

# To Thee Our Infinite Gratitude

Writings on the Passing of  
Sri Aurobindo

*To Thee*  
*Our Infinite Gratitude*

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*Sri Aurobindo*

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM  
PONDICHERRY

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Sri Aurobindo - 5.12.1950

## Preface

The unremitting endeavour of man to expunge death from his destiny made startling progress in the twentieth century so far as physical science is concerned. To cite an example that unerringly testifies to this statement, a noted medical researcher and author, Alvin Silverstein, dedicated his significant thesis *Conquest of Death* (New York: Macmillan, 1979) “To our generation — the first Emortals” and said in conclusion, “The 1980s will be the Decade of the Scientific Payoffs. The impressive decline in the incidence and mortality of heart disease that has already begun to gather momentum will accelerate. Cancer deaths will dip and then plunge. Dramatic progress in aging will bring new youth for the millions. The close of the decade will bring a virtual end to disease and a welcome reduction of pain and suffering... The heart disease rate has been falling annually since the early fifties. The cancer death rate may have already turned down and will continue to do so at an accelerated pace in the years ahead. During the next decade, further advances will bring a striking improvement of the odds. If you survive the next ten years, you may live on indefinitely in youth and vigour — you may become emortal.” In other words, if not immortal, at least not obliged to die.

No more than a year or so had passed when this pleasant forecast was shattered by the appearance on the horizon of that deadly cloud soon to spread and darken the entire global sky — AIDS.

And that brings to mind what Sri Aurobindo wrote in a footnote to the chapter entitled “Rebirth and Other Worlds” in *The Life Divine* as if in anticipation of such a development:

Even if Science — physical Science or occult Science — were to discover the necessary conditions or means for an indefinite survival of the body, still, if the body could not adapt itself so as to become a fit instrument of expression for the inner growth, the soul would find some way to abandon it and pass on to a new incarnation. The material or

physical causes of death are not its sole or its true cause; its true inmost reason is the spiritual necessity for the evolution of a new being.

Though just a footnote, it contains an essential truth: it is the spiritual necessity for the evolution of a new being that warrants death. We can interpret this profound statement according to the meagre light we have been able to absorb from the vision the Master has unfolded before us. The situation is marked by a paradox: there is no possibility of an indefinite physical survival unless the body has become an instrument fit enough to contain a spirit that aspires to grow. On the other hand, the body cannot become worthy of that process without the intervention of some new transforming consciousness. We the students of Sri Aurobindo-lore know that the Master was engrossed in a hitherto unexplored possibility and devoted his mighty yogic power to resolve the paradox and bring down and establish that transforming power in the physical. Any claim to understand that divine process the Master and the Mother followed and the success they obtained may be presumptuous on our part. But the unique documents compiled in this slim volume will lead any reader with a genuine seeking to the verge of that mystery. While the Mother's observations on the Master's passing away enlighten us about the crucial moment that had arrived in their Yoga, requiring either of them to sacrifice the human body they had put on, her superbly poetic and precise composition meant to be engraved on the Samadhi should cast a mantric spell on a sensitive mind.

Nirodbaran's reminiscence of the last few days of the Avatar is a document one of its kind, a disarmingly frank account of the predicament of matter — matter as the human body with all its limitations as well as with its privilege to accommodate and adjust to the demand of a mighty consciousness. This writer has never come across any other example of an epic grandeur encompassed in such a short piece of prose. We of course realise that its powerful charm emanates from the unconditional love and adoration the

physician-turned-poet-turned-the Master's servitor and scribe had spontaneously infused into his words.

How thin was the screen that separated the Mother's normal activities and her power to perform a miracle is the realisation that stuns us in Dr. Prabhat Sanyal's reminiscence. At the same time, we realise the difference between the miracle the Mother graced this disciple with and miracles as they are popularly understood. Her miracle was, for her, nothing different from a smile or a word of compassion, helping us to see a point that is so obvious to her but inordinately unfathomable to us. The doctor's loving audacity in asking the Mother, "Where is the light you speak of — can I not see it?" yielded for us an invaluable gem to treasure.

While the essays of Amal Kiran, Udar and K. R. S. Iyengar give us a vast spiritual, psychological and factual perspective of the event, greatly helping us to understand several aspects of the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo, the young American scholar Rhoda P. Le Cocq's account of the last Darshan of the Master and the Mother unveils that aspect of the power of Grace which so smoothly and silently demolishes the wall of scepticism one had maintained around oneself for long.

The compilation brings us a serene calm and an intense feeling of gratitude, and reminds us that

Death is a stair, a door, a stumbling stride  
The soul must take to cross from birth to birth,  
A grey defeat pregnant with victory,  
A whip to lash us towards our deathless state.

*Savitri*

Manoj Das

**The Mother  
on the Passing of  
Sri Aurobindo**

Lord, this morning Thou hast given me the assurance that Thou wouldst stay with us until Thy work is achieved, not only as a consciousness which guides and illumines but also as a Dynamic Presence in action. In unmistakable terms Thou hast promised that all of Thyself would remain here and not leave the earth atmosphere until earth is transformed. Grant that we may be worthy of this marvellous Presence and that henceforth everything in us be concentrated on the one will to be more and more perfectly consecrated to the fulfilment of Thy sublime Work.

Lord, this morning Thou hast given me the assurance that Thou wouldst stay with us until Thy work is achieved, not only as a consciousness which guides and illumines but also as a dynamic Presence in action. In unmistakable terms Thou hast promised that all of Thyself would remain here and not leave the earth atmosphere until earth is transformed. Grant that we may be worthy of this marvellous Presence and that henceforth everything in us be concentrated on the one will to be more and more perfectly consecrated to the fulfilment of Thy sublime Work.

*December 1950*

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The lack of receptivity of the earth and men is mostly responsible for the decision Sri Aurobindo has taken regarding his body. But one thing is certain: what has happened on the physical plane affects in no way the truth of his teaching. All that he has said is perfectly true and remains so. Time and the course of events will prove it abundantly.

*December 1950*

\*

To Thee who hast been the material envelope of our Master, to Thee our infinite gratitude. Before Thee who hast done so much for us, who hast worked, struggled, suffered, hoped, endured so much, before Thee who hast 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.

*9 December 1950*

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To grieve is an insult to Sri Aurobindo who is here with us, conscious and alive.

*14 December 1950*

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We must not be bewildered by appearances. Sri Aurobindo has not left us. Sri Aurobindo is here, as living and as present as ever and it is left to us to realise his work with all the sincerity, eagerness and concentration necessary.

*15 December 1950*

\*

I was painfully shocked when I heard the translation of the leaflet you are distributing here in the Ashram. I never imagined you could have such a complete lack of understanding, respect and devotion for our Lord who has

sacrificed himself totally for us. Sri Aurobindo was not crippled; a few hours before he left his body he rose from his bed and sat for a long time in his armchair, speaking freely to all those around him. Sri Aurobindo was not compelled to leave his body, he chose to do so for reasons so sublime that they are beyond the reach of human mentality.

And when one cannot understand, the only thing to do is to keep a respectful silence.

*26 December 1950*

\*

People do not know what a tremendous sacrifice Sri Aurobindo has made for the world. About a year ago, while I was discussing things, I remarked that I felt like leaving this body of mine. He spoke out in a very firm tone, “No, this can never be. If necessary for this transformation, I might go, you will have to fulfil our Yoga of supramental descent and transformation.”

*1950*

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Lord, we are upon earth to accomplish Thy work of transformation. It is our sole will, our sole preoccupation. Grant that it may be also our sole occupation and that all our actions may help us towards this single goal.

*1 January 1951*

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We stand in the Presence of Him who has sacrificed his physical life in order to help more fully his work of transformation.

He is always with us, aware of what we are doing, of all our thoughts, of all our feelings and all our actions.

*18 January 1951*

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When I asked Him (December 8, 1950) to resuscitate his body, He clearly answered: “I have left this body purposely. I will not take it back. I shall manifest again in the first supramental body built in the supramental way.”

*11 April 1952*

\*

Sri Aurobindo has given up his body in an act of supreme unselfishness, renouncing the realisation in his own body to hasten the hour of the collective realisation. Surely if the earth were more responsive, this would not have been necessary.

*12 April 1953*

*(Words of the Mother, Collected Works of the Mother,  
Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1980, Vol. 13, pp. 6-9)*

## **Sri Aurobindo: “I am here, I am here!”<sup>1</sup>**

When all over the world there was a growing eagerness to know more and more about Sri Aurobindo and the interest in his work was on the increase, he suddenly disappeared from the earth-scene. Superficially, this is a terrible irony of fate. But a study of his life suggests that more than once the utterly unexpected occurred as if by a choice on his own part. One may say that such an occurrence is almost a regular feature at each decisive turn of the upward spiral of his life. We see the rising curve bending down of a sudden when he threw away the I.C.S. career after a brilliant success and retired into an unpretentious State job in Baroda. There his sun was again in the ascendant, but as soon as he had captured the vision and admiration of the people, he left that peak of eminence. The sun then passed under a cloud; it worked behind the veil till it burst upon the political horizon with a dazzling lustre and when everybody's eyes were filled with wonder and delight, the light hid itself in the shadows of the prison cell where he had one of the sovereign spiritual experiences of his life. When he came out of the prison, his tremendous sacrifice and wise guidance awakened the nation and it waited at his door with the offer of All-India leadership. Again he disappeared one night and passed into oblivion for a large number of years in Pondicherry's unknown retreat. As if this was not enough, he entered into a greater oblivion when in 1926, after having achieved what we may call the first supreme victory of his sadhana, he,

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<sup>1</sup> Sometime after Sri Aurobindo's passing somebody wrote an article on his last days and accused the doctors of giving him drugs against his consent. I complained to the Mother about this false charge. She said, "Why don't you write an article yourself?" I wrote a small brochure. The manuscript was read out to her. She was on the point of suggesting a title when I foolishly interrupted her and said that I had named it *I am here, I am here*. "Oh, then it is all right," she replied. She not only liked it, but distributed it along with Amal's brochure *The Passing of Sri Aurobindo* to all the inmates. This is how, impelled by her, I wrote my first prose work, published in May 1951. (Nirodbaran, *Memorable Contacts with the Mother*, p. 46)

instead of hoisting the banner of the glory of the Spirit on the world's summit, withdrew himself for an indefinite period, to the utter surprise and disappointment of his close followers. Now at last has come as a logical conclusion the greatest oblivion in a most staggering manner and the shock had the intensity of a violent explosion. Always he has avoided the limelight and all his great achievements have been prepared in the secret silence of his retirement, and with each emergence he has brought down a greater light, a higher range of illumination and a vaster kingdom of knowledge and power.

But why has he chosen to withdraw through the last painful gate of human existence when, like other Yogis, he could have discarded the mortal sheath by an act of will, and for what purpose? For Sri Aurobindo to do anything without a purpose and ultimate advantage is in the last degree inconceivable. If he gave in at times to what he called the Adversary, that was because, to quote his own words, "retreat" (*palāyanam*) suited his purpose. One who had mastered the secrets of Life and the Spirit by his tremendous sadhana, who had been acclaimed as the Yogeshwara by those who had attained to the height of the Spirit, to him death could be neither a terror nor a mystery nor an inevitable necessity. Paying the full price of suffering he could pass through the "exit" of the common man, only if he felt that otherwise his life, his own Yoga would lack completeness and that to bear the human destiny on his God-like shoulders he must face, in its own den as it were, the dark Power that rules over this destiny and somehow wrest from it all its secrets. He would not embrace the dire extremity unless he found it to be the one way to emerge finally victorious and say, "O human race, from the citadel of the dark King I have issued forth and brought what I promised to you, the golden seed of Immortality."

This supreme sacrifice whose total significance will remain ungrasped by our limited intelligence, he accepted, as the Mother has said in unmistakable terms, for us alone. To enter into its history we have to go back two years in time when the first symptom that completed the sacrifice appeared. It was like a tiny cloud on the horizon; nobody attached any importance to it. But Sri

Aurobindo wanted to know what it meant. His disciple, Dr. P. Sanyal, F.R.C.S. (Eng.), an eminent surgeon of Calcutta who was consulted when he came for Darshan, recognized at once that it was a danger-signal and could not be neglected. He told Mother and Sri Aurobindo that it was a case of prostatic enlargement and frequency of micturition was the first symptom. He also explained at length its development and sequelae; he mentioned that as yet there was nothing to worry about, but warned us to watch the development carefully. It was a great advantage to be forearmed with the precise knowledge of things at the very initial stage, as it would facilitate Sri Aurobindo's action on it. For, as he has always maintained, knowledge of things and their processes in detail makes the action of the Yogic Force more effective. The fight would now take place in the open light: there would be no cover of ignorance under which the dark Force could take shelter and advance its attacks. We were never in doubt as to the issue of the fight, though the Mother told us once that they had cured any number of serious maladies in others but as regards their own case, things were very different and very difficult indeed.

As we expected, after a couple of months or so, the symptoms cleared up altogether and when Dr. Sanyal came for the next Darshan, Sri Aurobindo told him emphatically, "It is no more troubling me; I have cured it." Our faith was confirmed.

The work on his epic poem *Savitri* went ahead with vigour and enthusiasm. Book after Book was being revised and released for publication. Some 400 to 500 lines he dictated in succession whose beauty and flow were a delight for their sweep of cosmic vision and their magical language. At this rate, *Savitri*, it seemed, would not take long to finish. On everybody's lips was the eager question, "How far is *Savitri*?"

But *Savitri* was not his sole occupation. Side by side went on other multifarious and diverse activities, all the facets of which he alone could deal with by his tremendous grasp of intuitive power. The world erroneously believes, or at least used to, that Sri Aurobindo had turned his whole life

inwards and that, a recluse from life, he was now engaged in his own salvation and that of his disciples. How such a misunderstanding of a supreme dynamic person like him could have arisen is most surprising. Let us recall what his life had been, the major spiritual realizations he had attained in the course of his arduous political activities; let us recall what his Yoga stands for and the epoch-making books he has written during his Yogic career. Apart from *Savitri* which is a monument by itself, the daily reading of papers, the perusal of numerous journals, weeklies, fortnightlies, quarterlies edited by people connected with the Ashram and of articles written in four or five languages, poems, essays, letters, the dictating of replies to questions and to crown all, the preparation of his own books and others', the attention to their manuscripts and proofs etc. — all these were his routine work. Add pressing demands from the Press, blessings implored for help and guidance in material distress — and the list should be enough to open a blind man's eyes. All this work had to be dispatched within about two hours a day! During the latter part a remarkable faculty developed in him or was noticed for the first time. When I took some article for reading, he used to say "Have you not read it before?" "No." "Are you sure?" "How could I," I replied, "I have received it to-day." "Very strange, I seem to have heard every word of it." That happened more than once. This labour any mortal sight can attest to; but to the vast network of his cosmic activity as a Master Yogi, what vision can have access? One can have a dim penetration into it through the unrolling verse of *Savitri* and through other books or when he chose to let out a little inkling of it. We have played with him like Gopas in Vrindavan, cracked many jokes like comrades, even quarrelled with him, discussed many subjects ranging from Art down to the attractive subject of the palate during the last few years of his companionship. The tender expression that dropped from his lips, the pointed flashes of his quick humour, the silent unassuming distinction of his manner and above all, his vigilant and subtle protection guarding us against all adverse forces — all these had been our heritage, but could we ever reflect in our passing mirror even the slightest shadow of his wide universal action? His detached greatness,

disinterested largeness, limitless compassion and sweetness, as if Shiva had come down to earth to deliver the world from its roots of ignorance — where shall we see such a parallel? Even when his disease had advanced, he did not fail to respond to the call of the afflicted. To give an example: as he was engaged in the final drafting of the last two cantos of *Savitri*, there came an urgent call for help from a sadhika living outside. The lady was suffering from a mysterious disease; some doctors said it was coronary thrombosis, some diagnosed cervical rib and some others cancer and they all suggested different remedies. She, on the verge of death, took refuge at the Guru's feet and wired to him that she would rely on his force alone, even were she to die of it. News began to come in daily, by letters or wires. Suddenly no news at all for two or three days! Sri Aurobindo became worried and enquired again and again if any communication had arrived. At last he remarked, rather vexed, "How am I to save her if I don't get any news?" After this rude jerk news began to flow in and we are happy to find her settled in the Ashram in sound health. Those who have received this inner sweetness and solicitude, directly or indirectly, will ever treasure it in their hearts as the very grace of Heaven.

*Savitri* alone which was the preoccupation nearest to his heart will one day fire the imagination of the world — by its sheer bulk and beauty of profound images, vivid words, felicitous and daring expressions, every detail of which he took sculptor-like pains to develop. The first Book itself went through ten revisions and had he been able to maintain the same god-like labour throughout or had he not been compelled to lean on the support of a weak and at times unwilling assistant required to keep pace with his divine energy, *Savitri* would have seen the light of day before his own life's light had withdrawn. But, alas, that was not to be. About the middle of the last year, the symptoms of the malady came back and along with it we noticed a change in his mood. He was no more expansive, the gems of his speech became fewer and fewer. Days passed at times without any exchange of words except what was needed for the work. However much we tried to draw him out of this shell, it was a "yes", or

a “no”, or at most a smile that crowned our efforts and ruses. Naturally we began to speculate about the cause of this mysterious silence. Sometimes we thought it must be the grave world-situation that engaged his attention, — for at one time he remarked that the situation was very bad indeed, — sometimes other possibilities crossed our fertile brain. Or could it be the reappearance of the disease? That was another query. But all our efforts were baffled, we could not penetrate that armour of remoteness. He was so near, yet had gone far away!

That did not, however, affect his daily work. *Savitri* had slowed down its pace. We were engaged in the revision of the two big cantos; already 200 to 300 new lines had been added. What a revision! Every word must be the *mot juste*, every line perfect, even every sign of punctuation flawless. One preposition was changed five times; to change a punctuation-sign one had sometimes to read a whole section. All these opened a new sight in me, but for his scribe to carry that burden of perfection on poor mortal shoulders was a task too enormous to cope with in an entirely satisfactory manner. That is why perhaps the work had fallen at places from its height, missed its peak.

