on any other platform. The book is also going to be available on Google Books (epub) format for those who use Nook or iPad or other epub based readers. If you are interested in this offer, or wish to arrange for copies for resale, please contact by mail or email and provide your shipping address and contact information including phone. You also may email if you did not take advantage of the earlier offer regarding the prior books in the series (*Readings in Sri Aurobindo's The Life Divine*, vols. 1-3 or *Readings in The Mother* by Sri Aurobindo).

The next book of Sri Aurobindo's being focused on is *Essays on the Gita* with daily posts at <http://sriurobindostudies.wordpress.com>.

Sri M.P. Pandit's book *Bases of Tantra Sadhana* is being prepared for Kindle, Google Books, Nook, and iPad as an electronic book at this time. It should be available in Summer 2013. Other titles by M. P. Pandit in active preparation (or already available) include *Yoga in Savitri*, *How Do I Proceed?*, *How Do I Begin?*, *Kundalini Yoga*, *Teaching of Sri Aurobindo*, *A Summary of Savitri*, *Pitfalls in Sadhana*, *Readings in Savitri Vol. 6*, and *Readings in Savitri Vol. 10. A Savitri Dictionary* by Rand Hicks is also being turned into an e-book format.

The Institute also sponsors classes on reiki, levels 1, 2 and 3, conducted by Karuna Krinsky. The schedule is regularly updated and can be found at www.reikiteacher.org. For further information: Institute for Wholistic Education, 3425 Patzke Lane, Racine, WI 53405; 262-619-1798; email santoshk@msn.com.

Matagiri news

by Julian Lines

Matagiri recently appointed Tom Cowan to the Board of Trustees. Tom, who lives in Long Island, filled the vacancy of

Bhuvana Nandakumar, who has moved to balmy Minnesota. Matagiri President, Julian Lines, has been reappointed to Auroville's International Advisory Council along with Dr. Vishaka Desai and Sir Mark Tully. Julian also serves on the board of the Nakashima Foundation for Peace and is planning to lead a tour for the dedication of the Hall of Peace in Auroville in February 2014.

Auroville pioneer, Frederick Schulze-Buxloh, will be speaking at Matagiri April 27th as part of the Darshan Observed program. JV Avandanulu from Auroville will be teaching Stress Reduction and Pranayama at Matagiri May 18th and 19th at Matagiri. Aurovilians B (Sullivan), Vera and Ashesh will also be visiting Matagiri following the All USA Meeting in Oregon. Please check the events section on the matagiri.org website for program details.

Savitri immersion at Lodi Ashram

by Lucie Seidlitz

During the week of the Spring Equinox, March 20-24, several members of the extended **Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham** community gathered in the beautiful yurt to dedicate themselves to the second annual Savitri Immersion Workshop. Mateo Needham and John Robert Cornell organized the event and formed the core group along with Lucie Seidlitz, Mitra and Gaia Lamb and other devotees. Others were encouraged to join the group at any time. The event, almost five days, was supported by the entire ashram and included lodging; delicious, healthy meals; and access to the restful meditation hall and silent relics room.

Each session began with the ring of a bell, a chant of three OMs, and a brief meditation. The group members read in rotation, 20-30 pages an hour, breaking only at the end of a canto. I felt that our immersion into *Savitri* enveloped us not only through the beauty and rhythm of Sri Aurobindo's words, but also through the spring wind and the wildflowers peering into the yurt windows onto our peaceful inner circle.

FWE reaches milestone

by Jerry Schwartz

Since the late 1980s, **The Foundation for World Education** (FWE) has financially supported a wide variety of organizations that are working toward the evolutionary transformation espoused by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. FWE is happy to report that it has crossed a major milestone this year, in having granted more than two million dollars over time to programs and projects in Auroville, the U.S., and other parts of the world. Donations to support the activities of the Foundation are always welcome. The Foundation also considers setting up endowment funds as a part of its Planned Giving program. For more information, please visit www.FoundationForWorldEducation.org.



AV almanac

Developing entrepreneurship

Interview of Chandresh Patel by Larry Seidlitz

This article appeared in the March 2013 issue of Auroville Today.

Chandresh, an ex-student of the Ashram school who later worked in the Silicon chip industry in the US for 22 years, tells of his life before Auroville and his work here supporting new ventures.

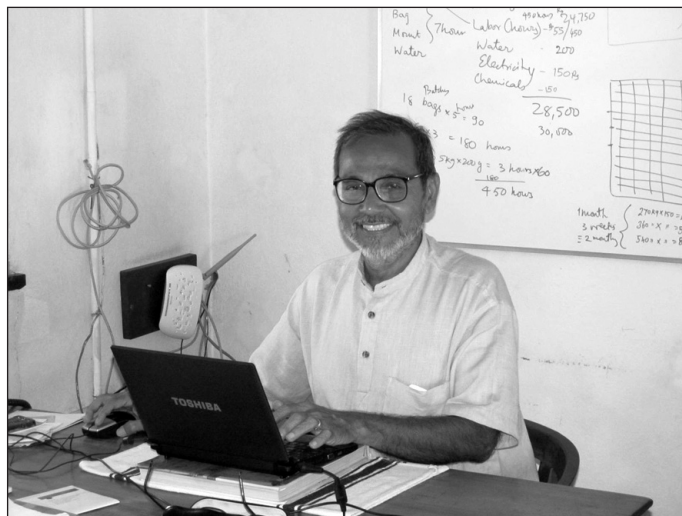
How did your experience in the Ashram school influence and shape who you are today?

My parents and uncles were all freedom fighters, so from them I was quite influenced during my early years in the social aspect of India's development. I joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram school in 1968 when I was 11 years old. In the Ashram, there was such an intense atmosphere, so it definitely had an influence. In the school, there was a strong discipline, and although it was flexible in the sense that you could choose what you wanted to do, it was very structured. That helped in developing the ability to focus and plan. The focus there was not on passing exams, but on getting a rounded education. In engineering we had a five year course and were exposed to the three main areas of mechanical, electrical and civil engineering, and because computers were just coming up at that time, I also took computer science and digital electronics. Being so broad it was not like the engineering courses outside, but it gave a very rounded background with a hands-on emphasis.

Were you also much involved with physical education?

In the Ashram, physical education was mandatory. Every day the students had to be involved in different activities—combat-ives, aquatics, gymnastics, athletics, games, and then of course there were competitions. There was a very structured program.

That emphasis on athletics is something I have maintained. This week over 3000 runners are competing in the Auroville marathon. I started the marathons in Auroville in 2008 for Auroville's 40th anniversary, and even this year it is based here and I am the race director. It is a huge effort, with about 20 team members and about 250 volunteers. When I was in the US I used to run marathons, and when I came here there were no marathons in the area. My original plan was to have a run from the Matrimandir to the Ashram and back again; that would have been about 30 km. But then I decided that we needed a marathon course within Auroville itself. It has been very successful; each year the number of runners has been growing.



Chandresh at his office at SaraCon in Kottakarai, Auroville.

After your education in the Ashram, what did you do?

I worked in Pondicherry for four years with a company that was started by one of the founders who had helped start Aurelec. The company was designing and manufacturing leather processing machines and I helped develop some new digital electronic design products for the company. Later it also moved into design and manufacture of computers and I worked with the design team on these new projects. I was happy doing this work, but my brother who was in the US kept saying that I should come and check it out.

In the U.S. I worked in the electronics industry, first on the East Coast where my brother was and later on the West Coast. Slowly I moved into designs that spanned microprocessors, computers and later networking. I worked in many companies there and afterwards started a company which did design services consulting for bigger companies, mostly on networking, wireless switching, and things like that.

Outside of technical work, in the mid 1990s along with some friends we started a weekly Sri Aurobindo study circle, which eventually expanded to having several evenings of readings and a sports activity on Sunday mornings. In 1995 our group also started going to the Lodi Ashram for their monthly retreats. Through this group I became a board member of the Sri Aurobindo Association of California which was involved in coordinating the All USA Meetings (AUMs), publishing the journal *Collaboration*, and helping to promote Auroville and other projects within US. In 1999 our group along with AVI-USA organized fundraising for the Village Action Group and land purchase in Auroville.

Through this fundraising work I was invited to join AVI-USA, and after joining I went to the general AVI meeting in Germany in 2000 where I was invited to join the general AVI board.



Then in 2003 President Bush started a preemptive war in Iraq, and I decided that was it, I am getting out of here and going back to India. Already for a long time I had been thinking of going back, but that was my turning point. It took me some time to wrap things up, and in 2006 I joined Auroville.

Briefly take us through some of your projects since coming to Auroville?

I started SaraCon as an entrepreneur development centre. I came from Silicon Valley where many new companies had been started with venture capital. The idea here was to create a kind of social venture pool to help young Aurovilians or newcomers who had ideas to start an activity. It is very difficult to find a place in Auroville to start something, and even if you find something you have to deal with the cost of setting it up and the rent. So the SaraCon campus was to become a hub for entrepreneur development, with workshops on business planning, project support writing, and things like that. Once some activities had started they could cross-pollinate and support each other. The idea was to initially support a team for a year or two, and if the team becomes successful, then any income over and above what they need for sustenance would be split three ways, one third to the unit to expand and grow, the second third to the sustain and grow the community, and the third would go to the pool from which we fund other projects. But that part of the vision has yet to materialize.

Also, the idea was that we would support three types of projects. One type would help the community as a whole. The community transport system is one of those. We did some research but the cost of a general transport system was too high and we couldn't support it. However, we developed Quiet Transport, an electric bike project, and Auroville Community Transport (ACT), a bus service as part of that. Both of these enterprises are struggling to gain traction, however—the bus service simply because it needs more users, and the bike service because of the unavailability of sufficiently durable batteries in India.

Blue Light with which I have been involved started off at SaraCon but has now moved to Town Hall. Blue Light represents the open source movement in Auroville. Usually in India when you buy a computer, the operating system and other software that is bundled with it are copied versions and not legal. So the idea was that at least all the services in Auroville could use Ubuntu, which is an open source operating system, and Blue Light also supported other tools that can be used on open source. Blue Light had a team that would go to the units and services and convert their systems to open source, train their staff, and do networking so that backups could be done remotely. The Blue Light team converted almost 40 units to using Ubuntu. They also gave courses at the SaraCon office for people working in the units to learn how to use these software packages, and also developed open source software for some of the activities in SaraCon, such as for our bus transport logistics.

Another project of this type is Urban Networks for which SaraCon provided a space in the complex until recently when they moved to Town Hall; they are doing regional planning (See *Auroville Today*, December 2012).

The second type of project SaraCon wants to support is those which would give maintenance to Aurovilians. In 2000 I started Avitra, a translation services. We have people from about 30 countries here, so it is an ideal place for website localization, voice-overs, translations of books and brochures. That unit is doing okay; we have about 25 Aurovilians who get their maintenance through that system. Another project of that sort was AurovilleArts.com, an online gallery for Auroville artists so that their art could be exhibited online and sold. After three years of effort, the website was good but we had to close it because most of our artists were not open to the idea.

We also started Auroville Consulting to offer management consulting services to companies outside using Auroville expertise. The idea here was to create a knowledge-based industry for Auroville. Auroville has a lot of expertise in greenwork, for example, and the idea was that if companies outside wanted to take some initiative in this area, Auroville could provide some project management for them.

The third type of initiative was to support local Aurovilians and local artisans. One example of this type of project is Wellpaper which had an office in SaraCon for two years, and now have moved to their own building. I have been involved in another initiative—growing mushrooms—using the same method of training local people and microfinancing them through the Village Action Group, and also helping with the management, quality control and marketing. Another project that has moved to SaraCon is Eco Femme, which is making reusable sanitary napkins for women; they moved into our complex about two months ago. Auro Creation which makes compressed earth block also has their management office here. Tapasya Design Studio had a sojourn at SaraCon for some time before they moved to their own offices in Humility building which they designed and built. Many initiatives have started off here and then moved to their own places.

For some time I have had in mind creating a space for product development. Today if you want to create a new product in Auroville, it is impossible to find a workshop or an affiliate to do the job-work. There also are not many skilled artisans who can do this work. I am trying to set up a product design space adjacent to Udavi school campus, where there are four big industrial sheds which need sprucing up. Building a team to do the product design work is challenging, however, as is securing the funding to set this up. We want to have facilities for wood-work, metal-work, and fabric-making. We have found a team leader for carpentry work, and a team leader for fabric, we also have interest from some designers to be part of this new setup. So these things are there but we will have to see how it can come together. We can provide a place and some logistical help, but each activity will have to be self-sustaining. There are possibilities and we are trying to realize them.



How do you view Auroville's overall development?

The socio-economic development is a big challenge, including the availability of housing and a sustainable maintenance for the residents. There are many young and skilled people who come to Auroville but they do not stay because there is no place for them and no maintenance for them. Even the volunteers who come have to contribute to the central fund while maintaining themselves from their savings. This is in contradiction to common sensibilities. In SaraCon we provide the volunteers with their basic needs—transport from Chennai and back, meals, an electric bike to get around, a little bit of pocket money. But other units are not doing this. In terms of housing, there is a resistance to building temporary housing because it tends to become permanent in Auroville as people don't move out because they don't have the means or the will in the future. What is promised is readily forgotten. Today, in Auroville most new structures are using reinforced steel and cement concrete. These rigid structures cost a lot of money and take a lot of time and energy to build. Recently I found out that the life of costly reinforced concrete structures is only about 60-70 years, and yet in Auroville these are the types mostly promoted.

When the early pioneers came to Auroville, the land was uninhabitable. By default their main effort was greenwork. But now the second and third generations of Aurovilians are here and the socioeconomic situation is as barren as the land was for those pioneers. There are not enough people, and so the community is struggling with problems of money and cash flow, and many residents go abroad to work or build guest houses in their residences to earn extra money. There is little money to move the economy forward, little to create new jobs and wealth. Forget about creation, you create when you have the basics, but the basics are still lacking.

There is not enough concerted effort towards socio-economic development. The Auroville Board of Commerce (ABC) is mostly focused on regulating whatever units there are with procedures, rules, taxes and loans, but it is not able to set aside any money or time for the development of entrepreneurship or new projects within Auroville. This is left to the initiatives of individual residents or newcomers. There is no group within Auroville reviewing business plans or encouraging teams, no corpus money to support new initiatives. For Auroville initiatives, bank loans from outside generally are unavailable, and there are no means to raise loans within Auroville except through a private party. The economic situation in Auroville needs concentrated effort to germinate new enterprises in a variety of fields with ongoing support, guidance and networking. Without this we will not be able to create a knowledge society. Due to the low population density, the cottage industry model will not work for our residents, and it is not practical to move workers in and out each day for low margin industries. Other micro-enterprise models have to be set up to leverage skills where the best resources may be mobilized and optimum returns are possible.

The change-maker

Interview of Gijs Spoor by Mandakini Gupta

This article appeared in the March 2013 issue of Auroville Today.

Gijs, a social entrepreneur, farmer, teacher and consultant, joined Auroville in 2010. Here's his journey...

What are your early memories of your turning-points which clarified the direction of your life?

"My parents are film-makers. They had made a documentary on children in Rajasthan. I was 10. The story was about twins—a brother and a sister. Due to sex discrimination, the girl wasn't allowed to go to school. However, when her father and brother went to the Pushkar fair to sell their pottery toys, the girl would wear her brother's clothes and sneak into school. The story was magical, my reality in Amsterdam where I was living was so incomparably different.

There was a farmer from Rajasthan, Inder Dan, who helped my parents make this movie. He came to the Netherlands to promote it and visited us at our home. I remember very clearly the image of this man—big bright turban, long beard, white gown, there he was standing in our very Amsterdam kitchen making his rotis (chapatis) on the open fire, without using a pan. 'Wow, I want to go to where you come from,' I told Inder Dan. All he said was, 'Finish your education and then you can come work in my farm.'

So that was it, I knew that this is what I wanted to do! This idea stuck in my head for the next eight years. When I was finishing high school I started preparing to go to his farm. I had no farming experience, so I looked at some local organic farms in Amsterdam to gain some experience in farming. I also took a Hindi course and finally went to India and worked for a year at Inder Dan's farm.

Inder Dan is a multi-talented guy. He is a farmer, poet, playwright, historian, manager and inventor. All my experience in farming and insights into politics, economy, entrepreneurship stem from the time spent with him.

I had so many experiences and memories of this one year in India. All of these have shaped my life in a way that I am what I am today—a change-maker. Inder Dan had these great ideas, he was a social entrepreneur who was always experimenting with business models and institutional forums. I was interested in grounding his ideas. I would always tell him, 'Let's do it.'

I remember saying that just selling raw products wasn't going to bring the farmers a livelihood; we decided to go up the value chain and have a retail shop. Inder Dan had been doing research and he knew how to make bread in a traditional way with a wood fired oven, and other exotic healthy bakes. One bril-



liant idea he had was to cook healthy meals for rickshaw pullers and in return they would do some advertising for him. He gave them t-shirts to wear which advertised our shop on the back. All the tourists would come to our shop.

