

# OUR LIGHT AND DELIGHT

*Recollections of Life with the Mother*

AMAL KIRAN  
(K.D. SETHNA)

Clear Ray Trust  
Pondicherry - India

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*Published by:*

**Clear Ray Trust  
25 & 27, Chinnatambi Street,  
Kuruchikuppam  
Pondicherry — 605 012.**

*First Edition: November 1980*

*Second Edition: January 2003*

**Price: Rs. 150/-**

**ISBN: 81-87916-02-8**

*Typeset and Printed by:*

**All India Press  
Kennedy Nagar  
Pondicherry – 605 001  
India.**

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## FOREWORD

This book took shape originally in response to the Mother's birth-centenary. The first article appeared in the special issue of Mother India dated 21 February 1978. The last was expected to coincide with the issue of January 1979 completing the twelve months of commemoration. But there was so much to tell and the public appreciation so warm that the idea of a set period was put aside and the flood of recollection allowed to go on until it came to a natural stop in July of the same year. Occasionally, side by side with the regular series other articles were written, bearing on the Mother and her work: they have been brought together in a Supplement.

The most concrete sign of welcome to the series came when my friend Harshad V. Mehta spontaneously expressed his wish to bring it out in book-form. This was the Mother's Grace indeed. But the loan available could be only a bright start, not a full covering of the course. Harshad happened to speak to his friend Maganbhai V. Patel. To his surprise his inspiration found an amplified echo in that old yet still visionary and adventurous heart. At once a plan was made to take up the major share of the expenses. Half of it was even offered as a gift, but I insisted on everything being a generous loan.

Thus the book was launched and the business of printing entrusted to the economical Andhra Bhavan Press at Pondicherry, which has carried out the project with constant goodwill and care.

My grateful acknowledgments are due to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust for permission to quote from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

The deepest thanks go to the Mother and the Master themselves for fostering through the years all my stumbling efforts to be their child and for filling my life sufficiently with their wonderful ways to enable me to remember and try conveying something of the varied interchange between the divine consenting to be human and the human toiling to be divine.

# OUR LIGHT AND DELIGHT

## *Recollections of Life with The Mother*

### 1

#### **The Mother and Sri Aurobindo**

"The Mother is not a disciple of Sri Aurobindo. She has had the same realisation and experience as myself.

"The Mother's sadhana started when she was very young. When she was twelve or thirteen, every evening many teachers came to her and taught her various spiritual disciplines. Among them was a dark Asiatic figure. When we first met, she immediately recognised me as the dark Asiatic figure whom she used to see a long time ago. That she should come here and work with me for a common goal was, as it were, a divine dispensation.

"The Mother was an adept in the Buddhist yoga and the yoga of the Gita even before she came to India. Her yoga was moving towards a grand synthesis. After this, it was natural that she should come here. She has helped and is helping to give a concrete form to my yoga. This would not have been possible without her co-operation."

There could be no better tribute to our Mother than these words of Sri Aurobindo written in his letter of August 17, 1941 to Arabinda Basu through Nirodbaran.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Mother — Sweetness and Light* (Editions Auropress, Auroville, 1978), pp. 203-204.

The Mother herself, in various places, has alluded to the truth of occultism and spirituality compassed by her both before and after coming to take her place by the side of Sri Aurobindo. In a many-faceted article entitled *Spiritual and Occult Truths*<sup>1</sup>, Huta has included, amidst a host of other new material, a most astonishing piece of information the Mother conveyed to her in 1961. The Mother disclosed "how she had achieved in her tender age the highest occult truths, how she had realised and seen all the visions set forth in *Savitri*". Here is indeed a marvellous flash of psychic autobiography. Huta continues the report based on the Mother's words: "Actually, she had experienced the poem's fundamental revelations before she arrived in Pondicherry and before Sri Aurobindo read out *Savitri* to her early in the morning day after day at a certain period of the Ashram. She also said to me that she had never told Sri Aurobindo all that she had seen beforehand."

I am especially interested in this information, for it touches on an unforgettable phase of my own life in the Ashram. Owing to my sustained aspiration to write what Sri Aurobindo has termed "overhead poetry", that is, poetic inspiration caught from secret levels of consciousness above the mind, levels of a superhuman light and delight, Sri Aurobindo generously granted the incredible favour of letting me see portions of his epic, which was then still in the making. Without letting anyone know, he started sending me, every morning, in sealed envelopes the opening cantos. On October 25, 1936, written in his own fine and sensitive yet forceful hand, there burst upon me the beauty and amplitude of the first sixteen lines of the poem's prelude of "symbol dawn" as it stood at that time. The precious gift of passages kept coming to me in private for months and months and a happy discussion of them went to and fro. Before enclosing them, usually with the Mother's "Amal" inscribed on the covers, Sri Aurobindo must have daily read the verse out to her prior to breaking up their joint sessions of correspondence with the sadhakas late at night and through the small hours of the morning. Some time in early 1938 the Amal-ward stream

<sup>1</sup> *Mother India*, February 21, 1978, pp. 134-79.

of *Savitri* ceased like the fabled river Sarasvati of the Rigvedic symbolism. I went on a visit to Bombay, Sri Aurobindo still wrote to me about the poem, mentioning its progress, but no passages were sent. Not long afterwards, he suffered an accident to his right leg and his old routine of sitting with the Mother to tackle the copious correspondence stopped and so did letter-writing, except to Dilip and me. Now the poet was surrounded by a small number of attendants, to one of whom — Nirodbaran — he accorded a privilege whose gloriousness I most envy, for he started dictating to him revisions and extensions of the poem. The year and a half from nearly October's end in 1936 to almost the close of February 1938 must have been the "certain period of the Ashram" to which Huta's article refers, a period of shining surprise not only to the Grace-inundated disciple to whom *Savitri* was sent but also on a far deeper plane to the Mother for the wonderful language in which the Master unveiled his high visions and to the Master himself because the Mother had anticipated them in mystic silence some thirty years in advance.

Side by side though Sri Aurobindo and the Mother stood, she often took the position as a of a "disciple" and spoke of carrying out a work allotted to her and of promulgating his message to the world. On the other hand, he never tired of declaring her to be not only equal to him but also indispensable for his mission and even suggested that if she were not there as his counterpart he would be incomplete. Many of his utterances about her are well known, but a few of an extremely illuminating kind are liable to be overlooked because they have not yet formed part of any published collection. I shall concentrate on them as well as on one or two which, though they have had a better fate, may not have caught everybody's eye.

Answering a disciple's question, "Is complete transformation possible without having a Shakti<sup>1</sup>?", Sri Aurobindo, after some general remarks, jocular at one place, indicated the Mother's inevitable counterpart-role:<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Spiritual feminine partner.

<sup>2</sup> "Sri Aurobindo at Evening Talk : Some Notes of 1920-1926" by V. Chidanandam, *Mother India*, April 1970. pp. 147-148.

"Why not? Transformation would be complete if one could bring down the thing that you have got in the mind and the vital being into the physical also, into the very cells of the material body. The conditions are that you should be able to keep the same deep peace, wideness, strength and power and plasticity from the mind downward to the very cells. When that basis is ready, the working from above begins. The transformation does not require a Shakti. Incarnating the Divine in the body means incarnating your own Divine Self that is in the Supermind. . . Transformation is a personal affair. I do not quite see what a Shakti has to do with it. Is your question about Shakti a prologue to an application for marriage? I do not object to a Shakti if there is a genuine case. You should not mix up your case with me.

"The function of the shakti is something special. In my own case it was a necessary condition for the work that I had to do. If I had had to do only my own transformation or give a new yoga or a new ideal to a select few people who came into personal contact with me I could have done that without having any Shakti. But, for the work that I had to do, it was necessary that the two sides must come together. By the coming together of Mirra<sup>1</sup> and me certain conditions are created which make it easy for you to do the transformation. You can take advantage of these conditions. But it is not necessary that everybody should have a Shakti just because in my case it was necessary. You cannot generalise like that from one case. It is not a question of great or small. It is a question of your being less complex than I am. If you had to do all the things that I have done you would never be able to do it. And before you can have a Shakti you must first of all deserve a Shakti. The first condition is that you must be master of all the movements of Kama, lust. There are many other things. One thing is that there must be complete union on every plane of inner consciousness."

<sup>1</sup>In the early days after the Mother's final arrival in Pondicherry in 1920 her name was still spelt this way according to its original form. She had also not yet taken charge of the Ashram.



Further light on what Sri Aurobindo has considered the necessity of the two sides coming together is shed by the closing part of a letter in which, on March 29, 1926, Amrita communicated to a disciple Sri Aurobindo's answers to his questions:<sup>1</sup>

"...it will be a mistake if you make too rigid a separation between A. G.<sup>2</sup> and Mirra. Both influences are necessary for the complete development of the Sadhana. The work of the two together alone brings down the Supramental Truth into the physical plane. A. G. acts directly on the mental and on the vital being through the illumined mind; he represents the Purusha element whose strength is predominantly in illumined knowledge (intuition, supramental or spiritual) and the power that acts in this knowledge, while the psychic being supports this action and helps to transform the physical and vital planes. Mirra acts directly on the psychic and on the emotional vital and physical being through the illumined psychic consciousness while the illumined intuitions of the supramental being give her the necessary knowledge to act on the right lines and at the right moment. Her force representing the Shakti element is directly psychic, vital, physical and her spiritual knowledge is predominantly practical in its nature. It is, that is to say, a large and detailed knowledge and experience of the mental, vital and physical forces at play and, with the knowledge, the power to handle them for the purposes of life and of yoga."

A very crucial pointer to the Mother's central place in Sri Aurobindo's world-work is in four pronouncements of his over and above the one to Arabinda Basu. In a letter of September 16, 1935 he writes:<sup>3</sup> "It is not clear what your Guru meant by my sitting on the path; that could have been true of the period between 1915 and 1920 when I was writing the *Arya*, but the sadhana and the work were waiting

<sup>1</sup> *Mother India*, December 5, 1970, p. 613.

<sup>2</sup> The abbreviation for Aurobindo Ghose, which the disciples used at that time.

<sup>3</sup> *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother* (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1953), p. 366.

for the Mother's coming. In 1923 or 1924, I could not be described as sitting on the path, so far as the sadhana was concerned, but it may perhaps be only a metaphor or symbol for the outward form of the work not yet being ready." Another letter, dated July 27, 1934, says among other things:<sup>1</sup> "Before the Mother came... I was still seeking my way for the transformation and the passage to the Supramental (all the part of the Yoga that goes beyond the ordinary Vedanta) and acted very much on a principle of *laissez faire* with the few sadhaks who were there." Nirodbaran, in the talk of December 10, 1938 between Sri Aurobindo and his attendants after the accident seventeen days earlier, said to him:<sup>2</sup> "The Mother's coming must have greatly helped you in your work and in your sadhana." Sri Aurobindo answered enthusiastically: "Of course, of course. All my realisations — Nirvana and others — would have remained theoretical, as it were, so far as the outer world was concerned. It is the Mother who showed the way to a practical form. Without her no organised manifestation would have been possible. She has been doing this kind of work from her very childhood." No wonder that at the end of the letter to Basu Sri Aurobindo added: "One of the two great steps in this yoga is to take refuge in the Mother" — the other great step being, as Sri Aurobindo afterwards clarified to Nirodbaran: "Aspiration of the sadhak for the divine life."<sup>3</sup> But perhaps the most sweeping as well as startling compliment to the Mother — a compliment charged with a humility possible only to a supreme instrument of the Divine such as Sri Aurobindo — occurs in one of the months just before the Descent of the Overmind into the physical beings of both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. He is recorded as saying:<sup>4</sup> "The inner guide may fail after a time in the sadhana. I had attained an inner calm, before I took help from Lele. But when I came to

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, 367.

<sup>2</sup> *Talks with Sri Aurobindo* (Sri Aurobindo Pathamandir, Calcutta, 1966), p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> *The Mother — Sweetness and Light*, pp. 204–205.

<sup>4</sup> "Sri Aurobindo at Evening Talk: Some Notes of May-to-November 1926" by V. Chidanandam, *Mother India*, August 1971, p. 453.

Pondicherry, there was no help from within, and I was seeking for some illumination from an outside thing or person. Then Mirra came; and, had she not come here, I would have been still fumbling..."

The same luminous humility overwhelms us in the words Amrita once reported to me in the early days of my Ashram-stay. He told me that after the Mother's arrival in Pondicherry Sri Aurobindo declared to the young men with him at the time, of whom Amrita was one: "I never knew the meaning of 'surrender' until Mirra surrendered herself to me."

The extremism of this declaration is confirmed by Barindra Kumar Ghose, Sri Aurobindo's youngest brother. When he had just come back from the Andamans, to which he had been banished for implication in the Alipore Bomb Conspiracy, he asked Sri Aurobindo: "the Mother has written in her *Prayers* what she felt after she saw you. But what was your feeling when you saw the Mother?" Sri Aurobindo thought for a moment and told him: "That was the first time I knew that perfect surrender to the last physical cell was humanly possible; it was when the Mother came and bowed down that I saw that perfect complete surrender in action."<sup>1</sup>

We might assert that in the first meeting of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo at 3.30 p.m. on March 29, 1914 the typical Aurobindonian Yoga, with its insistence primarily on Surrender to the Divine, found for the wide world the true seed of its call to life to break from the common hold of earth and thrust upward in self-abandonment towards the Light without yet losing its root in terrestrial existence, so that ultimately the Light may be drawn into the very depths of Matter and transform them.

Balancing this fact, we can discern in that inner gesture of the Mother throwing her whole self at the feet of Sri Aurobindo — a gesture which often took an outer shape in the days to come — her recognition of his absolute mastery over her life and of the beginning of a new epoch of

<sup>1</sup> *Glimpses of the Mother's Life*, Compiled by Nilima Das and edited by K.D. Sethna (Sri Aurobindo Ashram Mother India, Pondicherry, 1978), p. 253.

spirituality even for so extraordinary and so richly experienced a Truth-seeker as she. What she felt about him could be seen every time she spoke his name. A taste of some ineffable nectar seemed to be on her lips when with a musical blend of invocation of his presence from afar and evocation of it from her own profundities she pronounced it like a Mantra of mantras in a half French half English accent — the S of "Sri" becoming invariably *Sh* and the *r* of it as well as of "Aurobindo" emerging with a kind of golden gurgle from the throat. Utter devotion and utter identification appeared to be simultaneous in the sound. Her governance of the Ashram which he had put totally in her hands and which she moulded and expanded and brought to a multi-aspected creativeness was as if that Great Name were taking on Great Form everywhere. Although from the evening of November 24, 1926 he withdrew into a background of "dynamic meditation" to expedite his work of bringing about the descent of the hitherto-unmanifest Supermind into the blind-seeming long-suffering physical substance of the world and, although the Mother was to all intents and purposes our sole Guru, she ever acted out the verity enshrined in the letter of probably 1930 which was recently published in *Mother India*,<sup>1</sup> a letter written by a sadhak under Sri Aurobindo's directions and corrected by him:

"I am afraid that you labour under a fundamental misconception regarding the Ashram. It is not an institution planned by Sri Aurobindo with certain rules of management, laws or regulations fixed and made to order. It has grown up of itself out of the force of the Truth he manifests and can follow only the movements of that Truth. Sri Aurobindo and the Ashram form one integral whole. His being is spread out in the Ashram, gathers and takes up the entire life of the latter into itself and into one harmonious spiritual unity. Its life is the life of the Spirit; its growth is the growth of the Spirit. It is entirely wrong to look at the Ashram as a group or collection of Sadhakas or to look at it as having a life or an aspiration or an aim that does or

<sup>1</sup> November 1977, p. 780.

can exist apart from Sri Aurobindo. Its life and movements and activities are an expression, integrally, of its growth and development from within. It has no laws, rules or regulations, except the one law of spiritual growth and development in and through Sri Aurobindo."

After Sri Aurobindo withdrew from his body, the Mother may be said to have become physically even more Aurobindonian than before. Once, when some recent photographs of her were under scrutiny, she told us that her very face and particularly the manner in which she smiled were becoming like Sri Aurobindo's. Before his passing, there were two bodies to establish the Supermind's victory; now there was only one and Sri Aurobindo was packing everything into it as if it were at the same time his own and the Mother's. A clue to this biune fact came to me on my birthday in 1968. She had occasion to mention the event of December 5, 1950. She said:

"You see, when he left his body, he gave his whole supramental force to me. It came to me most concretely."

Then she touched the skin and flesh of her left arm to convey the sense of the concreteness, as if even flesh and skin had felt that supramental force. She added: "His force passed from his body into mine. Its passage was like a wind blowing upon and into my body."

The point about the intensified and redoubled presence of Sri Aurobindo in her was driven home to me on two other occasions. On April 30, 1953 I spoke to the Mother about a friend who had left the Ashram "he claims that Sri Aurobindo is all the time present with him, communicating with him and guiding him." The Mother replied: "The fact simply is that Sri Aurobindo made an emanation of himself for him. And this emanation Sri Aurobindo has not withdrawn. That is an act of Grace. It does not mean that the central Sri Aurobindo, Sri Aurobindo himself, is there. He is here with me all the time and working through me."

The book *Champaklal Speaks* quotes a direct letter to the person concerned, written on 5.5.1953:<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Champaklal Speaks*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1975, p. 25.

"I do not deny that you have got a connection with something of Sri Aurobindo, the something that was interested in you and in what you are doing. This something might have remained with you to inspire and help you in your work in America and elsewhere. But it is only a part, a very, very small part of the Sri Aurobindo whom I know and with whom I lived physically for thirty years, and who has not left me, not for a moment — for He is still with me, day and night, thinking through my brain, writing through my pen, speaking through my mouth and acting through my organising power."

The truth expressed here came to be reaffirmed by her in general when I raised an issue apropos of a message she had given on her birthday in 1958. Both the French and the English versions were published in the March issue of *Mother India*. The message consisted of three sentences. In the original the first ran:

"Fêter la naissance d'un corps transitoire peut satisfaire certains sentiments fidèles."

The Mother's English translation was:

"To celebrate the birth of a transitory body can satisfy some faithful feelings."

The remainder of the message in English read:

"To celebrate the manifestation of the eternal Consciousness can be done at every moment of the universal history."

"But to celebrate the advent of a new world, the Supramental, is a marvellous and exceptional privilege."

Evidently, the Mother was pulling us beyond the disciples' devoted urge to make overmuch of the annually returning single day on which the Guru's physical being had been born. With a natural modesty and an impersonal insight her emphasis fell more on the entry into time of the larger non-individual reality of the everlasting inner Divine within that being, and most on the transcendent Supermind's becoming now, through this reality and that being, a part of the earth's future and creating the possibility of an earthly heaven. The last allusion was to the Supramental Manifestation that had occurred on February 29, 1956 in the earth's subtle-physical layer. But I was rather



disturbed by the word "transitory", I wrote to the Mother that it suggested that her present body would pass away from our midst. I added: "Such a suggestion cannot but be quite upsetting to your disciples. Surely if Sri Aurobindo were here to guide us he would never let you use the adjective 'transitory'." I concluded with my conviction that Sri Aurobindo, who had asked her, as she herself had stated, to fulfil the Yoga of Supramental Descent and Transformation, would choose the French equivalent of "transitional".

After the Mother had read my note, she came to me where I sat on the floor as usual, waiting for her to finish her lunch and then meet me before she took her short siesta and I left for my house. Very quietly she looked at me and said in a low yet firm voice: "You have been impertinent. How can you dare to say what Sri Aurobindo would choose or not choose? Do you know where Sri Aurobindo is?" I saw in a flash the mistake I had committed. I said: "I am sorry, Mother. I did not realise the truth, I know where he is." At once she had tenderness in her eyes. She said quite simply: "He is all the time with me and directing my actions."

Clarifying the word to which I had objected, she wrote on a small piece of paper: "All body in course of transformation is by this very fact transitory. 'Transformed' means being changed into something else." This by itself might not mean the non-perishing of her own body: she was generalising, and transformation might stand broadly for evolutionary progress of the human physical vehicle through the ages. But, in my opinion, the Mother could not have implied that her present body was only a part of that general progress and might have to be given up at some point of time at a certain stage. In the circumstances of the Yogic process going on in the period immediately succeeding the event of February 29, 1956, death was not envisaged as a possibility. On September 25, 1957, the very year of the February Message, she asserts in connection with a passage in Sri Aurobindo's book, *The Supramental manifestation*:<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Questions and Answers 1957-58* (Collected Works of the Mother — The Centenary Edition, 1977), p. 191.

"I think — I know — that it is now certain that we shall realise what he expects of us. It has become no longer a hope but a certainty. Only the time necessary for this realisation will be longer or shorter according to our individual effort, our concentration, our goodwill and the *Importance* we give to this fact. For the inattentive observer things may appear very much what they were before, but for one who knows how to see and is not deceived by appearances things are going well.

"Let each one do his best and perhaps not many years will have to elapse before the first visible results become apparent to all."

The general reference is to what in the same talk she has termed "the Superman" who must serve as a link "between humanity as it is and the supramental being created in the supramental way" — that is, created not by the animal mode of birth to which all of us, including the Mother, have owed our bodies, but by a direct "materialisation", an occult method to be found by the transformed human being. The talk of April 16 in the next year returns to the theme of discovering "the means of producing new beings without going through the old animal method," and says: "these beings — who will have a truly spiritual birth — will constitute the elements of the new race, the Supramental race"<sup>1</sup> rather than a race of intermediate beings. In this talk too the Mother looks forward to the superman's rapid advent: "This new realisation is proceeding with what one might call a lightning speed."<sup>2</sup>

Here, as in the earlier conclusion, she must have had in mind not a general reference but a particular one — namely, her own body moving onward to commence a super-humanity, the human supramentalised as distinct from the supramental assuming a human-looking shape. Not that she attached any importance, in a self-regarding way, to the body she possessed nor that she considered it a paragon of health and on that account a just claimant for the physical divinisation which is the crowning consequence

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 314.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 315.



of the Integral Yoga. True, many of the illnesses she went through came of her dealings with the world's impurities and of her throwing herself wide-open to contacts with the unregenerate consciousness of the people she was nurturing towards the Life Divine. But she never made any secret of certain defects in her health. They were inevitable, for "*la condition humaine*" had been accepted by her in right earnest: the aim was to cope with actual physical nature in both its strength and its weakness in order to take Mr. Everyman to the status of Superman. The "human condition" could be seen clearly from a remark she made in my presence. Navajata had had a severe attack of renal colic. One morning, when he met her, she asked him how he felt. He answered in a somewhat sad tone that a little pain still persisted in the kidney-region. The Mother, wanting to take away his attention from this slight symptom, calmly declared: "From the beginning of this century there has not been a day when I haven't had a pain in my abdomen."

Sri Aurobindo has written of some deep-seated chronic troubles in his body, which he had Yogically tackled. The Mother's body had, besides this abdominal weakness, two abnormal characteristics. Udar once reported to me that she had told him of her body's tendency to dizziness at a height and a spontaneous aversion to the proximity of fire. Possibly the latter characteristic was the subtle-physical being's "carry-over" of the intense experience of burning at the stake to which Joan of Arc had been condemned: the Mother is believed to have been in one of her past births the Maid of Orleans who had come inwardly charged with the Soul of France. The Mother had herself hinted to me at the possibility of some sort of "carry-over" of even very outward physical formations when I on one occasion remarked how in a certain position her hands looked exactly like Mona Lisa's in the painting by Leonardo.

Of course, heredity too is responsible for some bodily traits and we do not know what she derived from parentage when she took birth in 1878 in the family of Maurice Alfassa, a Turk from Adrianople who had come to settle in Paris two years before with his wife Mathilde Ismaloun of Cairo, who had Egyptian Pharaonic blood in her veins. But, whatever the inheritance or the "carry-over", negative or

positive, we can have no doubt that her body had been so organised in its subtle qualities as to be the fit field for the supernormal experiment of supramental transformation. It had an openness in nerve and cell to the spiritual light, a supple strength which allowed her to play tennis every afternoon even when past eighty, and a resolute endurance which made light of the common ills of the flesh. Above all, it was a body responding to the Divine's demand for surrender, a demand met in its entirety by even the physical consciousness and not only the inner self. Both its humility and its uniqueness come through in that passage written on September 8, 1954:<sup>1</sup>

"The body repeats constantly and with a poignant sincerity: 'What am I to demand anything whatsoever from anyone at all? Left to myself I am nothing, I know nothing, I can do nothing. Unless the truth penetrates into me and directs me, I am incapable of taking even the minutest decision and of knowing what is the best thing to do and to live even in the most insignificant circumstances. Shall I ever be capable of being transformed to the point of becoming What I ought to be and of manifesting What wants to manifest upon earth?' But why does this answer always come from the depths, from You, Lord, with an indisputable certitude: 'If you cannot do it, no other body upon earth can do it.' There is but one conclusion: I shall persist in my effort, without giving in, I shall persist until death or until victory."

The last two sentences remind us of two statements of Sri Aurobindo in 1935: "... If I am seeking after supramentalisation, it is because it is a thing that has to be done for the earth-consciousness and if it is not done in myself, it cannot be done in others...<sup>2</sup> It is not for personal greatness that I am seeking the Supermind. I care nothing for greatness or littleness in the human sense. I am seeking to bring some principle of inner Truth, Light, Harmony, Peace into the earth-consciousness ...if greater men than myself have not had this vision and this ideal before them, that is no reason why I should not follow my Truth-sense

<sup>1</sup> *Champaklal Speaks*, p. 92.

<sup>2</sup> *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother*, p. 216.

and Truth-vision...Let all men jeer at me if they will or all Hell fall upon me if it will for my presumption, — I go on till I conquer or perish. This is the spirit in which I seek the Supermind, no hunting for greatness for myself or others."<sup>1</sup>

In the article which I wrote after Sri Aurobindo had passed away and which received the Mother's full approval, I tried to lay out the objectives and details of what I termed the Sacrifice of Sri Aurobindo marking a change of Yogic strategy to accelerate humanity's evolution. I said that Sri Aurobindo had changed his old formula "I conquer or perish" into a new paradox: "I perish to conquer." The Mother's cry of "death" or "victory" can lead an Aurobindonian worker like her to nothing save the same paradox in a new key. But her change mystifies us, in spite of all that the inner vision can descry, because there is none to confirm what is seen and because it is difficult to reconcile with it the fact that Sri Aurobindo, unlike the Mother, could afford to sacrifice himself knowing his counterpart was there for him to pack in that unique survivor the Supermind's final triumph.

Let me not, however, end this chapter about the relationship between the two Avatars on a semi-tragic note. Apropos of the supernormality of the bodies they occupied and used, I should like to touch on a topic which within a limited area at the same time illustrates this supernormality and brings the two personalities together. I take my point of departure from that extremely valuable book, *Champaklal Speaks*, on which I have already drawn and which, along with its sequel *Champaklal's Treasures*, conjures up the Mother and Sri Aurobindo to our hearts and minds in the most vivid and intimate way, while evoking without intention the instinctively wise, expansively warm and ever-helpful figure of the life-long disciple himself, ever-helpful not only to the Master and the Mother but also to the groping and stumbling humans who sought their saviour feet.

Yes, the books have extreme value, yet here and there one may take the liberty to fault them. At places, Sri Aurobindo is reported as talking not as a born master of

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 214-215.

English would but in a mode of Champaklalese. The editing should have been more careful. At one place at least, there is a wrong attribution: an early poem of mine, which Sri Aurobindo had corrected and commented on, has assumed Radhanand as its author! At another place I believe there is an inaccuracy owing to a misunderstanding, and my closing anecdote starts from the event concerned in it.

Champaklal reports on page 85 of his first book that in the presence of Amrita and himself the Mother told Satyakarma that when in 1920 she had fasted for ten days she had not taken anything, "not even a drop of water." I expressed to Champaklal my doubt about this. I said a fast of such a kind was not possible. He countered by asking how I could consider anything to be impossible for the Mother. I still remain unconvinced, especially as Champaklal did not obtain a confirmation from either Satyakarma or Amrita. I hold that she must have said somewhat dramatically: "nothing but a drop of water at times." Fasting, as any dictionary will enlighten us, consists in not taking food. Water is always taken, unless the fast is a short religious one as at the Muslim Ramazan — from sunrise to sunset. The idea of not taking water during a prolonged abstention from food never arises — unless one deliberately risks death, as in some cases of hunger-strike. In most cases even of hunger-strike, it is imbibed, though perhaps on a small scale. Sri Aurobindo went on a fast twice, once in Alipore Jail and again in Pondicherry. At neither time was there any question of abstention from water. And I am all the more positive about the Mother because I have myself heard her speak of this fast of hers. Both Champaklal and Amrita were present when she spoke, but Champaklal has perhaps forgotten the talk. It was in the "Stores" (Prosperity Room) on the first floor of the Library House one evening before the Soup-distribution downstairs.

The Mother never referred to not drinking water. Had she kept away from water, she would certainly have emphasised that remarkable feat. Her story was concerned only with food. And she said that one of the effects of her fast was that when she held a cup or anything else with her fingers, the hand kept shaking. I think the word "cup" is rather significant for our controversy. But the drinking

of water or any other liquid does not lessen the extraordinariness of the fact that, just like Sri Aurobindo, she continued her normal routine of daily activities all through the fasting period. I am sure she could have equalled Sri Aurobindo's number of fasting days — twenty-one or so — without feeling any debility. But she had to stop with a mere ten days for a special reason. A little shyly she told us that she ended her fast when Sri Aurobindo remarked: "You are not looking very pretty."

I surmise that if she had undergone a ten-days' dehydration, Sri Aurobindo's comment would have been less of an understatement.

## Some Ways of the Mother's Working

All of us have enchanting memories of the Mother's sweetness and understanding — a divine enfolding of us and entry into the most sensitive chambers of our hearts. But the Mother was no ordinary spiritual Guru. The Supramental Divine acts from a level which can often leave us agape at its unclassifiable originality.

A very unusual feature at times was the Mother's reception of physical facts reported by the sadhaks. Physical facts so impress and obsess us that we find any disrespect to them, or brushing away of them, a very disturbing if not incomprehensible matter. I have heard Champaklal say to me that these things mean much to our exterior consciousness but from the Mother's inner and higher viewpoint they can become very small and insignificant. This was said after observing the manner in which the Mother had faced some issue involving directly or indirectly a plant known to have been of Pujalal's rearing. She had shaken her head as if saying "No" to that information. The reason for her queer-seeming behaviour was, as both Champaklal and I realised, her concern primarily with spiritual truth, the true God-touched consciousness she was bent on evoking, encouraging and strengthening in us. If she found a sadhak reporting something physically factual with a wrong attitude or unseemly loss of inner poise due to resentment against somebody, she would either ignore the excited reportage or even go to the extent of saying "No" to what our normal senses had certified as undeniable. She was concentrated on our inner development. If a surprising negation of what seemed clear as daylight to our eyes could serve to give a jolt sending us bewildered from the too-outward-gazing mind into a sudden search of inner reality, she would not hesitate to do what we might ordinarily consider as calling day night and night day.



Not that she was indifferent to "truth-telling". She frequently insisted that a sadhak should never tell a lie. The supreme Truth-Consciousness, which is Supermind and which secretly holds the perfect divine original of everything here and gradually works itself out in an evolving manifestation, cannot find a full and permanent home in a being addicted to lying or even prone to be lax in accuracy. But that did not necessarily imply that every so-called accurate account was acceptable to the Mother at all moments. Even though she might take it as a genuine statement she was not bound to show herself to be receiving it as such at all times. At any particular instant when it came with the aura of an inner condition out of touch with the equanimity and impersonality characteristic of the supreme Truth-consciousness' influence on our being, her spiritual mission could impel her to deny importance to it and set it aside as if it were not worth crediting.

Of course, there is also the ancient right of the Guru to test the faith of the disciple by — as it is said in Indian parlance — dubbing the sun moon and the moon sun. Whatever word falls from the Guru's lips has to be accepted by the disciple without question. Every command of his has to be carried out and every statement taken as God's truth. Thus alone can the disciple open himself thoroughly to the Divine Power streaming through the Guru and put away the gross physical consciousness which is the main obstacle to the growth of the inner being. I do not know whether the Mother ever exercised the right of faith-test in the strict sense. She was too modern to go in for traditional methods. I have found her always ready to be corrected even when she had previously made a sweeping declaration. But the correction proposed by the sadhak had also to come with an approach proper from the spiritual standpoint. If there was uppishness on the part of the sadhak she ignored the offered idea — not because the uppishness offended any egoistic sense in her but simply because it arose from such a sense in the sadhak. I once pointed out to her what I regarded as a mistake in a geographical detail in a statement she had made for publication, but she refused to accept my correction and said I was not being compelled to reproduce in print the interview with Chamanlal in which the detail

had occurred. I realised later that I had made an elaborate, schoolmasterish and rather showy approach and had been scorned on account of it. At another time she wrote to me that mistakes should always be admitted and set right and herself made some changes I had proposed in a writing of hers on Auroville.

What a difference is made in result between the right approach and the wrong I knew when the University Centre edition of *Savitri* was to be published practically under my editorship. Perhaps her action had also a tinge of the other movement. I noted the whole incident in my diary soon after its occurrence.

It was April 10, 1954. The day proved one of the most decisive in my inner life. I took to the Mother some suggestions with regard to *Savitri*. I had written them down. The Mother looked strange and said "I can answer without even reading your note. I won't allow you to change even a comma in *Savitri*."

I knew she was striking out at something which in the past had led me to make some "editorial" adjustments in three letters of Sri Aurobindo in *Mother India*. There had been three related questions about the Mother, to each of which he had simply answered "Yes". I put the questions together, followed by only one "Yes". I realised afterwards that a needed affirmative emphasis had been watered down by a misguided sense of economical elegance. Later, when the second volume of the first edition of *Savitri* was under preparation, a sadhak had stressed to the Mother the danger of sending the proofs to me. The Mother seems even to have passed an order against sending them. But Prithwisingh and Nirod made urgent representations to her, saying that it would be a great mistake not to let me see the proofs, for I had made very appropriate suggestions in the past, which had been found correct when the typed copy had been compared with the original manuscript. So the Mother cancelled her order but left, of course, the final decision in the hands of Nolini and Nirod. In fact, I, being in Bombay at that period, had no power over what the press would print since whatever I might propose would have to pass under their eyes. The press was not dealing directly with me.

When the proof-reading was finished, Nolini wrote to me



thanking me for the important and valuable work I had done. Now, before the new single-volume edition of *Savitri* was started, I made another long list of suggestions, many of which came to be accepted. The proofs of the new edition were passing through my hands as I was in the Ashram at the time, and suggestions again were being made by me.

"Mother," I said, "I am not wanting you to sanction the changing of commas and such things. All I want is that in some sort of Publisher's Note we should say that certain passages in Parts II and III did not receive final revision: otherwise critics will think that they are what Sri Aurobindo intended them finally to be."

The Mother exclaimed: "Do you think there is anybody in the world who can judge Sri Aurobindo? And how do you know what Sri Aurobindo intended or did not intend? He may have wanted just what he has left behind. How can you say that he did not give the final revision? How can you judge?"

I said: "It is not only my own opinion. Nirod agrees with me, and I think Nolini also."

The Mother replied "It is presumptuous for anyone to have such an opinion. Who can enter into Sri Aurobindo's consciousness? It is a consciousness beyond everything and what it has decided how can any one know?"

"Mother, from the fact that Sri Aurobindo sometimes corrected his own things on our pointing out oversights we conclude that passages may be there which needed revision."

At this, the Mother exploded like a veritable Mahakali: "Yes, I know. People used to pester him with letters, pointing out grammatical mistakes and other things. He used to make changes just for the sake of peace. He was very polite and did not let people see what a nuisance they were. But when he and I were together and alone and like this" — here she put her two palms together two or three times to show the intimacy — "he used to say: 'What a bother, what a nuisance!' And once he said: 'But I had a purpose in putting the thing in this way. I wanted it like this.' Sri Aurobindo made many concessions out of politeness and a wish to be left in peace. When a great being comes down here to work he wants peace and not botheration. Yes, he was very polite, and people took advantage of his compassion and mis-

understood it and got all sorts of ideas. Sri Aurobindo was polite — but I have made it a point not to be polite. I am not polite at all. The other day Pavitra brought me somebody's idea about Sri Aurobindo's passing. Somebody said Sri Aurobindo had died because of this or that. I told Pavitra: 'Let him think anything — I simply don't care. The truth will remain what it is.'"

I raised the question: "Take the Epilogue to *Savitri*, Mother. It comes from an early version and is not equal to the rest of the poem. In some places it is almost like a sort of anticlimax as regards the plane of spiritual inspiration."

At this moment Nirod walked in and said: "Sri Aurobindo asked me: 'What remains now to be done in *Savitri*?' I replied: 'The Book of Death and the Epilogue.' He remarked: 'We shall see about them later.'"

The Mother turned to Nirod and said: "That may be his way of saying that nothing more needed to be done. We can't form any conclusions. At most you may write a Publisher's Note to say: 'We poor blind ignorant human beings think Sri Aurobindo did not intend certain things to be the final version. And we are giving our opinion for what it may be worth.'"

Just then a black lizard came and stood at Nirod's feet and looked up at him. The Mother saw it and said: "It seems to have a fascination for your feet. Why? Could it be symbolic?"

Nirod: "That is for you to say."

The Mother's whole outburst made me wonder about my discussions through the years with Sri Aurobindo over *Savitri*, the innumerable comments I used to make and he used to welcome and consider patiently. Was he just being polite with me? It hurt very much to think that. It also seemed impossible, non-factual. But I tried to open my being to the Mother and to accept wholly what she had said. I thanked her for the new outlook she had given me, and bowed down to her. She smiled and blessed me. She had made in me a wide opening. It opened out into a sense of Sri Aurobindo's vastness and divineness. Something in the physical mind seemed broken and to make room for the higher and wider Consciousness.

Later, the physical mind attempted a strong come-back

and I passed through a whole afternoon of severe conflict. Should I accept the Mother's statement without reservation? May it not be that Sri Aurobindo's discussions with me on *Savitri* were an exception to his practice of being merely polite? But to insist on an exception and to refuse to accept the opposite showed only the resistance of ego, of *amour propre*, the intellect's pride and vanity. I felt I must reject all these self-regarding attitudes and truly grant that Sri Aurobindo might have been nothing more than polite and compassionate in considering all my suggestions to him. Then my ego would be thrown out and my physical mind become clear and grow receptive to the vast divine Consciousness of both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. I chose to take without any question her words, however contrary they might appear to my own sense of factuality. Moreover, I said to myself: "Your heart will not go anywhere else in search of a Guru. All your hope and help are in this Ashram. Whatever the pain, submit. You have no alternative. But at the end you will surely find light and delight as the Mother's gift through every move of hers."

Now for the first time, even in my most outer awareness, I realised what she and Sri Aurobindo truly were. The whole poise of physical being experienced a change. A new life began, and I knew then that a fundamental obstacle — intellectual self-esteem — had essentially disappeared.

What is of extreme interest to note is the sequel to the whole incident. Some time afterwards, when I was putting together the letters which Sri Aurobindo had written to me on *Savitri* to serve as a supplement in the last part of the volume. I spoke to the Mother of an introductory note to them. She consented to listen to what I had a mind to write. In that note most of the points which I had previously put to her but which she had rejected came in again, amidst some other matters. She approved of all of them unconditionally. And when I proposed that this note might go as a footnote in small print she expressed her wish that it should go as a real introduction in its own right.

I learned how the state of mind in which we approach the Mother and the attitude we bring to any situation related to her determines the consequences.

A second lesson was that the Mother's actions, no matter

how bewildering, are directed always towards the flowering of our true soul.

Another danger to guard against is leaping to conclusions about the Mother's decisions by taking the face-value of any chain of events. There was a resident of Pondicherry, known to many of us, who had turned critical of the Ashram and of the Mother's way with sadhaks. Several reports had been conveyed to the Mother about him and she had even come to learn that he had been speaking against her. But she did not stop him from coming to the daily pranam and taking her blessings. This went on for quite a long time. Then one of the four darshan days arrived. He came to the darshan and Sri Aurobindo saw him. After he had left, Sri Aurobindo remarked to the Mother: "Are you still letting this humbug come to you?" Once Sri Aurobindo had spoken thus, she could no longer allow the man to continue at the pranam. Word was sent to him that he should keep away.

He took the prohibition as the result of an adverse report having been made after a certain incident before the darshan. At that time the daughter of the poet Sarojini Naidu was on a visit to Pondicherry. She had a friend in the Ashram who took Purani and me as well as the man in question to see her. At a meeting the last-named had aired some unfriendly views about the Ashram. Purani was present. When the order not to attend pranam was conveyed to the man, he inferred that Purani had complained about him and thus brought on the Mother's disfavour. When I reported this opinion to the Mother, she said: "My order has nothing to do with any report." And then she recounted to me what had happened after the man had had darshan of Sri Aurobindo.

An incident which taught me never to make snap judgments as well as focused a facet of the Mother's incalculableness took place after Sehra had prepared for her a lovely set of curtains and chair-covers. The Mother admired them and had them put to use in her bathroom. A little later several holes were found in many of them as if somebody had stuck sharp pins in them just to spoil them. Pujalal who used to sweep and clean the bathroom noticed them too and felt rather distressed. There was only one other person who had access to the bathroom in the natural course

of the day's work. It struck both Sehra and me as obvious that out of some freak of jealousy this person had done the disfigurement. I mentioned our condemnatory conclusion to Champaklal. He did not seem convinced. But I asked him: "Is there any other possible person on the scene?" Pujalal and I put our heads together and decided that the matter should be brought to the Mother's notice.

When the Mother, after the lunch, came to see me where I had been waiting for her outside the bathroom, Pujalal who was ready to go into it reported that very strangely a number of holes had been found in the set of new hangings. At once the Mother exclaimed: "Yes, several times I found it very convenient to stick my pins in the cloths." I was extremely surprised and at the same time very ashamed indeed to have jumped to a condemnation. I made a resolve never to judge anybody without proper inquiry and also oriented my mind to expect the unexpected of the Mother.

The field where perhaps the unexpected is most to be expected is that of the Divine's Grace. Grace is understood to occur without rhyme or reason for the thinking mind; else it would be not Grace but Justice. Actually the Aurobindonian Yoga may be described as essentially one of Grace. The Supreme Consciousness of the Mother offers to take up our sadhana and asks of us simply not to stand in its way but to let it handle all our difficulties and remove all our obscurities. This could be taken as the self-surrender which is at the heart of the dynamics of the Integral Yoga. The Integral Yoga is also known as the Supramental Yoga. Sri Aurobindo has said that nobody by his own efforts can reach the Supermind. One can rise to the Overmind by one's personal spiritual endeavour but one can only implore the Supermind to be realised and the realisation of the Supermind would be an act of the Divine's Grace. The power of the Transcendent Mother alone can lift us up to it or bring it down into us.

Before the supramental experience, there is also the constant play of Grace. Our whole residence in the Ashram is itself the Grace choosing us. Once when somebody complained that justice was not being done as it should in the Ashram, the Mother said "The Ashram is not a place of justice, it is a place of Grace. Otherwise how many would have



the right to be here?" When we stumble on the way, the Mother has never preached a sermon or even attached importance to the difficulty that caused the stumbling. She has only extended her hand to pick us up — provided, of course, we have wanted to be picked up. Sometimes even without our wanting it she has set us moving again. I would even go so far as to say: "There is no hole so deep that the Mother cannot lift us out of it sky-high." Our own little capacities are not concerned, the infinite capacity of the Divine who incarnated amongst us is the deciding factor. So while there is no call for complacency, there is also no room for despair and depression. There would be room if we depended for our progress on ourselves exclusively and the Divine Grace were not ever at work. Despair and depression would be signs of an inverted egoism, for not only would we be unduly concentrated on ourselves but we would be regarding our own powers as the sole possible agent of success.

I have said there is no rhyme or reason to Grace but perhaps we might venture to say that though there is no reason there can be rhyme. A certain happy harmony in our consciousness, a natural ringing of deep responses — in short, the unison of the various parts of us around the spontaneous sweetness and light and strength of what Sri Aurobindo has termed the psychic being, the inmost soul in us — can be designated the rhyme that creates the condition in which the Grace is likely to vibrate towards us most often. Even this, however, cannot be considered an absolute determinant. The emergence of the psychic being may itself be a result of the Grace. The Grace looks at some secret within its own radiant heart rather than on any pinpointable fact of our lives. Or, if some fact or other appears to be prominent in any situation where Grace operates, the operation still looks so enormously out of proportion to it.

From the numerous instances possible to cite relating to various people I may quote one or two connected with my own self. I have already written elsewhere of how on the night of the Supramental Manifestation on February 29, 1956 the Mother appeared to me in the railway compartment in which I was travelling from Madras to Bombay after leaving Pondicherry the same morning. She told me afterwards

that she had come to intimate to me the Great Event in fulfilment of a promise given eighteen years earlier when the same manifestation had been first visioned as coming though it did not material that year. At that time too I was to leave Pondicherry for a while and the Mother, after hinting at the wonderful future, assured me that she would immediately let me know of the happening. Her tremendous Grace on that night was beyond anything a poor erring disciple could deserve.

A fresh example may be offered. One morning, meditating in my room (which by the way had been Sri Aurobindo's own room for nine years and was itself a gift of Grace), I felt a keen urge in the heart to go to the Ashram and up the staircase leading to the apartment on the first floor where all heaven seemed situated because the Mother and Sri Aurobindo lived there. I just went and stood on the landing between the two sections of the staircase and looked at the door upstairs. Suddenly the door opened and the Mother stood on the threshold. She looked down and softly said: "Would you like to come in?" I was surprised beyond words for a second. Then I stammered out: "Oh, yes. May I?" She took me inside and let me do a pranam to her. She gave her blessing and a flower and saw me to the door. After this it became a daily event that after the general pranam I should go up to her. She would hold my hand and take me right inside to what used to be a small dressing-room. She would sit down on a *pouf* and, after my pranam, do again the hand-in-hand walk and see me out. Lalita was also taken inside in the same way. Why such a windfall of intoxicating Grace had come to me is still — in a phrase à la Churchill — a riddle within an enigma wrapped in a mystery.