At this time the Press sent up a demand for a new book. *Future Poetry* was given the preference and a chapter was actually written. But as some books on Modern Poetry needed to be consulted, it was shoved aside. He said, “Let us go back to *Savitri*.” Again the same two cantos. The symptoms of the disease had not abated, though fortunately they had neither increased. There were temporary improvements now and then. But the course of the disease did not seem to disturb him at all in his work. His whole attention was now focused on *Savitri* for which we could but spare about two hours at the most. So the progress had to be slow especially as he had to dictate and depend on another’s sight to be guided in his movement. Now came the call from the *Bulletin* for an article. That over, the correspondence and miscellaneous writings swelled up to such an extent that he was at last obliged to remark, “I am finding no time for my real work.” Then the path got fairly clear and I was wondering

what would be the next choice when looking away he declared, “Take up *Savitri*. I want to finish it soon.” The last phrase was a bombshell on my ear. “Finish it soon? What on earth...” I asked myself. My bewildered glance met an impassive face. So again the labour with these two cantos began. What surprised me still more was that he seemed actually to hurry the pace which was quite against his characteristic nature. Always habituated to slow and leisurely ways in his moods and dealings as if the whole of eternity were in his hand, he was the very embodiment of the Divine in his unparalleled patience and poise, in his conquests and withdrawals, in his diggings and in his soarings. Every word he pronounced had a repose, every simple thing he ate was an offering, every step he took was a gentle touching of the earth with his hallowed feet. When his bureau was ransacked, it was found littered with copies and copies of *Savitri*, no less than 4 or 5 versions of the same cantos! Here, there, in notebooks, in loose sheets, in small blocks, lines after lines written, scratched, new lines added in between like packed sardines, the links and connections shooting with arrow-marks up and down the epic battlefield. A genius or a God in labour? Such being the mode of procedure, it could not but come as a surprise to hear from his mouth that he wanted to finish *Savitri* soon. Not only that. There seemed to be no longer that unflagging will for perfection, not that élan. On the contrary, close repetitions of ideas and words sounded like obvious flaws in the compact intensity of this massive structure. Those who have carefully gone through these two cantos did not fail to notice this defect. “What has happened? What has gone wrong? Why has he lost his patience? Illness? Why is he also so grave?” were my brooding questions. At last after many detours and ups and downs in the far-flung journey, the goal was in sight. What a veritable rock of resistance these two cantos proved to be! One who had poured strains upon strains packed with grandeur and beauty, emotion and fervour, thought and vision in the dictated cantos on such subjects as Nirvana, as if the very goddess Saraswati had settled in his throat, was halted even by the pebbles of punctuation! As at last the cantos were wound up and the last full stop was recorded, a smile of satisfaction burst upon his

lips and he said, “Ah, it is finished?” How well I remember that smile, as if after a long strenuous journey in failing strength one had finally reached one’s station! And yet it was not the station, there were still many milestones to cover! “What is left now?”, was his second question. “The Book of Death and the Epilogue.” “Ah, that? We shall see about that later on,” he answered, in a calm and contented tone. But I was not contented at all, for the many repetitions at the end which he seemed to have hurriedly added jarred on my ear. But I decided that it was wiser to reserve judgment and wait for the revision to take place. Surely these flaws would not escape his eagle-vision. It was much later during the agonizing moments of night-enveloped consciousness that what struck me as flaws and repetitions came forcefully with a new significance:

*A day may come when she must stand unhelped  
On a dangerous brink of the world’s doom and hers.*

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*In that tremendous silence lone and lost  
Cry not to heaven, for she alone can help.  
She only can save herself and save the world.<sup>2</sup>*

Are these not his last message, his last injunction to us?... The emptiness slowly melted away and in its place shone his Right Hand, the dauntless boon-giver, the Mother.

The expected revision never took place; for along with the close of these two cantos, came winter and there was a sudden increase in the symptoms; urination became more frequent; with it, discomfort. These symptoms had appeared from time to time, to be cleared up and he had never for an instant stopped his work in spite of all inconveniences. Many times I anticipated, almost hoped, that there would be a respite owing to such relapses, but physical

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<sup>2</sup> All quotations in this article are from *Savitri*.

trouble would not hinder him. Even if there was half an hour's time, he would utilize it. On many occasions when I told him, "There is not much time today" and almost expected a postponement of the work, he would come out, to my surprise, with "We will work a little." That passionate devotion to work had brought its final reward: *Savitri* was his last testament. As the disease progressed, we began to feel concerned though we knew perfectly well that we were nothing more than mere spectators and whatever had to be done, he must be doing it. "How is it then the disease is progressing?" was my occasional self-questioning. We were dealing with a human body but not with a human patient; our means and standards of action did not apply any more than the laws of our earth to the being of other planets. We could only lay before his gaze the silent surreptitious approach of various undercurrents that tried to assail and break down the physical substratum, and depend upon his own Yogic Power to repulse the attacks.

There were about ten days or so for the Darshan. A surgeon-friend Satyavrata Sen F.R.C.S. (Eng.) had arrived for the Darshan. He was consulted; he corroborated the diagnosis given at the outset by Dr. Sanyal. Sen said that the gland had enlarged. Sri Aurobindo remarked he had also been feeling it for some time, though once it had completely disappeared. "What is the remedy?" he asked. There was only one radical cure, but Dr. Sen knew that it would gain neither Mother's nor Sri Aurobindo's approval. For Sri Aurobindo could not be subjected to the cruel and not always effective slashes with the knife. The mere use of a catheter was not favoured. Nor was it urgent at this stage. If any intervention were necessary, it could be done after the Darshan. So once more we followed the curve of the disease in a silent watchful attitude, ready to help, but never flagging in our faith that the curve could be checked. One night the urine suddenly stopped. I ran down to call Dr. Sen. In the meantime the urine started flowing. When he learned that I had gone to fetch the doctor, Sri Aurobindo remarked, "Why? Has he lost his head?" When we returned and heard his remark, I do not know what gave me the thrill, my madness or the

removal of the obstruction! He said, “Why have you unnecessarily troubled this poor fellow?” Then in an affectionate tone he continued, “You see, I had a dream; it seemed I was freely passing water and when I woke up I found this obstruction. Nothing more. Do you understand?” He added, smiling, “No cause to be nervous.” Next day, when the Mother heard the story, she also made a similar remark. She said, “After having passed so many years with Sri Aurobindo, you still get frightened?” — “What to do, Mother?” I replied apologetically, “we are dealing with no other person than Sri Aurobindo.” — “That is exactly why you should never get afraid. Do you not know that his mighty force is always with you and helping you? No, fear has no place at all, especially among you who are serving him.” I felt ashamed but uplifted too.

Darshan was now at our door. On the eve, a letter had arrived from an astrologer to the effect that Sri Aurobindo would be subject to a grave malady which may even threaten his life. We simply laughed out the idea, but he said, “Will you enquire what exactly he has written? I feel that he has caught some truth.” “What nonsense!” was my immediate reaction. Sri Aurobindo had studied the subject of astrology and held that astrology would very well disclose correctly the past of a person, but he said that its readings of the future would not be inevitable, especially in case of Yogis who can change their own and others’ destiny. He narrated the story of Narayan Jyotishi, a famous astrologer of Calcutta, whose predictions about Sri Aurobindo had all come true except on one fact, that Sri Aurobindo would be seriously ill at the age of 63 but he had also mentioned that by his yogic action, Sri Aurobindo could overcome that danger and then he would live up to a ripe old age. “So, you see, I am still alive,” he said smiling. He accepted nothing as predetermined and fixed in this world-field. Everything, in his view, is a play of possibilities and a Yogi can change these possibilities, even the destiny of others as well as his own. It being so, for astrology to determine Sri Aurobindo’s life and action was, we thought, sheer folly. But his inquiry puzzled us. It was found, however, that the astrologer had only hinted at some trivial malady. We

enjoyed the fun, as on a similar occasion mentioned by K. D. Sethna in his article '*The Passing of Sri Aurobindo*' The Darshan was now on. A vast crowd streamed forth with their offerings. At one time the question was mooted if the Darshan should not be postponed, but considering the anxiety and disappointment it would cause in the hearts of the devotees, the call was responded to at the cost of discomfort and perhaps undue exertion. Everything went on well — silence, calm reigned in the atmosphere pervaded by the beatific Presence of the Mother and the Master. After about two hours, an uneasy stir seized the throng and the rumour ran that Sri Aurobindo was not well; people in rapid succession took their blessings and beyond the horizon of their outward sight saw the Master beside the Mother in an everlasting communion and kinship within. The restless thought was no more voiced forth. But soon after the Darshan, the symptoms broke down another barrier, as it were, and visibly marked a broad thrust in the advancement of the disease. The question of passing the catheter could no more be left aside. It was agreed; a wire was sent out to Dr. Sanyal to come down at once. He had previously been warned to be ready to start, in case there was an urgent necessity.

The instrument immediately relieved the obstruction and we began to feel light-hearted. But our joy was short-lived. For in the wake of the intruding instrument came its long shadow, fever due to infection. A not uncommon feature, yet it gave us an unpleasant shiver. Dr Sanyal's arrival at this juncture was like warm sunshine and he dissipated all our anxieties by his calm confidence. We apprised him of the whole clinical development since he had last seen Sri Aurobindo. He wondered how that small insignificant speck of cloud he had noticed in the early stage could, from the perimeter of his consciousness, slowly, almost craftily, enlarge, envelope and take possession of the whole physical being. He asked himself, "How could this Adversary gain such an unbelievable dominance against the puissant action of Sri Aurobindo's force? He had cured himself once, what happened afterwards? Did he not take any step at all to prevent the course of the disease? Otherwise

I do not see why it should develop to such an extent.” To these questions no satisfactory answer could be given. What I observed was that while our main concern had been the patient development of the future glory of the human race in the language of the gods and in their symbols, the disease simultaneously advanced at a slow pace; Sri Aurobindo did not pay any particular heed to it, either because he had not sufficient time or because he did not care; but it had been a mystery all through. One would say that he had allowed it to advance for reasons unknown to us, slowly and gradually till the completion of *Savitri*, after which he stopped all his work and withdrew the control on the disease. That is the only explanation reason could supply to the rapid worsening of the condition after this stage. Whatever it was, Dr. Sanyal was yet optimistic and so were we of the final result. Our vigil went on, but Sri Aurobindo seemed now to withdraw himself from his surroundings and the release from the obstruction helped him towards that end. Evidently, he found the deep plunge more useful for whatever purpose he had in view than caring about the afflictions of the body. He appeared to have allowed the body to have its own actions and reactions while he was engaged in a more inscrutable work of world-significance. The body he had assumed had served him well, and, as the Mother has said, it had suffered, endured, worked and achieved all for us. Now, if it served as an impediment to the god-like sweep of his movements, why should he not change it? As he did not allow the physical handicap to trouble him in his work and maintained throughout the same fire and passion, so, after the accomplishment of the work, he did not allow the body’s distress to swerve him from his occult sublime purpose. Even of this dire disablement he took the amplest advantage. His was not a nature to be cowed by circumstances, however adverse they might be. If he had to give in on one front, he must gain the full compensation on another. Even if he knew beforehand that defeat and failure would be the result, that would not stop his working and fighting up to the end. “Even if I knew that my mission would fail, I would go on working till the last moment” were his words in a letter. *Nishkama* (disinterested) *karma* of the Gita was his motto. An interesting

example of which can be cited with regard to the Cripps Mission, now a matter of history. When the Mission arrived in India, everybody knows how Sri Aurobindo went out of his way and entreated all the big leaders to accept it and even approved of a disciple going to Delhi as his envoy. But after his departure, Sri Aurobindo told us frankly that nothing would come of it. The Mission would fail. “Then,” we said, “why have you taken all this trouble?” He answered, smiling, “I have done a bit of *nishkama karma*.” That was his life, both occult and overt. That is why the Adversary was always surprised by his unexpected moves. Divine Diplomat that he was, we have yet to see what was the supreme object of this highest strategy. He could not have been blind to the approach of the dark-cowled Figure. He envisaged a fight, a grim struggle and that is why he followed the same method he had always practised in his life — to be prepared in advance for any eventuality. As he had always marched ahead of time, so he marked every step he took with a solid foreknowledge and divine strength which passed our immediate understanding. Now we realise the meaning of his cryptic phrases and casual remarks. Many people asked us if he had left any message, any advice as regards the work, sadhana etc., before he passed away. The answer is ‘yes’ and ‘no’. ‘No’ because, after he had withdrawn completely inwards, he had done no work, he had uttered no word except in relation to the disease. ‘Yes’, because before he had passed into that stage, *Savitri*, as I have mentioned, was his last work, and the last seal and signature on its golden leaf were those lines which seemed to us repetitions. Repetitions they were, but now they come as the blazoning revelation of the whole secret of his Yoga: Surrender to the Mother. Let us read those prophetic lines and the sense will stand crystal clear:

*A day may come when She must stand unhelped  
On a dangerous brink of the world's doom and hers  
Carrying the world's future on her lonely breast,  
Carrying the human hope in a heart left sole  
To conquer or fail on a last desperate verge.*

\*

*In that tremendous silence lone and lost  
Of a deciding hour in the world's fate*

\*

*Alone she must conquer or alone must fall.*

\*

*Cry not to heaven, for she alone can save.  
She only can save herself and save the world.*

He was not in a hurry to finish the Book of Death. His principal task had been completed and hence his calm and contented smile when he reached the end of it. What was of supreme importance he had been able to communicate and about what was not, he said in a leisurely fashion, “We shall see about it afterwards”, knowing very well indeed, what he meant. Now, that momentous message imparted, slowly his consciousness slipped inwards and he became more and more absorbed within. Medical experts will say, “It was a simple uraemic coma.” Well, I shall quote Dr. Sanyal’s own words: “A patient who comes out of that coma every one or two hours, asks for a drink, enquires about time, his must be a very strange type of coma. At least I have never come across such a type throughout my medical experience.”

Whatever might have been the type, our problem became more difficult. We had solely relied on his Force, but the result had not uplifted our hopes. We could go ahead with our costly tablets and precious injections, but without the support of his spiritual Force, what effect would they produce? Human as we are we can but think of our own resources: good or bad we fall back on them in our need. But how to administer such strong and powerful drugs to one who had been unaccustomed to any medicine for more than half a century, was another question that vexed us. Anyone who had seen Sri Aurobindo at close

quarters could never forget this Divine Child with a body as supple, radiant and pure. His bare body, when he used to sit before the table for writing, his shapely hands, his long delicate fingers, had nothing of the crude mortal flesh in them; they were suffused, as it were, with a white transparent light, “une blancheur éclatante”, that could like the x-ray make one see through and through. How often have I not seen this radiance, when he used to sit before the table for writing or for rest, or when he was lying on the bed as if on the lap of the Divine Mother, with a half-bare body, the hands held together behind the head, the lips smiling in a wakeful dream! Every part of the body presented the picture of a god in human guise that could not be tampered with in the ordinary human way. Tampering could be nothing but a sacrilege. But, alas, human necessity knows no law, respects no person. And we subjected him to all our instruments of torture with the previous sanction obtained as a gracious gesture to satisfy our mortal ignorance. He knew that the catheter would be of no avail and he emphatically ruled it out, but as we had not the insight nor the proper appraisal of the value of words when they are clothed in the common language we are habituated to use, we insisted on the dangerous remedies in which we had faith and confidence. As the disease was taking a bad turn we repeatedly asked him to use his spiritual force to cure it, as we had been taught and made to experience that behind every malady, as behind everything else, there are forces that help and hinder. It is the proper adjustment of these forces that brings in success. Those who can consciously or unconsciously manipulate these forces achieve success in their career. We knew that without the effective help of his Force all our remedial measures would be palliatives of the surface manifestation of the deep-rooted trouble. But each time we questioned him, we met with an enigmatic silence. All the same, we had no positive reason to believe that he was indifferent to the course of the malady or that he was engaged in a far more serious struggle whose issue would have greater significance at that stage for the human race than his own cure. So, as the disease was following in its downward gravitation the typical picture, our duty pointed to us our own responsibility. The advent of

every dark sign and symptom was a pressing finger on our perplexed mood. As a result, we adopted all the means of saving that were available to us. But the Decree was otherwise!

At last arrived the School Anniversary on the 1st and 2nd December, with its programme of athletics and dramatics. The whole Ashram, busy and bustling, had its attention diverted there and nobody ever suspected that another drama — a lofty tragedy — was being enacted in those hours of Fate in the closed chambers of Sri Aurobindo. His ailment had been veiled from the gaze of the disciples and the disease also was of such a nature as to admit of being kept a guarded secret. But now the veil was rent, for with the successful ending of the function, the symptoms took a very grave turn, as if the violent tide deliberately checked until this day was now allowed to break through. I say “as if”, but there was no doubt that it was so, for when he was informed on the 2nd night that the function had terminated successfully, he remarked with a broad smile, “Ah, it is finished?” Then only he allowed the Adversary who had been held at bay to leap with fury and Sri Aurobindo plunged deeper within, snapping as it were the last link of his physical being with the need of earth-matter.

It was the memorable 4th December, the date written forever in letters of gold. Sri Aurobindo had totally emerged from the depth and expressed a desire to sit up. In spite of our objections, he insisted. We noticed after a while that all the distressing symptoms had magically vanished and he was once more a normal healthy person. Then he sat in the chair. The change was so sudden and unexpected that we looked at each other in sheer joy and amazement. “At last, our prayer has been heard!” This was the sentiment welling up in the silent heart of our devotion. It could not be believed! Now we ventured to repeat our question: “Are you not using your force to get rid of the disease?” “No!” came the shocking reply. We could not believe our ears and to get a confirmation of our disbelief we asked again. Now no ground was left to harbour the illusion. What we heard was as plain and sharp as a saber-edge. Then we put forth the

bold query: “Why not? If you don’t use the force, how is the disease going to be cured?” To this he simply gave the cryptic reply: “Can’t explain; you won’t understand.”