After this year in Rajasthan, I went back to Holland to get myself a university degree.

Did anything significant change in your belief system after this year? Did you face any challenges in Holland?

Yes, definitely. What changed was that I was determined to implement change where it was required. At my university I became very active in the student movement for voicing the truth. We realised how the system was chronically sick, it was always trying to restrict thinking. So we did everything to resist the politics in the system and implement effective actions. We were quite successful in standing our ground.

How did you come to Auroville?

We were a few friends from university who had all studied organic agriculture. Two of them, Dave and Natasha, who today are Aurovilians, were also part of this circle. They got married to each other in India and it is through them that I came to know of Auroville. While we were all in India attending their wedding, Dave, who had spent his career in Tanzania, Africa, convinced us that Tanzania was the place to start our own organic farm. We thought of buying a large 1000 acre farm to grow organic fair-trade herbs. So I went there to prepare the transaction and to make a business plan. It was very challenging because the system there was corrupt. We identified the land. It was beautiful land, it had a national wildlife zone, spring areas and an agriculture zone where the soil was rich rich rich; we could grow anything there. But there were five legal claims to the same piece of land so we decided to leave it. Our other obvious option was India, so I came back.

Dave and Natasha were already settled in Auroville, at Evergreen. I came to spend six months with them in 2003, working with the Farm Group doing research and preparing their first five year plan. But the more I explored Auroville, the more I felt that it was too inward-looking and disconnected from the world outside. I really wanted to experience India. So I left Auroville and went to Hyderabad.

I started working with farmers in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Kerala. Everything I did was to do with organic farming and fair trade, which meant mobilising groups of small farmers and helping them to get access to high-end value markets. I set up two companies. I wanted to experience the mainstream corporate sector, and I did. However, I also realised that what I wanted to do in the business world is actually to bring a change based on values, and I couldn't find a space to do that there. I still remember meetings in Mumbai with these huge textile conglomerates. We were not communicating. I couldn't express that what



From left: Jessamijn, little Sijmen, Liesbeth and Gijs

really matters is to use all this factory set-up to change the world rather than to just make money. Five or six years after I had first left Auroville I realised that, actually, Auroville is the place to explore how to insert values into business.

By now I was married to my wife, Jessamijn, who was also in our agriculture friends' circle from university. We already had a child and the second one was coming. I had been working too much and neglecting my family. We decided to quit Hyderabad and come to Auroville. It was a decision to spend more time with family, with values, with passion. It was 2010.

So what have you been doing in Auroville since you returned?

I came back to work with the Farm Group again. I was supporting them with planning, what to grow where, how to increase consumption, matching supply and demand. After charting the next five-year plan, I wanted to do something practical as well, so I worked at Foodlink distributing vegetables. Now I steward a nine acre forest in Udumbu, where we also try to grow food, but I am not a very good farmer.

Meanwhile my daughter started going to TLC, The Learning Community. This is a school where parents also dedicate their time to teaching children. So I got involved with TLC, teaching biology and science. After the first batch of kids graduated from TLC and went to Last School, I continued teaching them the same subjects at their new school. It was very important for me to start infusing values at a very formative age in a child's life. I even tried including systems thinking in the classes.

At Evergreen we started a systems thinking course called Systemic Change. It is a three-day workshop where we help people articulate the change they aspire to bring about, and build the vehicle that will help them reach their goal. Last time we had professionals from Bangalore who work with CEOs of big companies like Wipro, Voltas, etc. By the end of it some of them realised they needed a change in themselves. One of them



decided to quit his job altogether. He wants to come back to explore what he should do next.

My main passion is to be associated with a change in society. When we did these courses we realised that in three days there's very little you can accomplish. In order to consolidate or ground these different practices or perspectives, we need to spend at least 10 days together, if not longer. So the idea came that instead of giving courses, why not provide regular coaching and support to those who want to bring about a change in systems.

I decided we should get associated with UnLtd India, a launch-pad for social entrepreneurs. This is an Indian setup which 'finds, funds and supports exceptional individuals whose ideas, passion and entrepreneurial skills can bring about long-term solutions to India's social problems'. Right now we are in the process of becoming affiliated to UnLtd India. My targets are to raise 30 lakhs (approximately US \$60,000) in two years to support 30 social entrepreneurs in Tamil Nadu. As soon as such milestones are achieved and we have proved to be a worthy UnLtd India affiliate, we can officially call ourselves UnLtd Tamil Nadu. Once this happens, UnLtd India matches 100% of the money we have raised in the first year and 50% in the second year. This will really help us in achieving our goals."

Have your views on Auroville changed since you first left Auroville?

Yes, they have. Today I believe Auroville has a great potential to be a R&D hub for the world by experimenting with different models. Compared to when I first came to Auroville ten years ago, I see more initiatives in Auroville now in reaching out to the rest of India in the field of rural development. SEDAB, for example, the enterprise development programme in Auroville's bioregion, could create a serious impact [see *Auroville Today* #278, September 2012]. Another programme, IRD, Integral Rural Development programme, is still being considered by the central and Tamil Nadu governments. If it is approved, we can work with 20,000 rural families, and Auroville can become a hub for rural development for Tamil Nadu, and maybe even for India. The question is whether we have the management capacities to deliver that promise.

Auroville can bring a special flavour to the rural development sector. One example of a methodology we can introduce is "presencing"—leading from the future as it emerges. This is developed by C. Otto Scharmer from the MIT Sloan School of Management, based in Cambridge, Massachusetts. What he believes is that if you are very clear about what you want to see happening, and if you have also checked it wants to happen, then it will happen. The question is how you can collaborate effectively with its materialization and support it so it grows.

I want to be connected to the collective, the outside world; that is my mirror. I see that as my karma yoga. When we talk about change-making, inner work is half of the job, but the other half is being effective in the world!"

Chronicles

Preparing for the winter journey

by Zackaria Moursi

To Sri Aurobindo and the Mother: In eternal gratitude for the incredible love and "divine cunning" with which they have guided me through life.

Prologue

This story is written as a succession of vignettes and snapshots of incidents that have moved me deeply or shaken me when they happened, whose significance only much later became clear to me. I see them now as the signposts of the road I travelled. They reveal moments when the Divine Grace intervened most visibly in my life, or when my soul managed to break through and alert me of things yet to come. To me they are an irrefutable proof that we all carry in ourselves an entity that knows far ahead and better than our minds can ever know. From this point of view, I hope my story will be of interest to other seekers as well.

The theme threading throughout the story is that of love, and how it can be transformed from the merely human into a more divine form. It is the topic that has fascinated and challenged me most in my life. The plot progresses through three stages of growth in which I have experienced love very differently: the early phase of childhood and adolescence, in which love was covered up by thick layers of unconsciousness, followed by the phase of manhood when love became conscious, but was still hampered by the domination of the head, and finally the phase of maturity and ripeness when love slowly developed into an inner blissful self-giving without expectation of return.

Parts of the story are written in the third-person, others in the first-person; some are written in the past-tense, others in the present-tense. This can be explained by the fact that, while writing, I felt myself sometimes as a spectator dispassionately reviewing states and stages, while at other times I was actually reliving incidents of the past. Though the story is a true account of actually lived experiences, some details relating to other individuals were modified, for obvious reasons. To write succinctly, I had to leave much unsaid; I trust the reader will not mind weaving for him/herself a coherent picture from my few scattered brushstrokes.

2012, on an autumn afternoon, Lodi, California

His morning work done, and following his habitual routine, he carries his lunch and a few books to the little garden and installs himself in the sunniest spot. In front of him lies a



star-shaped lotus-pond where gold fishes and tadpoles swim merrily. The lotuses have lost their bloom by now, but they are to him the symbol of the One who has given him everything he cherishes in life. Around him stand trees and blossoming shrubs; a little further behind stretch vineyards far and wide. Above him arches a marvelous dome of serene light dotted with little puffs of white clouds.

Having finished his meal, he makes himself comfortable in his garden chair and closes his eyes. He becomes aware of the waves of ecstasy and bliss coming towards him from all sides: from the roses, the birds, the butterflies, the bees and from the tiny lizards bathing in the sun at the edge of the pond. His limbs become heavier and heavier, as stillness settles upon him more and more. Ecstasy and bliss now begin to well up from his inner being as well. In front of his inner eye, the sunny spaces of his life stretch with undiminished splendor; he can revisit countries where he has lived and commune with people who have long since disappeared from his life. The self-torment, disappointments and sorrows of earlier years seem now shrouded in a soft haze, as if belonging to someone else with whom he has been intimately associated, and of whom now only memories remain.

A state of wonder and awe gets hold of him. He wonders about the long and unplanned journey that took him, fifty years earlier, from his native country, made him study, work and live in many climes and meander in terrains he hadn't heard of before, only to bring him finally to his true niche: the spiritual community in which he now lives.

Egypt, 1947

I was four years old; living with my parents not far from the Pyramids of Giza. I still hear my mother calling for dinner; she had just heated a puree the governess Paula had prepared for my brother and me before taking off for the weekend. Paula had been hired by my parents directly after my birth, and since then had rarely left us for more than a day or two. Every time



Zackaria at the Ashram in Lodi, CA.

she left, I used to cling to her frantically crying for fear she might not return.

That evening my mother was the only adult around who could feed the children. She was in particularly high spirits, full of tenderness and smiles. This little incident stands in my memory as the only time that my mother ever fed or prepared a meal for her children. She was soon to succumb to her growing depressions that kept her mostly bedridden and totally absorbed in herself for the rest of her life.

1951

I must have been 8 years old when, for the first time, I became aware of the dynamics between the opposite sexes. In the rarely-used study of my father, which was then my hiding place and sanctuary, I was browsing the shelves for a book not too difficult to read. I grabbed a large volume on the performing arts and was flipping through it, when a ballet scene caught my attention: a ballerina standing on one leg, with her other leg stretched horizontally; her male partner bending on her pointed foot, barely touching it with his hands, in profound adoration. The uncommon motif of the scene, the beauty of the dancers, the elegance of the costumes and the grace of the movements seemed to me to come from a different planet. I experienced for

the first time the entrancing mixture of ecstasy, mystery, awe and bewilderment so characteristic for the first discovery of the opposite sex. The scene both captivated and shocked me and I could not explain to myself the fascination and hold it had on me. That a man should adore a woman in that way was something that had never entered the field of my awareness till then; and I was not even sure it was "the right thing to do". That moment marked the end of my childhood: the regaining of the lost simplicity and unity of being was destined to be the major aspiration and endeavor of the following decades of my life.

The first clue for resolving my conflict came many years later, after I had acquired some familiarity with Indian spirituality and become aware of the inborn need in all human beings for worship and adoration. India taught me to see the Divine not only as the mighty Creator and Lord of the Day of Judgment, but also as the loving Universal Mother and the Goddess of supreme charm and beauty... more about this later in the story...

1953

It was the end of the school year, and the students of the middle school had just received their certificates. Though I was the youngest of the class, I had the highest scores. The school bus dropped me in front of our house; I galloped up the stairs, certificate in hand, to my father's room. I knew how happy my results would make him; he had always maintained that success at school was the key to everything good in later life. The school must have informed him; he was waiting for me. I can still see him coming towards me with beaming face and wide open arms, taking me up in his embrace and covering my face with kisses. It was one of the very few occasions in which he had ever shown me his feelings, and it was to be the last one as well.

My father was a self-made man who had managed to rise from middle to upper class by erudition and hard work. At that time he was working himself to death to "secure a good life" for his children, and to



spare them the battles he had to fight himself. Unfortunately things did not work out as he had hoped. The military coup of July 1952 had just taken place a few months back, and the new regime was quickly changing the destinies of Egypt. As a finance specialist, he must have sensed that the fruits of his labor would soon be taken away from him. On that day, he had only one more year to live.

1957

I do not remember how my older brother and other classmates convinced me that evening to go out with them. I had moved up a grade to be in the same class with my brother; most students of the class were two years older than me. A gang had formed around my brother: his audacity, physical strength, and above all the family car he was driving without a driver's license—all combined to make him their natural leader.

The evening started harmlessly enough; we all went to a late movie followed by a snack in one of the cafés of downtown Cairo. One of the boys suddenly suggested trying a new adventure he had heard the guys of the higher grades bragging about: "prostitute hunting". The gang approved; we drove to the outskirts of Cairo where street prostitutes stand at night waiting for customers. They found a poor shabbily-dressed woman of venerable age, who must have been so desperate that she had to accept stepping into a car driven by crazy young teens. To avoid police patrols, one of the boys had to drive around in dark streets, while the others took turns in trying their luck with the woman in the back of the car. Finally they stopped the car and let her out accompanied by insults and jeer. I no longer recall if they had given her any money; they didn't have much of it in their pockets anyway. The utter brutality and brutishness of what I witnessed that evening, still haunts me today.

This incident stands in my memory as the exact opposite pole to the ballet scene, so full of adoration, tenderness and grace, which had moved me so deeply six years back. The ballet scene left me with an ideal to dream of in the following years: I intensely yearned for a love of total self-giving to someone I saw as higher, better and nobler than I. I was not much concerned about the "practicality" or the chances of fulfilling such a highly idealized dream; dreams have their own reality, and they can make us happy, even when they don't materialize.

What a comfort it was, when much later I discovered, that my ideal and dream had been, for millennia, part and parcel of the traditions of India: India that paradise

India taught me to see the Divine not only as the mighty Creator and Lord of the Day of Judgment, but also as the loving Universal Mother and the Goddess of supreme charm and beauty...

of the soul where the Feminine is worshipped everywhere. I could see then how the worship of a Universal Mother and Goddess has given India much of its characteristic charm, gentleness and tolerance. I also saw how the gentleness and compassion of the Madonna, the examples of the women saints and the works of caring nuns—have all prepared the ground in the Christian world for a growing charity, welfare and social justice.

1961

The sun was about to set on a hot summer day during the fasting month of Ramadan. Men, mostly from the disadvantaged class, were gathering in the foyer of the mosque: policemen guarding nearby embassies, taxi drivers who had been confined to blistering cars all day long, petty peddlers, street sweepers.... Their lips were visibly cracked from thirst; they had been subjected to a ferocious heat all day, and hadn't had a drop of drink since

dawn. The much awaited "cannon" shot, that announces the end of the day's fasting, had just sounded: the men took a sip of water, ate a few dates and arranged themselves in rows for a short prayer of gratitude. They sat in small groups on the floor around large dishes of black beans. A mosque clerk handed out to each a couple of pita loaves, a few shallots and a handful of dates. They took turns in dipping bread into the dishes to scoop up mouthfuls of the black stew. At the end of the meal, they lighted cigarettes and enjoyed the tea offered to them by the same clerk. Their voices became louder and livelier with their growing sense of completed duty and the wafting of the cooler evening breeze.

Soon the Muezzin will call for the night prayer; some will perform it and hurry to catch one of the busses that will carry them to the less fortunate quarters of Cairo where they lived. Others will linger on to listen to the Koran

recitations traditionally held in mosques every night in Ramadan. They will soon be ecstatically swaying to the rhythm of the verses, thrilled by the feats of the Biblical prophets, chilled by descriptions of the blazing hellfire that awaits the wrongdoers, and elated by the rewards and boons promised in heaven for those who fast Ramadan. They will soon have forgotten their aches and ordeals and will leave the mosque fortified enough to carry on one more day.

I liked to frequent this little mosque not far from where I lived; the Imam in charge seemed always to choose for his recitations the Koran passages I like the most. They date from an early phase of the Prophet's mission, when he was still a happy trader and living with his family in Mecca and in the habit of retreating alone to a nearby mountain to meditate. These verses are wonderfully mystical and poetical; they call for submission to the compassionate Creator, praise the marvels of his creation, call for brotherhood



and justice among men, and retell in a captivating way the stories of the Old and New Testaments. The Meccan verses have a different timbre from the later verses received in Medina after Mohammed had taken on himself the charge of defending and organizing the growing community of illiterate and unruly Bedouins that had followed him there.

How I wished then that the Meccan verses would be declared as the core of the Koran. A few years later, a Sudanese reformer dared publicly to suggest rearranging the Koran chronologically in two parts, one containing the “ever-lasting message”, the other the “temporal” verses that were tailored to suit the needs of one particular community at one particular time. He was executed by his own government in 1985.