I may add a second small episode where not only I but also a friend of mine was involved. Owing to a disturbance in the established management of *Mother India* the whole responsibility of running it fell practically on my shoulders, with Navajata appointed by the Mother as a background support. As I was all alone he provided to me a young man from Orissa as a helper. He was a very good-hearted and willing assistant, but his future was unsure because he had not yet been accepted by the Mother. He had been asked to make an application, give his history, detail his intentions,

attach a photograph and so on. All these routine procedures, though gone through, had not borne any fruit yet because of some delay due to over-pressure on the channel by which they had to reach the Mother. On one of the periodic occasions when I saw the Mother I mentioned this young man to her and asked her whether he could be admitted into the Ashram. She just asked me: "Do you need him?" I said he would certainly be of use to me but she had to attend to his application, see him and then be the judge of the case and approve or not. How could I determine her decision merely by my need? Again she asked: "Do you want him?" I answered: "Yes, but..." Before I could speak any further she said "He is to be admitted." Thus at one stroke the long technical bother was cut short and the Mother, without troubling to know any particulars or even look at the photograph, took the young man into her fold.

I should like to relate at some length a Grace-story which has a greater touch on my own life, carries many shades of significance and compasses a more striking sequence of ups and downs. I shall tell it by some extracts from my diary-notes.



## What Came Out of an Easter Egg

On a visit from Bombay in 1953 I reached Pondicherry on the 11th April. The whole journey had been a passage from state to state of aspiration — particularly aspiration in the head, a mounting movement which sought God with a passion eager to pierce through the skull — symbolising, of course, what Sri Aurobindo calls in *Savitri* "the intellect's hard and lustrous lid" — and grasp the infinities that seemed to brood overhead. This movement pulled at the heart also, lifting it up, though not quite deepening it into a discovery of its own inmost God-possession. Bombay drifted away like mist — only a few vivid impressions remained, a startle of faces now and then, especially one face. Except for this face, my entire life in Bombay seemed to be over. But even this face had the look of not belonging really to that city. Its future seemed merged in my own future in the Ashram and there was one single light enveloping both it and myself, a light which laughed, as it were, at Time, for it could hold, in a miraculous present, periods that were separated according to earth's calendar.

As soon as I stepped in Pondicherry, a peace came and surrounded me. I did everything with a profound quiet as if nothing had been left to worry over. "All shall be taken care of" — this was the sense of the peace.

I went to the Samadhi, knelt before the Supreme Presence and took his invisible blessing and got wrapped in his love. Then I went to the Balcony Darshan. Only a few people were there, scattered in small knots. Suddenly the Mother appeared. She was in a pink-gold dress. She looked at me, recognised me, smiled and jerked her head to one side in playful acknowledgment. Her eyes swept on to others, but again they came back to me and affectionately rested on my face. It was as if she were caressing it in order to find out what signs it bore of being dedicated. She did not seem displeased. For once more, after turning elsewhere, her eyes

returned to me. Oh it was blessedness indeed to be lit up so often by those blue-green-grey-gold stars.

When I had gone to the Samadhi, I had taken with me the parcel I had brought from Sehra. I had kept it in Amrita's room. After the Balcony Darshan I picked it up and went to the staircase. Quite a long "sit" I had there. The Mother seemed busy somewhere along the passage between the balcony and the staircase. At last the incomparable melody of her voice floated down to where I was seated together with some others. We got up, but again we had to wait. Finally, the movement of people up and down the stairs started. On that day the Mother was standing not at the head of the stairs but in the inside room where the girls work. When she saw me, she lifted her right arm and bending it towards her own face beckoned me joyously. I hurried to her with my parcel. I put the latter on the mat and clasped her hand and kissed it. The hand was wet with perspiration; but I found it wonderful to touch my lips to the moisture. Then I knelt and practised my "special discovery" — the ecstasy of hugging her legs. I would not let go the old ecstasy even — that of touching my head to her feet. Twice the Mother blessed me, her fingers brushing through my hair gently.

When I got up, she pointed to the parcel: "What's this?" I replied: "Sehra has sent it with a note. It is an Easter Egg." "How nice" the Mother exclaimed. I gave her the note. She at once opened it and read it through. When she came to the last sentence which had run: "When I am sending this Egg, my prayer is: May I be your chick!" — she gave a loud chuckle. She took the note and stood by an inside table near the wall as if she wanted to reply to it. I went over to her. She said softly: "You were under the impression, it seems, that *Mother India* would be published here in April only. But how can that be? It has to be published here always if you are to come and stay here permanently." I answered: "Yes, of course, but what about Sehra? Is she ready to come?" "Oh, I'll write to her that I expect her to come with you," I explained to her that Sehra had her job in Bombay. "Job!" the Mother exclaimed as though she deemed it a small matter. Then she asked me: "How much does she earn?" "A hundred and fifty rupees a month plus the commission she gets on the chocolates she personally sells. Sehra feels we

don't have enough money to come and stay here. But I believe that if you directly ask her to come, she will." The Mother said: "I have never asked anybody directly to come and stay here." I ventured to suggest: "Why not make a good beginning now? Do invite her." The Mother kept quiet, with a thoughtful face.

We then came back to the Easter Egg. "Open it up," she said, looking at the box. I untied the string and carefully pulled out the straw packing. I explained that the wings of the bird on the egg were delicately projected outwards and they might easily break. "Oh, there is a bird also?" the Mother asked in surprise. As the straw was removed, the bird came into view. Unfortunately, a chip had somehow come off the left wing, a part of its surface plaster had got rubbed away. "It's made in plaster," the Mother remarked. Then, as I was trying to lift the egg out, she stopped my fumbling hands and, with her own most sensitive and protective fingers, picked up the egg herself. It was marvellous the way she lavished an intense quiet care on the egg. After lifting it out with infinite tenderness she took it to her inner room — her dressing-room, of which Jayantilal had made a painting in that collection of nine pictures which I had once reviewed in *Mother India*. I saw this room for the first time. The Mother placed the egg on a glass-top table.

We came back to the front room. I said: "Roshan, Mina's daughter, has asked me to tell you that today is her examination in History of Philosophy." The Mother made a sound as if to indicate the toughness of the subject. I continued: "Mina has given a message too. She says that she is holding you tight within her heart, but she hopes also to come here soon." Next, I gave Shirin's "lots of love". Finally, as if to crown my messages, I mentioned my sister Minnie and the deep warmth of her feeling for the Mother. The Mother picked out packets of blessings — "How many shall I give you?" "Five." She gave them to me.

In the evening I went to the French-translation class at the Playground. I sat there and meditated while the Mother went on translating Sri Aurobindo's *Ideal of Human Unity*. I noticed that no Easter Egg could be more perfect than the Mother's own head. It had the most attractive oval shape possible.

Later, at 7.15 there was the distribution of groundnuts at the Playground. All the time, I felt I was face to face with an unknown future, a story whose details were hidden from me — a fascinating adventure which I had just to watch without fear. Inwardly I surrendered to the Mother the whole matter of Sehra's coming.

The next day, at the staircase, the Mother said: "I have prepared my reply to Sehra. Most probably I'll give it to you in the evening." There was music in the afternoon, I heard it sitting in the Ashram courtyard. It was a very soft but deep and moving and widely ranging music — it seemed as if something came down with some vehemence into my head, especially the back of the head. This created a genuine headache. Later, at the Mother's tennis-court I had the feeling that an immense egglike dome was above my head, entering the head with its lower curved base. Within the immense skylike egg there were faint far vibrations.

The Mother's letter for Sehra did not come that day. But the next evening at the Playground she handed me an open envelope with "Sehra" written on it in pencil. When I went home for dinner I read the letter. It was in reference to the last sentence in Sehra's note in which she had expressed her prayer to be the Mother's chick. On the same sheet of paper and exactly under that sentence the Mother had written her answer: "Surely, my child, this is quite possible. Won't you join the 'nest' and do your bit of work here? With my love and blessings."

Before this reply could have reached her, Sehra wrote to me a letter. At the staircase on the 16th I told the Mother: "Sehra has asked me to put my head on your feet on her behalf. She says that putting her head on your feet used to be the one thing she loved most." The Mother looked very pleased and said "Bon!" ("Good!") I did the head-feet touching and the Mother blessed Sehra through me.

On the afternoon of the 17th I had an inner movement of complete self-offering. But there was a strange hardness emerging somewhere in the being, which I didn't like — it was as if I were taking it upon myself to force things, ride roughshod over people and clear my way without any scruple. I had told the Mother that I could not come without Sehra, but the new feeling indicated a likelihood that I might

even come without her, waiting for her to follow. In one way this was good, because it made my life and work independent of everybody. But it seemed contrary to the movement the Mother had set going from the first day of my visit. At night all of a sudden I felt very human and the whole difficulty of giving up things rushed over me. I imagined vividly how Sehra must be feeling on receipt of the Mother's letter which must have come into her hands that very evening. The whole of the next day I was in a strange mood. I was still shaken inside but I did not encourage myself at all in the weakness. I told myself what Mina had said: "Now, Amal, you must do or die." Yes, she was right. There was no other way. I offered my whole difficulty to the Mother inwardly and went on as quietly as I could.

The next day, at 1 p.m., for the first time I went to Pavitra's room with the Mother's permission to hear her play on the organ. She came in, gave a few looks around, noticed me and sat on her stool and immediately started playing. She was quite absorbed and her arms were tense with inspiration. The music had a varied mingling of melodies. It seemed to me the archetype, the divine counterpart, of the music of Schubert and others like him. Not strictly classical music à la Bach, but semi-classical with a more distinguishable tune about it. It gave me great delight and the manner in which the theme developed and modulated and went from key to key and once started moving backwards, as it were, to match the forward movement with which it had begun — all this enchanted me. I had never enjoyed music so much in my life.

At night the aspiration which had gone on increasing was intense. An opening deepened in the mind and heart and I began hearing distinctly the far-off universal sound which is for me the measure of the inner silence.

The following day was a mixed bag. As the plan of staying here permanently took shape more and more in the mind, all sorts of reactions came from the various parts of the being. Sometimes it seemed impossible to go on here — life appeared dull and uninteresting. Then all of a sudden a breath from the Samadhi or the staircase-meeting with the Mother — and all doubts and dejections vanished. The psychic being is the true key to the life in the Ashram. If it is all

the time in the front, there is no problem. But when after a long stay in Bombay, one tackles the situation in a "realistic" way, issues rise up which have no place at all when it is merely a question of a short visit. The Mother would have to help a lot.

On the 29th Sehra's letter arrived. It was full of surface thoughts and fears and a lot of annoyance at so precipitate a prospect of settling in the Ashram. The Mother said that there had been no response to the Grace that had gone out to her. The whole thing had been looked at from the viewpoint of insufficient money and material discomforts. The Mother passed the verdict: "Neither of you can come now. I am not rejecting either of you, for, if I reject, that will mean an end. But I am putting the whole thing aside. I have done for Sehra what I have never done before in my life — and the exact opposite of what should have been the effect has happened in her. This closes the entire chapter."

"Mother, be with me. Help me to bring not only myself but also Sehra."

"Of course, I'll help you."

"Mother, if you want that I..." The Mother put her hand on my mouth and said: "No, don't say it. Let things be what they are at present."

"You probably remember that when once in your presence I referred to our future, Sehra said: 'Why talk of the future? I know our future. We shall settle in the Ashram.' So this shows that she is not really against staying here."

"That is quite a different matter. Staying here when you think you can afford everything and you are sure of your position — this is one thing. It is another to rise in response to the Divine's direct call, to be moved by the Divine Grace and come without thinking of how one will live. The situation being what it is, I think it is inadvisable for you two or even you alone to come now. If I let you come and if somehow Sehra comes for your sake, she will be very unhappy. Even good sadhaks become unhappy at times, missing the things to which they were accustomed."

In the very last interview I had with the Mother before I left on the 2nd of May, I reported to her:

"Sehra says that if I had the courage I would tell you the truth about a certain thing. I have the courage. She argues



that it is not her fault that she cannot come now. That last sentence in her letter, to which you replied, had been suggested by me and accepted by her on my persuasion. It was not originally her own."

"Oh, I see," said the Mother. "That sentence was so nice that I immediately felt like writing to Sehra."

"Perhaps I should have told you the history of that sentence. But I did not realise any need to do so."

"That's all right," said the Mother and, with a smile, added: "Tell Sehra that I understand. Say that now there is no question of coming. The whole thing is postponed until she herself feels like coming."

Then the Mother added: "I must say that what happened did not show much sense of gratitude."

I said: "Mother, what I feel is this — whether that sentence was mine or hers, your Grace flowed out to her in an extraordinary way. Evidently she did not realise the fact. If she had, she would have written a word of thanks and then mentioned all the difficulties and obstacles. I don't understand what has gone wrong."

When the talk ended, Amrita arrived after a frantic search for a flat for Sehra and me. The Mother, expecting that all would come right, had sent him out to keep everything ready for us. Amrita sadly reported: "Nothing is available."

Well, this was to be expected in the occult dispensation of things.

On the 5th of May I started for Bombay. I was wondering how my meeting with Sehra would turn out. She came to the station to receive me. We exchange smiles. During the car-drive home, the topic of going to Pondicherry arose. She was still agitated over being blamed for everything and not being properly understood. "I am not against coming there," she said. "I am prepared to come. But we must have the necessary money."

At night before going to sleep I told her that I had explained to the Mother her inner willingness. I then told her what the Mother had said about coming at the call of the Divine Grace and coming at one's convenience and how the two things were worlds apart. This went straight to her soul. She said she would come. The whole problem was immediately solved.



She said: "I thought Mother wrote to me only because of that sentence inspired by you. I never thought she wanted me for myself. If I know that she wants me without that sentence being there, I am ready to come. Oh I would like so much to fly to Pondi and put my head on Mother's feet. Mother thinks I am most ungrateful. Would I want to do this if I were ungrateful? I have inwardly suffered so much all these days. You have confused me very much."

We decided that Sehra should write to the Mother and tell her that she would gladly come with me. The letter was written, a very good one, in which she explained her willingness, expressed her gratitude and love for the special Grace of the Mother's direct call to her and asked forgiveness.

The certitude of our settling in the Ashram for good — an event which happened on 19th February 1954 — was ultimately what came out of the Easter Egg. The fact that apropos of the words accompanying that present the Mother had done what she herself considered an unusual act — namely, a direct invitation — proved to have been no accidental gesture. And there was another occurrence which showed how profoundly meaningful it had been. Sehra, after a few months of stay in the Ashram, opened very beautifully to the Mother. The Mother even said that Sehra's soul had taken its lodging in the Mother's being. She pointed to the middle of her own chest and declared with a smile that Sehra's soul was dwelling there quite snugly all the time. Act upon act of Grace followed and a lot of love was showered upon her. Sehra once thanked me for bringing her to the Ashram: the utmost happiness possible had been found.

Of course, the psychic being's keenly devotional move towards the Divine does not always change one's whole nature. The rest of the being has itself to consent to change. In measuring progress, many factors have to be weighed. Still, intense love for the Mother is — if I may use an imagery in tune with my narrative — a golden egg holding all divine possibilities and can lead to every progress desirable, provided one knows how to make the shell of the outer self break and let out the inner luminosity to spread into all the parts of our acutely complex being.

## The Mother and My Last Darshan of Sri Aurobindo

I had come from Bombay with my wife Sehra and some friends on a visit for the Darshan of November 24 in 1950. Sri Aurobindo was reported to have been unwell. But he gave a long Darshan, with a short break after some hours. He kept himself in a tolerable condition in the following days — until the late evening of December 2 when the Ashram's Sports-demonstration was over. His condition worsened on the 3rd; and when the Mother returned from the Playground she found him running a temperature. The same night I was scheduled to leave for Bombay. The Mother had previously informed me that she would see me before I started for the station. On finding Sri Aurobindo with high fever she cancelled the appointment. However, about an hour before the departure-time of my train she sent word to me that she was waiting and that I should come at once to meet her. This was clearly a gesture of extreme Grace. I was called to the foot of the staircase, north of the present Samadhi, which leads up to the corridor outside the Mother's room on the first floor.

On reaching the place I saw her seated in a chair with a table-lamp beside it. She looked calm and radiant as if nothing in the world troubled her. I sat on the floor, put my head on her feet and received her blessed. I spoke of the editorial I had written for the next issue of *Mother India*, at that time a fortnightly of Bombay: "The Chinese Dragon."

She said: Don't write anything implying war for India. No such thought should be expressed. You can discuss, if you want, the possibility of war between China and America."

I replied: "All right, Mother. But Sri Aurobindo never asked me to refrain from such an implication."

"Yes, I know. But, although our aims are alike, our approaches can be somewhat different at times."

I could easily understand this. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had necessarily different kinds of personality for the special individual work each had to do. In matters of high politics, Sri Aurobindo, with his grand background of past national leadership, could take the responsibility for certain gestures which the Mother would hesitate to make, being no particular figure in the political sphere. Even on the spiritual level, their modes of operation could be dissimilar. As the Shakti, the Divine Executive Power, she could be at times most dynamic and relentless but at other times most tender and considerate. Careful and conservative too she could be when the Force in her moved her not to be a breaker of norms and forms.

Now she continued: "After a short time Sri Aurobindo will resume reading your articles."

I was happy to hear this. A few more topics came up and then I took my leave with a long blessing-touch on my head.

Throughout the train-journey I kept thinking of Sri Aurobindo's resumption of work not only in relation to my editorials but also in connection with his own Yoga of physical supramentalisation. With my fellow-passengers I even discussed, in terms of such a transformed body, the way in which Sri Aurobindo's Yoga differed from all other Yogic paths. What a surprise I suffered when I reached Victoria Terminus at about noon and the man who had been asked to receive me handed me the express telegram my friend Yogendra had sent from Pondicherry to my Bombay address that very morning: "Sri Aurobindo passed away 1.26 a.m."

I repeatedly asked myself: "How could the Mother tell me that in a short while Sri Aurobindo would start reading my articles again?"

As I have recounted elsewhere. I emplaned the same night with two friends and arrived at Madras early the next morning and at Pondicherry by taxi round about 11.00 a.m. I need not repeat the story of the experiences while Sri Aurobindo's body lay incorrupt for five days. When, on the 19th, before leaving for Bombay I had my interview with the Mother I asked her several questions besides wanting to know why Sri Aurobindo had passed away. The sequel to the latter inquiry I have related more than once before.

What I may record now are some statements of the Mother and a few of my own communications to her.

I: "Why did you tell me in the evening of the 3rd of December that Sri Aurobindo would take up his usual work with my editorials? Two days after this he passed away."

Mother: "It was not certain that he would have his body."

This was a strange declaration. It could mean either that Sri Aurobindo, for a reason of his own, kept secret from the Mother his decision to depart, or else that the uncertainty lay not in the Mother's consciousness but in Sri Aurobindo's own because he was working out momentous possibilities one way or the other. From the snatch of conversation between Sri Aurobindo and his attendants on the 4th of December, the second alternative seems unlikely. He was asked: "Aren't you using your Yogic force on yourself?" His reply was: "No." Astonished, the attendants stammered out: "Why?" He answered: "Can't explain. You won't understand." The conclusion that he was acting out a decision already made dawns also from the Mother's words soon after his departure: "When I asked him to resuscitate he clearly answered. 'I have left the body purposely. I will not take it back, I shall manifest again in the first supramental body built in the supramental way.'" Thus the first alternative should hold.

Then the sole reason one can think of is that the Mother had not accepted the idea of Sri Aurobindo's departure and would have tried to stop it if she had known anything before it was too late. We may recollect the talk they both had some time in April of the same year. When Sri Aurobindo said that one of them might have to go in the interests of their work, the Mother immediately offered to do so. Sri Aurobindo turned down the proposal and added that if necessary he would go. The Mother had to acquiesce. Perhaps a finer explanation for the Mother's unawareness of the precise time he had chosen for his withdrawal is that, although she had fully accepted his terrible resolve, he did not want to create any unpleasantness for her and she did not wish to cause any difficult situation for him. He knew that she preferred her own going to his and she knew that he was bent on departing rather than let her do so. Hence a veil was drawn tacitly by him over what was to take place on the 5th of December.

To resume the account of my conversation with the Mother:

I: "At the last Darshan I observed that, when you saw me approaching both of you, you bent your head towards Sri Aurobindo and said something to him. What did you say?"

Mother: "I told him: 'Amal is coming.'"

I: "Why did you have to tell him that? He could surely know it by himself."

Mother: "His eyes had become so bad that he could not have seen you standing before him. Of course, he could contact your consciousness but not physically recognise you and have the outer relationship."

It is curious that the Mother should have told Sri Aurobindo about me on this particular Darshan and never before. I remember especially the Darshan on August 15, 1947. I had come to the Ashram after several years. When I approached Sri Aurobindo, I saw him looking at me as if he did not recognise me at all. I was very upset as well as deeply benefited because it knocked the bottom out of my ego and the result was a very painful but most liberating transcendence of the idea of my own importance. Now, listening to the Mother, I realised that Sri Aurobindo could not see even at close quarters. Some people have come to believe he was completely blind. But from what Nirodbaran has told me, this is not true. Nirod described to me how Sri Aurobindo had to take a table-clock close to his eyes in order to see what time it was. Most probably here was a case of advanced cataract in both eyes. The eye trouble must have started round about 1945. In that year he sent the last letter he wrote to me in his own hand, and the writing was shaky and the lines not quite straight. Studying a few late notebooks of his, I have seen that he wrote some of his prose and poetry in the rough without being able to judge correctly the breadth of the page or the space needed between the lines.

However, his super-shortsight could not be the only explanation of the Mother's telling him about me on November 24, 1950. Why had she not done the same either on August 15, 1947 or any of the two other occasions before the last Darshan? All actions of the Divine Incarnate have, whether the outer mind is allowed to know it or not, a truth-impulsion. Always at the right moment the right thing for

the soul is done. On the present occasion, as never before, Sri Aurobindo smiled at me and, as I was told by Sehra afterwards, he kept smiling in my direction even when I had turned to go away. Later the Mother also referred to Sri Aurobindo's smiling at me all the time I was there. I am convinced that, through the word the Mother put in for me, I was blessed with a special final act of Sri Aurobindo's Grace, a sweet intimate farewell.

Eleven days after this, he took the drastic step of giving up his body in order to achieve a tremendous breakthrough in the process of the Integral Yoga, so that the Mother could confide to me subsequently: "As soon as Sri Aurobindo left his body what he had called the Mind of Light was realised in me." The Mind of Light, as she defined it afterwards, is the physical mind receiving the Supramental Light. The nature of the victory won may be gauged from the two opening lines of the poem I wrote in 1954, lines which the Mother declared to be absolutely revelatory of the state of consciousness she had realised:

The core of a deathless sun is now the brain,  
And each grey cell bursts to omniscient gold.



## The Exercise of Divine Power

According to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the Divine Power which is all the time present in the world as well as beyond the world and especially the Divine Power as embodied by them for a new manifestation could do a lot of impossible-looking things. I know from my own experience how it could get us over the supposed necessity of acting in conformity with Nature's "laws" operative in the physical world and the living body.

Once I had a fall very badly hurting my left knee and resulting in a large collection of water over the joint. I went through a whole night of acute pain. My inner appeals to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother brought on some alleviation now and again but no appreciable relief. Soon after sunrise, my friend Ambu who used to be a great help to me in the early days of my stay in the Ashram came to enquire how I was. I told him of my restless night and gave him a note for the Mother to be taken immediately to her door and to see that it got into her hands as soon as possible. Shortly after this the pain was completely gone.

A still more serious occasion was when, during a long visit to Bombay, I developed myocardial weakness and passed through an initial phase of severe collapse on the 8th of May 1948. I have told elsewhere the story of what followed. Here I may touch on a few points. There was a sudden plunge into the psychic consciousness, which in Yogic terminology is the consciousness of the deepest heart or the inmost being, a plunge which seemed a surprising metamorphosis of the terrible prolonged sinking feeling in the middle of the chest as if I were passing inexorably out of life. I was inwardly calling to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother for help but also acted in a "realistic" manner by calmly telling my wife that there appeared to be not much hope of my survival. I believe it was the sustained intensity of my cry to my gurus that widely opened up the depths of



my being and took unexpected advantage of the sensation of the life-force falling as though abysmally away from the cardiac centre where, in the Upanishads' view, the whole complex of the living human consciousness with all its various radiations has its hub.

After the doctor had come and given an injection of atropine and morphine and advised complete rest instead of the anticipated drowse a profound tranquillity and inner awakening took place which seemed to look Wordsworthianly into the heart of things and felt the whole universe as a Divine Being, charging even the most ordinary physical objects like the tables and chairs of my room with a wonderful spiritual presence. Towards nightfall I read several parts of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*. In the middle of the night during a state of calm in-drawn-ness lines of poetry started to get composed in front of my eyes. In the morning I was still in a state of poetic sensitivity and creativity. Actually for three months the flow of poetry continued, constituting the book entitled *The Adventure of the Apocalypse*. Day after day, although the doctor had advised me not even to raise my head from the pillow if I could help it, I used to sit up and write poems in a condition of thrilled inspiration which made my heart go like a race-horse. All the time I felt the force of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo behind the poetry and, with every act of offering the surprising results to them, the room within me of receiving their presence grew ever wider. In spite of my flagrantly disobeying the doctor's strict orders, on his visit each morning he found me better and better was pleased both with his own treatment and with my supposed obedience to his orders.

I used to send to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother every day the two or three poems that flowed out spontaneously with a strange burden of occult symbol and spiritual sight. I would also send bulletins of my progress in health and told them of the absolutely shocking unmedical behaviour of mine which still kept me improving. I stressed my utter faith in their curative powers passing within me like a subtle electricity through the constant production of poetry. The Mother wrote to me: "My dear child, I quite agree with you that there is a power other and much more powerful than that of the doctors and the medicines and I am glad to see

that you put your trust in it. Surely it will lead you through-out all difficulties and in spite of all catastrophic warnings. Keep your faith intact and all will be all right."

From Nirodbaran, who used to be in close touch with our Gurus on many fronts, I have heard of cases of advanced tuberculosis which a doctor would sternly segregate and copiously treat, being made light of by the Mother, allowed to move freely in the Ashram and completely cured within a short time. What the Mother and Sri Aurobindo principally did was to deal with the occult forces which are behind all the diseases and to reinforce with their spiritual light the life-power of the body, more easily when one had faith but often even without conscious co-operation by the patient. They believed that the spiritual consciousness could achieve all kinds of undreamt-of results and that there were interconnections between physical events and spiritual movements. But they also had a poised scientific mind ever testing their own experiences and guarding against too much credulity. Thus when a disciple proposed an intimate relation between a certain earthquake in India and the work of Sri Aurobindo in his birth-centenary year, the Mother very coolly denied it. I remember also a short talk between the Mother and one or two sadhaks who had brought some miraculous stories of dematerialisation. I think it was Ravindra of the Dining Room who spoke of a report about an Indian saint who was said to have disappeared from a closed room and left in the place of his dematerialised body a heap of flowers. The Mother heard this account and some other tales very quietly and then said: "Everything is possible. I know of spiritualistic mediums who under rigorous scientific conditions dematerialised and rematerialised. But every reported incident is not necessarily true. Such things don't occur very frequently and under all circumstances." When she was pointedly asked whether we should credit the particular phenomenon mentioned about the saint's disappearance and the substitute-appearance of flowers, she said: "Its occurrence is not impossible but I don't think it really happened."

In their own spiritual overridings of natural limits Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were careful to define the nature and the range of the powers their mission demanded

of them. When there was a question of Sri Aurobindo employing the power of what he has named the supermind he always disclaimed the direct use of it. He repeatedly said that what he was directly utilising was the Overmind power. Not that the Supermind was still unrealised inwardly, but that he had not yet, at the time involved, established it as an active force from the station of physical consciousness he had taken up for the specific world-work he had come to do. The Mother once told me that she hoped to cure the damage infantile paralysis had done to one of my legs, but that the cure could be effected only by the Supermind when it had been brought into the very substance of her body. So the marvellous cure was to be on some far future day.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were wonder-workers in many respects but they were not miracle-mongers and they were perfectly honest and clear-headed. Moreover, their central job was to bring about a radical change in our inner and outer beings — a drawing forth of the hidden God-lit soul, the widening out of the mind into an infinite peace, the raising of the consciousness into realms of light overhead, the calling down of the spiritual Reality from beyond the human status into our whole psycho-physical organism to bring about an integral transformation. Whatever supernatural capacities would come automatically into play in the process of their Yogic concern with individuals and the world at large, these they would exercise without hesitation. Theirs would also be responses of miraculous Grace and the constant assurance of more-than-human help on tap, as it were, yet never an emphasis on spectacular disclosure of powers nor any indiscriminate claim for themselves and for other workers in the spiritual field.

## The Mother, Sri Aurobindo and the Procession of the Avatars

(a)

"When anyone writes about me, all the hair on my head stands up. Don't think I am merely being modest. I know where I come from and who I am. But it is the Truth that is important. Stress on the Person seems so much to narrow it."

This is what the Mother told me when I was on a visit to Pondicherry from Bombay. It referred to an article I had written on her in a Bombay newspaper. Having learned my lesson, I took the proper measures when I projected an article for her eightieth birthday in 1958. I announced my plan to her. She opened her eyes wide. At once I added: "Yes, I'm going to write on you but I'm not going to show you my article before publishing it." She looked at me incredulously. Pranab was present and he looked both surprised and amused. I explained: "If I let you see it beforehand, you won't let me say all that I want." The article in question is the one entitled: *The Mother — Some General Truths and Particular Facts*. It was based on notes taken a few years earlier by a young sadhak after an interview with the Mother and it also incorporated a few talks of mine with her as well as a number of philosophical reflections relevant to some of the occasions and topics recorded.

When it was published and the Mother glanced at it, she spoke to me about a certain incident I had reported of her girlhood. The incident concerned her falling from an elevated place and landing below quite safely on her feet as if she had been carried and taken care of. She said: "There is an inner story to it. What happened outwardly might have been possible even for one who had some control over his body by gymnastic and athletic practice. At a convenient

time I'll tell you the inner story." Unfortunately the chance never came for the narration. I find that the Mother, in one of her talks to the Ashram children, has related the same incident but more or less in the way I had done. No special inner story accompanies her account. I wish I had pressed her to tell it to me, instead of deciding to wait on her convenience.

It is not in my power to guess what remained unspoken. But perhaps I may try to reflect a little on those words of hers in connection with my Bombay article: "I know where I come from and who I am." They remind me of another statement she made: "If people don't know that I have come from above, they don't know the very first thing about me." This is, of course, a private declaration of one who was conscious that she was an Avatar. But do we understand Avatarhood in its various bearings?

Sri Aurobindo interprets as a parable of evolution the Hindu idea of the procession of the ten Avatars. Vishnu the Supreme Godhead makes a progressive series of incarnations, so that — to take for our immediate purpose the human portion of the traditional sequence — He who was Vamana (the Dwarf Avatar, the Divine in the primitive and mainly physical human stage) becomes afterwards Parasurama ("Rama of the Axe", the Divine in the kinetic or vitalistic phase of humanity) and then Rama, son of Dasaratha (the Divine as the mental Man, the embodiment of Dharma, the perfect Moral Consciousness) and, again, Krishna (the Divine as the "Overman", openly exemplifying a more-than-mental Consciousness, what Sri Aurobindo calls the Overmind, the world of the Great Gods) and, later, Buddha who shoots beyond the cosmic formula to the sheer Transcendent but to that Transcendent's absolutely immobile aspect (Nirvana, an indescribable Permanence void of all that we know as existence, or, in positive Vedantic nomenclature, Nirguna Brahman, Silent Quality-less Eternal Being) and, finally, Kalki who will come to set right the balance by bringing the Transcendent's power to base on the Transcendent's peace a new earth-order, a terrestrial Heaven. In this tale of evolutionary humanity we would identify Kalki with Sri Aurobindo (the Master of the Integral Yoga, the Yoga not only of liberation but also of the

perfect divine dynamism, the Supermind, the all-transformative Truth-Consciousness manifesting as Superman).

But, if the Mother is as much an Avatar, the supramental feminine counterpart of Sri Aurobindo, what Divine Incarnations was she in the past? When we think of Sita, Rama's wife, or of Radha, the chief feminine figure in Krishna's Godlike play, *lila*, on earth, we do not bring in the designation "Avatar". They are the closest to it and yet there is a line of demarcation. If the Mother was Sita or Radha, she could not be said to have made an unambiguous Avataric appearance in history. Far more doubtful would be such an appearance in any other woman prominently connected with God's work in the world. The Mother is supposed to have been Mirabai as well as Joan of Arc, but neither of these, for all their wonderful achievements, can count as Avatars. Much less, though still glorious, the births attributed to her as Hatshepsut of ancient Egypt, Cleopatra at a later date and Elizabeth of England. As Mona Lisa, she was a mysterious inspirer of the greatest art, but nothing more. Her present birth seems to be her first manifestation of Avatarhood. It could be that Avatarhood was not needed by her in the past and some other role short of it was sufficient, or the possibility is that the Avataric appearance is the culmination of a long series of births in which the being plays the part of the Vibhuti, one who is missioned and impelled by the Divine without the instrument's awareness of the source of its great destiny and who, for all its greatness, is still, as Sri Aurobindo<sup>1</sup> says. "the Divine working within the ordinary human limits".

Since the Mother stands on an equal and exactly complementary footing with Sri Aurobindo, and since her manifestation as an Avatar now is without a preceding Avatar-series, how should we think of Sri Aurobindo's having such a series behind him for himself? Would there not be a disequilibrium in their historical functions and achievements? There is also the fact that from Sri Aurobindo's letters we can derive the certitude of at least two Vibhuti-fig-

<sup>1</sup> *Guidance from Sri Aurobindo: Letters to a Young Disciple* — Nagin Doshi (Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry, 1974), p. 285.



ures of him in the past: Augustus Caesar and Leonardo da Vinci. Should we not take all his previous births to have formed only Vibhuti, just as the Mother's evidently did?

Going by a certain set of his correspondence with a disciple, we would be inclined to say "Yes," We may string together and interpret a number of his statements in it. When asked: "What is the incarnation? From what plane does it take place?", he<sup>1</sup> answered: "An incarnation is the Divine Consciousness and Being manifesting through the body. It is possible from any plane." This must imply either that the Supreme Godhead takes hold of a desired plane and brings its characteristic to earth in a sovereign shape or, better still, that He has a station of Himself on every plane and incarnates from there according to the needs of evolutionary history. Thus He incarnates as Rama from His station on the plane of Mind, and as Krishna from the Overmind plane. Similarly His incarnation as Sri Aurobindo is from His Supermind station. The common factor in all these incarnations is the Supreme Godhead himself. We have a pointer to this Godhead when Sri Aurobindo,<sup>2</sup> after equating Krishna with the Overmind Divinity, continues: "Krishna is the Anandamaya; he supports the evolution through the Overmind leading it towards the Ananda." This at the same time indicates the aspects of Bliss (Ananda) as a speciality of Krishna and echoes the ancient Indian spiritual vision of the Divine Bliss-Self (Anandamaya) as the creator and supporter of all things. The Bliss-Self, acting from one plane or another and incarnating from any plane, is the Supreme Godhead behind all the incarnations and the unifier of them all.

The second issue is whether the Avatar is a sheer descent from above, taking hold of some developed human being and using his outer personality for his manifestation, Sri Aurobindo's reply<sup>3</sup> is: "that would be a possession not an Avatar. An Avatar is supposed to be from birth." Here the third issue arises: Does the Avatar, in being born as such,

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 278.

<sup>2</sup> *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother* (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1953), p. 208.

<sup>3</sup> *Guidance from Sri Aurobindo*, p. 279.



follow in general the same conditions as attend the birth of any man? What these conditions are as well as what the Avatar does we gather from Sri Aurobindo:<sup>1</sup> "Each soul at its birth takes from the cosmic mind, life and matter to shape a new external personality for himself. What prevents the Divine from doing the same? What is continued from birth to birth is the inner being." Evidently the Avatar is not only a descent from above but also an "inner being", a soul, evolving from below an individual psychic entity passing from life to life with a new mind, vital being and body are each birth in order to compass a manifold experience.

The next problem is expressed in the query put to Sri Aurobindo about himself and the Mother: "We believe that both you and the Mother are Avatars. But is it only in this life that both of you have shown your divinity? It is said that you and she have been on the earth constantly since its creation. What were you doing during your previous lives?" The answer<sup>2</sup> was: "Carrying on the evolution." The words suggest that the earth's evolution was carried on by the activity of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in a form other than Avatarhood. The suggestion becomes quite explicit when Sri Aurobindo<sup>3</sup> says about their past personalities: "... there is no reason why the Mother and I should cast off the veil which hung over these personalities and reveal the Divine behind them. Those lives were not meant for any such purpose...<sup>4</sup> Your reasoning would only have some force if the presence on earth then were as the Avatar but not if it was only as a Vibhuti."<sup>5</sup> Both these answers were given to questions involving what was the biggest puzzle to the disciple's mind: "... how is it that even Sri Krishna, Buddha or Christ could not detect your presence in this world?... If you were on the earth constantly it would mean that you were here when those great beings descended. Whatever your external cloak, how could you hide your inner self — the true divinity — from them?"<sup>6</sup> The sense is that neither Sri Krishna, Buddha nor Christ — in spite of being Avatars — were past births of Sri Aurobindo. And in view of the advent of several Avatars before Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 282.<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 283.<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 282, 283.

and in view of the affirmation that no Avataric manifestation in the past could be equated to past forms of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, it was pertinently asked: "Since you and the Mother were on the earth from the beginning what was the need for Avatars coming down here one after another?" The response<sup>1</sup> was absolutely definitive: "We were not on earth as Avatars." The conclusion seems inevitable that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were Avatars only in their present lives and that none of the other Avatars could be said to be they. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother came as Vibhutis at the time of those Avatars, and worked veiled either where these Avatars were or at some other place which served as the right context for whatever they had to do.

The veiled work, whether at the time of some Avatar or at another phase of history, can be affirmed from the Mother's answer on January 23, 1960 to a student's inquiry about Sri Aurobindo's earlier births: "It is said that Sri Aurobindo in a past life took an active part in the French Revolution. Is it true?" She wrote back: "You can say that all through history Sri Aurobindo played an active part. Especially in the most important movements of history he was there — and playing the most important, the leading part. But he was not always visible." The sense here is surely twofold. First, even when in the fore-front of events the one whom we know now as the Avatar in the form of Sri Aurobindo did not manifest Avatarhood every time. Secondly, even when he was the moving spirit he did not invariably occupy the forefront.

The Mother did not directly refer to the French Revolution, But Sri Aurobindo's presence in it was disclosed to me by Amrita. Amrita said: "Sri Aurobindo told us that he could still feel the edge of the guillotine across his neck. The memory was so vivid." Such a vividness of memory was once admitted by Sri Aurobindo himself to me in another context. He wrote that he had a psychic memory of Dilip as Horace: what was *sous-entendu* was his own birth as Augustus, who was Horace's patron and whose essential role in Europe's evolution Sri Aurobindo went on to outline to me just as he outlined that of Leonardo.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 285.

To return to our theme: the picture that emerges of Avatarhood would be as follows. There are various lines of Avatarhood. Each line has a separate soul developing from below and presided over by the Divine stationed on one plane or another. This soul passes through various lives as world-helping Vibhutis until the time arrives for the presiding Divine to descend from above into it and constitute the Avataric manifestation. Once that manifestation has occurred, the line concerned has reached its climax, and its work has culminated. The line of mental Avatarhood ended with the appearance of Rama. Krishna marked the close of the line of the Overmind Avatar. The *grand finale* of the line of Supramental Avatar was Sri Aurobindo. All these Avatars are different in regard to their evolutionary lines and are one and the same solely in the supreme Godhead who they basically are but who has diverse plane-poises or at least starting-points on diverse planes.

The Mother has employed a terminology of her own in speaking about the soul passing through several lives and about the presiding divinity. In her talk of May 21, 1958, while discussing the Ramayana story symbolically, she distinguishes Hanuman as representing "the evolutionary man" from Rama "the involutory being, the one who comes from above". She explains: "The evolutionary being is the one that's the continuation of the animals, and the other is a being from higher worlds.... But in the evolutionary being there is that central light which is the origin of the psychic being and which will develop into the psychic being., and when the psychic being is full-formed, there is a moment when it can unite with a being from above which can incarnate in it. So this being from above which descends into a psychic being is an involutory being — a being of the Overmind plane or from elsewhere."

The Mother's explanation provides a truth which holds for all souls. Every soul and not only that of the future Avatar finds its consummation by receiving into itself its own archetype from the higher worlds. An archetype of it exists on all the planes above, just as the Divine has his station on each of them, but at any period of history the one which it will receive will depend upon the plane from which the Avatar has come down for that particular period. In gen-

eral all souls, including the soul meant to be the Avatar, are on a par: all have their corresponding "involutionary" beings. But we have to visualise on every plane a central involutionary self which is the destined Avatar's and around it the other involutionary selves. If there were not a general parity, the Avatar's pioneering life would not be significant for the rest of embodied souls but constitute a shining freak rather than a guiding light for all Nature. The temporary difference is that the Avatar is conscious, overtly, of his divinity, he is aware both of the plane from which there is the divine manifestation and of the Supreme Godhead who has that plane-poise, whereas the Avatar's followers have to develop the divine consciousness. However, we must add that even the Avatar has to go through a sadhana before he becomes the Guru, for otherwise he would not be the true meaningful pioneer in human evolution. On the other hand, it is very necessary for the disciples to remember, side by side with the Guru's example-setting sadhana, the fact of his descent from above, the dynamic truth of Avatarhood stressed by the Mother.

In relation to the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's Avatarhood, the earlier Incarnation that was Krishna has a specially sympathetic and intimate reality. Krishna, the Overmind divinity incarnate, who declared in the Gita his own transcendent Godhead no less than his universal form and his individual Mastership, and who in the self-disclosure at Brindavan let loose the intensest power of the soul's love for and surrender to the Supreme Beauty and Bliss in terms of the very body's sensation — this Krishna is called by Sri Aurobindo "the guide of my Yoga"<sup>1</sup> and was the name which the Mother in France instinctively gave to the lightward-leading presence of Sri Aurobindo in her occult experiences before she ever heard of the Yogi of Supermind. Sri Aurobindo has declared that the work done by him and the Mother is a furtherance of Krishna's and that the descent of Overmind into their physical beings on November 24, 1926 prepared the descent of Supermind and Ananda.<sup>2</sup> He has termed the Overmind's descent the descent of

<sup>1</sup> *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother*, p. 209.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

Krishna,<sup>1</sup> with whom, as the result of that event, he "realised identity"<sup>2</sup> and thereby moved towards the descent of his own supramental status.

(b)

We may cast a glance at this Krishna who, from among the past spiritual figures, has a unique place in Sri Aurobindo's general scheme of the spiritual life. How does he emerge from the Gita which is the authoritative scripture on both Avatarhood and Vibhutihood?

No doubt, Krishna says that he comes from age to age to uphold the Dharma, but does he make it quite clear anywhere in the Gita that the long line of births preceding his Avatarhood at the time of the Bharata War counted any Avatar-life, say, as Rama who in the Hindu procession of the Avatars is held to have come before him? Actually Krishna mentions no name of any past Avatar as once having been himself. Rama is indeed mentioned but solely in the phrase: "Among the warriors I am Rama" (X.31). Rama is listed only as a pre-eminent warrior who, like other pre-eminent figures, is regarded as a Vibhuti of Krishna.

Even the Vibhuti-idea which Krishna illustrates at great length is nowhere given a directly personal connection with his own past births. In dilating on Vibhutis, he alludes (X.37) to himself as being a Vibhuti at the very time that he is Krishna the Avatar, meaning thereby a Vibhuti to be whoever is outstanding in any category of the Divine's work in the world during all periods. He equates himself to being in varied ways the most pre-eminent in every category. And when he speaks in this style he refers not merely to past top echelons but also to contemporary ones: "I am Vasudeva [Krishna] among the Vrishnis, Dhananjaya [Arjuna] among the Pandavas, Vyasa among the sages, the seer-poet Ushanas among the seer-poets" (X. 37). Here the second and third names are of Krishna's own contemporaries who would have their proper lines of earlier births, which would have no identity with Krishna's line proper. How should we gauge the strange situation before us?

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.



A Supreme Person — "Purushottama" in the Gita's own language — may be conceived, whose self-expressions, both as Avatars and as Vibhutis, may be along several birth-lines, only one of which is the line represented by the figure face to face with Arjuna and with Vyasa as Krishna. The Godhead speaking as Krishna in the Gita may be thought of as having a beyond-Krishna status which finds tongue in an utterance like the one we have just cited. Such a status is in fact attributed to himself by Krishna among the diversity of statuses which he claims as his. Sri Aurobindo<sup>1</sup> recognises it in his comprehensive phrase: "the Krishna of the Gita who is the transcendent Godhead, Paramatma, Parabrahma, Purushottama, the cosmic Deity, Master of the universe, Vasudeva who is all, Immanent in the heart of all creatures..." And such a status would be capable of issuing a multiplicity of Avatars who do not run on a straight single line. Significantly, Krishna, instead of corresponding to the popular Puranic idea of himself as an incarnation of Vishnu running on a straight single line with other incarnations of that member of the Divine Trimurti, makes this member a Vibhuti of his by saying: "Among the Adityas I am Vishnu..." (X. 21). Evidently, to Krishna the Adityas, solar sons of the Infinite Mother-Goddess Aditi, are a class of supernatural beings and Vishnu is its outstanding exemplar or Vibhuti. Like Rama the warrior, he occurs in the Gita's Vibhuti-chapter. All in all, the Gita's doctrine of Avatarhood apropos of Krishna looks far from being as simple as one might imagine from the common Indian notion of the theme.

From all the enumerations connected with it, this doctrine does not counter in any way the picture emerging from the hints we have picked up in Sri Aurobindo about the background of his own Avatarhood and the Mother's.

(c)

And yet there is another side to the medal, equally stamped with the Gita and Sri Aurobindo.

It is true that Krishna does not name for himself any specific past life — Rama, Parasu-Rama, Vamana or any other

<sup>1</sup> *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother*, p. 209.

— as a manifestation of Avatarhood. But he definitely mentions a chain of his own past births: "Many are my lives that are past and thine also, O Arjuna; all of them I know but thou knowest not. O scourge of the foe" (IV. 5). And he associates his supreme divinity with them when he declares: "Though I am the unborn, though I am imperishable in my self-existence, though I am the Lord of all existences, yet I stand upon my own Nature and I come into birth by my self-Maya" (IV. 6.) This declaration he follows up with those two ringing famous unforgettable statements: "Whensoever there is the fading of the Dharma and the uprising of unrighteousness, then I loose myself forth into birth. For the deliverance of the good, for the destruction of the evil-doers, for the enthroning of the Right, I am born from age to age" (IV. 7,8). It appears impossible to deny that, if not in all, at least in some of those "lives that are past," Krishna "the Lord of all existences" has loosed himself forth into birth as an Avatar.