Here at last was the key to the mystery! That is why the disease had progressed step by step, marked by three clear stages in its downward path: the completion of *Savitri*, Darshan and the School Anniversary, each stage followed by a deeper and deeper in-drawn condition. It was at one of the final stages that the Mother remarked, “Whenever I was there, I used to see him pulling down the Supramental Light.” It was clear from this statement what Sri Aurobindo was busy with. He had shifted his gaze and concentration to something else which, to his view, must have been much more important than minding the afflictions of the body. But we had not the vision nor the comprehension; so we thought that the descent of the Light would fulfill our heart’s desire. Though on the one hand his curt reply had taken the last plank away, this sudden transition instilled faith and hope — “the gleaming shoulder of some god-like hope” that had upbuoyed us all through. It was much later when the sun had crossed beyond our horizon that these extraordinary incidents showed their true significance.

After an hour he came back to his bed and along with his coming returned all the signs and symptoms with a vengeance. The short respite seemed to have given him time to further grapple with the advancing Shadow that was trying to draw a premature veil upon his work. Half an hour before the fatal moment, he drank some water and bestowed on all a last glance of compassion and recognition for the services rendered and took the plunge ultimate. Even then we had not the slightest suspicion that

*This was the day when Satyavan must die.*

The news spread in the early hours of the morning. The reaction of the disciples can be better imagined than described. Through the hush of night one by one they came and mounted the stairs of Heaven to see what nobody had seen

before. It was not death they saw, not a resurrection, nor a withdrawal into Nirvana but a grand repose, a death that was pulsating with power, light and beauty in every limb as if death had become immortal in the body of the King of kings. A vivid rendering of the Truth into a touchstone of Matter, it was no longer the body, but the golden lid which half-covered, half-revealed that Truth. Those who had the inner sight had realised the Truth and those who had the inner ear had heard in the still cave of their heart the piercing cry, "I am here, I am here!"

In that awakened consciousness we are marching forward towards the Goal the Master set before us, for which he had worked to the last breath and has promised to do so till the Goal is attained. The Mother, supreme creatrix and realiser of that Goal, is our Guide and Goddess. Enriched with all his inexhaustible achievements, occult and spiritual, and with the Supramental Light that had automatically passed on to her she is shaping us to the mould and figure he had visioned as the future type of humanity. Any one who has visited the Ashram after the great Event could not but have been impressed by the will to victory that his sacrifice has engendered in every breast. Out of his Samadhi a thousand flames seem to be mounting up and, lodged in our soul, burning in an ever rejuvenating fire, while His Presence enveloping and merging with and radiating from the Mother's being and body is pervading the whole atmosphere. One can see His Presence, hear his foot-falls, his rhythmic voice, ever vigilant, devoid of the encumbrance of the physical body. One day the sacrifice will bear fruit; what he had depicted in *Savitri* will come true. For, what is, after all, *Savitri* if not the inner life-episodes of the Mother and the Master? What he had pictured in the great epic has been faithfully enacted on the world-stage. The veil has fallen on the first part of that wonderful Drama and the sequel is being played behind the screen. The Fight with the last supreme Adversary has not ceased; if it has ended on the earth's battlefield in an apparent failure, it is raging as fiercely in the occult planes. When at the close of the Duel, the curtain will be lifted, we shall hear the sonorous recital of the Book of Death, we shall see materialised the Epilogue on the earth-

stage, and throughout the world will echo and re-echo the embodied passionate cry of Victory:

*“I am here, I am here!”*

Nirodbaran

*(Sri Aurobindo: I am here, I am here!, Sri Aurobindo Ashram,  
Pondicherry, May 1951, pp. 1-25)*

## A “Call” from Pondicherry

On the evening of the 29<sup>th</sup> November 1950, as I was resting after a heavy day, a servant brought me a telegram which read: “FLY — URGENT — MOTHER” Never could I have imagined the amount of meaning there was in those few words.

Then it came to me — Is Sri Aurobindo ill? — Why otherwise would the Mother send such a telegram? Other thoughts crept into my mind and I could not decide how best to equip myself for the errand.

The next morning, 30<sup>th</sup> November, I flew to Madras, only to find that the next train for Pondicherry did not leave until 9.50 p.m., and so I would reach my destination by 7 a.m. the next morning. It was a torment to think that after travelling 1000 miles in 5 hours it was now to take me 20 hours to cover 100 miles. I looked at the telegram — read it once again — No! I could not waste time, so I hired a car.

It took me an hour to obtain a permit from the Police authorities, who looked me over thoroughly, trying to decide whether I was a smuggler or some thirsty drinker wanting a joy ride to French India. They finally decided however that I could go. The driver being assured of extras, my car literally flew along the roads to Pondicherry having only to stop twice at the inefficient and rude customs barriers — and by six in the evening I was at the Mother’s feet in the Ashram playground. As usual She greeted me with Her heavenly smile, saying She had expected me that very evening. She then told me of Sri Aurobindo’s illness and asked me to examine Him; She added that She would be coming to His room after the programme was over in the playground.

On the way Dr. Nirod of the Ashram and my young colleague Dr. Satya Sen acquainted me with the history and present condition of the Master. Softly but quickly I ascended the stairs and entered the room. There I looked on the Master, my divine patient, semi-recumbent on His bed, seemingly

unconcerned, eyes closed, like a statue of massive peace. I approached the bed, knelt by His side and made my pranams at His feet. Champaklal called: “Look, Master, who has come.” There was a quiver on His face; heavy eyelids opened a little — then all was still again. But again Champaklal called: “Master, see Sanyal has come.” This time he opened His eyes fully, looked at me and smiled — oh, such a smile, serene and beautiful, it carried one to ecstasy, lighting the innermost corners of the heart.

He placed His hand on my head and lovingly patted it a few times — all thoughts vanished, it seemed my heart had stopped. I was overpowered with a mighty peace and calm. He had closed His eyes — except for His respiration all was still and a great silence reigned. Then Champaklal whispered delightedly, “He has given you a Darshan Smile and Blessing.” It was a blessing no words could describe; only one who has seen it and known it in his heart could appreciate what it meant, for it was an experience of the soul.

I waited for the opportunity to become the doctor. I asked Him what the trouble was and whether I could give Him any relief. I put to Him the regular professional questions, perhaps forgetting that my patient was the Divine housed in a mortal frame, and He answered: “Trouble? Nothing troubles me — and suffering! one can be above it.” I mentioned the urinary difficulties. “Well, yes,” He answered, “I had some difficulties but they have been relieved, and now I do not feel anything.” Again there was silence.

We retired to the next room and I had a consultation with Nirod and Satya. His urine analysis report had arrived, showing slight albumen and sugar, specific gravity a little above normal. The Mother now entered the room and stood in silence near the foot of the bed and watched Sri Aurobindo. Soon She called me out into the next room where I explained the position to Her, that He was suffering from a mild kidney infection — otherwise there was nothing very serious as far as could be judged from the urine report.

We thought that, *Deo volente*, continuous drainage would suffice and antibiotics would gradually improve the rest.

The following morning, 1<sup>st</sup> December, was very encouraging; our Lord was absolutely alert and responsive and His temperature was normal. After His sponging he took His simple breakfast and even cracked jokes with us. I was giving Him a scalp massage and enquired if he was liking it or not. He remarked: “I know you went to England for your Fellowship but where did you learn massaging?” I suggested that we would like to have His blood examined for a detailed bio-chemical examination, to which He smiled and retorted: “You doctors can think only in terms of diseases and medicines but always there is much more effectual knowledge beyond and above it. I do not need anything.” All of us were very happy by this most remarkable improvement and the day passed on.

The next day, 2<sup>nd</sup> December, there was little change except for a rise of one degree in temperature towards the evening. The day was a heavy one for the Mother as it was the second day of the annual display in the playground; but as soon as the activities were over She came to His room and stood at the foot of His bed. Her countenance was very grave but She did not say anything. I suggested, as the urinary infection was again flaring up in spite of continuous drainage, we should try antibiotics and infusion therapy.

Mother then warned me that orthodox methods of treatment were unsuitable for Him — not only would Sri Aurobindo not like them but they would be harmful. She also reminded me that my patient was the Divine, “He will work out whatever is necessary.” I could only give some simple medicines to allay symptoms if any.

We doctors were in a state of perplexity; true our patient was an avatar; true He had cured innumerable ailments in the sadhaks as also in Himself several times — would He not now cure Himself?

Champaklal once entreated Him in a favourable moment: “Why don’t you use your force and cure yourself, Master?” He kept silent and showed rather a dislike for such questions.

December 3<sup>rd</sup> — After a rather quiet and restful night he looked better that morning and when the usual morning routine was over Nirod offered Him some fruit juice which He enjoyed.

The temperature had dropped to normal and so much was our relief that at 11 a.m. while making my Pranams to the Mother I ventured to suggest that as the Master was steadily improving I might perhaps leave that evening. The Mother remained silent; She looked very grave. I looked into Her eyes and felt a quiver, a pain in my heart. What had I said? Was She not willing? Why did I suggest my departure instead of waiting for Her to tell me? I felt a wrench at my heart and I blurted out: “I would rather stay a few more days.” A smile lit all Her face. “Yes,” She said. In the afternoon the picture rapidly changed. The temperature had risen to 101 degrees. There was a definite respiratory distress. The Mother came into the room at 4 p.m. and stood watching. All the afternoon we had found it difficult to get Him to drink water or fruit juice, so now we sought Her help. She brought the spoon near His lips. Immediately He opened His eyes, took a few sips and lapsed back into unresponsiveness. The Mother came with us into the ante-room and then for the first time declared: “He is fully conscious within but is losing interest in Himself.” We could understand very little and dared not question further. Satya was restless as energetic treatment could not be instituted. The Mother simply said: “It all depends on Him.”

As the darkness closed in upon us our hearts grew heavier. At times Nirod or Champaklal would offer Him sips to drink and He would even remark on His choice of tomato or orange juice or something of that sort, then would lapse back into a state of unresponsiveness.

Not once would He say or at any time indicate that he was uncomfortable or thirsty, but if we changed His position or offered Him a drink he smilingly accepted it. The Mother came at 11 o’clock at night as usual; the moment She offered Him a drink He was all alert and obediently drank a cupful of fruit juice — then again He lapsed into a state of repose.

The distress continued now with little sign of abating and the Mother took me into the ante-room remarking, “I don’t know. He has no interest in Himself.” I suggested intravenous medication from the next day onwards, but She advised me not to disturb Him.

The long night passed, a long and worrying night. Nirod and Champaklal kept watch throughout. If there is a quiver of the lips, — it may be that He wants a drink. If a shake of the hand — perhaps He needs His handkerchief. They are there to serve Him; that is their sadhana — life dedicated to the service of their Master. I remembered Sri Aurobindo one day telling me of His early days of sadhana; when He used to sit up all through the night. Champaklal, then a mere boy, would lie on the stairs below, waiting for any summons. On another occasion some time before, I mentioned to Sri Aurobindo that Dr. Nirod would change the medicine when needed. He remarked, “Nirod is no doctor to me.”

We continued keeping a careful watch on the urinary flow and He was still passing 50 ozs, in 24 hrs, at specific gravity of 1012-1010. Nirod would sit by the bottle and watch each drop as it fell and if there was any delay, which was often the case, he would immediately draw my attention.

December 4<sup>th</sup> — At dawn His temperature had dropped to 99 degrees. The respiratory distress was negligible and He seemed bright and responsive. The morning duties were over and we settled Him in His usual sitting position. There He sat majestic and serene. At about 9 a.m., the Mother came and helped Him to take a light breakfast. As She walked into the ante-room, the room used for our consultations, I smiled to Her and said, “The Master seems cheerful again and taking interest.” The only answer She made was “Mmm” and then went out of the room.

I settled by the side of the bed and gently massaged the Master’s body while Nirod and Champaklal were attending to their duties. After a little while He opened His eyes and asked the time, I told Him 10 o’clock. I saw He was in a mood to talk, so I ventured: “How do you feel?” He smiled, “I am

comfortable.” There was a pause; He looked at the clock and then asked how Bengal was faring, especially the refugees. I narrated to Him their pitiable plight and implored: “Surely the Divine can help them?” My Lord answered, “Yes, if Bengal seeks the Divine.” He closed His eyes and went into silence (samadhi).

But alas, it was only a brief lull — a belied hope. From midday the respiratory difficulty reappeared with greater amplitude and the temperature went up to 102 degrees. This time signs of distress could be seen in the face but there was not a word, not a protest.

The Mother came at about 1 p.m. She watched for some time before entering the adjoining room with me. Then She said, “He is withdrawing.”

Though He looked apparently unconscious, whenever He was offered drinks, He would wake up and take a few sips and wipe His mouth himself with His handkerchief. To all of us it seemed apparent that a consciousness came from outside when He was almost normal, and then withdrew when the body quivered and sank down in distress. He was no longer there!

By 5 o’clock again He showed signs of improvement. He was quite responsive. We helped Him out of His bed. After which He walked to the armchair to rest. For the moment he seemed a different personality. He sat there with His eyes closed — calm and composed with a radiating consciousness. We remarked on the majestic beauty of His form as He sat there; such calm and beatitude brought to my mind the Vedic Rishis. But this did not last long. After three quarters of an hour He became restless and wanted to be back in bed. Respiratory distress appeared with redoubled momentum. From midday onwards the urine output which had been good all these days definitely diminished and the distress was very prominent. Though He seemed to be unconscious He was not, which was evident by the fact that He drew Champaklal several times to His breast and kissed him lovingly and this Divine compassionate embrace was extended to Nirod and myself. It may be

mentioned that this emotional behaviour was evident here for the first time. He had taken no drink the whole day.

The Mother came back after Her usual attendance at the playground. She laid Her garland at the foot of the bed, a thing which She was doing daily, and stood watching Sri Aurobindo. She looked so grave and quiet that it almost distressed me. I went to the ante-room to wait for Her. She entered and I gave Her the report and told Her that glucose had been given by Satya and we wanted to arrange for intravenous infusions etc. She said quietly and firmly, “I told you this is not necessary. He has no interest in Himself, He is withdrawing.”

We sat round His bed, wondering why He was losing interest in Himself; He, if He so desired, could certainly cure Himself as He had done on so many other occasions, — Nirod had seen Him curing the illness of others. But now at this crucial hour He had no interest in Himself! Was he going to sacrifice Himself?

At about 11 p.m. the Mother came into the room and helped Sri Aurobindo to drink half a cup of tomato juice. A strange phenomenon — a body which for the moment is in agony, unresponsive, labouring hard for breath, suddenly becomes quiet; a consciousness enters the body, He is awake and normal. He finished the drink, then, as the consciousness withdraws, the body lapses back into the grip of agony.

At midnight the Mother came again into the room, looked intently for some time as if there was a silent exchange of thought between them; then She left.

At 1 a.m. (5<sup>th</sup>) She returned and again looked at the Lord and stood at the foot of the bed. There was no sign of agony, fear, or anxiety on Her face. Not a thought, not a feeling could I fathom in Her expression. With Her eyes She asked me to go into the other room and She followed me in. She asked, “What do you think? Can I retire for one hour?” This is a significant hour: the Mother retires — Her consciousness leaves Her body, none are to call or enter Her

room then. This is imperative. I murmured, “Mother, this is beyond me.” She said, “Call me when the time comes.”

I stood behind the Master and started stroking His hair which He always liked. Nirod and Champaklal sat by the side of the bed and were caressing His feet. We were all quietly watching Him. We now knew that anything might happen any time, only a miracle could save us and the world. I perceived a slight quiver on His body, almost imperceptible. He drew up His arms and put them on His chest, one overlapping the other — then all stopped. Death, the cruel death that was waiting so long — we had been keeping vigil for it — had descended on our Lord. His respiration failed. I told Nirod to go and fetch the Mother. It was 1.20 a.m.

Almost immediately the Mother entered the room. She stood there, near the feet of Sri Aurobindo. Her hair had been undressed and was flowing about Her shoulders. Her look was so fierce that I could not face those eyes. With a piercing gaze She stood there. At exactly 1.26 a.m. I saw and I said all was over. Champaklal could not bear it and sobbingly he implored, “Mother, tell me Dr. Sanyal is not right, He is alive.” The Mother looked at him and he became quiet and composed as if touched by a magic wand. She stood there for more than half an hour. My hands were still on His forehead. My mind wandered. He lay, my Guru, Rishi Sri Aurobindo, Avatar of the new era of the dawn, a thing past! Only a few seconds ago I was watching and hoping for a miracle to happen; could there be a more appropriate time than this! Sri Aurobindo is no more! He was alive, and now He is history. Thoughts kaleidoscoped in my brain. I could almost see thousands of people passing by the bed, whispering aloud — “Here lived Sri Aurobindo.” But it cannot be; I am standing here by His side, my hand almost touching Him; I am watching Him breathe, yes every moment, all is much more quiet now, — I could not think any more. A sharp pain went through my head. I looked at the Mother. Softly, She came to me and touched my head, stilled my thoughts, quietened my mind. No trace of agony was left, I could now think normally. I asked Her,

“What is to be done, we have to arrange for the last offices.” She quietly said, “He will be given Samadhi, under the Service tree, in the place where the giant maidenhair plants are arranged.” So, this place had been earmarked beforehand, such is the way of the Divine!

The Mother also reminded me of the formalities that had to be observed, a French doctor must certify the death first. Then only members of the Ashram and the public could be informed. Nolini Gupta and Amrita were called and stood there stunned. Pavitra stood at the feet of the Master, tears rolling down his cheeks.

We were busy in dressing the Lord. The Mother had already agreed to my request to call the Ashram photographers (sadhaks) to take the last pictures.

The physician of the Government Hospital, Dr. Sukumaran, came and saw the Master’s body and we both signed the death certificate.

Now the sadhaks of the Ashram were to be informed. It was now dawn, the eastern sky was slowly getting clearer and clearer, a shaft of light appeared over the horizon. Quietly I left the main Ashram.

As I sat by the window, bewildered, in my room at Golconde, I saw the hurried but silent progress of the Ashramites towards the main Ashram — Sri Aurobindo has passed away — I felt a violent pang in my heart. I looked at the sky. Look!... There, Sri Aurobindo is rising again — the eternal Sun bursting forth with a million rays.