1963

The last day of senior exams at the school of engineering, Cairo University. With a heavy heart, I entered the electronics lab: my graduation project was not working; it had to be tested on that day. The project consisted in designing an oscillator covering a certain range of radio frequencies. The examiner looked in some dismay at my ungainly box and started immediately to fumble around in my circuit trying to find proper nodes where he could attach the probes of his testing device. He turned the tuning dial: a sigh of bewilderment and relief rose up from my depths. I could hardly believe my eyes: a perfect sine wave was standing on the oscilloscope screen! My circuit was working after all; I had tried any number of times before, but could never bring it to do that. The examiner must have changed, by his random fumbling, the stray capacitances of the wires and components in a way that made resonance possible. What was the probability for such a thing to occur at the exact moment that counted?! I had just experienced one of the saving miracles of my life. The examiner smiled, and something in my soul smiled as well. Now the goal I had strived so desperately to achieve in the past years seemed closer than ever before.

1964

The ship destined for Genoa, Italy, was still parked at one of the piers of the port of Alexandria. I was standing on the top deck waving goodbye to college friends, who had travelled all the way from Cairo to see me off. It was the end of October, the sky was overcast; Alexandria seemed forlorn and desolate after the summer vacationers had left. Inside me things were quite different; a new phase of life was about to begin for me. Hard work and “luck” helped me in securing a highly prized scholarship, one of the few offered by Western countries that were accepted by Egypt that year. The scholarship was the only way I could leave a world that had been steadily collapsing in front of my eyes in the previous ten years. I had to push myself to the utmost to reach this moment; and now it was there. I was supremely happy, and the ship was about to leave. I will not return to Egypt for twelve years, and by then, I will be a different man.

Germany, 1964-1966

In an earlier story, I have narrated how discovering the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother [see: The Encounter] while studying in Germany became the turning point of my life. To avoid repetition, I will limit myself here to those inner developments and psychological experiences of my twelve years in Germany that were not mentioned there.

1967

That summer scholarship holders studying in German universities were invited to an orientation held in one of Germany’s seaside resorts. They were to travel together by bus from Frankfurt northwards all the way to the Baltic Sea. I happened to sit beside a young woman; on introducing ourselves we discovered we came from the same country and even the same city. In the casual conversation that ensued, we were further amazed to find out that our families shared some common ties. She was twenty one years of age

at that time, but carried around her the atmosphere of a girl of fourteen who knew nothing about the cares and complications of life and who was still perfectly happy in the fold of her family. Her joyfulness was contagious; I felt totally at ease from the first moment, as if were sitting beside a friend whom I had known all my life. Toward the end of the trip, I had the strong intimation that we would one day be husband and wife. I asked her if I may write to her; she gave me her address. I proposed to her in a letter, and after what seemed an interminably long time, she wrote she would have to consult with her parents before giving me her consent. We were soon engaged; marriage followed three years later. I changed university and moved to Munich, where she was studying, to live with her and complete my studies there. We shared together thirty years of life’s journey, after which we had, with heavy hearts, to separate.

1970

Soon after our marriage, my wife asked me one morning: “Is something wrong? Why do you grind your teeth so often in sleep?” I told her reassuringly: “O, nothing, it is just a bad sleeping habit!” This was not true though; a conflict was growing in me: the conflict between what I then considered my spiritual calling and married life.

For some time, I had been intensely practicing yoga according to books written decades ago for practitioners who chose, or were expected, to lead a celibate life. I was practicing on my own; there was hardly anyone around to guide me. I didn’t know then that the Mother had recently launched the City of Auroville and invited to it all men and women of good will, whether celibate, married or in partner relationships. My wife did not show much interest in yoga; she had behind her a very happy childhood and adolescence and saw no reason to deviate from her former life. In contrast to her, I had witnessed a lot of suffering in others and experienced it in myself; I wanted with all my being to change. When I discovered that Sri Au-



robindo's yoga was about the transformation of man into something happier and nobler, I delved into it with all the passion and avidness of youth. I tried hard to live outwardly the normal married life, while keeping yoga for myself. Things worked well at the beginning, but I was changing fast, and not always in positive ways.

After my arrival in Germany, I lost my former ambitions of worldly success and was now trying to balance my mentally-lopsided education by playing music, swimming and enjoying nature. I knew from my studies that often beginners of yoga have to endure hardships in the beginning before improvements become visible; but I did not imagine that these hardships would be as great and prolonged as they turned out to be. Health issues began to crop up one after the other; I was constantly losing weight. I needed more and more hours of solitude, and became less and less "fun to be with". I had finally to consult a physi-

cian, and was astounded, when he asked me after taking my vital signs: "How did you manage to leave your bed and come to me in this state? Your blood pressure is dangerously low." I lagged behind in my research and ultimately lost my scholarship. I had to return to Egypt after twelve years, my task uncompleted. Soon after my return, I met coincidentally a former colleague of mine. He looked somewhat puzzled and did not recognize me at first. When I introduced myself by name, he stared at me for a few seconds, bounced back abruptly making a full turn around himself and holding his head between his hands while murmuring: "Not possible! Not possible! What happened to you? What on earth has changed you in this way?"

My wife had tried valiantly to cope with the fact that the man she chose was changing on her without her being able to see any convincing reason for the change. She carried her grief in herself, which came at the expense of her former joyful-

ness and exuberance. Watching her develop in this way was for me a much harder ordeal than anything I had personally to go through...

USA, 1884-1997

My wife and I managed rather well to survive the difficult years that followed our return to Egypt; we completed our Ph.D.'s and got teaching jobs in Cairo universities. My health improved, even though I remained somewhat weakened and excessively underweight. My wife showed remarkable fortitude in dealing with the whole situation. Sunshine and hope returned unexpectedly to our lives when our applications to teach in an American University were accepted.

Knowing her has assured me that the archetype of the Feminine I was dreaming of was not just a mirage. Through her I discovered that what I always wanted all those years was to be allowed to love.

We moved to the US; our teaching contracts were renewed on several consecutive years. This qualified us to apply for citizenship, and we soon became American citizens. Quiet and pleasant years followed, filled with study, work, and occasional travel. Our situation became stable enough to allow us at last to think about having children, but when the gynecologist mentioned the risks of possible fetus deformations when a woman conceives after forty, we gave up the idea. It was a much bigger disappointment for my wife, than it was for me.

Houston, Texas, 1997

I was sitting in the waiting room in an attorney's office. My wife was in conference with the lawyer, who, as is customary in Islamic tradition, was advising her to reconsider her application for divorce. I was reflecting with burdened heart on our life together since we had met on a happy

bus trip thirty years before. In all these years, we had been to each other family and daily companions and we had gone together through the ups and downs of life. It had been a good marriage; we had shown each other compassion and understanding. Divorce became unavoidable, because we were yearning for two different worlds. She considered faithfulness to family, tradition and heritage her first duty and was yearning for the happiness of her childhood. I was yearning to participate in the preparation of a new world, in which ignorance and suffering will no longer have a place. We both had to pay the heavy price of living against the call of one's soul. We both had tried hard to uphold the marriage in the hope that something might still come and narrow the widening gap between

us, but nothing came. Finally we had to admit the futility of continuing a life in which each of us was blocking the other's way.

The divorce was sealed; a month later I moved to Auroville. On a couple of occasions in the following years, we urgently needed each other's help; and we had the chance to support and stand by each as we had done while married. On one of these happy occasions, we had a good laugh when one of us remarked that our marriage has actually never worked as well as when we were already divorced!

Auroville, Early in the new millennium

It was evening; no meditations were scheduled in the Matrimandir at this time. The cleaning team was performing its routine tasks: vacuuming carpets, replacing cushion covers, and polishing columns and stairs. Following the customary practice for Auroville new-comers to dedicate part of their time to community services, I had opted to join the Matrimandir cleaners, a choice that would lead me to



one of the most significant experiences of my life.

The light emanating from the large crystal, the perfect beauty of the design, the lingering aspirations of thousands who had already meditated in this sacred space, all combined in creating in the Inner Chamber of the Matrimandir an unearthly atmosphere. I could see her darting back and forth across the room doing her work with remarkable skill and speed. From time to time she would beckon to me to help her lift a heavy object or reposition a carpet into its right place. Our roads had crisscrossed a few times before in different venues of the township. Though she was a key participant in several projects, she never pushed herself into the lime-light. She was always going about one work or another with the ease and cheerfulness of those deriving their happiness from an inner source.

One evening, in the silence of the chamber, suddenly an overwhelming wave of recognition and gratitude rushed upon me: Here she was at last; the one for whom I had searched all my life, the one whom I could adore, just for the sake of adoration. Since I was not expecting anything in return, I was no longer subject to the fleeting joys and sorrows of human love. In the following days and months, I prayed intensely to be spared making a fool of myself by putting a holy name on a common passion. I searched my soul for any signs of reproach or disapproval, any warnings or foreboding of a pending spiritual disaster, but found none. Love, as I was experiencing it now, was very different from what usually goes by that name...

It was the day before her birthday. As "chance" would have it, I saw a vacant spot at the table where she was sitting in one of Auroville's cafes. To my question if I may join her, I got a welcoming nod. After lunch, I found myself telling her, as if it were the most natural thing in the world: "I have adoration for you!" Her reaction will remain with me as one of the most beautiful reactions I have witnessed in my life. She looked at me quietly for some time; in her expression I could read

amazement, faint surprise and deep understanding at the same time. There was no trace of indignation, defensiveness or judgment in her eyes. It was as if she was telling me: "O, I have been suspecting something like this for some time. I know very well what you are talking about. But surely you know you will have to leave it at that?!" The few words she then uttered confirmed what I had already perceived; she said smiling: "You will have to be very quiet now!" and with her usual ease she steered the conversation to a different topic.

In the few months that followed, a mostly silent friendship grew between us. I had several chances to express by little symbolic acts my devotion to her; she always received my gestures with dignified humility and simplicity. We were linked by our dedication to a common goal, and it was understood that this goal was the base of any relationship between us. I had learned the art of deriving abiding ecstasy and bliss from an occasional smile or a tiny symbolic act. I had no need for more.

After a few months, I had to leave Auroville; urgent matters waited for me elsewhere. My sun disappeared behind dense clouds for some time. Ultimately it reappeared, now transformed through distance into a bright star that never fails to guide me when I am in the dark. To this day, I can still in lucid moments feel her presence and see her walking ahead beckoning for me to hasten my steps....

Knowing her has assured me that the archetype of the Feminine I was dreaming of was not just a mirage. Through her I discovered that what I always wanted all those years was to be allowed to love. I had managed somehow to live without being loved; what was much harder was not being able to love. I started to see my bent for adoration in a wider context, and I no longer suspected it to be some kind of refined eroticism. Many experiences had been necessary to teach me how to love properly, but, once the lesson was learned, the one worthy of love and adoration appeared in my life. She has set me free from my former romanticizing weaknesses and yearnings... All the deprivations, pangs and joys of my meandering path have

proven to be exactly what I needed in order to understand that human love is nothing but a tiny current from the universal ocean of divine Love and that the one whom we adore is only the gatekeeper who admits us into the eternal gardens of paradise... After her, the chapter of human love was happily closed for me; I became ready to dedicate myself to the next chapter: that of widening love into something... truly divine.

2008

Auroville: My short visit to Auroville was about to end. During my stay, I met, as usual, with my Aurovilian friend Walter, and he has again suggested I should translate Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's works into Arabic. I had always succeeded in evading his suggestion by one "convincing" argument or another. Walter hadn't given up; he mentioned casually that a Japanese professor, an acquaintance of his, had just finished translating "The Life Divine" into Japanese. I cringed when I imagined what a colossal project that would be for me, with my technical and non-literary background, and with the shreds of Arabic still in my command.

The taxi that will take me from Auroville to the Chennai Airport was already waiting for me outside, when Walter appeared on his motorbike. He pressed a book in my hand saying: "Translate this!" It was a compilation of writings by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother with the title: "Integral Healing". On the long flight back to Cairo I read, at random, short passages in the book. In the next weeks, whenever I had a long break between the classes I was teaching, I tried my hand at translating a few lines at a time. It proved to be a perfect complement to my purely mental work. Slowly it dawned upon me, that translating would be the perfect occupation for me in my retirement. In a couple of months, I had already resigned from my teaching position. A month later I moved to the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham in Lodi, California.

Walter gave me the new focus for my life. I became more and more aware that



translating Sri Aurobindo and the Mother into Arabic is the work for which I had been unknowingly prepared all my life.

Epilog

The sun has gradually shifted in the sky; he was now in the shade and was beginning to feel the cold. He remembered all the things he was planning to do that afternoon, but lingered a few minutes more hoping his inner voices might still have something to communicate to him. When nothing came, he started to stir and to set his stiff limbs into motion. He knew that any further reflection and musing would have to wait for another day...

A mystic slow transformation works.
All our earth starts from mud and
ends in sky,
And love that was once an animal's
desire,
Then a sweet madness in the raptur-
ous heart,
An ardent comradeship in the happy
mind,
Becomes a wide spiritual yearning's
space.
A lonely soul passions for the Alone,
The heart that loved man thrills to
the love of God,
A body is his chamber and his
shrine.
Then is our being rescued from
separateness;
All is itself, all is new-felt in God:
A Lover leaning from his cloister's
door
Gathers the whole world into his
single breast.
Then shall the business fail of Night
and Death:
When unity is won, when strife is
lost
And all is known and all is clasped
by Love
Who would turn back to ignorance
and pain?"

—Sri Aurobindo

(*Savitri*, from the canto, "The Debate of Love and Death," pp. 632-33).

The New World

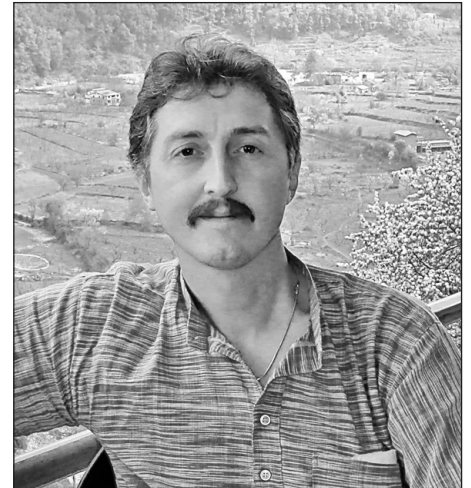
by Ritam

This essay served as an introduction to Ritam's fourth photo exhibition in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Exhibition Hall in February 2013. In it he discusses his journey.

Thus we draw near to the All-Wonderful
Following his rapture in things as
sign and guide;
Beauty is his footprint showing us
where he has passed...

—Sri Aurobindo. *Savitri*

These days we are celebrating the Mother's Birthday. This is the Birthday of the New World, the Miracle-World of the Golden Fairytale of Divine Truth, Beauty, Harmony, Happiness and termless Freedom, the Wonder-Reality beyond our most daring dreams and aspirations. This is the priceless gift of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother for us all. This Golden Miracle is already here, already present, already very active and effective in the earth-atmosphere and the earth-consciousness. We can already see the marvelous outcomes of its presence and action, we can feel it in many ways; what is most important, we can live it. We can live in the Divine Fairytale of a constant miraculous Grace weaving in Her Dance the marvel-space and the marvel-ways for us. We can glide in the waves of the Miracle-Stream carrying us in its tender loving current of Joy and Freedom to ever new "adventures without danger beautiful," as Sri Aurobindo puts it in *Savitri*. We can soar on the wings of inspiration of our soul in her inexhaustible creativity of happy liberty and spontaneous self-revelation. We can breathe the air of the Soul-Miracle transforming our essence and tissues with its light-substance of tender starry honey-rays. We can wander in the wonderful, all-alive World carrying us in its embrace from miracle to miracle in the happy flow of the One



Ritam, photographer, poet, and translator.

astonishing Reality, where even the most daring dreams come true and there is no limit to the soul's powers of self-expression and creative inspiration.

We are all living already, at least to greater or lesser extent, in this New Reality of the miraculous Wonder-World. And this exhibition is a part of this living Miracle taking birth; it has become real in most marvelous ways, as a whole series of miracles of Divine Grace. These photographs, these prints, these poems for me are all gifts and outcomes of the Divine Fairytale of the New World, and my deepest aspiration was and is to share these marvelous bounties with all of you. That is why I would like to describe how this exhibition took form and could manifest and what astounding miracles of Divine Grace are behind it.

In 1990 I came across a book on Sri Aurobindo, and that has opened for me the doors into the Divine Fairytale of the New Creation. The book has changed my entire world-vision and self-vision. Besides, I was somehow deeply touched by the few lines of *Savitri* quoted there. The first miracle was that I could find a copy of *Savitri* in English in the State Public Library in what was then Leningrad (that was an amazing miracle itself in that Soviet period). That led me to start studying *Savitri*. I would spend all my free time to learn English (of which I knew little then) and would try to understand at least something in *Savitri*. That was another miracle



because before coming to Sri Aurobindo and *Savitri* I had practically no interest in poetry. I did not have a single book about *Savitri*, no one to ask about it, no commentary on it; I did not even have my own copy of *Savitri* and could only study and copy it in the Library. But my aspiration to read *Savitri* was so deep that everything started coming. I met a high level teacher of English who soon got interested in *Savitri* too and has become my dear friend and helped me to learn English and understand *Savitri*. She

still helps me in the preparation of translations of *Savitri*. I studied under her guidance very intensively for several years.

