



TRIBUTES TO  
NOLINI KANTA GUPTA  
*Pilgrim of the Supermind*

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**NOLINI KANTA GUPTA**

*Pilgrim of the Supermind*

*Edited by*  
NIRODBARAN

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THE MOTHER'S BIRTHDAY MESSAGES  
TO NOLINI

*(Translated from original French)*

Happy Birthday  
Nolini!  
With my blessings for a decisive  
year of realisation in light  
and harmony, truth and love.

13.1.65

The Mother

Happy Birthday  
Nolini  
in silent endurance, one step  
forward towards the victory,  
with the eternal love.

13.1.66

The Mother

Happy Birthday  
Nolini  
for taking another step on the  
luminous path leading to the  
Divine Realisation in Peace,  
love and joy.

13.1.67

The Mother

Nolini  
Happy Birthday! Happy New  
Year in the light, peace, joy and  
love with my love and affection  
and blessings.

13.1.68

The Mother

Happy Birthday  
Nolini  
en route towards the superman  
with my love and affection and  
blessings.

13.1.69

The Mother

Happy Birthday  
Nolini  
and all my love and affection  
and blessings in the light,  
consciousness and joy.

13.1.70

The Mother

Happy  
Birthday Nolini  
with my love and affection for a life  
of collaboration and my blessings  
for the prolonged continuation of  
this happy collaboration in peace  
and love.

13.1.71

The Mother

Happy Birthday  
Nolini  
with my love and affection and  
blessings.

13.1.72

The Mother

Happy Birthday

Nolini.

With my affection, my trust and my blessings.

Go forward towards the Realisation.

13.1.73

The Mother

## INDIRA GANDHI'S MESSAGE

Prime Minister's House  
New Delhi  
In flight  
Delhi – Dabolim  
February 11, 1984

Dear Shri Gupta,

I am so deeply saddened by the news of your father's passing away that I do not know what words to write.

Nolinida was a father not just to you but to the Ashram. I hope his successor will be able to give proper guidance and keep up to the high standards set by Nolinida and the directions given by The Mother. Nolinida was a man of spiritual attainment and quality. India will miss his benign presence. He radiated peace.

You and your family and the inmates of the Ashram have my sincere sympathy and condolences.

Yours sincerely,

(Indira Gandhi)

Shri Samir Kanta Gupta,  
Sri Aurobindo Ashram,  
Pondicherry.

## PAUL RICHARD'S APPRECIATION

### A DIVINE WARRIOR

During our Marathon interview the great French savant Paul Richard said to me, "I see Nolini even more as a divine warrior than as a great thinker. He is Sri Aurobindo's Earthly Shield and Heavenly Sword. His mind is illumined. I admire Nolini."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Extract from an interview by Chinmoy with Paul Richard dated 29 April 1967 at Flatbush, Brooklyn, New York. From the book "Nolini: Sri Aurobindo's Unparalleled Friend - Son - Disciple" by Chinmoy.

## NOLINI-DA — HIS ASHRAM LIFE

### NIRODBARAN

It was about ten years ago that we assembled in this historic playground of hallowed memories on the occasion of the Mother's passing and it was Pranab who addressed you at that time. Most unexpectedly it is on the occasion of another departure that we have assembled again tonight. It is the passing of Nolini-da who was, to borrow a happy phrase, one of the first and foremost disciples of the Mother, her collaborator and our eldest spiritual brother. The sanctity, solemnity and beauty of this occasion my poor words cannot express though my mind can envisage it without fathoming it. His "unhorizoned" consciousness is too wide for human measurement and it never ceased to climb towards the heights even when he fell ill. At that time I was once called at night. He said, "You see, I went out of my body and when I came back, the body received a jerk. Hence this minor disturbance. You will understand. I don't need any medicine." The tone was reminiscent of Sri Aurobindo. I had come to know that often Nolini-da used to go out of his body and had to keep his hold on somebody's hand in order to keep contact with the earth. Once, he is said to have gone out to Bengal at the call of a dear friend of his young days. The friend was mortally ill and died. When Nolini-da brought back his soul to the Mother, she asked, "You have brought him to me?" It was a very perilous journey, indeed and he suffered much on the way. I had read also the Mother saying that he could easily go out of his body to the Sachchidananda state. Well, these superconscious things are beyond me; I know, a bit of the subconscious ones. Nevertheless I feel it my humble duty to present a few glimpses of his vast-visioned life to you so that you may have a rough idea of a person who rarely spoke of himself and to whom you may offer your gratitude and love for having quietly done so much for us. I must confess that most of what I shall say is based on my observation, reflection and conviction,

I had a moment's sight of him when I met the Mother for the first time. She came to see me accompanied by Nolini-da, Amrita-da and Dilip-da. It was Dilip-da who had arranged the interview. Later, when I came to settle in the Ashram for good, I used to hear of three people's names: Nolini-da, Amrita-da and Pavitra-da and of these three Nolini-da was an enigma, known to be a man of few words, and kept himself apart. People would not dare to assail his sanctum except on strict business. He was the secretary of the Ashram and was occupied with his own work but they all respected

his aloofness. Often he used to be brusque with them and there were quite a number of anecdotes current in the Ashram about his abruptness. He had acquired the knack of upsetting people without himself getting upset. I shall quote two such stories. Once a sadhak complained to the Mother for what he considered Nolini-da's rude behaviour to him. Sri Aurobindo wrote to Nolini-da about it. As a result he called the sadhak and apologised to him. On another occasion the hair-cutting saloon was to be opened. Nolini-da was approached to perform the ceremony; he flatly refused. The person wrote to the Mother and proposed another name, instead. When, next day, Nolini-da went to see the Mother, she asked him why he had refused. On coming down, he hastened to the saloon and opened it. There you can see two traits in his nature, the outer somewhat jerky and the inner obedient to the Mother, obedience being the first requisite of a disciple. Amrita who was his close associate used to say that Nolini-da was like *yaṣṭi madhu*. You have to chew it before you taste its sweetness. What a conversion took place in the later phase of his life! I marvelled at it. But let me not anticipate.

Though I kept myself at a distance because of his rudeness, his learning and writings had a great attraction for me. I admired and respected him for them as well as for his personality. His passion for knowledge, which made buying books his one hobby, could be summarised by a verse from *Savitri* "He sought for knowledge like a questing hound." If the small can be compared with the great, I had also such a passion, but a minor one and I tried to satisfy it at Sri Aurobindo's expense. You know the way I provoked, pestered, even bothered him with a host of questions. While I did this, Nolini-da gathered his consciousness in the 'quiet' cathedral of his mind and seated him on its high altar as the supreme deity. You know how Sri Aurobindo initiated him in the esoteric lores of the Vedas and Upanishads as well as in the secular knowledge of various literatures and languages. Sri Aurobindo's heart must have been gladdened to find such a worthy young mind. Thus his approach to Sri Aurobindo was through the mind. I need not dwell at length upon this aspect, since his erudition is quite well known. Perhaps I can summarise it by quoting another expression from our Shastra. Both *parā vidyā* and *aparā vidyā* were at his command and they have all gone into 10 volumes of Bengali and 8 volumes of English works. They can make a side-stream running along with Sri Aurobindo's vast Brahmaputra-like productions, fed and nourished by them and flowing into oneness with them. Sri Aurobindo has said that Nolini-da had a remarkable mind.

I have often wondered how he could contain such "infinite riches in a little room". For except his broad and high forehead, the other parts of his body were frail. His forehead often made me think of Shakespeare and Einstein. In fact, at times during our medical visits in the morning when he had just come down from the inner empyrean as if with the gold dust of trance-land still on his body, a few locks of hair disarrayed, eyes dreamy, he looked very much like a mystical Einstein. But after he had had his wash, combed his hair and brushed his pet moustache, he was the elegant incarnation of Virgil who he had been in a previous life.

Still, he was by no means a book-worm, a recluse. He had his hands full. He had to manage the bulk of the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's correspondence, distribute their letters to sadhaks and carry on other work as well as his voluminous writings. His domestic chores he did himself: washing his own clothes, making his bed, bringing his kuja-water, preparing his own tea, polishing his shoes, etc. He had a weakness for shoes. When Sri Aurobindo wanted to get rid of a pair of Vidyasagari shoes, having no further need for them, he said they could be given to Nolini since he was fond of shoes. He was a bit of a dandy. He was doing regular athletic exercises and taking part in competitions. Mass drill was his favourite item and he participated in it till his late seventies. With what gusto he practised the Mass drill which I found boring!

Every fraction of his life was disciplined and methodised. That is the external reason of his keeping fit and being capable of a huge output in a single life. I wonder if there is any world-figure today with so many facets combined and harmonised to such a degree of perfection. Indeed, he was a perfectionist.

But where is the key to be found for such various accomplishments? It was certainly in his inner development that lay the secret. He practised yoga with one-pointed concentration and took up his literary and other activities as a part of it. As in Sri Aurobindo's own case, so in Nolini-da's and in other cases of flowering in art, literature, etc. in the Ashram, Yoga and the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's force were mainly responsible for success. It seems during the most brilliant period of the Ashram in 1927, when the Mother was bringing down the gods into the sadhaks, there descended into Nolini-da's *ādhāra* the consciousness of Varuna, the Vedic god of Vastness. Hence the characteristic vastness in his writings. One could never achieve such an amplitude and integrality by mere mental labour. The work of the mere mind would be nothing but dry intellectuality. Besides, he must have attained a high degree of spiritual realisation to be able to contain that Vastness. Nolini-da's later productions, like those of his Master, must have been written from a silent mind. I

would say, transcribed rather than written. I would have doubted such a process, had not Sri Aurobindo convinced me of it by his personal examples and cogent arguments during our correspondence.

Now I enter a *terra incognita*. To talk of the inner developments of a Yogi is like a layman perorating on the theory of relativity. Fortunately I can draw upon some casual hints given by the Master and the Mother. Once when someone complained that Nolini-da was not doing Sri Aurobindo's yoga since he kept aloof, was unsociable, etc., Sri Aurobindo replied, "If Nolini is not doing my yoga, who is doing it? Is sociableness, a part of yoga?" Secondly, when it was alleged that the sadhaks here would count for nothing in the world outside, Sri Aurobindo remarked, "The quality of sadhaks is so low?... There are at least half a dozen people here who live in the Brahmic consciousness...." This statement excited my curiosity and I surmised that Nolini-da must be one of these. I began to study his outer life. I could not get any clue except that he was absorbed in his own sadhana. Otherwise, he was a closed shell, would not expose his pearls to an outsider. Besides, I was just a novice and had not the ghost of an idea of what the Brahmic consciousness was. Apropos of my query I received another sweetly castigating letter from the Master.

None the wiser, I went on merrily without caring much about it, for Sri Aurobindo was my Brahman till he passed away. And then the Mother filled his place. In the 'sixties came a startling disclosure from the Mother. She wrote on Nolini-da's birthday card — "Nolini en route towards the superman." The years that followed brought a succession of revelations: "Nolini, with love and affection for a life of collaboration"... "For the prolonged continuation of this happy collaboration"... and lastly, in 1973, "With my love and blessings...for the transformation. Let us march ahead towards the Realisation." These are very big words indeed. I don't know if any other person received such high encomiums. I could now understand to some extent what these simple expressions meant and I was struck speechless. But Nolini-da swallowed all calmly and with ease. The coming superman did not 'undermine' the natural man. I could not glean his ample inner field. Perhaps he was marching ahead with the Mother and when there was "one more step to take and all would be sky and God," the greatest calamity befell the earth. The Mother passed away. There was an overclouding gloom, dejection, consternation.

It was then that Nolini-da came forward and took the lead as it were. When the Mother's body was brought down and laid in the Meditation Hall, the Trustees came and Nolini-da was called from his room. He was requested to say a few words.

Keeping quiet for a moment, he stood up straight like a column of light and uttered in a commanding voice: "Let us stand together and go forward in harmony and collaboration. The Mother has said she will be with us in our consciousness." He felt perhaps that a vacuum had been made and that he was called to do his part.

Now a new life began for Nolini-da and a new phase for us. He had to come out of his shell. All eyes turned to him for guidance, for help, spiritual and mundane. His guidance was said to be always precise and correct. He was invited to witness many functions; his approval was sought in many activities. In other words, he was called to shoulder a big part of the Mother's spiritual work. A plethora of visitors asked for his touch. His writings were continuing in the same way and he used to read many of them in the School, in the Playground and in the Meditation Hall in front of his room. The idea, I believe, was to hold the Ashramites together and bathe them in the spiritual Presence. The Mother had assigned to him a French class for the elders and he continued it. In this manner, he was coming out more and more and his presence and nearness were available. It will not be an exaggeration to claim that he held the divisive tendencies together and saved us from falling apart. His hold particularly on the youth was of very good augury. When he had to undergo an operation for a cataract, the young boys kept vigil over him for about three months. Strange enough to observe that people operated upon along with him or afterwards got cured in two or three weeks while he took three months or so owing to a number of complications. He remarked jocularly that because he was given so much attention Nature took revenge.

In 1977, he had an apocalyptic vision of the Mother. He writes: "The Mother says, 'Just see. Look at me. I am here come back in my new body — divine, transformed and glorious. And I am the same Mother, still human. Do not worry. Do not be concerned about your own self, your progress and realisation nor about others. I am here, look at me, gaze into me, enter into me wholly, merge into my being, lose yourself into my love, with your love; you will see all problems solved, everything done. Forget everything, forget the world. Remember me alone, be one with me, with my love.' "

After this vision probably he began to talk more and more about the Mother. To the departing students of the Higher Course he used to repeat that the Mother would be with them wherever they went. They were bound to her by a golden chain.

In 1978 either due to overstrain or some other reason he fell ill. Dr. Bose, Dr. Datta and myself formed a trio. I was the zero of the three, for my presence was more of a

personal nature than a professional one. Now we enter the last phase of Nolini-da's long career. It is a sweet song telling of sad things. His heart had gone wrong; to use Sri Aurobindo's words, it was misbehaving. The blood pressure was high. The doctors succeeded in stabilising them. Satisfied with the progress Dr. Bose went to his hometown for about a month. After he had returned, there was a recrudescence of the symptoms and the condition took a serious turn. Consultation with an outside physician was thought of but Nolini-da had confidence in his doctors and vetoed the idea. However, things were becoming critical. Nolini-da himself said that he would be passing away. The Calcutta people were informed. Somehow the faith and energetic intervention of the doctors, particularly of Datta, called down the Mother's Grace and Nolini-da was sent back from the threshold. A slow recovery followed and along with it he took up gradually his previous work, but naturally modified according to his measure. His movements were now confined to the Ashram precincts. Apart from the recording of *Savitri*, translating it into Bengali, seeing visitors and various other minor activities, most of the time he used to keep to his bed. We were visiting him as usual. At this time or even before, I do not remember, my stock shot up with him, though I was only a pulse-taking doctor. He used to call me by name, "Nirod", which had an Aurobindonian ring, and, stretching his hand, ask me to feel his pulse. Often he used to do that and ask: "All right?" When all of us had examined him, his query was again: "All right?" "Yes, all right, Nolini-da," we would answer and depart.

No superfluous talk. Sometimes he would simply give a steady look and then utter, "Bonne nuit." From Datta he would inquire about his patients or he would himself speak of some patients who had approached him. Monique, the French Ballet teacher, had a very bad fracture and had to be sent to France. Nolini-da used to inquire about her almost three times a day.

After that massive attack he never enjoyed sound health and was kept on drugs which he used to swallow without any murmur. Anima his personal attendant would exclaim that she had not seen any other person taking 4 or 5 bitter drugs a day as if it was a habit. When the symptoms increased, I being near at hand was called at night and, if necessary, the others were informed. At times all the three medicos were present. In addition to his own troubles, occasionally Nolini-da used to groan in sleep as if in pain over the ailments of other people. Once he cried out repeatedly a person's name. That person appeared to have been in a very critical condition that night and Nolini-da's body received the vibration. The person's condition turned for the better. There are numerous instances to show that he was sensitive to other people's inner

and outer condition and perhaps sent help to them in the yogic way. I know one case of an "incurable" malady cured or at least arrested by him. He had given peace and taken away deep sorrow from people. A woman came from London and wanted to have Nolini-da's darshan. She was asked to take my permission. I saw her coming back from the darshan with tears streaming from her eyes. I wanted to know the reason. She said that when she had got up after pranam, she was flooded with light coming down upon her. She was permitted to do pranam to him every day from a distance. This was the first concrete proof I had of his spiritual communicative power and my solar plexus was knocked out. There was also a certain Bishop of good standing who visited the Ashram and met Nolini-da. He said that he felt a great power in him.

A few months before his passing, Dr. Bose suddenly passed away. Nolini-da was deeply moved. With tears in his eyes and a choked voice, he murmured: "What a fine soul! What a fine soul! He should not have gone before me." He embraced his two weeping daughters when they came to see him. Such human expression of feeling from him was something new to us. Once Bose had seen in a dream Nolini-da's upper body full of golden light; the lower part was absent. Nolini-da commented that it was an overmind vision. A few days later, as he was lying in his bed, I asked him through Anima where his consciousness could be. He answered: "Why, with the Mother!" I wanted more precision. Then he answered: "In the Overmind, in the cosmic consciousness." I was simply swept off my feet. Though the Mother had indicated it, the information coming from Nolini-da himself had a tremendous effect upon me — I don't know how people in general would understand the significance of that large utterance. Quietly I went away and tried to absorb the impact, for I knew more fully by that time what it meant and at once in a flash many of his actions or decisions which had puzzled us were revealed in a new light. He was suspected to have some weakness for his family. He replied: "Great souls are beyond such ties." For the first time in our knowledge he had made a personal reference. We were also baffled by his tolerant attitude towards those who were known to do harm to the Ashram. When I saw him distributing his own photos to selected people, I was piqued. Now all these bizarre-looking movements troubled me no more and every question was set at rest. The mystery and mystique of all his actions became clear to me. Later I learned from Anima that Nolini-da had confided to her that he was mostly in the Overmind but at times a little beyond it.

To resume, yet cut our story short: Bose had gone from the doctor-group, two were now in harness, Datta being the head — I, a helper. Nolini-da was comparatively

well and we expected that he would score his century. Anima and Matri Prasad, his two closest attendants, were regaling him with many stories and he too enjoying them. They were very free with him and would cut even personal jokes. I myself used to feel embarrassed at times; for this image of Nolini-da was a new development and I kept always my old attitude of respect towards him. In this period, which was a little before Bose's departure, his most memorable action was to go and see Vasudha, a former personal attendant of the Mother, on her last birthday. We were somewhat alarmed. She had been bedridden. Nolini-da would often inquire about her and Datta kept him informed. I think Nolini-da had realised that Vasudha's days were numbered. So he took this opportunity, though he could hardly walk even a few steps. We had great difficulty in putting him in a car and getting him just across the road. He sat before Vasudha with his chest heaving from exhaustion, took her hands into his own, blessed her and then came back.

His Bengali translation of *Savitri* had been completed and was expected to come out before his next birthday. Since the last months of 1983 things had begun to take a bad turn. His old pain in the heart re-appeared, stringent measures had to be taken regarding seeing visitors and other activities. His birthday on January 13 which had been expected to be a day of jubilation passed quietly, but he did not fail to meet the out-going students and give his blessings. Pain and distress were now on the increase. All modern measures were adopted, but only with momentary relief. Again the question of consulting a known heart-specialist was thought of, but met with disapproval. Distress and agony pervaded the general picture. We were at constant call and the attendants were ever vigilant, particularly at night. Less than a week before the last act, Nolini-da said to Anima that he would like to distribute his *Savitri*-translation to all the attendants. Books were a bit late in coming. He ordered: "Get the books quickly and call the people," This was the last gesture. As *Savitri* was Sri Aurobindo's last composition, its translation was Nolini-da's last composition. And I can affirm that the masterly translation has added a large dimension to the Bengali language. When more than once doubts were raised about the exactness of some words, Nolini-da said with force: "One has to read the Vedas, Upanishads, Mahabharata, Sanskrit literature before questioning their use." He surprised me by this unusual self-estimation.

On the 7th February the closing scene was enacted. We had examined him in the morning. The condition, though bad, was not critical. At noon, I heard that he had taken his usual meal and relieved himself. Datta was by his side. I was suddenly called

at 4 p.m. and informed that after the motion Nolini-da had collapsed. When I came down, Datta said with a gloomy air that there was a sudden fall of blood pressure. Nolini-da had gone within; his eyes were shut; the pulse was thready and he was sweating profusely. The end was near. I sat by his side and called "Nolini-da!" He opened his eyes, gave a look of recognition as if from the Beyond and closed his eyes. Slowly, quietly, the breathing stopped at 4.42 p.m. — the *grand finale* of the long epic story.

Once I had collapsed due to a sudden fall of blood-pressure. Nolini-da was informed that I was passing away. He came to see me and found that I had revived. He seems to have remarked later that I couldn't go away, I had still a lot of work to do. I suppose, one of the assignments was to help in his departure.

The day after the event, his body was laid out in the Meditation Hall. Hundreds saw his chiselled face embalmed in a Nirvanic peace.

The rest of the story is well-known. One thing to be observed is that his body was taken to the Cazanove garden in royal splendour. The procession of cars was something new in the history of Pondicherry. And almost the entire Ashram and a group of visitors made their pilgrimage to the burial place as a token of their love and respect. That too was something unprecedented in our experience. A man who had lived a quiet, unassuming life had earned the veneration of thousands. The body was laid to rest by the side of his old friends and colleagues Amrita-da and Pavitra-da, fulfilling his last wish. This was his only wish.

Now when I ruminate over what I was given to observe of the last phase of Nolini-da's life, a few rare qualities remain impressed upon my memory and reveal to me his true soul. First, his freedom from the taint of personality: ego was dead. He had love for all and sundry. Enemy he had none, not even those who were considered to be doing harm to the Ashram. He accepted them all as the Mother's children and left it to her to judge them. In consequence he gained universal respect and confidence. The government also had trust in him and the Prime Minister stated that he radiated peace.

Secondly, he always preserved a strong strain of impersonality even with those people who were close to him. That was his natural genius. This was a typically Aurobindonian stamp. The other Aurobindonian stamps were: he would not push himself to the front and never interfered with what people did, even when they happened to be his near ones, unless approached for advice. He never criticised

anyone and did not approve of anyone making criticisms and using strong language. A large liberality, sweetness and compassion crowned all his actions and movements. Even children used to love him. If he did not approve of anyone's actions, he did not confuse the man with his actions. He could invite the man to sit by his side.

These were the later manifestations of his hidden divine nature. Once somebody complained to him about life and its difficulties. He answered: "Why am I here?" Then the person who had complained said: "You are needed for the Ashram. Therefore the Mother has kept you here." In a grave tone Nolini-da declared: "I am here for a particular development. So far in my evolution there was the sattwic consciousness: the element of knowledge. Now a new element has been added: love, ananda. For that new growth I am here. But no use saying all this. People won't understand and they will distort it."