Precisely such is the interpretation by Sri Aurobindo of Krishna's several assertions about himself in the Gita. In the expression "many are my lives that are past", especially when coupled with these succeeding words — "and thine also, O Arjuna" — Sri Aurobindo<sup>1</sup> finds "an air of reference to" Krishna's "various lives", and he adds: "In that case all these many births could not be full incarnations, — many may have been merely Vibhuti births carrying on the thread from incarnation to incarnation." Sri Aurobindo<sup>2</sup> touches on the same subject when he writes: ".. it must be remembered that Krishna speaks of many lives in the past, not only a few supreme ones and secondly that while he speaks of himself as the Divine, in one passage he describes himself as a Vibhuti, *vrnsinam vasudevah*. We may therefore fairly assume that in many lives he manifested as the Vibhuti veiling the fuller Divine Consciousness. If we admit that the object of Avatarhood is to lead the evolution, this is quite reasonable, the Divine appearing as Avatar in the great transitional stages and as Vibhutis to aid the lesser transitions."

<sup>1</sup> *On Yoga II, Tome One* (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1958), p. 409.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 405–406.



Thus the popular notion of Krishna coming every time as the Avatar is not accepted by Sri Aurobindo. He ascribes a large number of Vibhuti-lives to him, yet he does speak of these lives as bridges between a small number of Avataric ones. So, to Sri Aurobindo, the Gita's Krishna comes as an Avatar more than once: not only at the end of his birth-series but also in the course of his sequence of lives Krishna manifests Avatarhood.

One more letter of Sri Aurobindo seems to link up, though rather indirectly, with the Gita's Krishna who is "born from age to age". Here Sri Aurobindo brings in the topic of the life-series of an Avatar undergoing a process similar to the natural one through which the life-series of each of us passes. The Avatar is not simply a descent from above; there is an evolution of a soul-centred mould, physical-vital-mental, in which at certain critical points the descending Avatar Self is revealed. The letter<sup>1</sup> runs:

"...each being in a new birth prepares a new mind, life and body — otherwise John Smith would always be John Smith and would have no chance of being Piyush Kanti Ghose. Of course inside there are old personalities contributing to the new life — but I am speaking of the new visible personality, the outer man, mental, vital, physical. It is the psychic being that keeps the link from birth to birth and makes all the manifestations of the same person. It is therefore to be expected that the Avatar should take on a new personality each time, a personality suited for the new times, work, surroundings. In my own view of things, however, the new personality has a series of Avatar births behind him, births in which the intermediate evolution has been followed and assisted from age to age."

This passage has a particular significance because of the phrase: "In my own view of things..." Sri Aurobindo is speaking in *persona propria*, not merely expounding a traditional doctrine as when, dealing with the list in the "Hindu procession of the ten Avatars", he<sup>2</sup> writes: "It was not my own view of the thing that I was giving." But there seems to be a bit of a puzzle in what he says in the wake of that important phrase. From the words "a series of Avatar births"

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 409-410.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 406.

we should be disposed logically to conclude not only that the one who is an Avatar has repeated Avataric appearances in that past but also that every past birth was Avataric. Knowing that Sri Aurobindo was himself a Vibhuti on several past occasions and that he took the Gita's Krishna too as having been so, the words cannot be understood in this sweeping sense. Such a sense is hardly borne out by the explanation offered for the term "births" and referring to their following and assisting "from age to age" (the exact Gita-turn of speech) "the intermediate evolution." This explanation would convey that the line of births possessed by one who is the Avatar is marked at the same time by a new personality on every occasion and by a high age-to-age function of each personality, a function which unlike the role of ordinary people's personalities in their various births is always of a leader of the evolutionary process which has gone on in the interval between birth and birth.

The characteristic Aurobindonian vision which we have noticed in relation to the Krishna of the Gita would, therefore, be best articulated if we took something to be missing in the final sentence. Do not the words "intermediate evolution" point to a period between the Avatar-births and remind us of the phrase already quoted: "the Divine appearing ... as Vibhutis to aid the lesser transition"? The vision in question suggests the sentence to read: "In my view of things, however, the new personality has not only a series of Avatar-births behind him, but also births in which the intermediate evolution has been followed and assisted from age to age."

Once a repetition of the Avatar-birth, along with a multiplicity of the birth as Vibhuti, is acknowledged, we cannot help asking what Avatar-birth in the past could have been Sri Aurobindo's. Considering the close association he has emphasised of Krishna with himself and of Krishna's work with his own, we are led immediately to affirm that the most luminous anticipation of Sri Aurobindo's Avatarhood was the "blessed Lord" of the Gita: the latter presided over and prepared his further manifestation, the passage from the epiphany of the Overmind to the apocalypse of the Supermind, the firmer and more matter-permeating descent of his earlier *point de départ* of earthly expression until, as

Sri Aurobindo has said, an "identity" between them was made manifest not only within but also in the most external field.

The identity can be guessed from some remarks of Sri Aurobindo's about the spiritual light characterising his inner being: "The pale whitish blue light is 'Sri Aurobindo's light' — it is the blue light modified by the white light of the Mother...<sup>1</sup>

A whitish blue like moonlight is known as Krishna's light or Sri Aurobindo's light".<sup>2</sup>

In a letter<sup>3</sup> dated August 14, 1945 to Dilip Kumar Roy, who was greatly under Krishna's spell, we have a more explicit personal note:

"If you had an unprecedented peace for so long a time, it was due to my persistent inner pressure; I refuse to give up all the credit to my double, Krishna."

A little earlier letter (June 18, 1943) to the same disciple is even more explicit in a personal vein:

"If you reach Krishna, you reach the Divine; if you can give yourself to him, you give yourself to me. Your inability to identify may be because you are laying too much stress on the physical aspects consciously or unconsciously."

This, of course, does not mean that a cult of Krishna à la Vaishnavism ensures the results of the Aurobindonian yoga: if it did, the appearance of a new Avatar would be otiose. What it means is that a natural devotion for Krishna does not jar with that Yoga and may even help the sadhak provided the supporting background and upholding basis is life in the presence of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother within the dedicated soul.

Yes, the Mother no less than Sri Aurobindo. The utterance to which we have alluded more than once — about Sri Aurobindo's work and Krishna's — occurs in a letter of July

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* By the way, this light has a special bearing for the present writer. For, when the Mother was giving significances to the various flowers offered to her or given by her she told him that the flower special to him was the one signifying "Krishna's light in the mind".

<sup>3</sup> *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother*, pp. 268-269.

11, 1933 to an aspirant – Narayan Prasad – brought up in a Krishna-charged atmosphere and relates to her rather than to the Master:<sup>1</sup>

“The struggle in you (between bhakti for Sri Krishna and the sense of the divinity of the Mother) is quite unnecessary for the two things are one and go perfectly together. It is he who has brought you to the Mother and it is by adoration of her that you will realise him. He is here in the Ashram and it is his work that is being done in this Yoga.”

How intimately the Mother is linked at the same time with Krishna and with Sri Aurobindo becomes astonishingly plain when we have Sri Aurobindo’s reference to an experience of the Mother at a period when she knew hardly anything about matters Indian, historical or legendary. The reference also leads us on to probe certain complexities in the procession of the Avatars. We have the query: ‘When Ramakrishna was doing Sadhana, Mother was on earth physically for the first eight years of her childhood, from 1878 to 1886. Did he not know that Mother had come down? He must have had some vision at least of her coming, but we do not read anywhere definitely about it. And when Ramakrishna must have been intensely calling Mother, she must have felt something at that age.’ The reply<sup>2</sup> on July 11, 1935 is:

“In Mother’s childhood’s visions she saw myself whom she knew as ‘Krishna’ — she did not see Ramakrishna.

“It was not necessary that he should have a vision of her coming down as he was not thinking of the future nor consciously preparing for it. I don’t think he had the idea of any incarnation of the Mother.”

The complexities of Avatarhood to which this reply directs us are suggested by the mention of Ramakrishna. In connection with “the Hindu procession of the ten Avatars”, Sri Aurobindo marks the distinction the Gita draws between the Avatar and the Vibhuti — the one conscious of the Divine born in him or descended into him, the other embodying some power of the Divine but without the consciousness of an inborn or indwelling Divinity — and then proceeds to comment:<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 476.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 474.

<sup>3</sup> *On Yoga*, II, Tome One, P. 474.

"If we follow this distinction, we can confidently say from what is related of them that Rama and Krishna can be accepted as Avatars; Buddha figures as such although with a more impersonal consciousness of the Power within him. Ramakrishna voiced the same consciousness when he spoke of Him who was Rama and who was Krishna being within him, But Chaitanya's case is peculiar; for according to the accounts he ordinarily felt and declared himself a bhakta of Krishna and nothing more, but in great moments he manifested Krishna, grew luminous in mind and body and was Krishna himself and spoke and acted as the Lord. His contemporaries saw in him an Avatar of Krishna, a manifestation of the Divine Love.

"Shankara and Vivekananda were certainly Vibhutis; they cannot be reckoned as more, though as Vibhutis they were very great."

Adverting to several of these names again and bringing in one new name, Sri Aurobindo writes that he fully accepts "Chaitanya's position as an Avatar of Krishna" and that the "outbursts of the splendour of the Divine Being [in him] are among the most remarkable in the story of the Avatar". Then he adds: "As for Ramakrishna, the manifestation in him was not so intense but more many-sided... I would not care to enter into any comparison as between these two great spiritual personalities: both exercised an extraordinary influence and did something supreme in their own sphere...<sup>1</sup> He was certainly quite as much an Avatar as Christ or Chaitanya..<sup>2</sup> Mahomed would himself have rejected the idea of being an Avatar, so we have to regard him only as the prophet, the instrument, the Vibhuti. Christ realised himself as the Son who is one with the Father — he must therefore be an *amsa avatara*, a partial incarnation...<sup>3</sup> As for the unconscious Avatar, why not? Chaitanya is supposed to be an Avatar by the Vaishnavas, yet he was conscious of the Godhead behind only when that Godhead came in front and possessed him on rare occasions. Christ said 'I and my father are one', but yet he always spoke and behaved as if there were a difference. Ramakrishna's earlier period was that of one seeking God, not aware from the first of his

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 412.    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*    <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

identity... And supposing the full and permanent consciousness, why should the Avatar proclaim himself except on rare occasions to an Arjuna or to a few bhaktas or disciples?"<sup>1</sup>

From all this we may arrive at a few conclusions about Avatarhood. First, there are full Avatars and partial ones. Secondly, even among partial ones — Chaitanya, Christ, Ramakrishna — there is a difference. Each of them is equally powerful an Avatar as the other two, but the first-named is clearly an Avatar of the line of Krishna, to which Sri Aurobindo belongs, the rest may have a different line. Thirdly, since Sri Aurobindo and Ramakrishna were contemporaries and since the Mother saw the former and not the latter as Krishna, the latter evidently belongs to a line which is not the same. Fourthly, since Sri Aurobindo was present as the Vibhuti Augustus Caesar when Christ lived, the line of Christ too must be dissimilar.

So we come to the vision that the Purushottama has more than one line of Avatar and that two general categories may be distinguished; the central Avatar and the peripheral Avatar — the central expressing the Divine Plenitude directly, the peripheral doing it indirectly — the central conveying a sense of totality in various manners, the peripheral a sense of particular qualities — the central coming in periods of great evolutionary transitions, the peripheral in those of a less crucial character. When the peripheral Avatars are on earth, the line along which the central is manifested may show itself either in Avatarhood or in Vibhutihood, depending on whether the age concerned is crucial or not. Our own age Sri Aurobindo has considered crucial and so we should not be surprised that Ramakrishna and he were co-present — Ramkrishna by his intense synthesis summing up the world's and especially India's past spirituality and rendering the inner ground ready for the novel leap forward that is Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga of Supramental Descent and its labour towards even physical transformation. A testimony to Ramakrishna's relation in the inner domain to that leap is an admission by Sri Aurobindo<sup>2</sup> in a letter, most prob-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 423.

<sup>2</sup> *Supplement*, Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, Pondicherry, 1972, Vol. 27, p. 435.



ably of 1913, to Motilal Roy in the course of a comment on the Ramakrishna Mission:

“What you say about the Ramakrishna Mission is, I dare say, true to a certain extent. Do not oppose that movement or enter into any conflict with it.. Remember also that we derive from Ramakrishna. For myself it was Ramakrishna who personally came and first turned me to this Yoga. Vivekananda in the Alipore Jail gave me the foundations of the knowledge which is the basis of our Sadhana. The error of the Mission is to keep too much to the forms of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda and not keep themselves open for new outpourings of their spirit, — the error of all Churches and organised religious bodies.”

It should be obvious that the central line of Avatarhood covers Rama, Krishna, Sri Aurobindo, and in a somewhat odd way, Chaitanya. Obviously, too, we cannot cling to the inference we originally drew that Avatarhood comes only as a culminating life just once along any line. Indeed, the Mother seems to have brought forth her divinity in a recognisably Avatic form in her present life alone, but Sri Aurobindo surely produces the impression of having had openly Avatic lives in the past. Supposing our impression to be accurate, how are we to reconcile it with his statement; “We were not on earth as Avatars”?

We have to note that merely in one letter Sri Krishna is named by the disciple apropos of his wonder how Avatic personalities whom he designated “portions” of the Divine could have failed to know that the Divine’s very self — that is, the Being of the Supermind-plane — was constantly on earth and hence in their time as Vibhuti. The detailed questions and answers touch only on Buddha and Christ. We have Sri Aurobindo saying: “... If the Mother were in Rome in the time of Buddha, how could Buddha know as he did not even know the existence of Rome?<sup>1</sup> ... So if the Mother was present in the life of Christ, she was there not as the Divine Manifestation but as one altogether human. For her to be recognised as the Divine would have created a tremendous disorder and frustrated the work Christ came to

<sup>1</sup> *Guidance from Sri Aurobindo*, p. 283.

do by breaking its proper limits."<sup>1</sup> It is on the heels of these replies that Sri Aurobindo explains that the Mother and he were not present in an Avataric shape on the earth-scene. Sri Aurobindo must have overlooked the single occasion on which the disciple wrote of Krishna by name. There is no letter of his in which, naming Krishna, he has allowed the impression that he could have been somebody else when the magical flute-player of Brindavan and the majestic charioteer of Kurukshetra was in the midst of men, the glorious figure about whose "historicity" Sri Aurobindo<sup>2</sup> has said that if we accept it "there is this great spiritual gain that one has a *point d'appui* for a more concrete realisation in the conviction that once at least the Divine has visibly touched the earth, made the complete manifestation possible, made it possible for the divine supernature to descend into this evolving but still very imperfect terrestrial nature."

(d)

We may round off our discussion with a piece of occult insight by the Mother. She has spoken of Avatarhood not only in terms of the highest Superconscient as the source but also in those of the deepest Inconscient which is the seeming opposite of the Divine. Within that Inconscient she has seen the Divine Himself, plunged there by His own will and lying hidden as a concrete Being who is the initiator of evolution. She<sup>3</sup> has suggested this mysterious figure to be the subject of those two lines in *Savitri* where Sri Aurobindo describes the end of the symbolic night preceding the symbol dawn:

The darkness failed and slipped like a falling cloak  
From the reclining body of a god.<sup>4</sup>

In elaborating upon her vision she mentions in her talk of May 28, 1958 "a very old tradition", more ancient than

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 284-285.

<sup>2</sup> *On Yoga II*, Tome One, pp. 433-434.

<sup>3</sup> *About Savitri with Some Paintings*, Published by Huta (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 1972), p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> *Savitri* (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1972) p. 3.

the Vedic and Chaldean and constituting their origin. Explaining this tradition she<sup>1</sup> recounts :

"... it is said that when, as a result of the action of the adverse forces — known in the Hindu tradition as the Asuras — the world, instead of developing according to its law of Light and inherent consciousness, was plunged into the darkness, inconscience and ignorance that we know, the Creative Power implored the Supreme Origin, asking him for a special intervention which could save this corrupted universe; and in reply to this prayer there was emanated from the Supreme Origin a special Entity, of Love and Consciousness, who cast himself directly into the most inconscient matter to begin there the work of awakening it to the original Consciousness and Love.

"In the old narratives this Being is described as stretched out in a deep sleep at the bottom of a very dark cave, and in his sleep there emanated from him prismatic rays of light which gradually spread into the Inconscience and embedded themselves in all the elements of this Inconscience to begin there the work of Awakening.

"It one consciously enters into this Inconscient, one can still see there this same marvellous Being, still in deep sleep, continuing his work of emanation, spreading his Light; and he will continue to do it until the Inconscience is no longer inconscient, until Darkness disappears from the world — and the whole creation awakens to the Supramental Consciousness.

"And it is remarkable that this wonderful Being strongly resembles the one whom I saw in vision one day, the Being who is at the other extremity, at the confines of form and the Formless. But that one was in a golden, crimson glory, whereas in his sleep the other Being was of a shining diamond whiteness emanating opalescent rays.

"In fact, this is the origin of all avatars. He is, so to say, the first universal Avatar who, gradually, has assumed more and more conscious bodies and finally manifested in a kind of recognised line of Beings who have descended directly from the Supreme to perfect this work of prepar-

<sup>1</sup> *Questions and Answers* 1958 (the Mother's Centenary Library, Pondicherry, 1977), Vol. 9, pp. 332-334.

ing the universe so that, through a continuous progression, it may become ready to receive and manifest the supramental Light in its entirety.

"In every country, every tradition, the event has been presented in a special way, with different limitations, different details, particular features, but truly speaking, the origin of all these stories is the same, and that is what we could call a direct, conscious intervention of the Supreme in the darkest Matter, without going through all the intermediaries, in order to awaken this Matter to the receptivity of the Divine Forces.

"The intervals separating these various incarnations seem to become shorter and shorter, as if, to the extent that matter became more and more ready, the action could accelerate and become more and more rapid in its movement, more and more conscious too, more and more effective and decisive.

"And it will go on multiplying and intensifying until the entire universe becomes the total Avatar of the Supreme."

## The Mother, Her Children and the Various Interrelations

(a)

When the Mother's son, André, by the painter Henri Morisset who had married her in the studio-days of her late teens, was to come on a visit to the Ashram on 4th November 1949 after a separation from the Mother for 34 years, she was reported to have joked: "I don't know what he looks like now. I only hope he hasn't become bald." She must have been pleased to find that though his hair was not quite bushy his head was far from having reached the billiard-ball state. The reunion of *Maman* and *fils* was said to have been a warm one. The Ashramites were very glad to see the Mother's one and only son. I happened to be on a visit to the Ashram from Bombay in this period.

André was a handsome and affable person, with a fine poise of mind. He was invited to the houses of many Ashramites and the enthusiastic welcome he received included an affectionate laudatory poem by Pujalal. When he left, Kameshwar accompanied him in the car to see him off at the Madras airport. After Kameshwar had returned, the Mother talked to us more or less as follows: "Kameshwar was all curiosity to ask André whether he had always known who I am. It seems André told him that he had the sense of the reality from an early age. When he was a boy, I never called any doctor to treat his illnesses. I always cured him by spiritual power. Whenever any harsh opinion was expressed by in-laws, little André used to defend me. Once at dinner a criticism of me was made and André rose up to declare spontaneously: 'Ma mère est la vérité' "<sup>1</sup>

I asked the Mother why André had not come here all those

<sup>1</sup>"My mother is truth"

years. She answered: "Why should he have? He had his own life to live in France; and actually, even while he was there, there was no real inner separation. Up till now it was as if there were a screen in my room and André was present behind that screen. What has happened now is simply that he has come out in front." Talking with André on one occasion I learned from him that a subtle contact always existed between the Mother and him and that even at a distance he would know if she wanted him to do something.

From my friendship with him and from the various types of work the Mother gave him I gathered that, although he was a graduate of the *École Polytechnique* of Paris which was a military school for turning out officers and engineers highly qualified in all the scientific disciplines, he had a multitude of talents and capacities and could cope intellectually with almost any kind of commission. I recall that when my associate editor on *Mother India*, Soli Albless, was planning to go to a philosophical conference at Brussels and some hitch temporarily arose, the Mother suggested that André should take my friend's paper with him and represent him in whatever discussions might ensue.

In later years, when André came on long visits to the Ashram I found that communication to and from the Mother could be at its clearest through him. When the Mother in old age, was a little hard of hearing, André's voice and way of speaking seemed to be on a wave-length most attuned to her. She also showed confidence in his capacity to convey her messages faithfully and I believe she has left some instructions with him about a few matters which would be helpful in case of uncertainty. One of the instructions is said to be that he should see whatever had remained unpublished from the tape-record of her talks in the series from which selections were appearing in the *Bulletin* under the title "Notes on the Way", she considered these talks as rather impromptu and therefore needing his scrutiny and judgment in case she could not attend to them. I hear that she told him Nolini too should go through the tape-record before its publication. A copy of the whole set covering many years used to be kept in a cabinet in her room. Subsequently it was found that the papers had been removed from there by the persons who had done the tape-recording. The



Mother also referred another Ashram-member to the tapes, saying they might be consulted in order to get the type of information needed in the course of the work with which this member had been entrusted.

Of course, André would be the last person to announce publicly that the Mother had given him any special charge. He never forces anything on people's attention in personal matters and is always loth to take advantage of being the Mother's son. He knows too that being physically born from her is not the sole claim to being her child. To him the invocation which Sri Aurobindo's elder brother, Manmohan Ghose, made to his own mother in a moment of high poetic vision would come most naturally:

Augustest! dearest! whom no thought can trace,  
Name murmuring out of birth's infinity.  
Mother! like heaven's great face is thy sweet face,  
Stupendous with the mystery of me.  
Eyes, elder than the light; cheek, that no flower  
Remembers; brow, at which my infant care  
Gazed weeping up and saw the skies enshower  
With tender rain of vast mysterious hair!  
Thou at whose breast the sunbeams sucked, whose arms  
Cradled the lisping ocean, art thou she,  
Goddess, at whose dim heart the world's deep charms,  
Tears, terrors, sobbing things, were yet to be?  
She, from whose tearing pangs in glory first  
I and the infinite wide heavens burst?

(b)

Even from the outward point of view the Mother's relationship with those whose souls had felt in her the Divine Creatrix or even moved towards her with a deep instinct and without any definite mental conception, was exactly as of a physical mother. Champaklal once told me that one could hardly imagine how far the Mother's intimate and tender Grace could go in dealing with certain disciples. However, I have observed that, no matter what closeness one may have to her, she never really gave in where the central truth of the Yoga was concerned. She could be very calm and cool and yet drive home certain aspects of a situ-

ation which her supposed "favourite" had failed to see. Actually, with those whom she considered really near in heart and open to her she felt could let herself come out with clear criticism, knowing that they would never misunderstand it and were always eager to stand face to face with the highest ideal. Such children of hers have told her repeatedly that she should never mince matters with them.

The Mother rarely asserted her motherhood unless the child plainly declared his wish for it. The true master is he who never longs to have disciples. I remember how, on my first arrival in the Ashram, I expressed my desire to do Yoga, saying dramatically: "I have seen all of life. Now I want nothing except God." The Mother very sweetly asked: "How old are you?" I answered in a dignified tone: "Twenty-three." Then she said: "And at twenty-three you have seen all of life?" I was a little taken aback at this splash of cold water. The Mother continued: "You are very young. You must not decide anything in a hurry. Stay in the Ashram, look around, see how you feel and calmly come to a decision." Something had already chosen the Mother, and I am sure she had also chosen me. But I realised in the next few months that, under the pressure of the Ashram atmosphere, several sides of me which in my initial enthusiasm I had thought to have outgrown were still there and posing all kinds of problems. I had to tackle them; they were both mental inclinations and sensational-emotional proclivities. The true turn to the Yoga came when, apart from spiritual ideation, something opened in the heart. Then the Mother's child that was deep hidden within rose to the front and was spontaneously accepted as such by the Mother.

I did not want any barrier to exist between her and me. I was anxious to be pulled up by her if she felt that anywhere I showed unconsciousness of belonging to her. How she took me up at my word may be seen from a small incident. Once I spoke to her about a letter which had come from my mother, sister and brother who were at Bombay. I said: "I've just heard from home." The Mother, with a slightly ironical smile, exclaimed: "I have caught you out. You said 'home'. Where is your 'home'?" I understood at once that even in our outermost habit-ridden being we must let the inner truth, the soul's choice and destiny, shine

through. The commitment to the Integral Yoga has to be integral.

Sometimes I have wondered at the Mother's inexhaustible patience — a patience stemming from a boundless understanding of one's nature. Sri Aurobindo has written that she and he went through more difficulties than anyone else either now or in the past, for theirs has been the task of being at the core of all the psycho-physical problems of evolving humanity and first solving them in themselves before assuring the frantic or dejected disciple that the apparently insurmountable obstacles can be got over. "How can you trust in our word of confidence unless you believe that we have been through the same complexity of troubles and succeeded in untying every 'knot intricate' of life?" — such in effect is the stand of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. This diversified experience within themselves of all types of natures and all species of problems has given them a sympathetic and helpful tolerance that is unique.

I know from my own example how they could hold on to the best part in a disciple's nature and adjust themselves even to some vagaries on his side and to certain trends of behaviour persisting from a particular cultural and social background. They were aware that I had a very westernised mind and a temperament with quite a bit of affinity to the Latin Quarter of Paris. They gave me a lot of liberty of movement and contact.

They were themselves astonishingly broad-minded and full of laughter at the foibles of erring humanity, though they never stopped insisting on the ideals of the Truth they had come to establish. Sri Aurobindo's uninhibited humour may be gauged from a little incident connected with my experiment in learning to ride a cycle. After some private practice on a small scale I took a machine out from Benjamin, the sadhaka who used to keep the cycle-store. On returning home from the long adventure I wrote to Sri Aurobindo:

"My first cycle-ride went off very well. Just one fall into the gutter. A pedal-crank got slightly loose, I had it set right. Scratches on the chain-guard. Couldn't be removed at once; nothing very serious — a few touches of paint will remedy them. I hope the Mother won't mention anything about the pedal to Benjamin."

Sri Aurobindo's reply ran:

"All right. You remind me of the servant girl who had an illegitimate child but pleaded to her mistress. 'Please, maam, it is only a very little one.'" (21.3.1935)

The first two years of my life in the Ashram were rather ascetic by way of reaction from the manner of living to which I had been accustomed before. During them the foundation of Yoga was laid. The intense opening of what Sri Aurobindo terms the psychic being took place. The beard that I started growing and the hair that I refrained from getting cut framed the soul's emergence with an appearance which people dubbed Christlike. But there was an element of fear in the sanctity — a kind of early-Christian flight into a desert in order to escape from the world, the flesh and the devil. When the inner work done in this period was over and the time arrived for the superstructure to be raised upon the part — ascetic part — psychic foundation, the old K.D. Sethna re-emerged with his complex modernism so that a proper natural form might be taken by the growing spiritual personality. A reaction set in to the earlier reaction itself. I got into touch with life outside the Ashram and grew acquainted with one or two families in the town. I did not hide the fact from the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, but, although the Ashram regime was fairly strict in this period as compared to what it later became, they hardly ever interfered with my freedom.

(c)

Udar — at that time Laurie Pinto — came to Pondicherry a few years after my arrival, to set up a business here in collaboration with Monsieur Gaebelé, member of a very influential French family and himself the husband of a highly cultured lady and the father of four charming daughters, two of them strikingly beautiful. Madame Gaebelé was a devotee of the Mother and the teacher of French to a small group of Ashramites including myself. When Udar arrived, I was already on very friendly terms with the Gaebelé family and soon struck an extremely close friendship with him. He was as westernised as I and had gone one better by having stayed in England for some years and got engaged to an

English girl. Although I was doing sadhana and writing poetry, philosophy and literary criticism under Sri Aurobindo's inspiration, I still found the time to meet all my friends.

Sometimes I used to return pretty late at night. My chum Premanand and, the then librarian of the Ashram, who stayed in the same building, the Old Guest House, where the Mother had given me the room in which Sri Aurobindo had once stayed for nine years, would always willingly open the courtyard gate for me. But I suppose my late entry was accompanied by an amount of noise which did not agree with the spiritual slumbers of the other residents. Complaints must have gone to the Mother. She must have been expected to cut short my "strayings" from the "razor-sharp path". But, to the surprise of all, she supplied me with a spare key to the house gate, so that I might steal in as quietly as possible at any hour of the night.

Perhaps my redeeming feature was that I had no secrets from the Mother. When I experimented in a spot of wine-bibbing I kept her in touch with its effects. She joked with me at first, saying: "It is quite a test of one's self-control to see if, with some alcohol inside one, one can move one's feet along a straight line drawn with a chalk." Later, when I discovered that a certain craving was felt in my abdominal region, as if there were a small hand in it with clutching fingers all the time. I wrote to the Mother that I saw now what really lay behind the urge to drink and that I had decided to give up my little experiment. She replied: "I am happy at your resolution and I hope you will keep to it. I was going to write to you must choose between seeing me and drink — for I would not see you if you went on drinking — but I am glad to hear that you have made the resolution already." (11-10-1935)

Actually my dallying with Bacchus lasted no more than a week. My fondness for gambling at cards persisted longer. Udar and the Gaebelés proved very good company for this indulgence. From my college days I had the gambling instinct. I put the gains of many a scholarship at stake. The instinct found play in that most glorious, though also pretty ruinous, game of chance: horse-racing. Having been a great lover of *equus caballus* and consequently a rider too (despite

my lame left leg) for at least twenty out of my life's twenty-three years before joining the Ashram, it was an extra-fascinating challenge to me to catch the dominant theme from amid a Wagnerian harmony-hubbub of galloping hooves, and set my wits against the unknown to pluck the heart of the elusive future. When I started reading Sri Aurobindo's books I gave quite a whoop of delight when I found at the end of the chapter "The Planes of Our Existence" in *The Synthesis of Yoga* the sentence: "... the Purusha has sought in the material universe, as if in a wager with itself, the conditions of the greatest difficult." The attempt of Yoga too Sri Aurobindo views in terms of gambling when he formulates the discouraging and restricting advice of the wise ones and exclaims in response:

Who is the nomad then? who is the seeker, the gam-  
 bler risking  
 All for a dream in a dream, the old and the sure and  
 the stable  
 Flung as a stake for a prize that was never yet laid on  
 the table?

Our hazardous earthly existence itself Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* calls:

The wager wonderful, the game divine.

Of course, brag, poker and pontoon are poor aspects of what in general Sri Aurobindo says about the whole many-layered process of nature:

All is a wager and danger, all is a chase and a battle.

Even horse-racing cannot transmit the profound excitement of the world-adventure as seen by Sri Aurobindo, but in a semi-perverted way it used to relive for me in Bombay the humdrumness of a too conventionally regulated living. Pondicherry could not offer even the thinnest shadow of its thrill. My eyes were starved of the very sight of a horse. But when gambling at cards offered itself, my Yogic detachment and calm could not quite push it away. This too I kept the Mother informed about. She explained to me the occult wire-pulling of forces behind all games of chance. Subtle entities make sport of human beings when the latter think they are being clever at these entertainments. The tactics of these entities is to give us some striking luck and elate us as well



as create a false sense of our capacities. They lead us to risk more and more money and then, when we are most confident and hopeful, bring us down with a crash. The more acutely miserable we become, the more they jump in joy.

I dropped my brag, poker and pontoon when the Mother opened my eyes.

Apropos of playing cards, the Mother recounted to me an occasion when she had gambled. I shall tell the story later when I touch on Paul Richard's role in the Mother's life; for, her gambling experiment took place in connection with him.

My friendship with Udar, which was not only on the gambler's level, drew him more and more towards the momentous experiment with both the True and the New that was Sri Aurobindo's Yoga. Communications went on, time after time, through me between the Mother and him. She evidently found in him a bold and large nature and, not long after he had married Mona who had sailed out from England to join her life with his, the Mother took both of them along with their baby-girl Judy Anne (later Gauri) under her wings.

(d)

The Mother's unfailing comprehension of the diverse sides of my being came into view most clearly when I stayed away from the Ashram for several years. A number of times during my first six years in the Ashram there were earnest invitations from my grandfather and mother to visit them. When I refused to go, my mother, brother and sister came to Pondicherry year after year. But grandfather was obstinate and thought it *infra dignitatem* to visit a fellow nearly fifty years his junior. I also held out. But there was some weakness in myself which cropped up again and again. The Mother tried her best to keep me in the Ashram — and I obeyed her. In 1934 grandfather sent one more invitation, this time pleading that he was getting older and older and might take his leave any time. Actually he lived on for twenty-four years more and died just a few months before he could hit a century. But his threat of making an exit in his seventies sounded rather serious. I put it before the Mother. Now she said, "Yes." I was astonished. My next

feeling was of disappointment that she did not say. "No." It was as if she were cutting me loose from herself. A tinge of fear also crept in at the thought of a maelstrom of life like Bombay.

I wrote a number of letters to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. One was in connection with a spell of danger to the Ashram brought about by some hostile elements in the British Government which wanted Sri Aurobindo dislodged from Pondicherry. Sri Aurobindo suspended correspondence with us for a fortnight in order to concentrate his Yogic Force on the situation. When the situation had cleared I wrote to him that during the dangerous period I felt as if I could throw away my life with the utmost ease if thereby I could defend the Mother and him. I made an analysis of my own character — the positive and the negative sides — and asked him whether I was right. He replied:

"Your analysis is correct, but the doubts are not your own, they come from outside. It is true you have a capacity for heroism which can come out on the surface *if your will helps*, but usually it needs difficult circumstances to come out. In ordinary circumstances your vital tends to become dull and needs excitement. You must be careful to resist the encroachment of the outer atmosphere when you go to Bombay." (7-2-1934)

In the interview before my departure I asked the Mother how my life should run in Bombay. She said that I did not need to put special restraints on the ordinary course of things but eat, drink and live normally as a person in Bombay would do. At the end of my talk I said: "Please give me one promise. Never let go your hold on me. Even if something in me wants to leave you, never accept it." She answered: "I am like a fairy godmother. Whatever one wishes to have, I can grant. If you wish to separate from me, that too I can grant. But if you want me never to let go my hold on you, I will keep you in my hands forever."

Before parting I put one arm around her shoulders and drew her near to me. She led me to a big photograph of Sri Aurobindo and asked me to kneel before it. The same night I took the train to Madras. The whole journey was full of her face before my shut eyes. I could hardly sleep. I was going far from her after six and a half years.

My experience in the turmoil of Bombay was hardly pleasant except for the fact of meeting dear family-members. Until I established some sort of balance between me and the city-whirl, every face I saw seemed to come hurling like a coconut towards me and hitting against my chest. Soon after my arrival I contracted scarlet fever, bringing a high temperature that went down by slow degrees over almost a week. It was 105 F, one whole day, then 104 the next day and so on. A severe headache persisted all through. I am a person who, despite sustained reading and prolonged brain-work, never suffers from headaches. Only during this fit of fever and once before when I had an attack of bubonic plague I experienced pain in the head — indeed pain with a terrific vengeance. But all through the illness I had the firm assurance of a cure and not the slightest idea of any danger. The Mother later told me that it was my sense of certainty of her help that made the curative power of her Grace work so well and save me from the possibility of meningitis which is a common sequel to scarlet fever.

After I returned to the Ashram I felt an extreme pull towards the Mother and, looking back on my seven years of stay in the Ashram, I wrote to her: "Pardon my writing to you without any specific reason; but I felt like telling you that you are my darling. In spite of my thousand and three imperfections, this one sense remains in me — that you are my Mother, that I am born from your heart. It is the only truth I seem to have realised in all these years. A very unfortunate thing, perhaps, that I have realised no other truth; but I deeply thank you that I have been enabled to feel this much at least."

Sri Aurobindo replied: "It is an excellent foundation for the other truths that are to come — for they all result from it." The Mother added under his reply: "My blessings are always with you." (17-9-1934)

My second visit to Bombay happened in 1936. Before leaving, I wrote to Sri Aurobindo: "Won't you tell me something to which I can always turn for help and contact during my stay in Bombay?" The answer was: "Remember the Mother and, though physically far from her, try to feel her with you and act according to what your inner being tells you would be her Will. Then you will be best able to feel

her presence and mine and carry our atmosphere around you as a protection and a zone of quietude and light accompanying you everywhere." (12-12-1936)

When I went to Bombay for the third time — at the end of February 1938 — circumstances so developed that I was in great perplexity in the matter of returning as planned. I stayed on for over a year and then wrote to the Mother: "My heart is pulled towards you and I want to come back. But certain things are keeping me here and I feel that they will keep drawing me even if I return at present. What should I do? But please know that whether I come just now or not I cannot ever break away from you. I pray to you not to abandon me."

The Mother's reply, dated April 24, 1939 ran: "My dear child, blessings of the day....Just received your letter of 21st; it came to me directly (without the written words) three days ago, probably when you were writing it, and my silent answer was categorical; remain there until the necessity of being here will become so imperative that all else will completely lose all value for you. My answer now is exactly the same. I want only to assure you that we are not abandoning you and that you will always have our help and protection."

The letter is notable not only for its proof of the Mother's occult powers and its deep understanding of my all-too-human two-ways-tugged being but also for the evolutionary truth it enshrines. Our choice of the spiritual life must come ultimately as a sheer necessity of our nature: then alone is it the seed of a true growth into godhead. Merely mental decisions will not work. Not even a desire to obey the Divine's call is enough. A spontaneous leap from within has to take place. Then no experience will be a superimposition, a precarious thing however grand. All will be a glad flowering and whatever arrives will stay for good.

This does not mean that we may wander about with a lazy reliance on the Divine to do everything for us. We must create the right conditions for the soul to get a chance to emerge. But until the soul truly peeps out, even if it does not fully emerge, we are not ready to plunge into the uncharted ocean of the Infinite.

## 8

## **"The Seal of Solomon", Tagore's Visit to the Ashram, Soup-Distribution, "Prosperity" Meetings, Yogic Fulfilment**

In the preceding chapter I announced that I would write what I had gathered, from the Mother herself and from some disciples who had been close to her, about Paul Richard's role in her life. But I have changed my mind in view of the fact that for reasons of her own the Mother always wanted to keep his name in limbo. In passing, I shall touch only on two topics. First, I shall repeat the story which I have told elsewhere and which I promised in my last article to relate in connection with Richard and the subject of gambling. Then I shall correct a report which has been going round for years and years as authoritative about his first meeting with Sri Aurobindo in 1910.

The gambling story has for its scene the boat on which the Mother was coming to India from France. She told it to me with the introductory words: "I have gambled only once." Richard played cards with his friends hour after hour and kept losing money all the time. His friends turned to the Mother, laughing: "Madame, why don't you take his chair and bring him some luck? The Mother answered: "I warn you that if I play I will take away all your money." They guffawed. The Mother took the seat — and she did take away all their money! It was by the exercise of an occult power. She explained to me: "I could see all their cards as if they had been transparent." So, knowing their hands she played hers. It was a good lesson to them. They had to beg her to stop playing.

Four years before this amusing incident Richard had arrived in Pondicherry on a political mission. Through a person named Zir Naidu who happened to know Sri Aurobindo

he got the chance to have interviews with Sri Aurobindo on two successive days for two or three hours each time. The tale is current in the Ashram that the Mother had asked Richard to find out from some Yogi in India the meaning of the symbol which goes by the designation "Seal of Solomon", popularly called also "Star of David". Sometimes it is taken to be a pentagram such as the Middle Ages of Europe employed in magical practices and such as is supposed in India to cure the scorpion-sting if not the snake-bite too. But really it is a hexagram and, under its second name, it is at present the official emblem of the State of Israel — a six-pointed star made of two intersecting triangles with their apexes in opposite directions up and down. With the triangles isosceles in shape, enabling a square to be formed at the centre of their intersection and holding within the square some significant additional design — wavy lines for water and a lotus resting on them — the Seal of Solomon is also Sri Aurobindo's spiritual symbol. When it is said to have been shown to Sri Aurobindo by Richard. Sri Aurobindo is reported to have given an interpretation which completely satisfied the Mother when Richard conveyed it to her on his return to Paris. Unfortunately this fascinating tale has turned out to be mythical.

When a biography of Sri Aurobindo was being prepared by A.B. Purani in 1957, the Mother was asked to consider the statement: "Mother had given Richard some questions which he had to get solved by some spiritual person in India." The Mother inscribed a twice-underlined "Omit" above statement. In the margin she wrote: "Not correct. I never gave him any questions to be solved." She also commented on another sentence of Purani's. Purani had written: "One of the questions which the Mother had asked related to the symbolic character of the 'Lotus'." Above the words "which the Mother had asked", her comment ran: "Not I. Probably Richard himself."

All this, however, does not mean that the Mother had nothing to do with the Seal of Solomon or with the Lotus as symbols. The Ashram's Research and Archives Library is in possession of a manuscript of the Mother dating probably to 1912 and certainly earlier than 1914, the year of her first arrival in Pondicherry — a manuscript not only relevant to



our study but even going beyond it to an astonishing fact. Here we see drawings, mostly geometrical figures. There are some triangles and a square, near which is written "*Croix ou carré d'équilibre — réalisation quaternaire parfaite*" ("Cross or square of equilibrium — perfect fourfold realisation"). Below this is a hexagram built of two intersecting triangles with a square in the middle, the symbol of Sri Aurobindo minus the wavy wateriness and the lotus! The hexagram-design is surmounted by the inscription: "*Sceau de Solomon*" ("Seal of Solomon").

What is a still greater surprise is that the same square-enclosing hexagram appears on the cover of the periodical *Le Revue Cosmique* started by the Mother's Egyptian teacher of occultism, Théon, and managed for a time by the Mother — but now with a mass of water supporting a lotus inside the square! The opening year was 1901–02. The Mother was managing it in 1904. Evidently, at some point after getting charge of the Pondicherry Ashram in 1926 she based Sri Aurobindo's symbol upon Théon's, giving the inner design a more stylised shape. The final version of it was fixed by her on 6th May, 1964.

The Mother's first visit to Pondicherry lasted about a year. Owing to circumstances created by the First World War she went back to France for a while and then sailed for Japan. In Japan she came into contact with Tagore. Tagore had the habit of meditating every morning at a fixed hour. The Mother once told us: "I could follow him in his meditation and know exactly what was happening. On the mind-level he used to get a touch of Sat-chit-Ananda."

The Mother left Japan in 1920 and came to join Sri Aurobindo. Several years later — some time after I had settled here in December 1927 — Tagore who was on a boat passing by Pondicherry stopped to pay a call on Sri Aurobindo. Nolini took him upstairs where at the other end of the meditation hall Sri Aurobindo was standing to receive him. As soon as Tagore entered and saw Sri Aurobindo he flung his cap away and ran towards him and made as if to embrace him. Sri Aurobindo extended his arms and caught Tagore's hands. Then they sat down for a talk. The Mother sat on a stool near Sri Aurobindo.

Nolini was also present at the meeting and that is how

we came to know what happened there. Most of the talking was done by Tagore. He described what he had accomplished in Europe and asked Sri Aurobindo: "Why do you not go to Europe and spread your message?" Sri Aurobindo answered: "If Europe wants my message, it is bound to come here." Tagore seems to have been struck by Sri Aurobindo's lack of any desire to make himself famous or to preach his philosophy.

When the interview was over, Nolini brought Tagore down, followed by the Mother who halted near the bottom of the staircase. Later Tagore asked Nolini: "Who was that lady sitting near Sri Aurobindo? Is she his secretary?" Nolini answered: "She is the Mother." Tagore exclaimed: "Oh, Mirra Richard? I could not recognise her."

If I remember aright, the Mother had passed through an illness just before Tagore's visit. She had become rather emaciated. Perhaps that was partly why he could not recognise her. To some extent the reason may be that she was in a sari, a costume in which the Bengali poet had never before seen her. Another cause must be the fact that in the eight years since her stay in Japan she had grown in spiritual stature and could manifest a greater divine Presence.

A few years after Tagore's interview the Mother's body again suffered — now a much more serious illness as a result of nearly four years of the physico-spiritual practice of what we knew as Soup-distribution. Every evening, at first in the upstairs verandah of the "Library House" (9 rue de la Marine) and later in what is now the Reception Room downstairs in the same building, we used to sit in semi-darkness, meditating. The Mother would be in a chair in front of us. Champaklal would bring a big cauldron of hot soup and place it on a stool in front of her. He stood by while she went into a trance. After some minutes, with her eyes still shut, she would spontaneously stretch out her arms, and her palms were poised over the cauldron. She was transmitting the power of Sri Aurobindo into the soup. After a while her eyes opened and she withdrew her hands. Then the distribution started. Each of us went to her, bent down on our knees and gave her our enamel cup. Then with a ladle she poured the soup from the cauldron into our cups. Before handing each cup back she would again withdraw

inward with eyes half shut and take a sip. Sometimes after the sip she was lost once more in a trance and we had to wait until she came out of it. When the time was rather long she gave a faint apologetic smile. The occult truth behind the ceremony was that she was putting something of her own spiritualised subtle-physical substance into the soup in our cups. This was naturally a strain on her which could be compensated only if something in our being went out to her in return. Unfortunately the yogic traffic was often one-way. The consequence was a severe strain on the Mother's body. This strain was the real cause of her illness. Sri Aurobindo is reported to have said under his breath: "Brutes!"

The Mother suffered for quite a time. At one point she called the best physician in the town, Dr. Amaladas, not to prescribe any medicine but to consider the outer symptoms and diagnose where the damage had resulted. His diagnosis was meant to help the Mother and Sri Aurobindo to focus their curative spiritual force.

The Soup-distribution was never resumed. But, of course, the Mother's giving of her energies to us went on in different ways, and many of the physical troubles she later had were due to the inner road-blocks in the course of her disciples' sadhana.

With the stoppage of the Soup-distribution there came an end also to the most interesting meetings she used to have with a few of us in the "Prosperity"—room above the soup-hall. Among other activities, some talks were given there by the Mother. I would take them down in shortened longhand, and reconstruct them afterwards. They have appeared, with the Mother's approval, in book-form as *Words of the Mother*, Third Series. The Mother once remarked to me that something of her living manner had come into the reports.

As far as I remember, the number of people she had decided to admit into those pre-soup sessions was 24. To each of us she gave a number. Number I was for René, the Mohammedan boy, originally named Yakub, who belonged to an aristocratic family from Hyderabad. Many members of it had become Ashramites. They were the first Mohammedans to join the Ashram, just as Lalita and I were the first

Parsis. Both of us were included in the "Prosperity" — group. Her number was 2 and mine 15. I believe number 24 was that of Doraiswamy, the well-known advocate of Madras who used to come to the Ashram every week-end and was extremely devoted to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

An interesting bit of occult news I heard in the early days of my stay here when I was very chummy with the central group of the sadhaks — Nolini, Amrita, Purani, Anilbaran, Champaklal, Dyuman, Rajangam, Pavitra — was that, when in a past life of theirs Sri Aurobindo had been Leonardo da Vinci and the Mother Mona Lisa, Doraiswamy had been Francis 1, King of France (1494–1547).