As the day wore on, longer and longer became the stream of people, eager but calm and patient, to have a last Darshan of the great Rishi. In the afternoon I again entered the room where our Lord lay serene and majestic. A never-ending stream of people, laymen, clergymen, doctors, lawyers, rickshaw pullers, labourers, rich men, poor men, all filed past the Sage, silent but inspired. At dusk the Ashram door was closed. The Mother blessed me, asking me to come again early in the morning. I left for Golconde. Champaklal and Nirod were keeping vigil night and day.

December 6<sup>th</sup> — I entered Sri Aurobindo's room before dawn. Mother and I had a look at Him; how wonderful, how beautiful he looked, with a golden hue! There were no signs of death as science had taught me, no evidence of the slightest discoloration or decomposition. The Mother whispered, "As long as the supramental light does not pass away, the body will not show any sign of decomposition, and it may be a day or it may take many more days." I whispered to Her, "Where is the light you speak of — can I not see it?" I was then kneeling by Sri Aurobindo's bed, by the Mother's feet. She smiled at me and with infinite compassion put Her hand on my head. There He was — with a luminous mantle of bluish golden hue around him.

With the morning came the procession of people, taking a last glimpse of the Divine Master. The Mother said to me, "People do not know what a tremendous sacrifice He has made for the world. About a year ago, while I was discussing things I remarked that I felt like leaving this body of mine. He spoke out in a very firm tone, 'No, this can never be. If necessary for this transformation I might go, you will have to fulfil our yoga of supramental descent and transformation!'"

After that night, there dawned on us the third day of Sri Aurobindo's passing. The Mother and I had a look at His body. As yet there was no sign of decomposition. The French surgeon corroborated the findings, this being required by the law of the State.

I was talking with the Mother, in Her room. In my own foolish way I voiced my apprehension for Her health and the strain She put on Her fragile frame. She smiled at me, and asked, "Do you think I get all this energy from my frugal meals? Of course not, one can draw infinite energy from the universe when needed!" She also added, "No, I have no intention of leaving my body for the present. I have yet a lot of things to do. So far as I am concerned, it is nothing to me. I am in constant contact with Sri Aurobindo."

Sri Aurobindo's sudden decision of withdrawing stirred the mind of us all. Was it a retreat? Or was it a means used by Him to attain something for the earth? Who can answer?

With our limited mental logic, whatever we try to explain will only be part of the truth, or may even be a distortion. What we need is a supreme faith in Him that if many a battle is apparently lost the ultimate victory of the war is inevitable. Sri Aurobindo has no doubt withdrawn from us, from our physical eye, but the Mother is continuing the fight for humanity as the Mahashakti.

While we all feel as if we are sliding down the incline to disappointment; for the world torn with dissension, distrust, hatred and greed, looking for a ray in the sky, a divine gesture — for the uplift of humanity — a transformed humanity — the Mother holds out HOPE.

I took leave of the Mother on 7<sup>th</sup> evening — taking a last look at the Master's luminous body, — the Divine in a mortal frame, beautiful, calm, and still without a sign of decomposition. I naively asked the Mother, "Why was I not allowed to treat the Lord as I would have done in the routine way, and why was I called?" Mother consoled me by saying, "We wanted you to be here, not so much for treatment." The Mother blessed me three times and all my sorrows, my disappointments, my doubts vanished, and my mind was aglow with hope. I bowed at Her feet, and looked up to see the Divine Mother, the Mahashakti smiling at me.

Dr. Prabhat Sanyal

*(Mother India, December 1953, pp. 180-88)*

# **The Passing of Sri Aurobindo**

## **Its Inner Significance and Consequence**

### **I**

“No one can write about my life because it is not on the surface for men to see” — this is what Sri Aurobindo said when the idea of a definitive biography was mooted. There is no doubt that, except perhaps for his brilliant academic career in England and the early phases of his fiery political period in India, his life was too deeply inward for its utmost sense and motive and achievement to be unravelled by a narration of external events supplemented by a psychological commentary. To arrive at some vision of it one would have to catch an inkling of not only the vast mysteries of traditional spiritual realisation but also the dazzling immensities of the new earth-transforming light which he called the Supermind and which he endeavoured for forty years to bring down *in toto* for suffering humanity. As with his life, so too with the phenomenon which the world has reported to be his death. Sri Aurobindo “dying” cannot but be as inward, as profound as Sri Aurobindo living.

No Yogi dies in the ordinary meaning of the word: his consciousness always exceeds the formula of the physical body, he is beyond and greater than his material sheath even while he inhabits it, and his action on mankind is essentially through his free and ample spirit to which both life and death are small masks of a fully aware immortality in the limitless being of the Divine and the Eternal. All the more inapplicable is the term “death” to the passing of a Master of Yoga like Sri Aurobindo. For, it is well known that the transformative power of the Supermind was at work in the very cells of his body and that it commanded an efficacy physical no less than psychological, to which hundreds of his disciples can testify because of the wonderful curative impact of it on their own ailments. This efficacy was not confined to his Ashram: telegraphic offices all over India will bear witness to the daily

flashing of appeals for help in various illnesses, including those that often defeat medical science, and then messages of thanksgiving for relief and remedy by spiritual means. No, Sri Aurobindo, the Yogi of the Supermind descending into the outer as well as the inner being and bringing a divine life on earth in addition to the infinite immortality of the Beyond, cannot be looked upon as passing away on account of old age and physical causes. Whatever the purely clinical picture, it must have behind it a significance integral with his highly significant and immeasurably more-than-physical life of spiritual attainment.

That there should be a clinical picture instead of a miraculous vanishing trick is exactly in keeping with Sri Aurobindo's Yoga. His Yoga was meant to be a process and a progression of the evolutionary method: it aimed not at a bewildering superimposition of divine qualities which still left the grain of human nature unchanged, but at a spiritually organic luminous growth, an assimilation by nature of supernature, a marvellous and yet no freakish transfiguration, an intense working out within a lifetime of what is not foreign to the purpose of terrestrial evolution but its inmost meaning, whose unfoldment is in the very logic of things, though that unfoldment may ordinarily take aeons. The evolutionary was always fused with the revolutionary in Sri Aurobindo's Yoga of the Supermind and, just as his life's audacities, like those of his art of poetry and prose, were always felicitous, full of ease and aptness, gloriously adapting nature rather than violating it, so too the adventure of his death would be no utter supernormality but carry for all its profound import and exceptional mode some semblance of the common passage to the stillness and the shadow.

What medical science would try to describe as physical causes are, therefore, far indeed from being any contradiction of the thesis that Sri Aurobindo did not pass away as a result of them. And this thesis, we may now add, is based not only on Sri Aurobindo's special spiritual status but also on a number of remarkable physical facts. Doctors have declared, on the strength

of typical non-response to stimuli, that he entered into deep coma in consequence of an extreme uraemic condition following upon a failure of all treatment. As every medical tyro knows, such a state of uraemic coma admits of no return to consciousness. Yet to the surprise of the doctors attending on him, Sri Aurobindo opened his eyes at frequent intervals and asked for a drink or inquired what the time was! This repeated occurrence of the scientifically impossible leads one to believe that the deep uraemic coma was intermixed, as it were, with a very conscious Yogic self-withdrawal from an instrument which was too damaged to be kept for common use but which yet could not quite bar the uncommon will of its master. Here was no brain of mere carbon and iron and phosphorus: here was the subtilised servitor of a mind that had sat on the peaks of God and from there could command response in the midst of all material determinism. Even half an hour before the breathing ceased and the heart stopped beating, Sri Aurobindo looked out from his calm compassionate eyes, spoke the name of the doctor by his side and drank some water. This was the strangest uraemic coma in medical history.

Nor did the extraordinary character of the passing of this Yogi of Yogis end there. In a case certified to be one of complete pervasion of the system by the accumulation in the blood of body poisons which should be thrown off by the kidneys, the system gets discoloured in a short time, a blackening grows apace and then decomposition sets in. But when there was a consultation of doctors both French and Indian, two and a half days after the death-certificate had been signed, Sri Aurobindo's body was found to have retained the beautiful white-gold colour that had distinguished it during his life and there was not the slightest trace of decomposition. It was just as it had been at the moment of his passing — 1.26 a.m. on December 5 — and also just as it had been 41 hours later when instead of the scheduled burial the famous announcement was made by the Mother, indefinitely postponing it: "The funeral of Sri Aurobindo has not taken place today. His body is charged with such a concentration of supramental light that there is no sign of decomposition and the body will be

kept lying on his bed so long as it remains intact.” It lay intact for several days in a grandeur of victorious quiet, with thousands upon thousands having *darshan* of it. Only at 5 p.m. on December 9, in a rosewood case lined with silver and satin, it was buried most simply and without any sectarian religious ceremony in a vault specially prepared in the centre of the Ashram courtyard. Even when the body was put into the case, there was neither actual decay nor the odour of death, though marks were present to indicate that the miraculous preservative light had begun to depart. The light may be said to have remained in full for over 90 hours a period more than double the record time which Lyons’ *Medical Jurisprudence* gives of a body keeping undecayed in the climatic conditions of the East.

When during the transition to life’s close and even after, in the very thick of death, a challenging lordship is manifested over Matter and the transformative power of the Supermind that was ever increasingly Sri Aurobindo’s is not denied but paradoxically proved, it is — to say the least — reasonable to see the whole event of his passing as the culmination of a momentous deliberate fight whose implications must be read only by understanding a little the supramental light. But here the question arises: If the fight was deliberate, did he give any signs of its forthcoming? The answer is: Yes. It is indeed true that, though the great illuminating letters to his disciples had not quite ceased nor the fine humour forgotten altogether its leap and flash nor yet the wide look on the world’s movement turned away, he had been for the last couple of years rather reticent about his plans for the future and more and more absorbed in his own inner spiritual work and in literary creation, especially his epic poem *Savitri: a Legend and a Symbol*. But through the reticence and the absorption a few hints did glimmer out of a strange and dire possibility he might have to confront in the course of his mission.

Some time in November the predictions of a Gujarati astrologer were read out to him. Their focal points were the years 1950 and 1964. The astrologer wrote: “In 1950, as the sun and the moon are in conjunction and the moon is

the master of the twelfth house, there is a chance of Sri Aurobindo's self-undoing." About 1964 he opined: "In that year some mighty miracle of Sri Aurobindo's power will be witnessed. Aged 93, he will withdraw from the world at his own will after completing his mission." On hearing this, Sri Aurobindo raised his hand and half-jocularly said: "Oh, ninety-three!" as if he had found that age too far away for his mission's achievement. With regard to 1950 a disciple remarked that it must be a year of importance, since important things had happened in Sri Aurobindo's life at intervals of 12 years. 1926 was an outstanding landmark in Sri Aurobindo's spiritual career: it is called the year of assurance of victory and marks practically the beginning of the Ashram with the Mother radiantly presiding over it. In 1938 — 12 years after that landmark — Sri Aurobindo passed through a physical crisis by falling and fracturing his thigh-bone. 1950 — with its indication of a possibility of "self-undoing" — makes again a 12 years' lapse. And, though the astrologer took only his forecast of a memorable ninety-third year in Sri Aurobindo's life very seriously, Sri Aurobindo seemed to regard his statements as not quite fantastic. He said: "The man has got hold of some truth." Then he was asked: "Isn't the prediction about your 'self-undoing' this year nonsensical? Surely, you are not going to leave us?" In his grand unhurrying way came the calm counter-query of just one mysterious word: "Why?"

A most surprising word, this, to all who had expected that an unusual longevity as a result of the Supermind's increasing descent was part of Sri Aurobindo's programme. Another surprise was fraught with a strange foreboding joy. To those who looked after him or worked in his room he gave a sign of sudden personal tenderness. Sri Aurobindo's was not exactly a demonstrative nature: he had the subtle kindness as of an all-enveloping ether and though his extreme compassion is evident both in the labour he undertook and in many letters written to his disciples in difficulty, physical expressions of his great paternal attitude were rare. But now for a brief moment there went out to his attendants — to each in a different way and on a different occasion

— a distinct outward gesture of affection, as if he had wished them to know before it might be too late his appreciation of their service. The gesture, exceedingly sweet and welcome though it was, appeared to hold vaguely in it the poignancy of a possible leave-taking.

A third surprise may be recorded: a remark which fell oddly on the ear of the disciple whose job it was to take down whatever Sri Aurobindo dictated by way of letter or book. The Master had been busy with his *Savitri* for several years, revising the text he had composed earlier and constantly adding to it, amplifying the significances, enriching the story, extending the symbolism, catching more and more intensely the vision of the superhuman planes of existence and consciousness to which he had access, breathing with an ever-truer thrill the vast rhythms of the movements of the Gods with which he had grown familiar. Out of some unfathomable silence he would draw out golden phrase and apocalyptic line — wait as if he had eternities to throw away — proceed with splendid bursts of occult imagery and revealing description — hark back to expand or amend, with an eye to the tiniest detail of punctuation or sequence, and again press forward with a comprehensive yet meticulous inspiration. A lordly, a leisurely labour was *Savitri*, conceived with something of the antique temperament which rejoiced in massive structures — especially the temperament of the makers of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* which take all human life and human thought in their spacious scope and blend the workings of the hidden worlds of Gods and Titans and demons with the activities of earth. A kind of cosmic sweep was Sri Aurobindo's and he wanted his poem to be a many-sided multi-coloured carving out in word-music of the gigantic secrets of the supramental Yoga. More than fifty thousand lines were thought necessary to house the unique vision and the unparalleled experience. A patience as vast as that vision and that experience characterised always Sri Aurobindo's dealings with this epic. Even the version on which he was engaged was the eleventh or the twelfth. Time without end appeared to be at

his disposal when he sat dictating lines like those about the central figure of the poem:

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

But all of a sudden a couple of months before the fateful December 5 Sri Aurobindo startled his scribe by saying: "I must finish *Savitri* soon."

Of course, all this does not fix the very date of his passing nor does it show any desire to depart, but clearly, the grim struggle in which he got involved and which came to a close on that date had loomed already as a likelihood in the near future. And a certain fact about *Savitri* fits in here with the aptest symbolism. Though he strove to finish his epic soon, it just fell short of completion. It had been projected in twelve Books, with an epilogue, but while even the epilogue got written — at least as a general first draft — and the Book of Beginnings, the Book of the Traveller of the Worlds, the Book of the Divine Mother, the Book of Birth and Quest, the Book of Life, the Book of Love, the Book of Fate and several other Books are either in print or in manuscript, the one single Book which does not exist in any form at all — except for a short piece written a long time ago and meant to be revised and included in a much larger whole — is the Book of Death. Most suggestive is this fact, as if that Book could not be composed until the grim Spectre had been grappled with in actuality and as if Sri Aurobindo had been waiting for some mighty crisis of

his own bodily existence before he could launch on this part of his *Legend and Symbol*.

Everything goes to prove that what happened in the small hours of that December day was no purely physical casualty, no fell accident to the seeker of the life divine on earth, but a dreadful gamble freely accepted, an awesome trial undergone for a set purpose, a battle faced in every wounding detail with open eyes and joined with the explicit possibility threatening him of losing in it the most gifted and glorious bodily instrument forged by the manifesting Spirit that is for ever. But the question still stands to be answered: What could be the reason of the perilous experiment? It is doubtful whether any answer expressible by this mere mind can be entirely satisfying. Perhaps none ought to be attempted and we might rest with the conviction that Sri Aurobindo of his own will did what he deemed most necessary for the advancement of his work and we might leave it to the Mother — Sri Aurobindo's partner in that work — to unroll the supreme rationale of the Master's will in the actual developments of the Integral Yoga in the future. However, the Master himself never completely discouraged the effort of the mind to comprehend the Spirit's manifold action. Intellectual formulation of direct inner knowledge or else of intuitive seizures of the Unknown was a thing he fostered, and if by some rapport with his own luminous philosophy we could arrive at a mental glimmer of the Aurobindonian Supermind's intention we should be doing what he himself from beyond our gross senses would perhaps not refuse to sanction.

## II

The core of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and Yoga is the dynamic Truth-consciousness that is the Supermind. By "Truth-consciousness" is meant that status and force of the Divine which brings out of the Divine's absolute Transcendence into a perfect manifestation of Self-being and Self-becoming the potentialities of the play of the One who is at the same time the Many. This

manifestation is a complete harmony in which exist and function the creative truths, the flawless originals, the golden archetypes of all that is in our imperfect cosmos in which the Divine has posited a difficult evolution of matter, life-force and mind — with a soul supporting them — out of a vast Inconscience, a primal darkness set by Him as the nether pole to the transcendent Absolute. Between the two poles and above the evolving earth and below the archetypal Supermind are various occult planes — Subtle Matter, Vitality, Mind, Overmind and, at the back of the first trio, Psyche, — with their beings and movements and there is a complex interaction in the whole system of cosmos on cosmos. All this was known in general to the ancient seers and they saw in man who is the microcosm a threefold reality concretised into what they termed three sheaths or *shariras* — the gross outer, the subtle inner, the causal higher. The last is the substance of the Supermind, compacted of its creative light of total knowledge, infinite power, immortal bliss. But the ancients did not realise that the earthly evolution is not meant only to release the being into the Cosmic Self and into ever more deep, ever more high poises of consciousness and into some eternity beyond birth and death but also to bring into earth-terms the dynamic modes of the widths, the depths and the heights and ultimately the supreme perfection of the Truth-plane — the *karana sharira*, the causal body — so that earth-terms themselves may be fulfilled and not merely serve as bright points of departure into the wide and the deep and the high. In short, the ancients lacked a full and organised possession of the Supermind's purpose and power: the fusion of the supramental light with the inmost soul and the descent of it into mind and life-energy and even the physical body, transforming and divinising them in entirety, are Sri Aurobindo's special discovery and Yoga. With the supramental descent Sri Aurobindo aimed at creating a new humanity enjoying true self-consummation and living divinely in every field, and it is with this aim that he sought to form an initiating double centre for the new humanity by his own supramentalisation and the Mother's.