Some of his last utterances are worth recording. I was once called at night and found him sitting on the edge of his bed. He said: "You see, this body is of the earth earthy and will mix with the earth. But the realisation will remain." Then in the last days he used to be in-drawn. We thought he was sleeping. When he came out of his absorption he had the appearance of an ever-joyous child and he also spoke and behaved like one. I said: "Perhaps you are in the Sachchidananda state" — to which he replied with a smile: "It is in an Anandamaya region." On another occasion he was heard to mumble in an absorbed way: "Sat-yogi, Sat-yogi." Asked whether he was by any chance referring to himself, he softly whispered: "Yes." After that he withdrew almost wholly into himself and, when he spoke, it was to tell many that he would be leaving his body. On his 95th birthday he remarked: "This new year will be very critical for me." When he was once asked where he would be after he had left his body he stated very clearly: "A little beyond the Overmind." During those days he had also visions of the three goddesses Chamunda, Kali and Gauri. About Chamunda, he said that she was trying to do mischief with his heart and he had detected it. Kali was all dark: everywhere there was darkness. In another vision he saw that he had gone away to a solitary place, all alone: there was no sign of life anywhere around. Then he saw Matri, following him.

When I try to assess his contribution to the sum-total of the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's work, I feel that short of the Supermind he realised in himself a true synthesis of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga and proved that this many-sided, complex, comprehensive Yoga is not an insane chimera. Further, he has made the path easier and smoother for posterity, as he has himself said that his realisation will remain. He

serves as a bridge, an intermediary between us and the Mother. I can illustrate this point by citing the experience of a young sadhika the very night Nolini-da passed away. She went home with a heavy heart after seeing Nolini-da. She read a few pages from *The Yoga of Sri Aurobindo* before going to sleep. She dreamt that Nolini-da's body had been shifted beside the Mother's room on the second floor. People were going to see him in batches. When she arrived, she saw Nolini-da standing at the door radiant, youthful and full of zest. He called her in and cried loudly: "Come, come, today is my Bonne Fete." Then he made her sit down and talked a lot on the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Simultaneously she saw his dead body lying beside the wall, as it had been in his room. She was very much astonished. Then she read a chit from Counouma, asking her to go to Cazanove, since she was one of the attendants, and a vehicle had been arranged for the purpose.

As in life, so in after life his was a totally dedicated and one-pointed luminous soul come down to serve the Divine Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Not that he had no difficulties. He had plenty of them and had to fight a hard battle. But what saved him, he said, was his completely frank confession of them to the Mother.

Let us try, therefore, to be Nolini-like, to quote K. D. Sethna, if the Mother and the Master seem far beyond our reach.

Finally, my, story will be incomplete if I fail to recognise the inestimable service rendered by our young people to Nolini-da. We cannot be too grateful to them for what they have done night after night, specially Anima and Matri. Anima's devotion and self-abnegation will be a matter of history. For years she looked after Nolini-da — his secretary, nurse, mother, sister, all in one. As soon as he called "Anima", she was there. She gave him all the royal comfort and ease he deserved. She may have her faults — who is free? — but, without her, Nolini-da would have left us long ago and in a very lamentable condition. Our admiration for her knew no bounds. She kept her eyes upon the comfort of the attendants as well. She was full of life and cheer and had a fund of tales, anecdotes, reminiscences by which she tried to enliven Nolini-da's mood and mitigate his physical distress though she herself had high blood-pressure and was subject to headaches, pains and other ailments.

In conclusion let us hear a part of the recorded voice of Nolini-da where we get a clue to his true being (*svarūpa*):

"The story is after all the story of our adventure upon earth, a common adventure through centuries — not only through centuries but perhaps from the very creation of

the earth. It is the story of the adventure of a group of souls, souls who were destined, who were created for the advent of a new creation. I will speak of only just a few bits and some important episodes of this adventure in which I participated, because you wanted to hear my life.

"We came, all of you, all of us who are here, most of them, in different epochs at the crucial stages of our evolution. In different periods, whenever there was a necessity of an upliftment or an enlightenment, we all came together, each in his own way. So one or two episodes like that I can tell. For example, in Europe a crucial turning-point of its history was the Renaissance, the new light. At the time of the Renaissance we all know that the creator of the Renaissance was Sri Aurobindo — Leonardo — and the whole Renaissance was in his consciousness and all those who flocked around him, each one did his own work. You know that Amrita was intimately connected with that work — he was Michael Angelo. And Moni was there — Suresh Chakravarty. He was one of the chief artists. I have forgotten his name...

"But all...the work they actually did, you know, the important thing, the consciousness they brought — expressed some sad event, some not so, but living, concretising the consciousness....

My contribution in that age of Renaissance was in France. The Mother always said: "Your French incarnation was very prominent, even today it is very prominent." That little bit of evolution is still living. The consciousness at that time in France — that was also the beginning of the Renaissance and... the new creation, new poetry — I was a poet of that time and introduced the new poetry in France. At that time the King of France was François I<sup>er</sup>. He was in the political — also in the general life of the people he introduced this new light, new manner of consciousness. So I was with him. And who was François Premier you know — Duraiswamy!

"The consciousness of the reality of that country was so strong that when I started reading or writing French — I wrote French — then sometimes I noted down some lines... later I found that I had noted down exactly some verses of this poet of France, Ronsard..."

I may add an incident of recollection by Nolini-da of a past life. One day when he went to inspect our School garden, he was very much interested in observing the plan of the garden, the trees, the lotus pond and he remarked: "I was the gardener of Louis XIV, Le Nôtre."

*N.B.* Nolinida's last act of wisdom which we came to know after his departure was the selection of a competent young sadhak as a Trustee of the Ashram in his place. The selection and the way it was done was really a master-stroke.

## SRI NOLINI KANTA GUPTA

*(A Life Sketch)*

STEPHEN K. WATSON

As observed by Sri Aurobindo, the life of a man of destiny is not on the surface for the outer vision of man to perceive. This Truth was confirmed in the long, dynamic life of Sri Nolini Kanta Gupta, as it flowed river-like, seeking its way to the Ocean of the nectarous Divine Reality. The very source of his life's dynamism and creativity was the Ocean of Consciousness in which it moved through his daily actions. Some glimpses of the inner and outer movement of his life are found in his own Reminiscences, from which much of this brief life sketch draws its truer colours. Thus, it is hoped to avoid distortion in this delineation of a man, much of whose outer life was an outflowing of a vast inner Truth, inaccessible to man's limited gaze.

Sri Nolini Kanta Gupta, who was born in Faridpore, Bengal (now located in Bangladesh), on 13 January 1889, was the eldest of a family of six brothers and two sisters. At the age of three years, he came to Nilphamari, where his early education began. That he describes his penchant for learning in tandem with his mastery of physical activity, in the form of sports, is highly significant, as his life unfolds itself as one destined to collaborate in a work in which the highest mental and spiritual development joins with a simultaneous effort for physical perfection. As he recalled his earliest life's occupations:

"I have dabbled in football almost since my birth or, to be more exact, from the time I barely completed five. My hand was introduced to the pen or chalk and my feet touched the ball practically at one and the same time. Would you believe it, I had my formal initiation into studies not once but twice, and on both occasions it was performed with due ceremony on a Saraswati Puja day, as has been the custom with us. The first time it took place, when I was only four years old and I cannot now tell you why it had to be at that early age. It may be that I had gone into tantrums on seeing somebody else's initiation and a mock ceremony had to be gone through just in order to keep me quiet. But I had to go through the ceremony once again at the age of five, for according to the scriptures one cannot be properly initiated at the age of four, so the earlier one had to be

treated as cancelled and a fresh initiation given to make it truly valid. Perhaps this double process has had something to do with the solid base and the maturity of the learning!"<sup>1</sup>

We discover this happy union of the inner and the outer, the spiritual-mental and the physical, at each phase of the development of one who was destined to play a role in the spiritual work of the great reconciler, Sri Aurobindo.

Nolini-da V high school education began in 1904 at Rungpore, where his sensitive mind and heart were first touched by patriotic influences. Between the age of 15 to 18 years, he went to Calcutta for his higher education at the Presidency College. His patriotic urge for the liberation of his Motherland was further enkindled during his college experience. During his holidays at Rungpore, he had his first fearless, one might even say defiant, brush with the government of the British colonialists. As he explained:

"During the holidays I was back in my home town of Rungpore...We roamed the streets singing, that is shouting hoarsely at the top of our voices. We did morning rounds with songs like

'Awake O men of India, how long would you sleep' and so on....I roamed the streets as usual, shouting 'Bande Mataram' with the processions..."<sup>2</sup>

As the Government had served an order banning all processions in the town, Nolini-da, at the age of 16 or 17, was brought to the court for his deliberate defiance of the law. Fined Rs. 25, in those days quite a sum, he was thus initiated into the movement for the freedom of India, which was to bring him into contact with the one destined to mould his mind and life, his Guru in both *laukika* and *parā vidyās*, Sri Aurobindo.

He had the first darshan of the one to whom he was to surrender his all sometime when he was not yet 18 years old. Of this college experience he wrote:

"... I myself attended a number of meetings, particularly at Hedua, in Panti's Math and College Square, in the evening after college hours.... I chanced to see, in the fading light of evening at a meeting in College Square, Sri Aurobindo. He was wrapped in a shawl from head to foot — perhaps he was slightly ill. He spoke in

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<sup>1</sup> Nolini Kanta Gupta, 'Reminiscences', *Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta*, Vol. 7, (Pondicherry; Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, 1978), p. 445.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 325.

soft tones, but every word he uttered came out distinct and firm. The huge audience stood motionless under the evening sky listening with rapt attention in pin-drop silence.... And the other thing I remember was the sweet musical rhythm that graced the entire speech. This was the first time I saw him with my own eyes and heard him."<sup>3</sup>

Though Nolini-da attended the Presidency College along with many who were to make great names for themselves, as the flame of patriotic fervour for the freedom of India grew in his breast, the interest in merely academic pursuits began to pale.

While Nolini-da was a student at Presidency College, Lord Curzon, then Viceroy of India, divided Bengal, which ignited the flame of protest all over the State. At this time Nolini-da adopted a subtle form of protest, in contrast to his earlier experience in Rungpore. He explained:

"In what manner did I register my protest? I went to College dressed as if there had been a death in my family, that is to say, without shoes or shirt and with only a chadder on...."<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps during this period, the contentment with an ordinary sort of life also died a natural death. As he expressed it:

"...Within a short while I discovered that my mind had taken a completely different turn. Studies offered no longer any attraction, nor did the ordinary life of the world. To serve the country, to become a devoted child of the Mother, for ever and a day, this was now the only objective, the one endeavour.... And as to my decision, that would be unshaken, 'as long as shone a sun and a moon. *yavaccandra-divakarau ....*"<sup>5</sup>

This brings us to the next phase in the life of Nolini-da, in which the freedom of the Motherland became the all-consuming passion. He opted to follow the path of Kurukshetra, armed struggle against the English. This was pursued through the manufacture of bombs at the Manicktolla Gardens in Muraripukur. He explained:

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 323.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 332.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 328-29.

At last I made up my mind finally to take the plunge, that I must now join the Manicktolla Gardens in Muraripukur. That meant goodbye to College, goodbye to the ordinary life.... This decision to choose my path came while I was in my fourth year.... It was settled that I would join the Gardens and stay there.... I attended College as well, but at infrequent intervals. College studies could no longer interest me."<sup>6</sup>

This radical choice in Nolini-da's life was much more than a mere 'cult of the bomb'. His life was infused with a spiritual aspiration which welded his being with the spirit of sacrifice for the freedom of India from British domination. Here again, we observe the dual elements of pragmatic means to a physical realisation of freedom, as well as a strong element of spiritual means to spiritual freedom, to be won through *tapasyā* and *sādhana*. Manicktolla Gardens was not a mere den of terrorists, but had, side by side with bomb-making, an atmosphere of intense spiritual seeking. It followed much the spirit of the *Bhagavadgita*, in which the highest spiritual Truth was revealed on the battle field. At the same time, Nolini-da's seeking for intellectual learning was evident. As he explains:

"... life at the Gardens... had just begun.... We began with readings from the Gita and this became almost a fixed routine where everybody took part.

About this time, I had been several times to my home town of Rungpore.... At the Rungpore Library I came across another book, namely Gibbon's famous *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*... and added a great deal to my learning and knowledge...."<sup>7</sup>

Life in the Gardens was pervaded by the joy and enthusiasm of the inmates. Further describing the character of the atmosphere in the Manicktolla Gardens, Nolini-da wrote:

"Although we had made the preparation of bombs our first object when we chose this lonely and out of the way place, we were not... atheistic and given wholly to a materialistic philosophy. It had been a part of our plan to devote some time to the cultivation of an inner life too in that solitude. I remember how we would get up an hour before sunrise and sitting down in that calm

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 337-38.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 7, p. 340.

atmosphere in a meditative pose we would recite aloud with deep fervour and joy the mantra of the Upanishad:

'... As one gets oil out of oilseeds, as one gets butter out of curds, as one gets water out of the stream, as one gets fire out of wood, even so one seizes the self out of the self, one who pursues it in truth and tapasyā....'

It would not have been far out to call it an Ashram.... And it was precisely because of this that Barin got Lele Maharaj down here for our initiation and training in Sadhana, the discipline of Yoga, the same Lele who had been of a particular help to Sri Aurobindo at a certain stage of his own sadhana...."<sup>8</sup>

Yet destiny had already chosen for Sri Nolini Kanta the Guide who would show him the way to join the heights and depths of his being in a perpetual flow of Light. The one whom he had seen speaking to the crowd in College Square, Sri Aurobindo, was to meet him soon, when Barin, Sri Aurobindo's brother, sent Nolini-da to Calcutta to request him to visit the Gardens. The truth that when the aspirant is ready the Divine appears to him in the form of the Guru, is clearly discerned in the relation of Nolini-da with Sri Aurobindo. As Nolini-da describes their first meeting:

"... It was during my stay at the Gardens that I had my first meeting and interview with Sri Aurobindo... it was about four in the afternoon when I reached there<sup>9</sup>... As I sat waiting in one of the rooms downstairs, Sri Aurobindo came down, stood near me and gave me an inquiring look. I said, in Bengali, 'Barin has sent me. Would it be possible for you to come to the Gardens with me now?' He answered very slowly, pausing on each syllable separately — it seemed he had not yet got used to speaking in Bengali — and said, 'Go and tell Barin, I have not yet had my lunch. It will not be possible to go today.' So that was that. I did not say a word, did my *namaskāra* and came away. This was my first happy meeting with him, my first Darshan and interview."<sup>10</sup>

The pursuit of the path of violence was not to succeed. The members very early experienced the inevitable with the accidental death of Prafulla<sup>11</sup> during their first

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<sup>8</sup> Nolini Kanta Gupta, *Reminiscences*, p. 27.

<sup>9</sup> The house of Raja Subodh Mullick near Wellington Square.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Works*. Vol. 7, p. 347.

<sup>11</sup> Suresh Chakravarty's elder brother, and Nolini-da's very intimate friend.

experiment with a bomb. Still, they were firmly determined to sacrifice life itself for the cause of India's freedom. As Nolini-da described their *bhāva*:

"... We were no Vaishnava devotees. We were Tantriks, worshippers of Kali. Our chosen deity was the Goddess of Death incarnate, with her garland of skulls. Ours was the heroes' worship of strength."<sup>12</sup>

In this happy, nomadic existence at the Gardens, we observe a mingling of several strands of experience which may seem to many incompatible. Along with the Vedantic seeking of the Upanishads, and the surrender to the terrible Mother of Tantra, Nolini-da simultaneously continued to enrich his mind. As he explained:

"... However, we did not confine our studies to religious books alone, we had with us some secular literature as well. It was precisely at this period that a collection of Mathew Arnold's poems came into my hands. The book belonged to Sri Aurobindo.... That was my first introduction to Matthew Arnold...."<sup>13</sup>

Thus, spiritual seeking was not sought at the cost of the development of the mental faculties, nor to the detriment of their sacred duty to battle for the freedom from domination of the Indian people. Yet the Supreme Mother had other plans for the progress of Her intended manifestation. Thus the life at Manicktola Gardens was brought to an abrupt end. At the age of 18 years, Nolini-da was arrested with the other members of the Gardens. He writes:

"... We were all arrested in a body. The police made us stand in a line under the strict watch of an armed guard. They kept us standing the whole day with hardly anything to eat.... We were taken to the lockup at the Lai Bazar Police Station. There they kept us for nearly two days and nights. This was perhaps the most taxing time of all. We had no bath, no food, not even a wink of sleep. The whole lot of us were herded together like beasts and shut up in a cell.... Then, after having been through all this, we were taken to Alipore Jail one evening. There we were received with great kindness and courtesy by the gentleman in charge....

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 350.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 350-51.

And he had us served immediately with hot cooked rice. This was our first meal in three days, and it tasted so nice and sweet that we felt as if we were in heaven.”<sup>14</sup>

Still, the ordeal was just beginning. As undertrials they passed one year in jail. Sri Aurobindo was amongst them. Charged with sedition and waging war against the King, the possibility of death hung over their heads, before they could really begin their underground fight for India’s freedom. As with Sri Aurobindo, so also with Nolini-da, this enforced retirement from the field of action brought to the fore the always-present current of spirituality, which would more and more guide their external actions. Still, at such a tender age, Nolini-da had to struggle with the negative emotions of despair and despondency, which he victoriously tackled with the help of the dynamic spiritual power of a book that came into his hands. He writes:

“A personal reminiscence. A young man in prison, accused of conspiracy and waging war against the British Empire. If convicted he might have to suffer the extreme penalty, at least, transportation to the Andamans. The case is dragging on for long months. And the young man is in a solitary cell. He cannot always keep up his spirits high. Moments of sadness and gloom and despair come and almost overwhelm him. Who was there to console and cheer him up? Vivekananda. Vivekananda’s speeches. *From Colombo to Almora*, came, as a godsend, into the hands of the young man. Invariably, when the period of despondency came he used to open the book, read a few pages, read them over again, and the cloud was there no longer. Instead there was hope and courage and faith and future and light and air...”<sup>15</sup> Indeed, it was the soul that Vivekananda could awaken and stir in you.

During that period, in another cell, Sri Aurobindo was rapidly unfolding his spiritual Being and Power, which in time would act more and more on the being of Sri Nolini Kanta Gupta. Finally, on 6 May, 1909, Sri Aurobindo was released. No evidence had been found of his involvement in terrorist activities. Nolini-da also was released.

Upon coming out of jail, Nolini-da was in a fix as to his next step in life. For him, going back to the ordinary life was out of the question. He writes:

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 364.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Works*. Vol. 2 (Pondicherry: SAICE, 1971), pp. 103-4.

"...I had just come out of jail. What was I to do next? Go back to the ordinary life, read as before in college, pass examinations, get a job? But all that was now out of the question. I prayed that such things be erased from the tablet of my fate, *śirasi mā likha, mā likha, mā likha*.... One day, I felt a sudden inspiration. It had to be on that very day: on that very day I must renounce the world, make the Great Departure, there was to be no return...."<sup>16</sup>

External renunciation, however, was not to be the destiny of Nolini-da, who was to demonstrate by example the ideal of spiritual transformation within the activities of life. Having been frustrated in his first attempt to renounce the world, he found his niche soon in his daily afternoon visits to Sri Aurobindo, at the *Sanjivani* office in the residence of his [Sri Aurobindo's] uncle. The impulse to something higher than the ordinary round of life was still present, and surfaced soon after, along with an impulse to see all of India as a wandering ascetic. This time Sri Aurobindo interfered by asking him to wait a few days, and inviting to travel with him for some political work in Assam. The desire was to surface a third and last time in Pondicherry, before the Mother's final arrival. Nolini-da sums up this movement in his life as follows:

"The first time it had been myself, my own self or soul, who rejected sannyasa. The second time the veto was pronounced by the Supreme Soul, the Lord — Sri Aurobindo himself. And the third time it was the Supreme Prakriti, the Universal Mother who it seems scented the danger and hastened as if personally to intervene and bar that way of escape for ever, by piling up against us the heaven-kissing thorny hedge of wedlock...."<sup>17</sup>

Though not recognized as yet, Sri Aurobindo's ideal of the Highest Spirit manifest in Life was to become Sri Nolini Kanta's guiding Light. Next Sri Aurobindo initiated him into several new experiences of life. Though he had never written anything beyond college papers and essays, Sri Aurobindo asked him to pick out some important items from the English papers and write them up in Bengali. As Nolini-da recalled:

"... He seemed to be pleased on seeing my writing and said that it might do. He gave me the task of editing the news columns of his Bengali paper *Dharma* ...."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Works*. Vol. 7, p. 383.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 390.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 394.

Thus the job of editing the news columns of the Bengali paper fell to his lot, which slowly turned him into a journalist. It was also from the Hands of Sri Aurobindo that he was to receive earned money for the first time. Though this earning for his editorial work was only a token amount, it is interesting that his first writing was done for his destined Guru and his first earnings came from him as well. The die was being cast for a lifelong association in union with one who led his inner and outer life to its full blossoming.

From that time he came to stay at Shyampukur, living and working on the premises of the two papers, *Dharma* and *Karmayogin*. Here, his true awakening and education began in earnest under the benign influence of the Master. As he noted:

“It is here that began our true education, and perhaps, nay, certainly, our initiation too.... Sri Aurobindo had his own novel method of education.... It went simply and naturally along lines that seemed to do without rules. The student did not realise that he was being educated at all... By giving me that work of editing the news he made me slowly grow into a journalist underwriter. Next there came to me naturally an urge to write articles. Sri Aurobindo was pleased with the first Bengali article I wrote.... This my first article was published in the 11th issue of ‘Dharma’ dated 15th November, 1909. I was twenty then. Some of my other articles came out in ‘Dharma’ afterwards. My writings in English began much later.... One day in the midst of all this, Sri Aurobindo asked me all of a sudden if I had any desire to learn languages — any of the European languages, French for example. I was a little Surprised at the question, for I had not observed in me any such ambition or inclination. Nonetheless I replied that I would like to. That is how I began my French....”<sup>19</sup>

How much Sri Aurobindo’s initiation was fruitful became obvious many years later, when the Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, a native of France, observed about Nolini-da:

“He is no inconsiderable poet in French.”<sup>20</sup>

The life of mental and spiritual enrichment, side by side with continued writing to spur the Independence Movement, was brought again to an abrupt halt one evening, when

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<sup>19</sup> Sisir Kumar Mitra, ‘Nolini Kanta: *Towards the Heights*’, “Srinwantu”, November 1969, p. 146.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

a friend, Ramchandra, brought the disturbing news that the Government had again decided to arrest Sri Aurobindo. As Nolini-da recalled, Sri Aurobindo

"... came out of the house and made straight for the riverside.... Those of us who were left behind continued to run the two papers for some time.... But afterwards, we too found it impossible to carry on and our pleasant home had to be broken up. For news came that the police were after our blood;... And I decided to leave for an obscure little village in distant Barisal.... I spent a couple of months there.... Then I got the news that the time had come for starting on my travels again...."<sup>21</sup>

Thus Nolini-da followed the footsteps of Sri Aurobindo to Pondicherry, where at last the foundation would be laid for an undisturbed unfoldment of a great spiritual endeavour. The earliest days at Pondicherry were characterised by an austere simplicity. As Nolini-da recalled:

"... I may add that we had no such thing as a bed either for our use. Each of us possessed a mat, coverlet and pillow; this was all our furniture. And mosquito curtains? That was a luxury we could not even dream of.... for Sri Aurobindo we had somehow managed a chair and a table and a camp cot. We lived a real camp life.... All I can recall is a single candle stick for the personal use of Sri Aurobindo. Whatever conversations or discussions we had after nightfall had to be in the dark; for the most part we practised silence...."<sup>22</sup>.