Francis 1 was renowned for his love of art and chivalry, he was a patron of Renaissance learning and founded the Collège de France. In his arms Leonardo is said to have died.

It was one of the impressions of Sri Aurobindo that in a past life I myself had been in Renaissance Italy. So perhaps I had some connection not only with Leonardo and Mona Lisa but also, through the former, with Francis 1. That may explain why I was very friendly with Doraiswamy. We were also psychologically similar in one respect. The Mother said that in the "Prosperity" — group he and I were the two persons who were perhaps most inclined to feel helpless by ourselves and to call inwardly for her aid scores of times each day. I may here remark the curious fact that the digits of Doraiswamy's number — 24 — and those of mine — 15 — sum up equally to 6, the number which means, according to the Mother, "New Creation". A phenomenon of which both of us possibly felt the greatest need at every hour of our lives.

At present not all the members of the "Prosperity" - group survive in the Ashram. Some died and some withdrew from the Mother's side, through it is certain that the Mother's inner enfoldment of her children could never cease. Yes, she has specifically declared that she would never abandon anybody. This, however, does not mean that she would go all out to get a person back. Her action was always guided by spiritual insight into each particular case. I well remember once saying to her about a certain sadhak: "I am quite sure that if you gave the least sign he would come back to you." The Mother answered in effect: "I know he will come back

if I call him. But the problem he faced in himself in the past will not be solved. It was a crisis of such a kind that it will recur in the future — unless his soul makes a free choice to come back to our fold. In all such critical and basic situations the decision must spontaneously come from the soul. I have to wait, even for lives, for the decisive turn to occur. Only with such a turn the true evolution takes place."

When the choice did not have a basic character, the Mother has acted differently. There was an old couple from France who after a year or so of stay in the Ashram became misguided enough to leave the Ashram and stay outside in Pondicherry in association with some friends. I came to know that they were badly disillusioned in their hopes of outside success. Two or three times I saw them standing opposite the Ashram and looking wistfully at it. I never had any special inclination towards them and I had also heard that they had said some unpleasant things about me to some mutual friends, but I saw that here was a need of the inner being and, putting aside personal dislike, I spoke to the Mother about them. I told her that if she could somehow let them know they were still welcome they would run back to her. I do not know what exactly she did but they were soon Ashram-members again. The old man died in the Ashram. His wife, after a while, went back to France because she liked to be buried in French soil. The old man's death was memorable in the sense that it was the first death in the Ashram's history.

However, we looked upon it as an exception and not as the beginning of a rule. I well remember the time when it was taken for granted that Sri Aurobindo would complete the Integral Yoga by a transformation of his very body so that, just as there would be no ignorance or obscurity in the mind and no impurity and incapacity in the vital being, the body would acquire a divine nature and be free from disease, ageing and death. What he as well as the Mother would achieve was intended to be repeated in their disciples. Not that one would be eternally bound to one physical frame: one could leave the body if one wanted but one would not be obliged to do so by any defect in it, any subjection to the so-called "laws of physical nature", which have obtained up till now. The death of the old Frenchman was not taken to



contradict this expectation. It was important as a fact simply because no member of the Ashram had died but it had no far-reaching significance since he was a man of advanced age who had joined the Integral Yoga very late in life: no one could argue that the Yoga could suddenly put time in reverse and perpetuate a body naturally gone far on the way to a breakdown.

Incidentally, another condition for realising a transformed body comes out in a talk recorded by Nirodbaran between Sri Aurobindo and his attendants. Sri Aurobindo says there: "Amal once asked the Mother if he would realise the Divine. The Mother replied that he would unless he did something idiotic to cut short his life. And that is exactly what he very nearly did!" The reference is to my taking, under a wrong impression, a huge quantity of a powerful drug prescribed by a doctor friend during a visit of mine to Bombay. I took forty-eight times the normal dose and was about to die. Nirod, after meeting me on 21 March 1940 in Pondicherry, informed Sri Aurobindo of my conviction that I had been saved by a special divine intervention. Sri Aurobindo emphatically said: "Yes."

The same point is made in a letter by him on 1st August 1938 when I wrote from Bombay after my accident that I was all agog to know whether I should pack up for Pondicherry and come away with my heart still below normal by medical standards. Sri Aurobindo replied: "You must on no account return here before your heart has recovered. No doubt, death must not be feared, but neither should death or permanent ill-health be invited. Here, especially now when all the competent doctors have gone away or been sent to a distance from Pondicherry, there would be no proper facilities for the treatment you still need, while you have them all there. You should remember the Mother's warning to you when she said that you would have your realisation in this life provided you did not do something silly so as to shorten your life. That 'something silly' you tried your best to do when you swallowed with a cheerful liberality a poison-medicine without taking the least care to ascertain what was the maximum dose. You have escaped by a sort of miracle, but with a shaken heart. To risk making that shaky condition of the heart a permanent disability



of the body rendering it incapable of resisting any severe physical attack or shock in the future, would be another 'something silly' of the same quality. So it's on no account to be done."

It took me almost ten years to regain half my vigour, which is all that has been possible. But, considering the old superabundance, it was enough for the Mother to base herself on it for the continuation of her work towards the goal she had set for each of her disciples. The nature of the goal is spotlighted by a short talk I had with her in the very early years of my Ashram-stay. I was despondent about myself and said: "I can see that I am not fit for this Yoga and will never be able to do it properly." The Mother calmly answered: "Do you think you know more about yourself than I do? I am not at all in doubt." Then I suggested: "Well, I may be able to do something in some other life, some future rebirth." The Mother's response was clear-cut: "When I speak of the fulfilment of our Yoga, I don't think of other lives. I refer only to the present one." During this talk there was no question of the body being kept intact for the realisation: the question was essentially of having the will to carry on and never yielding to dejection. This question, of course, held good at all times, as the Mother more than once reminded me in later years. But in the wake of my accident the question of the physical state kept recurring, and she took always a positive attitude. Even as late as 1966 or thereabouts she repeated that if I took reasonable care of my body I would "participate in the realisation of the New World". But we must remember that this was said before she retired from all of us and went through the terrible crisis of May-to November 1973. With her own withdrawal from embodiment, who can usher within calculable time the New World in the realisation of which one may aspire to participate?

As the Mother established the Supramental Light, Consciousness and Force on a universal scale in the earth's subtle-physical layer in 1956, the evolution of the New World in the future by the Supermind's entrance into the gross-material is certain. But evolution is a slow, zigzag, back-and-forth, up-and-down process, and human nature is difficult to change without the Incarnate Divine's pioneering

sadhana concretely proceeding amidst us and gathering us up into its own movement with its constant Grace. Spiritual evolution and spiritual revolution were a single prospect when the Mother was still present in her body. In my view, it can be the same only when she takes birth once more or in any other way reappears on earth.

However, if the Mother has changed her plans we should trust that she knows best what is Sri Aurobindo's ever-wise will for the world. We must go on preparing the field for their Yoga's fulfilment in the time to come. Hence the continued importance of the Ashram's role as a luminous rallying-point of the world's aspiration. Hence also the significance of the Auroville-experiment in international collective living, with the same fundamental goal as the Ashram, even though immediate self-consecration to Yoga is not insisted upon in so integral a way and more concessions are made to the common difficulties of human nature.

## The Mother's Compliments and Criticisms

The Mother, although capable of being a "supreme Diplomat" (a phrase from *Savitri*) when the Divine Guidance required it, could be quite uninhibited both in the tenderness of Mahalakshmi's Grace and in the severity of Mahakali's Grace — both the movements being straightforward acts for the soul's good and having behind them the Grace of Maheshwari's wisdom and the Grace of Mahasaraswati's skill in works.

We must realise that the same soul, for its good, could receive in clear-cut terms at different times the unqualified compliment and the unconditional criticism. It would be wrong to go exclusively by the one or the other. Each is absolutely true on its own occasion. It is meant to touch the soul, the true path on which it is at the moment or else bring it back to the right path when the direction ahead has been obscured by some wrong impulse in one's own nature or by outside influences of an unsuitable kind.

An example which immediately occurs to me is of one whom the Mother had considered to have "the nature of the Saints" but who happened to drift away from the Ashram after a number of years. I was confused —until the Mother explained that the subconscious could hold the very opposite of the qualities present in the conscious being and this opposite might erupt at any moment under the pressure of circumstances. If one was not sufficiently on guard, the upsurge could bring about a "fall". According to the Mother, the mistake in my psychology was its excessive simplification: I looked at one side with exaggerated emphasis and ignored the rest. To counteract the sadness and discouragement which I felt, the Mother wrote a little later: "I may point out to you that nothing irreparable has happened. Of course the further one wanders away from the path, the more radical will be the conversion needed to return to it; but the return is always possible." (22-12-1943)

Amrita had once referred to the person in question as being almost a part of the Mother. And, with the help of the extraordinarily developed soul-quality which the Mother had spotlighted, the invasion of the subconscious was eventually repelled and, after a long passage through a whole "sea of troubles" not only was the old profound relationship with the Mother re-established, but the storm-tossed wanderer came again to the old "haven-heaven". Now the saint-nature has the chance to be permanently at work.

The Mother's compliments are surely no mere emotional responses, much less tactics of convenience. They reach deep down to some basic trait, particularly when that trait has sent a radiation of itself to the outer being either at a certain moment or during a certain period. However, they must never be regarded as an all-time blanket certificate for a perennial halo. There is a tendency in people to publicise such encomiums, and sincere friends are liable to harp on these tributes, forgetting that, although the words of praise were most apt at the time of their utterance and indicate a permanent potentiality in the being, human nature is very complicated and there could be on the part of the complimented individual even a play of cunning, vindictiveness, dishonesty and various deviations from the Integral Yoga. On the other hand, criticisms, no matter how keen, from the Mother cannot be taken as eternal condemnations. They act on the contrary side the same role as the compliments. They hit out at the upthrust of some base attribute for a while and are meant to awaken awareness of it in the person concerned as well as to put others on watch against the possibility of it at some instant in the future. Actually, there is nobody on whom the Mother has not at one moment of another made some sort of cutting remark for the good of that disciple's soul, but if the piercing flame has gone home and the disciple has received it with the insight of his inmost self it could very well happen that the reverse of the criticism, a luminous compliment, would follow in the very wake of the corrective stroke.

Occasionally what looked like a complete about-turn by the Mother has puzzled the sadhaks no end. A very extreme case came to my notice a year or two before she passed away. A sadhak took to her all the required details, including the

photograph, of a person who wanted to be admitted into the Ashram. He brought back a clear refusal. After the negative news had been conveyed to the applicant, the latter had a talk with another sadhak and told him of the sad result. The second sadhak took it upon himself to put the man's case once more before the Mother. This time there was a clear acceptance. Here seemed indeed a poser. Why did the Mother say No and Yes about the same person on two consecutive days? Was she capricious? Was her judgment clouded on one or the other occasion?

It was supposed that the different personalities of the two go-betweens made all the difference. It was said that the Mother's answer depended on the way the case had been presented. Indeed it is true that the proper attitude has a say in all matters and that there is something called incalculable Grace in the Mother's dealings. But an ever-present truth-sense is also at work in her actions. There is a straight plunging into the heart of a situation and a luminous feeling of the future. Behind it all is the drive, sometimes open, sometimes concealed, often direct, often roundabout, towards the progress of every soul. I should be inclined to essay the paradox that the two contrary answers came not because two dissimilar persons carried the application but because the applicant was himself two different persons on the two days! The man who first applied was not the one who had already suffered the Mother's refusal. The man who applied once more had received the rejecting blow and was thereby a different man. He had felt his ego crumble. The eyes of his soul had suddenly opened and he then approached the Mother not with a demand to be her child but as one who was already in his heart her child and had come in search of his long-lost Mother.

I cannot say the Mother always thinks up and plans out her moves. In her outer consciousness she may not always know what the purpose is of the Divine Force that is her true self. She may commit what looks like a mistake on an occasion. I should state that, viewed from purely external stand-points, some of her actions cannot help being considered errors but through those errors there can take place what we may term spiritual shock-tactics. Something unexpected makes a tremendous impact on the hearer and carves

for him a short cut to a truth about himself of which he was unaware. One has always to probe one's own depths in order to realise the dark spot because of which an apparent misjudgment by the Mother has disturbed one's self-complacency. Instead of wondering how the Divine could make mistakes, one should ask: "Why not, if they help to do the Divine's work with a startling swiftness?" The Divine could certainly make mistakes, but even the mistakes are divine.

Of course the benefit of the Divine's mistakes can be reaped only if the sadhak is ready to look into himself with the conviction that whatever the Mother does is directed to the development of his soul and he has not to rest until by an inlook he has found the wrong turn hiding in some obscure recess of his nature.

Let me recount a personal experience. Sehra and I, when we first settled here together, had at our disposal a fine spacious flat. The proprietor of a flat which we had occupied on a short visit a year or two earlier came to tell me that those rooms which had been once appreciated by us but had later been rented out to another party by him had fallen vacant. Would we like to take them up once more? I thanked the man for coming to us but explained that we were very comfortably lodged already and had no mind to change the apartments. I suggested that if he were in need of a tenant he should go to Amrita and ask him to put someone there. This was at a time when the upper floor of our house, which was occupied by some other sadhaks, was soon to be vacated. We had it in mind to request the Mother to let Sehra's sister Mina occupy it in partnership with us.

A few days after the previous landlord's visit Sehra at the playground put our request to the Mother. Immediately the Mother with a stern face declared: "I have no intention of giving you the upper storey. You have already planned to leave your present flat and go to one you had once occupied." Sehra was absolutely stunned. She could just look her utter astonishment and come away much disturbed and depressed. When I learned of the confusion I at once wrote a letter to the Mother telling her that what she had told Sehra had been exactly the opposite of the real situation. I expressed my wonder as well as the hurt amazement that she could entertain the idea of our having such a deceitful plan



in our heads. I related what had transpired during my meeting with the earlier landlord. We could not help marvelling how information could get so topsy-turvy and through whom. I had spoken of the landlord's visit only to Udar. And Amrita was the other person who knew of it through the landlord's own meeting with him. Both of them were dear friends and I could not imagine either of them deliberately misreporting to the Mother. Nor could I imagine them not understanding the true posture of things. So we spent an uncomfortable night.

The next day when Sehra met the Mother, the Mother referred to my letter and said: "I understand everything now. But what could I do when I got that report from more than one reliable source? It meant not only deceit on your side but also the drag on me suddenly to pay the rent of your flat until I found some other occupants. Now it is all right and you can have the upper floor for Mina and yourselves." Here was certainly what one might dub a Himalayan blunder. I was never able to sort things out because neither Amrita nor Udar could conceive of any reason for the Mother's having the impression she did have. But I was convinced that there was some important point in the inconceivable actuality. I peered long and deep into myself and caught a strange velleity which should never have taken shape. It was as if we were not satisfied with the wonderful flat that had come to us and were on the look-out for something else. What I told the old landlord was true, for there could be no comparison between what we had and what he offered. But I remember that, time and again, during our outings in the evening we looked to right and left to know whether any apartment had a sign of "To let" for us to go and see the inside. I cannot rationalise this urge at all: it was something obscure and perverse, indicating a spot of ignorant ingratitude. The Mother's incomprehensible slash brought this spot quivering up to the surface and put a stop for good to the neck-craning this side and that for a possible change of residence.

The ingratitude, on concentrated thinking, disclosed itself as all the more out of place when I recalled how our flat had fallen to our lot. At the time the Mother first expected us to settle in the Ashram and sent out Amrita to arrange

for our living quarters he particularly sought to engage the very flat in which we had once stayed and whose landlord later came to offer it to me. In the list of his failures the lack of success in getting this flat was the most prominent. When our exodus from Bombay was postponed but its ultimate occurrence was certain at the beginning of the following year, the Mother kept Amrita on the alert for a suitable flat. At one point Nolini wrote to me that Amrita had found the best possible accommodation and that the Mother had fully approved of it. A few months later he wrote again saying that somehow the ideal accommodation had been snatched out of Amrita's hands: I was asked to come to Pondicherry myself and help find a flat.

I phoned to Navajata's travel agency and booked a train-ticket. The next day I went by bus to collect it. As I alighted at the stop nearest to the office I was hailed by a young Muslim whom I had met a year earlier in Pondicherry.

"Hullo, where are you off to?"

"I'm going to settle in Pondi and I am on my way to collect my train-ticket."

"Where will you be staying there?"

"I have to look for a flat."

"May I make a proposal? I have a flat in Pondi but my business has not turned out well and I want to dispose of the flat. Would you like to take it?"

"I should certainly like to see it. Will you put me in touch with your landlord and request him to show me your flat?"

My friend pulled out a notebook from his pocket and wrote a short letter and gave it to me. I thanked him and went to the travel agency.

On reaching Pondicherry I contacted Amrita and showed him the letter I had brought with me. He was amazed. What I had been offered was the very set of rooms that had slipped from his hands owing to the intervention of a third party. The third party happened to be the young Muslim who had later to leave Pondicherry. It struck me as nothing short of a miracle of the Mother's Grace that the man who had taken away the flat approved for us by her should have been waiting at the precise bus-stand where I had to alight in order to get my ticket for the trip to Pondicherry, which would decide where we should settle.

I believe that the tendency in us not to feel completely content with the result of such Grace was an utterly wrong movement. It is in my view also significant that the question of this flat should have arisen between the Mother and us from the appearance of the proprietor of the rooms which had been sought for but missed by Amrita at the time when, owing to certain unfortunate psychological factors of which I have written elsewhere, the Mother's plan to bring us to the Ashram could not be fulfilled. Everything hung together as though by some occultly planned "coincidence" to create an occasion for the wrong movement in us to be touched by the finger of light. But how could it have been touched without that inexplicable misunderstanding by the Mother which shook us up, sent us nearly out of our wits and made us cast about for some reason for the apparent irrationality?

The Mother's actions were always inspired by an inner truth — and the inner truth has many facets. Almost from hour to hour, if not from moment to moment, there is a kaleidoscopic switch from one to another, though not always in a very marked manner. Naturally, the Mother's direct and immediate insight into this truth gets expressed variously. Of course, a certain central mould of soul-personality persists throughout a life-time, but it is not a rigid cast either. Always the outer mental-vital physical being is a constantly changing mixture, and according as the sun-white rainbow-shimmered soul looks out or not, the Mother responds with compliments or criticisms, while keeping always the vision of the soul's ultimate unfoldment before her. In the story I have recounted, her action, impelled by that vision, took two contrasting forms, one of which was more bewildering in its radical sweep than usual. Most often the criticism is attuned more to the apparent play of a fault and is not so subtly oriented.

The lesson for an observer of the Mother's diverse "reactions" is that he must not jump to easy and final conclusions. Rarely, even one who has been very highly complimented may lose his way and his life may terminate not with a celestial bang but with an all-too-mundane whimper. I may end with an example which is rather saddening, especially to me who knew the person intimately. Sri

Aurobindo once asked Nirodbaran if this sadhak, along with another well-known name in the Ashram, was not doing the Aurobindonian Yoga, who was doing it? He also declared him a born Yogi. I remember how the Mother used to direct newcomers very frequently to have a talk with this friend of mine who had a radiant dynamic personality. Normally he led a somewhat secluded life. When the Ashram expanded and a lot of new activities involving youngsters came up, there was a sudden change in his poise. Later I could see a gradual loss of perspicacity in him and a lowering of the ultimate ideal. Finally he went out of the Ashram. His bent of leadership remained and he could influence people along fairly fruitful lines in the ordinary world-field, but the Mother lost all interest in his movements and even expressed her dissatisfaction now and again. His failure to consummate the initial lofty promise has been to me the most tragic episode in the Ashram's history of sadhaks' ups and downs serving as occasions for the Mother's compliments and criticisms.

**The Mother's Blessings — Soul and Body —  
St. Augustine and the Early Christians —  
A New Disciple's Birth — A Great Moment —  
Then and Now**

Life with the Mother, life away from the Mother, life again with her — this briefly was my lot from the end of 1927 to the beginning of 1954. And running through that three-fold movement of time was the basic theme: life in the Mother.

I say "basic" in a double sense: the support underlying all and the support not always showing itself through all the overlay. As I had appealed to the Mother never to let go her hold on me, no matter how much I might appear to deviate from the path, there was no question of her not being with me, but the possibility existed of my not being fully with her in my conscious parts. Here lies the relevance of the second meaning of "basic". And it is pinpointed in an exchange of letters between us some thirty-six years ago in the context of a course of action on which I had launched and which she had dubbed "silly". Referring to a communication from her, I asked "Why have you omitted those words which mean so much to me and with which you have always ended: 'Love and blessings'?" She replied: "It is purposely that I have omitted the words 'love and blessings', because I did not wish you to think that I am blessing your enterprise — I do not — just because I find it silly. So, do not be misled if I end by love and blessings. These words are for your soul of which you are not just now very conscious, and not for your exterior being." (18-6-1942)

A similar note is struck in another statement of the Mother's: "Understand that blessings are for the best spiritual result, not necessarily according to human wishes." The implication here is that the Mother's blessings may bring

about in the exterior life even what we commonly consider misfortune. If seeming ill-luck figures in her vision as the shortest cut for the soul to evolve towards the Divine, the blessings will allow it to happen. Usually, they work for exterior good provided this good does not markedly go counter to the soul's profit. Most often the two are compatible and in many cases no special issue of a spiritual kind is involved, so that health, success, prosperity flow freely. But when blessings do not manifest themselves in a favourable outer consequence we must refrain from considering them inoperative: we must try to extract the golden honey of their grace from the core of an apparent disaster. Then the very difficulty will prove to be Sri Aurobindo crushing our ignorance with his mighty embrace.

The soul's benefit, the soul's progress are the Mother's central concern. No doubt, she does not pit the soul against the body in the life of Yoga. It is never her belief that in order to develop spiritually we should neglect physical welfare, as though with the waxing of the soul we should expect the waning of the body. The old asceticism, the ancient mortification of the flesh, the puritanical disdain or rejection of external beauty — these have never been encouraged by her. Even fasting for the sake of chastising the body — leave aside for using it as a tool of moralistic blackmail against a supposed wrong — she did not countenance. Prolonged seclusion itself found little favour if its aim was a shying away from the challenges of outer existence. Indeed a Yoga called "Integral" could hardly subscribe to a lopsided growth of the being and would court failure if anything was deliberately done to harm the physical instrument of the evolving psyche: the final result envisaged of the Integral Yoga is a transformed, divinised body.

Yes, physical welfare is an every-present objective for the follower of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. But it is an objective fundamentally linked to the benefit, the progress of the soul. Apart from that central concern it loses ultimate importance. Simple to save one's skin and ensure corporeal happiness cannot, for all the acceptable common sense of it, be an imperative ideal. Otherwise no risks would be worth running for a great cause, no deadly struggles with a force like Hitlerism could be faced. And in a



certain confrontation that I have observed between the psychic being and the body's life the Mother's procedure was unequivocal.

I recollect the time when a philosopher friend of mine lay unconscious with an attack of meningitis. A telegram came from his sister saying that only a miracle could save his life and that the Mother should be informed. The Mother very gravely received the appeal. Evidently it was a significant moment of crisis and not an ordinary phase of illness. The next day she told me: "I have put the decisive force." I asked what that would mean and whether it would mean a saving of my friend's life. She explained: "The decisive force should ensure that the soul's will would win. If the soul wants to stay in the body but somehow physical conditions tend to push it out, it shall not be pushed out. If, however, the soul wants to leave the body and somehow physical conditions are holding it back, they shall not prevail. The soul knows what is right and my sending the decisive force will give it victory." Obviously, my friend's soul had no wish to cut short its philosophising career. For, it made him survive the crisis, thanks to the Mother's intervention on its behalf.

I have spoken of "life in the Mother" with regard to my deep-down relation with her whether near her in the Ashram or at a distance from her in Bombay. The phrase has for me a special connotation. I shall elucidate it by recalling a brief talk with the Mother about the way I felt Sri Aurobindo's presence. Whenever I have been at his Samadhi I have not been aware so much of him in my heart as of myself within him. I told the Mother of this peculiar sense. "Sri Aurobindo is too big for my heart to hold him. I am conscious of being included in his great form. I nestle in his heart, a small creature enveloped by his huge divinely throbbing love. Always he carries me. I live in him rather than he in me." The Mother commented: "It is really the same thing, but what you have said is the truer manner of putting it." My "life in the Mother" is an identical phenomenon.

I seem to repose in her, either with a trance-like yet profoundly aware absorption or with a faint far-away feel of the real Me separate from the superficially engrossed ego.

In both experiences She the grandiose Goddess contains Amal the meagre Man, suffusing the latter with something of the truth the Chhandogya Upanishad enshrines: "There is no happiness in the little — immensity alone is felicity." A hint also of the truth treasured in the second line of that magnificent Sonnet-close of Sri Aurobindo's is divined:

My vast transcendence holds the cosmic whirl;  
I am hid in it as in the sea a pearl.

Lastly, the truth St. Augustine catches in his "confessions" to God has come home with a touch of its poignant depth to the world-wanderer who had sought with half-blind eyes through year on year the elusive Ineffable to whom the poet in him had endeavoured to give name after mysterious name: "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee."

These words of Augustine, which I knew before getting acquainted with the Upanishads or becoming familiar with Sri Aurobindo's writings, stood out as the motto of my life the moment I read them in my twenty-second year. Some other utterances also of this multi-mooded Christian of the fourth century kept ringing in my ears. There was that powerful insight into the Divine Nature and its strange dealings with the world, which might be considered to have flashed out to Francis Thompson the "majestic instancy" of his *Hound of Heaven*: "And lo! Thou pressing at the heel of those who are fleeing from Thee. God of Vengeance and yet Fountain of Pity, who turnest us back to Thee in various ways." At the other end of the Augustinian gamut is the simple solution of all problems of conduct in relation to the Deity: "Love, and do what you will." Once the heart is truly given to the Supreme, an infallible truth-feeling ensures that all our actions move along the right lines. The soul's sweetness and light are the forces featured together here — sweetness of the inmost being's devotion spontaneously generating a decisive light at all times in the direction of the Divine. An analogous simple touch of intuition on the immediacy of the psyche's gestures and perceptions creates the utterance: "In the thrust of a trembling glance I arrived at That Which is." Such enchanting formulas of experience, however, were not reached easily. The frailty in the young

seeker found tongue in an endearing all-too-human aspiration: "O give me chastity — but not yet!" This turn of temperament was no stranger to me. Finally, how could I fail to remember those words of piercing regret which still breathe a profound fulfilment? — "Too late have I loved Thee, O Beauty of ancient days who art ever new, too late have I loved Thee!"

The words refer to Augustine's thirty-third year in which he accepted open baptism and entered the Church. I was more lucky, since I discovered Sri Aurobindo and his Ashram when I was twenty-three, but I too could not help and Augustinian cry, urged by the unique intensity of the soul's taste of God to deem no age young enough to excuse the absence of that taste earlier:

Enhaloed love, why flowerest thou to bless  
So late with fume of God my wilderness?  
Haven of glory, all-transfiguring peace —  
Won with what travail through the heart's dim seas!  
O the vain dreams ere this eternity,  
O the void hours ere thy Vast flamed in me!

Sri Aurobindo's comment was: "The lines are very good." It consoled me that the Incarnate Divine should accept my despair both as genuine in itself and as expressed in authentic art. But, though I came to know with an undeniable intimacy the adorable Dweller in the deepest and there were spells during which his proximity and even absorbing presence were constant, the ultimate direct inseverable poise in him lacked. When some photographs were taken a year and a half after my first settlement in the Ashram, the Mother remarked both that I was very photogenic and that I resembled the Early Christians. I had cultivated a fine beard and let my hair grow long. The beard was meant to be in imitation of my old favourite iconoclast Bernard Shaw rather than of any Greek Father of the first Christian centuries. But, in the context of the new life I was leading, the comparison with the religious, who fled into the desert of the Thebaid to escape the world, the flesh and the devil, was more apt.

In the course of time the beard and the hair grew more and more short until, when in 1938 I paid Bombay my third

visit, the hair became normal and the chin had no hirsute appendage at all. But some fundamental affinity with the Early Christians and with Augustine among the slightly later followers of Jesus lingered. In 1950 my wife Sehra's sister Mina received the initial fire-touch of Sri Aurobindo. When Sri Aurobindo passed away at the beginning of December that year she was startled into the awareness that so grand a being had lived and she had not realised his existence in spite of my having spoken of him time and again to her. She frantically looked for a way to come to Pondicherry while his body lay in state for over five days, but failed. What she felt with a remarkable intensity may well be summed up in four lines that occurred to me apropos of the strange heart-shattering yet soul-stirring event of December 5:

Till the fall of your body a void was my day.  
 You sank like a sun and made me your west:  
 O Deathless who died since in no other way  
 Could you be buried forever in my breast !

Yes, Mina was struck awake to the marvel of the spiritual life, even if the final resolve had not come. And in the meanwhile another influence was brought to bear upon her by a Christian friend who was preparing to be a nun. She presented her with St. Augustine's *Confessions*. After reading it, Mina passed the copy on to me. I for the second time in my life plunged into it. Although its author fascinated me, Christianity as such had no attraction by now; and Mina too outgrew its temporary influence when she accompanied me on a visit to the Ashram in 1952.

It is not too much to say the Mother proved for her an overwhelming experience. Her deepest self broke open. That typical sign of the inmost soul budding forth was in ample evidence: the almost constant vision of all kinds of wonderful flowers the moment the eyes were shut. A harmonious happiness overflowed her being. After she had responded thus to the Mother's light and love I took her to an institute of nuns in Pondicherry where some embroidered materials she had wanted were on sale. Its contrast with the Mother's presence and with the Ashram's atmosphere was tremendous. Once and for all the vacillation vanished. Like Sehra, like me, she went through the new-birth that creates

the disciple of Sri Aurobindo: she became the Mother's child for good.

My own connection with Christianity remained only in the fact that I kept harbouring the Augustinian struggle towards the Divine. There was no draw towards the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as revived in the Vatican's Father in Heaven, no draw even towards the figure of Jesus. What was common to Augustine and Amal was a complex questioning intellectuality, an imagination on fire with the world's varied colourfulness, a passionate heart wide in its sympathy but acute in its leap to the excitement of the senses, a spirit questing for immutable peace in the midst of "this mortal coil". On finishing a re-perusal of *Confessions* I wrote a general impression of its author:

"Augustine, besides being a powerful and piercing mind, is certainly a man led by the soul in him — the spark of God — towards the Light eternal and he lives in vibrant contact with this Light. But the contact is not complete: he does not feel the soul in a direct and total manner all the time. He is deeply, highly, keenly, hugely religious and touched by marvellous spell of the spiritual as understood in Yogic India, but he is not the full-fledged spiritual man in the Yogic sense. He does not seem to have taken indefeasibly his central seat in the soul: his seat is still in the ordinary human consciousness though at a great elevation or interiority in that consciousness' domain, so that he mainly dwells close to the soul even if not always within it. But it is often by the mind's will and not with a natural poise that he sustains his halo, and just this difference between abiding in the soul and residing very near to it and only sometimes merging in it distinguishes the religious saint from the saint who is spiritual. In the latter category are Francis and Teresa and John of the Cross. Although I do not have Augustine's morbidity about 'sin' nor his attachment to a formal pietism, he is a magnified and consummated version of what I am at the moment. His characteristic disposition markedly anticipates me and his conversion prefigures my own. But once the conversion comes, I should like to pass beyond him to a permanent soul-centredness."

When I next met the Mother during a trip to the Ashram, I mentioned my feeling of the Augustinian Amal. She re-



plied: "Yes, Augustine was a fellow very much like you." I told her also that I was tired of my life in the ordinary world and asked her to do something to pull me out of it. She smiled assent.

The great moment arrived in the afternoon of February 12, 1953. I was alone, resting in bed. Suddenly, in some bright amplitude above the head a silent command was given with the strongest emphasis to go and live in the Ashram. I felt one with the source of the command. I got up with a start and stood beside my bed. Almost simultaneous with the overhead impulsion which had strangely absorbed me into it, there was a pull from behind my back on a level with the heart and I seemed to exist no longer in the body but in some inmost profundity of flame, independent of my personal physical form. The words issued from my mouth: "I have made the crucial choice. May Mother and Sri Aurobindo help me!"

Sri Aurobindo has said that our true "I" is the Jiva or Jivatman, a non-evolutionary portion of the Supreme, an expressive part of the many-ness inherent in the One: it presides, from the above-mind region of Cosmic Knowledge and ultimately from the Transcendence, over the series of births in Cosmic Ignorance and guides its own delegate or representative there, the Antaratman or Chaitya Purusha, what Sri Aurobindo calls the Psychic Being, the inmost Soul that develops from life to life through a new mental, vital and physical personality each time. Sri Aurobindo has also said that when the Jivatman decides a turn in our career the absolutely definitive step is taken. Automatically this turn is reflected in the Antaratman. My "great moment" appeared to be an action of the true non-evolutionary "I", immediately echoed by its evolving truth-image. A sense of something radical and undeniable hung about my being and I knew that the road to the Ashram had at last been victoriously cleared.

But the experience of that afternoon was not merely a short outburst of Grace. It persisted for a number of weeks, during which I hardly had the sensation of living in my body. The body existed without its usual reactions to the world. Although it did everything as before, I lived



exclusively high up and out behind. In this condition I visited Pondicherry for the darshan of February 21. I told the Mother that she had done what I had requested her to do.

In an attempt to catch the strange event in a poem plumbing the actual posture of things for pointers to things to come, I wrote:

Above my head I am one with God's huge gold,  
Behind my heart God's white-fire depth am I;  
But both these freedoms like far dreams I hold,  
Wonderful futures caught in a cryptic eye —  
A light without lids — suspended timelessly  
'Twixt flickering glimpses of mortality.  
I am they and yet no part of body or mind  
Shares in their splendour: a nameless strength alone  
Possesses every limb. A block of stone  
Dead to all hungers, void of smile or sigh,  
The outer self endures the strokes of time,  
But feels each stroke flash from beyond, behind  
The world of man, a smite of the God on high  
And the God at my back to rouse from the rapt peace  
Of my stone-mass a shapeliness sublime  
That shall be God to the very finger-tips  
By the falling of brute superfluities.  
Treasuring that sculpture yet unborn, I wait  
For the luminous outflowering of my fate —  
Blindness that is a locked apocalypse!

Of course, for the apocalypse to be unlocked must take a long series of years: the Aurobindonian fulfilment is a glory beyond the dreams of all past Yogas — the total divinisation of gross matter itself. Many lives would be required now that the Mother is not on the scene to carry us forward willy-nilly and to expedite the process of transformation. But after certain critical experiences one acquires an inner surety because one feels that, however slow the movement, there will be no turning back.

In the wake of what happened on February 12 of 1953 there was the exodus to the Ashram with Sehra (and my dog Bingo) for final irrevocable settlement a year later, followed by a surprising little statement by the Mother when I

harked back to a feature of 1929. Among the several photographs of mine, recalling the Early Christians, one was particularly striking. Whoever has seen it has admired it for the suggestion of spirituality. I found it among my mementos of the old days and showed it to the Mother on May 24, 1954. I had written behind it: "To my dearest Mother with gratitude for what she can make of me in spite of myself." The Mother gazed at it quizzically. I said: "If it were not my own picture, I would call it "A Study for the Head of Christ'." "Yes," she replied. She continued to gaze and remarked: "Very interesting." Then I asked her: "Why do you say that?" She explained: "there is an element of acting and pretending. I should like to ask you why you were playing Christ. It is different from your present state. At that time you were trying to look spiritual. Now there is a great change."

This was such a bewildering announcement that I cried out: "It sounds like a paradox, Mother. At present I don't at all appear so spiritual." "Yes, but my comment is quite true." Then I asked: "This picture goes back to a period before I may have had the need to look spiritual. There was a truth pressing through." "Even so," she answered, "the reality is now."

The whole talk was at once a disappointment and an immense fillip. It rather spoiled my Christ-study, but it meant that she was very pleased with the new Amal and that my diffidence in the days after the serious business of all-round Yoga had restarted was ill-founded. The words I had written behind the photograph should hold for those very days.

Trying to understand the phrase — "an element of acting and pretending" — I recollected the situation in which the picture had been taken. My mother, brother and sister had come for the first time to see me a year and a half after I had joined the Ashram. I was afraid to meet the contacts of the world I had renounced. I used to meet them no more than twice a week. I would go to the French hotel where they were staying, and I would attempt to create a special mood, practise an attitude of aloofness and call upon the psychic being to put its mark on my outer self, my face towards the world. The new spirituality lacked spontaneous strength. It was like an unearthly phantom which I had to pull down

from its ether and throw like an aura around my body. No doubt, there were hours when the aura came of itself and the psyche seemed to flow in the very blood-stream. But, by and large, a steady effort had to be maintained and a kind of fear lurked, fear to confront the common course of human life lest it should prove stronger than the Deity within.

Later than the period of the Christ-photograph something of a wide serenity came as a gift of Sri Aurobindo, along with a fixed tender intensity as a boon from the Mother. But the triumphant sense expressed in the opening phrase of a poem of mine<sup>1</sup>—

I stand here for all time, rooted in God —

took shape a quarter century after I had originally stepped into the Ashram.

Not that the unending God-rootedness has put a *finis* to every defect of human nature. It may even seem that — to adapt Scott's couplet —

The way is long, the wind is cold,  
The minstrel is infirm and old.

Yes, many are the shortcomings to be got over, and the years are flying. But the golden seed sown in a moment of supreme Grace bears, in the midst of all impediments from within and without, the conviction caught in that line of Sri Aurobindo:

I, stumbling, clouded, am the Eternal One.

<sup>1</sup> *Mother India*, May 1978, p. 306.

## In the Year of the Greatest Difficulty

On the evening of December 31, 1954, the Mother announced that the coming year — with perhaps two more months added — would be a very crucial one, the year of the greatest difficulty because a great outburst of the Divine was preparing and the hostile forces would give battle with the utmost ferocity to stop it. A sort of last-ditch fight was anticipated. The Mother said it would affect individuals and collectivities alike. She warned us to be on guard and to hold out at all costs.

I must, however confess that I passed nearly the whole of 1955 very enjoyably by choosing as my special cross the most difficult poet in the world to study and translate and comment on. All such troubles as my friends went through were sub-merged for me by this poet: the Frenchman Stéphane Mallarmé. Grappling with his obscurity was to strive with the covering under which the light which is beyond the mind puts itself when the mind approaches it with its own terms and standards. An Upanishad says: "The Gods love the obscure." In an analogous sense Mallarmé loved it. Once, after a lecture, he asked a student to hand him the notes the listener had taken. Mallarmé said: "I want to put a little obscurity into them." Without that tinge of the elusive his thoughts would become merely mental. By a certain inspired twist he would distance them, so to speak, and make them suggest what cannot be expressed in the percepts and concepts to which our mind is accustomed. By the challenge which Mallarmé posed all the time to the mere mental, I felt I was getting in contact with a consciousness which made everything in the world a riddle instead of a plain fact and demanded an answer other than our normal life, even our normal imaginative life, could give.

I do not say that Mallarmé's way of conjuring up mysteries is the highest, the most spiritual. One can be mysterious

without being mystifying, and it is then that one is authentically mystical: there strikes on us a glory of Truth which dazzles us into an ecstatic inner intuition of realities, each having a precise form with an infinite halo. With Mallarmé we are left not with realities but with symbols that by their baffling vividness, their dynamic vagueness, annul the ordinary system of experience and create what I may call a pregnant void, an emptiness full of the promise and potentiality of a new cosmos — but that cosmos itself is not there.

Perhaps in that year of definitive confrontation by the unspiritual darkness of the ages, the preoccupation with the Mallarméan darkness which was a hidden illumination helped to prevent the unspiritual gloom from overwhelming one: it gave one a trick, a skill, an art, as it were, to live with that gloom and give a new turn to its presence so that it might be made, in spite of itself, to serve a higher end. Of course, Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* was never far from me and I tried to look at Mallarmé and interpret him in the manner Sri Aurobindo had hinted at in his correspondence with Nirodbaran while commenting on two sonnets of the French Arch-Symbolist. But the Mallarméan technique and inspiration were a good training and I approached the end of 1955 with a happy face and a brain healthily athletic with a ready wrestler's grip for supra-intellectual secrecies.

Then suddenly a grim shadow fell over my achievement. It was of an accident which happened in early November. The mischance did not involve my own person nor was Pondicherry its setting, but it affected me keenly because the one involved in it was my wife Sehra's sister Mina who was a close friend to me and whose coming to the Ashram had been linked with me intimately. Late in the evening on the Divali day of 1955 we received an extra-express telegram saying that Mina in Bombay had been flung from her running scooter and very grievously hurt in the head and lay unconscious in hospital. Although the hour was fairly advanced we ran up to the Mother. She was in an inside room but came out at once on learning that we were waiting for her. She took the news most gravely and said the situation looked indeed bad. She wanted to be kept in constant touch with developments from day to day.

Sehra worried a great deal the same night and the next

morning. Towards noon she felt that she just had to go to Bombay and be by her sister's side as well as near her niece Roshan who was naturally in extreme distress. We were told afterwards that Mina — a markedly beautiful woman — had looked horrifying when she had been picked up from the pavement where she had fallen off her scooter. One side of the face had turned black and huge and the mouth had been set in a frightful grimace with bared teeth.

Arrangements were made for Sehra to leave by the night train. In the late afternoon, as was her privilege in those days. She went to see the Mother at the Playground to tell her of her forthcoming departure and receive her blessing. Some minutes after she had left our house it struck me that I should rush out and see what transpired between the Mother and her. When I entered the Playground I saw the Mother standing on the threshold of her resting-room and Sehra kneeling at her feet. I hurried to where the parting was taking place. I reached there before Sehra lifted her head for the blessing. Looking at the Mother's serious face I gathered in a flash that she did not really approve of Sehra's precipitate journey. As soon as Sehra raised her head I said: "Mother does not want you to go. Don't go." Sehra was amazed as the Mother had shown no sign of a negative attitude. The Mother herself turned to me and protested: "I have not said No. Why do you say I don't want her to go? Let her go if she feels like it." I replied: "I am sure that you don't wish her to go. How can she do so against your wish?" The Mother's face was still unresponsive to my intuition. But some ray of understanding entered Sehra's mind and she, although puzzled, managed to say: "If Mother truly disapproves, I shan't go." I addressed her: "Of course she disapproves. Ask her." It would appear that Sehra had not once asked the Mother: she had merely declared her resolve and received permission. When she said she would not leave Pondicherry unless the Mother openly gave her sanction, the Mother relaxed her own expression and showed that she did not like Sehra to leave. The trip was thus cancelled and the Mother explained in effect: "If Sehra on her own initiative took it upon herself to go and be a help to her sister, my responsibility would be secondary. If, on the contrary, she threw herself into my hands and left everything to me with



full faith, I would become fully responsible and my direct capacity to save Mina would be in action. It was a choice between my staying in the background and my standing in the front as Mina's saviour."

These words provide an insight into the Divine's workings. They remind us of Sri Krishna's *Mahāvākya*: "Abandon all dharmas and take refuge in Me alone. I will deliver you from all evil. Have no fear." The idea of personal help, even the idea of self-help, are dharmas, set rules of conduct, which, though commendable under ordinary circumstances, grow obstacles in a life aspiring to be in immediate relationship with the Divine. Not that one remains passive or indifferent: one gives whatever assistance is possible, but the sense of individual responsibility is put aside, the Divine is constantly invoked, one's own self and ability are offered to Him as instruments and a deep equanimity which is suffused with complete trust in the Divine's wisdom-illuminated love serves as a base on which He is allowed to build His own vision of things to come.

Sehra proved a good medium. Here an interesting fact calls for mention. The Mother could act through her so well, first because there was a psycho-physical connection between sister and sister and secondly because Sehra's heart was wide open to the Mother. But the heart's openness brought about a strange phenomenon in the head. Mina had been severely hurt on her head but had become totally unconscious. Now, Sehra began to suffer from a strong headache as though some of the pain, which would have been Mina's if she had been conscious, had got transferred to Sehra and as though Sehra's brain had been acting proxy for her sister's and supplying the Mother with a focus-point for concentrated play of curative force.

Day after day the Mother's profound work went on. News was sent without fail so that some outer specific guidance might be available for the inner movement of the Power. Once there was no news. The Mother sternly demanded why it was lacking, and she emphasised the importance of a daily bulletin. Mina was unconscious even after a fortnight. The doctors were very much concerned, but the Mother said that the unconsciousness was a boon to the patient, for else the pain, at the beginning at least, would have been unbear-

able. Information came one day that the side of her body that had been paralysed was still immobile. The Mother put her concentration on it and the next day we heard of slight stirrings in the limbs.

On about the twenty-first day, when the unconsciousness still kept on, I spoke to the Mother: "Mina has always been very receptive to my influence. It has often happened that things like an ache anywhere and even a state of fever got cured when I tried to channel your presence and power to her. I have the feeling that if I went to Bombay and attempted in your name to draw Mina out of her unconsciousness something in her would respond." The Mother kept silent for a few seconds and then answered: "I know that you can help. But let us wait a little longer. If no change takes place I shall send you to Bombay. But don't leave the Ashram just yet." Two days after this talk we were informed that Mina had come out of her dead stupor of more than three weeks. There was no sign of paralysis left but she could not speak at all except two words: "Mother" — "Sehra." My sister Minnie who had been visiting her all along visited her now too and reported to us her conviction that Mina understood everything said to her and what was going on but could not exteriorise her understanding. An eminent neuro-surgeon was called to examine her. He put her through some tests and arrived at the conclusion that she would never recover normal speech. Thinking she was not looking, he sombrely shook his head. She caught sight of him and burst into tears. By a curious quirk of fate, this neurosurgeon met with an accident three or four weeks later and lost his own speech completely. He had to be sent to London to undergo a long treatment. Mina, on the other hand, began to increase her vocabulary though at times the words got mixed and one word popped out instead of another. When she returned home she tried to read a paper. The whole mass of printed matter seemed one black blotch. But gradually, as time went on, the eyes came to discern things on a page, though not to her satisfaction. She was in a hurry to come to the Ashram where, she felt, her hope of full recovery lay. Within a month of her home-coming she was on board a train, accompanied by a nurse. She would reach Pondicherry on January 6, 1956.