As the Mother revealed, *Savitri* is a mantra for the transformation of the world. I also could feel its mantric influence evident, to the extent that after a couple of years of intensive studies and attempts to translate lines of *Savitri* to better understand them, I suddenly saw the poetic capacity opening in me. My translations of *Savitri* started taking more and more poetic shape and my own poems started coming to me spontaneously, and after some time, even in English. As I have written later in one of my poems, which was dedicated to dear Nirod-da and published in his centenary volume, about his own poetic phenomenon,

Touching his heart with His mighty
beam
The Lord a poet awakened in him
And dropped so many a poem-star
From the distant heaven to his pray-
ing jar...

This happened to me too, and this is one of the most unbelievable miracles of my life flowing from the Golden Grace of the New World, from its poetic breath of Beauty and Harmony.

With time, my literary and poetic capacity got so developed by these stud-



The Avatar. (Photo by Ritam)

ies and translations of *Savitri* and other works by Sri Aurobindo that I became a professional translator of Sri Aurobindo's books. By now more than 25 books from Sri Aurobindo's works have been published in my translations in Russia. So miraculous a transformation I could never have envisaged or dreamed of!

After years of trying to understand and follow Sri Aurobindo's path, many new understandings of life started growing in me, and I began to perceive some influences of the New World and the new consciousness. In 1995 all of a sudden I got a miraculous opportunity to come for the first time to the blessed land of India, the Motherland of Sri Aurobindo. It was the first foreign country I had ever visited. That became possible after Perestroika in Russia, one of the outcomes of the New World which is manifesting and bringing more and more freedom to people. Since then India has become the deep and dear love of my soul. Since then I started coming regularly to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, and I have had the amazing opportunity to have close relations with those whom the Mother herself had grown and nurtured, even with such disciples of Sri Aurobindo as Nirod-da and Amal-da, whose influence was invaluable in my growing as a poet and as a translator of *Savitri* and other works of Sri Aurobindo. That was another miracle I could never have dreamed of some years ago.

It is here in the Ashram that a few years ago I received the spiritual name Ritam. That was a turning point in my life and spiritual path, one more undreamt-of-miracle of the Divine Fairytale. With receiving that name, it was as if some new energy and consciousness started manifesting suddenly, swiftly and very powerfully in my inner world and consequently in my life. Ritam represents the principle of dynamic Truth, Truth in manifestation. Soon after accepting this name I felt

and witnessed how a great dynamic energy entered my consciousness and life, a new consciousness and reality, the reality of a sublime Beauty, Light and Harmony. What was latent started to manifest quickly, what was in a bud started flowering. Projects that lay dormant for years suddenly started taking material form. Material energies and means needed for the realization of the soul's aspirations and inspirations started coming abundantly. The life got filled with an intensity and dynamism undreamt-of earlier. A vision and understanding of life from another reality, from a world of absolute freedom and bliss, started revealing itself within. That brought another state of being and other creative capacities. The flowering of poetry is one of them, and another is photography.

My interest in photography started a few years back when my sister presented to me on my birthday a simple compact camera. It proved quite good and simple to use, so I soon found myself expressing through the photos my deep love of Nature that I have had since my early childhood. This intimate communion with Nature developed greatly due to following the spiritual path. I got very interested in expressing my communion with Nature through my photographs of her beauties, first of all,



her flowers. Thus I managed to create my first photo exhibition here in the Ashram, "The Symphony of Beauty: Simple Marvels of Russian Nature," which took place in February 2008 and was dedicated to the simple natural beauties of the four seasons of my Motherland. That was only a humble beginning of my studies and development in photography, but I put all my soul into it to express my deep love of the Nature of my Motherland and her beauty. I was very happy when the exhibition was warmly welcomed by the audience here whose kind benevolence informed me with new inspiration and impetus to go on developing in the way of creative photographic art. A special Grace for me was the opportunity to present my humble photos to my Indian friends here in the Ashram on the Mother's Birthday. I felt it as a special blessing and it was also very inspiring. Soon after that, by Divine Grace I got a higher level mirror camera, a Canon 450D. That was my true step into the creative art of photography. It took a lot of effort to learn the more complicated processes of managing the mirror camera, but soon I started to realize to what extent photography is a visual art, and it fascinated me. It was one more miracle.

Since my early childhood I have been greatly interested in visual arts. I completed my studies in a School of Arts and then had an opportunity to enter the State Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg. But at that age, in my teens, I had a kind of inner crisis of feeling very acutely my incapacity to express satisfactorily what I felt was depicted in the object. So I dropped painting and drawing almost altogether. At that same time, I found Sri Aurobindo and Savitri, and for almost 20 years delved deeply into poetry, almost forgetting visual art. Well, not quite, for during all those years I was quite involved with computer design in various ways, including making the designs for the covers of many books



Nanda-Devi: The birth of Light, The Mother of the World opening her Face. (Ritam)

of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother which were published in Russia. Now to my utter surprise this deep and almost inborn interest in visual art suddenly revived in me through the art of photography. With the newly developing spiritual consciousness it acquired a new dimension and a much deeper vision. The Mother said that,

The modern photography has become an art, and like any other art it can be expressive of the soul's vision.

Now with the appearance of computers, very advanced digital cameras and printing technologies, it has become even much more so an art. With the possibilities offered by modern equipment and software one can create in photography so freely and powerfully as one could never imagine just some years ago. This fantastic development of technologies opening new perspectives for creativity in man is one more outcome of the New World of freedom and limitless creativity of the soul manifesting itself.

Soon after my studies of photography started, the spiritual name Ritam came to me, and the new creative energy it brought resulted in a swift flowering of my skill in photographic art as one aspect of the growing soul's self-awareness and creative self-expression.

Two years ago, my second photo exhibition, "Winter Fairytale in Russia," took place here in the Ashram's Exhibition House, and was dedicated to the winter

beauties of my Motherland. The year 2011 marked an opening of my photographic creativity on a larger public scale, and the exhibition in the Ashram on the Darshan of the Mother's Birthday was the best initiation of this wider presentation of my creative work. The exhibition aroused great interest here and it was then shown also in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Delhi and in the Aurovalley Ashram near Rishikesh. I was also invited to show it in the Center of Russian Culture by the Russian

Consulate in Chennai (I had to decline the invitation since it did not fit into the schedule of my travel); later it was exhibited in Tashkent in the Center of Russian Culture by the Embassy of Russia in Uzbekistan.

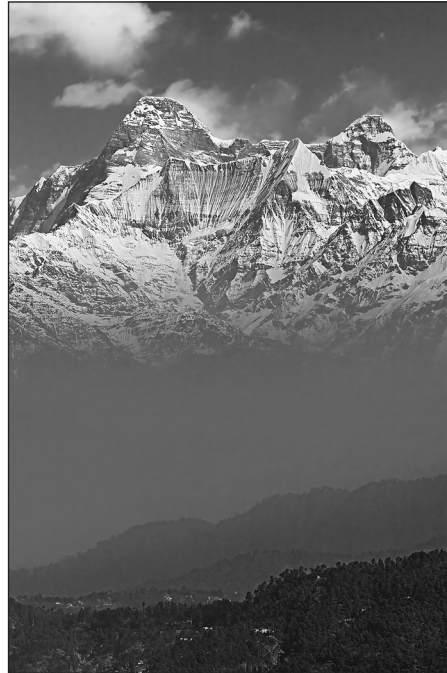
Two years ago during the second exhibition there was an extra exposition in the last hall which was dedicated to photos of some of the beauties of the rich Indian Nature. That exposition proved to be a fetus of one more exhibition sharing with people the beauties of India which has become my second Motherland and the Motherland of my spirit.

That exposition with some additional photos was for the first time shown as a proper exhibition in April 2011 in Tashkent at the Center of Indian Culture by the Embassy of India in Uzbekistan. I showed it again with still more photos added at our All-Russia Meeting on Sri Aurobindo's Birthday in August 2011 in the surroundings of St. Petersburg, and later at some spiritual seminars in St. Petersburg. In October 2011, I was invited to arrange this exhibition in the House of Culture in the town of Omutninsk (in the northern part of Russia, Kirov region), and there it was for the first time shown as a full scale exhibition of around 40 photo-works called "The Living Beauty of India."



This exhibition got an extremely good response, and I saw how the people of the Russian provinces are thirsty for beauty and for a message of a more sublime spiritual life. It inspired me greatly and I got a dream and an aspiration to go to India with the best photography equipment and try to express the highest Beauty of her Soul manifested in the marvels of her abundant Nature, and first of all, in the grand Himalayas. A new story of the Divine Fairytale started in my life, and the outcome of it is the Himalayan beauty shown here, one more wonder-tale of the universal Soul.

In the year 2011 I had traveled in the Himalayas in the spring and there some kind of new inner opening came to me which was marked with some spiritual experiences that were deeply significant for my inner life. It seemed to open a new source of inspiration for my poetry or some freer poetic capacity. For several years, I had almost not written any poems, feeling no interest in it and concentrating instead on translations of Sri Aurobindo's poetry. At this time, however, new poems started coming to me quite abundantly and freely and spontaneously. Many of them are in various ways expressive of the New Creation and new consciousness manifesting upon earth. It was not coming from my mental designs; the poems started to come by themselves and were written easily and spontaneously like a butterfly's flutter. Many of them are very unusual and unexpected even for me. After some time, I saw that a whole cycle of poems had formed itself which I called "Songs of the New Creation." Mostly I write poems now in Russian, my native language of which I have full command. But I find deep delight in translating these poems into English which lets me re-experience the original poems and their inspiration and to re-express them in another language, often in a somewhat different way. Thus usually two versions of the same poetic expression or creative vision come out. The English language is so rich and flexible which gives a great opportunity to translate adequately the original poems from Russian into English. Still, my command over English is, of course, not so



The Temple of Himalayas (Ritam)

perfect as it is over Russian, but I tried my best to prepare the English renderings of my poems in the most adequate way I could to share these gifts of the Divine Grace to me with all my English-speaking friends who may find these poems interesting. I am sorry for any possible inadequacies in the renderings which hopefully can be corrected with the help of some native English well-wishers.

In 2012, this photo exhibition was shown here in February on the Mother's Darshan. In the summer I was invited to present it in Moscow at the Museum of Nicolas Roerich, famous Russian painter, poet, and cultural and public figure. There it was a large scale exhibition with many large photos and accompanying poems for them. The exhibition got a very positive response and now is being shown in other cities of Russia. This year the same exhibition is being presented here with many new and reworked photos as well as new poems, also at the request of many who could not see it a year ago.

These photographs and poems are the outcome of some deeper communion with the universal Soul in all, her price-less gifts to me, her language of Beauty

in which she converses with my soul and with those souls that resonate with them. These are messages of another world, the World where everything is alive and everything speaks to you the words of its soul, of the universal Soul. This is a World where you can flow in the limitless embraces of the living Soul-Space, bathing in her soft substance of star-tender light and quiet sweetness. This is the infinite miraculous World breathing as the one living Being of an ever-unveiling Miracle, the myriad-dimensional Universe of starry all-connected living marvels moving in one span-less dance of universal Harmony and self-outpouring Bliss. Here one can soar so freely with no bonds, no cares, no fears, no limits, rising to ever new revelations of Beauty and Light and Joy. This is a World of New Consciousness, New Life, New Love. This exhibition is about this New World, and I hope you will feel and experience it with me both in the photographs and even more so in the poems. My main aspiration is to share with you the abundant gifts of the universal Soul, of the Soul of India, of the Soul of Himalayas, the outcomes of some deeper communion with her!

The main themes of the exhibition are the Himalayas and the world of butterflies. The Himalayas are the most valuable gem in the crown of India, the treasure of the whole world; their ageless beauty always draws insatiate souls and the eyes of people who are receptive to beauty. Here are presented some Himalayan images in which I aspired to express their sublime eternal Soul. You will also find here some flowers and some birds of India, just as a brief glance, for both these themes are so rich that each requires a special exhibition.

This is my fourth photo exhibition in the Ashram, and I am extremely grateful to the Divine Grace and to all the people of goodwill concerned with it for this marvelous opportunity to share with my Indian friends these outcomes of the creative aspiration of my soul, the gifts of the One Soul in all. And I am most happy to express my deepest gratitude to all my dear ones, relatives and friends whose invaluable help and support made this exhibition possible.



Essays

Search for a group-soul: the case of Indian-Americans

by Beloo Mehra

A search begins... I lived in the US for more than 14 years; December 15, 2006 marked the completion of 14 years, and I moved to Pondicherry, India in August 2007. What I share in this exploratory essay is based on my personal observation, experience and reflection as an Indian-American. Without claiming any generalization I present my evolving and emerging view in the light of which I have started to make sense of the bi-cultural experience that shaped my life and experience for many years.

First, a few basic facts. The magnetism of 'The American Dream' attracts people from all over the world who make their homes in that land of opportunity. Starting in late 1960s, as a result of changes in the US immigration laws (passage of Public Law 89-236, 1965) scores of Indian families began migrating to the United States. There are now well-established Indian communities in large urban centers, such as New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. Immigration data and the US census records show that Indians are among the fastest growing immigrant groups in the US.

Over the years, groups of Indian-Americans have been highly successful at realizing their Indian-American Dreams of comfortable upper middle class lives. Their children have now become highly paid doctors, engineers, and some are now even writers, musicians and actors; and their grandchildren are attending expensive elite schools learning all the necessary stuff needed to become even more successful than their parents and grandparents. And now after having 'arrived' on the economic scene, many of these highly



Beloo Mehra.

successful Indian-Americans are beginning to pay attention to their dual-citizenship-related responsibilities. For the most part, these responsibilities take the form of social involvement in activities, such as organizing Indian cultural programmes, fund-raising and campaigning for construction of temples and community centers, advocating for correcting the misrepresentations of India and Indian culture in American textbooks, and other similar 'identity politics' related activities that have sooner or later captured the collective imagination of all immigrant groups in the US. At other times, the social and political activism of several Indian-Americans manifests in other forms, such as financially supporting various social and economic development programs in India, active political campaigning for causes that impact the US-India political relationship, and exerting political pressure to influence US policy regarding India.

Thus, the Indianized version of The American Dream is well on its way of being defined and refined, and for many socially conscious Indian-Americans this version also includes an ever-growing awareness of their Indian identities. In most cases this growing awareness incorporates deliberate attempts at under-

standing the bi-cultural identity struggles, including the need to maintain a separate Indian identity along with a selected assimilation in the larger American identity. These struggles sometimes get intertwined with the struggles to define what it means to be Indian—an identity which is not static and unified but is shifting, evolving, and inherently diverse and multiple. While most of the times these struggles occur at the level of individual and family as they emerge within the context of interactions with the larger American community, often these struggles also take a more public form when these issues are discussed in Indian-American media—print and electronic. (Internet is buzzing with numerous websites that allow Indian-Americans to discuss and debate these issues of identity.)

The identity politics debates also take place at the level of representation of one's group-identity in the larger social discourse. Indian diasporic collective identity in the US is partly constructed by the representations they see of their 'imagined homeland' (India) in the media, textbooks, or even in the US policy toward India. The activism of several Indian-American social and political groups reflects how identity is being shaped and even re-structured by the India-related discourse constructed through these representations. This activism suggests how a marginalized cultural group seen as 'Other' by the majority in the US resists being essentialized and stereotyped through these representations.

Sri Aurobindo's social philosophy gives me a valuable framework to make sense of some of these Indian-American behaviors and patterns of collective diasporic identity formation. The concept of collective egoism helps explain how one begins to assert one's distinct social identity, as an Indian among Americans, as a Hindu among non-Hindus, as a minority that is different from American majority. Is such visible demonstration of difference and separateness—on the level of individual or group—merely a show of pride, a massaging of individual-ego and group-ego, or lurking underneath and



behind all of this is there some veiled truth of the connection between individual-soul and group-soul? Can this collective self-assertion by Indian-Americans be a necessary step—however crude, obscure and vague—by which the group begins on its journey to become self-conscious, self-aware in a search for its group-soul? What might that group-soul be? These are some questions I wish to explore in the remainder of this essay, in the light of Sri Aurobindo's thought. The tentative and exploratory nature of this analysis requires a free-flowing narrative and a loosely-structured argumentation style.

Individual and group-ego, individual and group-soul

Human life is moved by two equally powerful impulses, one of individualistic self-assertion, the other of collective self-assertion; it works by strife, but also by mutual assistance and united effort: it uses two diverse convergent forms of action, two motives which seem to be contradictory but are in fact always co-existent, competitive endeavour and cooperative endeavour. It is from this character of the dynamism of life that the whole structure of human society has come into being, and it is upon the sustained and vigorous action of this dynamism that the continuance, energy and growth of all human societies depends (Sri Aurobindo, 1997, p. 157).