Sri Aurobindo continued to lead his companions in serious study of various subjects. For several months, for about an hour every evening, the topic of study was the Veda, which drew the special interest of Nolini-da, as well as Subramanya Bharati, the famous Tamil Poet. Sri Aurobindo continued to initiate Nolini-da in the study and mastery of various languages. Nolini-da noted:

"... Sri Aurobindo has taught me a number of languages.... When I took up Greek, I began straightaway with Euripides' *Medea*.... I began my Latin with Virgil's *Aeneid*, and Italian with Dante. I have already told you about my French, there I started with Molière...."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Works*. Vol. 7, p. 397.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 417-8.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 421.

Thus was Nolini-da's mind moulded carefully by Sri Aurobindo, from his twentieth to twenty-fifth year. A characteristic of Nolini-da was his continued pursuit of football, side by side with his intellectual enrichment. At the age of 25, in 1914, Nolini-da went back to Calcutta. He returned to Pondicherry and remained for several years before going again to Calcutta. This time, in 1919, he went to Nilphamari, where, at the age of 30, he married Indulekha Devi of Mymensingh. He continued to travel between Pondicherry and Calcutta for several years, having begun publishing his Bengali writings in 1921. He brought his wife with him once to Pondicherry, but thereafter he came alone. Ultimately his outer travels ceased, with the unfolding of the imperative spiritual urge of his soul, not a little influenced by the arrival of the Mother. It was perhaps the Mother who awakened him to the spiritual stature of his Companion, Sri Aurobindo. As he explained:

"The Mother came and installed Sri Aurobindo on his high Pedestal of Master and Lord of Yoga.... the Mother taught by her manner and speech and showed us in actual practice, what was the meaning of disciple and master...."<sup>24</sup>

It was, further, at the urging of the Mother that Sri Nolini Kanta's trips to Calcutta ceased. After the *Siddhi* of Sri Aurobindo, Nolini-da's place in his spiritual work was settled. From 1926, Nolini-da never again left the Ashram in Pondicherry, where he served as its Secretary and later as one of its Trustees.

From this period on, it is difficult to say much about Nolini-da's life. Outwardly, he worked for Sri Aurobindo's Ashram and also continued to publish writings in Bengali, English and French. He engaged himself in sports activities throughout his life, even into his eighties. His writings have attracted many by the light they throw on many facets of knowledge and life, including luminous expositions of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga. This dynamic light of an ever-expanding spiritual awareness was applied by Nolini-da to many aspects of mind, life and matter. From his writings alone it becomes clear that their extreme variety and depth of insight are explained as the result of his being an instrument in the 'hands' of a supreme Light, which is capable of illumining everything upon which it is directed. His writings are all short, yet they carry so much light and power that one's understanding is immediately kindled. One finds them containing many germinal ideas, each capable of serving as the basis for a comprehensive understanding of the multiple facets of existence. In his English works alone, one finds

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 422.

political theory, international relations, poetry, musical theory, ancient and modern Western and Eastern literature, esoteric Yogic knowledge, and his own poetry. All are critiqued in such a way as to open windows onto the spiritual Reality behind, of which they are manifestations. In his Bengali writings, he treated all of the above subjects, and translated as well much of the best from Western Poetry. His poems in French were even appreciated by the celebrated French Poets, Mon. Maurice Magre and Sylvan Levi. This list does not exhaust the subjects masterfully dealt with in Nolini-da's writings. His last work in Bengali was his translation of Sri Aurobindo's epic poem *Savitri*. By a thorough review of his collected writings, one clearly understands the Upanishadic reference to that knowledge, "knowing which, everything is known." It is such knowledge, in dynamic and creative form and power, which was manifest in Sri Nolini Kanta Gupta. Thus it was demonstrated by his life and action that the highest spiritual realisation is not only compatible with life and the world, but productive of the means to fully understand and enjoy the world in perfect consonance with the Supreme Truth. We see in Nolini-da the Light and Power of the Supreme Mother, pouring itself out upon the world of Her Creation. Such truly is the ideal of Sri Aurobindo, as demonstrated in the life of his lifetime companion and disciple, Sri Nolini Kanta Gupta. He published about 50 Bengali works, and his English writings are embodied in Eight Volumes of his Collected Works. Yet his prodigious outpouring in the form of writings is only one aspect of his life from 1926 to 1983. The crucial development of his spiritual realisation during this period is what really gives the immense value to his writings. About this spiritual achievement, his *Yoga Siddhi*, we must refrain from any assessment, due to our limited capacity to know. We can perhaps only discern the trend of his spiritual life from the words of Sri Aurobindo, who told Nirodbaran sometime in 1940:

"I always see the Light descending into Nolini."<sup>25</sup>

We can safely say that his Realisation in Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga far transcends even his tremendous outer activity in the form of his published works. The Mother's words to him on his birthday reveal something of this aspect of his True Life. On 13 January 1967(?), the Mother blessed Nolini-da on his birthday in the following words:

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<sup>25</sup> Sisir Kumar Mitra, 'Nolini Kanta: *Towards the Heights*', "Srinwantu", Calcutta, November 1969, p. 147.

“Happy Birthday Nolini en route towards the Superman. With my love and affection and blessings.”<sup>26</sup>

Again, on 13 January, 1971, the Mother sent Her birthday Blessings, writing.

“Happy Birthday Nolini with my love and affection for a life of collaboration and my blessings for the prolonged continuation of this happy collaboration in peace and love.

The Mother”<sup>27</sup>

We can confirm our perception that he continued to march ahead tirelessly towards greater realisation, and served as a luminous example of an instrument of the Truth-realisation of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo. His heights and depths were, however, not measureable by us. The testimony of many who had his *darshan*, however, could confirm the perception which was expressed one day by Andre, the Mother’s son, when he visited Nolini-da after the withdrawal of The Mother. He spontaneously told him that to come to him is truly to be in the Presence of the Mother.

One aspect of the Mother which was quite apparently manifest in the life of Nolini-da, Mahasaraswati, also made itself felt at the end of his physical life. Sri Nolini Kanta left his body on the auspicious day of Saraswati Puja in 1983. The room from which he served the Mother and the Master, and achieved his spiritual realisation over a period of more than fifty years, still retains the glow, unmistakable of the Divine Presence with which he united his being. The body with which he served the Supreme Divine continues to radiate the penetrating Peace of Divinity from his Samadhi at Cazanove. Even in apparent death, the body he left behind continues to manifest the Divine Vibrations, thus testifying to the Truth of the Integral Ideal of The Yoga of his Master, Sri Aurobindo.

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<sup>26</sup> V. Madhusudan Reddy, ‘Nolini, Arjuna of our age, Hyderabad: Institute of Human Study, 1979, p. 68.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

## NOLINI-DA

### ANIMA

Know him?  
Dawn-to-dusk  
Dusk-to-dawn  
Whirls the Sun's cyclic way —  
How much is he seen?  
Yet he is there.

Air-space is there,  
Pervading everywhere —  
Upholder of all living things,  
Self-existent is its being.  
Who remembers? How much of it?

Filling the universe, the creation  
Ceaseless the light particles  
Shower non-stop.  
Who cares to remember them?

Moon-phases increase and decrease,  
In the sight of the world's measure  
They are seen waning and waxing —  
Yet the moon stays ever full  
Beyond the ken of man.

In the yard on a sleepy midnight  
I stand, a sweet zephyr blowing,  
Silent in the night,  
Steeped in the honey-sap of noiselessness,  
Do I remember?

In the blaze of a fierce midday,  
In the breast of an empty expanse  
I plunge in the cool of the lake  
Where an icy touch spreads over the body

Snuffing out the midday fire,  
The robe of torrid days falls  
Like a discarded mantle —  
Peace descends —

In the night's profound silence  
The city is merged  
In slumber deep,  
Have you seen it from the roof-tops?

The Post-runner in the distance passes  
Bearing alone the words of the dawn,  
His bells ringing as soft music  
Have you heard?

At the village outskirts towers the huge  
Aswattha wrapt in meditation —  
A hermit below has his hut,  
Above in the foliage the vultures nest,  
Yet the Aswattha in affection guards  
Both equally —

A lonely coconut tree stands apart  
Braving storms. The scorching sun  
Leaves it unmoved, ever mounting high  
To one goal, the lofty sky —  
Why? Who knows?

In childhood roaming, holding father's hand  
I stretch out to feel the water's silken touch,  
In his eyes saw you his affection's indulgence?  
In winter's drowsy night, the mother's warm hug —  
Do you remember?

All of this and more  
Have I seen and got  
In his closeness, yet I saw not  
Nor got ever so much more.

Yet I know all this  
Is nothing — his lustre only,  
He remains, overflowing and beyond all,  
Otherwhere, alone, unique  
In his own self-form beyond,  
Unknown to the mind and its speech.  
He alone soul-companion, yet  
Hard to discern, no word explains —

Still how easy to love him —  
To plunge into his bosom confident, fearless,  
Staring into the bottomless effulgence of his  
Star-like eyes — how easy to give in Silence.

*(Translated by Kalyan from her Bengali Book of Poems — Manjira)*

## THE INTEGRAL YOGA AND NOLINI KANTA

ARABINDA BASU

Sri Aurobindo has introduced to spiritual seekers a new Yoga — the Integral Yoga. Its integrality consists in the novelty and totality of its aim. He is emphatically clear that the primary and ultimate purpose of yoga is to realize the Divine. In his experience of the supreme Reality, the Divine Being has many aspects. The integral Yoga aims at realizing all the aspects in one comprehensive experience. It is not being suggested that a practitioner of the integral yoga can have this experience all at once. He cannot do so because the medium of knowing the Reality that has been utilized for the purpose till now is not capable of achieving the aim of the integral yoga. This is why Sri Aurobindo insists that a new level of consciousness must evolve in spiritual seekers which will enable them to have the integral knowledge of the Divine. But before this new level of consciousness can be evolved, says Sri Aurobindo, the Reality has to be realized by the means that is at the disposal of a seeker now:

Man is a mental being. Even in his spiritual quest mental consciousness is his means of progress towards the goal. Mental consciousness purified, made calm and tranquil and receptive of the Light, of the Being-Consciousness-Bliss Reality, of God, becomes capable of reflecting that Light. The reflection can be so clear that it almost seems that it is not a reflection but the reflected Reality. This is what passes as knowledge of the Self, experience of God, realization of the Absolute etc. But if we look at the history of spiritual mysticism, it will be easily seen that the experiences described as those of Self, God, Absolute are very different and diverse. It will be wrong to say that the experiences are not genuine. But it will also be right to say that they are partial. There is, however, according to Sri Aurobindo, a level of consciousness which enables a seeker to attain the integral knowledge of the Reality in all its aspects — transcendent, cosmic, individual, static, dynamic, impersonal, personal, spirit, soul, mind, life, matter.

The integral yoga has a twofold aim. First, to attain knowledge edge of the Reality in one or other of its aspects by the spiritualized mental consciousness. Secondly, to lift the consciousness in the seeker already in direct touch with the spiritual Reality to the supramental spiritual consciousness. For the supermind which is Truth-Conscious is in possession of the integral knowledge of the Divine. The supermind is God's self-

knowledge and world-knowledge. It is also simultaneously the Divine Will which is God's Force of self-manifestation as the world in his own being. The world is to all intents and purposes an organization of three principles, viz. mind, life and matter. These are truly speaking levels and formations of Consciousness in which God is hidden and involved. The purpose of the integral yoga is to manifest the hidden divine supramental Knowledge-Will in them and to transform them by its power. Their transformation will turn mind, life and matter into the transparent means of revealing the hidden Divine in them. This radical change of mental, vital, and material Nature of several yogis will be the basis of the formation of a community of supermen. Their collective life will be directed by Knowledge unmixed with Ignorance, empowered by spontaneously effective Will and an expression of unitive Love. Their life will be the Life Divine.

Nolini Kanta is a name to reckon with in the history of man's spiritual evolution. In spite of being an amazingly versatile talent bordering on genius, he was first and foremost a seeker of the spiritual life. Under the luminous and effective guidance of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother he blossomed into a yogi of high stature and all-round spiritual growth. A long time ago he made a clear choice. Not for him were the lures of the world, there was one thing to seek — the Mother of all creatures and existences. The poet in him gave expression to his preference thus:

Turn my gaze away from thousand nothingnesses —  
One thing for me is enough and more  
O Queen of hearts!

What avails the senses each to pursue its luring fire  
That leads but to a dismal engulfing bog,  
To nothingness or worse?

The Sense of the senses dwells at home  
And through its moon-lit grace distills  
Peace and ease and rapture exquisite!  
The essence of delights, the secret sap of blooms,  
The winkless Light beyond all flickerings,  
The one treasure intimate — it is Thou!

My all has melted away and vanished  
Into the single orb of thy compassion,  
O my One and All!<sup>1</sup>

The note of rejection of transitory values is clear and loud. Not only that, the poet-seeker's attraction for the Divine is beyond doubt. Nevertheless at times he feels

In Thee I am a perfect slave,  
Sovereignly free and happy!  
Without Thee I become the master  
Bound head to foot, a figure of misery!

\*

Thus he enjoins himself and others to

Aspire wholly,  
Ask for the fullness of Grace —  
But weigh not the measure of Response,  
Nor repine if seems doled out scantily, niggardly,<sup>2</sup>

Give yourself wholly and ever more and more,  
It is your unreserved giving that will create the spaciousness  
to hold safely the gift from the Divine.<sup>3</sup>

Acceptance of the Grace, however, in whatever measure it comes is an important step in the sadhana. For

The high wisdom knows and gives just what is needed —  
Could we only rest contented and move in its rhythm and not transgress its  
will,  
Serene would be the path and perfect and even prompt the achievement.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Nolini Kanta Gupta, *Towards the Heights*, The Culture Publishers, Calcutta, 1944, p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 49.

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*

Nolini Kanta's aspiration soars higher and he prays to the Lord that the voice of his silence may enter him rousing every atom of his being, till it vibrates to his Truth and is a harp of its utterance and its visible embodiment. He prays for strength and power to withstand the tumultuous surges of the wide world that rush towards him assured of victory. He hopes and aspires that they may roll back in confusion and turn away upon themselves and leave him as a virgin rock tranquil and ever firm on its pristine foundations.

Lord, this is my prayer:  
May the voice of thy silence enter me —  
Rousing every atom of my being,  
Till it vibrates to thy Truth,  
And is the harp of its utterance  
And is its visible embodiment.

All the tumultuous, surges of the wide world  
Rush towards me assured of victory —  
May they roll back in confusion and turn away upon themselves  
And leave me as a virgin rock  
Tranquil and ever firm on its pristine foundations.

May the universe dissolve, may it vanish  
Even like a dream —  
And thou alone appear, thou alone abide  
One in thy multitudinous reality,  
I shall find a new world in Thee, a world made of Thee,  
Therein each limb of mine shall realise its fullness of union with Thee  
And shall taste utter felicity.<sup>5</sup>

The seeker has gained insight into the nature of Reality which reveals itself to him as Pure Consciousness and also as unconscious Matter. He sees clearly that

Spirit is Matter sublimated, Matter is Spirit crystallised  
Soul is Body introvert, Body is Soul extravert.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 18.

He has gained a new vision as is evident from his own description of it in the following lines:

My eyes have followed the lines of thy beauty,  
The winging curves of grace that embody thee —  
In a delight that was gathered to its core of utmost intensity,  
                    To its height of supreme exquisiteness...  
A light bathed them, a glory suffused them slowly —  
A clear and vast vision entered,  
stood face to face with Truth —  
And the scales of Ignorance fell away!<sup>7</sup>

He has developed subtle hearing and subtle touch. His "ears have drunk God's voice — its ringing sweetness filtered through the depths of my being and it awakens crystal listenings that mirror and capture the Mother-harmony of immemorial spheres and God's rhythm divine that graces and moulds his life".<sup>8</sup> And so his hands

... have touched the roses of thy feet —  
The very soul of fragrance has passed into the substance  
Of my transmuted earth...  
This body has grown sheer into thee as if it were thy own limb!<sup>9</sup>

Nolini Kanta feels that there is a deluding midworld that with its lurid shadow divides heaven and earth. But he also feels confident that

... one day they shall come close  
And the lightning fire leap out  
To consume the shadow track  
And turn it into the gleaming path  
For Heaven to descend upon earth.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>8</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>9</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>10</sup> *Op. cit.*, p 41

His ego has melted away. He breathes and moves and acts not for himself but for the beloved Lord of his life. He is a slave of His Will and a plaything in His sweet hands. His seeming T is an empty thing that bubbles up with God's breath as He chooses and utters and enshrines His iridescent Delight and sinks back again and melts into His tranced silence.<sup>11</sup>

All this effort at dissolving his ego and filling his being with the presence of the Lord and the might of the Mother gives him a new confidence. And he sings:

Thou hast proved, O mighty one,  
that the meanest of things here below is rounded  
with a divine ending,  
and man is not all too human:  
there is a prophecy in mortal creatures that only bides its time,  
nothing is impossible even in this sorry world  
For, behold, I am no longer what I was.<sup>12</sup>

The newborn confidence is the armour in his assault on the higher levels of consciousness. Knowledge of the Self and union with the Divine equipped Nolini Kanta with the capacity to ascend to the spiritual mind of which there are many levels. At the end of his long life Nolini Kanta succeeded in elevating his consciousness to the Overmind plane. Along with this ascent his nature was also changing and evolving. Consequently he achieved a versatility of capacities which enabled him to engage quietly but successfully in various kinds of activities. Through this development of nature he was preparing to meet and unite with God in many aspects and along different lines. It can even be said that he had a foretaste of the culmination of the integral yoga,

I have heard His call and He has embraced me intimately from afar,  
Lo, I am grown into the translucency of His divine serenity,  
the earth-made cells of flesh are now spirit-stars  
that bear the undecaying lustres of immortality.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Op cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>12</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 31-32.

<sup>13</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 34.

Nolini Kanta was a forerunner of a new kind of being on the earth — though not a true superman yet, but one who was very much above mental humanity. His life was an illustration of a basic truth of the integral yoga — that consciousness in the world, that is, as it is now on the spiritual mental level, is on the march towards its own superior poise, the supramental.

It is to be earnestly and prayerfully hoped that Nolini Kanta would continue to evolve towards the ultimate and evolutionary spiritual destiny on this earth — the ascent to the supramental Divine, the descent of the integral Knowledge-Will of that Consciousness into the earth-consciousness and the consequent transformation even of physical Nature and the establishment of the divine life in the world.

The following messages of the Mother given to Nolini Kanta on his birthday respectively in 1969, 1971 and 1973 bear eloquent testimony to the truth of our estimation of the life, character and achievement of this valiant Karmayogi whose *karma, sādhanā* was a sacrifice dedicated to the Supreme.

Happy Birthday

Nolini

en route towards the Superman,..<sup>14</sup>

(13.1.1969)

Happy Birthday

Nolini

With my love and affection

for a life of collaboration

and my blessings for the prolonged continuation of this

happy collaboration in peace and love.

(13.1.1971)

Happy Birthday

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<sup>14</sup> The Mother's message is in French in which occurs the word *surhomme* rendered here by the word *superman*. Whether *surhomme* is the same as what Sri Aurobindo means by superman and what the Mother has designated the supramental being may be open to doubt. But it is not necessary to raise the question here because *surhomme* is certainly a higher type of being than the ordinary merely mental.

Nolini

My confidence and my blessings for the transformation.

Let us march ahead towards the Realisation.

(13.1.1973)

## NOLINI'S ATHLETICS

CHINMOY

The utility of games and sports, especially in the spiritual life, has been brought home to us by the Divine Mother herself: 'By setting a personal example'... Had she not herself played Table Tennis and Tennis, had she not given a direct encouragement to us by her presence day after day for hours together during our Sports season and given each of us her smiling appreciation in every case, our physical culture activities would not have attained the standard they now have. Seeing her taking part in physical activities, elderly Sadhakas like Nolini, Amrita, Pavitra, Purani, the late Naren Das Gupta, Nolini Kanta Sen and others more or less of their age joined the Marching Exercises. At the centre of our girls' enthusiasm for sports and games, and of their equality with the boys in some items, even of their superiority to them in certain events there lies the Mother's particular concern for physical perfection.

There is no lack of foolish argument in our country against sports: "When did our ancient Yogis and Saints take part in sports? If they had no such need why should the Yogis of to-day have it?" The ancients were never without sports and amusements. The Rishi Jamadagni practised archery. It is on record that one day he was shooting arrows and his wife, Renuka Devi, helped by collecting and bringing them to him. The burning sun fatigued her so much that the Rishi fitted his arrow to the bow to hit the sun. Frightened, the sun-god came down and appeared before the Rishi and said that according to divine dispensation his function was to give heat and light to the earth, but to save the lady from trouble he would present her with a pair of sandals and an umbrella. It is said that since then the umbrella and shoes have been in use. It is not only that the women helped their husbands and relatives in such sports; when necessary they themselves fought side by side with them. On the battlefield, when queen Vishpala, wife of king Khela, lost her thigh, the twin divine physicians Aswinikumaras, gave her an iron thigh, at the request of the king's priest, Agastya. Was this the beginning of "artificial limbs"?

Even among the gods there was provision for happy competition. Suryā, daughter of Surya, was to select the most successful competitor for her husband. The terms of the competition were: whoever would be the first to reach the sun-world would win her hand. The Aswinikumaras won the race and the prize.

Our beloved Captain, Manoj (himself a champion in Athletics, an ace student of his time and an adept in histrionics, now a Professor at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education) has most impressively dwelt at length on *Physical Education in Ancient India* in the April issue of our *Bulletin of Physical Education*.