I went to Madras to receive her. She was extremely glad

to see me. I noted that she had regained her old looks. The monstrous disfiguration had entirely vanished. This was enough of a wonder. The three of us reached Pondicherry happily and Mina's meetings with the Mother started again. She told the Mother in her broken way that she could not say words with ease and frequency except "Mother" and "Sri Aurobindo". Hearing this, Champaklal who was somewhere near rushed into the Mother's presence and exclaimed: "Ideal condition, Mother, ideal condition! I also want to say nothing except these names." The Mother stared in a bit of amazement. So did all of us who were present. What was at the back of Champaklal's mind seemed to be that he was often led into useless talk and that only the names of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo with their deep spiritual associations made speech worthwhile. Several years later a difficulty developed in Champaklal's articulation. There was nothing organically wrong: some dietary deficiency appeared to be responsible. A period of silence was advised and treatment prescribed. The regime of keeping quiet suited Champaklal very much and he made it a rule not to speak even after the stipulated time was over and he had considerably improved. He has gone far beyond the "ideal condition" he had dreamt of, for now invariably he scribbles on a writing-pad in answer to people's questions and the two Great Names themselves do not get audibly uttered. They certainly keep ringing within him, since he is all the while in a state of radiant joy and the absence of speech obviously helps in his case to conserve as well as communicate it better.

Mina made an earnest plea to the Mother that she might be given again the capacity to read her works and Sri Aurobindo's. She said she did not care whether she could talk as freely as before, but would be endlessly grateful if she could intelligently absorb herself in their marvellous books. Her prayer was granted.

Her speech too returned to normal. At one stage Dr. Sanyal proposed that if improvement was not rapid enough he might be permitted to drill a small hole on one side of the skull and let out whatever obstructive blood had collected there. No need arose for the operation. Mina had complete faith in the Mother and knew how to be patient. Little

"howlers" were taken by her as part of the day's work. With her overflowing sense of humour she would laugh at her own occasional verbal misfires. I am sure she will not mind my citing one of the instances which provoked her own hilarity. She had presented to the Mother a beautiful large aquamarine. The Mother had it fixed in a headband. Mina, seeing it worn upon the Mother's brow, was pleased beyond measure and recounted to me that her "aquarium" was being carried by the Mother on her head.

Actually, Mina in Bombay had set up an elaborate aquarium in her flat and she is an expert in fish-lore. Born under the astrological sign "Pisces" on February 28, she might be expected to be so — and we might expect her also to take spontaneously to life with the Mother, who, born on February 21, was herself a Piscine and by virtue of this early date the primary one. Like the first member of the Hindu procession of Ten Avatars — the Fish-Incarnation of Vishnu who led Manu, the Indian Adam-cum-Noah, to safety over the World-Flood — such a Piscine would most appropriately be our leader through the super-Mallarméan mysteries which Sri Aurobindo in a line of *Savitri* calls "the soul's great deeps". And what more natural than that with her love she should bear safely a wounded fish-child of hers across the profundities during that period when the blackest of black winds blew over the adventure of the Integral Yoga: 1955?

## The Most Difficult Year and Chamanlal's Interview

I have already written about the crucial year 1955 and recounted how the Mother saved my sister-in-law Mina from the consequences of a terrible accident. Now I may put on record a peculiar situation which arose apropos of the talk the Mother had given about that year at the Playground on December 31, 1954. The situation is partly connected with a much-publicised interview the journalist Chamanlal had with the Mother in February the same year.<sup>1</sup>

Chamanlal reported, among other things, the Mother as saying that 1957 would be a very significant year. India would start playing a glorious spiritual role in the world — and two features of great importance would be: (1) the complete dissolution of Pakistan by inner dislocation, (2) the serious possibility of a World War owing to America and Russia falling out over India. The Mother, according to chamanlal, quoted Sri Aurobindo as having predicted these features.

When she had concluded her talk on 12 January 1955, a few questions were put to her by one of the brightest students of our Education Centre: Manoj Dasgupta. He asked: "You have said that in 1955 the hostile forces will try to give a tremendous blow. If we prove incapable of getting the victory, will the transformation at which our Yoga aims be considerably retarded?" The Mother replied with a grave face: "It will be retarded for many centuries. It is just this retardation that the hostile forces are attempting to bring about. And in spiritual matters up to the present they have always succeeded in their delaying tactics. Always the result has been: 'It will be done some other time.' And the other time may be hundreds of years later or even thousands of years.

<sup>1</sup> See *Mother India*, March 1954, pp. 1-3.

Now again the same trick is being tried." Then Manoj obviously remembered Chamanlal's report of the Mother's statement: "Yes, I feel there is a serious possibility of a Russo-American war and if the war does come in spite of our efforts to stop it, our spiritual work will be finished." Prompted by his remembrance, Manoj asked: "Will the crisis of a possible World War which, in Chamanlal's interview with you, you have put in 1957 arrive in 1955 ahead of time or is it something quite other than the attack of the hostiles in the coming year?"

Hearing that she was said to have envisaged a World War in 1957, the Mother asserted twice in a firm loud tone: "Jamais de ma vie!" ("Never in my life!"). Everybody was amazed. Chamanlal's whole report had been declared by the Mother at the time as authentic. I recall Nolini bringing her written confirmation authorising Chamanlal to broadcast the interview in any way he liked. Here was a stunning contradiction: how were we to reconcile that thorough approval with this downright refusal to accept responsibility for one of the momentous items?

After the Playground sessions I walked to the Ashram in the company of Nolini and Amrita. I reminded them of what the Mother had clearly pronounced to be genuine reportage. Amrita's memory seemed very vague. When I turned to Nolini who had transmitted to us her pronouncement, he also appeared unable to recollect. "Was it like that?" he asked. "Most certainly," I answered. There was no further conversation. But the next morning I took to Nolini a copy of Chamanlal's interview and made him read the passage in question. There was no ambiguity now. So I requested him to bring the matter to the Mother's notice and ask for a clarification.

When he had seen the Mother as he daily did, I inquired if the issue had been raised. He said: "No." Evidently he did not wish to face the Mother with the glaring contradiction. I told Amrita that Nolini had not carried out the work I had proposed to him. Amrita remarked: "How can he dare to ask her anything after she had so forcibly said 'Jamais!' twice?"

What then was to be done? I used to be at times a little "pushy" with the Mother and she accepted this trait in me on several occasions while putting it down in no dubious



manner on some others because of a wrong attitude on my side. I decided to write a frank letter, but with the right attitude so that the situation would be fully presented to her and yet no directly critical accent smacking of any uppishness would come into my words. My letter ran:

"I have adopted as a motto the words spoken by André once when, as a boy, he found your in-laws doubting you in something or other: 'Ma mère est la vérité!'<sup>1</sup> I, therefore, do not doubt at all that you never gave Chamanlal the year 1957 as the year of the crisis. But then how did the interview-report in which 1957 appears in such a role get authorised by you? Here is a passage in which not only you but also Sri Aurobindo is committed by words attributed to you:

The Year 1957 will be a very important year in Indian history, like 1757 and 1857. It will see the end of Pakistan and there are serious possibilities of a Russo-American war over India. Many politicians expected war in March 1950 and they came to Sri Aurobindo and told him about it. But Sri Aurobindo did not believe. Once when I asked him he definitely said. 'The crisis will only come in 1957.'

"How did you authorise this? The interview-report has gone far and wide, even to the State Department at Washington, as perfectly authentic. So perhaps it may be necessary to correct it?

"One explanation given for your passing as genuine the above statement is that occasionally you are in a tranced or absorbed condition when things are read to you and so you miss certain portions while believing that you have heard everything.

"As there is no rival explanation, we may say, as the scientists do, that this hypothesis holds the field — provided, of course, you, who are being hypothetised about, agree to it."

I took my letter to Nolini and told him: "I don't want you to get into any embarrassing position, but if you take a letter from me and simply read it out at my request, whatever

<sup>1</sup> "My mother is truth!"

unpleasantness may come about will be directed at me. Will you kindly do this job on my behalf? It surely does need doing." He consented and the deed was, as Christopher Smart would have phrased it. "determined, dared, and done".

Nolini brought no verbal or written reply. I thought the Mother might require some time to frame an answer and I might have to wait for a day or two. But actually she answered me the same evening at the playground. When my turn came to receive the usual quota of groundnuts from her hands, she held my fingers, looked up from her seated position and said with a smile: "The fellow has made a big confusion. Several things have been mixed up. But, since it has been said in that way, it may even come true, though we shall try to stop it."

Actually, in 1957, the U.S.A. and Communist China, which at that time was none else than Russia under a mask, came within an ace of armed conflict because of a bold yet necessary action by the former over the island of Quemoy between mainland China and Taiwan which was in the hand of Chiang Kaishek. The crisis was averted. India did not come into the picture at all.

As for Chamanlal's "big confusion" which escaped scrutiny when it was formulated, we may clear it with the help of some hints by the Mother. Her real stance may be summed up as follows. We may take her as saying:

"I did not speak of any crisis as coming in 1957. In Chamanlal's account several points that were separate have been run together. A three-stepped series of possibilities has got jumbled and the different steps fused. There is first the crisis coming before 1957: that is to say, in 1955, as I have told you. Then there is the clearing of the crisis: the victory. As a result of the victory, there is the beginning of a new period in 1957: that year marks the completion of what has gone and it ushers in a time in which India will have the splendid opportunity of being the Guru of the world. It is because of the decisive commencement of this glorious future in 1957 that 1957 is as important in India's history as in their own ways 1757, the year of the Battle of Plassey which brought India into British hands, and 1857, the date of the so-called Indian Mutiny against British domination. Now you

have the correct sequence of the possibilities in front of you.

"A World War such as I have spoken of in the interview is not ruled out: its threat is part of the anticipated difficulties in 1955. This threat has not been put in 1957 by either Sri Aurobindo or myself. That wrong impression should be dispelled from the mind, no matter how things have been expressed in Chamanlal's report."

In fact, it is impossible for the Mother to have alluded to a global conflict in 1957, for she was expecting a great spiritual event in 1956 — the event which proved to be the manifestation of the Supermind's light, force and consciousness in the subtle-physical layer of the earth. In the wake of such a tremendous outburst of the Divine the possibility of a World War would be extremely meagre, if not even nil.

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While in relation to both 1955 and 1957 about the topic of Chamanlal's interview, I may dwell a little on some other statements attributed in it to the Mother. These statements concern Pakistan as it was in 1954. The Mother is reported as saying: "When India was partitioned I asked Sri Aurobindo what he thought of the future of Pakistan. I asked him how long it would last. Without hesitation Sri Aurobindo said. 'Ten years.'" When Chamanlal, after discussing the menace of a World War, asked: "How will the dissolution of Pakistan come about if there is no war?", the Mother answered: "It may be by inner dislocation."

Unlike as with the subject of a World War, the Mother never denied having made the above pronouncements for 1957. But they have puzzled people a great deal in view of the apparent non-fulfilment of the prophecy ascribed to Sri Aurobindo. Inquiries came to Nolini in 1958 from all quarters and no definite reply went out. There was a general playing of variations on the theme the Mother herself had set immediately after the words about "inner dislocation". She had added: "Occult forces must not speak about how the things will happen." Now it was suggested that too much talk and publicity had been made and in consequence hostile forces had queered the pitch. One of those who were

most worried was a pious old man named Acharya Abhaydev who was in sincere sympathy with Sri Aurobindo's work. On a visit to the Ashram he talked to Nolini and sent through him a question to the Mother about the "failure" of the prophecy. The Mother with that divine levity which always went hand in hand with divine gravity in all her acts answered: "Surely, the Divine, like everybody else, has a right to change His mind."

Poor Abhaydev scratched his head all the more. In desperation he presented himself one morning at my personal *Mother-India* office. This office was located in a large beautiful garden-environment which had led me to abbreviate the description of it as "Editor's den to the designation "Eden". The prelapsarian atmosphere had little effect on Abhaydev. His face, usually extra-emaciated, looked now super-sad, as if what oppressed him was not that Adam had fallen but there seemed to be a Fall of God Himself. How could a prediction by Sri Aurobindo cited so emphatically by the Mother be confronted by a Pakistan appearing to stand quite solidly even though 1957 had passed? Was nothing to be said on behalf of the Divine Consciousness? Would nobody elucidate the situation and render the non-fulfilment more understandable in concrete terms?

When Abhaydev poured out to me his tale of woe, I startled him with the quiet affirmation: "I have an answer." He pleaded for a disclosure of it. I said: "I shall first have to put it before the Mother. If she approves of it and agrees to my showing it to you, I shall call you again to receive it." I typed out my view and sent it to the Mother through Nolini. Nolini conveyed to me the Mother's permission to acquaint Abhaydev, as well as any other inquirer, with it. No doubt, the ultimate occult key to phenomena is beyond our range, but a certain plausible pattern of outer movements suggestive of it on the world-stage can sometimes be traced if one looks keenly and closely with the aid of whatever light from within is available. What I saw may now be safely published after a substantial interval of years, in order to focus a strange historical phase in the context of Sri Aurobindo's vision as revealed in the chamanlal-interview. The exposition I submitted to the Mother was in brief, simple and straightforward terms:

"It should be evident even to the most disappointed observer that during 1957, Pakistan passed through foundation-shaking vicissitudes. For, instead of politicians being at the helm, the military assumed power.

"To drive home the profound significance of the change-over, I shall cite the testimony of Pakistan's strongest supporter, the U.S.A.

"Owing to distrust of Russia, America had been doing her best from 1947 onward to build up Pakistan economically and militarily to stand up against any possible Soviet strategy. Americans had been seriously interested in the non-dissolution of Pakistan. But we get a bit of a shock when we read what the most widely circulated American weekly newsmagazine, *Time*, said on July 22, 1957, in a special article on Suhrawardy, who was then in power in Pakistan.

"*Time* (p. 10), called him in a headline 'A Confident Leader of a Chaotic Land'. In the course of its write-up, it commented: 'The nation is bedevilled by bad planning, corrupt bureaucracy, absentee landlordism, heavy defence spending.... Seasoned Western diplomats often wonder whether anyone can bring order out of Pakistan, even call Suhrawardy Pakistan's last chance.'

"On October 13, 1957, the 'confident leader' went out of office under a vote of No-confidence. Pakistan's 'last chance', according to 'seasoned Western diplomats', was gone. The already 'chaotic land' had no more hope of order and hence of an organic form of effective existence.

"On October 28, after Chundrigar became Prime Minister, *Time* (p. 26) again declared: 'Chundrigar promptly pledged Pakistan's continued loyalty to the anti-communist Baghdad and SEATO Pacts. But few observers in Karachi believed that his rickety coalition could muster the strength to deal with the nation's slide toward economic chaos. A reliable U.S. ally appeared to be getting weaker and, because of this weakness, less reliable.'

"Keep in mind the words 'chaos' and 'chaotic'. Can any others define the essence of dissolution better? To all intents and purposes, Pakistan dissolved and this it did in the last few months of 1957, ten years after Independence. The mere shell of it kept standing.

"The mere shell would itself have disappeared if India

had played its part properly. On the strength of private information given to me by Surendra Mohan Ghosh, I can say that 'feelers' were sent out to India from Pakistan for some sort of overall arrangement which would undo the stark partition of 1947; but they were altogether discouraged. Had they been accepted, Sri Aurobindo's unhesitating prophecy would have come true *in toto*. Even as things are, we can assert that it came true in essence."

To round off the picture of what happened we must record a few events that occurred in the wake of 1957.

The grave disturbances to which Pakistan was subject are reflected not only in alert journalists. *Time's* reference to "diplomats" points us beyond them; and we discover that official America did sit up and take notice of the developments. The disturbances were so persistent in spite of efforts by the Army to stem them that even a year later there was keen self-questioning by members of the American Senate. Thus, the prominent Bombay daily, *The Times of India* (p. 5) of October 11, 1958, carried a report from New Delhi: "Senator Fulbright, known for the fellowships named after him, said here today that the large U.S. military aid to Pakistan was a 'mistake' and events had proved that it was a case of 'misjudgment' by American leaders who are new to business."

Two days earlier the same Bombay paper had reported on the moves made by the Pakistan Army after the collapse of the politicians. The moves had been initiated by Major-General Iskander Mirza who had now become President. *The Times of India* said (p. 1):

"The President's proclamation, running into 2,000 words, traced in detail the political events of the last few years and emphasized the chaos in national politics, the chronic instability in Karachi and the proven inability of successive regimes to solve the basic ills of the country. President Mirza concluded that the present constitution 'so full of dangerous compromises, is unworkable.' 'Pakistan will soon disintegrate internally if the inherent malaise is not removed,' he stated.... To save Pakistan 'from complete disruption,' he decreed that the Constitution of March 23, 1956, would be abrogated, the Central and Provincial Governments would be dismissed with immediate effect and, until alter-



native arrangements were made, Pakistan would come under martial law."

On October 11, *The Times of India* (p. 1) again quoted President Mirza's "own reluctant conviction over the past year that the country was headed for disaster through a 'bloody revolution from below.'" The Bombay paper went on to report General Ayub Khan, who was then the Chief Martial Law Administrator: "Talking about the take-over, he reiterated that the alternative to it was disintegration of the country."

Before the end of October, Ayub snatched the reins of government from Mirza. On October 31, *The Times of India* (p. 1) cited him as saying "about his military regime that this was Pakistan's last chance to escape complete chaos."

Thus we have, in the course of 1958, two Presidents of Pakistan providing the very evidence we need. Not only do we hear of "chaos," "complete chaos," on the heels of events in 1957 — expressions echoing the judgment of expert American observation. We also hear of Pakistan about to "disintegrate internally" and needing to be saved from "complete disruption", Pakistan heading "over the past year for disaster," for "complete disintegration of the country." There we actually get synonyms for the Mother's words: "complete dissolution of Pakistan...by inner dislocation."

Conditions directed towards the fulfilment, to the exact letter, of Sri Aurobindo's prophecy as set forth by the Mother, materialised in 1957. What then prevented the fulfilment as if by a hair's breadth? At first glance, one might point to the strong hands of Iskander Mirza and Ayub Khan who, as it were, held the fragments of Pakistan together. But there are facts which demonstrate, first, that they could come upon the scene only because India did not rise to the occasion of those destructive conditions which would lead to reunion and, secondly, that even they were not sure — as we might guess from Senator Fulbright's hint — of holding by their own strength the country's fragments together and required an *entente* with India, the beginning of a reunion.

Let us glance at the revealing facts. When the Pakistani politicians found their country toppling, they made attempts — as we have already noted in short — to read the mind of the Indian Government on the idea of a loose federation. At

the same time, perhaps partly inspired by a suspicion of these subtle antennae, rumours were afloat in Pakistan that India, in order to bring about an end to Partition, was at the bottom of the inner dislocation. Countering these rumours and keeping those antennae in view and representing Indian political thought in general, Nehru made the sweeping announcement that even if Pakistan were to ask for reunion he would refuse it. It is this wide-spread official attitude that stood in the way of the "dissolution" predicted in the interview.

Nehru's announcement was in the beginning of 1958. But a short time afterwards the "feelers" were no longer secret. Ayub, who had not yet superseded Mirza as president, paid an unexpected visit to Delhi and proposed joint defence for India and Pakistan. Here was the clearest sign of Pakistan's insufficiency and her call for a fresh start pointing towards ultimate reunion. The Aurobindonian prediction, so far as Pakistan herself was involved in fulfilling it, succeeded in entirety. But again the Indian Government failed to co-operate. It replied to Ayub in effect: "Joint defence against whom?" India in that period was doing "Bhai, bhai" to Red China and looking upon Soviet Russia as a close ally. If Soviet Russia was our dearest friend and Red China our beloved brother, we could militarily be in no danger at all. What other Power was there to pose a military threat to us? These were our only neighbours and they struck us as sure defenders rather than possible offenders. A joint defence pact with Pakistan might be construed by them as distrust on our part of their love for us. So the door was none-too-politely shut in Ayub's face in 1958. The next year (April-May 1959) the press was again astir with the same impasse. What 1957 had led to — namely, the break-up of Pakistan and the cry for reunion — was thus set at nought by the political myopia of our own country two decades ago. How could the great marriage, whose child would be a new world of the Spirit, take place if the bridegroom refused the bride?

A God-given opportunity went in vain. We may add that Pakistan's recovery, its wooing of Red China and the growth of the latter's subsequent menace to us followed our negative responses.

**The Divine and our Dullness — The Mother  
and Food — Not only Guru but True Mother —  
Grace towards Youngsters — Freedom  
and Discipline**

All of us have aspired for the grace of being allowed physical nearness to the Mother. The possibility to be in her presence hour after hour has seemed the greatest luck. Naturally I once exclaimed to her: "Oh Mother, I wish I could live with you!" Immediately she answered: "Do you think it is easy to live with me? There will be a tremendous unceasing pressure on you. You will have to be capable of standing before the highest idea of consciousness every minute."

I realised how far I was from that ideal. So often I would let myself slip from the psychic poise and indulge the trickster ego for little common satisfactions ! Those who have been chosen for physical attendance on the incarnate Divine have spoken of the inner demands the privileged proximity creates. Always the right attitude of humility, always the willingness to change what is deep-set in ourselves, always the ready response of the Wonder in front of our eyes: these are tests very few can successfully pass. And perhaps the dulling of the soul's awareness of the Divinity present before it is the most common failing.

For years I was more or less near the Mother every day from about 9 a.m. to nearly 1.30 in the afternoon. Those hours were the greatest happiness of my life, but I once had to tell the Mother: "I feel terribly depressed because I am getting used to you." Getting used to the marvel of marvels that is the Avatar's existence amongst us may be adjudged the saddest, the most deplorable fact about human nature. The Divine no longer calls forth from us the ecstatic inner cry. We look at a body like our own, at movements such as we ourselves make, and we forget that here is the Supreme in a

garb that resembles us in order to touch our ordinary humanity and draw it towards depths and heights beyond it. The light that comes through the embodiment — by means of the penetrating or compassionate gaze, the upbearing or enfolding curve of the blissful smile, the gesture of the hand to bless, to support, to lead — all these rarities grow too familiar and lose their moving power. We take them for granted and even begin to be careless about them. Some amusement or other of the normal life may send its lure into the atmosphere of Ananda: this atmosphere may fail to hold us as it should. I know that Nirod has appreciated very keenly the hours he spent attending on Sri Aurobindo after the accident of 23 November 1938. Full well he benefited from the Master's spiritual closeness and poetic creativity. And yet he has frankly confided to me how he would not only miss the precious chance to be in Sri Aurobindo's room after he had finished his duty but also on occasion appear late for duty: what drew him away and kept him out was his passion for playing tennis. I have myself once or twice given up the glory of being near the Mother in the forenoon and chosen to enjoy the Sunday morning show of a picture like "The Brothers Karamazov" at a local theatre.

When I complained to the Mother that I was getting used to her I thought I was the only unfortunate one, but I soon learned that what I experienced was nothing exceptional. Others could suffer even more acutely and be led to strange remedies. A friend of mine would find himself unresponsive to the various photographs of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in his rooms because they were there at all hours for his eyes. He struck upon the device of putting towels over them so that for a number of days the impression of Sri Aurobindo's majestic tranquillity and of the Mother's powerful sweetness would stop being commonplace. Then he would remove the white coverings and stand in excited enchantment before the revelation as if the Avatars in all their heavenly hue had burst upon the earth for the first time in history!

Yes, we could be dull towards the Divine, but the Mother never gave us up. Tirelessly she would tolerate our shortcomings, be sensitive to our needs and keep ever ready to pick us out of our trough of inertia or our slough of despond. But though she never stopped attending to us she would

rarely lose a chance to correct us. There was no compromising with small desires. At the beginning of my stay I was asked by the Mother to take up painting all the flowers she gave us from day to day. I procured some tubes of water-colour. She used to visit Lalita's room every week and I would be there to meet the Mother along with her. I took off the cap of one tube and, holding the open nozzle near my nose, said: "It has a most appetising smell." At once the Mother's smiling face changed. There was an expression of disgust. She said: "Don't talk to me of eating." In a flash I was made to understand her outlook on food.

She never advised fasting or cutting down whatever food was necessary. But she discounted all desire to satisfy greed. And greed meant for her not just the urge to gorge oneself with as much stuff as available. It meant also the lip-smacking turn of the consciousness towards even a single morsel. Nothing should be eaten with an appetite gloating on taste. Food which tastes good is to be cooked but from a sense of doing a thing well, from an application of the artistic feeling to the culinary operation and not in order to make the mouth water and the eyes dance with the expectation of enjoying delicacies. The approach to food as to everything else has to be calm and consecrated. Discrimination, yes — but no like or dislike, resulting either in a move towards self-indulgence or in a reaction of recoil. The one mood in front of food has to be: "May it all go to the growth of the Divine within me!"

The Mother assured us that food would be much better digested if it was inwardly offered to the Divine. This offering goes beyond the grace often said before meals in a Christian household. Over and above the gratitude for God's gift of the "daily bread", there has to be a control of animal relish and of the eager push to fill the stomach: the food consumed has to be not for personal pleasure or profit but to equip the body better for the development of the Yogi living in it, the Yogi who has pledged himself to the Divine's Will both internally and externally.

The Mother did not encourage any kind of food-faddism. Cleanliness and restrained spicing were favoured, but too much preoccupation with one type of diet or another implied for her a lowered consciousness, an extreme externalisation of interest. Even on the subject of vegetarianism which is fre-

quently linked in the East to the spiritual ideal she had no fixed ideas. In an institution like the Ashram she has established the rule of vegetarian food as the most rational, helpful and economical on the whole, but as between vegetarianism and meat-eating in general she has said that the kind of food consumed does not matter much until the stage is reached when physical transformation concretely starts. Then the body, increasingly Truth-sensitised by the Supermind, will have to be very selective in what subtle vibrations the stuff eaten may set up in the changing metabolic process.

Choosing vegetarianism for the Ashram as a collective body, she yet was ready to make individual exceptions and did not look upon meat-eating as something heinous just as she did not consider the sexual life as abominable in itself but only as unsuited to the ideal of turning all one's energies towards the Divine for a total transformation.

Even in the matter of that life I know of a case in which the Mother went out of her way to write to a young sadhak, asking him to give his wife a child even though he himself was all for absolute abstinence. The girl, who was a recent entrant into the Ashram and whose marriage with this young man the Mother had herself approved and brought about, had confessed to her that while she loved her very much she craved, like any ordinary woman, a child of her own. She honestly tried hard to live without one but could not feel happy. The Mother explained to the husband that the difficulties through which his wife was passing would end with the birth of a baby. The husband and wife were told to stay away from the Ashram during the time the child would be conceived and born and then return with it. The young sadhak could not believe that the Mother could issue such a written command in the teeth of his own prayers to enable him to practise Brahmacharya in spite of marriage. In fact he resisted the command for a long period, feeling he was being Yogic thereby. We often think we are doing the Mother's Will when we are following our own notion of Yoga. To be a spiritual child of the Mother we must blindly do what she wants and not judge whether it is spiritual or not by our own standards or our own understanding of the Aurobindonian revelation. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were not merely Gurus of aspirants bent on a razor-sharp



yogic path: they took under their wings a vast variety of souls at different stages of evolution: they were Divine Parents who knew the specific need of each of their children and did not prescribe indiscriminate cast-iron rules. Whatever they visioned for a devotee of theirs in the light of a more-than-mental wisdom they attempted to materialise, not sticking hard-and-fast even to their own general guidelines for an institution dedicated to Yogic practice. They preserved the broad framework of this institution but theirs was a many-sided plasticity, dealing with each person according to his or her evolutionary requirement and according to the insight of the Grace which incalculably the evolving soul evoked from them. To obey their direct wish in each instance was the basic law for whoever aspired to be a part of the New Life they had come to create on earth.

A surprise akin to the young sadhak's but in another context awaited a middle-aged Sannyasi who wanted to join the Ashram, He offered as his credentials the ascetic regime he had followed for years. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, while appreciating the capacity for discipline he had developed, saw that he was cast in a rather rigid mould and the relatively free existence enjoyed in the Ashram would be a shock for him in the course of time and make him react in a way healthy neither for him nor for the people he would be in contact with. No doubt, he was genuinely spiritual, but in a life-denying and world-escaping manner which was foreign to a Yoga for a divine fulfilment in the very terms of terrestrial evolution. So he was quietly advised to give up his Sannyasa, live in the ordinary world for a time, face its difficulties and challenges and then come here to confront the complexities of the Integral Yoga. The ascetic was scandalised and went away murmuring he had made a big mistake in thinking the Ashram a spiritual place. The very fact that he could not accept implicitly the word of those whom he had wished to take as his spiritual masters and that he thought of the Integral Yoga on the lines of his own conception of what such a path should be like — this showed that he was not cut out for the New Life with its diverse psychological turns and intricate material situations. The New Life seeks for the secret truth behind every side of mental-vital-bodily nature and for a central stance of peace and purity

amidst a constant circling of co-operative work, an inmost aloneness with God simultaneous with a radiating manifold of human relationships which have to be looked upon as the expression of the multiplicity inherent in the one world-creative Divine Father-Mother of a myriad manifestation.

Indeed, under the Mother the Ashram life, by combining liberty with light never constituted a field of *laissez-aller*, each member permitted to live entirely as he liked. Outwardly, kindness, courtesy, consideration, the will to collaborate were invariably expected by the Mother. Inwardly, equanimity towards all conditions, aspiration to the Highest, rejection of egoistic trends, surrender to the soul's intuition and to the word of the Guru were the ideals ever set before the sadhak. But there was no uniform law of action: each one's *svadharma*, every sadhak's true mould of being and line of nature, were sought to be evoked. A set of rituals was never prescribed: a wide scope of individual spiritual experience was accepted and allowed. The Mother granted the utmost freedom possible for spontaneous development.

All the more she offered it to the youngsters whom she took into her fostering fold. I remember how my sister Minnie's daughter Jean — later named Jayini by the Mother — was received when she came to the Ashram to become the Mother's child. I have already mentioned the way her need in the marriage which the Mother had sanctioned was tackled. What I have to say further will show another aspect of the Grace the Mother could pour on a young soul. Both Jean and her two brothers had been born in Bombay under the Mother's creative eye, as it were: her help had been received all during the prenatal months and they grew up in the atmosphere of deep devotion which my sister had always carried about her ever since in her late teens she first came into touch with the Mother. Gladly now the Mother welcomed my niece's prayer to enter the Ashram. Minnie had asked the Mother whether she would take the young girl into her care. The Mother replied that she certainly would but that she would look after the girl in her own way and not necessarily in any way expected of her — according to family norms or community customs. I took Jean to the Mother — a slim, pretty seventeen-year-old with a somewhat sad face and a rather restrained manner. After the interview in which the Mother

was all gracious smiles I spoke to her alone about Jean and asked her what she thought. Later I wrote down her words and sent them to her for confirmation. She commented: *Ca va* ("It's all right"). My report, which has been included without my knowledge, as well as without mention of its subject, in *Champaklal's Treasures* (p. 133), ran:

"Jean is a very refined girl, and she is extremely sensitive, easily hurt. Never scold her or speak harshly to her of force her to do anything. I find her very nice. But she looked so frightened — I don't know who could have told her about me that she should feel like that. Tell her that I found her very nice. She is very refined but somehow she has been living all tightened up. Let her feel quite free, don't try to put any ring around her. Let her feel completely relaxed and free here, and tell her that she should relax and just feel as if she were all the time in sunshine." (16-9-1968)

It should be clear that the Mother never had the school-mistress mentality. She was all for a happy flowering unique to each soul. But I must repeat that she did not want life to be without any discipline. She dwelt again and again on the need of discipline in order to realise anything worthwhile. What a modernist would call an "unrepressed" life in a "permissive" society was very far from her dream of the future humanity. Surely such an existence would be out of the question in an Ashram explicitly concentrating on the transcendence of common human nature and on the invocation of its divine counterpart. It would have no place, either, in a less demanding mode of inner progress like Auroville where unity with one's fellow is put more in front than union with the Divine. The Mother could be very patient and tolerant and understanding: she knew that Yoga could not be perfected soon and that several aspirants have necessarily to go slow, she was aware also that human unity is a gradual growth, but the Ideal, whatever it be, should be kept constantly in sight. While the multi-faceted being of man should not be compressed or coerced, impoverished or rendered lopsided, the sense of lightness and freedom required for its evolution cannot be properly developed unless one makes a repeated effort to resist the downward drag of petty impulses and does one's best to fight free of egoism.

## Some Spiritual Aspirants from the West

(a)

Some days back I came across the March issue of the English periodical *Encounter*. Among the books reviewed I saw the title: *Wittgenstein's lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics, Cambridge, 1939*. The editor had drawn upon the notes of four students of that brilliant Austrian who had become the most influential thinker of his day with his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. In the list of the students I noticed the name : R. G. Bosanquet.

My mind flew back to the late 'thirties when my brother had gone to Cambridge for a year and in the course of his research had attended some of the talks of Wittgenstein. He got to know R.G. Bosanquet, a nephew of the well-known Bernard Bosanquet who had ranked next to F.H. Bradley as the best and most original English exponent of the metaphysical world-view designated "Absolute Idealism". My brother spoke to the young man of Sri Aurobindo and his Ashram of Integral Yoga at Pondicherry. Bosanquet immediately caught fire and wanted to get into touch with Sri Aurobindo.

At my brother's suggestion he wrote an account of his search for ultimate reality. This account was sent through me to Sri Aurobindo, along with a photograph of the writer. The picture showed a tall handsome bearded youth. The story of the search had a deep tone and rang absolutely sincere. Sri Aurobindo went through it and communicated to me his opinion as well as the Mother's of both the search-story and the photographic representation. He said: "The Mother and I were both extremely well-impressed by Bosanquet's photograph which shows a remarkable personality and great spiritual possibilities. If he come here, we shall be glad

to give him help in his spiritual aspiration." (13-12-1938)

Seldom have the Master and the Mother given so positive an estimate and evinced such a glad and even eager acceptance of a seeker. Naturally Bosanquet was overjoyed. He planned an early trip to India. But some unexpected delay occurred and in the meantime the Second World War broke out. The young student had to join the army. Now the Pondicherry pilgrimage depended on when he could return to civilian life. From his letters home to his sister, letters which my brother was subsequently sent for perusal, it was clear that Bosanquet found the war a series of extreme horrors. A person with an extraordinary inner development was bound to suffer terribly in the gruesome game of mutual slaughter. Again and again he must have longed to escape from it. The escape came sooner than expected but in a form one would never have hoped for. Bosanquet was killed in action in Italy.

In the literal sense this was a most regrettable casualty in the spiritual field. It makes us realise the battle that is always on between the forces of Light and those of Darkness — a battle in grim earnest, the long-entrenched powers of obscurity even on the alert to spoil the chances of the Divine's work.

Bosanquet's death in early manhood has always struck me as comparable in its own way with the mortal collapse of Keats at the age of twenty-three as a result of pulmonary tuberculosis — a stupendous promise cut short. But, while Keats left behind him a body of poetic composition which will keep his name alive forever, we can apply to Bosanquet with perfect truth the self-depreciatory epitaph the English poet in a mood of dejection had framed for his own tomb: "Here lies one whose name was writ in water." Nothing remains of the philosophy-student except fragmentary notes of his studies. Who will dream that he had so bright a future in the realm of spiritual attainment? It is, therefore, with profound pleasure that I put his name on record as one of the worthiest aspirants to the Integral Yoga.

All the more fitting is it to associate him with the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother rather than with any



other spiritual discipline, because what Sri Aurobindo says apropos of the photograph implies a very unusual "psychic" development. "Psychic" refers not to a sort of mediumistic opening to occult planes as understood in so-called "psychic phenomena" but to the inmost soul which Sri Aurobindo terms "the psychic being", indicating the true spiritual individual behind the apparent mental-vital-physical personality ruled grossly or subtly by what he dubs "the ego". The emergence and activity of the psychic being are the key to the special process that constitutes Sri Aurobindo's "Yoga of Supramental Descent and Transformation".

The psychic being is the only directly divine element in the evolving human composite. All the others, even at their highest, function as part of the cosmic formula with its various ascending planes of decreasing yet never annulled Ignorance and of increasing yet still limited Knowledge, a gradation whose top Sri Aurobindo distinguishes from the Supermind as Overmind. But the psychic element has hailed from the Transcendence to which the Supermind belongs and so it alone can serve as the dynamic basis of the supramental action in its full purity in our world. Its role is complementary to that of the infinite Silent Self (Atman) which is needed to serve as the static basis, the medium through which the Supermind can descend without distortion into our world. Once the psychic being has taken charge of our whole nature and set the mind, the life-force and the body working in accordance with its spontaneous truth-sense, it is ready to be the Supermind's central poise in the cosmic formula for an all-round irradiation of our nature, a process whose final result will be a totally transformed (that is, entirely divinised) mentality, vitality, physicality. No doubt, the Yoga of the Supermind's descending and transformative operation carries in its train a lot of other experiences and realisations than the psychic being's progressive emergence and activity: none of the constituents of our human composite can be neglected, all have to grow to their finest spiritual potential, but, while they contribute to the ultimate richness of manifestation, they do not form the pivotal power of



it. That power is the psychic being — a sun round which they will brightly revolve to make a harmonious system of superhumanity.

All of us talk of our souls — and not always vainly, for most of us have some feel of it in general, but we are apt to confuse it with our vital-mental self. Neither the mind's ethereal abstractions nor the life-force's ecstatic sensations are an index to the real psyche. They certainly have a veiled touch of it, for all extreme intensities of our psychology express it in however oblique a way: the psyche holds the pure essence, as it were, of all our faculties and it works to raise them to their finest articulations. But its proper presence rather than its oblique penetration through them is glimpsed only at rare moments. When the sight of beauty leaves us utterly breathless in a perfectly disinterested rapture, when the enthusiasm for a noble cause leads to a deep and all-enveloping dedication of our energies, when the common man in us rises out of his rut to a sudden height of heroism, when the social self breaks from its routine relationship into a passion of love which gives and gives without any thought of return, when "the still, sad music of humanity" moves us to a silent generosity forgetting every personal grievance and flowing forth in impartial help — when any of these moments in which a Heart of extraordinary sensitiveness, light, strength, sweetness and amplitude breaks into the open from behind our habitual source of sentiment and emotion, then the psychic being has out-flowered. And a veritable Rose of roses it is in its burst beyond the ego into a blaze of devotion to the Divine, invocation of the Infinite, possession by the Eternal.

At the root of these three states lies the constant act of self-surrender to the Supreme. The Aurobindonian Yoga of Supramental Descent and Transformation can also be termed the Yoga of Self-surrender. And with such an appellation goes another equally apposite. Corresponding to the psychic being's natural gesture of what the Gita calls abandoning all set rules (dharma) and taking refuge in God alone, there is the action of the Divine Grace, the Godhead coming forward in all its plenitude to uplift the human instrument. And it is fundamentally by

the Divine Grace that the Integral Yoga can be fulfilled. Man's consciousness can climb by its own initiative up to the Overmind, the highest range of the Cosmic Consciousness. To mount further than this, there is required the leaning down of the Grace from the Supermind, that Face of the sheer Transcendent turned towards the cosmos. And for this Grace to operate at its most intense and immense the call of the Transcendent's own representative in the cosmic formula, the cry of the psychic being with its absolute gift, is needed. The interplay of the psyche and the Supreme Grace, the vibrant ceaseless communion of the soul that is at once a child and a seer with the Supreme Grace that is the outpouring of a Divine Motherhood: such in its essential form is the sadhana Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were so happily willing to carry on for young Bosanquet, insighting in him a rare capacity of self-surrender to the Highest.

Two statements of Sri Aurobindo's bring into sharp focus the spiritual posture we have been depicting. He writes: "In this yoga, the psychic is that which opens the rest of the nature to the supramental light and finally to the supreme Ananda.... If the inmost soul is awakened, if there is a new birth out of the mere mental, vital and physical into the psychic consciousness, then this Yoga can be done; otherwise (by the sole power of the mind or any other part) it is impossible."<sup>1</sup> Again, we have the words: "No Sadhak can reach the supermind by his own effort and the effort to do it by personal tapasya has been the source of many mishaps. One has to go quietly stage by stage until the being is ready and even then it is only the Grace that can bring about the real supramental change."<sup>2</sup>

(b)

Talking of the Cambridge Englishman I may not inappropriately mention the Frenchman in whom I felt and

<sup>1</sup> *On Yoga II*, Tome Two (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 1958), pp. 206-207.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 329.

observed a similar capacity: Philippe Barbier St. Hilaire, known in the Ashram, under the name given by Sri Aurobindo, "Pavitra" (meaning "The Pure"). When I first came to the Ashram he also had a fine brown Bossanquetish beard as a base to a highly intelligent and happy-looking face. After a search in the Far East — Japan and inner Mongolia — he had arrived at the Ashram a few years before me and established close contact with the Master as well as the Mother. His face kept its happy look all through — except on the repeated occasions when on meeting the other companions of Sri Aurobindo he would intend to allay the suspicion of "white superiority" common to those pre-Independence days and tell them with the typical semi-smothered guttural French *r* and with the *o* sounding as in "pot": "I am a brother to you all", and they would hear "brother" instead of "brother" and always hasten to reply, "No. no."

My westernised education and cheerful temperament, along with the same spiritual quest as his, brought us together from the beginning in a friendship which kept fresh to the end of his life. I could not help understanding why he had been renamed "Pavitra" and I was glad that the inner purity was free of all taint of prudishness and went with an outer gaiety which in turn had nothing loud about it. The Mother bestowed a lot of attention on him and it was reported that the consciousness which had manifested through Jesus. Chaitanya and, most recently, Ramakrishna — three examples *par excellence* of the psychic being's love-light within the context of the old-world spirituality which put its goal in the Beyond — had taken Pavitra as its channel for the new Yoga. There can be no question that the presence of the psychic being could be perceived in him by all who enjoyed even a little association with him. At times a school-masterish trend in his mind came to the fore and then one found it somewhat difficult to get the radiant touch. At its best, with its limitations at a vanishing point, this trend made him a very competent Director of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. But what rendered him a most consecrated Director was the drive of the soul with its utter self-giving to the Mother. The true spiritual child

in him was evident in the way he took the Mother's scolding now and again. Such gentle humility is scarce indeed — and it is thrown into striking relief all the more in a Westerner hailing from a psychological environment in which the stress on individuality is very prominent.

I remember the Mother's comment on an American sadhika's plea about her little son that he was finding adjustment of the education at the Ashram's International Centre difficult because of the "more active vital and highly developed individuality" of the Western child. The Mother wrote to me: " 'Highly developed individuality' means a magnified ego trying to rule the being." In Pavitra this product of the West helped only to place at the disposal of the psychically illumined servitor of the Mother a highly talented and finely trained external mind and life-force. The West contributed also a non-ritualistic and tradition-free approach to the Guru. The Mother herself occasionally surprised her Indian disciples with her own uninhibited behaviour. In India one is taught to shudder at the idea of eating from the same spoon as somebody else. Champaklal has told me how his body instinctively shrank when once the Mother asked him to taste something with the spoon with which she had herself tasted it. The devotee in him got immediately the better of the traditionalist and he did with gusto what the Mother had asked. I recollect too the shock received by Chandulal, our sole engineer and architect in the early days, when the Mother told him to do something which was likely to bring his feet in close proximity, if not actual contact, with an old bound volume of Sri Aurobindo's periodical *Arya*. Similar was Champaklal's amazement on seeing Pavitra blithely spring on to the seat, which once used to serve Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on Darshan days, in order to reach up to a point on the wall where a fixture was to be made to suit the Mother. No Indian would commit such a "sacrilegious" act, but Champaklal, recounting the incident to me, said "It is impossible to doubt Pavitra's devotion to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. I can never consider it as less in any manner than my own. So one can pass no judgment at all on what he did. It's all a matter of different conventions."

Sharing a common interest in the thought-structure of modern physics, Pavitra and I often met to discuss new turns of scientific theory and experiment. During these meetings many personal subjects also were discussed. In the course of a talk on his early life he answered to a question of mine about a certain period of it in France: "I can't recall anything. A complete blank has come over it as a result of Yoga." I was set wondering how such a thing could happen. But I understood it some years later during a visit to the Ashram from Bombay. My sadhana was passing through a phase in which the psyche had suddenly burst to the surface and covered the whole consciousness for days on end, a great warmth of aspiration and love for the Divine blazing out through the heart-centre and surrounding the body and leaping upward from the head toward unknown immensities. I felt cut off from all that had been connected with my ordinary life. The most astonishing result was that, try as I might, I could not visualise in the least the face of my wife Sehra who was in Bombay! After a week or so, the memory came back in a tentative fashion, but I had caught a glimpse of the tremendous life-revolutionising power possessed by the psychic being.

Apropos of Westerners turned towards the Integral Yoga I may criticise a common tendency among us Indians to underestimate the spiritual urge in those who have come from a sphere of existence where most of the taboos still lingering in India have vanished. Even in regard to the Mother a group of sadhaks in the 'twenties, when she returned to India for permanent stay near Sri Aurobindo was averse to accept her as an incarnation of the Divine — merely because she was from the West and a woman besides, while all the Avatars of tradition had been Indians and, furthermore, exclusively of the masculine gender. Gradually the Mother having been a 'Frenchwoman' stood as no bar to the worship offered her by thousands of Indians. In fact, Amrita once remarked to me; "What a difference for the worse would be there if an Indian instead of A European lady were at the head of this Ashram!" However, a prejudice continues in some quarters against Western aspirants.



No doubt, a few of them are rather brash and conceited and take spiritual truths too facilely, mistaking small supernormal experiences for lofty realisations. A visiting American had spoken to me of his daily trips to the Supermind. When I made a mild protest, he shut me up with the words: "It may be difficult for you people, but for us it is very different." This was said years ago, but quite recently I was told by another American in quite a casual tone that he was living mostly in the Overmind and that a good friend of his in the States was constantly going to and fro between Overmind and Supermind. Nor is such commuting confined to Americans. A small number of Europeans are equally prone to spiritual megalomania. On 24 February 1973 the Mother is on record as saying: "In Auroville there are people who believe that they are already manifesting the Supramental. And when you tell them that it is not so, they don't believe you." In fairness, however, to many of my Western friends I must state my repeated impression of their genuine psychic urge, their humbleness in face of the realisation to be achieved, their dogged perseverance in the spiritual endeavour despite the heat and dirt and disease they cannot help confronting in the subtropical places of the East: neither bad health nor difficult conditions discourage them from the inner adventure on which they are launched. This holds for Aurovilians no less those who come to live in the Ashram. Not only I but several friends of mine have observed the admirable intensity with which young people from Europe and America live the life of Yoga — pretty girls who could in a trice get any man, and handsome boys who could easily have a good time, and many of these boys and girls coming from circumstances in which every comfort and any career were open to them. Then there are the Westerners settled here for decades: they have had the grit to stand against all odds and, concentrating on the Mother's Grace, persisted in their endeavours to know their own souls.