The geographic dislocation of Indians to the US often forces them—consciously or subconsciously—to rediscover and reshape the forms in which the dynamism of their individual and collective life-force manifests. These forms are also moved by the cooperative and competitive motives, as they must involve a synthesis of at least two parallel self-discovery processes, their attempts at locating their psychological connection with the collective psychological history and memories of two collectivities—Indian and American. Of course, as we know neither of these two identities—

Indian or American—are static or uniform. These terms are inherently divided, diverse and dynamic, and may convey different meanings to different people, therefore the outward forms of group-identity of Indian-Americans will be multiple, ever-shifting and changing. And these outward forms will carry in them the nature and consequences of the strife and mutuality between individualistic self-assertion and collective self-assertion.

Pointing out a “real identity of nature” between an individual's and society's conscious, half-conscious or obscure unconscious groping and attempts at “self-formulation,” Sri Aurobindo writes:

... the primal law and purpose of a society, community or nation is to seek its own self-fulfillment; it strives rightly to find itself, to become aware within itself of the law and power of its being and to fulfill it as perfectly as possible, to realise all its potentialities, to live its own self-revealing life (Sri Aurobindo, 1997, p. 35).

He reminds the readers that this real identity of nature between individual and society exists because like an individual, society is also a being:

... a living power of the eternal Truth, a self-manifestation of the cosmic Spirit, and it is there to express and fulfill in its own way and to the degree of its capacities the special truth and power and meaning of the cosmic Spirit that is within it. The nation or society, like the individual, has a body, an organic life, a moral and aesthetic temperament, a developing mind and a soul behind all these signs and powers for the sake of which they exist. One may say even that, like the individual, it essentially is a soul rather than has one; it is a group-soul that, once having attained to a separate distinctness, must become more and more self-conscious and find itself more and more fully as it develops

its corporate action and mentality and its organic self-expressive life (Sri Aurobindo, 1997, p. 35).

Like the relation between an individual body and soul, so is the case with the group-soul. Sri Aurobindo describes the identity of nature between an individual soul and group-soul as follows:

There is only this difference that the group-soul is much more complex because it has a great number of partly self-conscious mental individuals for the constituents of its physical being instead of an association of merely vital subconscious cells. At first, for this very reason, it seems more crude, primitive and artificial in the forms it takes; for it has a more difficult task before it, it needs a longer time to find itself, it is more fluid and less easily organic. When it does succeed in getting out of the stage of vaguely conscious self-formation, its first definite self-consciousness is objective much more than subjective. And so far as it is subjective, it is apt to be superficial or loose and vague. This objectiveness comes out very strongly in the ordinary emotional conception of the nation which centers round its geographical, its most outward and material aspect, the passion for the land in which we dwell, the land of our fathers, the land of our birth, country, patria, vaterland, janma-bhūmi. When we realise that the land is only the shell of the body, though a very living shell indeed and potent in its influences on the nation, when we begin to feel that its more real body is the men and women who compose the nation-unit, a body ever changing, yet always the same like that of the individual man, we are on the way to a truly subjective communal consciousness. For then we have some chance of realising that even the physical being of the society is a subjective power, not a mere objec-



tive existence. Much more is it in its inner self a great corporate soul with all the possibilities and dangers of the soul-life (Sri Aurobindo, 1977, pp. 35–36).

In the light of this quote a few questions emerge. How do we make sense of the enthusiasm of the diasporic emotions? Are the diasporic Indians still at the stage of discovering the “shell of the body” or is there something deeper going on here? Let me examine these questions before proceeding further.

Diasporic Indians have a concrete physical experience of separation from the “shell of the body” and are therefore more prone to live in their emotions that are intensely about expressing the “shell of the body” and vicariously living in unity with it. They have—with their own mental and vital view of things—constructed

an image of “shell of the body” that may not be the same as the shell of the body that Indians in India experience. So they go on month-long ‘India’ vacations when they travel the sites that they feel represents their India—old palaces now converted into expensive hotels, old forts that tell the glorious history of their homeland, religious places where they feel reconnected with their heritage, and yes, even American-style shopping malls that make them feel they don’t need to sacrifice the little physical comforts of American-style life.

The enthusiasm of diasporic Indians is about this mental, emotional construction of the “shell of the body,” not necessarily the real, concrete shell that surrounds Indians living in India in its throbbing, breathing, living truth. This real shell includes all that the ‘tourist’ Indian coming from New York does not visit for ‘seeing’.

But because of this very constructed nature of the shell of the body that diasporic Indians are discovering, they are becoming more aware that this construction is a subjective one. And it is in

this developing awareness that there is a glimmer of next level of awareness that underneath the shell needs to be discovered the more subjective meaning of living the Indian life in India. So the children of ‘tourist’ Indians from New York now also go for three-month ‘learning’ stay in India through their colleges’ study abroad program. Also, there are now organizations like Indicorps (<http://www.indicorps.org/>) which help them experience—even if it is for a short period of time—selected aspects of the subjective consciousness of selected sections of Indian people.

To continue our analysis of the Indian-American collective experience, I invoke now Sri Aurobindo’s description

The enthusiasm of diasporic Indians is about this mental, emotional construction of the “shell of the body,” not necessarily the real, concrete shell that surrounds Indians living in India in its throbbing, breathing, living truth.

of the “objective” or “superficial or loose and vague” subjective attempts of a group’s striving for becoming self-conscious. This provides an appropriate framework to understand why a group of Indians removed from their “janma-bhūmi” would develop a strong connection with the emotional conception of the nation which centers around the most outward and material aspects. These connections resulting from a strong affiliation to their group-identity (illustrated by the earlier-mentioned identity politics-driven examples) and resulting in passion-driven social and political activism on behalf of their group exist on the outer and apparent surface, and hence can be seen as individual ego-self feeding itself off the group-ego and vice versa. But, does this connection between apparent individual identity and apparent group-identity hide in its womb something deeper, something more real than this, or something struggling to reveal and find itself? If we agree with Sri Aurobindo’s meaning and interpretation of group-soul, our answer may be ‘yes’:

A psychic self-knowledge tells us that there are in our being many formal, frontal, apparent or representative selves and only one that is entirely secret and real; to rest in the apparent and to mistake it for the real is the one general error, root of all others and cause of all our stumbling and suffering, to which man is exposed by the nature of his mentality. We may apply this truth to the attempt of man to live by the law of his subjective being whether as an individual or as a social unit one in its corporate mind and body (Sri Aurobindo, 1977, p. 44).

I propose that behind the sensational-vitalistic attempts of Indian-American communities to play the game of identity politics, to assert its collective self, to passionately engage

in social-political activism, there may be deeply hidden and remote signs of the group-soul of Indian-Americans trying to find its true “subjective communal consciousness.” I wish to quickly add here that in most cases this may not be a conscious attempt, but perhaps the attempts to discover or forge even a physical-vital communal consciousness may be the first and essential step.

The emphasis placed by individual Indian-Americans on preserving the outward forms of Indian identities as reflected in proliferation of desi restaurants, stores and markets, cultural events and community celebrations of Indian festivals, native language classes for children, Sunday classes to ensure that next generations of Indian-Americans know their religious and spiritual traditions, pujas and satsangs at temples, and many other similar activities can be explained as a:

... vague sense of ... subjective existence at work even on the surface of the communal mentality. But so



far as this vague sense becomes at all definite, it concerns itself mostly with details and unessentials, national idiosyncrasies, habits, prejudices, marked mental tendencies. It is, so to speak, an objective sense of subjectivity ... It [the community] clings indeed always to its idiosyncrasies, habits, prejudices, but in a blind objective fashion, insisting on their most external aspect and not at all going behind them to that for which they stand, that which they try blindly to express (Sri Aurobindo, 1997, p. 37).

This suggests that behind the initial stumblings and strivings of Indian-Americans to cling to their “idiosyncrasies, habits, prejudices, marked mental tendencies” manifested in attempts to deliberately identify with, preserve and protect the outward ways of being ‘Indian’ might be something which is trying to express itself, the true subjective consciousness. In some form and to some extent this expansion of individual ego into a collective one helps transcend the limits of individual egoism (concerns about self and family) by being concerned about larger egoism of the group (e.g., how can Indian-Americans and South Asian-Americans get more social, political recognition). As Sri Aurobindo writes:

In society he [the individual] finds a less intimate but a larger expansion of himself and his instincts. A wider field of companionship, interchange, associated effort and production, errant or gregarious pleasure, satisfied emotion, stirred sensation and regular amusement are the advantages which attach him to social existence (Sri Aurobindo, 1997, p. 160).

The “objective sense of subjectivity” (objective as in outward) that Indian-Americans begin to experience and express in the form of outward efforts to express and preserve their Indian identities helps them enlarge their individual ego-

self into a collective-ego-self, a group-ego which is separate from other group-egos surrounding them (European-Americans, African-Americans, Latino-Americans, Chinese-Americans, Korean-Americans, etc.). At the same time there is a tendency to further expand the collective ego-self as reflected in identities, such as South Asian-Americans, Asian Americans, and other similar collectivities. There are also signs of conflict between the identity labels of Indian-Americans and South Asian-Americans. In some ways, this emphasis on ‘being different from others’ also acts as an important resistance against the uniform-izing tendency of The American Dream.

With the “full rationalistic flowering” of Indian-Americans’ “instinct of collective life” (Sri Aurobindo, 1997, p. 162), over time their individual, familial and small group strivings to discover a subjective consciousness get more organized and visible. This attempt at collective organization translates into social and political activism and gets reflected in emergence of numerous Indian-American social, cultural, and political organizations. This furthers the evolution of Indian-Americans as a separate group-ego or a collectivity, or even a society within the larger American society. And it serves an important purpose for the individual Indian-Americans by giving them a collective identity and meeting their collective vital needs.

For the society is only a still larger vital competitive and cooperative ego that takes up both the individual and the family into a more complex organism and uses them for the collective satisfaction of its vital needs, claims, interests, aggrandisement, well-being, enjoyment. The individual and family consent to this exploitation for the same reason that induced the individual to take on himself the yoke of the family, because they find their account in this wider vital life and have the instinct in it of their own larger growth, security and satisfaction (Sri Aurobindo, 1997, pp. 161–162).

The more this group of immigrants to the US gets organized and emerges into a separate collective-ego, the more it interacts with other collective-egos in both cooperative and competitive ways.

But since the society is one competitive unit among many of its kind, and since its first relations with the others are always potentially hostile, even at the best competitive and not cooperative, and have to be organized in that view, a political character is necessarily added to the social life ... (Sri Aurobindo, 1997, p. 162).

The political campaigns led by several Indian-Americans—on individual and group levels—are a reflection of their becoming a politically-conscious social unit in themselves. Because of the divided nature of their “collective self-assertion” (Indian and American), the nature of their social and political activism takes such forms as campaigning for or against causes that are generally about some of the ways their perceptions of India or Indian-ness either competes or cooperates with their perceptions of America or American-ness.

“The primary impulse of life is individualistic and makes family, social and national life a means for the greater satisfaction of the vital individual (Sri Aurobindo, 1997, p. 159). The modern idea of society is founded upon the primary and predominant part played by this vital dynamism in the formation and maintenance of society, according to Sri Aurobindo. In this respect, the social or collective ego-assertion gives an individual a solid grounding to grow into oneself and to develop a strong sense of one’s individual identity, a resting place for one’s constant vitalistic seeking for bigger fields of activity and perhaps also a place from where one can begin the process of peeling off one’s layers of outer identity—familial, social, cultural, political—and to see oneself as a human being who is capable of expanding one’s concept of self to include all. Thus, this relation between individual-ego and group-ego serves an important purpose



but only as a transitory step toward both the individual and group finding the hidden individual-soul and group-soul. It is in this constant and continuous process of self-finding—both for the individual and the group—that life fulfills itself and paves the way for transcending the limits, constraints and burdens imposed by the external forms as the inward journey toward true subjective consciousness begins.

All the discussion so far is a reflection of the higher significance given to the realms of the social and political, the apparent and frontal selves, on the level of a highly limited subjective existence. But if this search for subjective communal consciousness rests in the apparent and frontal—represented in social, cultural, and political organizations, social awareness and political campaigns, community events and conferences, regardless of the ideologies being championed by any of these—that general error caused by the nature of individual and group mentality will be a loss for the future of the group's and humanity's collective evolution.

Man must learn not to suppress and mutilate but to fulfill himself in the fulfillment of mankind, even as he must learn not to mutilate or destroy but to complete his ego by expanding it out of its limitations and losing it in something greater which it now tries to represent (Sri Aurobindo, 1997, p. 300).

With time, and as a result of further deepening of the attempts of Indian-American groups to 'find themselves,' these strivings may get to the deeper, real subjective being, the soul of the group or nation that is India, and soul of the group or nation that is America.

It is when this subconscious power of the group-soul comes to the surface that nations begin to enter into possession of their subjective selves; they set about getting, however

vaguely or imperfectly, at their souls (Sri Aurobindo, 1997, p. 37).

In the US one finds a burgeoning body of literary and academic work that interprets and analyzes this constantly evolving Indian-American identity. But what interests me here is the question: when the Indian-American ultimately finds his subjective self, will he retain the difference of this cultural identity or will the difference efface itself because it has found that source which is the common source of all—the Universal Being or consciousness?

In the light of Sri Aurobindo's social psychology I am inclined to say that once the Indian-American finds the source which is the common source of all—the Universal Being or consciousness—the issue of 'identity' becomes mute. Forming

When we move beyond the level of group-identity and toward developing a sense of the group-soul, we begin to enter the deeper realms of psychological and subtle.

identity is an outward process, searching for self is an inward journey. But the inner truth also gets represented in outward forms, and that is where the diversity or multiplicity of identities may provide the necessary richness that is needed by the Universal Being to express itself in its full potential and infinite variation. Thus there may still be many Indian-American aspects of identity-formation being celebrated in various outward forms of presentation and representation, Indian-American community and service organizations engaged in different activities, and even the conflicting feelings resulting from hyphenated identities may still be the basis of a lot of outward action among Indian-Americans. But when this outward experience is based in the inner subjective consciousness that is universal, the outer Indian-American identity is not in conflict with Indian or American identity because those two are also just outer layers, not the true inner consciousness. The in-

ner true Indian-American soul connects with the inner true Indian and inner true American souls despite the different and multiple forms of Indian and American cultural identities.

In the case of Indian-Americans, as they continue to work toward formulating and asserting their group-ego, underneath their attempts may be lurking a deeper invisible urge to break the shell of group-ego, the body of being Indian-American, and to get in touch with the soul that may be termed as the Indian-American group-soul. When we move beyond the level of group-identity and toward developing a sense of the group-soul, we begin to enter the deeper realms of the psychological and subtle. And in the case of Indian group-soul, as Sri Aurobindo would remind us, we also begin to enter the realm of the spiritual. If we agree that spirituality is the soul of India, the prevailing context of the materialist versus spiritualist divide in the American mainstream consciousness may create a psychological conflict as Indian-Americans con-

tinue with their journey to discover or realize their group-soul. To what extent and in what ways this Indian-American group-soul will become a synthesis of the American group-soul and the Indian group-soul remains to be discovered as time goes by.

What also remains a matter of future discovery is the interpretation that Indian-Americans will make of the American group-soul. Consciously or unconsciously, their outward actions and behaviors will be in some way a reflection of—remote and loosely formulated as it may be—an attempt at unfolding hidden inner connections with the Indian group-soul. "[T]his is true that by constant enlargement, purification, openness the reason of man is bound to arrive at an intelligent sense even of that which is hidden from it, a power of passive, yet sympathetic reflection of the Light that surpasses it" (Sri Aurobindo, 1997, p. 123). Some Indian-Americans might at some point in their lives begin to feel an awareness of this



latent connection to Indian group-soul, though they may not become aware of this connection in these specific terms. This may happen because underneath the very temporary identities of national, ethnic, or cultural belonging, their inner journeys will also happen in the context of their outer journeys. By the fact of the Indian group-soul being hidden—no matter in however latent form that may be—in their apparent group self, and as they become more self-conscious of their Indian-American group experience, they may find it relatively easier to discover a connection with a group-soul that is Indian. They may or may not experience similarly deep connection to what might be seen as the American group-soul, or they may try to find it in their own unique way, which will be partly guided by their gradual unfolding of the subjective experience or awareness of the Indian group-soul.

It must be remembered that Indian social life has subordinated almost entirely the individual to the family ... the mould of society has been long of an almost iron fixity putting each individual in his place and expecting him to conform to it ... a courageous solution is only possible where there is freedom of personal will; but where the only solution (if one remains in this life) is submission to the family will, there can be nothing of the kind. It is a secure life and can be happy if one accommodates oneself to it and has no unusual aspirations beyond it or is fortunate in one's environment; but is has no remedy for or escape from incompatibilities or any kind of individual frustration; it leaves little room for initiative or free movement or any individualism (Sri Aurobindo, 1970, p. 871).