We now come to Nolini's athletics. The difference between an ordinary athlete and Nolini is that he took athletics as part of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga. Even after stepping into his seventieth year he has made striking progress. This has been possible by his earnest personal effort and by the Grace of the Mother. He has proved that the main enemy of athletics is not age but lack of the sense of youthfulness.

In 1955, at sixty-six, despite his practice of the Long Jump all round the year he was disqualified in all three competitive jumps before the Mother. The three rounds of laughter from the spectators vanished in the air because Nolini remained the same unperturbed figure that he always is. But he felt how such defeats affect younger nerves.

"Can an ever-happy being even in a distracted moment sense the feeling of the afflicted? How can one who has never been bitten by a venomous snake feel its tearing pain?"

Here in the test of merit it is the bite of frustration. Here the Yogi had to pay the highest price of his *Karmayoga* (Yoga in Action) — *sama jaya parājayo* (equal in victory and defeat).

Just two years later, in his sixty-eighth year, he won first place in the Long Jump, and thus reminded us of the great words of Sri Aurobindo in *Savitri*:

"His failure is not failure whom God leads."

Or

"Man can accept his fate; he can refuse."

If he could take the jump from the last point of limit, then he could easily exceed his 1957 record of 385cm not by several inches but by two feet or more. For others of that age this would be an unimaginable feat.

Nervousness, though undesirable, is natural to us in the hour of competition. The goddess of sleep keeps her benign face away from us for even a week before that hour. That it is sheer weakness of our vital being is a little difficult to admit for sadhakas like us. Much to our surprise, Nolini was never seen in a state of jitters.

Our Amrita became a member of the Blue Group. Marching exercises he did — unexpected, unbelievable, quite contrary to his nature. But he left the Group a few years later. However, despite his being in a whirlwind of work he would be present on the Sportsground on the days of “his” Nolini’s athletic competition. One can easily predict that wherever Nolini is present, Amrita also is sure to be there. Lakshmana knew, and so do we, that he had no equal in standing by Rama; Rama too felt in the heart of his heart:

Dese dese kalatrani dese dese ca bandhavah  
Tattu desam na pasyami yatra bhrata sahodarah.  
(Wives and friends can be found everywhere,  
But at no place a brother of my own.)

On January 13, 1962, on Nolini’s birthday an inmate of the Ashram wanted to know from Amrita if his relations with Nolini were friendly or brotherly. Amrita was silent for a while, taken aback. “Is he my friend? You people may think so. But I always look upon him as my own elder brother.”

Two flowers on one stalk. Such joint lives dedicated to Mother are an example to all the Ashram.

Now for an anecdote which sounds like, but is not a cock-and-bull story.

One day Abinash Bhattacharya, a fellow-prisoner of our Sudhir (Captain Mona’s father) in the Andamans, was witnessing the Marching Exercises in the Ashram Playground. The sight of Nolini’s running upset the gentleman. He said to Sudhir: “Sudhir, stop Nolini from running. God knows when he may make a scene by a fall. Is he not aware that he has long passed his youth? I tremble at the sight.” “Dada,” said Sudhir, “have you seen Nolini participating in the running and jumping competition?”

“Competition! at his age! If I were not an eye-witness here I would not believe it. Of course, everything is possible for a Yogi. If I were asked to give a jump, I would at a bound jump over to the next world. At any rate, I may pass the rest of my life in bed, limbs broken. Sudhir, you are laughing, but my heart skips a beat for Nolini.”

To come back to Nolini’s athletics. Though it may sound unbelievable, in 1954 at the age of 65, he breasted the tape in the 100 metre sprint with his best timing of 14.9 seconds. He could easily have bettered it by one second had he been able to maintain his uniform speed from start to finish. Alas, the last twenty metres of the race did not fully surrender to his fleeting feet. Of course, ninety out of a hundred suffer this fate.

But never was Nolini compelled to cover the final 20 metres with the speed of a Slow Cycle Race as did the Pakistani sprinter, of course unwillingly, in the World Olympics held in London in 1948.

In 1954 Nolini came off not only first in the 100 metre sprint but also third in the 200 metre. Time for the latter: 32.4 s. But one year later the athlete Nolini rose to his best timing (31.6) in the 200 m sprint.

A striking event. In 1958 while practising 200 m he fell after having run 40 m and was hurt in two or three places. He stood up and said to his co-runner: "Who but I should fall? I could not give the full measure of concentration that I should have had before the start." Here is the difference between him and ourselves. In such a case we blame our fate, whereas he who believes in self-effort blames his personal lapse. In a few seconds Gangaram, our genial Athletic Coach (himself a matchless athlete in his time) ran up to the spot and gave Nolini first aid.

In 1955 Nolini took part in the most arduous of all the races, for it demands both speed and stamina — 400 m. Time: 1.20.6 s. To compete in a 400 m race at the age of 66 is a matter of surprise not only for an Indian but for any athlete in the world.

Another surprise. Two years earlier he had chosen the most exacting and difficult of all the jumping events — Hop, Step and Jump. In this he won the third place, beating his fellow-competitors of less than half his age.

A sample of Nolini's timings in the 100 m sprint:

1955 — 15.2 s

1956 — 15.3 s

1957 — 15.3 s

1958 — 15.4 s

1959 — 15.4 s

To keep up the same standard with negligible variation for five years successively, especially in a 100 m sprint, is unimaginable.

Here in the Ashram all work is part of our Sadhana. To look upon success and failure with an equal eye is our first essential. Victory or defeat made no difference to Nolini. A burning and lasting enthusiasm had he.

In every action of Nolini one can find a full measure of his zest and enthusiasm. In sports his interest, earnestness and enthusiasm did not end in himself only. He shared his feelings with all.

Nolini participated also in Hammer and Shot-Put after regular and systematic practice. His Coach in Hammer was his beloved Rajen, ever-young, ever-zealous and ever friendly to all sportsmen. Disregarding pain here and there in his body Nolini carried on without a break his daily practice in these two items. Thoughtless fellows like us might read in this an ambition to win a high place. But the fact was: he was quite against pampering the pain by keeping to bed and persuading himself that he was helpless. His aim was to ignore and reject pain altogether from his body. Indeed, herein lies the secret of a true sportsman.

There can be no shadow of a doubt that Nolini could have excelled in Athletics in his school days as he did in Football, had Athletics been introduced in Bengal at that time.

While the author of *Swapani* was a student at Nilphamari H. E. School in Rangpur District, one day his playmates were admiring highly his skill in Football before their Games teacher, Sri Amulya Banerjee. With a smile he said: "You have not seen his father (Nolini Kanta) play. Had you seen..."

1945. The late Monsieur Benjamin introduced our rising football player, Robi Gupta, to the patron President of Cercle Sportif Ground at the end of a football match. His immediate comment was: "Mais il ne joue pas comme son père" ("But he does not play like his father").

Our Austin so liked Nolini's article on *Football* that he sent a copy of it, along with Nolini's autographed photo, to his Canadian friends who are well-known football players.

He was not only a brilliant sportsman but also an athlete of the mind. At the age of only thirteen he passed the Matriculation with a scholarship. Because of his tender age his father had misgivings. But his uncle was well aware of the sharpness of his intelligence and memory. Hence he encouraged him to sit for the examination. And the result was a success attained with a scholarship.

## RELAXATION IN ATHLETICS

What Nolini has written on Relaxation in Athletics is not only the result of a scientific research but also a deep spiritual truth regarding the body, mind and life based on the realisation of the Yogins. We use the word "Relaxation" in Athletics as one counts the beads of a rosary. But most of us do not know the real signification of it. Indeed, we

can derive much benefit from Nolini's personal experience. This calls to mind the famous novelist Saratchandra's words to Dilip Kumar Roy: "Do you know our difficulty? Our readers are so lazy that they would refuse to go to Heaven if it meant toiling up the stairs and if a little somersault would land them in Hell."

## RELAY RACE

In our Ashram Athletic Competition it was the Relay Race that used to give the athletes an automatic *élan*. Competitors of all ages, from children to old men and women, would take part in this event. Tagore's immortal utterance, "There is a race about being the first to offer one's life," cannot be applied here. Here what holds is: "Who can outrun whom and win the first place?" Our former groups C and D were like East Bengal and Mohan Bagan. Terrible rivalry. And their supporters also gave themselves up to wild excitement.

1954. Baburam and three other children of Group A outran Nolini's team, and Baburam was beside himself with joy. A youth questioned him: "By outdoing old people you are so happy?" "No, no. Just because we could defeat the Secretary of the Ashram. Can you dare defeat him in anything?" came the prompt reply from Baburam. The poor questioner could not find his tongue.

It is through sports that Nolini could so intimately mix with children. Even now he keeps up that capacity. There is an affinity of soft feeling between Nolini's heart and the children's.

Just one unforgettable incident. On the first of March, 1961, at about 3 p.m., Nolini was standing in front of the room where incense sticks are lighted for us at Sri Aurobindo's Samadhi. A child named Gopal who enjoyed his affection happened to be there. He asked Nolini: "Such a big line, one going behind the other to the Mother for her Blessing, what do you call it in French?" "Queue," came the reply from Nolini with a gentle smile.

"No, it's wrong. My teacher Jayanti-bhai told me something else."

"All right. Ask Jayanti-bhai about the French word for 'line' and tell me tomorrow," said Nolini patting Gopal on the back.

"No, why should I tell you?"

"I shall learn it from you."

“Then I am ready to ask Jayanti-bhai and let you know the word to-morrow.”

One day Gopal will grow old. By that time most probably

Nolini’s French poems will be brought out in book-form and Gopal as well as the rest of us will have the opportunity to read those valuable works. One day he will hear the great French savant Sylvan Levi’s high appreciation of Nolini’s command of French. Gopal may one day study Plato and Aristotle. Plato’s comment on Aristotle was: “My academy consist of two parts — the body of my students, and the brain of Aristotle.” Perhaps Gopal will then find no difficulty in pointing out the Aristotle of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Perhaps also he will know the Matthew Arnold of Bengal in our Ashram, the author of *Adhuniki*, one among the first hundred Bengali books, and Tagore’s comment on its rival sister *Sahityika*, “Nolini Kanta Gupta’s contribution to Bengali literature is unique. According to Barindra Kumar Ghosh, “Nolini is the intellectual son (*manas-putra*) of Sri Aurobindo.”

Let us end this account of Nolini’s athletic career on a symbolic link with his spiritual career.

Nolini beginning his sprint and finishing the race can be seen in a composite photograph which makes him start from the Mother’s feet and arrive at Sri Aurobindo’s — a token illustration of his Master’s advice: “Accept the Mother. She will bring you to me.”

## THE PILGRIM OF ETERNITY

CHUNILAL CHOWDHURY

The call from beyond comes  
With the music of waning day...  
Will you merge into the Absolute  
Or return into a new life?...  
The question quivers in me  
Melting my heart to tears...

O fiery fighter of freedom,  
Traveller of the unknown,  
I have not seen you  
Amidst your heroic actions!  
Only I see you here in calm repose  
Absorbed in Sri Aurobindo's Yoga.

But now you have gone beyond mortal reach,  
Your visible eyes are closed for ever.  
While the evening conch heralds  
The unseen Flute-Player  
As He draws you to Him,  
I conceive the essence of your existence.

The seed of eternal Life, Love and Light  
Has been sown within you  
At an unknown hour —  
Bathed in a golden glow  
It will sprout again  
With green leaves, fruits and flowers.

**NOLINI-DA**  
*Soul-Reminiscences*

GAJARAJ D SUKHDEV

1

I saw Nolinida sitting on the terrace, waiting to be called by the Mother.

From the Ashram Post-Office footpath, I saw him, sitting upright, and through his eyes of profundity he was peering into the infinite blue in front.

My heart went to him, touched his feet and asked, "What are you seeing, Nolinida?"

And in the silent spaces of my soul I heard him answering:

"He called me and I came,

He beckoned me and I followed,

He commanded me and I obeyed.

My home is in the world beyond worlds,

I came missioned down to do His Will.

Siva, sitting on the throne of his snowy infinity, is my comrade.

His supernal secrecy is lurking in my depths,

His wondrous grandeur is shining on my heights.

In that world I move when I sit on the terrace,

Waiting to be called by the Mother."

2

I saw Nolinida working in his office, one fine morning, surrounded by the piles of correspondence, while his typewriter waited patiently for his touch.

I stood at his door with awe and amazement and invariably  
my reverence leapt with joy and humbly said,  
"What are you doing, Nolinida?"

He looked at me through his eyes of benevolence  
which carressed my being and I felt him saying:  
"I am the bridge between the Mother above and Her worlds below,  
I am a serene clarion to proclaim Her glory  
to the longing hearts and the aspiring souls,  
My voice echoes Her messages in the valleys of life.  
Her Grace has opened my windows on the oriental  
and occidental vastnesses of Knowledge,  
And when I touch my pen, they say even the Gandharvas tremble  
at my criticism.

But in my heart of love I carry the whole world  
and I bear the burden of Her Grace when I am working in my office,  
surrounded by the piles of correspondence."

3

I saw Nolinida at the Playground on a Monday evening,  
walking to and fro in his uniform of the H Group.  
His eyebrows reflected the rainbow's curves and his visage  
was serene, impenetrable, invincible,  
and in his walk was seen the magic of Vamana's all-pervading strides.  
The weakness of my strength touched his arms of might,  
and timidly enquired:

"How are you feeling, Nolinida?"

And his puissant will, thundering its ebullient vibrations,  
declared without words:

"I am the rock where He intends to build  
His resplendent home of tomorrow,

I shall house in my cells the inviolable ecstasy of the Gnosis  
And my footsteps shall be imprinted on the yearning breast of earth,  
I am the child of Strength, the son of Immortality,  
the torch-bearer of the new world  
that with tremendous pace is now taking shape,  
not only in the mind and in the heart of man  
but also in the very atoms of matter.  
All this I feel when I am walking in the Playground  
in my uniform of the H Group on Monday evenings.”

4

And in my everyday dreams I see Nolinida.  
His melodious voice, his soothing touch, his unparalleled affection  
come to awaken me at the dawn, saying:  
“I am nothing,  
I know nothing,  
I can do nothing,  
In all the game of only He and She  
I am simply your  
NOLINIDA.”

## THE ELDER BROTHER OF THE ASHRAM

INDRA SEN

Nolinida (whom the wider world knew as Sri Nolini Kanta Gupta) was an institution by himself. He had been here long before the Ashram came into existence and he and the Ashram grew up together. As the Ashram became an institution he too became an institution within the institution. Quiet and economical in words and action, as he always was, he was able to dispose of a great deal of business of the Ashram and yet save a lot of time for his varied studies and writings. He looked so leisurely in the midst of all this.

Once he spoke of an inner Ashram of truth and beauty besides the outer Ashram. His own words are:

“At present, as I say, there is a separation between the two ashrams.... They are to be made one single existence: the inner must take up, assimilate into itself the outer, the outer must allow itself to be cleansed and emptied of its dross and be possessed altogether by the inner.”

His fondness for the younger people was also a special one. Once he spoke to them saying,

“You have been told, and I have also often told you, that although the Mother’s physical body is not there, she has left her consciousness with us: the consciousness is still living, it is still working. She herself said even while she was in her body that if ever she left her body, her consciousness will be always there with us. But I will add something more here. Apart from the consciousness what she has left with us, what remains with us, is her Love, the love for her children is still there undiminished as before in its fulness. I spoke of the inner ashram life: that life is built out of her love for her children, and it must be easy for you to enter and enjoy that life through your love for the Mother, your answering love for the Mother’s love for you. And through the glow of that love you will gradually develop into what she wanted you to become.”

His identification with the Ashram and its younger people was indeed profound. And this found a poignant expression in his letter written a few months before his final departure where he talks of his “last wish about the Ashram.” He says “We are all old and none is immortal. Before we leave one by one, the next generation should be trained to take over the charge of the Ashram and only those among the younger

generation should be chosen for this responsibility who are not only wise and efficient but also — and most of all — are honest and truly dedicated to the Mother.” Very touching words indeed! ‘We are all old and none is immortal.’ And how deep is the concern for the Ashram! “Before we leave one by one the next generation should be trained to take charge of the Ashram....” How far-sighted is he regarding the well-being of the Ashram and how willing and bold is he to pass on the charge of the Ashram to the next generation! All so wonderfully wise.

The Mother had spoken to some young people in 1972 shortly before She left Her body. She had said, “Well, you must rise to the height of the task, you must strive, you must conquer all weaknesses and limitations: above all you must tell your ego: your hour is gone. We want a race that has no ego, that has in the place of the ego the Divine Consciousness!”

These words of the Mother would come to our mind as we think of Nolinida’s last wish regarding the Ashram.

What a trust the Mother reposed in the young people to whom She addressed those words which look like Her last message! And how similar is the sentiment of Nolinida, his faith in the young people and their capacity to manage the Ashram for the future.

Nolinida’s love for the Ashram and his concern for its continued working are really very profound. He served the Ashram all his long life most devotedly. Such was his love for Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and such was his dedication to them. He was a model of a disciple, an example to others, truly an elder brother of the Ashram almost all along.

In his later years, however, it appears, he attained to a perfect identification with the Divine Mother. He seemed to be merged in Her. The Mother had become to him his all. It was so wonderful to see this development in him after the Mother’s passing.

The Mother Herself had testified to Nolinida’s inner status on his birthdays in Her remarks on his cards in the years 1969 and 1973 in particular. In ‘69 she said, “en route towards the superman” and in ‘73, “My blessings for the transformation.” These are spiritually high appraisals. ‘Supermanhood’ and ‘Transformation’ are our ultimate objectives and to be in a position to seek them, to approach them, is a high status in sadhana. One must have covered much aspiration, much consecration and many successive realisations to aim at these ultimate objectives.

Nolinida was a model of a disciple in lifelong dedication of service to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. He was also a profound scholar. Pursuit of knowledge in very many fields was a passion with him. His representation of the thought of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is always so clear and sure. He was also a wonderful spiritual aspirant. His turning to the Heights was really astounding. And he did approach the highest objectives.

Nolinida was an inspiring elder brother to us all. He showed to us by his vibrant example the path of service and consecration, the path of understanding and knowledge as also of the highest ranges of self-merger in the Mother and fulfilment in life.

## NOLINI-DA

JAYANTILAL PAREKH

“Nolini was Sri Aurobindo’s *Manas putra*” someone once said. To be called Sri Aurobindo’s mind-born child is not just a tribute; it is a fact perceived intuitively. Nolini got life from Sri Aurobindo’s intellectual being. He was sustained by Sri Aurobindo’s intellectual light. He identified himself totally with Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual self as the intellectual being merged in the spiritual self, as intellectual light turned into cosmic vision. It is a Truth-sense which governed Sri Aurobindo’s seeing and feeling even when it was of an intellectual character. Nolinida’s seeing mind (*paśyanti buddhi*) gradually acquired a similar texture.

The ultimate of true intellectuality is agnosticism. Pushed beyond the bar of intellectuality one perceives an inexhaustible energy, a seeming inscrutable intelligence, an incomprehensible Reality, further down the line perhaps even a Being, a Supreme Person — call it God if you like.

No true understanding of Sri Aurobindo is valid which separates the Mother from him. They are undivided in being and in manifestation. I think Nolini was one of the first to perceive this fact. He never deviated from that perception.

Sri Aurobindo was verily an intellectual *par excellence* with the Truth-sense and its luminous word.

Sri Aurobindo was a poet not by choice but by inherent colour, perfume and texture of his being — a seer-poet. He was a citizen of that land of delight and significance where things always move in the grand stream of rhythm and power of their inscrutable self. A poet of the classical stature and breadth with a vast vision of things.

Sri Aurobindo was a Yogi by destiny, a Yogi in spite of himself, as it were — one pursued by the Hound of Heaven, from whom he could not escape.

Nolini was born of Sri Aurobindo’s mental self. Poetry was his father’s legitimate legacy which he enjoyed whenever the urge took him. Yoga was the unquestioning pursuit of a loyal child. He became a facet of the multi-dimensional Diamond of changing facets we know Sri Aurobindo to be.

Merging of the son in his father's being of light is the ultimate of spiritual life. If the son is required to rule his father's empire or a part of his domain, it is by delegation of power he does it, not by the right of conquest.

Nolini never projected himself as a thinker, a writer, a worker or a sadhak. He lived unobtrusively like a quiet white shadow of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. He never displayed any restlessness of ambition. Personality, ambition, self-importance, self-assertion of an individual were lost in his identity with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

There is no sin that leaves a stain on the person, no weakness which incapacitates the being in the case of one who identifies himself with the being of the Master. We can safely say this of Nolini.

In the early photographs of Nolini we observe the refinement of intelligence of a high-born one. In the Mother's portrait of him we see, besides the refinement, the mystic inwardness of a quiet soul.

In Sri Aurobindo we feel a power large, gigantic, self-assured, whether it be that of a lord, ruler, seer-poet or god — a power we see in the mid-day sun.

In Nolini we never saw this aspect emerge. Perhaps it was not a dominant trait of his active nature. Clarity of vision has a power but it is of light, not of the body of the vibrating Sun — *Savitur*. I feel Nolini's abode was in some spiritual coolness of being, but he continued to tread the upward path laid by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

## NOLINI KANTA GUPTA

K. D. SETHNA

With the passing away of Nolini Kanta Gupta at 4.42 p.m. on February 7 something precious in our world of time ceased to pass away: a life of profound spiritual moments reached at the age of ninety-five its grand total and, becoming a rounded whole, grew a permanent part of history.

Regarded by all who knew him as the disciple whom Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had considered the closest to themselves in many respects and had appointed their Ashram's Secretary from almost the very beginning, Nolini lived lately with a quiet inwardness making no display of the richness of its contents yet effortlessly pervading the Ashram's atmosphere. After Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had departed, his personality helped much to sustain the manifold activities which the two great Initiators had set in motion to realise more and more their vision of a new creation on earth rather than a gradual preparation for freeing the soul into some beatific Beyond.

Not that this Beyond was ever out of cognisance in the Aurobindonian Yoga that Nolini followed. Indeed the uttermost of it was the goal, what the Master called Supermind, the ultimate Divine Dynamism that not only has manifested the world but also holds the secret of the world's divinisation through an evolutionary process. To attain the Supermind yet not merely to rest in its luminosities was the spiritual path originated by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother: the aim always was to bring that supreme perfection down into the terms of mind, life-force and even body.