Supramentalisation involves, among its final elements, freedom from disease, duration of life at will and a change in the functionings of the body — all, of course, as a material expression of the divine nature emerging in the human and not as an outer aggrandisement of an expanding inner egoism. But to compass these final elements which alone would found with utter security a supramental earth-existence, the Yogi has to tackle at last the bed-rock of the Inconscience, the dark basis of the submerged Divine from which evolution seems to issue. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, taking upon themselves as representative pioneers the agelong difficulties of all human nature, have been striking against this bed-rock for the last decade and a half. “No, it is not with the Empyrean that I am busy,” wrote Sri Aurobindo in 1936 to a disciple and added: “I wish it were. It is rather with the opposite end of things; it is in the Abyss that I have to plunge to build a bridge between the two. But that too is necessary for my work and one has to face it.” In the course of this plunge, as layer after layer of the occult Inconscient is torn open and the supramental light sought to be called down into it, various dreadful possibilities rise up and great inner wounds as well as severe bodily tensions have to be endured. But throughout the fight the master of the Supermind carries the talisman, as it were, that can ward off the fatal blow. Immense, in spite of the sublimest light within his very body, are his trials and yet he has also the capacity to emerge finally the victor and blaze a path of ultimate triumph for the men who follow him. Thus to emerge had been Sri Aurobindo’s plan, so far as the plan can be read through his philosophical writings and his personal letters. Both the plan and the non-egoistic worldwide attitude of an Avatar find voice in a letter of 1935: “I am not doing anything for myself, as I have no personal need of anything, neither of salvation (*moksha*) nor supramentalisation. If I am seeking after supramentalisation it is because it is a thing that has to be done for the earth-consciousness and if it is not done in myself, it cannot be done in others.”

Yes, Sri Aurobindo, in his published pronouncements, appears to have envisaged the need and therefore the prospect of himself constituting together

with the Mother the starting-point of supramental humanity. But in the same pronouncements he leaves also a small margin for a different *dénouement*. A letter of 1934 speaks in general about the ways of a vessel of God: “The Divinity acts according to the consciousness of the Truth above and the *Lila* below and It acts according to the need of the *Lila*, not according to men’s ideas of what It should do or should not do.” A clearer hint of unexpected turns in the Divine’s dealings is contained in a letter of 1935: “Why should the Divine be tied down to succeed in all his operations? What if failure suits him better and serves better the ultimate purpose? What rigid primitive notions are these about the Divine!” This suggests that apparent defeat of the Divine’s grandest goal could even be a concealed victory, a way precisely to reach that goal with greater swiftness by means of a paradoxical strategy. And, all conditions considered, it is truly such a strategy that seems to have been employed by Sri Aurobindo when to the superficial gaze he succumbed to a renal disorder.

The whole supramental Yoga was indeed like a great general’s campaign against forces that had never been combatted before by any spiritual figure. In the teeth of every common experience, every posture of human living down the ages, even every articulate spiritual tradition, this Yoga hoped to change the very foundations of Matter and proceeded into an embattled darkness: only a fearless fighter like Sri Aurobindo, only a genius like him of the Spirit militant could have intuited the mighty secret of the epiphany in evolution and planned the transformative onslaught on established nature and moved ahead in the frame of mind that is disclosed in yet another letter of 1935: “It is not for personal greatness that I am seeking to bring down the Supermind. I care nothing for greatness or littleness in the human sense.... If human reason regards me as a fool for trying to do what Krishna did not try, I do not in the least care. There is no question of X or Y or anybody else in that. It is a question between the Divine and myself — whether it is the Divine Will or not, whether I am sent to bring that down or open the way to its descent or at

least make it more possible or not. Let all men jeer at me if they will or all Hell fall upon me if it will for my presumption — I go on till I conquer or perish. This is the spirit in which I seek the Supermind, no hunting for greatness for myself or others.” A splendid heroism of selflessness is here, the vividest picture of a warrior Yogi who would take any risk, if thereby he could press closer to his objective — and though the formula is “I conquer or perish” the frame of mind is one that might easily avail itself of a yet more audacious formula: “I perish to conquer.” To embrace this formula what would be required is simply the sense that, by sacrificing in a final grapple with the black powers of the Inconscient a wonderful body tinged with supramental light, those powers would be terribly exhausted and the golden godhead above tremendously pulled towards earth and into this body’s partner in the Yoga of the Supermind. As soon as the momentous sense would dawn, Sri Aurobindo would be ready — supreme general that he was — to alter his entire scheme of battle, relinquish his whole line of previously prepared forts, abandon the old method of advance, change suddenly his well-plotted direction and, instead of attempting to supramentalise his physical existence in every detail, move imperturbably towards some titanic ambush, cast away the very guard given him by the Supermind and go down fighting to win all in secret, while losing all on the surface.

Nothing except a colossal strategic sacrifice of this kind in order that the physical transformation of the Mother may be immeasurably hastened and rendered absolutely secure and, through it, a divine life on earth for humanity may get rooted and be set aflower — nothing less can explain the passing of Sri Aurobindo. There would also be implied in the holocaust a world-saving action by the sweet power of which Sri Aurobindo speaks in a letter as far back as 1934: “It is only divine Love which can bear the burden I have to bear, that all have to bear who have sacrificed everything else to the one aim of uplifting earth out of its darkness to the Divine.” We may say that some undreamt-of catastrophe would have overwhelmed the world if the vast poison had not been

drawn away into the body of this one man whose spiritual consciousness, armed with divine Love, had made him a universalised individual incarnating the Transcendent's Will. And here we may refer again to the fact that the obstacles confronting Sri Aurobindo in his Yoga were not really personal. They were representative of the race and he gladly accepted their retarding perilous load in spite of or perhaps because of his own exceptional gifts and abilities. Apropos a query about some temporary complaint in the Mother's body many years ago, he wrote: "We have not sought perfection for our own separate sake, but as part of a general change — creating a possibility of perfection for others. That could not have been done without our accepting and facing the difficulties of the realisation and the transformation and overcoming them for ourselves. It has been done to a sufficient degree on the other planes — but not yet on the most material part of the physical plane. Till it is done, the fight there continues.... The Mother's difficulties are not her own; she bears the difficulties of others and those that are inherent in the general action and work for the transformation. If it had been otherwise, it would be a very different matter." Obviously, then, whatever sacrifice is made by Sri Aurobindo or the Mother cannot be one imposed on them by personal defects. Theirs the unique *adhars* or vehicles of Yoga which could, if left to themselves, surmount every obstacle. This, in the present context of Sri Aurobindo's departure, means that death is not anything he was obliged to undergo on account of some lack in himself. It is some stupendous crisis of the evolving earth-consciousness — some rebellious clouding upsurge of the divinely attacked Inconscient — that has been diverted to his own life, concentrated in the mortal risk of the uraemic coma and utilised by the master strategist for an occult advantage to the work he had assumed — the work which was always more important than direct personal consummation. But it would be of the essence of the sacrifice and the strategy, as well as typically Aurobindonian, that a keenly struggling resistance should be there together with the large and tranquil acceptance. That is why we have said that Sri Aurobindo has gone down fighting. Never to acquiesce in any shortcoming of

earth-nature was his motto, for he saw the very secret of evolution to be the manifestation in earth-nature of what superficially looks impossible — the quivering forth of vitality and sensation in seemingly lifeless Matter, the glimmering out of mind and reason in apparently instinctive animality, the all-perfecting revelation of Supermind in ostensibly groping intelligence, stumbling life-force and mortal body. So there never could be for Sri Aurobindo either a surrender to ordinary world-conditions or a flight into peace away from the world. An inviolable timeless peace he had always known ever since those three grand days in Baroda in 1908 when through a complete silencing of the mind the absolute experience of Nirvana, which has been the terminus of so many other Yogas, became his — not as a terminus but only as a base for further conquests. As for surrender, he could surrender to nothing except the Divine. Consequently, he battled for the Supermind's descent till his last breath — calling the immortal Sun of the Spirit down, passionately packing his earthly envelope with the supramental light so much so indeed that he could keep for several days that envelope free from the taint of discolouration and decay. To battle thus in the very moments of the sacrifice was in tune with his whole life-endeavour. Has he not himself expounded in a letter the technique of triumph in the midst of seeming downfall? “Even if I foresee an adverse result I must work for the one that I consider should be; for it keeps alive the force, the principle of Truth which I serve and gives it a possibility to triumph hereafter so that it becomes part of the working of the future favourable fate even if the fate of the hour is adverse.”

With these far-seeing phrases of the Master we may close our attempt to elucidate a little the mystery of that look of magnificent meditation with which he lay from early morning of December 5 for more than 111 hours in his simple bed in the room where he had spent over two decades of intense world-work. “Spiritually imperial”—this is the only description fitting the appearance of his body: the heroic countenance with its white beard and its flowing white hair above the massive forehead, its closed quiet eyes and its wide-nostrilled

aquiline nose and its firm lips whose corners were touched with beatitude, the broad and smooth shoulders, the arms flexed to place on the indomitable chest, hand over gentle, artistic yet capable hand, the strong manly waist covered by an ample cloth of gold-bordered silk, even the legs stretched out with an innate kingship reminiscent of their having trod through seventy-eight years with holy feet at once blessing and possessing earth. The atmosphere of the room was vibrant with a sacred power to cleanse and illumine, a power which appeared to emanate from the Master's poise of conquering rest and to invade the bodies of all the watchers with almost a hammering intensity from over their heads as if, in redoubled force because of Sri Aurobindo's selfless physical withdrawal, there came pouring down to humanity the life-transfiguring grace of the Supermind.

And we may add that somehow the personal presence itself of Sri Aurobindo grew intenser. He who had so long kept to a room for the sake of concentratedly hastening the Yogic process of transformation — the wonderful bliss and dynamis which the Mother had been canalising by her physical nearness to the disciples — he by setting aside his most exterior sheath broke out into a new intimacy with his followers and took them even more directly into his immense being. But it would hardly do justice to that being if we thought of it as merely a pervading greatness. Behind the material envelope are other organised vehicles — subtle and causal — Sri Aurobindo had brought the remote causal effectively into the proximate subtle and was pressing it into the outer sheath at the time of his strategic sacrifice. To quote again his words, “The transformation has been done to a sufficient degree on the other planes.” This means that he held the Supermind embodied in his subtle *sharira* and that he was under no occult necessity, no law of subtle Nature, to give up the latter for the purpose of returning to some place of the soul's rest before being reborn with a new subtle body as well as a new gross one. Sri Aurobindo, at the hour of his physical withdrawal, was in a position to do much more than be the cosmic and transcendent Purusha that his supramental Yoga had made his

incarnate personality. He could actually be that Purusha active in an indissoluble subtle body at once divine and human, in a far more direct constant touch with the material world than could the forms which mystics have visioned of past Rishis and Prophets and Avatars. In a most special sense, therefore, Sri Aurobindo the marvellously gifted and gracious person who was our Guru and whom we loved is still at work and a concrete truth is expressed by the Mother when she says: "To grieve is an insult to Sri Aurobindo, who is here with us conscious and alive." The same concrete truth is in-gemmed in the beautiful message of December 7, which she delivered out of her depths where she and Sri Aurobindo are one: "Lord, this morning Thou hast given me the assurance that Thou wouldst stay with us until Thy work is achieved, not only as a consciousness which guides and illumines but also as a dynamic Presence in action. In unmistakable terms Thou hast promised that all of Thyself would remain here and not leave the earth-atmosphere until earth is transformed. Grant that we may be worthy of this marvellous Presence and that henceforth everything in us be concentrated on the one Will to be more and more perfectly consecrated to the fulfilment of Thy Sublime Work."

So the work goes on, the Mother fronting the future, with the Master by her side in subtle embodiment. And for those who have faith in the work's fulfilment and who understand what that would be, there is a hope that sees the future pregnant with a particular most heart-soothing possibility. Sri Aurobindo has written in connection with the time when the Supermind's descent into flesh and blood will be complete: "In the theory of the occultists and in the gradation of the ranges and planes of our being which Yoga-knowledge outlines for us there is not only a subtle physical force but a subtle physical Matter intervening between life and gross Matter and to create in this subtle physical substance and precipitate the forms thus made into our grosser materiality is feasible. It should be possible and it is believed to be possible for an object formed in this subtle physical substance to make a transit from its subtlety into the state of gross Matter directly by the intervention of an

occult force and process whether with or even without the assistance or intervention of some gross material procedure. A soul wishing to enter into a body or form for itself a body and take part in a divine life upon earth might be assisted to do so or even provided with such a form by this method of direct transmutation without passing through birth by the sex process or undergoing any degradation or any of the heavy limitations in the growth and development of its mind and material body inevitable to our present way of existence. It might then assume at once the structure and greater powers and functionings of the truly divine material body which must one day emerge in a progressive evolution to a totally transformed existence both of life and form in a divinised earth-nature.”

These words hold out the prospect that Sri Aurobindo who has already a divinised subtle physical sheath may employ the supramental mode of manifestation for the purpose of presiding in the domain of Matter itself over the new humanity which the Mother will initiate. In that dawn of God’s gold the Mother will be the first being to achieve the divine body by a progression through a body born in the natural manner, while through the support of her achievement Sri Aurobindo may be the first being to put on the physical vesture of transformation by a projection of substance and shape from supernature. Nothing, of course, is certain about what Sri Aurobindo may will to do, but the possibility we have figured is not out of accord with all that we have glimpsed of a quenchless and victorious light beyond the human in the very event which strikes the surface eye of the aspiring world as a universal sunset — the passing of Sri Aurobindo.

Amal Kiran

*(The Passing of Sri Aurobindo, Sri Aurobindo Ashram,  
Pondicherry, 1951, pp. 1-23)*

## Regarding Sri Aurobindo's Passing

Regarding Sri Aurobindo's passing we know now that He had decided to leave this physical world because, as Mother explained to us later, it was the only way that the final conquest of Death could be made; Mother said that Sri Aurobindo had told Her that one of them would have to cross the barrier and work from the other side — so that death, the greatest obstacle to the physical transformation, could be finally overcome. Mother offered to be the one to cross over but Sri Aurobindo said to Her that She had the more difficult task to perform and must continue to remain, while He would go across and work from the other side. That is why His presence is constantly felt by all of us.

Because He had taken a decision to leave His body, He chose to do it in a 'natural' way and allowed His body to be subjected to an 'illness'. I suppose that normally such an illness could have been cured by suitable treatment but in His case, the illness did not respond at all to any treatment. Mother had given the doctors full permission to try any medical treatment they wanted and they tried everything. Dr. Sanyal, Dr. Satyabrata and Dr. Nirod were all in attendance and they were constantly trying out different medicines which I had to procure for them at any time of the day or night. This I was able to do with the assistance of a very mysterious person who had come to the Ashram at that time and was staying at Golconde. He called himself Dr. Kaplan — a German. I remember him with gratitude as he was able to get, somewhere, somehow, all that was asked from him.

In spite of all medical treatment, there was no improvement in Sri Aurobindo's physical condition and it became worse from day to day till He came to a state when oxygen had to be administered. I was asked to arrange for it. It was not available in Pondicherry and had to be obtained from Cuddalore. At that time, Pondicherry being still a French colony, there was some tension between the Indian Union and the Pondicherry Government. At

the frontier, movement was restricted. It was here that Mr. R.K. Tandon helped us so much. He was the Indian Consul General at Pondicherry and was very helpful to us at this difficult time. He sent me to Cuddalore in his own car to get the oxygen equipment. When I brought it, I was shown how to work it also. Hence, when I took it to Sri Aurobindo's room it was understood that I would be sent for if and when the equipment was needed.

It was about 10.00 on the night of 4th December 1950 that I got a call to go to Sri Aurobindo's room to work the oxygen equipment. I went at once and so I was present throughout the night, that fateful night when Sri Aurobindo left His physical body, and I was a witness to His last moments on earth.

Mother said that She would retire for the short rest of two hours or so that She used to take each night. She said to Dyuman that She should be called if there was any sudden deterioration in His condition. Sri Aurobindo continued to be in a comatose state from which, I understand, one does not come out as it precedes the final moment of death.

But at about 1 a.m. Sri Aurobindo suddenly came out of this condition and asked Nirod the time. Nirod told Him the time and gave Him a drink, then He went back into His previous condition, which I then understood to be that of a deep meditation and not a coma, which, I think, is a state of unconsciousness....

Then Dr. Sanyal said that it was better to call the Mother. Dyuman went to Her room and called Her. She came in a few moments and stood again by the side of Sri Aurobindo's bed. After a while Sri Aurobindo woke up once more and asked Nirod to give him something to drink. Then He sank back. At 1.26 a.m. His breathing ceased. Everyone and everything was completely still and silent. The Mother was like a rock of strength. At this most grave moment in the history of the world, She stood erect, unmoved, a tower of peace and fortitude. At that moment I saw in Her the fullness of Her Divinity and loved and worshipped Her in my heart to an extent I had never been able to do before.

The Mother then said Sri Aurobindo had lived so long in the Supramental Consciousness that it had come down into His body and made it shine with a golden light. But She added that one could not be sure how long the light would remain and in case it remained for a long time it was necessary to protect the body against dust and air-borne insects. So She asked me to prepare a large glass covering to go over the whole body in a way which would not disturb it. Immediately a man was sent to Madras to get the necessary large sheets of glass and through Dyuman we arranged for the silver angle strips to join them to form a cover.

In the meantime we thought it would be good if we could keep the room temperature low by arranging large blocks of ice round about with fans to blow over them. We did this without consulting the Mother. As soon as She saw it, She asked us to remove everything at once: She did not want any artificial measure to be taken at all. If the body was to remain without perishing, it would be by His will alone.

The news had spread in the Ashram and as soon as Sri Aurobindo's body was properly laid out, people began to come in. All the doors were opened and everyone was free to enter. It was the morning of 5th December. We were now constantly going to the Mother for instructions. It was at this time that She told us many important things and particularly about Sri Aurobindo's decision to cross over....

Udar Pinto

*(Udar, one of Mother's children, Sri Aurobindo Udyog Trust, Pondicherry, pp. 34-36)*

# A Telegram and A Letter

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

Tel. Addr.  
AUROBINDO — PONDICHERRY

PONDICHERRY  
India  
December 5, 1950

My dear Father,

Sri Aurobindo passed away last night, after an attack of uraemia.