As for spiritual fantasies, Indians are not immune to indulgence in them. In some letters of the 'thirties Sri Aurobindo refers to the frequent jump by several sadhaks, all Indian, to the conclusion that they have



reached the Supramental Consciousness when they have just got an inkling of the "overhead" ranges. Thus he says: 'You were quite right in what you wrote about the supermind — people here do indeed use the 'big word' much too freely as if it were something quite within everybody's grasp.'<sup>1</sup> He also marks "an eagerness in the vital to take any stage of strong experience as the final stage, even to take it for the overmind, supermind, full Siddhi", and adds: "The supermind or the overmind either is not so easy to reach as that....."<sup>2</sup> As a general comment we may quote: "It is very unwise for anyone to claim prematurely to have possession of the supermind or even to have a taste of it. The claim is usually accompanied by an outburst of superegoism, some radical blunder of perception or a gross fall, wrong condition and wrong movement."<sup>3</sup> In one of the talks I gave a long time back I spoke of a fellow-sadhak who, on the strength of an upward opening to the Divine Light, harboured the delusion that the Overmind was descending into him and that henceforth Sri Aurobindo and he would press towards the final victory — with, of course, the Mother as their assistant. The delusion played havoc with him and he had to leave the Ashram. A wit coined a spiritual epitaph for him: "Undermined by Overmind."

Yes, Indians too are liable to fall or go astray on the Yogic path. Yet, by and large, they have a more pervasive sense of the genuine and the spurious in spiritual experience: a long historic background charged with realisation on realisation by numerous followers of various Yogas — Jnana, Bhakti, Karma, Tantra — is responsible for this sense, so that, as the Mother said to the Aurovilians on 5 February 1972, a simple and ignorant peasant here is in his heart closer to the Divine than the intellectuals of Europe. At the same time we must not forget that Western and Eastern are often mere masks: people coming from the West may very well have inner beings with that Indian background of spiritual history from their past births springing to life again in their present ones. Even otherwise there can be a host of awak-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 327.<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 228–230.<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 330.

ened consciousnesses in the West — owing to certain special conditions there.

One such consciousness was surely the American lady whom we all knew by her Ashram name "Nishtha". Sri Aurobindo wrote on 5 November 1928: "the name means one-pointed and steady concentration, devotion and faith in the single aim — the Divine and the Divine Realisation." Nishtha was the daughter of the one-time President of the U.S.A., Woodrow Wilson. She lived for several years in the Ashram and died amongst us. Few can show the strength of character which came so easily to her. The Mother had most considerately made her as comfortable as possible in the Ashram and even given her a special cook. Once, in Lalita's presence, she told her: "You are not used to a vegetarian diet. If your health requires a non-vegetarian one, don't hesitate to have it." Nishtha replied: "No, Mother, I will not have it — even if I were to die as a result." A declaration in the same strain broke from her when a physical ailment of hers tended to be grave. It was suggested to her to go back to America, be with her family and consult her special doctor. She flatly refused, saying with some animation: "They can take care of my body, but who will take care of my soul?" The conversations of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have many allusions to her. One at hand is the entry dated 18 December 1938, from Nirodbaran's *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*. On the eve of 24 November, a darshan day, Sri Aurobindo suffered a fracture in his right thigh-bone. He had to be confined to bed, and a group of attendants was formed. It is with these that he carried on the talks noted down by Nirodbaran. The entry I have mentioned begins:

8.30 p.m. N read an article in *Asia*, an American paper, to Sri Aurobindo on himself and Yoga. It was written by Swami Nikhilananda.

N: It is surprising that a Ramakrishna Mission Yogi should write on you.

Sri Aurobindo: It is Nishtha who arranged for its publication. He was a friend of hers before she came here. It is peculiar how they give an American turn to everything.

N: The Americans seem to be more open than the Europeans. Why?

Sri Aurobindo: They are a new nation and have no past tradition to bind them. France and Czechoslovakia are also open. Many from there are writing that they want to do Yoga.

N: Was Nishtha in communication with you for some time?

Sri Aurobindo: Oh, yes. She was in touch with us for three or four years. She has very clear ideas about Yoga and she was practising it there.

At this point Dr. M arrived. He heard the reference to Woodrow Wilson's daughter.

Dr. M: She must be disappointed because there was no darshan in November.

Sri Aurobindo: No, She has taken it with the right Yogic attitude — unlike many.

It was Margaret Wilson who interested Henry Ford in the Ashram. A believer in reincarnation, he asked her whether anybody in India could show him his past lives. The Mother accepted to do so. He arranged to visit the Ashram. Unfortunately the Second World War intervened to stop his journey just as it had stopped Bosanquet's. Like Bosanquet, though in peaceful circumstances, Ford died before he could have a chance to carry out his wish.

In relation to Nishtha's own death I may bring out a fact which may make an appropriate conclusion to this article on Western aspirants. The fact is an extraordinary one and I derive it from Nirodbaran. He has told me that Margaret Wilson had an extreme devotion for Sri Aurobindo and that the Master responded to it in an unusual way when she died. At the moment her demise was reported to him, Nirodbaran saw a soft shine in the Master's eyes. Never before or after has the attendant caught on the imperturbable face of the Super-Yogi a reflected hint of what a Virgilian phrase in *Savitri* calls "the touch of tears in mortal things".

## Some Famous People Admired by the Mother

The mother never hesitated to admire quite openly whoever impressed her as of extraordinary merit. Right from my early years in the Ashram — from 16 December 1927 onwards — I heard her speak enthusiastically of Ysayë. To her he was the greatest violinist possible. I had never come across his name before she uttered it. I do not see why, since, as I later learnt.

Eugène Ysayë, born in Belgium at Liège in 1858, studied not only at the Liège Conservatoire but also at Paris and from 1918 to 1922 conducted the Cincinnati Orchestra, made several tours of Great Britain, the last in 1923, eight years before he died, and won sufficient international fame. My idols in violin-performance were Kubelik, Kreisler and more directly Heifetz whom I, along with Lalita, heard in Bombay and even met offstage where Lalita out of enthusiasm took off a gold-chain from her wrist and presented it to him. I also knew of the almost legendary Paganini who had lived from 1782 to 1840.

But on listening to the Mother's praise of Ysayë I came to believe that he must have been superior to all of these. He could not have been so memorable to a being with such profound insight into the values of art unless he had been the very personification of the spirit of violin-playing. I remember her once alluding to his presence as having a head like a lion's. Even before she spoke at a little length about him in one of her evening sessions of Questions and Answers<sup>1</sup> at the Playground in 1953. I had known from her that something of Beethoven's power had possessed him or had reincarnated in him.

She regarded the musician César Franck highly for his pure psychic inspiration. Her admiration for Bach and Beethoven is well known, but perhaps it is not so commonly understood

<sup>1</sup> Centenary Edition Vol. 3, p. 106.

that Wagner also was to her one of the greatest musical phenomena, though not always of such unmixed quality as those two. I recall a special reference by her to one of his operas. I recall it all the more distinctly because I happened to distinguish myself on the occasion by being the only one to be able to name the opera about which she was speaking. She could not get the title from her own memory and nobody in the company — we were more than a dozen and a half, including Nolini, Amrita, Pavitra (Philippe Barbier St.-Hilaire). Datta (Miss Dorothy Hodgson) and Shantimayi (Mrs. Jeanette Macpheeters) — could help her out. With some hesitation I dared to whisper in the midst of the general silence: "Parsifal." The Mother gave an exclamation of pleasure and said: "Yes, Yes." It would seem that this bit of knowledge on my part — as well as at a later date the mention of 1066 (which every schoolboy mugs) as the year of the Battle of Hastings — established for me a reputation for practical omniscience in the history of human achievement, a reputation which soon reached Sri Aurobindo's ears through the Mother's wonder at all that I appeared to know.

Rodin the sculptor, a contemporary, was to her an outstanding genius. Her mention of him brought to her face an expression as of grateful happiness kindled by his superb art. In judging writers she distinguished between those who had an elemental creative force and those who were perfectionists in their art. She gave Victor Hugo as an example *par excellence* of the former category, saying, "Such people are not very careful, they may misspell or even make mistakes in grammar, but their rushing inspiration carries them on to great results." Among the perfectionists she listed Flaubert: "He does not produce in such abundance but the little he writes is flawlessly done." Perhaps among writers of her own day she admired Anatole France the most. His style struck her as the very quintessence of literary prose. Sri Aurobindo also has ranked him among the great prose-stylists. The Mother had all his works in her private collection. At the beginning of April 1955, when I composed a long essay on French Culture and India and quoted a sentence from Anatole France and underlined an English author's notion that it was untranslatable in a direct fashion, the Mother took up the challenge and, after explaining to me some fine points of

French idiom, wrote: "To translate France the most *simple* and short sentence is always the best." Her rendering appears at the end of the passage which runs in my essay:

"...Has not the agnostic Anatole France, ironical about the aspirations of the all-too-human, pitiful of blind pieties, shown also the irony of the negative attitude, the piercing pitiableness of the denying posture, when he penned that sentence of delicate inexplicable nostalgia: 'Ce que la vie a de meilleur, c'est l'idée qu'elle nous donne du je ne sais quoi qui n'est point en elle.' A sentence, we may observe, that is typical also of the beautiful directness of French prose in even the glimmers it gives of the far and the faint, a combination of the subtle with the simple and straightforward, a fearless use of the almost colloquial without sacrificing euphony. Paul Bloomfield remarks that this sentence is as mellifluous in French as it would be awkward in English if translated word for word; and we may add that the soul of its liquid elegance as well as of its pellucid poignancy would be a little missing even in the finest English rendering: "The best in life is the idea it gives us of a something that is not in it."<sup>1</sup>

The Mother had met Anatole France. She gave us her impression: "He presents his works as someone detached and cool, but in life he was a very emotional person. I could clearly perceive this," Almost a rival in her eyes to France as regards perfect French prose, though with a different style, was Jules Romain. His multi-volumed novel, *Men of Goodwill*, in its French original gave her great pleasure both for its language and for its subtle precision of psychological observation. She told Udar to read it. But when Amrita asked if he too could do so she refused. It would seem that its frankness in sexual matters would have brought it unnecessary trouble for Amrita's non-experienced vital being, whereas Udar was too blasé to be affected. I am sure the Mother would have thought of me also in the same way as of Udar.

It was rather surprising to see her admiring Lenin. Sri Aurobindo is reported to have thought highly of him as an instrument of progressive change in despotic Russia just as he adjudged Mustafa Kamal for Sultan-ridden Turkey, and

<sup>1</sup> *The Vision and Work of Sri Aurobindo (Mother India, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1968), pp. 201-202.*



to have helped him with his spiritual force to bring about the Revolution against Czardom. It was only with the advent of Stalin that Sri Aurobindo turned his spiritual force against communist Russia, Communism in its Stalinist "Asuric" form was anathema to him. Here it would be well to realise that the politicians in charge have to be differentiated from the common folk. Both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had a warm appreciation of the Russians in general. They are, according to her, a fine people, capable of devotion and self-offering, who were coerced into a mould not suiting their innate tendencies. Lenin, however, was esteemed by the Mother for his tremendous mental power. She once declared in a "Prosperity-Room" talk:

"When he suffered a stroke he lost all ability to speak. The language seemed lost to him. But by sheer exercise of his will he drew the language-consciousness back into himself from the mind-plane which exists independently of the brain." What he did is a curious comment on his avowed philosophical beliefs. A Dialectical Materialist à la Marx, he did not accord mind a separate status from the complexly organised grey matter of the cerebrum, and yet his own experience was obviously of a distinct mental personality dealing masterfully with the brain's shortcomings under paralysis.

Apropos of Materialism and Atheism I may set down what the Mother declared concerning fitness for the Yoga that she and Sri Aurobindo were exemplifying and teaching. "I don't care," she said, "whether a man is a religious one or an unbeliever. What matters to me is the stuff of which he is made. If he has fine stuff I can work on him. His intellectual opinions may be anything and will not come in the way of his inner response to me." Not only will mere spiritual belief fail to bring a man into relation with the Mother, but even spiritual experience can keep him still apart from her. I have heard her comment on a person who had been meditating with her: "People sit before me and go into meditation and are quite pleased with the spiritual state they feel themselves in — and yet they may not be at all in contact with me. Nothing may pass between me and them. They can be in a world of their own which has no relation with my consciousness, with the work which I am here to do." Of course, the Mother in her non-personal aspect would be in

touch with every kind of spiritual experience anywhere. What is at issue is the Integral Yoga of Supramental Descent and Transformation whose radiating centre was the embodied Divine Mother gathering around her all those children of hers who had in these times a special affinity with her mission and brought both their qualities and defects to lay at her feet in loving self-surrender.

In connection with prominent spiritual figures I have heard the Mother speak at first-hand only the Abdul Baha, son of Baha-ullah, founder of the Bahai religion. She knew him intimately in Paris and some notes of hers regard him as a truly God-realised leader, though he never drew complete adherence from her and she refused to commit herself to any set religion. On one occasion she remarked in my presence: "When Abdul Baha used to lift his hands, palms upward, to pray, I could see Light descending into him from above."

I do not recollect anything in particular said about Théon, with whom she had been associated for several years both in Paris and in Algeria. But I may quote a few lines of Sri Aurobindo's, penned in 1936, which have not been published so far, I wrote to him: "I should like to know something about Théon who is said to have taught the Mother in Egypt. What role has he played in this new manifestation of yours?" Sri Aurobindo replied: "Théon was merely the Mother's guru in occultism — he had some idea of the aim to be achieved, but got much of it wrong. Moreover, what was true came from his wife and was not originally his."

One evening in the "Prosperity-Room" that talk turned on sleep. The Mother said that if one could go deep enough in the sleep-state and touch even for a second the Sat-chit-ananda consciousness which is in our inmost recesses one would awake completely refreshed. It is not the length of time spent in sleep but the quality of the time spent that relieves and refreshes one. Somebody mentioned Napoleon's capacity to snatch a short spell of sleep even in the midst of the loudest cannonading on the battlefield. The Mother said: "The great actress Madame Sarah Bernar'dt had the same remarkable ability." From the manner in which these words were spoken, I could surmise a profound admiration in general for the character of that extremely gifted figure of the french stage during the Mother's days in Paris.

Discussing mental detachment, the Mother referred to Bernard Shaw: "He has a mind completely free from conventions. It stands apart and can look at things as well as at ideas with an unattached power. Beyond this I cannot say anything about his mental quality."

A stray remark about "Kaka" Kalelkar, a prominent Maharashtrian social leader, comes to mind. He paid a few days' visit to the Ashram in the middle 'thirties. Several people found him a bit of a Puritan with some rigid Gandhian scruples. But the Mother was pleased with him and said something like: "He has a clear clean character, a nature well-disciplined, a good preparatory ground for something higher."

During the Korean War of 1950-51 the Mother expressed a high opinion of General MacArthur. She considered him one of the great military figures of history, comparable to soldiers like Wellington. There was also an appreciation of his bent of mind *vis-à-vis* Stalinist Communism and its force at work in Mao's China in the early days of Mao's triumph over Chiangkai-shek. As long as MacArthur was commanding the American forces in Korea one might expect the right decisions in the necessary work of containing Stalin's ambition to get a hold over the entire world: one might also expect his actions to serve as a check on any gamble by Stalinism to start a global clash of arms. Her point of view was totally the opposite of Truman's. Truman sacked MacArthur for putting forth suggestions aggressive towards Red China which was at that time serving as a base for the supply of electric power to North Korea, besides sending out an unofficial army of million Chinese "volunteers" against MacArthur's troops. MacArthur believed that readiness to strike by air beyond the Yalu River which formed the frontier between North Korea and China would best deter the latter from open future participation in the war, a participation which could lead to Russia coming into the picture against America and thereby swelling the hostilities to global proportions. I wrote a long article in *Mother India* exposing the folly of Truman's act. The Mother gave me on 17 April 1951 a paradoxical-sounding thought-provoking message on the situation. It said: "We are sorry to say that the dismissal of MacArthur may well be one more big step towards a new world-wide war."

## Spiritual Life in the Mother's Light

In the spiritual life, even more than in other fields since the possibilities and the pitfalls are greater here, a proper assessment of oneself is salutary and helpful. Two generations ago Tagore said that although India was lying in the dust the very dust in which she lay was holy. Obviously it was in his mind that this dust had been trod by the feet of Rishis and Saints and Avatars. Sri Aurobindo's comment is reported to have been that whatever might be the case the dust could not be the proper thing for a man to lie in and that man had not been created to adopt a prone posture. Indeed, if the Rishis and Saints and Avatars are our models, then even while we may be prepared to "take the dust of their feet", as we in India call the act of *pranam* to the Guru, we have normally to be as they were — with our heads and feet in the right places, the former in the free-flowing air, the latter on the firm-fixed earth.

There is a true humility and a false one. The false is likely not only to make a virtue of disgrace but also to stand in the way of aspiration as though a limit were set forever to man's development. The true humility takes at once a realistic and an idealistic view of the limited state in which man at present is. It indulges in no anthropocentric vision of the universe, which would constitute his present state itself the highest possible point of God's manifestation; and yet there is a hopeful mood, an evolutionary vision, refusing the rule of "Thus far and no further." The only proviso preventing the forward-looking humility from turning into a pride of progressivism is that one should know oneself as facing always an endless Ahead of unachieved spirituality. This sense of an Infinite always in front is the Mother's definition of true humility: one feels that at each stage one falls short of the Supreme —

for the Divine is no fixed paradise  
but truth beyond great truth....

as an Ashram poet has sung. And the Mother said that she had met only one complete exemplar of such humility: Sri Aurobindo.

The Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo may be expected to create in a more or less degree the Aurobindonian stance in its practitioners. One is never allowed to remain entrenched in this or that high experience. A pressure is put to grow on every side and dare fresh flights into the Unknown. In other spiritual paths one is content to be a Jnani (Knower), a Bhakta (Devotee) or a Karmayogi (Doer of Divine Works). Here one is called upon to be all of them together — and something enormously extra. No wonder Sri Aurobindo once said that where the other Yogas terminate we make our beginning. The release of the individual consciousness into Eternity, Infinity, Divinity, is the basis for us of the release of Eternity, Infinity, Divinity into all the parts of our being for a total transformation of mind, life-force and body. Eternity, Infinity, Divinity themselves are to us more than they have been to spiritual seekers so far. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have been bent on bringing into action a power of these Ultimates more radically effective in earth-existence than ever before. As a result the practitioners of the Integral Yoga have had experiences which have scarcely been tabulated in earlier spiritual histories. But they are urged to halt nowhere. Many of them, if permitted to go into the common world with whatever they have realised along the lines of Jnana, Bhakti or Karma-yoga, could easily set up as Masters and shine out. In the Ashram they remain almost unmarked — and, instead of being complimented upon their triumphs, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have gone on asking from them still higher and deeper and wider explorations of the Spirit.

Aware of the tremendous demand behind their summons, we often felt ourselves falling short. In view of that demand, even the simplest summons could at times prove too difficult to answer immediately. To give an example in a vein which both Sri Aurobindo with his abundant humour and the Mother with her quick wit would have enjoyed. I may say that to the Mother's simple-sounding New-Year's Message of 1964 — "Are you ready?" — only one sadhak could answer "Yes" but in a sense never ex-



pected by the Mother. The sadhak was Narayana Reddy.

Occasionally the call was all too evidently towards an achievement unheard-of. Thus we were adjured in 1968: "Remain young." When an old sadhak was told this, he exclaimed with a sad face: "The first problem with me is just to remain." Age so obsesses us with its traditional associations of something physical which is irreversible that we miss the deeper meaning the Mother infused into the word "young". What she meant by asking us to remain young comes out in the sentence following this command "Never stop striving towards perfection." Old age, according to her, arrives when we sit back either content that we have done enough or too tired to attempt anything more. As long as we are prepared to launch on a new adventure of the soul or body, there is no onset of age in the consciousness. And the youth that is in the consciousness shows itself soon in the outer self. A glow is on the face, a suppleness in the limbs, an energy in the movements. The idea of the impossible recedes — and even vanishes the moment we fulfil the prime condition of the Aurobindonian Yoga: dependence on the Divine Grace. All feeling of inadequacy, incompetence and inability arises from the failure of our personal being to do the needful. This feeling is ultimately a sign of the ego: we have depended on our bounded individuality in the belief that it can accomplish things by its own strength, and when this strength has proved insufficient we are plunged in despair and stand impotent. We fail to look beyond the ego and to put ourselves in the hands of the Divine Grace whose possibilities are boundless.

Surely, personal effort cannot be given up in the early stages, but such effort must have as its goal a state of effortlessness in which the Divine Grace takes up our labour and acts through our being. To reach that state there have to be practised a constant equanimity in the face of people and circumstances and a constant equanimity in the face of people and circumstances and a constant dedication of ourselves and our work to the Supreme Lord, the Eternal Mother. Essentially these steps involve the abolition of the separative ego by leading towards the Atman, the Silent Universal Self one in all, and towards the Chaitya Purusha,



Antaratman, the Inmost Soul, the entity called by Sri Aurobindo the "Psychic Being", who is the true individual in the evolutionary process from birth to birth and whose pseudo-form in the surface of our consciousness is the ego. Here some words of the Mother on the ego's abolition will be in place, differentiating as they do the static abolition from the dynamic.

At one of the sessions in the Prosperity Room before the evening's Soup Distribution — sessions which included about two dozen sadhaks sitting in a semi-circle in front of the Mother — the Mother said in effect: "No matter how liberated one may be by withdrawing from the play of one's nature, the ego will persist in the play unless one gives oneself in utter love to a Being other than oneself, to a Divine Person."

This statement may be elaborated and set forth step by step as follows. Even when the Atman is realised in a universal poise free from the mental-vital-physical nature and there is no sense left of the ego in the inner consciousness, the ego still keeps colouring one's thoughts and impulses and activities. To erase that colour there must be in wake of the realisation of the static Atman a silence imposed by it on all the parts and then the emergence of the Psychic Being. Only when the Psychic Being with its intense movement of love for the Personal Divine takes charge of one, the dynamic freedom from the ego occurs. Even if the Atman is not realised, the Psychic Being in full play in the mental-vital-physical nature can remove the twisting and turning ego by its spontaneous self-surrender to the Supreme Lord, the Eternal Mother. And this self-surrender will be most genuine, complete and effective — that is, most eradicated of the ego — if one's Yoga depends on a condition which has been stressed in Indian spirituality from ancient times: the presence of a God-realised Master, the human-divine Guru. If the outer self is deeply attuned to the spiritual call, the Guru may not be indispensable. But, by and large, the ego does not wholly disappear unless the aspirant, guided by his Psychic Being, puts himself devotedly in the hands of the Guru. The Guru serves as an absolute check, leaving little room for the myriad self-deception for the sake of self-convenience to which man's na-

ture is prone. One is now enfolded completely by the Other and the ego is afforded no chance to play about. Through this concrete and quite often very discomfiting Other, facing even one's most external form of mind and life-force, one gets intensely into relation with the egoless Lord of the universe, the creative Mother-Power of Grace — and that Perfect Divine Person starts permeating one's human personality in every part. Then one is cleared of egoism with the greatest assurance.

The practical upshot for us of such a view was the necessity of giving ourselves entirely to the guidance of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. As the twofold incarnation of the Supramental Ishwara-Shakti, they could carry us most swiftly forward. On so complex a path as the Integral Yoga we could hardly have advanced without their light and love. And, suiting the path's complexity, they were beings of an immense versatility. Combined with towering spiritual attainment, Sri Aurobindo brought a rare genius in political thought, philosophical ideation, poetic expression, literary criticism, while the Mother stood as a most gifted painter and musician no less than as an expert on all life-problems and a supreme organiser. In addition, there was a warmth of heart and a charm of mind, a temperament lavishly jocular in Sri Aurobindo and delightfully ironic in the Mother. To be led by such Guruship meant extreme pleasure side by side with enormous profit. Even now, when they are no longer in material shape before us, the spiritual life for us should not change: it cannot be more pleasurable and profitable than by a continuation of the same disciple-teacher relationship. For, indeed they have assured us of their nearness to us in a subtle-physical form until their mighty work is accomplished. To concentrate on them as we knew them and open ourselves to their ever-flowing Grace by an adoring devotion is the best mode of progress.

Let us, however, not forget that in their eyes the inner progress has little value if the outer self does not reveal it by an increasing refinement and wideness, harmony and efficiency. In the absence of these outer qualities, we may even question a phrase like "inner progress". In a letter to my friend Nagin Doshi — as true a sadhaka as one could

wish — Sri Aurobindo has actually said: "Obviously, the outer life must be a true example of the inner, not a mere empty mould or form. But if the outer life is unyogic, that means that the inner is still unchanged in some, even in a great, perhaps the greater part of itself". (14-2-1936)

To render the outer life Yogic, it is not enough to refrain from being mean, inconsiderate, nasty. Surely, the Integral Yogi is expected to be courteous and compassionate, understanding and generous, above gossip and backbiting, mindful of others' needs and not selfishly assertive or scheming, careful to control that fluctuation of inner and outer temper commonly defended as "mood". But he is expected also to face correctly the unyogic conduct of his fellows. Where a direct confrontation is necessary, he should have the courage to stand up to them and not run away to avoid unpleasantnesses — and yet there has to be a coolness, a calmness in the courage and not any stress to bring about a confrontation just for one's own benefit. All victories in Yoga are essentially victories over oneself rather than over others — and through these victories the Divine's outflow into the world.

What I mean may be summed up in what I once heard the Mother say to a Swiss sadhika. I was standing behind the latter, waiting for her to finish her pranam to the Mother. Almost every morning she had a tale of troubles to tell. She was in charge of some girls in an Ashram house and the neighbours of her establishment seemed to be a constant bother. They were reported by her to be harassing her daily, with either hurtful words or obstructive acts or else a succession of pin-pricks subtly causing inconvenience. The Mother used to hear the complaints patiently. She had faith in the Swiss sadhika's sincerity and devotion; so she would soothe her and suggest various ways of avoiding conflict. One day, however, she came out with a master-formula: "*La vraie attitude est toujours plus forte que toutes les personnes et toutes les circonstances*" ("The right attitude is always stronger than any person and any circumstance'.) I have never forgotten this advice. It has been elaborated by the Mother in her "Notes on the Way" of September 10, 1969. But what I overheard dates back much earlier and it has proved an immense help — along

with that other master-formula of the Mother's: "Remember and offer."

In fact, the two go together. The latter tells us never to let the sense of the Divine disappear from our consciousness and to make at all times a gesture of surrender to the Supreme Presence — surrender of our own selves, our thoughts and impulses, the work in hand, the environmental set-up of fellow-creatures and situation-complexes. In this manner our inner life goes on being not only intensified, deepened and heightened but also widened to cover the world which is the Divine's field of action. Again, the widening extends not merely to the subtle psychological ambiance of a consciousness in relation with other consciousnesses: it extends as well to all one's material acts and to all the physical facts of interaction with material agents. Hence the whole outer life on both the psychological and the physical planes is brought within the practice and process of the inner Yoga. And such encompassment by the gesture of offering involves at every moment the taking of the right attitude: an attempt to detach the ego from the problem, an equanimity towards all behaviour and each turn of event, a poise of general goodwill, a passing of the situation from one's hands to the hands of the Divine, an appeal to the Highest to make one as well as others Its instrument and to dispose of the problem according to the Will of Its Wisdom.

Mentioning a poise of general goodwill and the Will of the Divine's Wisdom, I am led to the memory of a strange incident in my own inner life. A situation had arisen in which I had felt extremely harassed by a certain person, I did not know what step to take. I went to the Samadhi and sent up my prayer to the Mother to guide me. I fervently asked her: "What should I do to check this harassment? I would like to follow your will and your way." Suddenly there was an exquisite explosion, as it were, in the occult heart-centre in the middle of the chest and, through the opening made there, an intense love flowed out towards the person who had been considered an enemy. Here then was the Mother's unexpected answer to my appeal. This was the Mother's mode of dealing with the hatred I had felt to be pouring against me. The psychic being had come

forward to solve the problem. It spontaneously saw the Divine within everyone and strove to pierce to that reality behind all masks and to dissolve the obstacles of the outer consciousness of both myself and the other party. The great saying of Buddha occurred to me: "Hatred does not cease by hatred; hatred ceases by love."

When I met the person whose behaviour had affected me as harassment I said quiet simply: "When I looked into myself I could find nothing except love for you." The effect was magical. Gone was all that had seemed hostile. A new turn of conduct was immediately apparent. The wide warmth that had issued from my soul was no mere word-woven sentiment: it was an elemental force of luminous sweetness and could immediately kindle a light and a love where it touched.

I do not say that a complete lasting change can always be established. One may fall back into the old consciousness and the problem can recur. But the golden key was disclosed to me in that surprising moment. If we could command this key at all times, it would resolve every deadlock.

This key, I may add, is also a pointer towards understanding one of the most valued phenomena in our life with the Mother: her smile.

The Mother's smile was at once what I may term a revelation of rapture and an enigma of ecstasy. It was always like a door of heaven opening, but often one was at a loss to know why the door opened. And, when it did not, many thought she wished to show displeasure. Sri Aurobindo explained more than once that she could have a reason quite other than displeasure for not smiling: she might be absorbed in some inner work on the sadhak. Conversely, she might smile without wanting to register full approval: she could act as a soother to some silly sense of hurt. But one thing I found invariable: whenever the deep heart in a child of hers opened in her presence, there was a wide smile from her side. And this smile had a special expression as of complete acceptance of that child and of ever deeper entry into his being. Sometimes, looking at the Mother on the one hand and at the sadhak on the other, one could perceive unmistakably the psychic-spiritual communion and interchange.



I have seen this phenomenon again and again in a certain period of my friend Nirodbaran's sadhana. Both Champaklal and I used to recognise and watch the delightful drama of the inner contact gleaming through the outer meeting. The Mother was all smiles. Champaklal whispered to me on one occasion: "What has happened in Nirod is a clear example of what is called 'reversal of consciousness'." The phrase employed means in general a sudden shift of an individual's habitual poise from the outer to the inner being and it signifies in particular, as it did in Nirod's case, such a shift from the mental-vital-physical complex to the true soul.

I have known Nirod and held him in great affection ever since he fell willynilly into the Divine's snare. I have seen him supervising the Carpentry "godown", eager to get for his consciousness a quick "go-up" by means of a lively correspondence every day with the Master. I have observed him in charge of the Ashram Dispensary, on the surface a frowning physician, seeming to accuse his patients of a crime whenever they took ill, but in the depths a conscientious curer, all the more anxious that his patients should get well and leave him alone since he was aspiring all the time to write poems rather than prescriptions. In the course of his "pleasure in poetic pains" I have been happy to help, now and then, his bright deliveries, and many have been the golden moments when we have tossed to and fro some problem of scansion and, discussing the lines of the Supramental Avatar's compositions, gone most enjoyably against Alexander Pope's advice:

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan:  
The proper study of mankind is man.

I have been in close touch with him during his lucky days when he was not only one of the Sri Aurobindo's personal attendants but also his one and only scribe for the slowly dictated *Savitri*. After the Master's passing, he swam repeatedly into my ken as "a new planet" of professorship in that solar system of all-round enlightenment, our International Centre of Education under the directive gaze of the Mother. Hobnobbing with all these aspects of him, I have been glad of the warm friendship he has given me, a



friendship full of laughter in spite of his mask of a "Man of Sorrows", as the Master had jocularly nicknamed him. But the sheer sadhak in me was gladdest to contemplate, and associate with, the new Nirod of that "reversal of consciousness".

The sudden shift in one's being may not invariably be permanent from the start, there may be an unshifting once more for a while; but after it has come the Yogic destiny is sealed and sooner or later one is bound to grow a predominantly psychic personality. The development will be sooner rather than later if one is vigilant enough to erase the lingering discords and fumbles of the ego and attend faithfully to the infallible tone of Krishna's flute-call from within.

## The Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's Way with Animals

The Mother was known for her love of animals and her deep understanding of their nature. It was a delight to hear her speaking to a cat in a musical tone full of affection, a tenderly modulated baby-talk. She dealt with the Ashram cats as if they had been "persons" with rights. The man who was in charge of the Prosperity Room in the 'thirties was given strict orders not to interfere with the movements of the beautiful female cat Bite-Bite which had made this place its home. If a cupboard was left open by him and Bite-Bite got on to any shelf of it, he had to respect its right to be there: not only was he forbidden to shoo it off but he had also to let it commit nuisance there if it wanted. His job was to develop his own consciousness and remember always to shut the cupboards. Else he should bear with equanimity the catty consequences of his own oversight.

The Mother has recorded many reminiscences of her dealings with cats. When I first came to the Ashram, they were a part of the life in it, serving various occult ends. How powerful the Mother's influence could be was borne in on me when she acted on a semi-wild female cat which she had named "Pichune". It had got into the habit of spoiling the bed of the sadhika — Lalita — who had it for her companion along with two other she-cats named by the Mother "Pink Nose" and "Black Nose". The bed was an unprotected area and no amount of hurdles put in the way of Pichune could prevent its perversity. So at last the Mother was informed. From the very next day Pichune was a well-behaved civilised creature.

Pink Nose had the Mother's darshan just before it died. There is a tribe of people in Pondicherry that looks out for cat-meat. These strange persons carry a long pole with a

hook at one end. On seeing a cat pass, they rip open its belly with that hook. Pink Nose got attacked by one of the savages. It ran away and hid itself in a place difficult of access. Somehow Lalita and I pulled it out. We took it in a basket to the Ashram dispensary which at that time was within the main block of buildings. While Lalita stayed with her pet, I waited at the back-entrance of the Ashram through which the Mother used to go for her evening drive and return home. As soon as she was back I told her of what happened. At once she came with me to the dispensary. She said something and Pink Nose stood on its hind legs and putting its front paws on the top-rim of the basket looked up at the Mother. The Mother again spoke to it. Its little nostrils quivered. After the Mother had gone we had to get it chloroformed for the operation by Dr. Rajangam: its intestines, which were hanging out, had to be put in and the skin stitched. Naturally Pink Nose tried with its paws to slash away at the chloroform wad and the doctors' fingers. So I had to catch its front legs and hold them forcibly wide apart while the chloroforming was being done. It gazed at me with a most pained surprise as if wondering why I who loved it so much was torturing it by stretching apart its legs. Then it went under the anaesthetic and was lifted out to the operation-table. The intestines were pushed in and the ripped skin joined with stitches but Pink Nose died. Probably the anaesthetic proved too strong for it.

Almost immediately afterwards there was the Mother's Soup Distribution. The memory of Pink Nose's last look at me of unbelieving bewilderment haunted me all through the meditation. It was quite a trial of my Yoga, keeping my mind and heart quiet before I went to the Mother to get my cupful.

Lalita was very grieved, for she had loved the cat dearly. The Mother gave an interesting explanation of the accident that had happened to Pink Nose. In that period there was a talk of Lalita's moving to a better flat. The Mother said that the desire for such a place had become very strong in her, a wrong movement. This movement drew adverse forces. The cat, being extremely open to its owner and thus easily affected by that desire, found itself exposed to the attack. With the cat-eaters around, it fell a victim and thus

sidetracked what might have harmed the owner in some subtle occult way affecting her body.

(In those days the inner movements tended very much to have repercussions in the outer being — a hypersensitive connection used to be there, For example, I once had a horrid crop of boils near my eyes and ears. The Mother reminded me of a certain acute desire I had allowed in myself a little earlier.)

Another cat, which was connected with me and had the Mother's darshan in its last hours, was the tom Miel. It was a very handsome animal. Sehra and I were indeed proud that it stayed with us, but it was never quite domesticated. It had sometimes a savage manner, as if it did not quite like our possession of it. In its sixth month, it caught the infection of an enteric epidemic which had already laid low all the cats in the neighbourhood. I have noticed that cats are very hardy creatures and can survive almost unthinkably adverse conditions of life, but when attacked by diseases their proverbial "nine lives" slip away pretty easily. The malady which affected Miel usually kills its victims within a few hours. Miel amazingly held out for nearly three days and went on suffering, most probably because Sehra whose first feline pet it was, and therefore doubly beloved, was extremely attached to it. At our wits' end we took it to the Tennis Ground where the Mother was having her daily game in the afternoon. When her set was over and she was walking out towards her car, we showed Miel to her. She looked into its eyes and said: "You don't look very brilliant, my little one." We had the impression that she found the case hopeless and did something occult to put an end to the "little one's" misery. Two hours later I noticed a dried-up wizened look on Miel's face. Sehra was perturbed. I gave the cat some drips of Coramine. It crawled under my bed and after half an hour died. The Mother confirmed the next day that she had severed the connecting "cord" between the subtle body and the gross.

Sehra was very cut up by the loss of Miel. The Mother, however, soothed her with the words: "You were attached to Miel, but it was not attached to anybody. It had a free wild nature. The relationship was rather one-sided. It was not particularly upset to lose you. It has gone to a special

part of the subtle plane where there is a Cat-Kingdom with a kind of Cat-God ruling it."

The next cat which we had — Goldie — lived longer. It was very affectionate and spent more than half the night in Sehra's bed, sitting on her chest and purring away. The Mother was apprised of whatever unusual happened to it. Thus, when the wheel of a rickshaw once went over its abdomen, Sehra lost no time in informing her. The Mother said: "Cats have some of their inner organs in a flexible mobile position and when the wheel was felt on the abdomen the organs moved away automatically. If the cat is eating its food normally, you don't have to worry." Goldie was much upset by the accident, its "mind" was confused for nearly an hour by what had so heavily passed across its body and it was in a slightly bad temper with us for a while. But it recovered soon enough and took its normal meal after a few hours.

The high spot of each day for it was the afternoon outing in my hand-pulled single-person rickshaw. It sat quietly behind my head on the lowered hood while our fox-terrier Bingo sat at my feet and barked at all passers-by who came too near the vehicle. After a full happy life Goldie, like Miel, succumbed to an enteric infection. When the Mother thought the case hopeless we consulted her as to putting it to sleep and thereby sparing it suffering. She said: "It is better to let it live out its life — unless the suffering is too acute." Goldie died a couple of days later.

Both the dogs which, one after the other, Sehra and I had were also fortunate to be in contact with the Mother. Bingo was already famous with her because it had figured in all the letters we had written from Bombay prior to Sehra's first visit with me to the Holy Land. When on the day of our arrival we went to the Playground, the Mother was standing in the midst of some boys and girls. She put up her right hand in greeting to me and soon came towards us. After Sehra had been introduced and blessed, the Mother caught sight of Bingo which had been given in charge of a friend sitting nearby. Immediately she exclaimed: "I must meet Bingo. I can miss people but Bingo I must meet." She hurried over to the dog, asked an attendant to bring some groundnuts and offered them to it. Bingo returned the

Divine's courtesy with a growl of (I hope) gratitude. Sehra cried out "Mother, don't be afraid. He won't do anything." The Mother turned towards her and, smiling, asked: "I afraid?" She fed the groundnuts to Bingo. The English expression "Lucky dog!" could not have been more literally true.

Bingo died in the Ashram while I was in Bombay to see my grandfather pass away. The Mother was kept in touch with its condition from day to day. Our next dog was *Épave*, meaning "Waif". It was a street pup, a bag of bones, with severe diarrhoea and with a rump hurt by a cow's kick. Thoughtless street-urchins were harassing it. We took it into our garden to let it have a peaceful death. It survived the crisis and grew into a sturdy specimen of a cross between a bull-terrier and a fox-terrier. When, after years of a happy and even "bossy" life, it fell ill and its condition seemed to go from bad to worse, Sehra informed the Mother. The Mother went into a short meditation and then said: "I don't feel it can recover." Soon after, *Épave* sank into a coma. Our sadhak-friend Barin Ganguli, a great lover of animals and an expert veterinary doctor, tried his best to bring it round but to no avail. Sehra watched over the inert body all through the night following the evening when she had spoken to the Mother. At one point she felt as if she had to touch the dog to make sure it was alive, but suddenly she saw a faint form approach with outstretched arms and make the motion of taking up *Épave*. That very moment *Épave* gave a gasp and died. The next morning Sehra reported the night's experience to the Mother. The Mother said: "Yes, I came to take your dog's soul."

Although within my actual knowledge the Mother had only to do with cats and dogs and the Ashram's bulls and once a small donkey bought by Udar, she was interested in many other animals. She has referred to horses as well as to birds, which, like some cats and dogs known to her, had an aspiration to become human beings. But perhaps the animal she most fancied is the puma. I remember her telling us in the Prosperity Room with a very appreciative smile that the puma had a natural affinity with human beings and could make close friends with them. Of course, the dog is best known for such an affinity but the dog has been a



domesticated animal for millennia, while the puma is still a denizen of the wild. The New American Encyclopedia<sup>1</sup> has the entry on page 1135: "Puma (or Cougar), a large species of the cat-family found in America, where it ranges from Canada to Patagonia. The puma, sometimes called the American lion, from its tawny color, is about the size of a leopard, which it resembles in habit, preying upon animals up to the size of deer, but rarely attacking man. It is now scarce in North America, but in South America is found both in the tropical forests of Brazil and up in the snow on the Andes." It is surprising that no book comparable to Judy Adamson's series on a lioness and on its young has come out on this carnivore about which the Mother spoke so enthusiastically.

In my presence she twice talked of snakes. Once in connection with the liquid known by its patent name Lexin she said: "You can safely use it for scorpion-stings. But if a snake bites you it is better to inform me immediately." Lexin is really an effective inhalant antidote for all injuries from insects: I have seen it relieve a scorpion-sting within a matter of twenty minutes. I have not seen a case of snake-bite in the Ashram and evidently the Mother was not willing to take any risk with so serious an injury. It is equally evident that she was confident of curing it by her spiritual force.

The second occasion on which she mentioned snakes was when she related an experience of hers during one of the outings she made daily in the late afternoon. She said: "I was walking rather absorbed. Suddenly I saw a snake sliding past just in front of my feet. One step more and I would have trodden upon its body. It never struck me that I might be bitten. The only thought I had was: 'I would hurt the snake by stepping on it.'"

Sri Aurobindo too is known to have dealt with animals. During the years of his association with the Mother he came most into touch with cats. Once Purani found him busy arranging a plate of fish for some cat of the Mother's. It is said that if a cat came and sat on his chair he would not allow anyone to disturb it. A certain dog also used to go to his room and lick his toes. When the cat Big Boy was about

<sup>1</sup> Published by Books Inc, New York, 1945.

to die, Sri Aurobindo came down from his room and kept caressing it with his right hand. Very few people, however, have heard of his doings with animals prior to his association with the Mother, though there is a clear evidence of a most unexpected kind. In the course of reading the proofs of the Centenary Edition of his works I came across an early writing, entitled "Some Selected Notes", on an epic by Kalidasa. Sri Aurobindo quotes a commentator on Kalidasa's mention of peacocks. The commentator gives an interpretation which says that peacocks are not attached to their environment. Sri Aurobindo rules out this interpretation and remarks: "I have reared peacocks myself and I can assure the reader that they have as much attachment as any other creature." Sri Aurobindo rearing peacocks is indeed a revelation!

But perhaps from the occult viewpoint this is in the fitness of things. The peacock is the national bird of India just as her national flower is the lotus and Sri Aurobindo laid the true foundation of Indian Nationalism, and his date of birth — August 15 coincides with the date of India's Independence. Again, in Sri Aurobindo's own symbology, the peacock stands for Victory. November 24, 1926, is the momentous landmark in the Aurobindonian Yoga, called the Day of Siddhi or Victory: on this occasion the Overmind descended into the physical beings of the Master and the Mother, laying the foundation for the future descent of the Supermind. The Victory Day is also the birthday of the Ashram's real and regular start under the Mother, to whom Sri Aurobindo then handed over the charge of his disciples and of the houses in which he and she and they were residing.

## The Mother and the Beings of the Vital Plane

The Mother and Sri Aurobindo did not work only on the physical plane. Behind the physical are subtle realms with influences good, bad and indifferent. The Victory Day of 24 November 1926 brought the Overmind Gods into direct alliance with our Gurus' purpose of earth-transformation and rendered more effective their fight with the occult Evil that acts upon earth from its headquarters on the vital plane either directly or through human beings open to it.

The Overmind dynamism, preliminary to the Supermind power which was the ultimate aim, came into repeated use during the Second World War. This war brought into play two figures whom Sri Aurobindo and the Mother recognised as extending into the physical plane the occult Evil at its most dangerous. Hitler was seen as possessed by the Rakshasa-aspect of that Evil. The Rakshasa is a devouring "Giant" who openly declares his enormous greed and makes no secret of his ambition to dominate the world with a master-race of ruthless henchmen. Hitler's *Mein Kampf* is a glaringly open manifesto of such greed and ambition. In Stalin Sri Aurobindo and the Mother discerned a phenomenon not merely of possession but of incarnation, a vital being born in a human form and not just employing that form as its medium — and here was the Asura-aspect. The Asura is an all-gripping "Titan" who is even more destructive than a "Giant" but with a cold cunning intelligence which conceals its subversive policy under a mask of high ideals like economic equality and social classlessness. Stalin's pronouncements are all couched in noble-sounding terms borrowed from Marx and Lenin but directed to nefarious ends.

There are several other orders of vital beings bent on harm — like those who bear the Pisacha-aspects. The Pishacha is the "Demon" obsessed with a defiling and mutilating mania: he is utter foulness and ugliness personified. The Pisacha

always puts himself slavishly at the service of the Rakshasa and Asura.

The characteristic mark of all these denizens of the vital plane is that the force they express is "typal" and not, like the earth's, "evolutionary". The sign of a typal force is a drive towards mechanical uniformity, rigid regimentation, strict conformity to one type alone — a drive contrary to the many-sided, flexible and free movement of the evolving human soul striving, by means of trial, error, self-correction and through a thousand truths and innumerable impulses, to live and let live more and more abundantly, more and more profoundly.

The Mother and Sri Aurobindo considered the Second World War as their own war because of Hitler's typal tyranny which, if successful, would have blocked their work of spiritual evolution. Sri Aurobindo kept in close touch with every development by means of a radio fixed in his room by Pavitra. Many of us understand that he intervened at various turning-points. But not many realise a most crucial intervention by the Mother. I came to know of it from private sources nearly twenty years ago, directly from Udar and indirectly through André. We may look upon it as based on a prophecy Sri Aurobindo had made at the end of his poem "The Dwarf Napoleon".

This poem ridiculed Hitler's pretensions to equal "the immense colossus of the past" who had arisen as a master-militarist to save the results of that progressive uprising, the French Revolution, from being submerged by the old-world powers ranged against it in all Europe outside France. Indeed, Napoleon was an autocrat, but Sri Aurobindo always pictured him paradoxically as a despotic defender of democracy. As the poem puts it:

A movement of enormous depth and scope  
He seized and gave cohesion to its hope.