Faithful to his Guru's demand, Nolini worked indefatigably towards the spiritual heights and sought to express them here below. It is notable that during the last months of his life he who was never given to much self-disclosure let escape a few words which afforded a sign that he was working from a level which Sri Aurobindo had described as nearer to the Supermind than any other. On one of his daily visits to Nolini's room, Nirodbaran ventured the question among the attendants present there: "Where is Nolini-da's consciousness these days?" Unexpectedly Nolini himself looked up and said: "Why, with the Mother." Nirodbaran pushed the inquiry further: "But where exactly?" Nolini answered: "In the Overmind." Although startling in its precision, this was not quite a surprise in its general drift, for all around him had been feeling

that throughout the preceding months some unusual inner power had been accompanying the vicissitudes of his illness: a glow seemed to emanate from his face and there was a calm confidence in his dealings with troubled souls as though he had been graced with a new right of guidance.

Whoever was sensitive to spiritual influence could feel the presence of this power and this grace all about Nolini as his body lay in the immobility of death but diffused a most living and energising peace. A steady pressure from above one's head brought the experience of a creative immensity urging us with its blessing towards a greater life and towards the fulfilment of Sri Aurobindo's dream of the Ashram as a collective passage to a golden future.

Nolini's true being is still with us and secretly continues here to serve the Divine who had a double incarnation amongst us, mastering our unregenerate human nature and mothering the evolving godhead in each sincere aspirant. Many memories surge up in me as I look back over the years since I first met Nolini in December 1927. His high forehead, his serious eyes which yet knew how to twinkle, his frequently raised eyebrows not indicating any disapproval but silently signalling his attempt to keep his mind uplifted, his full hanging moustache reminiscent of the Nietzsche who had first invoked, however faultily, the unborn Superman — none of these features changed through the decades. Although occasionally brusque in manner and speech, he had often a tender understanding of people, especially young ones. And I remember the Mother saying that she had never heard him speak ill of anybody to her. Another trait I observed was one to which Champaklal once drew attention. The Mother would at times ask Nolini what he had to say on this or that problem which had arisen or to make a pronouncement on some point needing elucidation. He would maintain a grave face as if giving thought to her question, but not a syllable escaped his lips. It was a scene of respectful silence appealing to her to frame the decisive word. Anything he spoke might come in the way of the plenary light she could shed. Anybody else would have been flattered into speech by the Mother's gesture as of consultation. Not so Nolini in the least. The result was the Mother's own deliverance of all-clarifying judgment. When, however, the matter was of a technical literary import, as happened now and then in the Mother's French-translation class, he would respond with alacrity on hearing, after she had stated the uncertainty, the sweet trustful call: "Nolini?" Time and again, the Mother would send us to his room to get advice on a practical point concerning the aptness of one course of action or another in relation to Sri Aurobindo's writings.

There is no doubt that though she was aware of human shortcomings even in the best of us, the Mother, in tune with Sri Aurobindo, had a very high opinion of Nolini as a practitioner of their Yoga as well as in his role of an evolved mental being. Still, this did not imply that she meant him to be her successor in any radical sense. Nobody could be an authentic successor to the Avatars of the hitherto-unrevealed Supermind. As things have stood, none can serve as a third Guru in the domain of so rare a reach of Divine Consciousness. Neither did Nolini ever claim to be such. But nobody deserved as richly as he to be a potent helper on the way, the exemplar of a lofty spiritual detachment which could yet be the door-opener of a treasure-house of inner knowledge and prove a warm-hearted brother at once unobtrusive, sympathetic, elevating. He has also figured admirably as a guardian of the Ashram by his wide reputation for deep mystical experience and a many-sided wisdom. Here was a guardian alive to the need in Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's unique experiment in the reshaping of man that the seat of this experiment — the Ashram — should be left free to proceed on its own inspiration with the light caught from the founders of its Yoga of Supramental Descent and Transformation.

Well may we set up for ourselves, as those founders' co-disciples with the illumined soul that has left its body, the ideal of being as Nolini-like as possible.

## HOMAGE TO NOLINI

K. R. SRINIVASA IYENGAR

Late in life, from his Inn of Tranquillity in Pondicherry, the inscrutable, unflappable, inimitable, unchanging, unforgettable Nolini was to recall how, as a mere boy, at dead of night in front of the image of Kali, he had taken a vow spelt out in blood drawn from his chest, affirming solemnly that he would “dedicate his life to the whole-hearted service of the Motherland”.<sup>1</sup>

About a quarter century later, as an inmate of Sri Aurobindo’s household, on the eve of his annual trip to Bengal, Nolini (now in his mid-thirties) wished to take leave of Mirra Alfassa, then in temporary seclusion:

“I entered and waited in the Prosperity Room... The Mother came... I approached her and said, ‘I am going’, and then lay prostrate at her feet, my first pranam to the Mother. She said, ‘Come back soon’. This ‘Come back soon’ meant in the end, ‘Come back for good’.”<sup>2</sup>

Soon after his return, the household became the Ashram on 24 November 1926, and Sri Aurobindo went into retirement having installed Mirra as Mother of the Ashram, and Nolini as its Secretary.

Since his early years of nonage, there had occurred in Nolini a progressive movement in consciousness, from his looking up to Sri Aurobindo, first as the prophet of the Indian Revolution come down to achieve the liberation of the Motherland; then — after Manicktolla, Muzzaferpore, Alipur, Chandernagore, and the shift to Pondicherry — as the liberator in retreat but biding his time; presently as the Master of many languages and knowledges, who was at once leader, senior comrade, teacher, father; and lastly, with the aid of Mirra’s seer-vision, gaining a view of the Guru, the Mahayogi.

This was matched by the parallel movement in consciousness, from looking up to Mirra, first as the many-splendoured visitor from France who was Sri Aurobindo’s collaborator on the *Arya*; then (after the second coming on 24 April 1920 and the shift, on the night of the cyclone on 24 November, to Sri Aurobindo’s house) as the

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<sup>1</sup> Nolini Kanta Gupta & Amrita, *Reminiscences* (Mother India Publisher, Pondicherry, 1969), p.6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

immaculately efficient manager of the growing household; and, finally, guided by the Master's uncanny perception of Mirra's true Being, as the Mother, the creatrix of the New Life to be. After the climactic 24 November 1926, Sri Aurobindo was Master and Lord of the Yoga, Mirra was the Mother, and the Ashram the spiritual reactor engaged in the alchemy of life-transformation and world-transformation.

For Nolini too, there was the radical leap in consciousness, from whole-hearted 'service of the Motherland' to complete surrender to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The lesser was gathered into the greater, and for nearly sixty years Nolini was to be a plastic instrument in the hands of the mystic Two-in-One, the Master and the Mother.

I had my first interview with Nolini forty-one years ago in the Ashram 'reception room', once the venue of the 'soup distribution'. The late Shankargauda arranged the meeting. Nolini's words were "few but roses"; and no thorns either. The relationship thus established, it continued on an even keel. I reviewed his *The Malady of the Century* in the *Social Welfare* (edited by K. M. Munshi) and commented on his *To the Heights* in my *Indian Contribution to English Literature* (1945), which also carried a long chapter on Sri Aurobindo. On my first visit to Delhi, Nolini advised me to contact Surendra Mohan Ghose and Surendranath Jauhar, which I did; and the contacts, then made, have since had many fruitful ramifications. Again, on the eve of my visit to Japan in 1957 to attend the World P. E. N. Congress, Nolini asked me to meet Prof. Okhawa at Tokyo and Madame Kobayashi in Kyoto whom the Mother had known forty years earlier. From the meetings Prof. Gokak and I had with Dr. Okhawa and Madame Kobayashi, I learnt a good deal about the Japanese interlude in the Mother's life and ministry. On the rare occasions I wrote to Nolini, and the rarer occasions I met him, our exchanges were spasmodic or telegraphic on my part (because of my self-consciousness), and on his side, pointedly brief, often with the rich finish and finality of 'sutras'. His letters, even the small-sized letter-heads that he used, revealed the man. There was no scattering of effort or resources.

When I wrote towards the end of March 1973 seeking the Mother's permission and benedictions for my projected new Biography — or rather an enlarged new edition of my *On the Mother* published twenty years earlier — Nolini replied on 6 April: the Mother had been apprised of my intention and request, and she sent her blessings. "I am sure this work will be as successful as the book on Sri Aurobindo", he wrote, and added; "It is more difficult to be sure; but with the Mother's Grace, you will come out of it brilliantly". Thus had Grace taken the matter in hand, and I was able to send through Jayantilal the completed typescript to Nolini a year ahead of the

Mother's birth centenary. And *On the Mother: The Chronicle of a Manifestation and Ministry* came out on time.

During my more recent visits to the Ashram, much as my heart wanted to meet him, I was reluctant to disturb him, knowing the condition of his health. However, in December last, when I was in Nirodbaran's room, he generously offered to take me to Nolini. This was Grace abounding! Nolini was sitting on his bed, the same dear unflappable Nolini as ever. "How are you?" I asked. Taking my hand in his, he smiled and said: "Well, I am here, and you are there!" All was said indeed. My granddaughter, Ahana, was with me. "Prema's daughter!" he said with a new light in his eyes and, taking her hand, gave his blessings. "All can be done if the God-touch is there"; and Ahana was flushed with happiness.

For a Yogi whose goddess of idolatry was Bharat Mata, till she became part of the brooding, resplendent, dynamic, transforming Creator-Spirit of the universe itself, visibly symbolised in the Mother (as Sri Aurobindo had visioned and memorably described her in the revelatory poetic prose *The Mother*), there was no 'I' or 'You', for all was part of the one creative consciousness-force. Was it this he meant to convey when he said in his parting sutra-like 'message': "Well, I am here, and you are there!" — and at the same time joined his hand to mine as if we were one. The separative moulds of form were but mere outer seeming, for the real 'I' and 'You' both disappeared in the single sovereign consciousness of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Did Nolini in the full plenitude of his realisation want to prepare my mind for his own prospective withdrawal that would be no withdrawal at all, but only a blissful definitive return to the mystic integral relationship with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother?

From childhood, boyhood, on to Future Man:  
The patriot, revolutionary,  
The sportsman, scholar, poet, friend, serviteur,  
Keen of eye, ear, tongue, soft-spoken, active,  
Observant, observer of all observers,  
The perfect link between the Two-in-One  
And the eager aspirants at the gates,  
The exemplum of the new askesis!

Visitant from Bengal, but grown native,  
You breathed in Pondy perpetual spring,

And laboured with others to make this place  
Old Vedapuri risen once again.  
Paraclete, seer-poet, Nolini! Abide  
With us always, and receive our obeisance.

17.3.1984

## NOLINI-DA

M. P. PANDIT

Speaking of Maheshwari, Sri Aurobindo writes:

To the wise she gives a greater and more luminous wisdom; those that have vision she admits to her counsels.

Nolini Kanta Gupta was perhaps the first of the few whom the Mother so admitted to her counsels. And no wonder. Right from the first decade of the century he had been not only associated with Sri Aurobindo but had come close to him in several ways. Neither Sri Aurobindo nor Nolini was demonstrative but a close bond grew up between the two. Sri Aurobindo taught him French, Latin, Greek, in a direct way. Nolini entered into Sri Aurobindo's being via Mind and became his *mānasa-putra*. Whenever an article had to be written, the first person Sri Aurobindo thought of was Nolini. Whether it was the Bengali *Dharma* or later the *Standard Bearer* of Chandernagore, Sri Aurobindo's stand-by was Nolini. Naturally much later, when it was decided to start the *Advent* Quarterly in 1943 to expound the Master's Vision of the Future, Nolini was the obvious choice for its editorship. During all these decades he set up a high standard not only in his editorial writings but also in the selection of its contents. It will be our endeavour to uphold his lofty values and follow his pattern as far as possible.

The Mother had always a special regard for Nolini's judgment in these matters. She never allowed a single line of her writings to be published in the *Bulletin* unless Nolini approved. It was her express direction that no writing of hers was to go out unless it passed through Nolini's hands. And Nolini was very conscious of this trust of Mother's in him. He thought twice and thrice before suggesting an emendation. For the Mother being used to French construction, her English expression would at times need slight alteration. But Nolini was hesitant as a rule to change so much as a comma. It was an education for persons like me to watch their interaction. For it was not only in literary matters that Mother depended upon Nolini. The areas where she consulted him, waited for his reactions, were varied. I noted that he never answered her instantly; he waited for a few seconds before replying.

They had such a close relation that he could easily anticipate her requirements. It was touching to see him offer his muslin upper-cloth to her for wiping her hands after

she arranged flowers in a vase and turned for a napkin to dry her fingers. There was such deep harmony between them that she did not at all need to speak to him in words; a mere gesture was enough. She — and Sri Aurobindo too — always appreciated his cool and they refer to it on more occasions than one. Both of them had an eye to his personal well-being. It was the Mother who designed the famous skull-cap of Nolini. Sri Aurobindo would reminisce about Nolini's bald head and his thinking of a possible remedy for it!

Nolini was a silent polymath. His interests ranged over a variety of subjects: philosophy, psychology, poetry, aesthetics, languages in their deeper bearings, Veda, Upanishad, Epics of different cultures. And he was a renowned footballer, famed as Roy in Pondicherry of those days. He had almost a passion for athletics, and would not miss a single evening of our physical culture sessions. He was perhaps the most reticent person I have met and his very economy of speech was an asset to the Mother in the Ashram work which she handled through him and Amrita for long.

But on that account he was never far from us. His humanism was most palpable in his dealings with children. Of this let the children speak.

## NOLINI-DA [February 9, 1984]

R. Y. DESHPANDE

A calm infinity covered his face  
As if a golden rod had cloven the clouds:  
His flame dissolved in the vast of the Mother-Flame.  
A brow of Indra glowing with mid-day blaze,  
A subtle sense that seized rhythms of the farthest Word,  
His life, a Virgilian song to the august sun,  
A canticle and a prayer brightly enriched  
In meaning of the birth of the Supreme.  
Now, as though some inner door opened to Fate,  
Burns the occult fire withdrawn into trance.  
Grief crying in darkness for light lifted its eyes,  
But the quivering of a million sounds  
Disappears into a luminous sea.  
Between the silence and the Unknowable  
He rests, a faint glimmering ridge of Thought  
Where Eternity stepped towards human Time.

*February 9, 1984*

## NOLINI KANTA GUPTA'S PERCEPTIONS OF POETRY

R. Y. DESHPANDE

Between Genesis and the Apocalypse is the struggle and the striving and the reaching out. Creation issuing from God and man's divine fulfilment as his Destiny are the subjects of the two Testaments. But eating of the forbidden fruit of knowledge is another story and it is for the poets to write about it. Virgil's "tears in mortal things", Keats's "this nest of pain", Shelley's falling on the thorns of life and bleeding, Eliot's "hollow men" or the "inoperancy of the world of the spirit", even the Gita's "this transient and sorrowful world" are a poignancy that has to be borne on this difficult and dangerous pilgrim's march. The frustrating endeavour and travail lie between the two glorious ends; a tortuous hiatus separates birth and death. But there is another dimension to this labour and toil, even to death in the sequence of life, put aphoristically by Sri Aurobindo: "He stung Himself with bliss and called it pain." To the woe of our heart He does not consent but tells us simply that its grief is just another name for joy. The horror of night about which we complain is but an opportunity to emerge into the day. Death is after all a passage towards life making the adventure worthwhile.

Nolini Kanta Gupta believed that the entire history of mankind, seen in its essential psycho-spiritual sense, is a mighty effort of the human life, almost a poetry of triumph, transcending itself and entering into the law of harmony, beauty, sweetness, truth, knowledge, even power, a wondrous movement born of and sustained by a secret delight that is its own cause and its own effect, a great creative urge touching and pervading everything. The saga of evolution is an unwritten composition of the invisible poet and is sung by the bee and the lion and the hero. It is for us to join in its upward flight and the high-rising note. "We ascend the ascending grades in our heart and we sing the song of ascension. The journey's end is heavenly Jerusalem, the House of the Lord." The ways of God are justified to Man. But Nolini Kanta Gupta goes far beyond the Augustinian mantra when he recognises that

A finite movement of the Infinite  
...winging its way through a wide air of Time<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Savitri* p. 148.

is indeed what has been thrown in this transient and sorrowful world as a "hook to clutch eternity". If Virgil was the noble singer of the glory of Rome that was to come, Nolini Kanta Gupta is certainly the high and lofty hymner and chanter of the splendours of the Poetry of the Spirit. But there is a difference: the imperial majesty of Rome was, with the declining time, to shed off its purple grandeurs, a thing which never happens to the Word that comes straight from the source of original sound; it never dulls in time. On the contrary, with the growing cycles of the seasons it wears variegated hues and rhythms and flame-raptures as though the dreams of the stars come true in the earthly sleep, ever waking up to greater, newer dawns. The Poetry of the Spirit is not only a strange or tremulous vibrancy-and-glow of the Far that stirs and enlivens our insentience, but is also a surge-and-breath that lifts all our heaviness and sloth and grey slime to the sublimity of the unseen peaks, a power that luminously widens in leaf and rock and stream, a beauty that opens out its grace and charm to the blue of the formless, a thought that goes out to touch the Imponderable. Such is the conviction and commitment for poetry held by Nolini Kanta Gupta; carrying a poet's heart it is with this admiration and absorption that he freely and royally travels in the "realms of gold". Yet the dazzle of those realms does not blind him because he at once identifies himself with those realms' creative spirit merging with their line and sweep and delicacy of flow and patterned movement and rhythm, drinking the secret *rasa* all along. He doesn't have to surmise wildly if something is to enter into his eagle-eyed stare. Indeed, he has an easy access to the places where those wonders have their first birth, as he himself becomes a citizen of those gleam-magical lands. Nolini Kanta Gupta's perceptions of poetry are by direct spiritual empathy.

But for acquiring the right of entry to the realms of gold he had to do a long apprenticeship. A *tapasvin* of literature, he had achieved that rare *siddhi* by arduous effort. To step into the sunlit continents and kingdoms of the Word's delight one has to prepare oneself by assimilating the best of the entire past, preferably in the light of the future that must illumine it. And what a privilege he had! Master of English and Bengali, Nolini Kanta Gupta knew several Indian and European languages. He could read the Vedas in the original; so too *The Divine Comedy* and *Aeneid*. Reminiscing about his early lessons of the Veda he tells us that "Sri Aurobindo would take up a hymn from the Rigveda, read it aloud once, explain the meaning of every line and phrase and finally give a full translation. I used to take notes.... His own method of interpreting the Rigveda was this: on reading the text he found its true meaning by

direct intuitive vision through an inner concentration in the first instance, and then he would give it an external verification in the light of reason, making the necessary changes accordingly.”<sup>2</sup>

His lessons in the literary classics started under Sri Aurobindo in the same way. He picked up Greek by taking directly Euripides’s *Medea* and Sophocles’s *Antigone*, Latin with Virgil, and Italian with Dante. Recollecting Sri Aurobindo’s method of teaching languages to the adults, Nolini Kanta Gupta narrates how he learnt French from him: “I started right away with a play from this volume [Molière’s Works], *L’Avare*. At several places in the margins he wrote out in his own hand the English equivalents for my convenience. I still possess that volume with the marginal notes in his handwriting.”<sup>3</sup> What does one get by this method? “One feels as if one took a plunge into the inmost core of the language, into that secret heart where it is vibrant with life, with the quintessence of beauty, the fullness of strength. Perhaps it was this that has prompted me to write prose-poems and verse in French, for one feels as if identified with the very genius of the language.”<sup>4</sup> A rare Teacher and a rare student, indeed!

With this grounding in the classics, with the heart of a Romantic, with the thought-mind of a Modernist, and living in the Aurobindonian Next Future, Nolini Kanta Gupta looks at poetry as the fulfiller of man’s age-long aspiration for the Truth-Beauty of Delight. He has truly acquired the patrimony in the realms of gold. He has done what the Gita calls in a generalised sense the askesis of speech, *vāṅgmaya tapa*. Thus for him the Vedic Riks are at once “beautiful things said in a beautiful way.”<sup>5</sup> The gods themselves are the great creators of the Word, *kavis*, for the “Poet is he who by his poetic power raises forms of beauty in heaven — *kaviḥ kavitā divi rupam āsajat*.”<sup>6</sup> When he listens to the Rik

Lo! the supreme Light of lights is come, a varied awakening is born, wide manifest,<sup>7</sup>

or to the Upanishadic power-packed revelation

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<sup>2</sup> Nolini Kanta Gupta. Col. Works, vol. 7, p. 421.

<sup>3</sup> Col. Works, vol. 7, p. 394.

<sup>4</sup> Col. Works, vol. 7, p. 422.

<sup>5</sup> Col. Works, vol. 2, p. 36.

<sup>6</sup> Col. Works, vol. 2, p. 42.

<sup>7</sup> Col. Works, vol. 2, p. 36.

There the sun shines not, nor the moon, nor the stars; these lightnings too there shine not; how then this fire! That shines and therefore all shines in its wake; by the sheen of That, all this shines,<sup>8</sup>

or to Sri Aurobindo's translation of the same sloka

There the sun shines not and the moon has no splendour and the stars are blind; there these lightnings flash not, how then shall burn this earthly fire? All that shines is but the shadow of his shining! all this universe is effulgent with his light,<sup>9</sup>

he knows that it is

The Word that ushers divine experience,<sup>10</sup>

Here, in the Upanishadic utterance, is the poetic mantra in its quintessential purity and because it is so pure it is also beautiful.

But the most daring thing Nolini Kanta Gupta has said is that even the formless can be beautiful. To see a statue by Praxiteles or a painting by Michelangelo is to admire the beauty of form in its harmonious measure and perfection, almost to feel the breath and vibration of the artist's experience itself; but the massive stone-carved statue of the Buddha in the cave radiating infinite peace — what Sarojini Naidu called "the peace annihilate from the world of men" — becomes inspiring and beautiful by the contours of the ungraspable and the formless. "The form of a thing can be beautiful; but the formless too has its beauty. Indeed, the beauty of the formless, that is to say, the very sum and substance, the ultimate essence, the soul of beauty — that is what suffuses with in-gathered colour and enthusiasm, the realisation and the poetic creation of the Upanishadic seer. All the forms that are scattered abroad in their myriad manifest beauty hold within themselves a secret Beauty and are reflected or projected out of it. This veiled Name of Beauty... has no adequate image... below, *na tasya pratimā asti*, it cannot be defined or figured in the terms of phenomenal consciousness."<sup>11</sup> Rare are such insights in the aesthetics of poetry. It is from this standpoint that Nolini Kanta Gupta differentiates the Vedic from the Upanishadic poetry. If the one is "rich and sensuous... luxuriating in high colour and ample

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<sup>8</sup> Col. Works, vol. 2, p. 36.

<sup>9</sup> *The Upanishads*, SABCL vol. 12, p. 280.

<sup>10</sup> *Savitri*, p. 327.

<sup>11</sup> Col. Works, vol. 2, p. 37.

decoration”, the other is the perception of a “concentrated essence”. If one is the form of the Formless, the other becomes formless in form.