Although he has left us physically, we strongly feel his presence.

It is too soon to tell you what changes this event will bring in my life, but I wanted to inform you immediately so that you would get the news from me rather than from the newspapers.

I embrace you affectionately,

Your son,

*Signed:* Philippe

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## SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

Tel. Addr.  
AUROBINDO — PONDICHERRY

PONDICHERRY  
India  
December 14, 1950

My dear Father,

I have received your letter today and I want to tell you at once how much, in its brevity, it has touched me. I am grateful to you for what you offer me and the manner in which you offer it to me. This is where I am in this regard:

Sri Aurobindo had some chronic difficulties which he had kept under control for many years. Sometime before the *Darshan* of November 24, these got aggravated. Even the *Darshan* would not have taken place but for his great effort of will. An ailment started at the kidneys and at the same time urea and sugar appeared in the blood in increasing quantities, attaining a proportion which ordinarily results in coma or death. Without doubt this hampered the full action of the supramental force. The equilibrium was broken and he succumbed to what is officially declared as a problem of uraemia (the 5<sup>th</sup> at 26 minutes past 1 in the morning).

We thought of burying him the same day, but as his body did not at all have the appearance of death and remained intact, we waited. The doctors though had examined him with much care and certified death. Many people saw his body luminous, with a golden light.

On the morning of the 7<sup>th</sup>, the Chief of the Health Service came to examine the body. According to his official report, written 55 hours after the death, the body did not show any sign of decomposition; the government permitted postponement of the burial, which by law had to take place within 48 hours.

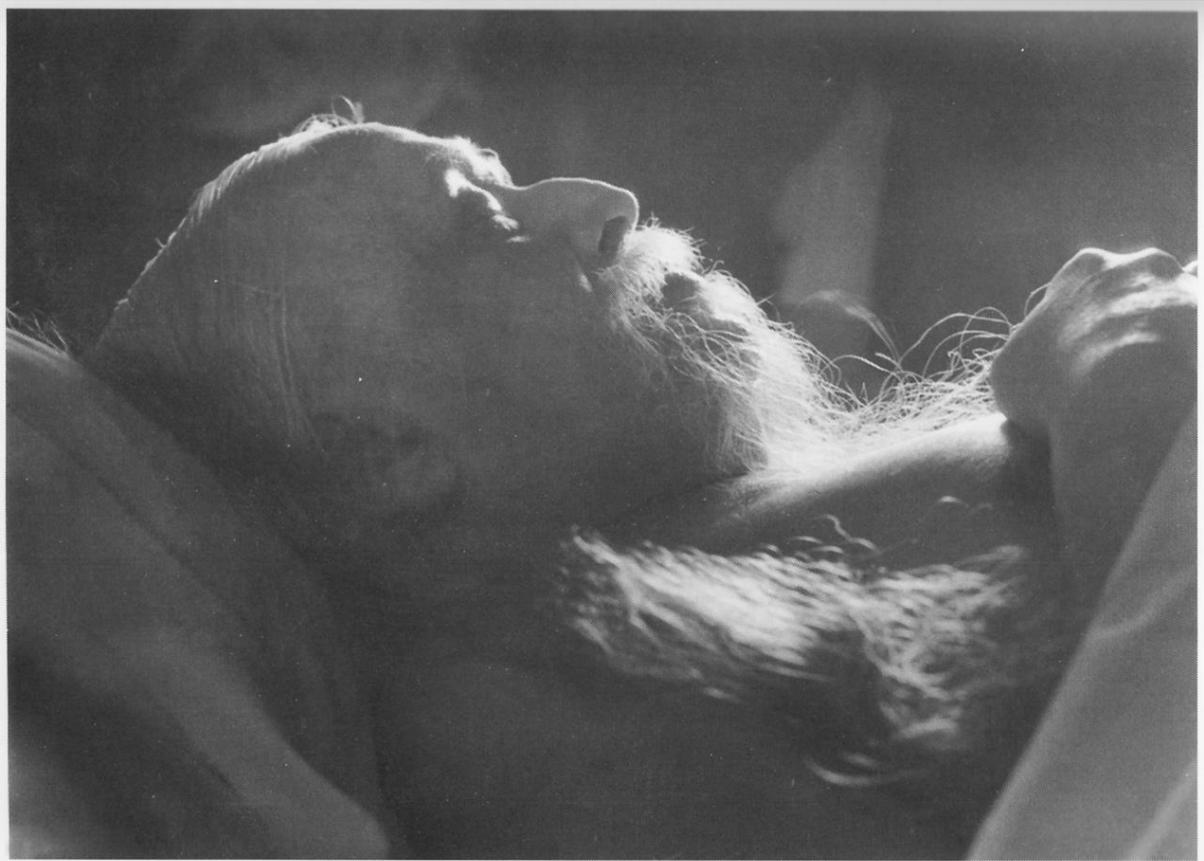
Several thousand people, many of whom had come by special plane from Bombay and Calcutta, filed past his body. Many had the impression of a person

immersed in a deep meditation, but not at all of death. It is thus that you will see him in the attached photo; it has to be held as though he were sitting with his back resting against the pillow. Mother told us that a part of the consciousness had voluntarily remained in the body. But subsequently, some signs of change appeared and the burial took place on the 9<sup>th</sup> at 5 o'clock in the afternoon. By special permission, the tomb is in the heart of the Ashram, under a spreading tree with yellow flowers.

Our grief has certainly been great, because the blow was unexpected. Above all, I measured the extent of the loss that the world suffered at a time when it is going through such a grave crisis. But a consolation has been given to us, which has proved to be greater and greater and which alone enables us to face the future. We feel the Presence of Sri Aurobindo, in us and around us, as powerfully if not more than when he was living, and we feel that this Presence is completely identified with that of the Mother. Thus is born and is confirmed this certitude that our Master has not left us, that his action is going on and that his work continues.

The true reasons for his withdrawal from the body are no doubt profound and will be known only later. For the moment I can only have a glimpse of them.

We could have thought that Sri Aurobindo has withdrawn into the Absolute or that he has entered Nirvana. Mother has told us and many of us also think that it is not that and that he remains and will remain with us, not only as a source of inspiration but as a living and active presence, radiating Light and Force until his work is accomplished, that is to say, until the Supramental has descended and is fully manifested on earth. How many years or centuries that will take, she does not say, and no doubt, it is not important when one sees things on the scale of the cosmos or of humanity!



Sri Aurobindo – 5.12.1950



Sri Aurobindo's casket being carried, 9.12.1950



Sri Aurobindo's Samadhi

DECEMBER 9, 1950,  
TO THEE WHO HAST BEEN THE MATERIAL  
ENVELOPE OF OUR MASTER, TO THEE OUR  
INFINITE GRATITUDE, BEFORE THEE WHO HAST  
DONE SO MUCH FOR US, WHO HAST WORKED,  
STRUGGLED, SUFFERED, HOPED, ENDURED  
SO MUCH, BEFORE THEE WHO HAST 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



Inscription on Sri Aurobindo's Samadhi

The true reasons for his withdrawal from the body are no doubt profound and will be known only later. For the moment I can only have a glimpse of them.

We could have thought that Sri Aurobindo has withdrawn into the Absolute or that he has entered Nirvana. Mother has told us and many of us also think that it is not that and that he remains and will remain with us, not only as a source of inspiration but as a living and active presence, radiating Light and Force until his work is accomplished, that is to say, until the Supramental has descended and is fully manifested on earth. How many years or centuries that will take, she does not say, and no doubt, it is not important when one sees things on the scale of the cosmos or of humanity!

So Mother has decided that the Ashram should continue, and, with an increased force, she continues to guide it, as she has been doing since its foundation in 1926 when Sri Aurobindo himself gave her the charge. For us, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are, now more than ever, one and the same Person. We have lost the great sweetness of the personal relation with Sri Aurobindo, but not his guidance, his knowledge and his power, and he has left to us the great sweetness of the relation with the Mother.

Certainly, some changes are going to be made in the Ashram. Some will probably be imposed on us by the circumstances themselves; others will result from the shock which this painful event has given us: a greater concentration in the aspiration, a clearer vision of the essential.

In what concerns me, I do not foresee any important changes in the immediate future. That is why, thanking you for your generous offer, I will not accept it. Rest assured that, as you wished, she has permitted me to make my own decision freely.

The end of the year is approaching and the time when one draws up the balance sheet. I send you my best wishes for the New Year, to you, to Denise and the children, and to the whole larger family. I shall be with you in thought

during this period, particularly on January 10. At the present stage of human evolution, death is perhaps necessary, not only for those who go away, but also for those who remain. But all the same, it will not always be like this.

I shall keep you informed.

Embrace Albert and tell him that I have not forgotten him.

I hold you affectionately against my heart.

Your son,

*Signed:* Philippe

(Itinerary of a Child of the Century, serialised in Mother India,  
September 2011.

Translated from the original French,  
*Itinéraire d'un enfant du siècle*, by Aniruddha Sircar.)

## The Mystery of 5<sup>th</sup> December 1950

Certain events that took place during 1949-50, although they did not perhaps attract any special attention at the time, now seem to be invested with pointer-meanings. In April 1950, Henri Cartier Bresson, the world-famous French photographer, on a visit to Pondicherry, was permitted by the Mother to make a number of portrait-studies of Sri Aurobindo — thus breaking a rule that had been strictly observed for about thirty-five years. Again, once when the Mother had told Sri Aurobindo that she felt like leaving her body, he is reported to have remarked, “No, this can never be. If necessary for this transformation, I might go; you will have to fulfil our Yoga of supramental descent and transformation.”<sup>1</sup> In his letter of 7 December 1949, Sri Aurobindo explained why, unlike Sri Ramakrishna who wouldn’t use spiritual force for preserving the body, he was not unwilling to maintain the body “in good health and condition as an instrument or physical basis” for Yoga sadhana. In his reported conversation with the Mother, it is implied that it was open to the Mother as well as Sri Aurobindo to decide for themselves if, or when, they should leave the body, and if they wanted they could overcome physical ailments by means of spiritual force. And Sri Aurobindo had decided that, if one of them should go, it would be himself, not she.

Again, it was during 1950 that the composition of *Savitri* was done at a quickened pace. The whole of Book XI (‘The Book of Everlasting Day’) was dictated, as if in one long spell. “I want to finish *Savitri* soon,” Sri Aurobindo told Nirod one day, — but wherefore this seemingly sudden spurt of hurry? Having made his announcement, “he increased immensely the general tempo of composition and revision”.<sup>2</sup> But somehow, even when his attention was

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. P. Sanyal, “A ‘Call’ from Pondicherry”, *Mother India*, December 1953, p. 187.

<sup>2</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (1954), Editor’s Note, p. 817.

drawn to it, he seemed to defer to an indefinite “afterwards” the revision of ‘The Book of Death’ and the Epilogue (‘The Return to Earth’).

There were other strange and sinister indications too, straws in the wind perhaps, yet showing in what direction the wind was blowing. Soli Albless, for example, has made an important revelation:

On 15 August 1950, an old sadhak with a capacity for vision saw Sri Aurobindo drawing into himself fumes that were rising from the subconscious parts of the people as they were coming to him for *darshan* in a procession. He was gathering up the lower elements of earth-nature within the area of representative humanity and then drawing them into himself.

Was he negotiating a deal of transformation with the bleak — or black — Nadir of existence? Was he hewing a pathway to Light by tunnelling through Night? As he said in the sonnet ‘The Pilgrim of the Night’, written in 1938 and revised in 1944:

I made an assignation with the Night;  
In the abyss was fixed our rendezvous:  
In my breast carrying God’s deathless light  
I came her dark and dangerous heart to woo.

For days before 24 November 1950, Sri Aurobindo was ailing on account of the recurrence of a malady, uraemia, that had afflicted him earlier but soon retreated. From 17 November, the illness caused definite anxiety, yet the *darśan* on the 24<sup>th</sup> afternoon took place all the same, although a bit rushed through. Hardly any of the hundreds that filed past him and exposed themselves to the steady compassionate gaze of the Master had, however, the remotest suspicion that anything was wrong. On account of the annual School

celebrations on 1 and 2 December, even the post-*darśan* days were filled with the excitement of preparation and anticipation. Some few nevertheless knew about Sri Aurobindo's illness, but this didn't affect the usual round of Ashram activities, and the Mother presided over the Playground events every evening. As Sri Aurobindo's illness continued to cause deep concern, on Nirod's suggestion the eminent surgeon, Dr. Sanyal, was summoned telegraphically from Calcutta, and he came on 30 November. On being told that Sanyal had arrived, Sri Aurobindo opened his eyes fully, smiled — “a smile serene and beautiful, it carried one to ecstasy, lighting the innermost corners of the heart” — and he placed his hand on Sanyal's head. When asked what the “trouble” was, Sri Aurobindo said simply; “Trouble? Nothing troubles me. And suffering? One can be above it.” As for the specific difficulties, there was already much relief; he felt nothing! As he had hinted, Sri Aurobindo seemed to be “above” the circumstances, calm, detached, even indifferent! It was as though he wasn't interested in the disease and its progress or arrest. Then once the Mother spoke to Sanyal in the ante-room: “He is fully conscious within, but he is losing interest in himself.” It was the well-beloved, ever-faithful Champaklal who ventured to put the crucial question to the Master: “Are you not using your Force?” “No” came the ominous answer. But why? “If you don't use your Force, how is the disease to be cured?” interposed Nirod. “Can't explain,” came the imperturbable reply, “you won't understand.”

The School celebrations on 1 and 2 December had gone without a hitch. Only on the 3<sup>rd</sup> the Mother had failed to come to the Playground, but although this was noticed, it was not connected with Sri Aurobindo's illness, for very few knew about it. The battle between the illness (“uraemia”, symbolic of the “Inconscience”, according to Sethna) and the doctors (with their sophisticated medical knowledge and expertise and, above all, their boundless devotion to the Master) went on, the patient himself being neutral at best. On 4<sup>th</sup> December, Sri Aurobindo was helped out of his bed at his request; the distressing symptoms had “magically vanished”, and he was able to walk to the armchair and take his seat. The disciples' eyes lighted up with joy, but it was after all

to prove a false dawn. Late in the night of 4 December, it was clear Sri Aurobindo was withdrawing himself of set purpose. And at 1.26 a.m. on 5 December — with the Mother already in the room and the select few watching — the Light seemed to flicker, the Light seemed to fade out:

A voyager upon uncharted routes  
Fronting the viewless danger of the Unknown,  
Adventuring across enormous realms,  
He broke into another Space and Time.<sup>3</sup>

But for the millions awake on the morning of 5 December, it was as though they had been orphaned all of a sudden; and the event overwhelmed many of them as a mystic holocaust that was both an end and a beginning:

It is finished, the dread mysterious sacrifice,  
Offered by God's martyred body for the world...  
He who has found his identity with God  
Pays with the body's death his soul's vast light.  
His knowledge immortal triumphs by his death.<sup>4\*</sup>

Two hours after Sri Aurobindo's passing, the Mother announced the news to the Ashram inmates at 3.30 a.m. on 5 December. The news spread quickly, and was flashed at once all over the world. Sri Aurobindo's body was to lie in state till noon, and the Ashram gates were to be thrown open to enable all to pay their homage to the Mahayogi.

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<sup>3</sup> SABCL, Vol. 28, p. 91.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 29, p. 445.

\* The last three lines are from one of the three passages dictated last by Sri Aurobindo as additions to *Savitri*. The autobiographical slant is unmistakable.

While Pondicherry was stunned by the news, the sadhaks were overwhelmed by a sudden sense of desolation. It was as though a fathomless zero was flung across the world.

Leaders and savants who had known Sri Aurobindo and those who had only followed his career from a distance or had merely read his works, all were equally shaken by the news that came over the air in the morning. The President of India, Rajendra Prasad, said in the course of the statement that he issued: "India will worship and enshrine his memory and place him in the pantheon of its greatest seers and prophets." The Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, referred to Sri Aurobindo's "astonishing brilliance of mind" and described him as "one of the greatest minds of our generation". The news took Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's mind to the "very beginnings of our struggle for freedom". Dr. C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar saw in Sri Aurobindo's spiritual life "a reduplication of the quest and the askesis of the Buddha and other apostles of humanity". Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, then India's ambassador in Russia, described Sri Aurobindo as "the greatest intellectual of our age and a major force for the life of the spirit". Numberless were such tributes, and they had the ring of spontaneity; many were wrung from the heart, many emanated from a genuine appreciation of the poet, the patriot, the philosopher, or the great sage of Pondicherry.

Sri Aurobindo's disciples and close associates, of course, could hardly recover from the impact of the event and formulate their reactions. For instance, S. Doraiswami Aiyar could merely say: "I have been shaken out of my foundations to grasp the significance of what is apparently the greatest tragedy to humanity at this critical juncture in its history." Dr. R. Vaidyanathswami remarked that "to the devotees and sadhaks, in the Ashram and outside it, he had been their Rock of Refuge, and the world without him would lose its brightness".

An English disciple, Morwenna Donnelly, recorded in great anguish of spirit: Faced by this event, I felt that for the first time I could understand a

little of that desolation of spirit which the followers of Jesus must have endured between the terrible Friday and the evening of the ‘first day of the week’. Jesus had warned his followers that his Kingdom was not of the earth, and Sri Aurobindo too had often warned his disciples not to visualise the promised Supramental descent in their own convenient mental terms. What Jesus had said to “doubting Thomas” was pertinent still: *Be not faithless but believing!*

Some disciples who were poets as well were able to invoke out of the fiery ordeal of their agony itself the “marvel bird” of ever-living love and gratitude and hope. Thus one of them, the Ceylonese-born J. Vijayatunga:

Are we sad today? Is the earth dark without light?  
Nay, Master, Thou didst not live in vain  
Thy life sublime and austere was not spent  
For nought.... Holding to the hem  
Of Thy garment we shall raise ourselves  
To High Heaven, by Thy Grace, if not now  
In some distant age, and once again  
We shall behold Thee, O Master,  
Shining with ever greater lustre, shining  
Like the Sun, but unafraid we shall reach Thee  
And touch Thee, and be burnt in the Fire  
Of Thy love.