Far other was Hitler, yet "a mighty Force" had taken hold of him:

In his high villa on the fatal hill  
Alone he listens to that sovereign Voice,  
Dictator of his action's sudden choice,

The tiger leap of a demoniac skill.

And Sri Aurobindo concludes:

Thus driven he must stride on conquering all,  
Threatening and clamouring, brutal, invincible,  
Until he meets upon his storm-swept road  
A greater devil — or thunderstroke of God.

This prophecy was penned in October 1939, when Hitler and Stalin had already signed a pact of non-aggression. Thus Stalin, the "greater devil", seemed close-linked to the lesser — and against them both there could be only God's thunder stroke preparing in the dim future. But within two years — to be precise, on 22 June 1941 - the possibility of Sri Aurobindo's prophetic words coming true loomed up: Hitler attacked Russia. Strangely enough, Stalin was caught somewhat on the wrong foot and there were German victories at the start. But "the Man of Steel" soon showed his diabolic superiority and, after the decisive blow at Stalingrad in 1942 on 25 November (Amal Kiran's thirty-eight birthday, by the way!), the lesser devil was critically weakened. Spiritual-minded historians may surmise that Sri Aurobindo, especially since Russia was now automatically allied to Churchill's England and Roosevelt's America, backed with his Overmind puissance the greater devil temporarily in order to smash Hitler who was at that time the bigger immediate menace to civilisation. But would any of them guess that the folly Hitler committed of turning upon Stalin and drawing the more heinous devilry against himself had the Mother's occult goad behind it?

The Mother knew exactly what Vital Being was egging Hitler on. She has dubbed him "The Lord of Falsehood", a Rakshasa and Asura in one, as it were, who arrogates to himself the title: "The Lord of the Nations." Finding Hitler going from strength to strength, she resolved to imitate the special form in which the Lord of Falsehood always appeared to him at his secret headquarters in the Bavarian Alps and inspired him to fantastic actions which yet proved triumphant. He used to come to Hitler clad in a silver cuirass and with a silver helmet from which a plume-like flame shot forth. Taking the same form in her subtle body and exteriorising her consciousness, the Mother went to the Fuhrer

and commanded him to launch on the most fantastic-seeming action of all: an attack on Stalin's Russia, his publicly avowed ally. Hitler, as usual, accepted the order implicitly. In view of the unexpected brilliant successes in the past, there was no question now of his doubting the new mandate delivered out of the same flashing presence by the "sovereign Voice". His resolve to unleash a sudden onslaught on his former partner was unbreakably set.

The Mother, on her way back from him, met the real Lord of Falsehood proceeding towards the Fuhrer's "bunk" at Berchtesgaden. He was astonished to see his own special form face to face with him. He realised what must have happened. He hurried to Hitler to contradict what had been commanded. But Hitler remained unconvinced and carried out the attack. Secretly he had himself wished to destroy Communist Russia and, when that long-cherished yet hitherto checked dream, which had been outlined in his *Mein Kampf*, was given so glorious a push forward, he could not help thinking that the second appearance of the guiding spirit was some piece of fraud.

As Sri Aurobindo had predicted, the greater devil brought about the lesser's downfall, but the prediction now revealed an unsuspected significance. At first sight Sri Aurobindo's words would seem to posit two alternatives as responsible in the future for the downfall: either an encounter by Hitler with a more diabolical darkness than his own or else a terrific bolt from the Divine's blue. Now the dividing "or" turned out to imply not a pair of different destructive forces but simply two different names for one and the same Mahakali, for the greater devil was pulled into action willynilly by the hands of the Divine. The Mother, by a bold piece of what we may call a divine outdevilling of the super-devil, the Lord of Falsehood, created directly a head-long clash between the two arch-enemies of Light, and managed to make this very clash a thunderstroke of God.

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Not every non-evolutionary force from the occult planes is evil. One embodied tygal being, who was neither Titan



nor Giant nor Demon, came into touch with me from very nearly the beginning of my stay in the Ashram.

It was a young French girl, the eldest child of a highly cultured lady who belonged to a one-time ruling family in Pondicherry but who became a disciple of the Mother although she was not technically an Ashramite. She had her own house in the town and lived there with her husband, three other daughters and a son. This lady was our tutor in French and sometimes when she could not to teach us her eldest daughter took her place. This girl was seventeen at the time, a very clever person of marked talent and an extraordinary fascination, pretty in an unusual way which mostly affected one through her eyes. She had been regarded as dead at birth but seemed suddenly to come alive, a phenomenon characteristic of cases where a being of some other plane than the earth, most often the Vital Plane, takes hold of an infant body.

The Mother, after seeing her as a young girl, confided to her parents that this child of theirs was not human but a spirit from the world of fairies who had wanted to come into contact with the Mother and so had entered a family which was likely to get associated with her. As normal with such entrants, this one had a tremendous fund of energy and a conquering drive of will, added to her sharp intelligence and charming personality. I was nearly ten years older than she and came to be trusted by her. All her difficulties she used to put before me and she was eager to learn whatever I had to teach her. When she became engaged to a tall Apollo of a Swede, she would invite me in the mornings to talk to her on Ibsen or Tolstoy or some other literary celebrity and she would in the evenings amaze more her fiancé with her versatile knowledge.

Inhabiting a human body she could not escape altogether "the thousand natural shocks the flesh is heir to" and, in spite of her brilliant gifts and natural force and spell-binding beauty, she suffered a good deal. Her marriage was on the rocks after ten years and fate separated her from all her three children. From Europe where she had made her life she returned to Pondicherry and spent her last years here, resuming her old friendship with me and her physical proximity to the Mother. These years were rather unhappy and

troubled, but she never lost her energy and *esprit*. Every now and again one could feel something strange in her. Especially on certain evenings she would carry an atmosphere that appeared to be filled with unknown influences. My personal editorial office was a flat adjoining the one in which she and her old mother lived. So I had ample opportunity to observe her in all her moods.

One evening she called me and said: "Amal, I feel that I shall die in a week." I laughed off the idea and told her that she had to live for a decade after I was gone. "Please hold my hand for a while," she begged, I did so and cracked some jokes and she was in a better humour when I left. Almost exactly after a week a servant of hers came to my room at about 8 p.m. to say that she was unwell. I left my typing and went to see her. She was in a doze. Knowing that she used to drink beer, I thought she had slightly overdone it and was asleep. I went back to my work. An hour later I was summoned once more. She was still unconscious but was now throwing up watery stuff at intervals. I sent for a doctor who had his residence opposite hers. He was out. I sent for her family doctor. He was not in Pondicherry. I sent to the hospital for a doctor. The reply came that nobody from there could come but an ambulance could be sent. The state of my friend was getting worse: there was breathing difficulty. I asked the ambulance to be sent. A minute before the vehicle stopped at the door my friend ceased to breathe. A few seconds later her heart failed. I did whatever I could to resuscitate her. All in vain. The ambulance men came in with a stretcher. They could give no help. I insisted that she be taken to the hospital. I accompanied her. It was nearly eleven at night. At the hospital I called the doctor in charge to come into the van and examine her. He tried all the possible tests and declared her stone dead. I took her back home.

News was sent to a friend of the family, a Swiss sadhika named Padma. Early next morning she and I went up to see the Mother. I told the Mother the whole story and conveyed the message of my friend's mamma that she wanted her daughter's body to be taken care of by the Ashram and carried by the Ashram people in a coffin to the family's vault. Later in the day the Mother communicated to the shocked

old lady that her daughter had returned to her own world and was having a rest which she had badly needed.

Her younger sister — another beauty but with a physical appeal different from the strange "vital" attraction of the dead woman — flew from France and made a fairly long stay in Pondicherry. A fortnight after her arrival, strange things began to happen in the house. Suddenly a gust of wind would be felt in a closed room or a light touch brush one's arm or an oil-lamp inexplicably go out and just as mysteriously re-ignite. The phenomena were reported to the Mother. She sent word that nobody should get perturbed, for the being that had left its human body was playing practical jokes and having a bit of fun at the expense of its erstwhile family.

The family did not seem to miss their departed member much. She had not been very popular with most of them: she generally had the better of everybody with either her glamour or her brains. But the poor of her acquaintance felt a void in their hearts, for she had been a very sympathetic and generous person with them. She was also almost madly fond of children — any child, rich or poor, white or coloured, would be sure of being carried along in her arms and caressed and given sweets. Interestingly, these two traits go well with what popular tradition suggests by that term in common usage: "fairy godmother."

After my friend's death I would wait till a late hour night after night to glimpse an apparition of her. As she had been very close to me, I thought she might visit me. But I never saw her "ghost". The strange memory of her, however, keeps her alive before my eyes: she was the most striking woman I have known because really she was no woman at all.

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A case of possession by a hostile and not a friendly vital force was enacted under my eyes in the early in the early days of the Ashram. A fellow-sadhak and a personal friend was a young Indian, an Oxford-educated free-minded "moderner" who yet spontaneously took to Yoga and developed into a fine devotee.

Suddenly he changed to an aggressive type, showing all the signs of an old-world religious fanaticism.

The altered attitude first betrayed its symptoms in the way he dealt with the Master's handwritten corrections of the Jnana-Yoga chapters of *The Synthesis of Yoga* as they had appeared in his monthly *Arya* of 1914-1921. He had promised to type out the new matter together with the old and pass everything back to Sri Aurobindo. Instead of doing this, he made a present of the original corrected pages to the spies of the British Government who in plain clothes were always hovering around the Ashram houses and seeking evidence to prove that Sri Aurobindo had not yet abandoned his political activity but was secretly continuing it.

The young man's rebellion came to a head one morning when he rushed up to the door leading to the Mother's interview-room. Dilip Kumar Roy was with her. He came to the door to answer the loud knockings. As soon as he opened it. The rebel stepped in. Dilip, having a bulky body, served as a good buffer between the Mother and the intruder, but his stalling tactics by means of what he later jokingly dubbed "brute strength" were not conclusively successful. The intruder was attempting to push past him. The Mother, who had come up behind Dilip, saw the situation worsening and shouted: "Purani! Purani!" Purani had his room nearby downstairs. He was the most fiery inmate of the Ashram. He had been famous as one of the inspirers of young Gujarat in the Nationalist struggle against British domination, an expert wrestler, a fearless fighter, an all-round heroic personality. I remember Amrita telling me: "Purani has a gigantic vital being, something approaching the Mother's." He had also some occult powers. When he ran up in answer to the Mother's call, he grabbed the intruder by the arm and tried to pull him downstairs. The latter clutched whatever was available and resisted Purani. Purani told me that the fellow had stood his ground and stuck to the door as if with superhuman strength, the kind of capacity that comes to possessed persons. With jerk after jerk Purani loosened his opponent's hold and moved him from the top of the staircase and finally with one terrific pull dragged him scurrying non-stop down the steps right to the bottom on the ground floor. There he challenged him: "Do you want a fight? I am ready."

The opponent knew that a vital energy greater than the one which had entered into him was pitted against it. Without a word he turned away and disappeared. Shortly afterwards he ran off from the Ashram and became a sort of wandering fakir.

Almost two decades later he returned for a while. The Mother allowed him to get free food in the Ashram's Dining Hall but he had to have his quarters outside. She could not forget his early good days of devotion when he had made an offering of his money of the Ashram.

Apropos of occult forces and entities, I may set on record two extraordinary phenomena. To one of them not only I but Sehra, her sister Mina and a Goan servant-girl of ours can testify. I say "extraordinary", not "unprecedented". In fact, it was paralleled by a series of happenings to which Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as well as Amrita and some others had been witness. We have all heard of how stones mysteriously started falling inside the "Old Guest House" (41, later 11, rue François Martin) in the winter of 1921, about a year and a half after the Mother had returned for good to Pondicherry. On Sri Aurobindo's advice she had taken up quarters in this building where he was himself residing. The strange story as told in Sri Aurobindo's own words is included in Dilip Kumar Roy's *Among the Great* and the Mother has recollected it in her Questions and Answers. The phenomenon I am going to describe took place in the first house I occupied — 13 rue Ananda Rangapillai — on my arrival in Pondicherry in 1954 for permanent residence. Sehra and I were staying downstairs and Mina in a room upstairs.

One night a brick-piece came crashing against Mina's door. The next day a similar object struck against a door on our ground floor. Stray pieces kept coming for a few more days. On the fourth day while Sehra was working in our garden in the early morning, a number of such objects began falling around her, though not with any murderous speed. When I came back from the Balcony Darshan she told me of the perplexing incident. The brick-pieces fell at several other times and we thought that somebody was doing mischief from the terrace of a house across the side-street, where some building job was in progress. I spoke to Kameshwar who was the Mother's man for all relations with



the police. He came to our house and looked at the pieces. We were asked to wait a little before bringing the police upon the scene.

The same night we arranged a secret watch on the veranda of our first floor. From our hiding-places we kept an eye on the empty opposite terrace. Two hours passed but nothing happened. When we were on the point of turning in, a brick-piece flew at a terrific velocity from an unknown direction and broke into fragments against the outside wall of one of the rooms. The next day Sehra took a few samples of the missiles to the Mother and spoke to her about them. The Mother asked if we had lately dismissed a servant. She recalled how Datta had done the same in 1921 and stones had fallen within the house: the dismissed cook had employed a black-magician to harass Datta and the other inmates. She also inquired whether there was a young person of puberty-age at our place, for such a person could serve as a medium for the occult force exercised. We had dismissed a servant but we had no adolescent residing with us. Then she said: "You must see whether on any part of the house cryptic signs have been chalked. If they are there, rub them off. If they are not there, the phenomenon is directly an occult one: beings of the Vital Plane are amusing themselves at your expense with the help of available bricks in the neighbourhood. I strongly suspect that they are responsible. But, if they are, I will take action at once."

We searched for cryptic signs. None could be discovered. The Mother was right. For, from that day no brick-pieces came furiously flying or slowly dropping. Peace was completely restored. Kameshwar was told not to bother the police. The Mother had turned off the invisible culprits by her own invisible means.

The second extraordinary phenomenon is very recent. The time was a little after 2 a.m. on 19 December 1978. I happened to be awake in bed. In the bed across the room Sehra started moaning very piteously. I thought she was doing so in sleep, as on some occasions she had done during a nightmare. As she went on moaning, I spoke loudly to her and then got up and touched her so as to rouse her from sleep.

She answered: "Someone has attacked me with a stick and



beaten me on my head," I said: "It's only a bad dream. Don't worry." But she complained of severe pain in the head and shouted to our servant Lakshmi who was sleeping in the next room. I said: "There is no need to wake her, Tell me what you want." She went on shouting for Lakshmi. I called out also and Lakshmi came in.

Before this I had switched on the light. When Lakshmi came, I pulled back from Sehra's head the counterpane which had been over it. The sight before our eyes was horrible. Above the upper ridge of the left eye there was a huge ugly lump and a swelling along the bone between the eye and the ear. In the middle of the lump was a point where the skin seemed slightly abraded: it was a reddish spot as if the stroke of the stick had especially fallen there.

What we saw was unbelievable. How could a beating received on the head in a dream have such a strong physical effect? I have read accounts in journals of occultism in which people getting hurt in dreams showed visible marks. The Mother also has in one place spoken of the body showing signs of mishaps experienced in a dream. But never had I witnessed such a consequence and never could I have imagined that so concrete and severe an injury to the body might appear as the result of a nightmare.

If I had not been absolutely sure that Sehra had not got up and fallen somewhere, I would not have believed a nightmare had hurt her so grievously. But here was no room for doubt. She had not got up at all after she had been to the bathroom just before retiring at about 10.30 p.m. on the night of the 18th. Besides, if she had fallen in the bathroom or on the way to it or back from it she would have cried out from that place and not from under her counterpane in bed. I could at once have known — and so would Lakshmi or her daughter who early that night had been sleepless and later asserted that she had not heard Sehra go to the bathroom any time after 10.30 or so. Again, our bathroom door creaks very loudly whenever opened or closed and is likely to wake up anyone who is not too heavy a sleeper. It is quite certain from my own evidence as well as from that of others that the terrible hurt was received during a nightmare.

Sehra asked Lakshmi to apply lightly a balm to the hurt

area. She also asked for water to drink. The great pain continued for some time, accompanied by a splitting headache. We did our best to make her comfortable. I sat by her, soothing her and invoking the Mother's help. Gradually she fell asleep.

At about 3.15 she woke up, wanting to go to the bathroom. I took her there. When she saw her face in the mirror she was amazed at the gravity of the hurt.

I brought her back to bed and she slept up to 6.30 in the morning.

While drinking her coffee she recalled that she had started dreaming of going to meet the Mother. Before she could proceed she was crossed by some being and dealt a blow with a stick. The blow was aimed at her head and meant to break it. Somehow it was diverted to the area of the left eye and it landed on the temple above it.

The enormous swelling subsided just a little during the day by getting spread along the temple, but the entire part round the eye became a deep blackish red and the skin below the eye was puffed up. (It took Sehra nearly seven weeks to get back to normal.)

The whole event proves how dangerously one can be attacked by a hostile force in one's sleep. One must always call the Mother's protection and be on guard even in a dream. People have got up with pain in some parts of the body — e.g. the abdomen — after a nightmare. I was myself once attacked during one of my out-of-the-body rambles several years ago and the sensation was as if the spine had been smashed. But there was no physical injury left. Sri Aurobindo in *Savitri* has written of how a spiritual worker in the subtle world

Assaults of Hell endured and Titan strokes

And bore the fierce inner wounds that are slow to heal.

But I think that in the Ashram's history the case I have reported is the first in which a misadventure in the dream-state got translated so substantially in the body.

I may end by striking a spiritually optimistic note. When I had an occasion to relate the incident to Huta, she suddenly lighted upon an implication I had not guessed. I had seen only the frightful possibility of hostile blows having

more and more gross-physical consequences. I had not let my mind appraise all-round the critical point at which the workings behind the scene might have arrived. But she exclaimed: "What has happened shows that the Divine Force also can now have a direct effect upon the body. If the dark powers have this new possibility, the inner Light and the higher Consciousness can just as well emerge into the body with concrete changes in it if we are truly receptive!"

## Apropos of *Savitri*

When I was preparing *Savitri* for our International University Centre's one-volume edition in 1954 I was very careful about the collection of Sri Aurobindo's letters to me, which was to accompany it at the end. I made several alterations in the arrangement — some actually at the page-proof stage. Not unexpectedly the Press felt bothered, but it did not put any hitch in my way. The Mother was kept in touch with all the goings-on.

Once I seemed to overstep the limit. After a letter of 1936 had been printed I made to new reading of two words from Sri Aurobindo's manuscript. The letter as it stood in print read: "Savitri is represented in the poem as an incarnation of the Divine Mother... The narrative is supposed to have taken place in far past times when the whole thing had to be opened, so as to 'hew the ways of Immortality'." Now, instead of "The narrative" I deciphered "This incarnation". Naturally I wanted a change to be introduced. Just as naturally the Press was upset. But it realised that the change was imperative. Either an erratum was to be put somewhere or the new words were to be printed on a small slip and pasted over the old ones. I opted for the slip to set right my own slip in decipherment a dozen years earlier. But the new words were longer by three letters and, even if we took advantage of the three dots after the fullstop to the preceding sentence, the words could not be fitted into the text. I suggested the use of a slightly smaller type. The aesthetic sense of the Press was somewhat shocked. I agreed with its disgust, but to leave the wrong reading intact and resort to an erratum elsewhere was hardly a harmonious and felicitous solution either. I thought of submitting the whole matter to the Mother the next morning when I would be seeing her.

On finishing my pranam I told the Mother: "A special problem has come up in a certain letter of Sri Aurobindo's

to me on *Savitri*." The Mother replied with a slight tinge of sternness: "I know all about it. The Press sent me the news last afternoon. I was informed that you had made a wrong reading in a letter and that a correction was now necessary. The printing is already done. So to correct is very inconvenient. I told Amiyo what I thought of you." "Mother, what did you say?" "You won't like it." "Well, whatever comes from you is welcome, even if it is not to one's liking. There's something to learn. Please tell me." "I said: 'Amal is too sure of himself.'"

I was extremely puzzled. Obviously the Mother had somehow not seized the situation in its total bearing. I answered: "You must be right — but from what you say it seems that somebody else than myself detected my blunder and offered the correction." "Yes, and isn't that so?" "Mother, it is I who found my own mistake and I wanted to rectify it with my new reading of the manuscript." "Oh, that's how it is? I did not get such an impression." "Mother, let me again be a little too sure of myself and say that not even in a hundred years would anybody else, on reading the printed version, suspect a mistake. I felt uneasy over the version and went back to the original in Sri Aurobindo's hand and then I thought I must correct myself at all costs. What would you say now?" "I say that you have the courage to declare your mistakes." "Thank you, Mother."

As for my proposal to get a slip in smaller type stuck over the old misreading on my part, the Mother remarked: "I too had the same idea. But the Press was not very happy." Ultimately the Press got over its initial recoil and did the sticking. No reader, to my knowledge, has drawn my notice to anything odd on the page concerned.

Before leaving, I told the Mother: "Tomorrow I'll bring Sri Aurobindo's manuscript for you to see for yourself that my old reading was wrong." The next morning I presented the letter to the Mother. She took up a magnifying glass and scrutinised Sri Aurobindo's semi-hieroglyphics. Looking at me, she asked: "Are you sure it is not as you first read it?" This consoled me no end: after all, if even the Mother could be in doubt, mine had not been a Himalayan blunder. Finally she agreed to my new version, which makes better sense and is more consistent.

There must have been a bit of intellectual pride in my ambience, for on more than one occasion the Mother appeared to counteract the importance I seemed to attach to my own mind. To give one instance. The Press sent to the Mother the proof of the contents of the *Savitri*-volume. When I came as usual to meet her, she showed me the pages and said: "Nolini and I have gone through everything. It's all right. There is no need for you to look at the proof." "Still, Mother, will you give it to me?" "Oh, you think we are wrong? Here are the pages. You won't find anything to correct." I glanced at the proof. Indeed there was no misprint, and in that sense nothing to correct, but I immediately saw that a certain title differed from the form in which it stood in the body of the book. Inside it had run: "Sri Aurobindo's letters on *Savitri*." In the proof the first two words were missing. Neither the Mother nor Nolini knew of the form inside; so they saw nothing. But it was necessary to make the titles match. Plucking up courage I faced the Mother's challenging eyes and said as quietly as I could: "I am afraid there is an error. One item does not correspond to the wording inside the volume. It has to be changed. The Contents should be accurate." The Mother kept silent for a few seconds and then nodded approval.

When the title was to be composed, there was discussion about the wording to be used in order to indicate the presence of Sri Aurobindo's letters at the end. The Mother cut short the debate and brought out the formula to be put between the mention of "Savitri" and the line giving the name "Sri Aurobindo". Her formula was "(Followed by the Author's Letters on the Poem)." On hearing such a long-drawn-out phrase, Udar grinned broadly and let out even a ghost of a chuckle. The Mother looked at him steadily and said in a serious tone: "It is a little long, I know, but nothing else will make things quite clear." After the book came out, I suggested to the Mother: "If *Savitri* is reprinted, don't you think a smaller formula can serve just as well? I propose simply: 'With Letters on the Poem.' As Sri Aurobindo's name comes in the next line it should be clear whose letters these are." The Mother readily accepted the shorter phrase as both elegant and sufficient. It now stands in all editions, along with a subtitle to "Savitri", which Sri Aurobindo himself intended: "A Legend and a Symbol."



In Subsequent editions new matter has been added to the "Letters", but two letters in my collection have been overlooked by me. Perhaps it is not necessary to include them, but I give them here for future consideration of the parts in them that bring in *Savitri*. The earlier is in reference to the first number of Sri Aurobindo Circle Annual, which I was editing. It is also one of the last two handwritten letters of Sri Aurobindo. It goes:

"Don't wait for any poems for your Annual. I think the Pondicherry poets will have to march without a captain, unless you take the lead. I have been hunting among a number of poems which I perpetrated at intervals, mostly sonnets, but I am altogether dissatisfied with the inspiration which led me to perpetrate them, none of them is in my present opinion good enough to publish, at any rate in their present form, and I am too busy to recast, especially as poetically I am very much taken up with 'Savitri' which is attaining a giant stature, she has grown immensely since you last saw the baby. I am besides revising without end so as to let nothing pass which is not up to the mark. And I have much else to do" (March 18, 1945).

The second letter, which was sent to me in typescript, is the last to allude — after touching on other things — to the epic:

"I am afraid I am too much preoccupied with constant clashes with the world and the devil to write anything at length even about your new poems; a few lines must suffice. In fact, as I had to explain the other day to Dilip, my only other regular correspondent, my push to write letters or to new literary production has dwindled almost to zero — this apart from 'Savitri' and even 'Savitri' has very much slowed down and I am only making the last revisions of the First Part already completed, the other two parts are just now in cold storage" (July 20, 1948).

The rather grim tone at the beginning of the note alludes to a state of affairs which called for an even grimmer accent with the same turn of phrase at the start of a typewritten letter to me in May 1949 about my discussion of the philosophical implications of modern physics: "I am afraid I have lost all interest in these speculations; things are getting too serious for me to waste time on these inconclusive

intellectualities..." However, interest in the writing of *Savitri* revived and resulted in almost an unwonted hurry towards the end of 1950. Nirodbaran has recorded how anxious Sri Aurobindo was to complete whatever he thought most important in the epic, as if, because of the increasing seriousness of the Yogic situation, he knew of the sacrifice he would soon have to make of his body — as he did in the early hours of December 5.

After the one-volume *Savitri* had come out I expected the Mother to give me a copy with her own hands. But nothing was done. I felt perplexed and said to her somewhat dramatically though not insincerely: "I don't know why you haven't given me a copy. *Savitri* means so much to me. I would give my heart's blood for it." The Mother replied: "I am sorry. I haven't distributed the book at all. But certainly I'll give you a copy." She called for a copy, wrote "To Amal with blessings" and put her symbolic signature. It was a precious gift and one has only to look at my markings and my copious marginalia to realise how closely the book has been studied and cherished.

I have related elsewhere some other incidents connected with my editorial work on *Savitri*. I may here mention the grand finale, as it were. After the last pages had been printed, the Mother calmly announced to me: "The Press is very displeased with you." I answered: "I know it, Mother, and I am sorry I have troubled the Press. But are you displeased with my work?" She gave a faint smile and said: "No."

The Press' displeasure found a concrete expression in a long manifesto that came out on the heels of the *Savitri* publication, asking all future customers to observe a set of rather Draconian-sounding rules. I was not mentioned anywhere but I knew that every short fired had me as its main target. I accepted the charter without a word of protest. What it demanded was fair enough. However, the Press' bark is seldom followed by a bite. In fact, the people who work there have been exceedingly considerate and I cannot thank them enough for letting me break every rule of the charter now and again. I honestly do my best of behave, but inspiration of the moment sometimes gets the better of me and I cannot help some chopping and changing. My "copy" too is occa-

sionally far from being a model. As much as possible the Press cooperates in a true Yogi's spirit full of understanding, tolerance, dedication to the Mother's Cause, fellow-feeling and even a dash of semi-Aurobindonian humor. Perhaps it even appreciates that, if not in anything else, at least in my dealings with the proofs I have walked rather faithfully in the footsteps of my Master who was an inveterate practitioner of creative proof-reading.

Perhaps the master-stroke of the Master occurred when *Savitri* was first appearing canto by canto in small fascicules. After all the pages of a certain canto were ready for printing, the Press sent up again to Sri Aurobindo the proof of one page, asking whether a particular comma was quite in place. Sri Aurobindo, instead of just replying "Yes" or "No", added a dozen or more new lines! The additional verses upset the arrangement of the fascicule and much had to be redone. I have not yet achieved anything so gloriously disturbing — but there is always hope of being more and more Aurobindonian.

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Soon after the one-volume edition was out, the Mother said to our small group upstairs:

"*Savitri* is occult knowledge and spiritual experience. Some part of it can be understood mentally — but much of it needs the same knowledge and experience for understanding it. Nobody here except myself can explain *Savitri*. One day I hope to explain it in its true sense."

An appreciative treatment of *Savitri* in terms of its poetic quality — an elucidation of its thought-content, its imagery-inspiration, its word-craft and its rhythm-impact: this she did not consider as beyond another interpreter than herself. I can conclude thus because she fully approved Huta's proposal to her that I should go through the whole of the epic with Huta during the period when the Mother and she were doing the illustrations of the poem, the Mother making outline sketches or suggesting the general disposition of the required picture and Huta following her instructions, invoking Sri Aurobindo's spiritual help, keeping the Mother's presence

constantly linked to both her heart and hand and producing the final finished painting.

It was a long-drawn-out pleasure — my study-sessions with the young artist who proved to be a most eager and receptive pupil, indeed so receptive that on a few occasions, with my expository enthusiasm serving as a spur, she would come out with ideas that taught a thing or two to the teacher.

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There was a period when the Mother was reciting passages from *Savitri* in front of a tape-recorder. Her longest recitation was from Book Eleven Canto One, the lines beginning a little before the important turning-point —

Around her some tremendous spirit lived —  
and ending with:

Built is the golden tower, the flame-child born.

It was a most exalting performance. In connection with it the Mother disclosed to us that in the line

For ever love, O beautiful slave of God !

the word she saw in place of "beautiful", although she did not read it, was "powerful". In the late hours of the evening, when she used to be inwardly absorbed in Sri Aurobindo's presence, she asked him why she had made that variant in the line. He answered: "What you have read is a truth — but a truth of the future. At present, 'beautiful' and not 'powerful' is the true word."

One day in the same period the Mother came down to the first floor from her room on the second after one more recitation and exclaimed: "Do you know what pains I take? I spent nearly two hours early this morning consulting an English Dictionary to get the correct pronunciation of several words. Now I hope my reading was good." We had the chance to hear the tape-record. It was really a good reading — though in two or three places there still lingered a slight shift of accent or a French way of speaking a word.

Often the Mother spoke excellent English so far as phrasing and construction were concerned. Her modulation al-

ways had a French ring, but that was a charming trait and not for the world would I have missed it any more than I would have wanted her voice — resonant and thrilling — to be changed one whit.

She never claimed to be an expert in English, but when corrected she could be obstinate if our attitude was pompous and self-important. Not that she would let the matter be printed as it was, she would withdraw it from being published, especially if she considered the matter not original enough. With the attitude right she was always willing to change. On 29 November 1967 I wrote to her: "In one of your declarations on Auroville you have the title-phrase: 'The first condition to live in Auroville.' Would you mind very much if, instead of 'to live' we put 'for living'? Both Tehmi and I felt that this would satisfy English idiom better." She wrote under my typescript: "Certainly yes — 'for living' is much more correct."

As a P.S. I had typed: "There is a little oversight in another phrase — in your letter on gossip. Would you permit us to print 'I wish all would repent like you...' in place of 'I wish all repent like you...'? Of course these are only suggestions. I shall do exactly what you want." The Mother's answer to my question here was "Yes." As a general comment she wrote: "To correct is quite all right and I fully agree!"

Sometimes I was too hasty in thinking there was an error or oversight. Nolini, on the other hand, always tried — unless forced by overwhelming evidence to the contrary — to believe the Mother to have somehow been intuitively right. This habit of his was in tune with his other stance face to face with any question put by the Mother. He would be very reticent — keep looking silently at her, pull a little at his moustache at times and wait for her to come out with the right formula instead of himself rushing forward with his own version. Once when she asked him for a statement and he would not say a word, Champaklal drew everybody's attention to his modest behaviour. By his half-shy half-patient dumbness we got the Mother's own statement: otherwise she might have let pass a lesser couching of the truth. Confronting her written statements he would feel that an attempt to make her alter her English might also take away a part of the power of the truth she wanted to articulate.

On 30 September 1963 I made a translation of some French words of hers written four days earlier, beginning with: "Il ne faut pas confondre un mental calme et un mental silencieux." My opening English sentence read: "One should not mix up a calm mind and a silent mind." She corrected it to: "One should not confuse between a calm mind and a silent mind." I told Nolini that, as far as I knew, English never employed "confuse" as an intransitive verb and that it always followed the model of: "Do not confuse this thing with that" or "Do not confuse the two things together" or else "Do not confuse this thing and that" (in the style of the Mother's own French way with "confondre"). But Nolini, who often consulted me on the fine points of English, was not satisfied on this occasion. He hurried away to consult the monumental Oxford English Dictionary and came back triumphantly with a solitary example of "confuse" in the Mother's manner, meaning "to fail to distinguish". It was a quotation in Volume II, p. 816, from the *Pall Mall Gazette*, p. 5, col. 2 of 13 July 1885. So I had to shut up.

Later, I found that the first occurrence of the usage which the OED had listed had not gone without the honour of a sequel. Webster's *Third New International Dictionary* (1966). Vol. I, cites one W.F. Morgan as writing; "I always confuse between him and Orion."

Evidently, a wide acquaintance with modern English idiom is not all-sufficing and even a good knowledge of English literature through the ages can fall short. But, among other parts they play, they are valuable in helping one to distinguish the typical Englishness of certain expressions. Indians who believe themselves proficient in English often come croppers over this quality. Even Englishmen who are not particularly attentive fail sometimes to realise it. I have heard many educated Indians — and one who had lived in England — say: "I'll take your leave." A mix-up is here of two legitimate locutions: "I'll take leave of you" and "I ask your leave to go." The correct form is "I'll take my leave." One cannot take somebody else's when one is oneself leaving. Another slip — and non-University Englishmen seem as prone to it as Indians — is: "I'll do it as best as I can." English indeed says "as well as I can" but always "as best I can". The second "as" is to be cut out. The phrase is equivalent to: "in the way I can best do it."



Indian pedants, not aware how naturally English flowed in Sri Aurobindo's veins both because of his education in England from his seventh to his twenty-first year and because of an in-born ability as linguist which made him score record marks in Greek and Latin in the open examination held in London for the Indian Civil Service and easily master French as well as be fairly at home in Italian and German — Indian pedants, spurred by the perversity we may pin down by turning a Tennysonian tag negative as "We needs must hate the highest when we see it", attempted again and again to fault his usage. The Mother referred to this ridiculous hobby on several occasions. Even one or two Ashramites indulged in it. Doubtless, the amount of correspondence Sri Aurobindo had to carry on day after day compelled a breakneck speed in writing and debarred revision. So one might expect oversights. In February 1931 he wrote to me: "Dealing with correspondence now occupies anything from five to seven hours — except a few slack days — so you can understand I have no time for accuracy. You must supply the gap left by pen-slips for yourself." Such lacunae apart, it was impossible that he should have shortcomings in knowledge of the language.

Quite frequently it was what I have called typical Englishness that stumped the critics in his usage. Or they would be grammar-bound and not conscious of a freer English practice. For instance, they would cry "Mistake!" if in a sentence of "neither nor" a plural verb were used. Technically the verb should be in the singular, yet to the born English ear the opposite can come just as naturally. Thus we see Churchill in *Their Finest Hour* override mere academic propriety by writing: "I must confess that at the time neither I nor any of my colleagues were aware of the peril of this particular incident." Again, a word like "someone" normally calls for a singular pronoun in reference back to it, yet — often combining, as it does, the two sexes — it is much more elegantly served by "they" as in a phrase like Agatha Christie's in a talk which she makes a doctor give with great acuteness on a Psycho-pathological subject: "It's someone who's got a definite grudge (or thinks they have) and who chooses a particularly nasty and underhand way of working it off."

A common practice in India, even among pedants, is the employment of "had" with a verb although there is no sense of a nearer past and a farther past in the narration. Every now and then one hears: "I had gone to the theatre last evening" instead of simply "I went..." Equally frequent is the speech-turn: "Shall I go to your house in the afternoon?" instead of "Shall I come..." If one expects a party to be at home to receive one when one calls, one "comes": one "goes" to that party's house only if the person is expected to be out at the hour. Then there is the tendency to say, for instance, "Both Minna as well as Nancy have done typing for me." Here, however, the situation is rather delicate. In proper English "both" is followed by "and". But, it would appear, the temptation of substituting "as well as" is so natural that even a fine English writer like Sir Herbert Read commits this solecism once in his book *A Coat of Many Colours*. Although it seems preferable to avoid it, I wonder whether it does not have something of a smack of the typically English. I have spotted it in a letter of Sri Aurobindo too.

English has many native quirks of correctness. In the matter of "both" itself, we would have our knuckles rapped in a good Indian school if we used it for more than two persons, yet all lexicons larger than pocket ones will spring a surprise on us with an extended application of it. Thus Volume I, p. 258, col. 1 of the authoritative Webster which I have already quoted records from no less a writer than Cyril Connolly the phrase: "both a musician, an archaeologist, and an anti-Fascist."

However, we Indians have to be on guard and be attentive to the niceties of the language which so many of us have adopted as our own. We are likely to trip up in tiny yet significant points. Careful as I always try to be, an error I have myself to avoid is a statement like: "I searched in vain for my *Savitri*-volume on the first shelf, and I couldn't find it on the second also." That "also" is *gauche*, if not dead wrong: the fitting word is "either". "Also" would be correct with an affirmative phrase; "either" is the mot juste in a negative one.

Provided we have somehow acquired an inner "feel" of the language we may dare to turn it this way and that when the truly creative afflatus moves us. With what originality

English can be pressed into suggestive service we can best gather from a study of Sri Aurobindo's extensive writings which always include the "luminous" in the "voluminous". I may illustrate it with a stroke of audacity which I came across in my plunge into his poetry in my early Ashram-days.

I wrote to him:

"I should like to know What exactly the meaning of the word 'absolve' is in the following lines from your Love and Death. I have been puzzled because the ordinary dictionary meanings don't seem to fit in.

But if with price, ah God! What easier ! Tears  
Dreadful, innumerable I will absolve  
Or pay with anguish through the centuries...

There is another passage a few pages later where the same word is used differently:

For late

I saw her mid those pale inhabitants  
Whom bodily anguish visits not, but thoughts  
Sorrowful and dumb memories absolve.  
And martyrdom of scourged hearts quivering.

Sri Aurobindo replied:

"In the second passage it is used in its ordinary sense. 'Absolution' means release from sins or from debts — the sorrowful thoughts and memories are the penalty or payment which procures the release from the debt which has been accumulated by the sins and errors of human life.

"In first passage 'absolve' is used in its Latin and not in its English sense, — 'to pay off a debt', but here the sense is stretched a little. Instead of saying 'I will pay off with tears' Ruru says 'I will pay off tears' as the price of the absolution. This Latinisation and the inversion of syntactical connections are familiar licenses in English poetry, — of course, it is incorrect, but a deliberate incorrectness, a violence purposely done to the language in order to produce a poetic effect. The English language, unlike the French and some others, likes, as Stephen Phillips used to say, to have liber-

ties taken with it. But, of course, before one can take these liberties, one must be a master of the language, — and, in this case, of the Latin also" (1931).

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By the way, "absolve", not a common word by any means, is a verb of which Sri Aurobindo seems rather fond. It appears six times in *Savitri*<sup>1</sup>, mostly as a past participle passive in the sense of "having been released", a natural English usage, but twice the meaning is Latinised, amounting to variants of "pay off". Thus we read:

The conscious Force that acts in Nature's breast...  
Absolves from hour to hour her secret charge<sup>2</sup>.

Here the suggestion is of acquitting oneself of a task or duty assigned to one. In

This most she must absolve with endless pangs,  
Her deep original sin, the will to be,<sup>3</sup>

the "pay-off" connotation is more direct: "the will to be" is the culpable sin-debt incurred and "endless pangs" are the price for getting rid of it.

But the linguistic adventurousness of *Savitri* strikes us in a thousand ways. A few instances may be culled. We have a French noun boldly turned into a verb expressing the mind's mode of working by an over-reduction of aspects or terms:

A single law simplessed the cosmic theme,  
Compressing Nature into a formula.<sup>4</sup>

Elsewhere a French adjective meaning "limp, slack, flaccid" faces us vividly:

Torn from its immediacy of errorless sight  
Knowledge was rebuilt from cells of inference  
Into a fixed body flasque and perishable.<sup>5</sup>

An English noun is employed as a transitive verb telling us how the Life-Force

<sup>1</sup> Pp. 87, 124, 202, 299, 305, 533, 599, 653, 695. (SABCL)

<sup>2</sup> P. 60.    <sup>3</sup> P. 599.    <sup>4</sup> P. 273.    <sup>5</sup> P. 267.

Ambitioned the seas for robe, for crown the stars.<sup>1</sup>

Another Aurobindonian coinage, now a new noun framed on a valid analogy, comes three times — first in

And driven by a pointing hand of Light  
Across his soul's unmapped immensitudes<sup>2</sup>

We get an unusual adjective-shaped noun about the doings of "a secret Nature":

As if her rash superb wagered to outvie  
The veiled Creator's cosmic secrecies.<sup>3</sup>

In a similar category is the phrase:

In man a dim disturbing somewhat lives;  
It knows but turns away from divine Light  
Preferring the dark ignorance of the fall.<sup>4</sup>

The sole difference is that an adverbial instead of an adjectival noun is at work. Again we meet an unfamiliar transformation with

A manifest of the Imperishable.<sup>5</sup>

a line which may well characterise the whole of *Savitri* from the viewpoint of spiritual revelatory literature.

This line could focus what the Mother meant when she called Sri Aurobindo's epic "that marvellous prophetic poem which will be humanity's guide towards the future realisation" (27-11-1963) and when she said to Norman Dowsett: "For the opening of the psychic, for the growth of consciousness and even of the improvement of English it is good to read one or two pages of *Savitri* each day."

<sup>1</sup> P. 116.

<sup>2</sup> P. 80. The two other occurrences are on pp. 237 and 524. (SABCL)

<sup>3</sup> P. 84. <sup>4</sup> P. 366. <sup>5</sup> P. 706. (SABCL)

## Lights and Shades of the Yogic Life

An elderly lady who had come to the Ashram through me and stayed here for several years went back to Bombay because of some dissatisfaction with her lodgings as well as in response to a call from her family. She must have thought Bombay-life would be a bit of a relief after the rigours of Yoga. But she was soon disillusioned. A lot of suffering had to be undergone and she was very anxious to return. The Mother, however, did not encourage her. Time and again her request went unheeded. I was again in Bombay at the time. So she visited me with a plea to recommend her to the Mother. She said she was prepared to accept any condition of life in Pondicherry. As I was shortly to make a trip to the Ashram I agreed to take up her case. I told the Mother: "X is frantically eager to come back. Won't you let her do so?" The Mother answered: "When she was here she was always complaining." I urged: "She will accept whatever condition you keep her in." The Mother smiled and said: "They all say that. But once they are settled they make demand after demand." I persisted in my brief, and ultimately the Mother said "Yes". The lady lived up to her promise and the rest of her days in the Ashram were peaceful.

I have mentioned her because we are inclined to forget what a blessing it is to be allowed to stay in the Ashram and breathe its purifying and uplifting atmosphere. We should be ready to put up with a few inconveniences, especially if they keep recurring in spite of efforts to remove them, for then they assume the role of challenges to our nature and press upon some part or other of our being which refuses to change. Frequently the advice proffered to bear them is disliked but the excuse to dislike it would be valid only if those who are comfortably off and do not know where the shoe pinches start a spiritual discourse for our soul's benefit. Even so, while perceiving the hollowness of the discourse, we



should not fail to realise in our recurring disadvantages the possibility of Sri Aurobindo's finger falling on the obscure spots of our psychology.

The lady whom I have brought into my narrative had a vein of maternal solicitude and as a nurse she could be very helpful if occasionally a little nagging with her over-attentions. There was also a streak of simplicity, almost of naivety, in her mind which was pleasing and gave a chance now and again to a mischievous person of my type to play a prank. Even if a trifle irrelevantly (or irreverently) I cannot resist a small anecdote connected with her.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had come on a visit to Pondicherry and the Ashram. After he had gone I met my friend in the Dining Room and told her: "From the pavement outside my house I saw Nehru's car slowly pass and I had a very good look at him." She said: "I had much better luck. He was at the Samadhi at a distance of only a few feet from me. I could see him clearly from top to bottom." The imp in me put the question: "How was the bottom?" At once she lit up and answered: "Very fair." The people around us burst into laughter, but the poor lady could not understand why and seemed to think them rather silly.

My impish strain surely needed control at times but it cannot be declared quite inconsistent with a Yogic life led under the Master's lavish humour and the Mother's keen wit. The humour of Sri Aurobindo was indeed so ready to cover any aspect of life and could so easily turn even upon himself that one had to exercise a certain censorship in print lest the public should misunderstand his temper. With a view to inclusion in the periodical I was editing, I remember submitting to the Mother a snatch of conversion reported by Nirodbaran. She enjoyed it but shook her head.

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On page 96 of *Champaklal Speaks* it is recorded on December 15, 1949 that to meet the demand for bonus by the employed workers of the Ashram — Rs. 20,000 in that year — the Mother was thinking of selling some of her jewellery. As the expense on the workers kept increasing with the

years, the need to sell her jewellery also increased. As far as I know, the Mother sold it in batches on several occasions. Luckily there was a very generous man connected with the Ashram, who bought it up two or three times and each time gave it back to her. After he died, the situation changed. Finally, I believe the jewellery had to go out of her hands. On the last occasion she gave a choice to many of us to buy what we wanted. When my turn came to take something, she said: "You are poor. You can't buy anything, I'll give you a tie-pin which I used to wear at one time." It was a gold tie-pin with a small gem in its head.

It is one of my post precious possessions. Another gift from her is the typewriter I am using. The letters to her typed on my old machine taxed her eyes. She told me: "Your lines are wavy — they are like little curving snakes. I shall give you a new typewriter. I have ordered four Remingtons."

An object that had immense worth for me arrived from Sri Aurobindo one day in the 'thirties. Whenever I had anything I valued, I had the impulse to offer it to him or the Mother. I thought everybody felt the same. But I came to know that often good gifts to people were sent up to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo merely to be blessed. A fellow sadhak, of whom I had a high opinion, sent up a beautiful fountain-pen. When I saw it with the Mother, I took it to be a present. She said: "It is not a present. To give it would never even enter the head of this man." I was surprised and came to the conclusion that extraordinary experiences were not the master-clue to the spiritual status of a disciple: the master-clue was the capacity of self-giving, the flow of the being towards the Master and the Mother, the inner generosity forgetful of one's own importance and interests.