Seen from such a consciousness it is quite understandable that the “poet is a trinity in himself... not only the revealer or creator, *savitā*, he is also the builder or fashioner, *taṣṭā*, and he is the organiser, *vedhāḥ*, of the Truth. As Savita he manifests the Truth, as Tashta he gives a perfect body and form to the Truth, and as Vedha he maintains the Truth in its dynamic working.”<sup>12</sup> It would have been good had Nolini Kanta Gupta given some examples, but the import is clear: he is talking about the modes of spiritual poetry.

What is spiritual poetry? and mystic poetry? “When the Spirit speaks its own language in its own name, we have spiritual poetry. If, however, the Spirit speaks — from choice or necessity — an alien language and manner, e.g. that of a profane consciousness or the consciousness of another domain, idealistic, philosophical or even occult, puts on or imitates spirit’s language and manner, we have what we propose to call mystic poetry proper.”<sup>13</sup> This is how Nolini Kanta Gupta distinguishes the two types of poetry. Thus, if Tagore’s *Golden Boat* is mystical and A. E.’s *Desire* on its borderline, Sri Aurobindo’s *Transformation* by its “poetic personality” and “stuff of consciousness” is at once spiritual. Take the following lines from *Savitri*. If

Where mind like a moon illumines the world’s dark<sup>14</sup>

is mystic,

Hearing that listens to thought’s inner sound<sup>15</sup>

more occult than mystic, and

All the great Words that toiled to express the One  
Were lifted into an absoluteness of light,  
An ever-burning Revelation’s fire  
And the immortality of the eternal Voice<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Col. Works, vol. 2, p. 43.

<sup>13</sup> Col. Works, vol. 2, p. 65.

<sup>14</sup> *Savitri*, p. 71.

<sup>15</sup> *Savitri*, p. 325.

<sup>16</sup> *Savitri*, p. 90.

mystico-spiritual, we have

The Absolute, the Perfect, the Alone  
Has called out of the Silence his mute Force  
Where she lay in the featureless and formless hush  
Guarding from Time by her immobile sleep  
The ineffable puissance of his solitude<sup>17</sup>

as purely spiritual. Or we have, coming from infinity and going to infinity, undulating with a tremendous presence and a power of effectuation,

The riven invisible atom's omnipotent force<sup>18</sup>

as the sheer mantra of the highest poetry, at once intense in rhythm, thought-substance, and soul's vision, bringing with it the supreme realisation of what the God of Death actually is in Creation.

However, Nolini Kanta Gupta's concept of the mantra is not Agastyan; it is rather secular in character. His attribution of mantric characteristics to poetry does not belong only to the scriptural genre; it can touch any subject and any matter lifting them to the intensity and wideness of the spirit's sky, yet bringing that ethereality as well as substantiality of soul-vision to material things. Sri Aurobindo describes the mantra as the "Word of power and light that comes from the Overmind inspiration or some very high plane of Intuition."<sup>19</sup> That is what the Vedic Rishis saw in it and spoke of it: the Word, received by the heart and confirmed by the mind, carries the power of creation and of effectuating what it embodies. But for Nolini Kanta Gupta the Shakespearean or the Modernist's Word too is mantra. "Mantra means a certain sum of syllables charged with dynamic force, creative consciousness."<sup>20</sup> Perhaps this may be more of a Tantric formula and not so much a definition of that supreme poetic utterance. But let us take some examples from his writings to illustrate the point he is trying to make.

In the opening scene of *Hamlet* the apparition has appeared for the third time and Horatio is harrowed with fear and wonder. He charges him to speak but the Ghost

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<sup>17</sup> *Savitri*, p. 67.

<sup>18</sup> *Savitri*, p. 255.

<sup>19</sup> *The Future Poetry*, SABCL vol. 9, p. 369.

<sup>20</sup> *Col. Works*, vol. 2, p. 175.

disappears. Nolini Kanta Gupta tells us that in the entire description nothing seems to belong to the earthly stage; it has another tone and hue, another setting. What Shakespeare presents to us is all loaded with magical creative power. "It is the creative force of the articulate sound... mantra."<sup>21</sup>

In the domain of the occult poetry Blake gives us another, vision that was inaccessible to the classical or to the romantic. The marriage proposed by him is an ideal to be pursued for fulfilment on the earth. Here "the Highest must come down wholly and inhabit the Lowest, the Lowest must give up altogether its own norms and lift itself into the substance and form of the Highest."<sup>22</sup> It is a ceremony attended and sanctified by the all-cleansing and transmuting power of the mantra. When the poet asks for the bow of burning gold and the chariot of fire we see that he is ready with the might of the Word to slay the forces that had built the dark Satanic mills. He had received the command from Vak herself and had given expression to it.

Even a Modernist Bengali poet, Dipak Majumdar, imparts to us, by the "collocation of words and images", a neo-mantric experience: the streams meet in the body, one and all; like bats on the branches the dreams swing as if possessed; it is time to dance and to go around the fire. True to the present sensibility, including its uncouthness and frightening shape, here an originality of form and substance is obvious in its intensity of expression. Nolini Kanta Gupta explains that in the body-consciousness spoken of by the poet there is a definitive expression and manifestation, a "concrete reality" itself. The mantra in that sense has succeeded. "The cry of our poet is a cry literally *de profundis*, a deep cavernous voice surging, spectral and yet sirenlike, out of the unfathomed underground abysses."<sup>23</sup>

When a contemporary Greek poet, George Seferis, asks

O nightingale, nightingale,

What is good? What is not good? What is in-between?

or tells us that

Suddenly I was walking and not walking,

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<sup>21</sup> Col. Works, vol. 2, p. 175.

<sup>22</sup> Col. Works, vol. 2, p. 128.

<sup>23</sup> Col. Works, vol. 2, p. 214.

or when Eliot re-emerges through the "still point" we have again a mantric utterance. The reason is, a Modernist invokes terror and pity "not for themselves but for the sake of purification."<sup>24</sup> While the modern sensibility does not give so much weightage to sound-value, it compensates that loss by thought substance and boldness of metaphor or simile or image which can produce a certain impact that could be akin to the effect of the mantra with the purificatory possibility.

The Hymn of Darkness is as ancient as Vedic literature, but it has acquired a new Baudelairean edge and penetration, a sheen and dazzle to illumine and open out the heart of night to a new day that lies beyond the invisible Apocalypse. That is indeed the glory of Transformation. We have here not the simplicity of the pastoral life, nor the winged ethereality of the world-disdaining visionary, but a complex urbanity asserting itself in heaviness of the diurnal routines. Its caves are dark, its waters are dark, its mountains are dark, its modernity is dark. Thus when Yves Bonnefoy moves

vers l'autre rive encore plus nocturne  
(Towards the other bank still more a night)

the journey becomes suddenly frightful-Vedic. In this conception of the power of the Word even the sombre hymn becomes mantric. The contribution of the Modern Age is such that its poetry, its dark subconscious mysticism, too takes a bold step and throws open the unexplored domains for the Spirit to build forms of yet another sight-and-sound in its own figure of faultless beauty. It becomes a means "to break open the doors of the luminous cavern."<sup>25</sup>

But Nolini Kanta Gupta does not linger too long in this Mysticism of the Subconscious. The subconscious aesthesis can be very dangerous. The horror experienced by Agastya while digging in the abysses of consciousness need not be repeated or tasted. *Raso vai sah* is indeed what one should await in the soul's delight. In our own time Tagore is one shining example whose work is "a constant music of the overpassing of the borders, a chant-filled realm in which the subtle sounds and lights of the spirit give new meanings to the finer subtleties of life."<sup>26</sup> Tagore was a dreamy silver-bright idyllic figure emerging out of the past, a lover of bird, flower, stream, Nature in her varied moods and seasons, the boatman, the lonely hut, all that is artistic

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<sup>24</sup> Col. Works, vol. 2, p. 195.

<sup>25</sup> *The Future Poetry* SABCL vol. 9, p. 280.

<sup>26</sup> *The Future Poetry*, SABCL vol. 9, p. 229.

and aesthetically pleasing, the song, the poem, the pergola arch, the wide blue sky. The Kalidasian "Winds carrying spray from the falls of Mandakini, making deodars all astir" lit his early imagination. His soul was morning glory awaiting the sunlight. Not only an admirer or appreciator of beauty; his was a psychic sense that touched and received all that was noble and charming and wonderful. Through this he saw his one deity, the goddess of beauty. He was drawn not so much towards Pallas Athene as towards divine Aphrodite with a cestus around her waist. Beauty, tells Nolini Kanta Gupta, "is the chief and essential thing in the poetic creation of Rabindranath. He appreciates beauty and makes others do the same in a delightful manner... Beautiful is his diction. Mellowness of words and the gliding rhythm have perhaps reached their acme. Charming is his imagination. Varied and fascinating are the richness and intricacy of thought and the firmness and delicacy of feeling..."

The stars drop in the lap of the sky  
From the chain hanging down to your breast.  
The heart is overwhelmed with ecstasy  
In the core of Man's being:  
Blood runs riot in his veins.  
Suddenly your girdles give way  
On the horizon, O naked beauty.

What a visionary world of matchless and unique beauty is unveiled before the mind's eye! That is true Rabindranath, the creator of such magic wonders. Perfect perfection of beauty is inherent in the nature of his inner being."<sup>27</sup>

The search of beauty is an aspect of the search of the hidden unknown. Rabindranath was a traveller of the Infinite. His was not the soul of a philosopher or a researcher but that of a seeker, of the one who pursued beauty in her various moods and guises and disguises. He would rather chase the colours of the butterfly than the ones coming from the tail of the rocket shooting out of sight to unseen skies. An intense aspiration led him on, and on, in search of his ideal that was dream-delicate and dew-fresh. This itself is a kind of lyrical devotionism whose constant strain is a total offering to the beloved of the heart. That is its *raison d'être* too. "Tagore is no inventor or innovator when he posits Spirit as Beauty, the spiritual consciousness as the ardent rhythm of ecstasy. This experience is the very core of Vaishnavism and for

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<sup>27</sup> Col. Works, vol. 7, pp. 146-147.

which Tagore is sometimes called a Neo-Vaishnava."<sup>28</sup> Therefore, when Tagore declares, though not in a very new or original sense, "Mine is not the deliverance achieved through mere renunciation. Mine rather the freedom that tastes itself in a thousand associations", Nolini Kanta Gupta asserts that his was an exploit similar to Socrates's who brought down Philosophy from Heaven to the market-place. It was on the path of the song, the epic of his joy, in search of the Infinite, that he really went very far. In that quest of soul he made the realities of the bare transcendental spirit somewhat tangible and visible to our eyes too. His perceptions have become immortally lyrical. In them it is the song that counts rather than the silence. Indeed, to quote from Radhakrishnan: "History bears witness to the power of the human spirit which endures longer than dynasties and creeds. The political world of Homer is dead while his song is living today. The splendour of Rome has vanished but the poetry of Virgil is yet vital. The dreams of Kalidasa still move us like the cry of a living voice, with their poignant sense of tears in human relations, while the Ujjain of which he was the ornament has left her memory to his keeping. The great mediaeval potentates are forgotten, but the song of Dante is still cherished; and the Elizabethan Age will be remembered as long as the English language lives on account of its Shakespeare. When our lords and leaders pass into oblivion Tagore will continue to enchant by his music and poetry..."<sup>29</sup> But perhaps Nolini Kanta Gupta is more restrained and chaste in the assessment of Tagore as a poet: "... if we compare Tagore with those who stand on the peaks in world-literature, we find in their creation an utmost, flawless harmony between speech and substance, while in Tagore we find on the whole speech carrying more weight than substance and this is why his poetic genius, as it were, somewhat falls short of perfect perfection."<sup>30</sup>

Naturally, therefore, we cannot put the two "Shining Ones"<sup>31</sup> on a par. If one was a forerunner of the era of future poetry, the other was himself its initiator and creator. Tagore derived his shining light from the Past. But even there Homer and Virgil were Greek and Latin to him. It is from the tradition of the race that he essentially received his mysticism and in that whole process what he did was to give to it a new song and a new lilt. His "honey-laden felicity of expression" is more characteristic of the mystico-lyrical than the full-orbed intensity of the world of joy towards which he yearned to

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<sup>28</sup> Col. Works, vol. 2, p. 100.

<sup>29</sup> *East and West in Religion*

<sup>30</sup> Col. Works, vol. 7, p. 185.

<sup>31</sup> Col. Works, vol. 2, p. 229.

take us. He had no access to the source of original sound and only lived in its reflection. No doubt, in Tagore's poetry "there is an imponderable element, a flavour, a breath from elsewhere that suffuses the entire creation, something that can be characterised only as the soul-element. It is this presence that makes whatever the poet touches not only living and graceful but instinct with something that belongs to the world of gods, something celestial and divine, something that meets and satisfies man's deepest longing and aspiration."<sup>32</sup> But his is a "breath from elsewhere" and in the turquoise-blue depth of our heart's passion and in the calm upward-burning intensity of the spirit's diamond glow it thins and pales into a tenuity that cannot upbear the flight of the golden eagle. The deathless Rose and the deathless Flame remain unfulfilled in him.

Not the reflected light but the very sun can be the only shining star of our journey to the high-pinnacled Temple of the Muse. One has to be the denizen of the Sky of the Spirit to pour its splendours. Sri Aurobindo was that Surya-Savitri who established his sky in our earthliness, who brought down the home of Truth of the Vedic seers into our midst, so that the Spirit may speak to us in its native language. Take the following lines from *Savitri*:

A last high world was seen where all worlds meet;  
In its summit gleam where Night is not nor Sleep,  
The light began of the Trinity supreme.  
All there discovered what it seeks for here.  
It freed the finite into boundlessness  
And rose into its own eternities.  
The Inconscient found its heart of consciousness,  
The idea and feeling groping in Ignorance  
At last clutched passionately the body of Truth,  
The music born in Matter's silences  
Plucked nude out of the Ineffable's fathomlessness  
The meaning it had held but could not voice;  
The perfect rhythm now only sometimes dreamed  
An answer brought to the torn earth's hungry need  
Rending the night that had concealed the Unknown,

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<sup>32</sup> Col. Works, vol. 1, p. 198.

Giving to her her lost forgotten soul.<sup>33</sup>

Here we have at once the language and rhythm of some other infinity, thought-substance and massive luminosity of the wide-ranging Truth-existent, and the soul-vision in the consciousness of sheer delight which is the stuff of creation — we have the highest mantra. Or, to use C. M. Bowra's less exalted description, given in a different context but quite appropriate to the Aurobindonian aesthesis, "the elements of sight and sound, and even the absence of them, have passed together into the poet's consciousness, and the effect is complete and single."<sup>34</sup> Or, what Nolini Kanta Gupta would have liked to call it, we have the Spirit's own poetry in its own matter and manner — *svabhāva* and *svadharma*.<sup>35</sup>

*Savitri* is of course Sri Aurobindo's supreme revelation with the full force of his personality behind it. But then even his lyrical pieces move with the same God-breath. They too bring that power out of the Infinite's depths and fulfil specific soul-needs in soul-delights. In his *Mother of Dreams* what we hear is a "sweet felicity naturally pleasing to the ear; there is a sense of wideness as in a far-flung movement of modulated grace; and the whole is surcharged with a rich opulence."<sup>36</sup> In the *Bird of Fire* we perceive the quality of "strength or energy" and in the *Rose of God* it is the "very embodiment of the Word with its power of calm clear vision." Or listen to the prayer when the two ends of existence —

Earth-souls needing the touch of the heaven's peace to recapture,  
Heaven needing earth's passion to quiver its peace to rapture —

must come together that the divine progeny be born:

Marry, O lightning eternal, the passion of a moment-born fire!  
Out of thy greatness draw close to the breast of our mortal desire!<sup>37</sup>

Here is a full-throated voice, in quantitative metre, supplicating the Dawn of the Eternal to transform our darkness into her being of light and sweetness. This is the Word that Sri Aurobindo sees and creates. But it is "something which appears to many

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<sup>33</sup> *Savitri* pp. 89-90.

<sup>34</sup> *The Creative Experiment*.

<sup>35</sup> Col. Works, vol. 2, p. 74.

<sup>36</sup> Col. Works, vol. 7, p. 89.

<sup>37</sup> *Collected Poems SABCL*, vol. 5, p. 523.

poetically intractable, not amenable to aesthetic treatment, not usually, that is to say, nor in the supreme manner. Sri Aurobindo has thrown such a material into his poetic fervour and created a sheer beauty, a stupendous reality out of it. Herein lies the greatness of his achievement."<sup>38</sup> Nolini Kanta Gupta reaches a high point of poetic appreciation when he concludes his essay *Ahana and other Poems* as follows: "And if there is something in the creative spirit of Sri Aurobindo which tends more towards the strenuous than the genial, the arduous than the mellifluous, and which has more of the austerity of Vyasa than the easy felicity of Valmiki, however it might have affected the ultimate value of his creation, according to certain standards, it has illustrated once more that poetry is not merely beauty but power too, it is not merely sweet imagination but creative vision — it is even the Rik, the mantra that impels the gods to manifest upon earth, that fashions divinity in man."<sup>39</sup>

A remarkable perspicacity of thought and vision is what we note in Nolini Kanta Gupta's writings. To seize immediately the truth of things is a rare faculty and given only to great souls. There is a catholicity of outlook, a way of seeing God's world in its many moods of joy, an intimacy, even an identity, with the hidden divinity in the grain and in the star, an appreciation leaping over all conventionality, of the bright as well as the obscure; but it is always with the lamp of spirit that he moves around. And his is not a search that ends in the futility of a Diogenes! Nolini Kanta Gupta sees the unmistakable Presence everywhere. His consciousness is spiritual consciousness and therefore his perception of poetry too is charged with spiritual feeling, association, sense, assonance and consonance, thought, knowledge, intuition. It responds and reverberates with the full dynamism of its calm; its certitude runs like the laughter of a God. But his intuition's eye is not only located in the mind; even to the heart and the very cells of the body it brings that vision of the Far. A heart that calls to the Heights, a mind that leaps to Silence, a body that quivers with the touch of the Beautiful are the shining instruments of his soul's will to live in God and to let God live in it. Listen to the miracle of silence:

In silence move the stars,  
In silence mounts the sap within the plant,  
The secret energies of Nature work and create in the deeps of silence.

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<sup>38</sup> Col. Works, vol. 2, p. 52.

<sup>39</sup> Col. Works, vol. 2, p. 62.

Out of the uttermost stillness the whirling universe was born —  
All the turmoil and tumult, the roar and fury that meet the eye  
Flourish upon an unfathomed quiet below.

In the tranquillity of death a new birth prepares itself,  
The gathered calm of Night's ending ushers in the rejuvenated Sun...  
And were my wild senses to turn back, they would face the abysmal silence  
of the soul.

The cry of the heart shoots up like a column of silence —  
That voice alone reaches straight to the High throne and moves it to grace.  
The gods descend along the path of luminous silence spread in the farthest  
spaces of our inmost being.<sup>40</sup>

A silence deepening into tranquillity that even death in it shall be the harbinger of new birth is a wonderful Aurobindonian insight we see not only here but throughout his *To the Heights*, a set of prose-poems written in the thirties. Lucid and direct in expression and simple in free-verse style here are poems embodying in a low quiet rhythm the profound philosophico-spiritual knowledge. A plain statement like

It is the Eye of the eye and yet it is the object  
that the eye contemplates<sup>41</sup>

begins with an Upanishadic vision but immediately brings all the associations and suggestions extending from Pythagoras to Descartes about the reality of the objective world.

Sometimes the lyrical moments too get loaded with a mass of mysticism when

White — colour of the moon poised on high in an autumn night —  
The soothing peace, the quiet heave of an in-gathered rapture

moves on to the

... colour of the lotus... that has taken body upon earth.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Col. Works, vol. 2, p. 309.

<sup>41</sup> Col. Works, vol. 2, p. 313.

<sup>42</sup> Col. Works, vol. 2, p. 338.

But always the voice rings clear and loud:

There is a breath that moves mountains,  
There is a touch that makes the dead arise,  
There is a voice that is the doom of Yesterday  
And the radiant herald of Tomorrow.<sup>43</sup>

It is in the last line of the *Divina Commedia*,

Love moved me...  
Love that moves the sun and the other stars,

so dear to this mystic-poet, that he goes on to see the beatific vision which is at once "the culmination and denouement of an unrolling of God's play of creation and world manifestation."<sup>44</sup> Then the poetic perception lifted to God-purpose becomes the grandest thing of the creative Word.

If you ask Nolini Kanta Gupta to explain a line from *Savitri* such as

In the griffin forefront of the Night and Day<sup>45</sup>

he will tell you that Griffin is a Golden Hawk plus a Winged Lion, or the piercing eye of soaring aspiration plus upsurging energy of the pure vital. "With these twin powers you cross safely the borderland between the lower and the upper hemispheres — the twilight world (Day and Night) — Griffin is the guardian of this passage."<sup>46</sup>

In the same way he will tell you that Narad was a devarshi, that by his spiritual tapasya he had developed into an immortal divine being. There is no doubt that Nolini Kanta Gupta too had become such a being in the light of God.

From the Chhandogya Upanishad we know how Narad as a young spiritual aspirant was initiated by Rishi Sanatkumar. Having mastered all the worldly lores, the traditional sixty-four vidyas, he had qualified himself well to receive the higher or esoteric knowledge. It is in that knowledge that he then lived and helped humanity to grow in consciousness. No wonder, Sri Krishna calls him his Vibhuti. Nolini Kanta Gupta also lived largely and freely in the golden landscapes of Truth. He accepted Sri

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<sup>43</sup> Col. Works, vol. 2, p. 317.

<sup>44</sup> Col. Works, vol. 6, p. 59.

<sup>45</sup> *Savitri*, p. 25.

<sup>46</sup> Col. Works, vol. 6, p. 45.

Aurobindo's "Invitation". The Mother once saw Narad standing far on the borderline between Overmind and Supermind. That too is the station of Nolini Kanta Gupta. He lived there, at least he had an access to that wondrous place. We can therefore well-surmise that it is from some such high plane of consciousness that he saw true poetry as an utterance of the Spirit. To hearken to Sri Aurobindo's mantra

To live, to love are signs of infinite things<sup>47</sup>

is also to recognise the highest aesthesis of the creative Word given to us in God's plenty for that living and loving, the Vedic plenitude in life. Nolini-da fully imbibed it; he was one of those poet-seers.

November 1, 1987.

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<sup>47</sup> *Savitri*, p. 397.

## NOLINI KANTA GUPTA

### The Vyasa of the Present Age

SATADAL

A Rishi is characterised by his seer-vision. Whatever he writes or states is like something seen before the very eyes and described *in toto* with minute precision right to the inmost depths. Such is Nolini Kanta, our Nolinida, as he is revealed through his writings.