By 5 a.m., Sri Aurobindo’s body covered in spotless white silk was laid in state on a cot, itself covered in pure white, in the room he had occupied for over 23 years. A painting of the Buddha from Ajanta adorned the eastern wall, and the whole room was strewn with flowers. The Ashram inmates had *darśan* first, between five and six; then the people of Pondicherry and others who had come from outside filed past silently and in the most orderly manner possible

and paid their respects to the almost mythical Person who had made Pondicherry his home for a period of forty years.

Although it was intended at first that the body should be interred in the Ashram compound in the afternoon, the preparations were suddenly stopped, and late in the evening an announcement was made conveying the decision to postpone the interment:

The funeral of Sri Aurobindo has not taken place today. His body is charged with such a concentration of Supramental light that there is no sign of decomposition and the body will be kept lying on his bed so long as it remains intact.

By evening over 60,000 people, young and old, had queued past the sublime Master — their eyes dimmed with tears and their visible grief one with spontaneous and solemn silence. For everyone — for almost everyone of the sixty thousand — it was a unique moment, a moment abstracted out of the stream of time when eternity was made out of the moment. Each took the burden of his (or her) own personality, carried his own inner climate of the soul; and the figure of the Purusha lying in the *ananta-śayanam* posture affected each a little differently perhaps, yet it was also on the whole a cleansing, cathartic and chastening experience for most.

One of the inmates, Dara (Aga Syed Ibrahim), had a singular experience that morning when he walked past Sri Aurobindo's body lying on the cot in its snow-white background:

I found myself in Sri Aurobindo's own room by the side of his cot. He seemed so peaceful and happy, and the flesh shone with a new lustre which I had failed to see at the *darśan* time on 24<sup>th</sup> November. Why could I not see it before?... I could not take my eyes off his face and arms. It seemed

to me he was alive. It was certain that he was in a condition of deep and upward soaring trance just then.<sup>5</sup>

Many others too had similar experiences. Between 1.30 a.m. and 7.30 p.m. was a stretch of eighteen hours, yet Sri Aurobindo's body had not only not shown any signs of decomposition, it had actually acquired a new lustre and the radiant complexion of life! Death, where is thy sting? Whose, then, is the Victory?

The Mother described the new lustre as the Supramental light, and helped Dr. Sanyal also — who at first couldn't — to see it: “a luminous mantle of bluish golden hue around him”. And Sethna's portrait has almost an epiphanic quality: “Spiritually imperial — this is the only description fitting the appearance of the body.... The atmosphere of the room was vibrant with a sacred power to cleanse and illumine, a power which appeared to emanate from the master's poise of conquering rest and to invade the bodies of all the watchers... as if... there came pouring down to humanity the life-transcending grace of the Supermind.” On the 6<sup>th</sup>, more and more pilgrims — including M. Andre Menard, the Commissioner for French Settlements in India — had *darśan* of the miracle of the living God in a lifeless body! It was not simply the delay in the body's decomposition; this was a superb positive leap of revelation as well, the glow of the Golden Purusha in majestic repose.

It was noteworthy that Sri Aurobindo's passing moved deeply all sections of the community throughout India. Officials and ministers of the French India Government and the Government of India in Pondicherry were among those who paid their homage to the departed Seer. Floral wreaths on behalf of the President of India and the Prime Minister were placed before Sri Aurobindo. Telegrams from all corners of the world poured in continually, and letters and messages piled up in heaps. In West Bengal, a Government resolution

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<sup>5</sup> Dara, “My Last Darshan of Sri Aurobindo”, *Mother India*, February 1951.

described Sri Aurobindo as “the greatest Bengali Seer and savant of recent times”, and as a mark of respect to him all Government offices, courts and educational institutions were ordered to remain closed for a day. In Bombay, the share market, the bullion market, and other markets and many institutions were closed on the fifth, and in Kanpur, Benaras, and many other centres too there were similar closures as a mark of respect to the great patriot who had become a Pilgrim of Eternity.

The press everywhere gave wide coverage to the event, and there were well-informed as well as appreciative editorial tributes in most papers. Among the best of these was *The Hindus* leading article on 6 December:

The news of the sudden passing of Sri Aurobindo will be received with profound sorrow throughout the civilised world. In an age of rampant materialism incorruptible witnesses to the supremacy of the spirit are none too many.... The seer of Pondicherry acknowledged no limits to man’s capacity to realise the divine in himself, no inhibitions that might militate against the harmony that alone could establish the rule of righteousness on earth. He spoke with no provincial accent, nor did he make dogmatic assertions that might have had the effect of repelling open minds. His was a universal message and his marvellous mastery of the written word helped to secure for it a respectful hearing across the barriers of race and language. For Aurobindo the prophet the unity of the human family in the Divine consciousness was not merely a matter of faith, it was a goal to be realised.

A shining page in our history records his heroic part in the struggle for Indian freedom. Nurtured on the English poets, his ardent nature rallied early to the call of patriotism, spurning a life of elegant ease. He brought to public life a burning eloquence, a power of idealism and a dynamic leadership which roused the land from end to end and destroyed that passive consent which had been the charter of imperialism.

...it must be confessed that the very subtlety of his speculation and the dazzling opulence of its expression often combine to put off all except the most hardy intellect and the most persevering will; nor should it be forgotten that a philosophy that bases itself on the integral apprehension of truth cannot be understood merely with the discursive intellect. In insisting that philosophy is not merely ideas that are talked about but experience that transforms, Sri Aurobindo was in accord with age-long Indian traditions.... Sri Aurobindo taught a doctrine which may be correctly regarded as not a negation but an amplification of India's immemorial teaching. And generations to come will honour his memory as that of a great path-finder in the realm of the spirit.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> morning the Mother issued a statement that was prayer and benediction both:

Lord, this morning Thou hast given me the assurance that Thou wouldst stay with us until Thy work is achieved, not only as a consciousness which guides and illumines but also as a dynamic Presence in action. In unmistakable terms Thou hast promised that all of Thyself would remain here and not leave the earth atmosphere until earth is transformed. Grant that we may be worthy of this marvellous Presence and that henceforth everything in us be concentrated on the one Will to be more and more perfectly consecrated to the fulfilment of Thy sublime Work.

At 8 a.m. the same day, Dr. Sanyal and two other physicians examined Sri Aurobindo's body 54 hours after life had become extinct, and declared that the body was still intact showing no signs of decomposition. This was certified also by Dr. Barbet, the Chief Medical Officer of French India. Such of Sri Aurobindo's disciples and admirers who had come from outside — by car, train or plane — were permitted to have *darśan*, but the inmates and the local people who had already had *darśan* on the 5<sup>th</sup> or the 6<sup>th</sup> were excluded. This policy of selective *darśan* was enforced on the 8<sup>th</sup> also.

For over three days Sri Aurobindo's body had remained intact: the golden tint had persisted: the eyes closed serenely had yet radiated the Greater Life, not the extinction of life. Might it not be that Sri Aurobindo intended to return to the body? On the 8<sup>th</sup> December, the Mother asked Sri Aurobindo in their occult meeting place to resuscitate, to return to life, but he answered, according to her testimony: "I have left this body purposely, I will not take it back. I shall manifest again in the first Supramental body built in the Supramental way." That seemed to be final; "the lack of receptivity of the earth and men", said the Mother on the 8<sup>th</sup>, "is mostly responsible for the decision Sri Aurobindo has taken regarding the body":

Hard is it to persuade earth-nature's change;  
Mortality bears ill the eternal's touch...<sup>6</sup>

But the world-redeemer must redeem the world even in spite of the world, in spite of recalcitrant humanity:

The poison of the world has stained his throat....  
He dies that the world may be new-born and live.<sup>7</sup>

On the 9<sup>th</sup> morning, after over 100 hours of Supramental sustenance, the first signs of decomposition were noticed at last, and it was decided to inter the body in the evening. The body was placed in a gleaming rose-wood coffin made under Udar Pinto's directions in the Ashram Harpagon Workshop. The box was lined with silver and satin, with a velvet cushion at the bottom. Sri Aurobindo's body was covered with a gold-embroidered cloth, and after India's Consul-General in French India, R.K. Tandon, had offered his homage, Champaklal covered his beloved Father's face with a piece of white cloth, and the lid, carrying Sri Aurobindo's symbol of the two intersecting triangles with

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<sup>6</sup> SABCL, Vol. 28, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 29, p. 447.

water and lotus at the centre,<sup>8</sup> all in gold, was screwed on the coffin. It was then carried by the sadhaks and laid in the cement concreted vault made ready in the Ashram courtyard under the “service tree”, planted in 1930, with its now wide-ranging multiple branches, covering almost the whole place and giving abundant shade and raining protective grace. The coffin was placed in such a way that Sri Aurobindo’s head might still be turned to the east, and concrete slabs soon covered the vault. Floral wreaths were placed, and sadhaks — first Champaklal, then Nolini, then the rest — placed potfuls of earth on the covered vault. There was nothing credal or sectarian about the ceremony. Not a word was spoken, there were no audible hymns or prayers, and no rites that indicated adherence to any particular religion. The enveloping silence was, however, more eloquent and more profound than all the funeral orations of the world. The scene, with the sun slowly setting, was ineluctably symbolic of the happenings.

The Mother in her great silent strength of suffering watched the solemn proceedings from upstairs, through a window overlooking the courtyard. Now that her spiritual comrade and Divine co-worker of over thirty-five years had chosen to withdraw from the scene, who could weigh the Atlas weight of responsibility that now lay on her shoulders? But, then, didn’t Sri Aurobindo anticipate it all — and forewarn all — when he dictated just a few weeks before his passing:

A vast intention has brought two souls close  
And love and death conspire towards one great end.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> In Sri Aurobindo’s symbol, the descending triangle represents Sat-Chit-Ananda (Existence — Conscious-Force — Bliss); the ascending triangle stands for the aspiration from the lower material existence under the form of Life — Light — Love. The junction of both (the central square) is the perfect manifestation — the water is multiplicity or creation and the Lotus at the centre is the Avatar of the Supreme.

<sup>9</sup> SABCL, Vol. 28, p. 459.

Death, so-called “death”, was “a beginning of greater life”. Who could say what the Divine intention was — what was “God’s secret plan”? Alone, alone, seemingly alone in her immaculate solitariness, alone in earth’s transforming hour, alone when the “soul of the world that is Satyavan” is held to ransom by the Asuric hordes of the dark, the hideous spectres of a possible nuclear war, what was to be the Mother’s role in the context of December 1950? Again, hadn’t Sri Aurobindo divined and even created her predicament and also prescribed her course of action in the great passage in *Savitri* dictated almost as the last thing he did as a poet with the vision and the voice Divine:

As a star, uncompanied, moves in heaven  
Unastonished by the immensities of Space,  
Travelling infinity by its own light,  
The great are strongest when they stand alone....  
A day may come when she must stand unhelped  
On a dangerous brink of the world’s doom and hers,  
Carrying the world’s future on her lonely breast,  
Carrying the human hope in a heart left sole  
To conquer or fail on a last desperate verge,  
Alone with death and close to extinction’s edge,  
Her single greatness in that last dire scene,  
Must cross alone a perilous bridge in Time  
And reach an apex of world-destiny  
Where all is won or all is lost for man....  
For this the silent Force came missioned down;  
In her the conscious Will took human shape:  
She only can save herself and save the world.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 460-61.

At last, “immobile in herself”, the Mother gathered force, and gave the world the *mantra* of renewal, the Mother’s hymn of gratitude to the Master in the name and on behalf of all the world and all humanity:

To Thee who hast been the material envelope of our Master, to Thee our infinite gratitude. Before Thee who hast done so much for us, who hast worked, struggled, suffered, hoped, endured so much, before Thee who hast 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.

For days and weeks following, Sri Aurobindo’s closest disciples and most devoted admirers continued to speculate regarding the meaning of the mystic holocaust or self-immolation if such it was. The retention by the body of its natural complexion — if anything the Golden Purusha only more golden — and of its natural tight organic formation puzzled many, not least the medical men. Was it not a reversal of Nature’s Law that Sri Aurobindo’s body — under tropical conditions too, and without the induction of drugs or special conditions — should have defied decomposition for over 100 hours, and reposed “in a grandeur of victorious quiet, with thousands upon thousands having *darśan* of it?”<sup>11</sup> Neither everyday experience nor medical science would give even half that much time as the outside limit for a body in the tropics to resist decomposition after death. And then, — the sustained glow, the supernal calm, the gracious mien! Did all that drama of immitigable death and radiant transcendence mean nothing? Was it no more than — at best — a freak of Nature?

“Withdrawal, the great withdrawal”, they said — but hadn’t Sri Aurobindo’s life been a whole series of withdrawals? While yet young in years, he was withdrawn from his home to the residential school in Darjeeling, and

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<sup>11</sup> K.D. Sethna, *The Passing of Sri Aurobindo*, p. 5.

then from India to England. Having qualified for the I.C.S. (the “heaven-born” Service), he manoeuvred to withdraw from it; having risen high in the Baroda Service and become Acting Principal of the Baroda College, he withdrew from that prison of affluent security and plunged into the maelstrom of politics and revolution; at the height of his influence after Surat, he withdrew to a quietude of Nirvanic calm in a small room in Baroda — then Narayana withdrew him to the Alipore jail so that he could continue his *sādhanā* — and still later Sri Aurobindo withdrew from politics altogether and proceeded from Calcutta to Chandernagore, and from Chandernagore to Pondicherry; and there, having won height after height of realisation and accomplished the God’s Labour of the *Arya*, he withdrew to complete silence on 24 November 1926; and now, in December 1950, this climactic withdrawal from the body itself. Weren’t the several withdrawals so many strategic retreats that were really purposive forced marches, each “withdrawal” merely signifying that one more phase of his campaign of conquest was over and another, in another but related field, had begun? Why, then, regret the “great withdrawal” of 5 December 1950?

Or one reviewed Sri Aurobindo’s diverse roles on the terrestrial stage: a Kacha mastering an alien lore in England but rejecting the blandishments of Devayani; a young Augustus at Baroda, imposing his empire on the “realms of gold”; a Perseus or Prometheus of “Bhavani Mandir”; an Arjuna surrendered to Krishna at Alipore; a Vyasa doing a neo-*Mahabharata* in the *Arya*; a neo-Vishvamitra giving us a new Gayatri in *The Mother*, a Yogishwara Krishna doubled with a Yogishwara Shiva playing an invisible hand in world happenings; and on 5 December 1950, “The Last Great Act of drawing off the ‘halahala’ that his own Mahakala action had precipitated out of the cosmic ferment”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Chimanbhai D. Patel, “Talk on ‘What Sri Aurobindo Stands For’ at Bangalore on 5 February 1967”, *Mother India*, August 1967, pp. 435-36.

Or one tried to find solace in the classical symbol of the seed dying to give life to plant or tree. The whole rhythm of existence upon earth — life and birth and growth and death was a mystery. And the greatest mystery at the heart of phenomenal life was the miracle of resurrection following the shock of the crucifixion. Nolini Kanta Gupta said some time after the event:

He has done it: he has made Nature take the final leap. The mental being with its triple nodi is at last bundled up and cast into the Supramental status. As he saw and assured us,

A seed shall be sown in Death's tremendous hour...

Nature shall overleap her mortal step —

The formed seed is now in the womb developing fast and sure, it awaits the moment to break out into the light of material and universal day.<sup>13</sup>

There was a “death” certainly, and there was a phenomenon surpassing our notions of “death”. The death was unnecessary because, had Sri Aurobindo been willing to use his Yogic force as he had done on former occasions, the “disease” couldn't have made headway and proved mortal. Not age, not disease, not just these; death was suffered, it was almost invited. But why? There must have been a capital reason; not a personal reason, but a cosmic reason — what was it? What was it Sri Aurobindo hoped to achieve — or avert — by making his tremendous assignation with the Night?

Since coming to Pondicherry, the whole aim of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga was to bring the Supermind here into our world, and make it a part of the earth-consciousness, as ‘Life’ and ‘Mind’ already are. When, during his interview on 4 February 1943, Dilip asked Sri Aurobindo, “Is your real work this invocation of the Supramental?” The Master answered very simply, “Yes, I

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<sup>13</sup> *Mother India*, 21 February 1951.

*have come for that*”<sup>14</sup>. If that was the cardinal purpose of Sri Aurobindo’s avatarhood and ministry on earth, anything he did — including his “self-immolation” — must have had a close connection with that fundamental objective. Even in 1938, the Mother used to see the Supermind descending into Sri Aurobindo, but it couldn’t be settled for good in the earth-consciousness, especially in the physical or the physical mind. In the series of articles included in *The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth*, Sri Aurobindo introduced the “realm between” — the Mind of Light — a limited or delegated power of the Supermind; and we have the Mother’s word — reinforced by the experience of the Supramental radiance from his body from 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> December — that “as soon as Sri Aurobindo withdrew from his body, what he called the Mind of Light got realised here”. Was it, perhaps, necessary for Sri Aurobindo to receive the full force of the Supermind in the physical, retain it for a few days, so that the way might be cleared for the ultimate Supramentalisation of the earth and man?

It is the mark of the ‘gentleman’ that he would suffer himself, rather than inflict pain on others or even see them suffer. According to Nirod, Sri Aurobindo was a “Supramental perfect gentleman”, and had a magnanimity of the kind described in the lines —

A magnanimity as of sea or sky  
Enveloped with its greatness all that came.

And it is of Shiva most that Sri Aurobindo reminded Nirod!<sup>15</sup> And Yogiswara Shiva, what was his role in world-existence:

A dreadful cord of sympathy can tie  
All suffering into his single grief and make

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<sup>14</sup> D. K. Roy, *Among the Great*, Jaico Edition, p. 359.

<sup>15</sup> “Talk on ‘Sri Aurobindo — Perfect Gentleman’ on 12 June 1970”, *Mother India*, August 1970, p. 413.

All agony in all the worlds his own....