Either prompted by the sight of the pen of else independently, I remember writing to Sri Aurobindo for specifications — whether he liked a pen that was thin or substantial in body, one that wrote fine or thick. As I had expected from his usual writing, he preferred a fine point. I got my mother in Bombay to send me the best fountain-pen available with the characteristics liked by Sri Aurobindo. When it arrived I dispatched it to him with the words: "This pen is fit only for your aristocratic hand. It will go ill with my peasant paw. Please make use of it." Imagine my astonishment when he

sent me in response the pen he had himself been working with. How happy I was, holding it in my fingers, the reddish-brown body of it a hint of some new earth-creation and the sharply pointed gold nib the spring-head of a divine outflow from the transformed terrestriality. All that I wrote with it carried for me the sense of the Master's hand subtly one with my own.

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During the last visit of mine of the Ashram before I came back to settle in it at the beginning of 1954, the Mother said to me in effect:

"The mental plane is so vast and so varied that one can go on and on in it and be lost in its wonders and surprises, its vista upon vista of search and discovery. Feeling at home in it, one may never turn to the true spiritual realm.

"It has also a certain watery nature. It easily flows into any channel, any mould. It is open to infinite diversity and does not have the inherent strength to hold on to one life-theme. Nor can it be firmly caught — it keeps slipping away.

"In your instance, it is not, as you believe, your mind that has kept you on our Path. No doubt, Sri Aurobindo has paid an extraordinary compliment to your mental ability. I should not tell you this, it may make you proud. But what has supported you in your ideal of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga, what made it possible for the inner psychic call to persist all along, and brought you safe to us through all dangers and deviations, is your vital being. It is the strength and loyalty of the Vital that has ensured your return in spite of numerous obstacles."

The Mother's speech was quite a startler to me. I had always blamed my Vital for all the difficulties I had had in Yoga, and I must have been right on many occasions, but I had never realised the positive contribution made by this part of my nature to my very adherence to Yoga. Now that I cast my mind back to a certain incident, I feel that it was my Vital that had made a pronouncement which must have astonished the Mother herself. When I was on the verge of a decision which she did not approve of, she remarked that I

seemed to think this decision would make no difference to my spiritual future and to my relationship with her and Sri Aurobindo. I declared in reply: "Nothing can ever come in the way of my spiritual future, nothing can ever change my attitude to you and Sri Aurobindo. I don't accept from anybody that any difference to my destiny as your disciple can come about through whatever happens or is done."

It was evidently the inmost soul, eternal child of the Divine, speaking, but the words of indomitable strength, with an oddly arrogant accent, in terms of concrete life-values, life-situations, were shaped by the spontaneous collaboration of the Vital with that soul. The reasoning mind was not looking at the future: the unthinking life-force that had been gripped by the Divine was pushing with utter faith towards the time to come. It could dare anything, it was sure of its adherence and its ability to endure. I am reminded of some lines in one of my poems:

The exquisite heart, the delicate reverie gain  
 Miracled escape, but never the God-life's zest.  
 Blind hungers alone draw down transcendent things...

It is such hungers — the vital impulses in a super-state, as it were — that are responsible for all massive creations giving from to the Spirit's vision: a Pyramid of Gaza, a Borobudur temple-complex, a King Lear, a Ninth Symphony, a Sistine-Chapel-ceiling. And the supramentalisation of matter depends essentially on the reckless self-abandonment of man's vital being to the Divine's call. The Mother once told me: "When the Vital surrenders to the Divine we have a marvellous event. Something indescribably beautiful and grand takes place — the absolute sweep of the Vital's throwing itself at the Divine's feet is incomparable." The Mother also observed that the true joy of the sadhana comes when the Vital co-operates. Till then all happiness of Yoga comes and goes, and there is no fixity, no planting of it down into the earth — into our physical existence.

Talking of adherence to the Divine, I recall the Mother's comment on a sentence which I once approvingly quoted to her from George Meredith. Meredith had written to the effect: "Men fall from God's Grace because they cling to God not with their strength but with their weakness."

The Mother's instant reaction was: "That is rubbish!"

I was taken aback and from her attitude I understood what she meant. Let me explain.

Meredith's is nothing more than a clever contrived statement with no real insight into the critical situation it flashes out. If the Grace is to respond and lift man up, man has to feel his weakness before the Divine, develop a sense of dependence on Him and make a self-surrender. To have a feeling of strength before the Divine is egoism: the true feeling of strength comes when one has clung to the Divine with all one's natural weakness offered to Him — the strength comes from the Divine, it is not something one has to boast of, independently of Him.

The Mother's infallible inner perception of the truth in words and things and persons came home to me also when she told us what she had seen in regard to a Frenchman who had landed in Pondicherry and suddenly got interested in the Ashram's doings and as suddenly ran away. He was given quarters in Budy House on the beach-road. Recalling the interview she had given him, the Mother said:

"He told me a very remarkable incident. While shaving himself one morning here, he saw in the mirror a ball of light entering his head from above it. Although the account looked unbelievable I could see at once that he was speaking the truth. For when he told me some other things, I could perceive immediately that he was making them up. A sort of shadow came over his face and I knew the presence of falsehood."

It would indeed be a helpful development on our part to acquire a little bit of her truth-sense. A general danger to which a lack of such a sense would expose us is hit off very pointedly by some words of the Mother. On one occasion she said: "I had two visions. In one, while I was walking at 6 p.m., I saw children rushing to hear a humbug! I thought: What will happen in my absence?"

Of course the first step is to be able to catch all that goes

humbugging within our own selves — all the pretensions, all the self-satisfactions, all the sense of superiority, all the manoeuvre to be impressive Yogis, as if an infinite of the unachieved did not stretch before us, the supreme egoless soul-sweet spirit-wide range after range of evolutionary possibility to which Sri Aurobindo and the Mother constantly beckoned us. But there is also the second step — to be on guard against other people's pretensions.

Either we are too important in our own eyes or else we cast about for spiritual excitement from whatever direction, groping for gurus and seeking substitutes for the Mother. We forget the special Light and Force she and our Master brought down for earth-use and fixed it in the earth's subtle being for all future. While we have to respect spirituality whenever it genuinely occurs, while we should be ready to profit by every authentic aspiration around us, we must cling centrally to the Great Presence that has been granted to our souls and never strive to find somebody to stand in the Mother's place. We must also guard against being swept off our feet by glittering shows and high-sounding claims — the fanfares of what the Mother bluntly designated as "a humbug".

No matter what may have attracted us in our days of ignorance, the moment the immaculate Himalaya of Sri Aurobindo rose up before us and the silvery Ganges of the Mother flowed down from it to our lowlands, all our work in the world should lie in giving ourselves to that Guardian Peace of the Eternal and that Gracious Power of the Infinite.



## The Mother's Attitudes and Actions

To ensure the success of the Mother's workings on our behalf we were called upon to accept implicitly her advice, however difficult or unpractical it might look, and not wonder whether she had truly her finger on the pulse of changing day-to-day reality. A particular episode in this connection has got impressed indelibly on my mind.

A couple put before the mother a difficult life-situation. Her instructions were accepted without argument, but in the course of time various unexpected circumstances, seeming to show a path out of the impasse, arose and made them think of new possibilities. They wrote to the Mother about the fresh turn of events and asked a number of questions. When the Mother failed to answer for a few days I inquired the reason. She wrote back:

"I did not answer because their minds are terribly restless, they do not know how to make use of the force and they spoil my formations. But you need not tell them that — send them only blessings." (13-5-1955)

A formation, as I understand it, is a subtle mould created in the stuff of the inner world for a person and empowered to guide the outer process of events to a happy issue, a fortunate pattern, even out of an apparently unfavourable posture of things. Naturally, it is important not to come in the way of any such occult phenomenon.

The next day I wrote again to the Mother: "Please allow me to tell them what they should do not to spoil your formation. This seems to me very necessary. They are not at all unwilling to try their best to co-operate, but they don't know how and the position is indeed difficult. Please forgive their ignorance. Don't give them up. They need your help very badly. But of course they must not spoil your work and waste your Grace. At least in order to prevent them from doing so, I should like to tell them what to do. They will be

very grateful to know whatever will enable them to co-operate with you when you have been so kind. Shall I tell them something like the following? —

"Have simple, unthinking, firm faith. Do just what you have been told by the Mother. Trust her vision and her work. Don't spoil the occult formations she makes for you. Don't bring in all kinds of fears. Don't start looking in diverse directions, muddling the situation by trying this, that and the other. Stop being so restless and snap out of all depression. Be natural, cheerful, and co-operate calmly, clearly, singleheartedly with the Mother's plan."

The Mother drew a line in the left margin against the last paragraph of my letter and wrote underneath: "Yes, you can write that, with my blessings." (15-5-1955)

About a month later I heard again from the couple. They reported a good chance to solve their problem. The closing words of the note were: "We have done our utmost on our side — but really the final touch would be the Mother's help. We find it very hard at present to live as we are. But it just can't be helped... All we can do is to put our faith in the Mother. Perhaps she'll make the new chance come true."

I asked the Mother whether there would be any message. I added: "If the new chance also does not come off, should I ask them plainly not to try for anything else but continue quietly and contentedly as you have advised? Some clear instruction or command seems necessary."

The Mother replied: "Amal, you must understand one thing. Before giving an answer to a question, I look at all the sides of the problem present and future, so when the answer is given it is final. It is no use coming back to the question any more. Blessings." (12-6-1955)

This sounded a little like giving up the parties involved, but that was not the Mother's way with her children. She tolerated their mistakes and looked essentially at their central turn towards her. All through the succeeding years her Grace kept pouring upon the man and his wife and their children. He appealed to her in all difficulties. I vividly remember one occasion nearly thirteen years later. He wrote to me: "Please tell Mother that I feel all the time as if life and energy were flowing away from me out of my hands and feet and I cannot stop it." The Mother's reply is both

that have been climbed. Following Mother's words that the time for rest is not now, Amal continues unceasingly this great adventure that is the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. All these three experiences have probably been published in *Mother India*.

17 August 1991, about 5 p.m.

Suddenly a great quiet took possession of the body and a sound was heard coming from far away and surrounding the still body. Then the body's borders seemed to thin and become open to permeation by a Vast Outside. I would call that 'transfluent' on the analogy of 'translucent', for now not light but a flow passed right through me – a flow which appeared to be the passage of a whole universe's movement through my form. The form still had its identity but it was not barriered against the rest of the universe. It was essentially continuous with a huge Existence and a wide Presence steadily advancing in time with a steady faintly audible rhythm. What a sense of freedom and serenity!

Automatically all thinking stopped: no ideas, no images. The universal flow was felt most in the region of the chest, although it was perceived as if at a slight distance in the head as well as the abdomen. I had to do nothing except sit in-drawn to this enormous flux which bore my embodied being onward to an unknown but beautifully trusted future.

Along with this open feeling within an unlimited uniform sound, there was a kind of effortless isolation from the immediate environment – except for a calmly sympathetic shadow – the Samadhi. That is why I use the word 'in-drawn'. And yet this very environment was, without its knowing it, part of the universal flux. It is that lack of knowing which my body was guarding itself against with an utter ease born of commingling with the tranquil majesty of the flowing Immense into which I had been taken up.

Heraclitus meant by his *panta rhei* – everything flows, that there is constant change, nothing stays the same. You can't step into the same river twice. What I sensed was a never-stopping fluency which was the continuity of some ever-identified Whole.

Sri Aurobindo in 1914 and what destiny awaits *homo sapiens*.

According to the most popular version of modern evolutionary theory, *homo sapiens* appeared not only very late on the scene but also at the end of a lengthy series of blind genetic mutations sifted by an equally blind process of natural selection due to the demands of the ever-changing external environment.

The Mother said in effect: "I realised long ago that the human form carries a fundamental importance. I used to rise into high levels during my trances — till I seemed close to the very ultimate spiritual reality. It was certainly beyond Sat-chit-ananda. There I once saw the figure of a being like a man with uplifted arms as if calling down something from the Unknown and Unmanifest. So, you see, the human form goes back to the utmost origin."

This vision should fill us with an immense hope; but to fulfill our destiny on earth we have indeed "miles to go". The Supermind is what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have held out to us as the all-fulfilling power. To receive and embody it is the aim of their yoga for us, and they have laid it open to our aspiring reach. But we must beware of crying "Supermind" glibly. Even the most advanced amongst us have to be careful in their convictions or claims. Sometime in the 'fifties the Mother said to me: "I had a vision in which I saw you and X on the mental level. Both of you were arguing and acting together. It was a state in which the mind is ignorant. Usually I see X's head filled with light. However, we must remember that this light is a very different thing from the Supramental Consciousness. There is a big gulf between the two, no matter how brilliant the light may be from the great mental planes above the human but below the Supermind."

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Of course the light proper to the mere mind itself is even less a thing to be proud of — though it may be very attractive. Along with it some soul-quality has to be at play if it is to be by its own strength a part of the spiritual life, Knowing my attachment to the mental personality in me. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother always tried to summon me be-

yond it. The very name I have been given by them — "Amal Kiran", meaning "The Clear Ray" — is meant to point not only towards clarity but also towards radiancy — towards being on the mental plane the manifestation of a light above it, a sun of Truth from which a revealing ray acts in the mind. Another pointer to the state in which my mental personality should be — a rather difficult and tall order — is the flower which the Mother allotted to me. In the old days when I was asked by her to paint the flowers she used to give at the Pranam in the morning, a certain number of them were set apart for particular rooms. I had to paint them on small pieces of drawing-paper and have them hung on the wall of one room or another. Thus I was asked to paint the flower called "Falsehood" for the room in which the sadhaks read daily newspapers. For my own room the Mother told me to paint "Krishna's Light in the Mind". I was very happy with this choice of hers — especially as "Krishna's Light" is said by Sri Aurobindo to be also "Sri Aurobindo's Light".

Ever since this choice, cleverness for the sake of cleverness has ceased to be a pursuit, though I cannot pretend that I always succeed in being truly luminous. What at least I seek to achieve is some soul-quality infusing the mind's functioning. And, of course, for us the soul-quality lies in being open in our inmost self to the new yoga Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have made active amongst us. If one has turned away from them one cannot expect a legitimate place in the field of mental expression that the Ashram's magazines afford. Not that everything published must be directly Aurobindonian; but it should not emanate from a consciousness that has explicitly strayed away from the Master's and the Mother's light. I realised this issue in connection with my editorship of *Mother India*.

A man in Bombay who had been once a devotee had become sceptical and sarcastic. He was contributing a series of commentaries on an Upanishad to *Mother India*. The articles were appreciated very much. I had kept the man's personal attitude apart from my judgment of his writing. As long as the writing bore no trace of the attitude, I could afford to be impersonal. The Mother came to be told of his attitude and the several unpleasant things he had said. She knew also that his series was appearing in *Mother India*.

She raised the topic with me one afternoon. I told her how much the articles had been admired and that they had no tinge of his critical approach to the Mother's workings. She very calmly heard me out. Then she expressed her wish that we should not seem to support the man by publishing his work. I inquired whether I could be allowed to run the series to its end and then forswear publishing anything else by the same hand. She paused for a minute and said: "It is best if we stop just now."

I could see that there was no personal feelings involved on her part. Actually, I had noticed in the past that complaints had been made to her about somebody or other's hostile remarks against her and the proposal had been made that she should take steps against that person. She had said: "As the remarks are about me, I can't take any stand. If they were about Sri Aurobindo, I would certainly act." On the present occasion her decision must have had behind it some insight into occult forces which might harm either me or the readers or else the Ashram's general work. Obviously, through my backing of the article the hostile elements were drawing sustenance. Purely literary principles have little validity where the battle between the illumined future and the obstructive past is concerned. I put aside the impersonal editor in me and acted as the obedient disciple.

It was a test for me over and above its being a lesson to the writer of the commentaries. There cannot be a compromise in such matters. But, of course, as the Mother's talk with me indicated, everything has to be done without personal animosity. A wide and wise serenity has to be at play in all decisive moves.

I dare say the Mother's move was even for the benefit of the writer himself — a quiet criticism which was an act of Grace to stir his soul to come forward again. And I am told that before his premature death he did turn to the Mother once more.

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While I am about the subject of *Mother India* in relation to the Mother's wishes, I may touch upon the hints she gave me of what *Mother India* should never stoop to. Once a co-worker offered the suggestion that we should ask our read-



ers their reactions and their expectations, so that we might increase our periodical's popularity and be more successful. No doubt, the co-worker had no insistence in his suggestion and was as willing as myself to accept the Mother's ruling in every respect. But somehow the Mother came down with a pretty heavy hand. She must have intuited a non-Aurobindonian force putting out its tentacles from behind the co-worker's innocent inquiry. She wrote to me: "Let us become as vulgar as we can and success is sure to come." (16-1-1965)

We were a little taken aback and I pursued the topic by seeking her views on what changes the journal might undergo without falling below standard. She was again uncompromising: "No — I have no superficial views on the subject — and what I could say would not fit the 'new spirit' of the journal. Let me out of all this, it is better." (17-1-1965) One point, however, she clarified by adding the next day: "All that is done with the purpose of pleasing the public and obtaining success is vulgar and leads to falsehood. I enclose a deeper view of the subject. Blessings." The deeper view was expressed in a Message of hers that we should want to please neither ourselves nor others but only the Lord.

Some time later she told me that *Mother India* was playing very well the moderate role it adopted — not setting itself exclusively in the direction of the spiritual elite but allowing a certain wideness of appeal which would keep room for general writing of various kinds without letting the spiritual theme go into the background or stop holding the centre of the stage — yet she warned me against any further move towards making it broad-based and popular. I have tried my best to live up to her vision, never forgetting the core of spiritual truth which we must preserve in full blaze, and always keeping a continuity with what Sri Aurobindo meant when in reply to an Ashramite reader's criticism of the opinions voiced in the early semi-political editorials, he exclaimed: "Doesn't he know that *Mother India* is my paper?"

Although the Mother often asked us to be sensitive to subtle realities and activities behind the visible happenings of the world and of the Ashram, she could pour ice-cold water when we indulged in spiritual fantasies. Thus on 10 May 1967 I informed her:

"The following is going round the Ashram as emanating from you. If it is authentic, may I publish it in *Mother India*?—

"4th May 1967 (4-5-67): The Supramental will start working on earth, but the working may start even a little earlier.

"I observe this day as the Supramental Manifestation day thus: this is the day of India's New Year, Earth's New Year and the whole Universe's New Year and all these three strangely coincide on the same day which may change the face of the whole Universe.' "

The Mother's brief answer was: "It is all fancy!"

A short time afterwards — to be exact. On 15 July the same year — I sent her the letter: "There is a story current here that into the body of Auroson you have put the soul of Paul Richard! Apart from anything else, I believe Paul Richard is still alive.

Or have you put him to sleep in order to give his soul a better embodiment? The story strikes me as rather fantastic — but one never knows until one asks you. A less colourful report is that this time you have completely succeeded in putting a great soul into a baby at the very moment of birth."

The Mother wrote back: "When will you learn not to listen to all the rumours going about in this place?"

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In her spiritual pronouncements the Mother could be very positive at times as when she said in February 1965: "Nothing can delay the inevitable realisation." But at other times she was ready to make whatever reservation appeared to her necessary. On 14 January of the same year I quoted to her some words which she had uttered and which I had wished to publish in *Mother India*: "The will of Sri Aurobindo is bound to be done... His work of transformation cannot but end in a supreme victory. And what he calls the supramental world will be brought down on earth and realised by us here and now." After Amrita had read out the

quotation to her she did not say "Yes" but wanted to know where it had come from. Amrita told me of her inquiry and I wrote to her:

"I had jotted down these words in my dairy but omitted to mention the source. On asking Kishor I have found the source: *Words of The Mother*, Third Series, pp. 54-55. The talks in that book date back to the time of the meetings you used to hold in the Prosperity Room before the Soup Distribution. They were recorded by me and, before publication by Kishor, approved by you.

"As a rule, when we print what has already been published, we do not ask your permission. I asked it because I wanted to remind you of the extremely encouraging and heart-cheering things you had said. But how is it that you have not let me repeat them? Any particular reason at the moment for keeping them out of sight?

"I do hope your words still hold true. If you have changed your mind — or supermind — my life seems hardly worth living."

The Mother's reply was reassuring, but as she appeared not to consider the occasion appropriate I did not republish the sweeping statement. Now, after nearly a decade and a half, seeing that the statement stands as permanent part of the Centenary Edition of her works, as indeed it should, I think that her reply must be made public. It was:

"My conviction is not changed, but the word 'now' must be understood in a supramental way." (15-1-1965)

I believe she wanted us not to be too sanguine about the great realisation. We must abstain from seeing it as in the very near future, much more imagining the supramental world as already taking shape amongst us. A proper sense of the time needed for so radical a "divine event" is surely the Mother's intention. But, if her statement is to be tied in with the one a month earlier and with several others in the same vein, earlier or later, we have to put the concerned span of years — long though it may be by ordinary standards — still within the Mother's own life-time and regard that life-time as extendable by Yogic Force to cover the "now" understood "in the supramental way". Then alone the categorical expression "Nothing can delay." becomes intelligible.

Somehow the extension was not done. For reasons best known to her, the Mother let her life be cut short even before her own centenary which she had more than once appeared to take for granted. There is a mystery here, before which we have ultimately to stand silent. However, our silence must carry the certainty that whatever the Mother has chosen to do is in conformity with the demands of her work as an Avatar of the Supermind. To quote Sri Aurobindo, "the Divinity [that is the Avatar] acts according to... the consciousness of the Truth above and the Lila [Play] below and it acts according to the need of the Lila, not according to man's ideas of what it should or should not do. This is the first thing one must grasp, otherwise one can understand nothing about the manifestation of the Divine."<sup>1</sup> Returning to the same theme elsewhere, Sri Aurobindo tells us that the Avatar's Divine Consciousness, bent as it is on only two things fundamentally — "the truth above and here below the Lila and the purpose of the incarnation or manifestation" — does "what is necessary" for them "in the way its greater than human consciousness sees to be the necessary and intended way".<sup>2</sup>

In this vision our groping hearts must find the rest they need to prepare them for a new life with the Mother.

<sup>1</sup>On Yoga II, Tome One (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 1958), p. 414.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 427.

# **SUPPLEMENT**

## The Birth Centenary of The Mother

The Mother's Birth Centenary, which fell on February 21, 1978, was celebrated in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry by nearly 9000 people from all over the world. But what marked the occasion unforgettably was not only the enthusiastic concourse of her disciples and admirers and the happy hushful visit to the room in which had been spent the last years of the most extraordinary being who had assumed a woman's form in terrestrial history. The distinguishing feature was also the powerful sense of that form still permeating the atmosphere and the rare inner experience that overwhelmed those who were attuned to this perception.

The Divine Light which the Mother had manifested during her life-time persisted even after she had her body. Under its guidance her spiritual children could continue on the great path it had shown to them. But her departure from physical existence had made a difference to their feeling of the Divine Delight with which she had charged their spacious days and profound nights. Along the road of the future illumined by her, the soul went searching for those eyes which had seemed to hold eternity in their depths and for that smile which had appeared to turn the whole long travail of time into an endless labour of love.

There was expectation of some revealing sign from her. In dreams and visions she manifested herself to several of her followers. But what was an ever-living Presence to the inner self was yet a mysteriously haunting Absence to the physical consciousness. It is this outer loss that has been counteracted in an indescribable way by the Birth Centenary. One feels irresistibly urged from within to say, "The Mother has taken birth again."

It was as if a veil had been removed and the reality of the subtle world from where, along with Sri Aurobindo, she watches and guides us had projected its bliss and beauty most concretely into our body's self-awareness. One may even affirm that it was as if she had put one foot forward



from that world into our earth-air and we could touch it not only with our inner consciousness but also with the very brain-mind that deals with the physical world. A vast opening took place in hundreds of us, blending the body-sense itself with her radiant being. With every beat the heart went feeling, "She has come back."

We could not see her. But a new life began under her subtle closeness. The entire being was conscious of an ecstatic melting — the sign of a reshaping of us within the crucible of her dynamic love.

There can be no loss any more. Her hands seem to touch and bless us with the same tender compulsion as before towards a perfect future. All the wonderful hours we had spent with her in the past re-lived — not as merely revived memories but as a new world of strange sensations filled with the warm creative beatitude that was the Mother with whom we used to have daily contact.

With implications undreamt-of by him whom Sri Aurobindo called not only "A perfect voice of sweet and serious rhyme" but also "Critic with judgment absolute to all time", we may well express our fundamental experience of the Mother's Birth-Centenary with the phrases forming the *grand finale* of that poem of the modern spirit's ceaseless searching, Goethe's Faust:

All things that pass  
Are symbols alone;  
Here into Fullness  
Each failure is grown;  
Here the Untellable  
Crowns all endeavour,  
The Eternal Feminine  
Leads onward forever.

## February 21

### A Look Behind and Ahead

On one 21st of February in the last 1950's I repeated to the Mother the usual English formula for a birthday: "Many happy returns." Immediately, half-jocular, half-serious, she exclaimed: "What! You want me to return again and to the earth still further? Haven't I had enough of being born so far?"

I was taken quite unawares by such a response. I mumbled something like: "No, Mother, I don't at all wish you a rebirth. I have only used the customary words meaning that you should enjoy numerous future birthdays in this very life." She answered: "That's all right." But her response set me thinking.

My first thought was of her own statement made a little earlier in that decade: "Since the beginning of the earth, wherever and whenever there was the possibility of manifesting a ray of consciousness, I was there." Then it struck me that though the work done each time had been glorious the labour must have been heavy and that the need to carry on this illuminating toil from age to age must have taxed the human embodiments for it grievously. The Mother must have passed through her frequent births with a graceful heroism but there could be no denying the fact that for the sake of the world's uplift she repeatedly

Assaults of Hell endured and Titan strokes

And bore the fierce inner wounds that are slow to heal.<sup>1</sup>

In the wake of this second thought followed the sense that the Mother was carrying even in her present embodiment a tremendous burden whose recurrence she did not want in another incarnation — a burden she wished to dispose of by a supreme victory. The victory was, of course, for the

<sup>1</sup> Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* (Centenary Edition, 1972.), p. 230.

earth's good. Like Sri Aurobindo who once said that the mighty task he had undertaken was not for himself since he did not require either liberation or supramentalisation, the Mother as the Avatar of the Highest Divinity had nothing to accomplish for her own sake: she had shouldered the luminous load of the Integral Yoga in order to lighten humanity's evolutionary travail. But the load was immense and such as nobody else could endure and it had become greater after the passing of Sri Aurobindo: now the concentration of the Supermind's transformative pressure was wholly on the Mother's body.

Sri Aurobindo has well summed up the Avatar's situation: "It is only divine Love which can bear the burden I have to bear, that all have to bear who have sacrificed everything else to the one aim of uplifting earth out of its darkness towards the Divine. The Gallio-like 'Je m'en fiche'-ism ('I do not care') would not carry me one step; it would certainly not be divine. It is quite another thing that enables me to walk unweeping and unlamenting towards the goal" (April 1934).

Obviously, if her remark to me was to be fully understood, the Mother desired the Divine Love, which was sustaining her, to fulfil its aim of supramental descent and transformation in this very birth of hers: she had no inclination to write "To be continued" to the story of her present life. What is more, she did not think in terms even of her disciples being reborn for success. Not only to me did she say at one time: "When I speak of total realisation for any of you, I mean in this very life." Her vision is expressed to others also when Sri Aurobindo wrote to a sadhak on 15 January 1934: "The Mother has never spoken of anything to be done in the next birth.... Naturally the vital has to be transformed if one is to succeed."

Yes, it was as she told me on one occasion: "Death is not in our programme." The Mother's birthday was meant to repeat year after year, with her work moving from strength to strength. In 1953 she expressed in general terms her vision as well as her will:

"The transformation of the material body has not been done nor even attempted perhaps in the past. It can be done only if life is sufficiently prolonged; you do not leave the

body unless you will it so and thus have the necessary time at your disposal to bring about this change. Sri Aurobindo once said — and he said it without the least hesitation — that it would take about three hundred years to do it; I can add, from the time when the last stage of union with the Divine is reached....

“To prepare such a body three hundred years is nothing; even a thousand years will not be too much. Naturally, I am speaking of the same body. If you change your body in between, it will no longer be the same body. At 50 the body already begins to wear out. But, on the contrary, if you have a body that goes on perfecting itself, if each passing year represents a step in progress, then you can continue indefinitely....”

After the Supramental Manifestation on 29 February 1956 in the subtle-physical layer of the earth her hopes took a still more concrete shape. No doubt, she did not envisage a quick change in general world-conditions and said on 5 September of the same year: “Before the effects of the supramental manifestation become visible and tangible, perceptible to the whole world, thousands of years have perhaps to pass.” However, she had a shorter view for the small world of sadhaks around her. On 10 October 1956 she declared: what Sri Aurobindo has promised and what evidently interests us who are here now is that the time has come when some chosen beings out of the present-day humanity who fulfil the conditions of the necessary spiritualisation would be capable of transforming their body with the help of the Supramental Force, the Supramental Consciousness and the Supramental Light and would no longer be animal men but become supermen. This promise he based on the knowledge he had that the Supramental Force was about to break upon earth. In point of fact, the supramental Force had come down into him long ago.”

The meaning of the last statement about Sri Aurobindo is evidently, as she explained to Monsieur Roger Anger one day and later to me on 25 November 1970, that Sri Aurobindo's embodied being had experienced the Supermind's descent but that the Supramental Force had not entered sufficiently and permanently his physical substance so as to start supramentalising it. She told Roger that because the physical supramentalisation had not been there

Sri Aurobindo's body could undergo death. To me she said: "Clearly, Sri Aurobindo did not have the supramental body, and neither do I have it. But that does not mean that the Supermind was not in his body. The two things are quite different. One can have the supermind in the body without the body being supramentalised."

What applied to Sri Aurobindo in the past applied with some difference to the Mother in 1970. The Supermind had not only been in her body for a long time: the process of preparing the physical supramentalisation had also advanced further in her instance. Still, the exteriorising phenomenon was absent. The Mother never made claims for her own person. She did not say that her Yoga had perfected her body in the external sense of the word. Her body possessed certain qualities marking it out, it could transmit the inner divinity by a subtle ambiance which all sensitive disciples and sometimes even sheer outsiders felt. It had also an unusual stamina: up to her eighty-second year she could play tennis every afternoon for about an hour. But purely material shortcomings she never concealed and latterly there was an avowed drop in the health of particular organs or parts. However, on 25 November 1970 there was no impression on me that she had given up the goal of supramental transformation. After she had asked me how old I was and I had replied "Sixty-three years complete" and then added: "Mother, I want to hang on till I see your Victory", she at first looked a bit surprised at the tall order, but in a second she laughed and said, "Bien." This signified that the Victory — that is, total physical transformation — was accepted as possible, if not certain, for her body in the long run.

Over a year and a half earlier — to be precise, on 15 February 1969 — she had expressed, for the first time as far as I know, something less than certainty about the upshot of her lengthy spiritual endeavour. She said: "...the work is becoming more and more 'exacting'. But I feel (that is to say the body feels very well) that it is part of a training. It looks like that: it must hold on, the body, or otherwise, so much the worse. It will be for another time."<sup>1</sup> Here the closing phrase conceives the possibility of giving up the body and getting

<sup>1</sup> *Bulletin*, April 1969, p. 897.

reborn: a passing through the experience of death is not ruled out. Yet the insistence is upon holding on and facing the test, the hard discipline of enduring the more and more difficult conditions under which the body lived in its attempt to assimilate the Supramental Force, Consciousness and Light directly into its cells.

The next occasion on which we hear of something less than certainty is, paradoxically, in the very talk of 24 March 1972 telling us her inner experience of "a body altogether new", a subtle perfection of shape — "sexless ... very white... very slim... pretty... truly a harmonious form".<sup>1</sup> She exclaims: "If that were to materialise..." Apparently, all was ready on the subtle-physical plane to precipitate itself in the gross; but the mode of precipitation, the technique for materialising the new body, was unknown. Feeling acutely the disparity between the waiting future perfection, so close yet so far, and the aspiring actuality, the Mother turned from the prospect of that glory, pointed to her partly handicapped frame and cried out: "Is that going to change? It must change or it has to follow the old ordinary process of undoing itself and remaking itself."<sup>2</sup>

The possibility of having to follow this process became an actuality on 17 November 1973. But this is a way of speaking from the ordinary outer point of view. The Avatar of the Supermind cannot be said to be compelled to any course by a necessity of Nature. Whatever course is adopted is freely accepted: the Supramental Consciousness belong to the Transcendence and is above all cosmic conditions even when it elects to work under them. What determines its future is its own transcendent Knowledge and Will. A moment must have come of such Knowledge and Will in the first week of December 1950 to Sri Aurobindo; and the instrumental being, put in front for world-action, obeyed. A period of crisis must have preceded this moment. We can discern it distinctly in a letter of May 1949 in which Sri Aurobindo writes that "things are getting too serious" for him "to waste time" on "inconclusive intellectualities": he did not care for any distraction from his Yogic work. We

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, August 1972, p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.



see a similar crisis in the Mother's sadhana.

In 1972 she said: "It is becoming terrible. It is like a pressure, a frightful pressure to bring about the desired progress. I feel it in myself for my body. But my body is not afraid, it says: 'Very well, if I am to end, it is the end.' Every minute it is like that: the true thing or the end. The body knows that this is the way for the supramental body to be formed. It must be wholly under the influence of the Divine..."<sup>1</sup> The formation of the supramental body: there is no mistaking the goal envisioned and sought. What was held in some doubt a few years earlier was simply whether the goal would be reached. In 1969 we get a glimpse of the sensitive situation. She states about her body's future: "(... as if the world put the question) Will it continue or will it get dissolved?... But the body knows that it has been decided, and that it is not to be told to the body. It accepts, it is not impatient, it accepts, it says, 'It is all right, it is as Thou wilt'...." Obviously, a little before 17 November 1973 the body must have been told the final decision of the Divine, the Mother's own highest transcendent self — a decision guided by the two factors which, according to Sri Aurobindo,<sup>2</sup> alone matter in the Avatar's life and alone mould it: the Truth above which has to be manifested and the need of the world-play below.

As a result, there was on 17 November a clear phase of great distress in the body, a marked painful difficulty for quite a time in breathing, the usual accompaniment of a severe heart-attack. Every sign showed that she was letting the body suffer the final stage of the prolonged disorder she had undergone with the unobstructed entry of the immense Supermind-power into a representative body for the first time in all history. When the end came, the doctor who had been summoned gave a closed-chest heart-massage — but to no avail.

Once the definite departure from the body had been ascertained, the vehicle that had striven and suffered and achieved even more than Sri Aurobindo had done twenty-three years before was made ready to lie in state for the last

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, April, p. 73.

<sup>2</sup> *On Yoga II*, Tome One (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 1958), pp. 414, 427.

darshan by those who had loved it. Not for long could it be kept. The Mother would seem to have got the utmost service out of it and willed that it should soon be put into the same Samadhi-vault which held the physical remains of the Master. Shortly after the body had been brought down from the Mother's room, rapid and extensive deterioration was observed. On 1 February 1969, in a series of questions and answers on death, when she had been asked: "How can one tell for certain that the physical body is dead?" her reply was: "Only when it decomposes." Now no doubt could remain as to what she had allowed to happen.

This does not mean that the goal she had originally set up was anything else than physical supramentalisation. Up to almost the end she worked for it, just as Sri Aurobindo had done up to the eve of 5 December 1950. But even as he changed his course, so too did she — both of them for their own occult purposes.

Let us repeat that the Supramental Avatar, the Incarnation from the Transcendence, is not forced by any cosmic law: an utter freedom goes hand in hand with the play of its action. The Mother has hinted at this freedom several times. On 26 December, three weeks after Sri Aurobindo had passed away, she declared: "Our Lord has sacrificed himself totally for us. He was not compelled to leave his body, he chose to do so for reasons so sublime that they are beyond the reach of human mentality." On 2 April 1972 she said about herself: "The body has some difficulty, so I can't be active, alas. It is not because I am old — I am not old. I am younger than most of you. If I am here inactive, it is because the body has given itself definitively to prepare the transformation." In the same talk she added: "If you believe that I am here because I am bound — it is not true. I am not bound..." On 30 August the same year we see again the supramental instrument and the Supramental Transcendent in their free relationship. "Very often, very often," she disclosed, "I ask the Lord: How can I help now that I can no more see clearly nor speak clearly? It is a state... the body does not feel the decline! It is convinced that if tomorrow the Lord wanted it to take up again its activities, it would be able to do so. The strength is there (*the Mother touches her arms, her muscles*), at times a mighty strength!... Why?... The

condition is willed so that ... I might be left quiet."

With her acceptance of an exit from the body, we hark back to the subject of 21 February, the day of the Mother's birth. And for this day the central question is: "When will she be reborn?" She has unequivocally announced that Sri Aurobindo will not be born in the human manner again: his return will be in the first supramental body built in the supramental way — through the extraordinary power the human body's attainment of supramentalisation will win to bring about the entry of higher beings without the ordinary process of sex. About her own future, the Mother has not denied "another time" and a self-undoing and self-remaking as in the common run of human generation.

21 February is especially an occasion of spiritual spell-binding for me. My first darshan of the Mother side by side with Sri Aurobindo was on this date in 1928 when she was exactly at her half-century. And my last well-remembered darshan of her was also on 21 February in 1973. The April darshan is vague in my mind and on 2 May I left for Bombay for a cataract operation. Owing to unavoidable circumstances the operation was long delayed. I had to miss the darshan of 15 August when the Mother was seen as an embodied divinity for the last time by the Ashramites. I returned to the Ashram on hearing in the early morning of 18 November that she had renounced her embodiment. On the preceding night she had appeared to me in a vivid dream, with a bunch of red roses which she has told me to put on my head.

Last year, on her birth-centenary there was a very strong experience of her coming extremely close to our physical space-time, as if she were on the verge of taking up a body once more. If on every birthday of hers we could feel with increasing strength her proximity to the earth-scene, one day in the near future the thin veil will be rent and her supreme sweetness and power, instead of guiding us invisibly, stand again intimate to our seeking gaze and eager touch.

## The Mother and Sri Aurobindo in the Light of Numerology

### 1

February 21 is the Mother's birthday. She was born in 1878. Sri Aurobindo was born on August 15, 1872. From 1872 to 1878 there are 6 years. From August to February, as well as from February to August, we have 6 months. From 15 to 21 the period is 6 days.

The name "Mother" has itself 6 letters. The name "Sri Aurobindo" has 12, which is the double of 6, and therefore from 6 to 12 the number is again 6. When we look at the days of birth, it is the number 15 of Sri Aurobindo's that adds up by its components to 6, while the number 21 of the Mother's is 12 in reverse. Besides, both 21 and 12 comes to 3, which is the common unit whose multiples make 6, 12, 15 and 21.

The components of 1878 — the Mother's year of birth — add up to 24 which not only is double of 12 but also adds up to 6. The components of 1872 — Sri Aurobindo's year of birth — add up to 18 which not only is the treble of 6 but also, when added to the Mother's 24, gives 42 whose components once more yield 6.

The Mother has said that Sri Aurobindo's spiritual number is 12. Not only is Sri Aurobindo's name composed of 12 letters but also, when the components of his day of birth are added to those of his year, we get  $1+5+1+8+7+2=24=6$  and, when the number of letters of his month August is further added to this 6, we get  $6+6=12$ . A 12-year period has also been seen as marking the most important milestones in his Yogic work onward from 1914 when he first met the Mother and their joint spiritual activity began. In 1926 there was the descent of the Overmind into his physical being as well as the Mother's. Although the Supermind had been already present in the body by 1938

in the sense that it had descended into the embodied complex of mental, vital and subtle-physical beings, it descended in 1938 into the outer physical being for the first time. What could not be done then was to fix it there. In 1950 Sri Aurobindo gave up his body in a strategic self-sacrifice and the Supramental Light was drawn for good and fixed in the physical mind of the Mother, constituting what he had called the Mind of Light.

We have learnt from the Mother that Sri Aurobindo, in leaving his body, sacrificed his own personal fulfilment in order to hasten the fulfilment of mankind. We may take as a sign of the hastened process the fact that what the Mother has described as the Supermind's manifestation on a universal scale in the earth's subtle-physical layer took place not 12 years after 1950 but in half the time — merely 6 years after it: that is, in 1956. The recurrence of the number 6 rather than any other in this hastened process should be noted.

According to the Mother, 12 represents the New Perfection which will be the Supramental World on earth: her own Lotus-symbol has 12 petals in its outermost ring. But 6 is a repeating figure in the numerological set-up of Sri Aurobindo's work. Even his symbol is a 6-pointed star. Particularly significant is the number 6 in connection with the Mother. And 6, in her numerology, represents the Divine Creation.

## 2

Yes, a great deal of meaningful numerology serves as light on the lives and labours of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Yet we cannot expect that the play of 6 and 12 should hold for all the chronological aspects of their lives and labours. Sri Aurobindo wrote to me on 28 July 1937 when I was discussing his past lives and the Mother's: "Your artistic passion for symmetry may easily mislead you, for life has all sorts of irregular figures. Your reasonings are too geometrical." And we find it impossible to press regularities and recurrences too far in the present context. A discrepancy crops up in regard to the hours of birth. The Mother was born at 10.15 a.m., Paris local time, which is 9 minutes 40 seconds ahead of

Greenwich time. Sri Aurobindo was born at about 4.52 a.m. at Calcutta. There is no precise or even approximate 6-hour interval, as one may anticipate from the intervals connected with the days and the years of birth.

When I had put before the Mother my numerological calculations, she had indirectly warned me against going too far, by pointing out that if the French "Mère" for "Mother" is considered, we have no more than 4 letters instead of 6. The same would be true about the Mother's original personal name "Mirra" as balanced against "Sri Aurobindo": the number of letters would be 5. The later "Mira's" number would be 4.

Of course "La Mère" would provide the required quantum, but then its English counterpart would be "The Mother", a 9-letter name. No doubt, 9 is multiple of the common unit 3 whose multiples are 6, 12, 15, 21: what is more, it is itself 3 taken 3 times and its relation to our scheme may be pleaded on two grounds. First, Sri Aurobindo's birth-year 1872 sums up to  $18=9$ . Secondly, the day of the Mother's birth and that of Sri Aurobindo's, when reduced respectively to  $(2+1=3)$  and  $(1+5=6)$ , sum up together to 9. Similarly, the 12 of "Sri Aurobindo" plus the 6 of "Mother" come to 18 which is equal to 9. Lastly, 9 is also part of the series 1914, 1926, 1938, 1950 when each year's digits are summed up. The year 1926 reduces itself to  $18=9$ . But in this way a lot of ingenuity needs to be exercised. The results do not show themselves naturally.

We may conclude that in relation to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo we should accept large numerological significances without making a fetish of numerology.



# **The Mother and The Lord of Falsehood**

## **A Reader's Letter and the Author's Answer**

### **The Letter**

I was going through the article "Our light and Delight", No. 18 and was astounded by the statement that the mother assumed and form of the Lord of Falsehood in order to misguide Hitler and make him launch an attack on Stalin's Russia. This seems incredible. I have not heard of this before and surely it is not the way the Mother worked for achieving results. Did she really say at any time that she had assumed this form?

### **The Answer**

I am sorry I have disturbed you. But what I have written about is factual. Both Udar and Andre heard it from the Mother herself. It is also in a talk dated 12 January 1965, which was taped and is included in the publication called Agenda. I am told that the Mother is on record there as having said to Hitler: "Go... To have the supreme victory, go and attack Russia." You have been shocked because you have misconceived the world-roles played by revolutionary Avatars like Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Old ideas about spirituality are leading you astray in the assessment of the Supramental Incarnations.

Let me elucidate my point. But before I come to immediate particulars I may say a word on Incarnations in general — Incarnations in the Indian sense. The two greatest and most recognisable Avatars before Sri Aurobindo were Rama Dasarathi and Krishna Vasudeva. Both of them carried out sanguinary tasks involving the direct destruction of those who embodied anti-divine titanic forces. A lot of lives were lost not only on the side of these embodiments but also on the side of the Avatars. War in the full sense of the term,

involving secrecy, ruse and surprise, was accepted as part of the Avataric mission. Orthodoxy is bound to get shocked and several attempts have been made to allegorise away the lives and deeds of Rama and Krishna. Particularly Krishna has given orthodoxy pause, it is finally through his stratagems — contrary to the traditional warriors' code — that, according to the Mahabharata, the Pandavas destroyed their enemies and Yudhishtira became Emperor.

By insisting on transformation of the physical existence and not merely a purification as a step towards transcendence of earth and life — by bringing the new message of the Supramental Descent — Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are more specifically evolutionary in their mission and more openly opposed to the rule of the Asura and the Rakshasa in the world. Sri Aurobindo did not hesitate to take part in revolutionary politics in the days before he came to Pondicherry. His work meant risk of life both to himself and his followers, as well as to those who were ranged against him. He had even in mind an armed insurrection.

When World War II broke out he went out of his way to give support to the Allied Cause. This evoked a protest from orthodox spiritual thinkers: "How can a master of spirituality associate himself with a war instead of standing above both the parties? Surely the Allies are no saints as compared to the Nazis!" Sri Aurobindo took care to show that, whether the Allies be saints or not, they could not be equated to Hitler and his henchmen: the Allies represented a side which was in accord with the many-moded evolutionary drive of Nature, unlike Nazism which was an inrush from the typical Rakshasic plane to take possession of the human world. Sri Aurobindo also pointed out the common error of putting together a human historical phenomenon like British Imperialism and Hitler's barbarous gospel of the Master Race. Lastly he not only espoused the Allied Cause but also took the bold step of calling the War "The Mother's War".

All this should show you how intimately the Mother and he were connected with the conduct of the war and with all its vicissitudes. They were like two Super-Generals. Sri Aurobindo has explicitly declared that he pitted his spiritual force against the Nazis and later against the Japanese. He kept himself acquainted with all the turns and twists of

the campaigns both on the European front and on the Asian. What the Mother did at a critical moment was absolutely in accord with the roles they had assumed — and it was a continuation or development of the subtle and occult process which Sri Aurobindo had hinted at in the concluding lines of *The Dwarf Napoleon*.

I hope I have clarified the doubt you had expressed saying that the Mother could not have acted in the manner I have depicted and that this could not be her way of action.

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K. D. Sethna, otherwise known as Amal Kiran – a name given to him by Sri Aurobindo, is a radiant multifaceted genius living unassumingly in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Born in 1904 he joined the Ashram in 1927 and is one of the foremost disciples of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, fortunately still amongst us today. He is a distinguished poet, a literary critic, an artist and a seer. (*kavi*). Apart from his own poems he is a great prose writer on a wide variety of subjects – poetry, literature, history, Christianity, philosophy and of course Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. He has been the editor of Mother India, the monthly periodical from Pondicherry, since 1949.

ISBN 81-87916-02-8

Price: Rs. 150/-

ISBN 81-87916-02-8



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