For nearly half a century, his prolific pen served both Bengali and English literature with volumes of writings whose proper value remains as yet to be grasped by the present Age — maybe the future will do the needful. Once his name was suggested by one of his ardent lovers to be included in the panel of names for the Deshikottam title — the highest honour conferred by Vishwa Bharati University. But, alas! the Deshikottam title was deprived of the honour of being associated with a divine personality such as Nolinida.

His seer-vision rightly brought out the truth in essence in his estimate of things literary or otherwise creative, of persons and of circumstances. This is amply illustrated in his writings but his estimate of Sri Aurobindo justifies the title of this article as we see him visualising the movements of the Divine Incarnate and enumerating the truth of his teachings and ideals like Veda Vyasa of ancient times. While speaking about "The Ideal of Sri Aurobindo", how beautifully and with what emphasis he writes: "Our ideal — the ideal of Sri Aurobindo — we may say without much ado, is to divinise the human, immortalise the mortal, spiritualise the material. Is the ideal possible? Is it practicable? Our task will be precisely, first of all, to show that it is possible, next that it is probable and finally that it is inevitable." He literally finishes his task in the article by bringing forth with his seer-vision "the essential unity and identity of the duality" that we see "between Matter and Spirit, between body and soul or between the human and the divine" and has shown that "spiritualisation of Matter is an inevitable consummation that is being worked out by evolutionary Nature". He goes on to say in continuance of his prophetic vision: "Matter will yield completely, and life-power too, only to the direct touch and embrace of the Divine's own self."

As if to put his seal on my statement, he continues: "In this age we stand at some such critical juncture in Nature's evolutionary history. Its full implications, the exact degree of immediate achievement, the form and manner of the Descent are things that remain veiled till the fact is accomplished. Something of it is revealed, however, to the eye of vision and the heart of faith..."

In his article "The Message of Sri Aurobindo" how beautifully in a plain and simple way he packs the sum and substance of all that Sri Aurobindo says, in a single sentence: "... Man is growing and has to grow in consciousness till he reaches the complete and perfect consciousness, not only in his individual, but in his collective, that is to say, social life."

He quotes Sri Aurobindo formulating the stages of human evolution — "Family, nationality, humanity are Vishnu's three strides from an isolated to a collective unity. The first has been fulfilled, we yet strive for the perfection of the second, towards the third we are reaching out our hands and the pioneer work is already attempted" — and then the seer Vyasa in him promptly adds: "But the supreme secret lies in Vishnu's fourth stride, from humanity to divinity. That is the goal of the evolution..."

Commenting on the general tendency of the bulk of humanity to leave Sri Aurobindo aside at the moment on the plea that "His ideal of a divine life upon earth... is not of today or even of tomorrow" and hence "One has to live first, live materially before one can hope to live spiritually", the Vyasa in him burst forth as if to inspire the present age to follow the path of the incarnate Divine: "To say that because an ideal is apparently too high or too great for the present age, it must be kept in cold storage is to set a premium on the present nature of humanity and eternise it: that would bind the world to its old moorings and never give it the opportunity to be free and go out into the high seas of larger and greater realisations.

"The highest ideal, the very highest which God and Nature and Man have in view, is not and cannot be kept in cold storage: it is being worked out even here and now, and it has to be worked out here and now." And comparing the time taken for the first manifestation of life in dead Matter in the form of the plant world, followed by the other stages of animal and human forms appearing on earth, he says that even though the age of animal life was much shorter than that of plant life — since "man is already more than a million or two years old — it is fully time that a higher order of being should be created out of him".

He understood Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to the core so as to recognise their impersonal personality and adore them or rather live them accordingly. In his salutations to Sri Aurobindo<sup>1</sup> he defines the greatness of a person as “the greatness of the impersonal in him” and goes on to say: “Sri Aurobindo from his very birth was such an impersonal personality — and, in the very highest sense”. But he knew that his mantric utterance might not be fully grasped by the human heart and intellect. So he explains later that this “impersonalisation is in reality a re-personalisation”, that is to say, not “a complete negation and annihilation of all personality” but in reality “the replacement of the ego by the true person”, and he finally elucidates that the “impersonalisation involves or culminates in divinisation which means the descent of the Divine, the supreme Person” and that “such is the content of Sri Aurobindo’s consciousness, such is the work that is being pursued under the stress of that consciousness towards the realisation of a new, a divine world” — like Vyasa’s revealing assessment for the men of his time who did not understand what Sri Krishna stood for.

His seer-vision, the vision of light, penetrates the inner world and atmosphere created by the Words of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and he says or rather describes, while answering the questions — “why do we read the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother? And if we read them, how to read them?” — thus: “The real purpose of coming in contact with the words of Mother and Sri Aurobindo is to become conscious, to acquire consciousness, to be more and more conscious, increase more and more in consciousness... To understand, that is to say, to seize by the mind, to grasp intellectually the writings of Mother and Sri Aurobindo is rather difficult. The easier, the more right way would be to enter into the atmosphere of the world that they have created with their words, to feel the vibration that the words emanate”. This reminds me of what he said in connection with my comparing his translations of *Savitri* into Bengali with the original: “Don’t try to get the meaning mentally. Read in between the lines, the white portions so to say, not with your mind but with your heart and try to grasp the atmosphere, the world these words create and carry”.

While commenting on the works of Sri Aurobindo, specially his poems and dramas, the seer Nolini Kanta describes the three words namely “Love conquering Death” to be “the central theme, the core of inspiration running through the whole of

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<sup>1</sup> *A Century’s Salutations to Sri Aurobindo* — Nolini Kanta Gupta.

his (Sri Aurobindo's) Poetic world culminating in the grand symphony of *Savitri*<sup>2</sup>. He further describes love and death thus: "It is the ego that ties man down to his lower consciousness which is the domain of death, and the only antidote of egoism is love, love human or divine." Love depicted in the plays of Sri Aurobindo is according to Nolini Kanta, "divinely noble and beautiful... if it cannot claim to be the very delight of Brahman (Brahmananda) yet it is as the ancients declared, *Brakmānanda-sahodara* consanguineous, of one blood with Divine Delight."

## II

We have so far seen the Vyasa of the present Age revealing to us what the Incarnate Divine of the age stood for. But it would be no less absorbing to see how the seer looked into every aspect of life in its entirety — even in its socio-political and other subtle aspects of intricate human relations.

In his book *The Coming Race* containing a dozen of revelatory articles he envisages the coming of a new species upon earth in no uncertain terms and feels vividly that "the world is in the throes of a new creation and the pangs of that new birth have made Mother Earth restless." He goes on to say that "the New Man — the divine race of humanity is already among us.... Only a thin veil covers it." Then he visualises the New Man to be "what man is not, also what man is" and declares that "the New Man will be Master — and not slave... by being *Swarat*, Self-Master, he will become *Samrat*, World-master." Then he shakes humanity with a volcanic explosion by pin-pointing the ultimate question "who among us are ready to be its (New Man's) receptacle, its instrument and embodiment?"

According to him "every individual being lives to discover and to create." And how strongly he inspires us to become the God in us saying: "It does not prove anything that I cannot become a Kalidasa, for that matter Kalidasa cannot become what I am... Not to do what others do, but what your soul impels you to do. Not to be others but your own self."

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<sup>2</sup> In an introduction to *Savitri*, how beautifully he sums up the whole epic thus: "Savitri, the poem, the word of Sri Aurobindo, is the cosmic Answer to the cosmic Question. And Savitri, the person, the Godhead, the Divine Woman is the Divine's response to the human aspiration."

While speaking on "Rationalism" — he beautifully admits that "Reason has this miraculous power of self-destruction or,... Reason is, at best, an organ of self-criticism and perhaps the organ par excellence for that purpose... but unless it gives up its exclusive absolutism, it will be perforce arbitrary and misleading."

He gives as "the *Mantra* of the new age — Life with intuition as its guide and not Reason and mechanical efficiency, not Man but Superman."

The world knows Nietzsche to be "all storm and fury" who wants to seize the kingdom of Heaven by violence like a titan, an asura. His "Superman is one who is the embodiment of greatest force." But there is another aspect of Nietzsche which the Vyasa's vision brings to light thus: "Nietzsche has an aristocratic taste par excellence — what he aims at is health and vigour and beauty. But above all it is an aristocracy of the Spirit... What Nietzsche wanted was a world purged of littleness and ugliness, a humanity, not of saints, perhaps, but of heroes, lofty in their ideal, great in their achievement, majestic in their empire — a race of titanic gods breathing the glory of heaven itself."

His comments on Marxism bear the testimony of the Vyasa in him when he says that the two principal concepts of Marx viz. a change in the rulers will change the nature of action and reaction in a state or society and the majority determines the right to everything, are wrong. The proletariats or the shudras must attain to the status of brahmins by following a rigorous discipline and sadhana before this ruling of the country by the masses can hope to become successful.

"Communism", as he sees it, "is the synthesis of collectivism and individualism", and this ideal or spiritual communism according to him is like the stars, the planets and the nebulae each of which "has its characteristic form and nature and function and yet all fulfil the same law of gravitation and beat the measure of the silent symphony of spaces." But as it is practised now-a-days and applied as a panacea, the bare truth about it according to him is this: "Communism cannot save humanity. For if it means the Dictatorship of the proletariat, well, a healthy normal society will not bear or tolerate it long... A Lenin cannot prevent the advent of a Stalin... The class struggle... is a postulate all are not bound to accept... Man does not live by bread alone... not even culture — the kind admitted by Communism... can be the be-all and end-all of human civilisation... As a matter of fact Communism is best taken as a symptom of the disease society suffers from and not as a remedy." He reflects on other isms like socialism, nationalism, internationalism and lastly even humanism also, to show their

inadequacy to remedy all the ills humanity suffers from and finally the Vyasa in him declares: "Until and unless man surpasses himself, finds a focus and fulcrum outside and beyond his normal human — too human — self, he cannot entirely and radically change his nature and rebuild his society on an altogether different pattern. Man has to reach his divine status, become the Divine, within and outside, body and soul; then only can the ills to which he is exposed totally vanish and then alone can he enjoy individually and collectively a perfect life on earth." But he knew that human beings would feel the task to be next to impossible, so he further adds to assure them, saying: "Naturally man is not expected to accomplish this mighty work alone and unaided, he can rest assured and comforted, for Nature herself is moving inexorably towards that consummation."

About duty and Dharma he states: "The path of duty is heroic, the path of Dharma is of the gods, godly" — while he explains the superiority of Dharma over duty thus: "One has to compel oneself, one has to use force on oneself to carry out one's duty — there is a feeling somehow of its being a bitter pill.... Dharma is not an ideal, a standard or a rule that one has to obey: it is the law of self-nature that one inevitably follows, it is easy, spontaneous, delightful."

While commenting on the World War II and the Nazi Germany under Hitler, the seer the Vyasa categorically says: "The outrages committed by Spain in America, the oppression of the Christians by Imperial Rome, were wrong and, in many cases, even inhuman and unpardonable. But when we compare with what Nazi Germany has done in Poland or wants to do throughout the world, we find that there is a difference between the two not only in degree, but in kind. One is an instance of the weakness of man, of his flesh being frail; the other illustrates the might of the Asura, his very spirit is unwilling. One is undivine, the other antidivine, positively hostile.... The whole future of mankind, the entire value of earthly life, depends upon the issue of the present deadly combat... between the Asura and men, the human instruments of the gods... India's destiny today hangs in the balance; it lies in the choice of her path."

While speaking about the Atom Bomb he sees clearly that it is a warning — reason and moral sense could not move man, so Fear has been sent by the Divine Grace "that unless man changes, becomes master of himself, he cannot be truly master of the world. He cannot command the forces he has unleashed unless he has command over his own nature. The external immensity, the bloated mass that his physical attainments are, unless armoured and animated by an inner growth, will crash by its own weight."

He visualises the ideal of internationalism in a single sentence thus: "Humanity is one and all nations are free and yet interdependent members of that one and single organism."

In his book *The Malady of the Century* how clearly he sees the malady of the age and states specifically in a pregnant statement: "What is the malady of our age? It is that man has lost touch with his soul."

According to the seer, "the modern age in its wide curiosity has neglected the penetrative and intensive movement and is therefore marred by superficiality... Even the entrance into the world of atoms and cells — of protons and electrons, of chromosomes and genes — is not really a penetrative or intensive movement... The microscope is only an inverted telescope." While shedding light on a possible reconciliation of Asia and Europe Nolini Kanta says: "It is Asia who grasps the Truth with the hand of the Master, the Truth in its full and absolute truth and it is Asia who can show in fact and life how to embody it integrally... And Europe in accepting or embracing Asia comes back to the fountain-head of her own inner being and nature."

How concretely he sees "The spiritual genius of India" and utters like a mantra: "Other peoples may be the arms and the feet and the head of Humanity, but India is its heart, its soul" and by way of explanation adds: "for she cherishes always within her the Truth that lives for ever, the flaming God-head, the Immortal awake in mortality, as say the Vedas, *amrto martyeṣu ṛtāvā*."

We all are, at one time or other, deploring the present state of affairs in our country so far as the tendency to imitate Europe and to take life in terms of "eat, drink and be merry", — wild seeking after material enjoyment and comfort and pleasures of life; even the knowledge of material science, in its outlook and development, is biased apparently by this strong upsurge. But the seer-vision of Nolini Kanta pierces the veil of appearance and sees that this new movement dawning in India of the new age is a sign of an attempt to synthesise the utter detachment of India and exclusive attachment of Europe, a synthesis which the genius of Europe could not even comprehend and even the wider and superior teachings and ideals of ancient India could not successfully make it effective.<sup>3</sup>

While speaking about the collective life of human beings how beautifully he describes the development of *sangha* from *samaj*. It is the ignorant urge of the human beings to live together to meet the demands of body and life that created the *samaj*

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<sup>3</sup> *Rachanavali*, vol. 5, p. 5.

or society. But when they became conscious under the influence of the mind by virtue of the evolution of the mental faculty, they created a collective life and a collectivity which is called the *sangha*; with the evolution of the supermind, what sort of collective life and collectivity they will create is not yet revealed in name and form because prior to that the truth and nature of the supermind must first be established here on earth.<sup>4</sup>

Then again, Nolini Kanta the seer sees the Irish sadhana for independence achieving the *siddhi* through three distinct steps or stages viz. first in the field of mind through the sadhana of their poets like A. E. and Yeats, second in the field of life through the sadhana for daily living with the help of cooperatives guided by leaders like George Russel and Plunkett and these two ultimately opened the vistas for the third in the field of the body through the sadhana of Griffith, De Vallera etc. for the liberation of Ireland — the political liberation of the country. He describes that the deficiency of India's freedom movement lies in the fact that we are trying to jump from the first to the third without taking care of the second which is vital in the true sense of the term.<sup>5</sup>

While speaking about the distinction between a true artist and a saint or a common human being he states that the true artist is a Rishi — his vision of things is not limited by the ignorance of the common man or by the sense of sin and virtue of a saint. He sees the truth in essence of things as it is and enjoys it as it is.<sup>6</sup>

In his unique appreciation of Rabindranath as a poet and a seer he says: "A great literature seems to have almost invariably a great name attached to it, one name by which it is known and recognised as great... Such a great name is Rabindranath Tagore in Bengali literature. We need not forget Bankim Chandra, nor even Madhusudan: still one can safely declare that if Bengali language and literature belonged to any single person as its supreme liberator and fosterer — *savitā* and *pūṣā* — it is Rabindranath.... Tagore is a great poet: as such he is close to the heart of Bengal. He is a great seer: as such humanity will claim him as its own."

To conclude, let me place before you a revelatory probe into matter where the seer — Vyasa — says: "Matter holds and expresses material energy.... what about mental energy and thought movements — can they too be made a function of Matter?.... The electronic computer seems to possess a veritable mathematical brain..."

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 30-32.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

may it not be capable also of poetic creation?... To produce a first class poem through a machine at least a first class brain must work at it. But the pity is that a Shakespeare or a Milton would prefer to write straightaway a poem himself instead of trying to work it out through a machine which may give out in the end only a second class or worse production.... But... the attempt of the machine to embody or express something non-mechanical, to leap as high as possible from material objects to psychological values has a special significance for us today and is not all an amusing or crazy affair.... The yearning of Matter for Light is an extraordinary phenomenon of Nature: physically speaking, we have reached the equation of the two. But that light is only a first signpost or symbol: it invites Matter towards higher and freer vibration.... When the brain-mind indulges in fabricating clay-images of God, it is not merely a foolish or idle pastime: it indicates a deep ingrained hunger. All this reveals a will or aspiration in Matter, in what is apparently dead and obscure (*acit*), to move and reach out towards what is living and luminous and supremely living and luminous (*cit*). Matter finally is to embody and express the Spirit."

# THE HUMAN NOLINI-DA

SHYAM KUMARI

Part I

*(Care and Cure)*

In golden moments of creation, great souls descend to earth surrounding the Avatar. There is a high oestrus of divine Conscious-Force at wide play. Like the breath of divinity or the Supreme's largesses these forerunners of superhumanity come to help in hewing the ways of immortality as the playmates, servants, comrades and the true children of the Lord.

"The great creators with wide brows of calm,  
The massive barrier-breakers of the world  
And wrestlers with destiny in her lists of will,  
The labourers in the quarries of the gods,  
The messengers of the Incommunicable,  
The architects of immortality."<sup>1</sup>

Surely one such was our Nolini-da. What was he to those around him? — a link with infinity; a touch of eternity; a breath of divinity; a presence of godhead; a realised embodiment of our highest aspirations.

Austere and aloof on his Overmental-Superman heights: such is the picture of Nolini-da a casual visitor might have conceived. But though dwelling on the heights he was kin to and intimate with our clay up to the end. An adept of inner and outer austerity, high purposefulness, great endeavours, sky-scaling ascensions and soul-touching inwardnesses, yet at most times he was so near and accessible, so sweet and loving.

Once a young lady, prey to a mighty emotional turmoil, in the grip of her despair stopped eating. Like a loving father Nolini-da sent her a message:

Tell her I too will not eat if she does not."

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<sup>1</sup> *Savitri*, pp. 343-344.

Needless to say the fathomless love behind these words lessened the heartache and thus by love and not by admonition he brought her out of the abyss of suffering.

Outwardly he seemed indifferent to our ills but it was a misleading appearance. Specially in his later years time and again he would ask the doctors attending on him about the condition of even the most insignificant Ashramite if it came to his notice that the person was ill.

A young vivacious girl of five or six came to the Ashram. This child instantly won every heart and became very dear to Nolini-da. She combed his hair, made his clothes ready, whatsoever she could do. He would have liked her to study in our Centre of Education but he knew that her parents would not agree. Though she did not want to, the girl had to go back and after a lapse of time came the shocking news. The girl was suffering from a dreaded disease and had been already given four blood transfusions. There seemed to be no hope. In a dazed shock, the girl's aunt went to Nolini-da and cried out, "No, no. It must not be so." She at once left for Calcutta.

That whole night Nolini-da kept calling and whispering the girl's name every few minutes. Such was his power, like that of the Rishis of yore, that the impossible happened. The girl recovered and is today preparing for a professional career. By his powerful touch how he cured or at least kept in effective suspension Anima's tumour is known to all in his circle. Once I told him about a generous and self-effacing lady whose only son was now suffering from T.B. The boy had had the inestimable privilege of daily darshan of and pranam to Nolini-da when his mother had brought him here. This tale moved Nolini-da deeply — I saw his eyes shine with tears of compassion. The upshot was that the symptoms of T.B. disappeared from the body of the boy in spite of the earlier diagnosis. Nolini-da's compassion was so deep that once when I was ill and in JIPMER, on his evening drive he came there and asked the person accompanying him to locate my room — his companion did not succeed. I feel eternally grateful for his grace.

He who surely knew the mystery of life and death and lived in a timeless consciousness, for whom the beyond was as familiar as the here and now, or maybe more so, once told me, "Yesterday you mentioned X. Very bad news. His son has died in an accident."

On another occasion, a young man of the Ashram had a nervous breakdown. On recovering somewhat he came to visit Sri Aurobindo's room. His mother had informed Nolini-da in advance. Having finished his lunch, Nolini-da was proceeding to his

bathroom when the boy met him in front of Madhav Pandit's office. He simply, clung to Nolini-da and said, in French, "I have need of you." Nolini-da's eyes became moist with love and compassion as he reassured him.

Day by day his realisation must have become deeper and higher as is evident by the messages given by the Divine Mother on his birthdays. But what was obvious to everyone around him was the intensity of his love for all, more so for the young people facing the harsh trials of Yogic life.

Once a young mother living alone with her child was asked to vacate her house. This girl could not find a house and wept before Nolini-da. When I told him of a vacant house I knew about, he almost pleaded in moved tones, his face reflecting her pain, "Help her. Today she was weeping."

He was above all attachment, yet was deeply attached, this was the paradox which baffled all those who could not measure his heights. His attachment was divine. If the Calcutta Pathamandir people were on their way here, he kept asking about them till he was informed that they had arrived safely because he was holding them within himself. In this sense only, he was attached to people. In that small suite filled with numerous things, he conducted the business of the Ashram and maybe directed the universal forces with a divine calm. When all around him raged petty emotional strifes he remained aloof but in our moments of need he was always with us. There was always a high purpose behind his words and an even greater force in his silence. The fathomless depth of his look could sear with its severity all that stood in the way of spiritual progress of those whom he graciously allowed in his presence. And many a time the infinite compassion of his eyes and the lightest touch of his hand on the head, eased the most crushing burden of life. He was:

*"Vajrādapi Kathorāni, Mṛdūni, Kusumādapi"*

He always talked of old Sadhaks as "Old Friends." On one birthday of Albert's father, Nolini-da saw him in the meditation hall and embraced him. Later he remarked to me, "These are old friends."

In the same way he used to look benevolently on Savitri Agrawal and Jagat's mother sitting in the meditation hall, again calling them "Old Friends."

One day he asked Dr. Bose to bring Mrs. Sanyal to the Ashram by car on rainy days, saying, "She will find it difficult to walk in the rain."

These were not isolated incidents. Many times I witnessed his love and compassion. It was not pity, "the emotional inability to bear the sorrow of others" but the compassion and care of a universal consciousness. In his quiet way he kept track of the destiny of the young and old children of the Mother.

A young lady well-known to and loved by Nolini-da has a retarded child. She wanted to have a normal child. I conveyed her prayer to Nolini-da. He gave his blessings. After receiving the blessings the lady conceived, though previously she could not. Now the doctors suggested that since the risk of having another retarded child increases if the first one is so, they should take some fluid from the womb to decide if the baby would be normal. At that time, this process was more hazardous than it is now. Nolini-da consulted the doctors and gave his consent. However, the test was inconclusive and could not be repeated. The lady asked for instructions. Nolini-da consulted Sanyal-da and in one day I had to send three telegrams to the lady. Such was his love. When a normal baby was born to the lady, Nolini-da remarked, "That is good news."

