



GANGADHAR

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

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GANGADHAR — “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

wants. He had whittled them down to the minimum. He never asked for anything extra, or even complained about anything. He used to say: "This is not my father-in-law's house." He did not believe in hoarding or collecting things, be they eatables or wearables. If a piece of bread was left over, he kept it in an old cardboard box and drew a ring of DDT to keep the ants away. Someone suggested: "Why not get a small meat-safe? Why this daily trouble of cleaning away DDT, putting on a fresh circle?" Gangadhar could not see the "trouble" part of it. He said he was doing a bit of necessary work! Some well-wisher offered him some money. He refused, saying, "Oh no, there will be no end to one's wants." (He did, I believe, accept a small amount for some specific purpose — but that was all.) He had an ancient mosquito net, patched up often enough, the threads somehow holding the holes in place. He took it to Prosperity for some more repairs. The people there had one look at it and referred back — 10-15 then 30 years, to their records — to find out when last he had taken a net. They then requested him to take a new one. He never asked for a servant, but later COUNUMA urged him to take one to help him out (in his old age).

Then blew up a storm. It was a period when it was thought that Gangadhar was going round the bend. I am not sure if anyone knew what was really wrong. He shut himself up, would not eat and threw things about. Some boys were sent, and he was somehow induced to open the door and come out. Then he gave himself up. There was enough "reason" to send him off to Bangalore for psychiatric treatment. Gangadhar himself probably couldn't or wouldn't say much in his own defence.

There is an amazing sequel to the drama. When Gangadhar was admitted to the hospital (Bangalore), he was not in the least happy about it. Then a nurse, sweet and kind, came to him at night and saw to his needs, talked to him, soothed his mind, nerves and body, with her kindly words, companionship and compassion. She brought him round, away from that brink. He even started to look forward to her arrival. Then it was time for him to go, return home to Pondicherry. He was being discharged. Gangadhar was full of gratitude for that nurse — an angel in white. He wanted very much for her to come to Pondicherry, the main reason being that she should have a darshan of the Mother. He spoke to the hospital authorities, describing the nurse. He singled her out from among the others. So far so good — but, there was a problem and a mystery! The nurse denied having nursed this man. The fact was that she had been on leave and had just returned to her duties! But Gangadhar was sure about his statements and his identification. He was insistent that she accompany them (himself and those who would come from Pondy to fetch him) to Pondicherry. The nurse, — you can well imagine her predicament, — was as strong in her refusal to come to Pondicherry and also her denials of having nursed him. Many around thought: “Maybe Gangadhar is having a relapse.” Gangadhar was somehow made to understand the situation and the party returned. Gangadhar was very disappointed that he could not repay his “angel” — also he was puzzled by her denials. Gangadhar went to the Mother soon after he returned and poured out his sorrows. The Mother smiled and lifted the veil of that “mystery”. She said it was

SHE who went to Gangadhar every night to soothe his pangs and deliver him from, god knows, where or what!

Gangadhar resumed his life from where he had left. The short storm seemed to have left him unscathed. But when he returned, he was transferred to another house. Why, and why to that particular house I cannot answer. It was an old two storied building in a lane near Ambabhikshu garden (our cycle repair department is situated in that lane). Gangadhar had to live on the 1st floor. He had to come down for his ablutions, etc. The stairs were steep and his legs were not as strong as they were a few years before. So, the going up was on all fours. For the coming down his seat too had to participate. He progressed (downwards) lowering himself, supported by hands and feet, to sit on the lower step and so on.... He never complained. Then one day he fainted (whatever the reason). The doctor was called, who took him away for treatment. The good doctor spoke up for him, to get him a better place to live in. He (Gangadhar) was told about another place, a bit dark and damp (according to one of his well-wishers). Gangadhar agreed to move in, saying "Oh, it is alright, if Counouma has decided." The friend remonstrated, saying "Gangadharji, you will die there!" Gangadhar smiled and reassured the friend: "I am not immortal anyway." But better sense prevailed and he was given a room on the ground floor of Subbu House (our hair-cutting place). There he lived his last days, doing what he could in our midst. In what else, and where else, he was more active I cannot say much. But it does seem that his field of action was not just the department he worked in. The following may elucidate where lay his field of action, or at least give us a hint and

allow a knowledgeable guess.

Once a person, who went to the Mother practically every day, mentioned to Her that Gangadhar came to Her only once a year. The Mother replied: "Gangadhar is always in my consciousness."

One day, it seems that Sri Aurobindo asked the 75 and odd sadhaks as to why they were here. He (Sri Aurobindo) liked best the answer that Gangadhar gave. (Alas! I have not been able to find out what that answer was.)

On another occasion when the Mother appeared on the Balcony for the general Darshan, she said that Sri Aurobindo's Grace was spread over the area like a mist and most had not felt or only vaguely perceived it. But one — that was Gangadhar — was very aware of it.

Gangadhar was in his room. He idly thought: "What is this Supermind? I don't understand anything, have no idea about it!" Then it happened; all on a sudden he saw the place around him was bathed in gold. Even the water he poured out of the *kuja* flowed out like liquid gold. This seems to be but the precursor of some more and higher experiences that he had — as he himself wrote about them later. He talks of how the "thousand petalled lotus Centre above the head opened due to the Grace of the Divine Mother. So too the *Brahma-randram*. He experienced being transported to many regions of Golden Light, into the presence of the Supreme Lord, full of peace and Ananda.

These are a few bits and pieces gathered and patched together by belated promptings from within me — incomplete and inadequate. Maybe someone else could add and shed

some more light on this man's life. But it would require a "keener sight" (or insight) both to shed the light and for others to "see" it.

As matters stand, Gangadhar could pass off as just another of the thousands of Mother's devotees. He was the simplest of the simple. No distinguishing or distinguished characteristics or achievements in any field of physical, mental or vital activities (not even in any of the social or friendly ties such as we dilly-dally in) marked him. At best we could single him out for being "not one of us", and then shelve him in a corner of our minds. So much for the vestiges of him, and his life in our memories. But his mortal remains — they are resting in another far corner of Pondicherry — they went back to where they began this earthly journey. His friends and family members from Veerampattinam requested and were given the body to be buried there (as per their custom). This earthly journey ended on 16 August 1992. He was not too old, but not too young either. He had developed some urinary problems, but refused to be taken to Jipmer, saying: "My end is near — so let me be." But, insisted upon, he relented. I am told he passed away even before being admitted to the hospital. He had quietly shaken off his mortal shackles, leaving us to figure out their future. It was in the scheme of things that he be taken to his village. The body was kept there for three days for his people to pay homage. It seems there was no smell, and no deterioration of the body was seen. Slabs of ice were kept in the vicinity — yet it is unusual (to say the least) that the body lasted so long.

No bells tolled, nor were requiems sung — but I would

say that we keep a clean little niche in our hearts and minds for this gentle giant, following whose ways could be rather rewarding.

The ONE Gangadhar is mighty Shiva whose matted locks could absorb the thundering fall of Ganga and imprison that flow. This Gangadhar is a tiny trickle from those matted locks, gentle, pure and clear.