This Indian social value that could discourage individual freedom is contrasted with one of the hallmarks of American individual and collective consciousness, namely, the emphasis on individualism and freedom. Though it must be remem-



Tasting sweet honey. (Photo by Ritam)

bered that both of these American ideals are primarily or only understood on a materialistic plane, and that historically both of these have not been part of the experience of many Americans. However, an individualistic bent is sufficiently ingrained in the American mind and psyche, even though its outward manifestations could be somewhat crude and overly rationalistic and secular in character.

Also, American modernity with its emphasis on materialistic and social progress and its constant attempts at creating an efficiently organized collective life are outcomes of the scientific, rationalistic mindset that objectifies, externalizes, and concerns itself mostly with the practical so that "[l]ife itself is the only object of living" (Sri Aurobindo, 1997, p. 158). "A purely rational society could not come into being and, if it could be born, either could not live or would sterilize and petrify human existence" (Sri Aurobindo, 1997, p. 123), and it is to move outside of the prison of rationality, that the West has always looked to the East and tried to revive and renew those ideas from its ancient heritage that resisted complete objectification and materialistic tendencies. The collective Indian consciousness, on the other hand, carries deep within it the ancient ideal that "life is a seeking for God and for the highest self ..." (Sri Aurobindo, 1997, p. 159). A true seeking of the Divine happens in complete freedom and is always an individual journey. So with Indian emphasis on spirituality and American emphasis on

individual freedom, a question, no matter how idealistic it may sound, emerges: Is it likely that as the Indian-American collectivity continues with its search for true subjective consciousness, the subconscious pull of Indian ideal of life as a seeking for Divine finds a happy union with the subconscious American ideal of freedom of the individual?

The trend of increasing popularity of Indian spiritual practices in the US may be somewhat of an external manifestation of how the material foundation is already being prepared (though this preparation may be happening in a crude, obscure and stumbling manner, often blatantly mixed with economic and political motivations) for the emergence of such an idealistic vision of an Indian-American group-soul. Of course, the recently increasing presence of Indian immigrant groups in the US may have little to do with this popularity, and perhaps the 1893 speech of Swami Vivekananda may have been the starting point, but the increasing interactions between two collective-consciousnesses—Indian and American—even if they are first on the level of externalities, may enable conditions necessary for the birth of a new group-consciousness that is reflected in new external forms and internal dynamics of life-force and spirit-force. This new group-consciousness may then in its self-conscious aim seek for its group-soul that is a synthesis of the soul of India and the soul of America. This new group-consciousness with its deeper truth of individualism implying that an individual is not "merely a member of human pack ... [but] a soul, a being, who has to fulfill his own individual truth and law as well as his natural or his assigned part in the truth and law of the collective existence" (Sri Aurobindo, 1997, p. 24) could further steer the direction of American mainstream consciousness toward true subjectivism and the spiritual aim of life.

This realization of the Indian-American group-soul will still only be a step, till it is ready to experience the higher vision of Self which is beyond the group-soul and connects with the soul of humanity, and lives in true freedom. While an individual



has the “tendency of self-limitation and subjection to his environment and group, but he has also the equally necessary tendency of expansion and transcendence of environment and groupings” (Sri Aurobindo, 1997, p. 69).

But until that dawn of expansion and transcendence ...

Thus the community stands as a mid-term and intermediary value between the individual and humanity and it exists not merely for itself, but for the one and the other and to help them to fulfill each other. The individual has to live in humanity as well as humanity in the individual; but mankind is or has been too large an aggregate to make this mutuality a thing intimate and powerfully felt in the ordinary mind of the race, and even if humanity becomes a manageable unit of life, intermediate groups and aggregates must still exist for the purpose of mass-differentiation and the concentration and combination of varying tendencies in the total human aggregate. Therefore the community has to stand for a time to the individual for humanity even at the cost of standing between him and it and limiting the reach of his universality and the wideness of his sympathies (Sri Aurobindo, 1997, p. 69).

The search continues ...

Author's notes

1. Much of the analyses of Indian-American experience presented in this article are my reflections based on the personal experience and observation over more than 14 years of living in the US. These highly subjective reflections are presented here with full appreciation that an individual's subjective experience cannot provide much or any substance for generalizing to a larger aggregate. But perhaps in some way each individual's unique journey of identification with a group-ego and group-soul, and consequent attempts

at transcending the hold of both on one's inner self are all one has to learn from in a process of self-inquiry and self-awareness which aim at a seeking for the highest self.

2. Some of the discussion presented in this essay may be especially relevant for those Indian-Americans who identify with spiritual and religious traditions collectively known as Sanātana Dharma (Hinduism). Besides the fact that I am from such a background and therefore can speak with a bit more experiential authenticity about some aspects of Hindu-American experience than about the experiences of Indian-Americans who identify with other religious or spiritual traditions, the other reason why these issues may be of more relevance to Hindu Americans is that the philosophical or metaphysical foundations of traditions grouped under Sanātana Dharma (or Hinduism) are in many ways deeply contrary to the more materialistic foundations of mainstream western cultures. However, at the same time it is important to add that because of the multi-religious nature of Indian society, the psychological impact on overall Indian consciousness of the inherent multiplicity, plurality, heterogeneity, and respect for diversity of faiths and belief systems all of which are at the core of traditions collectively known as Sanātana Dharma, and the ever-renewing organic hybridity resulting from the synthesis of various spiritual traditions in India, much of this may be equally applicable for those Indian-Americans who identify themselves with other religious traditions including Islam, Christianity, and other faiths.

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Individuation: Activating the four powers

by Ruth Lamb

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This persistent soul-existence is the real Individuality which stands behind the constant mutation of things we call our personality....we are not a mere mass of mind-stuff, life-stuff, body-stuff taking different forms of mind and life and body from birth to birth...there is a real and stable power of our being behind the constant mutation of our mental, vital and physical personality and this is what we have to know and preserve in order that the Infinite may manifest....
—Sri Aurobindo¹

Individuation—that is, moving beyond ego—requires another great work, another dynamic use of the gunas or qualities of sattwa (enlightened peace), rajas (powerful dynamism), and tamās (inertia and habit). In individuation, these gunas are used to express the special power of soul that organizes itself in the deepest innermost being, reflecting its light to the inner being and to the outer being's physical, emotional-vital, and mental nature.

Sri Aurobindo speaks of a four-fold power of evolution: the power of knowledge and intelligence, the power of force and strength, the power of harmony and adaption, and the power of work, service, or labor.^{2,3} Each power exists overtly or covertly in all people, and many claim that the amalgam of these yogic powers forms a person's character. As the ego strengthens, centralizes, and learns to overcome the downward pull from a wide array of adverse circumstances, these powers refine along with the guna qualities that direct them. When the ego begins to gain self-awareness, the personality forms—



once a dynamically healthy ego-point of 'I am' is stabilized, then there is a foundation for individuation.

Once a certain stability has been reached, the ego may be healthy enough to overcome its tamasic inertia, which rests on a refusal to change. The outer emotional-vital ego aspects, having claimed a sense of authority and egoic power on behalf of this 'I', rajastically hold their dominion. Even the outer mental egoic aspect has its challenges with change, once the sattvic quality has developed a standpoint of equanimity with values, beliefs, and doctrine or dogma accepted as right and solidified into a worldview.

Growth beyond the dynamically stabilized ego-point 'I am' requires the force of a more activated soul carrying the spirit of inquiry, a willingness to seek knowledge and understanding that activates the outer- and inner-mind formations of consciousness. This building of knowledge has innumerable stages, intensities, and maturities. Some individuals remain content with superficial awareness, others seek deeper, and a few will probe to the root of the possible. Without balance, this powerful force of seeking becomes one-dimensional; without practice and integration, knowledge remains theoretical and deadened.

Knowledge and understanding are the first requirements if we wish to achieve, followed by making the knowledge effective. Secondly, strength and will are required, and the ability and courage to carry forth despite obstacles. If knowledge, understanding, and intelligence are not supported by will and strength, the rajasic vital may intervene and destroy the right exercise of power—acute discernment is crucial. Third, there is a need to organize the intelligence and put the wisdom into practice in a wise, co-creative, and harmoniously practical manner. Finally, the fourth power requires that work be done, effort be made, detail be addressed and positive service to humankind be achieved—this is a conscious and surrendered service sustaining dharma, a soul-power which carries meaningful purpose.



Ruth Lamb.

As long as the outward personality we call ourselves is centered in the lower powers of consciousness, the riddle of its own existence, its purpose, its necessity is to it an insoluble enigma. —Sri Aurobindo⁴

Individuation requires a person to step away from being directly controlled by the outer physical, emotional-vital, and mental aspects of consciousness and become more awake to the underlying forces that have much greater sway—the inner physical, emotional-vital, and mental. With an active noticing state evolving and the witness consciousness gaining awareness, it becomes possible to seek the deeper, more poignantly urgent forces that subtly uplift manifold suggestions to the outer being. Individuation in this sense means that individuals are becoming just that: centralised in their deeper awareness and capable of greater intelligence in the choices they make. Of course, the outer dynamics and ongoing testing from numerous directions remain; nevertheless, with a healthy enough egoic stance and a willingness to look deeper comes a more directed connection with the innermost being (soul force). This connection itself brings a sustaining stability as faith in something luminous, clear, and wise arises naturally from within, bringing a greater ability to face the fracturing situations that inevitably impact the human condition.

The inner being underlies the outer being and is immersed in a state of subliminal consciousness; therefore, the inner mental, emotional-vital, and subtle physical have a much deeper and broader range of force, power, and consciousness impacting them. Impacts are received from the individual's own history and lifetimes of learning as well as from the environmental and universal consciousness, and from all levels of the hierarchical consciousness. "Our subliminal self...is a meeting-place of the consciousness that emerges from below by evolution and the consciousness that has descended from above for involution."⁵ In order to bring awareness to this domain, it is understandable that the outer egoic self needs to be centralised and somewhat stabilized; then, with a sense of the outer self stabilized, awareness of how much more we are becomes evident as a deeper reflective noticing develops.

...our present conscious existence, is only a representative formation, a superficial activity, a changing external result of a vast mass of concealed existence...our existence is something much larger than this apparent frontal being which we suppose ourselves to be and which we offer to the world around us....It is only when we go behind, below, above into the hidden stretches of our being that we can know it; the most thorough and acute surface scrutiny and manipulation cannot give us the true understanding or the completely effective control of our life, its purpose, its activities.... —Sri Aurobindo⁶

From the inner-being perspective, the inner mind is open to an infinite number of influences from our own subconscious (including access to imprints from our family of heritage and previous lifetimes, from the environment around us, and from those in the environment); in addition, at a collective level (e.g., through the media) many thought forms are impacting individuals globally. Finally, individuals are also impacted by thought



forms from the astral and hostile planes as well as from the higher mind, illumined mind, intuitive mind, and innermost soul. The complexities multiply. Each of these mind-related forces of consciousness affects our outer physical, emotional, and thinking mental field.

We have innumerable thoughts each waking moment, and dreams at night—what is real? The main discipline of the mind is noticing, observation, quietening, and controlling, opening to the higher wisdom and receiving that wisdom, all the while using the most acute mental discrimination. As soon as we can cultivate a soul-awareness, we also cultivate a soul-discrimination—we cultivate what the yogis term the *kshurasya dhara* or the razor's edge.

From an inner emotional-vital perspective the subliminal actively presents waves of life-force and emotional-feeling; hence, when formations from the astral bring imposing and convincing allures forward, being alert is crucial. Sri Aurobindo tells us that the power of the vital formations to flash lights and overwhelm with grandeur and brilliance is dazzling. For example, he says, if a person overwhelms you, pulls you, seduces you, imposes on you, and feeds your ego or your impulse for ambition—you must pull back. A spiritual personality, he says, is nonimposing and strengthening.

The inner vital is connected to and vulnerable to the local and global life force and the emotional streams of innumerable forces and feelings. So, in addition to one's internal pushes and personal feelings poking up from the subconscious and unconscious, this dimension of our being is aware at the consciousness level of the emotional-vital-feeling forces near and far. These waves impact the outer emotional-vital to different degrees in each person, and to different degrees at different times in life. Pandit tells us that the vital is cunning and convincing:

Whenever there is an attack or something untoward happens, the idea way is not to blame others or outer circumstances, but to look into yourself and detect what is

false, what is obscure, what is dark in you; and after detecting it, to reject it not only once but persistently because these things have a way of coming back and asserting themselves again and again.⁷

This process can be carried out from a personal perspective first, then look beyond the self to outer circumstances. For self or others, notice if cunning rationalizations link the lower and higher vital levels, allowing justification of actions that few would condone as right and honorable from an individual or humanitarian perspective. This takes humility, a rather alien attribute to the vital, which is drawn and fed by desire from the lowest level and is capable of sweeping nations into turmoil.

On the other hand, Sri Aurobindo states, the vital is the warrior of the soul—once it is reformed and transformed. Its powerful life force energies and sweeping access to consciousness, tied intimately to emotions and feelings and higher aspiration, can forge the pathway to the innermost being. A keen self-awareness must be cultivated, accompanied by a will for purification through objective self-examination, so that individuals become able to determine the difference between a vital glow and vital glamour, and to identify spiritual radiance. The required skills are based in an ongoing will to change, rejection or refusal of expression based on discernment, and surrender to a call from the soul.

The subtle physical serves to link the outer body physical consciousness to the subtle etheric and astral realms of consciousness, and to the physiological-nervous-system bridge between matter and energy. At the subtle physical, the chakras form an aspect of the bridge and bring subliminal awareness closer to the outer being on the physical, emotional-vital, and mental planes. Sri Aurobindo says that “only a little of the inner being escapes through these centres into the outer life, but that little is the best part of ourselves and responsible for our art, poetry, philosophy, ideas, religious aspirations, effort and knowledge and perfection.”⁸

The subtle physical holds the body's

potential for dis-ease and for health, as illnesses can be held in the human energy field or biofield prior to physical activation. All physiological disruptions pattern into, or arise from, the subtle physical as do all emotional states—they show their legacy within different levels of the human energy field, either as it overextends the physical body or as it lies within the body in the cells and tissues. There may (or may not) be somatic symptoms or a subtle somatic awareness of feeling tones held within the actual tissue structures. As with the inner mental and emotional-vital, the subtle physical interacts with the subconscious, unconscious, and the higher levels of consciousness just as it does with the surface egoic personality and physiological status. This dynamic and interwoven interaction occurs each moment in the moment.

From an Integral yoga viewpoint, individuation becomes a complex process: Step by step, one proceeds by refining the methods Sri Aurobindo and the Mother set forth. For our purposes here, I define the yoga of individuation as:

the power and the presence, the inner stillness and ability to consciously contact the Inner Guide—the deepest soul awareness—combined with a discerning witness consciousness that allows us to access the highest processes of which our nature is capable; this is a process whereby the inner insight informs the outer sight and is capable of guiding will and action. Here, one is in contact with the innermost consciousness, which is a widened, heightened, and spacious consciousness—a soul-consciousness that reveals the Divine potential in each person and sustains and supports the integration and harmony of all parts of the being.

This is one view for consideration, but it holds the foundational methods described here and brings understanding to the Integral yoga self-awareness processes. The four powers of knowledge and intelligence, force and strength, harmony and adaption, and work and service are dynam-



ic powers and processes interwoven into the yoga of individuation. The next step functionally is activating the soul. However, at all places and in all instances, the soul is involved—it is a matter of how consciously we as individuals can sustain *tapasya*, the conscious work of activating soul.

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³ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*, Twin Lakes, WI: Lotus Light.

⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, p. 191.

⁵ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, pp. 425–427.

⁶ Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, pp. 170–171.

⁷ Pandit, M.P. (1992). *Heart of Sadhana*, Pondicherry, India: Dipti, pp. 14–15.

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On the passing away of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

by Richard Pearson

First I will take you back to when Sri Aurobindo passed away in 1950. It so happened that I was not in Pondicherry on that day. Somehow for some reason—I do not know—my father had arranged to see Professor C who did experiments with music on plants in Annamalai University, and this had been approved by the Mother. We were to leave on 5th December. At four o'clock, the photographer friend of ours, Venkatesh, knocked on the window and said "I don't feel we should go today." But my father said, "Well, Mother had given the blessings. I will come but do what you feel." And when we came to Chidambaram—it was near Annamalai University—we were having something to eat—coffee, idly, or something. There was someone in the restaurant who asked: "Is there something new? Anything hap-



Richard Pearson at his Ashram home.

pened in Pondicherry?" We said, "No, everything is normal. Sri Aurobindo is not well, but..." So we went on and then we reached Annamalai University, and were received by Dr. Singh. There was a student there who was working with a radio that he had made. He said, "I hear that Sri Aurobindo has passed away." This was a big shock. Dr. Singh said, "Well, you have come this far, you might as well spend a few more hours with me and then go back in the evening." And that is what we did.

