



## GANGADHAR

*Mud with a little gold in it is often more highly prized than gold with a little mud in it.*

AUSTIN O'MALLEY

**G**ANGADHAR — “brother” to all and to whom all were “brother” or “sister”. Yet who was he? Do many remember him? Surely some do, when and if an occasion arises and then some have to untangle all those crowded, jumbled threads of the past to bring him back into focus in the present. That done, then what? Let our thoughts dwell a little bit longer on him and see what floats up.

Gangadhar was, to all appearances, just a Tamilian gentle-

man, bearded, long haired (both dark and thick). He was of normal proportions. His face was gentle, with large semi-closed eyes that smiled when he smiled, at any and every acquaintance he met — often with a “good morning brother” in a gentle voice. The dress was the simplest, white dhoti wrapped around a small, forgivable paunch and a white chudder thrown over the shoulders. This dress never changed. That’s all that surfaced after the first stirring — nothing very remarkable or out of the way. One more trait — I have hardly heard him talk but for the “good mornings” and maybe some more in his work time at the department (Sanitary Service).

Gangadhar lived in Nanteuil (opposite the Playground) back in 1945. Nanteuil is a beautiful, majestic, spacious old building, one of those from the past, with its own history and interesting stories. The building housed, let us say, “Royalty”. In the past an American daughter of the Mother, Nishtha, lived (and died) here. She was the daughter of President Wilson of the U.S.A. A remarkable lady she was. When terminally ill and suffering, she could have received the best of treatment anywhere she chose. But, she remained here saying: “They will take care of my body, but who will take care of my soul?” Then came Hyder Ali under its roof. He was a big man from the old State of Hyderabad — with his wife (French) Alice, daughter Bilquis and son Adil (and two big dogs). After that Sanat Kumar Banerjee, Ex-Consul General of India to French India and his family, lived and passed away under the same roof. Now, as most would know, the first floor contains memorabilia — sacred and dear to us — of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. The place is named “Sri Smriti”. So where did the simple Tamil gentleman fit in? There was a

small cubby-room at the back of the building, with a low ceiling, door and one window. Maybe it was meant to be a store-room (to which purpose it was put, after Gangadhar was shifted). Gangadhar lived there several years.

Veerampattinam is a village on the coast 5-6 km to the south of Pondicherry. A good-sized temple is situated therein. The deity is a form of Kaliyamman. Once the Mother had gone thereabouts and found the atmosphere unwholesome (there was a time birds were sacrificed to appease or please the deity). When the Mother's car was leaving, a small boy ran after the car. How far he kept up the chase, or whether he met the Mother — I could not ascertain. But, I believe he did come under the spell of her direct gaze. Whatever the facts of the chance meeting, one thing is certain — the young boy was marked; he was fated to serve the Mother. When the boy grew into a man of 20 years — on 24 July 1933 — he joined the Ashram. The young man was Gangadhar. No external needs goaded him. The inner ones compelled him.

Gangadhar was given work in the Ashram Sanitary Service. He served there (in the true sense of the word) till he could no more, i.e. the body's ageing was the cause. That was, I guess, in the late 80s or early 90s. He considered his work not just as a departmental occupation, but as the Mother's personal work. During his long tenure the heads (of the Department) changed, came and went, but he held them all with the same and utmost respect (many of them half his age). Were he late, he apologised to them. He said that the one sitting there (in the head's chair) was the Divine Mother Herself — not just a representative.

Gangadhar was a man with hardly any needs, let alone