In 1978, a young girl, X, and her friend came with their families. Nolini-da liked the girls and told the father about one of them, "You have nice daughters."

He specially chose and autographed for them his photograph with a cap. Later X married and gave birth to two children. Once while going to her father-in-law's place, her husband accidentally fell under the wheels of the train and was killed. The girl got a terrible shock. Doctors said she would either die or become insane. Most of the time she was in a coma. Her father, a devotee and in-charge of a Sri Aurobindo Centre, wrote to me. I related the incident to Anima who was moved and told it to Nolini-da. Gravely he said, "Send blessings for the boy's soul. For her, I will give blessings when she recovers."

This remark meant her recovery was sure and by his intervention the girl recovered indeed and got a good job.

One day, a young girl of five or six who was very close to Nolini-da kept on weeping. Nolini-da inquired about the cause. It was found that while playing on the beach she wanted a big balloon. Her grandfather had brought no money and could not buy her one. Nolini-da at once gave him money to go and buy her the balloon. He deeply cared for this child and wanted that three or four types of soft drinks be kept ready for her. He bore with love and patience all her mistakes, for she had little under-

standing. It can be testified to by all those around him how deeply he cared for every one. His heart went to all those children of the Mother who were in trouble.

His care was not the care of an ordinary being. He could cure, he could turn our woe into weal. I will end with one incident. Manish Rai was an intimate friend of Nolini-da's during his college days. But Nolini-da gave up his studies to join the fight for freedom and later followed in the footsteps of Sri Aurobindo to Pondicherry. Manish Rai could not turn towards the divine life but his deep love for Nolini-da remained undiminished.

Later on he helped in many ways Nolini-da's wife Indulekha who was left alone to bring up her three sons. People coming from Calcutta would regularly inform Nolini-da, "Manish did this for Indulekha-di, Manish did that for her."

Nolini-da, as was his nature, would listen quietly. Years passed and one day the news came that Manish Rai had died. Nolini-da became serious, but did not say anything. Later he narrated to someone, "I went into the dark world of Death where there was no air. I searched room after dark stifling room till I found his soul. Then I picked it up and went and dropped it at the feet of Sri Aurobindo."

This is how Nolini-da paid his debt of love and gratitude and except him who else could have done it?

Very impressed by the display of a lady's paintings, I asked Nolini-da eagerly, "Will you like to see her paintings?"

Looking grave, and with his hand spread out in a wide sweep, Nolini-da answered, "I do my own paintings."

Later when I saw instances of people's life changing and new-oriented by his compassion I knew what he meant by, "My own paintings." He was working on many points on the earth and changing and redoing others' lives so as to make them shapely and God-oriented.

## II

### His Aspect of Humour and Ananda

"Are you continuing here because the Ashram needs you?" someone asked Nolini-da.

Nolini-da replied, "Not necessarily... It is for my individual sadhana. I am staying here for some new development in my evolution. Up to now my consciousness was Sattwic, my way was that of Knowledge. But now a new element is added — love, Ananda..."

And it seems in the fitness of things that the principal disciple of Sri Aurobindo who was Incarnate Ananda Brahman should also manifest something of that aspect.

In his later years Nolini-da's awe-inspiring Himalayan heights were coloured with the rainbow tints of smiles, banter, and laughter. Here in a small way I have attempted to bring out some glimpses of the heavenly joy that suffused and balanced the natural gravity of this life-long Tapaswin, the Sage, Philosopher and Thinker, though people like Anima and Matriprasad could write in much greater detail and depth for they were with him constantly.

All of us have seen the serious, indrawn and ingathered personality aspect of Nolini-da which repelled unwelcome intrusions. But with those, whom he accepted in his inner circle, he became like a friend — *dādu*, grand-pa to youngsters and *dādā* or *dā*, elder brother to the adults. And they witnessed a continuous flow of light movements, full of carefree laughter. It seems the less the pull of gravity, the lighter and happier sits the burden of divinity.

\*

According to X who was close and dear to him, "He was a most humorous man. Only his humour was of a different kind and could change the very nature or personality of a man."

X told me about Y, an old, sincere and much respected sadhak. He had a grave nature and never laughed, Sometime X would tease him, "Why don't you laugh?"

Y would invariably reply, "I have no time."

One day a visibly shaken and perturbed Y came to Nolini-da and blurted out, "Nolini-da, I am in a fix."

"Why?" asked Nolini-da.

"I will have to leave the Ashram," with apparent anguish the man replied.

"What happened?" inquired Nolini-da.

Y related his tale. Though it was serious for Y, Nolini-da laughed and said, "Only this? All right, I will ask the Mother."

Y was stunned. He wonderingly said to X who was present, "Look, he is laughing at my calamity."

Nolini-da went and reported everything to the Mother. The Mother, saying, "It is all right," also laughed.

Y knew that Nolini-da cared for him. Nolini-da's attitude made a deep impression on him. After that his nature changed. He who never laughed often laughed heartily and sometimes even without any apparent cause.

\*

K was overwhelmed by her problems and one day went and poured them out in front of Nolini-da. Nolini-da replied, "You should be full of joy and ananda."

"How to do it when problems besiege and overwhelm me?" she asked.

"Remember that you are a child of the Divine Mother, that she has taken entire charge of you. This should make you full of gratitude and delight." When he said this, Nolini-da's whole being was filled with ananda and joy and K too felt a lightening of her sorrow and a joyous uplift or mood.

\*

Once there was a heated discussion between two Ashramites. They claimed that Nolini-da had told them different things about the same subject. Each stuck to his guns. In the end they decided to go to Nolini-da to get at the truth of the matter. Nolini-da heard them out and then remarked, "What Nolini-da said is not so important. What he didn't say is much more important."

\*

Nolini-da had a quaint and humorous way of putting things. In those days X used to come on his cycle to the Ashram and then Nolini-da and he would go to the Sports Ground on their cycles.

One day when X came as usual to accompany Nolini-da the latter said, "I will not go. I am promoted."

"How do you mean?" a puzzled X demanded.

"The Mother has said, 'Nolini! No more cycling for you. You can take a car.'"

It seems the day before, some children had dashed against his cycle and hence the 'promotion'.

\*

A young girl came to the Ashram hoping to get admission in our Centre of Education but being above fifteen was considered too old. Nolini-da advised her to take up work, "The mother loves those of her children much more who choose to serve her," he told her. Accordingly she started work in some department and became dear to Nolini-da. Every day she would call to him from the road. He would then go to the window and hear her carefree chat. One day she pouted and said, "What is this? Is it fair that you are inside, while I have to remain outside on the road?"

Nolini-da laughed outright and said mischievously in Bengali, "It is the way of love — one is inside, the other outside."

\*

In 1969, a young boy of three came to the Ashram with his mother and went every day to Nolini-da. Nolini-da played football with him in front of Madhav Pandit's office. First the boy would run and kick the football, then Nolini-da would run and kick the ball. This master player thoroughly enjoyed himself playing with the tiny tot.

When one is only five a pair of chappals is no ordinary thing. They are taken quite seriously. This boy's mother bought him a new pair of chappals. He proudly took them to Nolini-da and exhibited them seriously, "Look, I have new chappals."

Without a word in answer Nolini-da got up from his chair and went into his inner room. The boy's mother was taken aback by this abruptness. She saw Nolini-da bend and take out a pair of chappals from under his bed. He brought them out and, showing them to the boy, remarked, "Look, I have new chappals too."

Every day while doing pranam this child pinched Nolini-da. On inquiring, Nolini-da found out that the child did this to everyone. He remarked, "I see, it is his way of expressing his love."

\*

The above-mentioned boy was very fond of Ramayana and Mahabharata stories. One day he was found walking in the meditation hall with closed eyes. Nolini-da asked his mother, "Why is he walking with closed eyes?"

"He is pretending to be Dhritarashtra," said his mother.

"If you are Dhritarashtra, then I will give you an iron Bheem to embrace," joked Nolini-da.

One day, this boy and a lady of the Ashram were discussing who should play which part in a Mahabharata drama. All the parts were distributed to different Ashramites to the boy's satisfaction but the question remained, "Who should play Krishna?"

The lady suggested Nolini-da's name. The boy at once retorted, "What? Do you think Krishna had so little hair, or had such a big moustache? If we have to make Nolini-da something we will make him Bhishma Pitamaha."

Nolini-da enjoyed this very much and, laughing heartily, remarked, "The boy is right."

\*

A venerable old, renowned author came to the Ashram. Before returning to Calcutta he came to take leave of Nolini-da and started to talk in an affected and pompous way, "Nolini-da, the whole of my life, I wanted to come to this holy place. At last I have the great opportunity. Now I am going back. What should I tell the people? What have I brought? How should I go?"

For several minutes the man went on in the same vein. When he repeated, "How should I go?", Nolini-da answered in two words, "Empty-handed."

\*

One day Nolini-da put on a shirt which was rather the worse for wear and a little yellowed with age. The dhoti was sparkling white. Everyone remarked that the two did not match. Nolini-da answered, "Nothing can be done to improve the shirt, so I should roll in the dust to make my dhoti match the shirt." Everyone burst out in merry laughter.

\*

In his later years, Nolini-da had to lie down in his bed for the greater part of the day. Sometimes I would rub his back to relieve him. Naturally, I rubbed very gently. "X and Y rub me like a horse. So you can also beat me freely," he remarked.

\*

Somebody had a quarrel with a person very close to Nolini-da. In a fit of anger, he came to Nolini-da, spewed out his tale of woe, fully expecting Nolini-da to take some action against the person. Nolini-da laughed softly and holding out two toffees, asked the person, "What do you want me to do? Here, take these toffees."

Our petty human passions made him smile. One day a young lady came to give him a sweet on her birthday. Nolini-da, instead of taking it in his hands, opened his mouth wide. The girl was so happy at the opportunity to feed him.

Somebody was asked to help in serving him. In the beginning, this person was naturally over-awed and diffident. She would hold out the glass of juice or water to Nolini-da from a distance, not daring to approach too near. Nolini-da would say, "She holds out the glass at a distance as if I am an untouchable."

\*

A trainload of miners came to visit the Ashram. The Mother had left her body. They had heard of Nolini-da and requested that Nolini-da give them darshan from the balcony, a request that Nolini-da turned down. Later, they formed a tight queue for going to Sri Aurobindo's room. They were jostling each other and were not ready to let anybody cut across their queue. At that time, Nolini-da used to use the toilet in the Ashram courtyard. To reach it, he had to cut across this long queue. The miners

thinking that he wanted to join the queue would not let him through, little realising he was the great Nolini-da for whose darshan they were so eager. Later, with eyes twinkling with mischievous laughter Nolini-da remarked, "I have given them darshan but they didn't recognise me."

\*

One Saturday night on my way to the Playground I went to see Nolini-da. He asked me, "Are you going to the film?"

His tone clearly meant, "Do not go."

I went anyway. It started raining and all of us at the playground were thoroughly drenched. I came to the Ashram to get an umbrella. Nolini-da asked me most mischievously, "How did you enjoy the film?" and then burst out laughing. Then he told Anima, "Give her a big umbrella. She has to go far."

\*

I was desperately searching for a house. Someone suggested a plot with a hut. I told Nolini-da all about it. He asked me, "Who has seen the house you propose to buy?"

"Nobody, except myself and K."

"Who else can see it?" he remarked thinking whom to send. He thought for some time and then suggested, "Take X to feel the atmosphere of the place."

Then he added with a twinkle in his eyes, "You see! Don't take people who are too intelligent."

\*

An old Sadhika was leaving Pondicherry for a few months. She came to do pranam to Nolini-da. Later I asked him, "Even old sadhaks are going out nowadays. Is it correct? How can it be?"

"They have retired," Nolini-da said, laughing.

This lighter hue of his nature increased till in the last few months of his life he became truly Anandamaya. He would sing songs in which he mixed lines from

Dwijendralal's songs with those of Rabindranath. Often, from the road outside his room, I heard him sing.

Thus Knowledge and Ananda were now equally balanced, a *sangam* — a union of both took place in his personality.

## NOLINI KANTA GUPTA

M. SHRIRAMULU

Nolini Kanta Gupta, more affectionately and lovingly called 'Nolini-da', is the foremost disciple of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother — foremost — in the full sense of the word, foremost in time, in following, accepting, adopting and achieving. Rather, he is the foremost person of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram; be it on account of his being the Secretary of the Ashram or being the nearest and the highest disciple of the two Masters.

A tall lean man, brown in colour more towards black, clad in a white dhoti with another white upper-cloth over his shoulders, at times with a white cap pulled over his head, used to move out from his apartment and be walking beside the flower-pots in the Ashram court-yard in utter Himalayan silence, unconcerned, as if a stranger unconnected with the Ashram. This was in the early days of my visit to the Ashram which was in the later forties of this century. I had the feeling that Lord Shankara himself had come down in disguise from Kailas, or in the words of Sri Aurobindo, "A colonist from immortality". He was like a moving column of calm and silence inspiring awe, not with a sense of fear but with a sense of loving respect. Later I came to know that he was the Secretary of the Ashram and came into contact with his writings. My perception of his personality gradually grew in me and left an indelible impression on my mind of his vast and varied spirit which always inspired me with the unique force of the Masters who worked in him.

Nolini was born on 13-1-1889 at Faridpur in East Bengal. After completing his early education he went to Calcutta for higher studies and joined the Presidency College, Calcutta, in 1904. From his very young age he was fired with the spirit of patriotism which did not allow him to rest in peace till India was liberated from the bonds of colonisation. As with Sri Aurobindo it was a consuming fire within, which drove him incessantly to revolutionary activities.

In Calcutta, in those days there was an organisation known as "Atmonnati Samithi" which was a centre for the recruitment and training of revolutionaries. He joined that Samithi.

Nolini was interested in games, especially football. In his *Reminiscences* he has said, "My hand was introduced to the pen or chalk, and my feet touched the ball

particularly at one and the same time.” That means his initiation into the worldly education and his debut in the world of physical education — the games — took place simultaneously. It was so strong in him that even at Pondicherry where he was practising Yoga Sadhana, he did not give up football. As a matter of fact, he earned laurels and was an acknowledged expert in the field. Later when the Mother introduced Gymnastics to the young and old alike to keep the body fit for the supramental descent, he took to it like a fish to water at the age of sixty and continued for two decades. This is a phase of his life which got entwined with his spiritual sadhana.

In 1905, when he was in his 2nd year at the college, there was the pernicious partition of Bengal. His spirit revolted. He showed his protest in a novel way by going to the college dressed up as if there had been a death in his family. He went without shoes or shirt and with only Chaddar on. It was really courageous on his part to go to the college and sit in the class with such an unconventional and unnatural oddity. It shows the burning spirit in him.

When he was in the 4th year class he decided to join the revolutionary movement. Barin, the brother of Sri Aurobindo, was the leader of that movement then. Nolini met him in a kind of interview for admission. He was made to read the Gita with proper Sanskrit accent. During this period he was irregularly attending college and gradually lost interest in college studies. He joined the National College and tried to learn Chemistry with the idea of preparing a bomb. In this connection, he read a large volume of revolutionary and terrorist literature. He plunged himself into the terrorist movement and, becoming an active member of the party, took part in preparing a bomb which was one of the items in the activities of the party. A small group including himself, studied the preparation of the bomb and finally manufactured one with which they experimented to explode it on a granite rock on a hillock. It resulted in the death of one of their associates.

It was during this period he had the first Darshan of Sri Aurobindo. It appears as though some unknown bond of relationship, persisting from life to life, bound them; and thereafter we see Nolini following Sri Aurobindo just as Hanuman did Rama.

Meanwhile the events of Bengal were developing quickly. Between the revolutionary party on one side, and the Government on the other side, the members of the party including Nolini and also Sri Aurobindo were rounded up and put in Jail. It was the renowned ‘Alipore Bomb case.’ The rest of the story till the acquittal of Sri

Aurobindo and also, of Nolini is well known. After the acquittal Sri Aurobindo remained in Bengal for about a year. During this period two papers were published, one *Dharma* in Bengali and the other *Karmayogin* in English with which Sri Aurobindo was closely associated. Nolini was also associated in the publication of these journals. It was during this period that he learnt French from Sri Aurobindo. Thus the guruship started, as far as Nolini was concerned, even before Sri Aurobindo came to Pondicherry. Then Sri Aurobindo at the call of the Divine abandoned the political arena and stepped into the spiritual field by going over to Pondicherry in the year 1910. In the same year Nolini also came over to Pondicherry and joined Sri Aurobindo.

Nolini was not merely an expert athlete and a blazing patriot, but also a keen intellect. Though he discontinued his college studies, his urge for knowledge of the various branches of human life was keen, and he pursued them with indefatigable interest. At the feet of Sri Aurobindo, he learnt various languages, such as Greek, Latin, French, Italian, etc. He was taken into the glorious depths of the Vedic and other ancient lores of India. Sri Aurobindo's touch developed him into a poet of a high order and a Yogi of rare attainments. He wrote poetry in Bengali and English, above all he translated into English many of Sri Aurobindo's Bengali poems. As Sri Aurobindo closed and finalised his *Savitri* towards the end of his physical life, similarly Nolini, towards the end of his physical life, fully brought out in book-form, his Bengali translation of *Savitri*. This achievement gave him not only soul-satisfaction but also the satisfaction of a great service and help rendered to the Bengali knowing public.

Nolini was fully abreast of all the news trends and developments of the world, in the field of the material sciences, mental sciences, literary forms, cultural ways and spiritual and yogic mysteries. Not only did he know, but he fully studied them and assimilated them so thoroughly that they became a part of his intellectual treasure, dissolved in the crucible of his knowledge, and ultimately formed part of his being, for instance, his reference to anti-matter and the anti-material world expressed by the Western Scientists. The image of anti-matter (in his words) is Death. (Ref: Ladder of consciousness in Vol. IV, The Complete Works of Nolini). His vision was always in the future and on the high and the vast.

Nolini's thought is sharp, deep and logical. His style is crisp, clear and precise. There is no beating about the bush, no wastage of words, or irrelevant bombast. It is like the jeweller setting his stones to a pattern in such a wonderfully harmonious form that even a slight displacement of any stone would mar the whole effect. The thought and the expression are so tightly fitting that if you remove or replace one word the

whole thought-structure crumbles. In spite of all this chiselling it is flowing, elegant and harmonious. He has embodied some of the great qualities of the style of Sri Aurobindo. The style of Sri Aurobindo is full, flowing with an expanding flood of light, touching depths of knowledge and at the same time very elegant. It carries forward the reader with ease, in spite of the fact that it carries all the load of the past and the prior, with all the complexity and comprehension but made clear and transparent. It is more a rolling out of the mattress of knowledge. Nolini acquired depth and crispness, but in the place of complex comprehension, he is simple and lucid. His writings in English were published in eight volumes, while his Bengali writings were published in ten volumes. On top of it is his Bengali translation of *Savitri*. It is a huge output of a rare quality. It is a great pleasure to read any of his writings. It will be like swathing in light and swimming in air. We will be unconsciously led into depths and come out refreshed and invigorated.

Nolini was a unique personality of a highly expressive silence. We rarely saw him talking or discussing with others. He was a man of very few words. I feel that he had developed another means of communication of his ideas, thoughts and answers than the human voice. Despite his being a rock of reticence all were attracted into some kind of contact with him. I think it is the peace and love of his inner being of light which fell equally on all and drew them imperceptibly to his heart where dwelt the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

The life of Nolini, as the disciple of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, is a marvellous Sadhana which is difficult to follow. He effaced himself so completely that he could not only eliminate his ego but also wipe out and clear his mind into a clean slate or mirror which could perfectly absorb, reflect and express what was communicated to him by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

In the early days of the Ashram, when Sri Aurobindo went into complete solitude, the communication between him and the disciples was by correspondence. Each disciple maintained a note book in which he put down his doubts and difficulties of Sadhana, and the books were sent to Sri Aurobindo in the evening. Sri Aurobindo used to write in the books his replies and instructions. Nolini was the Divine Messenger, rather the Divine Postman who brought down all the books and distributed them to their respective owners in the morning. He was also the person who brought the Mother's foreign "tapals" from the post-office. What an enviable job he did!

When any disciple expressed any difficulty in understanding the note or the reply, or in following the steps indicated therein, he or she was referred by Sri Aurobindo or the Mother to Nolini for further clarification or commentary. Thus he was not the mere mechanical carrier of the load, but also blessed with the light therein to be imparted to his brother disciples. Thus he was the bridge between the Master and the disciples.

In the same way, when the Mother was faced with any critical situation she would refer to Nolini for his view. But Nolini knowing the mind of the Mother never hazarded a reply — feeling elated for being taken into confidence by the Mother thus. He knew that it was a test to his behaviour, *i.e.*, his mental attitude; or a moment's respite for her own thought and action. It is only after repeated reference that he would respond with humility. He had built himself up into such a colourless and pure being that his gurus could rely upon him for a correct reaction to a difficult situation or a correct reply to a knotty point. The *Bulletin* which the Mother edited was never published before Nolini had gone through the whole matter and approved. When the *Advent* was started as early as 1944, Nolini was made the sole Editor, a role which he filled and discharged efficiently till the end of his life. Thus he was an ideal disciple and his ways of life are a guidance for other disciples to follow.

While with many others, the Masters had to come down and help the Sadhaks to cut a channel for receiving their force, with Nolini it was different. He could rise to their heights and receive the light and force of Sri Aurobindo, and the love and joy of the Mother and be a channel for their flow through him.

The physical ceasing of Sri Aurobindo did not bring about much change in Nolini's outer activities, but after the Mother had discarded her physical body, his outer contacts with others became more active. The Ashramites as well as outside disciples looked up to him to fill the place of the Mother on the physical plane. He narrated the vision he had and the words the Mother spoke to him in the vision and thus kept everybody on the right path, showing how to cling to the feet of the Mother. Although given a great deal of importance by the Mother, he was not a man to arrogate to himself her role. His desire was to turn all towards her and take them nearer to Her or to bring the Mother nearer to them so that they may grow in Her Light.

In a series of articles, which appeared in a set of more than ten books Nolini elucidated the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo. Similarly the multifarious dimensions of the Mother's consciousness he followed closely and in a way brought out under the caption of '*The Sweet Mother*' which appeared in four volumes.

Nolini's achievements in the field of Yoga are not accessible to a man of my type to know and estimate. As Sri Aurobindo said, the life of a Yogi is not on the surface and therefore it is difficult for another person to know and write about it. This is true in the case of any Yogi big or small. Nolini is no exception to that rule and his achievements are no mean ones. But Nirodbaran, who was a close associate of his, and observed him at very close quarters, has been able to delineate them in a way in his long talk on Nolini (March issue of *Mother India*). I can only invite the readers' attention to it for this aspect of Nolini.