When we got back, I just took the kuja as usual and went to the Ashram to bring drinking water. It was my part of the housekeeping with my father. I couldn't recognize the place. It looked as though there had been a stampede. The newly planted trees outside the Ashram were all bent over and the Ashram rockery looked like a mess. I was so surprised that I wasn't even in Pondicherry. Somewhere in me I knew that I could not bear that. And my friends told me, "Oh, what you have missed! A whole town came crowding into the Ashram." I am by nature a rather sensitive person with regard to plants and animals and I particularly cannot bear mistreating them.

Near the time of Mother's passing we knew that Mother was very weak. We had heard painful cries in her room and we knew that she was undergoing a lot of physical suffering, but we didn't expect Her to leave. At 4 o'clock in the morning somebody came and knocked on the window, saying "Come quickly to the Ashram! The Mother has left her body."

In a flash the thought that came to me was "The Mother remembered my wish, that I should be informed." The Mother is so gracious—she even sent somebody to tell me. I went to the Ashram after informing Kailas. She was living next to Udar's house, diagonally opposite to the French Institute since 1966. I was asked to control people who were coming. It was an extremely peaceful arrangement.

But why did She leave? You may have seen the Mother's couch in the Meditation Hall where Her body was laid to rest. Mother never lay completely flat—She believed that to lie flat led one to go into Inconscience. So she preferred to sleep or rather rest in an inclined position, just resting her back. In fact, She often said: "You see my posture? It is like that because I never lie down, so I got a hunchback. But I want to be straight!" Well, She was in the Meditation Hall and, of course, after our duty was over and things were more smooth I took my chance in waiting to go before Her. Too difficult to describe the emotion... before a person with whom one has interacted, with whom one has been quite close. And to see just...as one would say, just a body. Everything with the Mother is absolutely unexpected. What I saw was a living Presence of a Warrior, of a Fighter, a grim determined person, whose work was not finished, who was constantly battling, physically battling with a grim determination to bring the final Victory! It was so powerful! So intent! I was so surprised. She gave me the impression of something strong, something powerful, something that would never give up! Each time I went back to witness this, it was always the same impression.

We would sit in the Ashram and look into ourselves, trying to understand. But what I am trying to say is something I cannot even explain to myself. This question, "Why did she leave?" went on nagging me, prodding me. I wanted to know the answer. I started to become clear with the answer the more I began to realize that She was there, She was present. And the feeling when sitting in the Ashram was simply that She has now entered—she has now entered into everyone, everywhere.



There is no corner, no place that could be hidden from Her, from Her Presence. It seems an inaccuracy to say that She has left, She is still there. The more I was assured of the answer, the more I knew that She was, she is, She will always be present.

It was also a very moving experience on the 20th of November when Her casket was taken to the Samadhi. It was really her Grace that I was called to be one of the bearers at that time. A notice had come out in the Ashram announcing who will be carrying the casket—and I read it and just thought it would be nice to be there. I was asked to go to Harpagon to see if everything was ready. Suddenly somebody came up to me and said, “Go and get ready. You are also going to carry Mother’s casket.” So I went home and fortunately I had white shorts and a shirt already ironed. I put them on and came back. For that opportunity to be included I am extremely grateful.

I would like to share with you one final incident at this bearing of the casket. There was another boy who was called—Sumantra—a friend of mine, whose name was added. And when we were outside when the Mother’s body was placed in the coffin, we could only smell the perfume. And I have a feeling that when some great soul or the Avatar decides to leave the Earth, it is as though the heavens open up. You know that during the very last Darshan of the Mother in August it poured heavily and incessantly. The heavens really opened up. There was such a torrential rain. As the Mother came to the Balcony, everybody was just spellbound.

To Thee who has been the material
envelope of our Master,
To Thee our infinite gratitude.
Before Thee, who has done so much
for us
Who has worked, struggled, suffered,
hoped, endured so much,
Before Thee who has willed all, attempted
all, prepared, achieved all for us,
Before Thee we bow down and implore
that we may never forget
even for a moment all we owe
to Thee.

Personal transformation and power

by Pravir Malik

From Pravir’s blog, blog.aurosoorya.com, which focuses on organizational and systems problems and solutions.

Our reality does not end with what the eye can see. This is where it begins. There is the whole informing edifice of which what the eye can see is only the final outcome. To focus only on the physical, on that which can be seen, is to focus on the surface of the edifice only, and by definition misses the causal dynamics that marks the real meaning and intent behind the physical. To focus on the physical only is to focus on established reality and to miss the reality of all the possibility that is seeking to manifest from within the heart of the edifice. And being that the heart of the edifice, the heart of Progress, is the real center around which the entire edifice and all physical manifestations revolve, to focus only on the physical, as though it were an independent reality with no connection to anything deeper, is to miss the context of life.

To imagine therefore that each of us are entities existing in a physical world to fulfill a part as determined by our common and most likely programmed physical-vital orientations is to consign ourselves to littleness and lack of possibility. We each become then a cog in a wheel, and depending on the randomness or luck or even effort of construction of our physical resources or vital capabilities, will play either a more or less central role in driving or moving a wheel that is headed ultimately toward its own destruction. If there is power in this, it is not power to bring about global change, but power only to accelerate debilitation of a poorly perceived and believed world-system.

Meaningful global change can come about only when the reality of one’s relation with the heart of the system is rightly perceived, and by identity, the dynamics of the heart of the system begin to deter-



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mine the dynamics in oneself. For this to happen, though, one’s psychology has to go through a sea-change. The existence of a Progress-centered, universal fractal system—of which each of us are potentially significant or insignificant fractal actors depending on if we choose to exercise the fractal for progress (shift in active perception from the physical-vital to the mental-intuitional)—must become a reality. In other words, it requires a basic re-contextualizing, so that rather than experiencing ourselves as independent and isolated entities existing in the world to fulfill or aggrandize a narrow physical-vital view of ourselves by catering to dominant physical-vital dynamics abroad in each institution of life, we must begin through an essential mental-intuitional orientation to experience ourselves as part of the larger fractal system.

Such a re-contextualizing implies that we become heroes, because every manner of limitation as evidenced by the pervasive and incomplete physical-vital outlook will then need to be faced, overcome, and successfully replaced by the mental-intuitional outlook that by definition begins to open us to the heart of Progress. This re-contextualizing, in fact, begins to become more real with each stagnating or opposing fractal that we successfully overcome. In this view, we are not just cogs in a wheel, but creative centers of a continually and sustainably progressing world-system for which we are each ultimately co-responsible. There can be no more power than this.



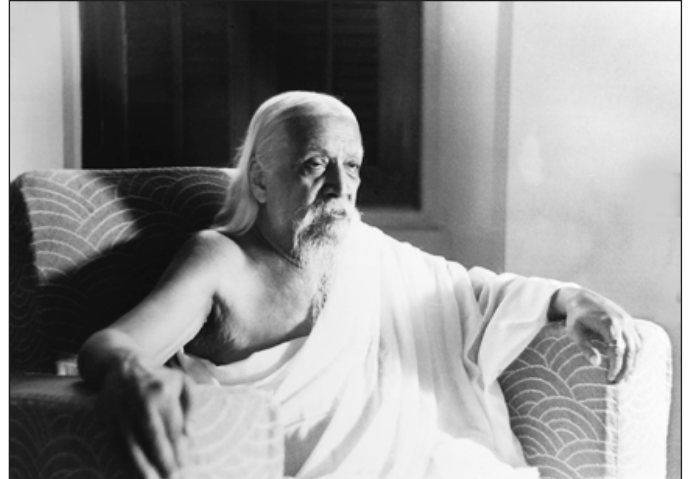
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Reality and the integral Knowledge

by Sri Aurobindo

This then is the origin, this the nature, these the boundaries of the Ignorance. Its origin is a limitation of knowledge, its distinctive character a separation of the being from its own integrality and entire reality; its boundaries are determined by this separative development of the consciousness, for it shuts us to our true self and to the true self and whole nature of things and obliges us to live in an apparent surface existence. A return or a progress to integrality, a disappearance of the limitation, a breaking down of separateness, an overpassing of boundaries, a recovery of our essential and whole reality must be the sign and opposite character of the inner turn towards Knowledge. There must be a replacement of a limited and separative by an essential and integral consciousness identified with the original truth and the whole truth of self and existence. The integral Knowledge is something that is already there in the integral Reality: it is not a new or still non-existent thing that has to be created, acquired, learned, invented or built up by the mind; it must rather be discovered or uncovered, it is a Truth that is self-revealed to a spiritual endeavour: for it is there veiled in our deeper and greater self; it is the very stuff of our own spiritual consciousness, and it is by awaking to it even in our surface self that we have to possess it. There is an integral self-knowledge that we have to recover and, because the world-self also is our self, an integral world-knowledge. A knowledge that can be learned or constructed by the mind exists and has its value, but that is not what is meant when we speak of the Knowledge and the Ignorance.

An integral spiritual consciousness carries in it a knowledge of all the terms of being; it links the highest to the lowest through all the mediating terms and achieves an indivisible whole. At the highest summit of things it opens to the reality, ineffable because superconscient to all but its own self-awareness, of the Absolute. At the lowest end of our being it perceives the Inconscience from which our evolution begins; but at the same time it is aware of the One and the All self-involved in those depths, it unveils the secret Consciousness in the Inconscience. Interpretative, revelatory, moving between these two extremes, its vision discovers the manifestation of the One in the Many, the identity of the Infinite in the disparity of things finite, the presence of the timeless Eternal in eternal Time; it is this seeing that illumines for it the meaning of the universe. This consciousness does not abolish the universe; it takes it up and transforms it by giving to it its hidden significance. It does not abolish the individual existence; it transforms the individual being and nature by revealing to them their



true significance and enabling them to overcome their separateness from the Divine Reality and the Divine Nature.¹

An integration of this kind would not be possible if a spiritual evolution were not the sense of our birth and terrestrial existence; the evolution of mind, life and spirit in Matter is the sign that this integration, this completed manifestation of a secret self contained in it is its significance. A complete involution of all that the Spirit is and its evolutionary self-unfolding are the double term of our material existence. There is a possibility of self-expression by an always unveiled luminous development of the being, a possibility also of various expression in perfect types fixed and complete in their own nature: that is the principle of becoming in the higher worlds; they are typical and not evolutionary in their life principle; they exist each in its own perfection, but within the limits of a stationary world-formula. But there is also a possibility of self-expression by self-finding, a deployment which takes the form and goes through the progression of a self-veiling and an adventure of self-recovery: that is the principle of becoming in this universe of which an involution of consciousness and concealment of the spirit in Matter is the first appearance.

An involution of spirit in the Inconscience is the beginning; an evolution in the Ignorance with its play of the possibilities of a partial developing knowledge is the middle, and the cause of the anomalies of our present nature,—our imperfection is the sign of a transitional state, a growth not yet completed, an effort that is finding its way; a consummation in a deployment of the spirit's self-knowledge and the self-power of its divine being and consciousness is the culmination: these are the three stages of this cycle of the spirit's progressive self-expression in life. The two stages that have already their play seem at first sight to deny the possibility of the later consummating stage of the cycle, but logically they imply its emergence; for if the inconscience has evolved consciousness, the partial consciousness



already reached must surely evolve into complete consciousness. It is a perfected and divinised life for which the earth-nature is seeking, and this seeking is a sign of the Divine Will in Nature. Other seekings also there are and these too find their means of self-fulfilment; a withdrawal into the supreme peace or ecstasy, a withdrawal into the bliss of the Divine Presence are open to the soul in earth-existence: for the Infinite in its manifestation has many possibilities and is not confined by its formulations. But neither of these withdrawals can be the fundamental intention in the Becoming itself here; for then an evolutionary progression would not have been undertaken,—such a progression here can only have for its aim a self-fulfilment here: a progressive manifestation of this kind can only have for its soul of significance the revelation of Being in a perfect Becoming.²

Man is there to affirm himself in the universe, that is his first business, but also to evolve and finally to exceed himself: he has to enlarge his partial being into a complete being, his partial consciousness into an integral consciousness; he has to achieve mastery of his environment but also world-union and world-harmony; he has to realise his individuality but also to enlarge it into a cosmic self and a universal and spiritual delight of existence. A transformation, a chastening and correction of all that is obscure, erroneous and ignorant in his mentality, an ultimate arrival at a free and wide harmony and luminousness of knowledge and will and feeling and action and character, is the evident intention of his nature; it is the ideal which the creative Energy has imposed on his intelligence, a need implanted by her in his mental and vital substance. But this can only be accomplished by his growing into a larger being and a larger consciousness: self-enlargement, self-fulfilment, self-evolution from what he partially and temporarily is in his actual and apparent nature to what he completely is in his secret self and spirit and therefore can become even in his manifest existence, is the object of his creation. This hope is the justification of his life upon earth amidst the phenomena of the cosmos. The outer apparent man, an ephemeral being subject to the constraints of his material embodiment and imprisoned in a limited mentality, has to become the inner real Man, master of himself and his environment and universal in his being. In a more vivid and less metaphysical language, the natural man has to evolve himself into the divine Man; the sons of Death have to know themselves as the children of Immortality. It is on this account that the human birth can be described as the turning-point in the evolution, the critical stage in earth-nature.³

¹Sri Aurobindo, *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, Vols. 21-22 (The Life Divine)*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, pp. 659-660.

²Ibid., pp. 708-709.

³Ibid., pp. 711-712.

The divine Presence¹

by the Mother

I've had an interesting experience.... Not yesterday evening but the evening before, someone I won't name told me, "I am fully in the physical consciousness: no more meditations, and the Divine has become something up above, so far away...." Then, instantly, while he was speaking, the whole room FILLED with the divine Presence. "Oh," I told him, "Not up above: HERE, right here." And at that moment, EVERYTHING, the whole atmosphere ... you know, the very air seemed to change into divine Presence (Mother touches her hands, her face, her body): you understand, everything was touched, touched, permeated, but with ... above all, there was a dazzling Light, a Peace like this (massive gesture), a Power, and also such Sweetness ... something ... you felt it would be enough to melt a rock.

And it hasn't left. It has remained.

It came like that, and has remained.

And the whole night was like that – everything. Even now the two things are there: a little of the ordinary consciousness, as if mechanically, but I just have to remain still or concentrated for a second and it's there. And it's the BODY'S experience, you understand, physical, material, the body's experience: everything, absolutely everything is full, full, there's NOTHING but That, and we are like ... everything is like something shriveled, you know, like dried-up bark, something dried up. You get the impression that things (not completely – superficially) have become hard, dry, and that's why they don't feel. That's why they don't feel Him, otherwise everything, but everything is NOTHING but That; you can't breathe without breathing Him, you understand; you move about, and it's within Him that you move about; you are ... everything, the whole universe is within Him – but MATERIALLY, physically, physically.

It's the cure of the "drying up" that I am now seeking.

I feel it's fantastic, you understand.

And then, when I listen, It also says things; I told Him, "But then, why do people always climb up above?" And with the most extraordinary, fantastic humor: "Because they want me to be very far from their consciousness!" Things like that, but not formulated so precisely: impressions. Several times – several times I heard: "Why do they go so far away to seek what's ..." (you know, the theories that have said, "It's within you") ... "to seek what's everywhere?"

I didn't say it to that person, first of all because the experience wasn't a continuous thing as it now is.

And above all, there was: NO NEW RELIGIONS! No dogmas, no fixed teaching. Avoid – at any cost avoid turning it into a new religion. Because the moment it was formulated in an ... elegant way that imposed itself and had a force, *it would be over*.

You get the impression that He is everywhere, but everywhere, and there's nothing else. And we aren't aware of it



because we are ... shriveled up (I don't know how to put it), dried. up. We've made (laughing) tremendous efforts to separate ourselves – and we've succeeded! We've succeeded, but only in our consciousness, not in the fact. In the fact, It's there. It's there. There's NOTHING but That. What we know, what we see, what we touch is as if bathing, floating within That; but it's permeable; it's permeable, absolutely: That goes through it. The sense of separateness comes from here (Mother touches her forehead).

Perhaps the experience came because, for several days, there had been a very great concentration to find, not exactly the why or the how, but the FACT, the fact of separateness, the fact that everything appears so stupid, so ugly.... I was assailed, assailed by kinds of living memories of all sorts of experiences (all sorts: from things read to paintings, films, and life, people, things), memories of this body, all the memories we might call "anti-divine," in which the body had a sensation of repulsive or bad things, like negations of the divine Presence. It began like that. For two days I was like that, to such a point that the body was almost desperate. Then the experience came, and it hasn't moved. It hasn't moved. It came: vrrff! finished, hasn't moved. You see, experiences come and then draw back – but this hasn't moved. It's there right now. So the body is trying to be fluid (Mother makes a gesture of spreading), it's trying to melt; it's trying, it understands what it is. It's trying – not succeeding, obviously! (Mother looks at her hands) But its consciousness knows.