The poison of the world has stained his throat.<sup>16</sup>

If he could himself invite and absorb — even at the cost of surrendering the material envelope that was his body — the first full impact of the Supramental descent (as Shiva received the impact of Ganga cascading in a downpour on the earth), both to make sure of the descent and to contain and consolidate the gains for the world, why, certainly he would do it — as Shiva drank the poison and yet contained it in his throat! If the victory could be won somewhere sometime by somebody, it would become possible ultimately for anybody to win it anywhere. To open the Possibility was the main thing. And the sacrifice of his body, as the first physical base for the demonstration of the Supramental possibility — if that could advance the date of the total descent of the Supramental light, or ensure the near descent — well, the sacrifice was worth making. Since, after all, even without his physical presence, he would be *here*, one with the Mother's consciousness and power, he could also accelerate, witness and participate in the decreed Divine manifestation upon earth.

“A meditative silence reigned in the Ashram for twelve days after the passing of the beloved Master,” writes Rishabchand; “then the normal activities began, but with a striking difference. One felt a pervading Presence in the Ashram atmosphere....”<sup>17</sup> On 14 December the Mother half-admonished the sadhaks: “To grieve is an insult to Sri Aurobindo who is here with us, conscious and alive.”

And on 18 January 1951, she gave a firmer assurance still:

We stand in the presence of Him who has sacrificed his physical life in order to help more fully his work of transformation.

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<sup>16</sup> SABCL, Vol. 29, p. 446.

<sup>17</sup> *Mother India*, February 1955, p. 12.

He is always with us, aware of what we are doing, of all our thoughts, of all our feelings and all our actions.

The Samadhi itself, visited daily by hundreds in an attitude of devotion and prayer, seemed to testify to the reality of Sri Aurobindo's continued Presence, bathed in the life-giving rays of the Everlasting Day. In Nirodbaran's inspired language:

Out of the Samadhi, a thousand flames seem to be mounting up and, lodged in our soul, burning in an ever rejuvenating fire, while His Presence enveloping and merging with and radiating from the Mother's being and body is pervading the whole atmosphere. One can see His Presence, hear his footfalls, his rhythmic voice, ever vigilant, devoid of the encumbrance of the physical body.<sup>18</sup>

Still Nirod hears the Master's whisper, "*I am here, I am here*", and with the ear of faith we can hear the words too.

The mystic realisation of his presence in our midst — for his nectarean presence and beneficence is not confined to the Samadhi environs or even the Ashram alone — is the promise of preservation, liberation and transformation to humanity poised perilously on the edge of the precipice; the deep Abyss on one side, the steep ascent to truth on the other. In this phoenix hour, the hour of the unexpected, when the Asuric and Divine forces are fighting the battle of man's future — the battle of Satyavan, the Soul of the World, — Sri Aurobindo gives us the all-suffering Word that his coming will not have been in vain, that his ministry, "Sri Aurobindo's Action", is as pauseless and potent as ever.

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<sup>18</sup> Nirodbaran, *Sri Aurobindo: 'I am here, I am here'*, p. 24.

Come, O Creator Spirit, come,  
And make within our hearts thy home;  
To us thy grace celestial give,  
Who of thy breathing move and live.<sup>19</sup>

K. R. S. Iyengar

*(Sri Aurobindo — A Biography and A History, Fourth Revised Edition,  
Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education,  
Pondicherry, August 1985, pp. 706-18)*

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<sup>19</sup> Stephen Langton, *Sequence in Mass of Pentecost*, translated by Robert Bridges.

## Remembering 5<sup>th</sup> December

### Darshan of Sri Aurobindo

After the interview with Jung in Switzerland, and while studying Indology at the Sorbonne, it became more and more imperative to me to visit Sri Aurobindo.<sup>1</sup> When, during that final summer session at the Academy of International Law at The Hague in Holland, I discovered that I could obtain passage to India and then across the Pacific for very little more than returning to America via the Atlantic, the decision was made.

Correspondence with the *āśram* in Pondicherry began. I discovered Sri Aurobindo now appeared in public only four times a year. The next scheduled Darshan (literally, “face-seeing”, but with the connotation of “blessing”) was to be November 24<sup>th</sup>. I was granted permission to attend.

First by a Dutch ship, the *Oranje*, I went through the Mediterranean, the Suez Canal, the Red Sea, and the Indian Ocean to Colombo, Ceylon, then by boat-train to India. In 1950, Pondicherry, on the south-eastern tip of India, was still a French colony.

I discovered other Americans had come: a woman physical education teacher from New York City, studying *Hatha-yoga*, and two men from Stanford. There were many more visitors from Europe as well as from India proper.

The visitors, including myself, were housed at Golconde, a delightful guesthouse built by a Japanese disciple of Frank Lloyd Wright. My room had an air of simplicity and peace that is hard to describe. The large louvered

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<sup>1</sup> At Stanford University... I attended classes in comparative religion and Indian philosophy given by Dr. Frederic Spiegelberg.... In one of these classes, Dr. Spiegelberg, who had returned from a trip to India, informed us that it was “worth travelling 4000 miles to stand for a few moments before Sri Aurobindo”. At that time I was impressed, but had little intention of going on to India from planned post-graduate studies in Europe.

windows overlooked a garden; along the length of the windows was a raised platform upon which sat a cool water-jug. The bed was complete with mosquito netting; and the floor was of dark stone and cool to the feet during the return monsoon weather. Outside hibiscus bloomed; and in the pool in the courtyard, lotus made bright splashes of color while goldfish darted around and under their leaves.

A number of the permanent residents were from Pakistan [East Pakistan, now Bangladesh] and had followed Sri Aurobindo to Pondicherry upon the division of India, a division of which Sri Aurobindo did not approve. (He believed India should form one whole nation.) Some residents lived at Golconde, some in the main building with dining room two blocks away, and other married residents had separate small homes of their own.

In the month or so before Darshan, I found there was time to explore the countryside and small Indian villages by bicycle, to investigate the French restaurants in town, and to swim in the ocean two blocks from the guest house.

There were events at the *āśram* each day, but one attended or not, without obligation. Mornings, breakfast was served at the main dining hall; usually a banana, home-made grain bread, and cocoa or milk. At noon, if it was ordered in advance, a girl in a sari brought around the shiny, brass, hitched-together dishes with vegetable curries and other dishes. On the lower floor, on a breezeway, there was a place to eat lunch at Golconde. A young Hindu, Vishnu Patel, whose family all lived in Pondicherry, soon introduced us to Indian sweets and to a kind of vegetable-flour doughnut, dipped in a hot sauce, for which I am still often hungry. In Vishnu's company, those of us from the United States and Europe were led to the bazaar, a dhobi who would wash and iron our clothes, and to the best place to buy sandals to wear in this heat.

Each morning, after breakfast, there was a meeting with Mirra Alfassa, called the Mother. There was a flower ceremony, in which visitors both offered and received flowers from her — each flower with its own esoteric meaning for spiritual development. In a small marble-floored room opening onto the

central court, there was also a morning group meditation period with the Mother.

Day by day, more people arrived at the *āśram* at Pondicherry. There were now exhibitions and sports competitions among the younger members of the colony, a fact which highly displeased some of the older Indian visitors. Others were disturbed because there was no “set routine”. One visiting professor of philosophy from Bombay finally explained to me that Sri Aurobindo’s *āśram* was a revolutionary departure from the old style *āśram*. He suggested that before leaving India, I should also visit Ramdas, called “The Laughing Sage of India”, at his *āśram* on the Mangalore Coast. This I did for a week, later, and it gave me greater insight into just how unusual the establishment in Pondicherry was, by older standards. Although I also found Ramdas a charming man, the entire atmosphere differed. There, women and men were expected to sit in separate sections; all food was Indian; and there were none of the modern conveniences one took for granted at Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

In Pondicherry, I was soon told, of course, that Margaret Wilson, the daughter of President Wilson of the United States, had spent her last years here at the *āśram* and had died there. I also discovered that in 1947, the entire colony had been besieged by communists who had sought a French protectorate where communism was still legal. One *āśramite* had been killed.

At night, Pondicherry became a place out of some romantic novel with ships arriving at a free port, loaded with what one suspected were gold bars to be smuggled into India proper. Huge fires on the beach flamed into the night, as white turbaned figures moved here and there.

All of this, of course, was at the village pier, and few regular *āśramites* ventured out at night except to affairs in the central *āśram* hall. But those of us from America had to take in *all* the sights, while we were there.

Afternoons as a rule, I did research in the *āśram* library, taking notes on books, most of which are now available in America. Evenings, a group of us

sometimes took in an outdoor movie in the village. On one such occasion, things became entirely too exciting. The movies were shown in a large tent, with a meager number of benches for Americans and Europeans; most of the villagers sat crosslegged on the sand. Suddenly, on this particular occasion, there was a scurry. A snake had been seen. From then onward, throughout the movie, my feet were under my body on top of the bench. On another occasion in the bazaar, a Hindu snake charmer, angry because I had refused to pay for his show, held a live cobra by the tail, writhing almost in my face. When he accidentally lost hold of the snake and several Hindu men had it slither near their feet, I discovered that Indian men could be extremely volatile and most amusingly fluid of language.

At last, it was the morning of November 24<sup>th</sup>. At Golconde, rumours flew. Although thousands had now arrived for this Darshan, it was said that Sri Aurobindo was ill and might find it impossible to appear. Then, at the last minute, we were told he was well enough. A long line led from the main building, around the block: people of every colour, every style of dress, government officials and high ranking professors, young and old from dozens of countries, wanted to see the philosopher-sage. Each of us finally climbed the stairs to the floor where at the end of a long narrow room Sri Aurobindo in white and the Mother in a gold sari, sat side by side upon a slightly raised platform.

As a Westerner, the idea of merely passing by these two with nothing being said had struck me as a bit ridiculous. I was still unfamiliar with the Hindu idea that such a silent meeting could afford an intensely spiritual impetus. I watched as I came up in line, and I noted that the procedure was to stand quietly before the two of them for a few silent moments, then to move on at a gesture from Sri Aurobindo. What happened next was completely unexpected.

As I stepped into a radius of about four feet, there was the sensation of moving into some kind of a force-field. Intuitively, I knew it was the force of Love, but not what ordinary humans usually mean by the term. These two were

“geared straight up”; they were not paying attention to me as ordinary parents might have done; yet, this unattachment seemed just the thing that healed. Suddenly, I loved them both, as spiritual “parents”.

Then all thought ceased. I was perfectly aware of where I was; it was not “hypnotism” as one Stanford friend later suggested. It was simply that during those few minutes, my mind became utterly still. It seemed that I stood there a very long, an uncounted time, for there *was* no time. Only many years later did I describe this experience as my having experienced the Timeless *in* Time. When there at the Darshan, there was not the least doubt in my mind that I had met two people who had experienced what they claimed. They *were* Gnostic Beings. They had realized this new consciousness which Sri Aurobindo called the Supramental. Later, this same experience made me understand what Heidegger meant by “standing presence”.

The visit was not to end there, however. Several days later, an English doctor staying at Golconde warned me that the condition of Sri Aurobindo’s health was becoming worse. At 1.30 in the morning on December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1950, he passed away of a kidney infection. About 3.30 that same morning, this was announced to everyone in the *āśram*. With great sorrow, I realized I had been at the last Darshan at which both of them would appear together!

During the day of December 5<sup>th</sup>, I hovered about the *āśram* grounds, feeling desolate. Already it had been decided, despite the objections of the French colonial governor, that Sri Aurobindo would be buried in the courtyard of the main building beneath a huge spreading tree. The male *āśramites*, including the visiting doctor, began to build the tomb. I watched the doctor, who had confided to me that he expected Sri Aurobindo to “reveal himself as an avatar”, and he beat with his sledge-hammer on the concrete slab as if he would destroy death itself.

There was weeping, but no hysteria. By afternoon, men and women passed baskets of earth from hand to hand, as the digging continued beneath the tree. Then, there was a new announcement. For all of us there, there would now be

a second Darshan. In lesser numbers, we filed through to view the body of the poet-philosopher lying upon his couch in the upper chamber.

Again, the following morning on December 6<sup>th</sup>, we all filed past. The “force-field” which I mentioned earlier seemed to remain about the body and throughout the room. Dressed in white, upon a white couch before the windows, Sri Aurobindo now lay in state. Bowls of flowers stood around the couch; and, at the bed’s head and foot, disciples of long standing sat quietly, heads bowed.

Unexpectedly, in the afternoon, there was another Darshan. Sri Aurobindo’s face still did not look deathlike. The skin was golden in colour, the white hair blowing on the pillow in a breeze from a fan. The aquiline profile continued to have a prophetic look. There was no odour of death and little incense was burning. To my astonishment, the repeated viewings of his body had a comforting effect. Previously I had always resented the idea of viewing dead bodies.

As I left this third time, I noted other things about the room: a collection of ivories in a carved cabinet, the tiger skins which padded an armchair and a side bench, a small Persian carved table very similar to one I had purchased at an auction in Seattle, years before; and a Japanese seascape on one wall.

By December 7<sup>th</sup>, everyone momentarily expected the funeral. This was, after all, a tropical climate. Bodies were usually burnt as quickly as possible in India. Even the planned burial in earth was a major departure from the usual Hindu custom. The grave had now been completed with large cement blocks lining the tomb. But instead of the burial, an announcement came from the Mother:

The funeral of Sri Aurobindo did not take place today. His body is charged with such a concentration of Supramental light that there is no sign of decomposition and the body will be kept lying on his bed so long as it remains intact.

From the French colony, already exploding with disapproval and its officials much disturbed by the burial plans, came the rumour that the body must have been “shot with formaldehyde” secretly, to preserve it. Moreover, said the officials, the *āśram* was not only breaking the law in burying anyone in the garden, it was worse to keep it so long unburied. (The legal regulation was that no body should be kept unburied longer than 48 hours.)

On the morning of December 7<sup>th</sup>, therefore, a French doctor representing the Government, a Dr. Barbet, arrived to inspect the body of Sri Aurobindo. At the end, he reported it was a “miracle”; there was no deterioration, no *rigor mortis*. It was an unheard of occurrence; the weather had continued to be hot during the entire time. After this official and scientific approval, nothing further could be done to prevent another Darshan. Visitors were flocking from all over India; and the Indian newspapers now proposed that Sri Aurobindo be suggested, posthumously, for the Nobel Peace Prize.

“This time, I suspected it might be the last time. Everyone and anyone was allowed into the *āśram* to pass by Sri Aurobindo’s body: curiosity seekers, villagers, *āśramites* and visitors.

By December 8<sup>th</sup>, silence was observed throughout the *āśram* grounds. Only late comers who had just arrived in Pondicherry were allowed to view the body. Tension grew among the *āśramites*, and incredible speculations became the order of the day. An Indian representative of *Life* magazine came around, wanting to talk to those of us from America. He told us that this phenomenon of bodily preservation after death had never taken place anywhere in India. Why, even *yogis* who specialized in “live” burial had never performed such a feat. No Indian “living saint” in history had preserved his body after death in this fashion. The Indian magazine representative wondered if Sri Aurobindo was not, after all, still alive and only in some kind of trance state or coma.

On December 9<sup>th</sup>, at noon, a notice was posted that there would be a final Darshan for those in the *āśram* at one o’clock. Later, the time was changed to

2.30 p.m. and visitors from outside were allowed in first. The night before, a plane chartered by nineteen people from Darjeeling had flown in. By now, in Golconde, everyone was sharing his or her room; bedrolls crowded the floors and halls of the guest house.

I had, of course, postponed my planned departure date. All of this, I realized, was a situation which would remain entirely unduplicated in my own life. I intended to remain until the end.

On the afternoon of December 9<sup>th</sup>, at 5.00 p.m., the burial service finally took place after another final Darshan. A feeling of force and energy remained in the atmosphere around Sri Aurobindo's vicinity, but that force had now weakened. Afterwards, in absolute silence, everyone in the *āśram* sat in the courtyard. The gates were locked against further curiosity-seekers.

There was no orthodox religious service at the burial. The coffin, of rosewood with metal-gold rings, much like an old and beautiful sea chest, was borne from the *āśram* and lowered into the earth. French officials, all dressed in white, made a line to the left, their faces stern, a bit superior in expression and definitely disapproving of the entire affair. Over the coffin, concrete slabs were laid.

Then, everyone lined up and, one by one, we scattered earth from wicker baskets. It was dark under the spreading tree when each of us had made this last farewell.

On the morning of December 10<sup>th</sup>, when I visited the grave, it was already covered with flowers, incense sticks burning. It was announced that the Mother would carry on at the *āśram* and that a new International University would be opened.

Although the Mother had announced there would be two weeks of meditation during which she would see no one, she graciously granted me a farewell interview on December 15<sup>th</sup>, at 6.00 p.m.

At 5.30, I went into the meditation hall, still very much mentally and emotionally upset by everything that had occurred. She appeared at the top of the stairs, dressed in white. When I smiled, she nodded and said: “Come on up.”

All the questions I had meant to ask seemed to vanish. I was intensely aware that the interview itself was an imposition, when she had so recently lost the companion of thirty years. “They say you wish to see me,” she said quietly.

Before I could think, I blurted out that I seemed to be full of fears, fears of new wars, fears of this or that in my personal life.

“One must not fear,” she said. “By fear, you bring about what you fear.” I nodded, then she added, and I had a feeling she spoke to the world, not just to me: “It’s ego! Ego!”

Several personal matters were discussed, and then of spiritual development, she said: “One must have a spirit of adventure about all this, you know.”

When our brief talk was over, she took a double French marigold from a bronze bowl, on the edge of a small dark table against which she had leaned an elbow while we talked. With a long look, she handed the flower to me.

Only much later, many years later, did I realize how fortunate I had been. Within the space of a year, far from my own shores, I had met three of the world’s greatest human beings: Jung, the Swiss psychiatrist, who had said that man had *outgrown* his concept of God; and these two: Sri Aurobindo, and Mirra Alfassa or the Mother, who together, had attempted to *give* the world that new needed concept of God, as those of spiritual genius always do. Because of them, life continues to have hope and meaning.

Rhoda P. Le Cocq

*(The Radical Thinkers: Heidegger and Sri Aurobindo,*  
1972 edition, pp. 196-203)