But that experience is having effects: some people have felt relieved all of a sudden, one or two absolutely cured. And when something goes wrong in the body, it doesn't need to ask: the trouble is set right quite naturally.

That hasn't even given the body a need to stop doing anything and to remain wholly concentrated in its experience, no: no desire, nothing. Like this: floating ... floating in a luminous immensity ... which is within! (Mother laughs) The immensity isn't only outside: it's within. It's within. This (Mother touches her hands, this separate appearance), you really feel it's ... I don't know how to put it, but it only has reality in the deformation of the consciousness – but not the human consciousness: something that happened, something that took place in the Consciousness ... (Mother shakes her head) I don't understand. (silence...)

All the theories, all the explanations, all the stories that are at the root of every religion, it all seems to me ... like a distraction. So then, you wonder, you wonder ... (I am going to say something ...) whether the Lord hasn't been putting on an act for Himself! ...

But it's difficult to express. I've spent days when I really lived all the horrors of the creation (and in the consciousness of their horror), then that brought about this experience, and ... the whole horror vanished.

It wasn't moral things at all: it was mostly physical sufferings. Especially THE physical suffering. And that physical suffering, I saw it: a physical suffering that lasts – unceasing, going on night and day. And all at once, instead of being in that state of consciousness, you are in the state of consciousness of this exclusive divine Presence – the pain is gone! And it was physical,



quite physical, with a physical reason. You understand, doctors might say: "It's for this reason, that reason ..." – quite a material thing, absolutely physical: poff! gone.... Your consciousness changes – it comes back.

And if you stay long enough in the true consciousness, the appearance, that is, what we call the physical "fact" itself, disappears, not just the pain.... I have the feeling of having touched ... (there's no mind to understand, thank God!), of having touched the central experience.

But it's a very small beginning.

One would have the impression or certitude of having touched the supreme Secret only if the physical were transformed.... According to the experience (the experience in tiny details), that's how it should be. But then, would there first be ONE body in which this Consciousness was expressed, or must everything, but everything be transformed? ... That I don't know.

It would happen if the play – the play of separateness – came to an end. That would be the solution of the transformation. A phenomenon of consciousness.

But it's so concrete, you see! (silence...)

Only, the other consciousness is still there.... Just now, this morning, I saw a considerable number of people: everyone of them came, and I looked (there was no "I looked": for the PERSON there, it was like that, I was looking at him), the eyes were fixed [on the person] like that, and then there was the perception and vision (but not "vision" as it's understood: it's all a phenomenon of consciousness), the awareness of the Presence; the Presence permeating that sort of bark, of hardened thing, permeating, permeating everywhere. And when I look, when the eyes are fixed, it makes a sort of concentration [of this Presence].... But it's certainly quite a transitory and intermediate state, because the other consciousness (the consciousness that sees things and deals with them as usual, with the perception of what goes on in the individual, what he thinks – not so much what he thinks as what he feels, the way he is), that's there. It's obviously necessary, too, to maintain contact, but ... It's clearly still an experience, not an established fact. What I mean by "established fact" is the consciousness established in such a way that nothing else exists, it alone is present – it's not yet like that.

¹*Mother's Agenda*, Vol. 9 (1968), Institut de Recherches Evolutives, Paris & Mira Aditi, Mysore, pp. 324-327.



The poetry room

From *Savitri*¹

Was then the sun a dream because there is night?
 Hidden in the mortal's heart the Eternal lives:
 He lives secret in the chamber of thy soul,
 A Light shines there nor pain nor grief can cross.
 A darkness stands between thyself and him,
 Thou canst not hear or feel the marvellous Guest,
 Thou canst not see the beatific sun.
 O queen, thy thought is a light of the Ignorance,
 Its brilliant curtain hides from thee God's face.
 It illumines a world born from the Inconscience
 But hides the Immortal's meaning in the world.
 Thy mind's light hides from thee the Eternal's thought,
 Thy heart's hopes hide from thee the Eternal's will,
 Earth's joys shut from thee the Immortal's bliss.
 Thence rose the need of a dark intruding god,
 The world's dread teacher, the creator, pain.
 Where Ignorance is, there suffering too must come;
 Thy grief is a cry of darkness to the Light;
 Pain was the first-born of the Inconscience
 Which was thy body's dumb original base;
 Already slept there pain's subconscious shape:
 A shadow in a shadowy tenebrous womb,
 Till life shall move, it waits to wake and be.
 In one caul with joy came forth the dreadful Power.
 In life's breast it was born hiding its twin;
 But pain came first, then only joy could be.
 Pain ploughed the first hard ground of the world-drowse.
 By pain a spirit started from the clod,
 By pain Life stirred in the subliminal deep.
 Interned, submerged, hidden in Matter's trance
 Awoke to itself the dreamer, sleeping Mind;
 It made a visible realm out of its dreams,
 It drew its shapes from the subconscious depths,
 Then turned to look upon the world it had made.
 By pain and joy, the bright and tenebrous twins,
 The inanimate world perceived its sentient soul,
 Else had the Inconscient never suffered change.
 Pain is the hammer of the Gods to break
 A dead resistance in the mortal's heart,
 His slow inertia as of living stone.
 If the heart were not forced to want and weep,
 His soul would have lain down content, at ease,
 And never thought to exceed the human start
 And never learned to climb towards the Sun.

—Sri Aurobindo

¹*Collected Works of Sri Aurobindo*, Vols. 33-34, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1997, pp. 442-443.

The fane of the Himalayas

In the blue deep soaring above the world
 From the pure ether's lofty white, behold,
 Carved by the Gods' immeasurable dreams
 The Himalayas' Fane eternal gleams.
 The daring lines, the spans like wings in flight—
 You are the Soul's manifested might,
 Your peaks aloft, your skyward-striving steep
 Reveal the Spirit's aspiration-sweeps;
 In the huge ridges' enigmatic row
 The godheads' living faces boldly glow;
 The sphinxes grand, the meditation's rocks,
 Keep the God's mystery in the epochs;
 The sacred pyramids' upsoaring climb
 Uplifts the soul to the heights sublime:
 Up to an ever higher rapture's call
 Like steps to the supernal Source of all
 The Himalayas' Fane aspires in flight,
 God's reverie in the ethereal height.
 O Spirit's pure flame of white that shone
 Into the solid light of the living stone,
 Your grandeur's face inspires the mortals' hearts
 To climb to the Immortals' high ramparts,
 To the white Timelessness' unbound halls
 To rise beyond the narrow earthly walls
 And bring down from the architects divine
 The dreams and deeds like mountain tops to shine:
 O Himalayan peaks, austere and grand,
 Up to the sky arisen high you stand:
 You reign above the world of crawling clay
 Like architecture of the Gods at play,
 A Scripture of the inspired mantra-crests,
 You feed all souls' sempiternal quests;
 Amid the world's uproarious fuss and noise
 You are its highest and its holiest Voice,
 The Spirit's tablets above the earth's years
 Telling the secrets of the griefless spheres.
 O Himalayas' timeless Fane of white,
 With the divine perfection so bright
 You light the world and open to us
 The gates to the sweet breadths of Paradise.
 The summits' dawns down to the nights you bring,
 The skyey Veda-calms to the ages sing,
 Show to the eyes peak-revelations steep,
 Grow in the hearts flame-aspiration deep;
 The triumph star of the souls' sacred fight,
 Your Fane fulfills their prayers for the height,
 Unveils in them God's hidden living shrine
 And leads the world to the Victory divine
 Inspiring all to climb to God along—
 O Himalayas' Fane, God's Veda-Song!
 O Himalayas' Fane, God's Triumph strong!

—Ritam



To the Spiritual Muse

(Translation of Part V of my long poem in Russian, A Poet's Gift)

O Spiritual Muse's deathless Face,
Appear to me in Light!
Your uncreated letters' blaze
Reveal in the sun-height!
With Your immortal glowing lines
Light my imploring eyes!
The verse in which God lives and shines
Grant to the poet's cries!
In the heart's strings just chant, I pray,
The skyeey raptures' runes,
Resound Your harmonies' array:
Swell in the soul's tunes!
Let in the strings so light You whirl
The cadences supreme
And their twirling dance reveal
The soul's starry gleam.
Let in the living heart-beats sing
The rhapsodies of Love
And into the earth-cells they bring
Your flame-strains from above!

Inspire the poet's wings upborne
To soar In Your sun-blaze!
And an immortal Rhythm unborn
In him flame with Your Grace!—
A Poem of the Worlds!
A Love-Song of the Gods!

Soar, O Rhythm!
Create, O Rhythm!
Share, O Rhythm!

O Rhythm!
The All-Rhythm!

O Beauty-Muse, the Chant Supreme,
How sweet's Your perfect Face,
Your Voice, the symphony of Dream,
Your flight of sudden Grace,
The white flame of the wind-swift Wings,
The lightning-Eyes' sun-reach,
The limbs that the orbs weave
with their rhythms,
The starry honey-speech!
Your Look attracts the poets' heart
To burn, to soar above,
Your Call inspires their wings to dart
Up to Your charming laugh!
Their song Your wine intoxicates

With the mad dreams so sweet:
He who has seen Your Glory-Face
Forgets pain and defeat!

O Voice unbound!
O diamond Sound!
God-Hymn's Profound!

O Muse of the gold secrecies,
Song of the worlds of Light,
Sing up Your suns' poem of bliss
In the earth's anguished Night!
Wash with Your Ode's immortal rhythms
The sordid earthly clay,
In the black mass of the Abyss
Your Hymn of Radiance play!
Into the sleepy fish-bog stream
Your diamond flux of Gods,
Rear in the rhymes of Light a gleam
Your Fane from the dark clods!
O Sun of our dreams! O Height!
In Your immortal shine
Flame in our world with all Your Light,
With Your Choral Divine!

O Anthem-Whole!
To You we call!
We call—
We all—
Call—
O Grace, descend!
Bend!
We pray!
We try!
We cry!
Come
To our earth-home!
Rise here Your sun-dome!
Your Home!—

OM OM OM

—Ritam

The touch of the Lord

The touch of the Lord
has warmed my sleeping heart
and caused it to bloom.
In this dawn my heart opens
and the world fills with fragrance.

—Angelo Salerno



A prayer and an answer

On the 9th December, 1950 at 7 pm, the writer of this poem, a devotee of Sri Aurobindo from Bombay (who did not know anything about the Mother until then) had just arrived and was offering the sand after the rosewood casket holding Sri Aurobindo was interred.

Why hast thou forsaken me,
O mighty splendor of the Supreme,
descended on earth to uplift the race?
Why hast thou forsaken me,
when I sought only Thy Light
To guide me on Thy path of Delight?

I longed to sit at Thy lotus-feet
to learn my lessons of life,
and Thy way its ordeals to face.
Why hast Thou left me then,
alone and helpless to strive
and surmount its tempests,
its deep and turbulent waters,
O Lord of my sublime existence?

Following Thy luminous trail,
I yearned to soar to the supernal heights,
and roam in the infinite Vast of Thy glory
with Thee as my omniscient guide unerring.
Why then, O my magnetic beacon-light,
hast Thou forsaken me?

Where shall I find now
Thy deep understanding and
Divine compassion?
—the Incontestable certitude
of Thy victory of Truth decreed?
Thy transporting vision of the Future
and Thy transmuting touch reassuring?
Where shall I seek Thy inspiration
to uplift me on its wings high-soaring?
How shall I see the splendour and glory
of Thy creative Force, all-transforming?
Or find the plentitude
of Thy Bliss Supreme?

On the day of Thy transcending
the mortal remains of Thy living,
I asked Thee again and again
with tears incessantly streaming
from the depths of my being:
O Lord of self-effulgent Light,
O Lord of Bliss everlasting,

Why hast Thou forsaken me,
who sought none but Thee
to lead me on Thy path of Bliss?

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Deep came Thy reply,
ringing sure and clear,
echoing in my vacant heart:
“I’ve not left you, be sure,
O my daughter of Delight.
I shall ever be by your side
and lead you through
every ebb and perilous tide;
Leave all your worries aside,
I alone shall be your guide.
Fear not. Be free and candid.
Do my will and act as I bid
in the luminous silence
of your surrendered self.
I shall answer your every call,
The moment is yours, mine the goal!

All doubts ceased, questions erased
In thy all-powerful Presence sweet.

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Then, twelve days after Thy passing,
I saw Thy resplendent face
ever-reassuring in the Mother sweet—
Her eyes of Light penetrating my being,
Following me wherever I be
with Her look, Her smile,
Her Presence, all-embracing!

Years rolled on and half a century gone,
Rich with experiences of Thy decisive Presence.
With absolute conviction now I can say:
Thou art living, indeed present,
My Master and Guide,
with our mighty Mother by Thy side,
Secretly leading the whole world
by Thy unerring golden Light
towards the advent of the New Race.

Salutations to Thee, O Lord ineffable,
and to the Mother ever-gracious!

—Kailas Jhaveri



Apropos

Be still. It takes no effort to be still; it is utterly simple. When your mind is still, you have no name, you have no past, you have no relationships, you have no country, you have no spiritual attainment, you have no lack of spiritual attainment. There is just the presence of beingness with itself. —Gangaji

Silence is our true teacher because it speaks the language of our soul. —Michael Jeffreys

The words shared don't matter as much as the vibration they come from. —Elina St-Onge

The world we see merely reflects our own internal frame of reference—the dominant ideas, wishes and emotions in our minds. We look inside first, decide the kind of world we want to see and then project that world outside, making it the truth as we see it. We make it true by our interpretations of what it is we are seeing. —A Course in Miracles

Be more interested in your inner-state in any given situation than what is happening in the outer situation. What is my inner-state at THIS moment is always primary. Dealing with external situations, the outcome of this situation or that situation or this person agrees with me or does not agree with me... all these are secondary things. —Eckart Tolle

The person in front of you is a reflection of yourself... be kind to yourself. —Infinity Comfort

To seek security outside to fill the void of insecurity inside is like trying to cure a wound by putting dirt on it. It only redoubles our insecurity because everything that is outside is already insecure! —Satinder Dhiman

Wanting something to make you happy is a sure way to be miserable. —Mooji

Life is simple. Everything happens for you, not to you. Everything happens at exactly the right moment, neither too soon nor too late. You don't have to like it... it's just easier if you do. —Byron Katie

Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it. —Rumi

What you seek is already within you. You uncover it by shedding all that is untrue within you. —Sampo Kaasila

The minute I think I can speak for someone else as if I know what it is like to be him/her is the minute I cut myself off from the vibrancy of my own ignorance, and the wonder of the mystery that is another human being. —Benjamin Smythe

One is pure awareness and the mind owes its existence to this awareness. When a seeker sees the mind and thoughts arising from the mind separate from himself, he knows that he has nothing to do with the mind. The mind does not bother him any more. He does not spend his time and effort in silencing the mind. He just remains as pure awareness, watching it all happen in this awareness. —Tarun Sardana

The more you have the more you want, and you are stuck in a state of "wanting-ness," and there is no lasting satisfaction in this circular cycle. Being in a state of "wanting-ness" creates suffering. Bear in mind, having cravings or a desire for anything that belongs in the physical world is not a source of happiness; instead these cravings are a source of unhappiness. It is not the lack of something that is behind your unhappiness; instead your craving is the root cause behind your unhappiness. —Sampo Kaasila

A meditative mind is at ease because it's not trying to acquire anything. —Adyashanti

To be full of things is to be empty of God. To be empty of things is to be full of God. —Meister Eckhart

There is nothing more important to true growth than realizing that you are not the voice of the mind – you are the one who hears it. —Michael A. Singer

Whatever people think of you is really about the image they have of you, and that image isn't you. —Don Miguel Ruiz

Only to the extent that we expose ourselves over and over to annihilation can that which is indestructible in us be found. —Pema Chodron

Desires are just waves in the mind. A desire is just a thing among many. I feel no urge to satisfy it, no action needs be taken on it. Freedom from desire means this: the compulsion to satisfy is absent. —Sri Nisargadatta

Do you see that everything in the Universe is simply doing its dance, i.e., expressing itself the only way it can... and this is happening in every moment. Seeing this clearly brings instant relaxation and peace. Why? Because if everything is doing the only dance it can, what is there to worry about? —Michael Jeffreys

Understand your darkness and it will vanish; then you will know what light is. Understand your nightmare for what it is and it will stop; then you will wake up to reality. Understand your false beliefs and they will drop; then you will know the taste of happiness. —Anthony De Mello

There is no one against us in this world but ourselves. You are against you. A failure to love, embrace, and accept yourself based on not a thing flows outwards and causes conflict. Love you for being alive, accept and embrace all of you, and where is the hate now? How can you hate another now? Where can conflict arise? —Barclay Littlewood

Realize that what you have been seeking is what you already are. No matter what idea you have of yourself in the future, see that it is only an image arising in the space of now. —Scott Kiloby