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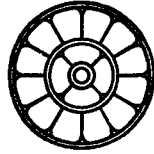
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.

AN APPEAL TO OUR WELL-WISHERS

Mother India has again to call for financial help. Our last appeal brought a very good response and we are deeply thankful. Costs have been steadily rising in everything. Our immediate need was to stock paper. We have paid a further Rs. 4,000. This has made a new gap in our resources. So we badly require donations of any amount that can be spared by our well-wishers.

The scheme of Life-Membership is still in force. If attended to, it can also help. Advertisements too can be a good contribution. Tariff cards can be had on application.

Increase in the number of subscribers is always welcome.

We shall be grateful for help in any form, and particularly in the form of donations.

The donations will be tax-free if sent ear-marked for us through the Ashram Trust.

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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

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"Great is Truth and it shall prevail."

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DECEMBER 5

AN EXPERIENCE OF 1956 DURING THE MORNING MEDITATION— AND THE MOTHER'S COMMENT

I HAD no sense of body. There was nothing except infinite space. Then I heard a voice which said: "From now on, I will rule the world." I asked: "Who is this 'I'?" The answer came: "The Supermind." I asked once more: "But who is the Supermind?" At the same time I said "Sri Aurobindo", as if addressing him—and then there was a sort of stroke on my mind and I knew that I had uttered the answer.

The infinite space in which all this happened was a profound darkness. When the words "Sri Aurobindo" struck me as an answer, I was looking into the darkness. Out of it, very slowly, there came an egg-shaped fire. At first it was a glowing red. Then it began to grow golden within the redness. Finally it started moving round and round me. This was the Supermind come forward to rule the world.

SEHRA

The Mother's Comment:

"The experience is quite correct."

Sehra's Note

When I asked the Mother what was the meaning of "From now on", she said: "The very moment the meditation started at 10 o'clock in the morning." Then she added: "So far Sri Aurobindo was not doing anything."

The Mother herself saw the same fire. She saw the oval lit-up picture of Sri Aurobindo—in the old Darshan room—becoming red at first and then golden. It was something grand and extremely intense. The background of the light was all dark and in the darkness all the Gods—Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva—were lying as if heaped like rocks. It meant that their reign was over and Sri Aurobindo's had begun.

THE WORLD OF THE SUPERMIND AND THAT OF THE OVERMIND

SOME EXPERIENCES OF THE MOTHER AS RELATED IN A TALK
ON 10 JULY 1957

It is quite difficult to free oneself from old habits of being and to be able to freely conceive of a new life, a new world. And naturally, the liberation begins on the highest planes of consciousness: it is easier for the mind or the higher intelligence to conceive of new things than for the vital being, for instance, to feel things in a new way. And it is still more difficult for the body to have a purely material perception of what a new world will be. Yet this perception must *precede* the material transformation; first one must *feel* very concretely the strangeness of the old things, their lack of relevance, if I may say so. One must have the feeling, even a material impression, that they are outdated, that they belong to a past which no longer has any purpose. For the old impressions one had of past things which have become historic—which have their interest from that point of view and support the advance of the present and the future—this is still a movement that belongs to the old world: it is the old world that is unfolding with a past, a present, a future. But for the creation of a new world, there is, so to speak, only a continuity of transition which gives an appearance—an impression rather—the impression of two things still intermingled but almost disconnected, and that the things of the past no longer have the power or the strength to endure, with whatever modifications, in the new things. That other world is necessarily an *absolutely* new experience. One would have to go back to the time when there was a transition from the animal to the human creation to find a similar period, and at that time the consciousness was not sufficiently mentalised to be able to observe, understand, feel intelligently—the passage must have been made in a completely obscure way. So, what I am speaking about is absolutely new, *unique* in the terrestrial creation, it is something unprecedented, truly a perception or a sensation or an impression... that is quite strange and new. (*After a silence*) A disconnection: something which has overstayed its time and has only quite a subordinate force of existence, from something totally new, but still so young, so imperceptible, almost weak, so to say; it hasn't yet the power to impose and assert itself and to predominate, to take the place of the other. So there is a concomitance but, as I said, with a disconnection, that is, the connection between the two is missing.

It is difficult to describe, but I am speaking to you about it because this is what I felt yesterday evening. I felt it so acutely... that it made me look at certain things, and once I had seen them I felt it would be interesting to tell you about them.

(*Silence*)

It seems strange that something so new, so special and I might say so unexpected should happen during a film-show.¹ For people who believe that some

¹ A Bengali film, *Rani Rasmani*, which describes the lives of Sri Ramakrishna and Rani Rasmani, a rich, very intelligent and religious Bengali widow, who in 1847 built the temple of Kali at Dakshu-

things are important and other things are not, that there are activities which are helpful to yoga and others which are not, well, this is one more opportunity to show that they are wrong. I have always noticed that it is unexpected things which give you the most interesting experiences.

Yesterday evening, suddenly something happened which I have just described to you as best I could—I don't know if I have succeeded in making myself understood—but it was truly quite new and altogether unexpected. We were shown, comparatively clumsily, a picture of the temple on the banks of the Ganges, and the statue of Kali—for I suppose it was a photograph of that statue, I could not manage to get any precise information about it—and while I was seeing that, which was a completely superficial appearance and, as I said, rather clumsy, I saw the reality it was trying to represent, what was behind, and this put me in touch with all that world of religion and worship, of aspiration, man's whole relationship with the gods, which was—I am already speaking in the past tense—which was the flower of the human spiritual effort towards something more divine than man, something which was the highest and almost the purest expression of effort towards what is higher than he. And suddenly I had *concretely, materially*, the impression that it was another world, a world that had ceased to be real, living, an outdated world which had lost its reality, its truth, which had been transcended, surpassed by something which had taken birth and was only beginning to express itself, but whose *life* was *so intense*, so true, so sublime, that all this became false, unreal, worthless.

Then I truly understood—for I understood not with the head, the intelligence but with the body, you understand what I mean—I understood in the cells of the body—that a new world *is born* and is beginning to grow.

And so, when I saw all this, I remembered something that had happened...I think I remember rightly, in 1926.¹

Sri Aurobindo had given me charge of the outer work because he wanted to withdraw into concentration in order to hasten the manifestation of the supramental consciousness and he had announced to the few people who were there that he was entrusting to me the work of helping and guiding them, that I would remain in contact with him, naturally, and that through me he would do the work. Suddenly, immediately, things took a certain shape: a very brilliant creation was worked out in extraordinary detail, with marvellous experiences, contacts with divine beings, and all kinds of manifestations which are considered miraculous. Experiences followed one upon another, and, well, things were unfolding altogether brilliantly and...I must say in an extremely interesting way.

One day, I went to relate to Sri Aurobindo what had been happening—we had come to something really very interesting, and perhaps I showed a little enthusiasm

neshwar (Bengal) where Sri Ramakrishna lived and worshipped Kali.

¹ On 24 November 1926 Sri Aurobindo withdrew into seclusion and Mother assumed charge of the running of the Ashram.

in my account of what had taken place—then Sri Aurobindo looked at me...and said: “Yes, this is an Overmind creation. It is very interesting, very well done. You will perform miracles which will make you famous throughout the world, you will be able to turn all events on earth topsy-turvy, indeed”,...and then he smiled and said: “It will be a *great* success. But it is an Overmind creation. And it is not success that we want; we want to establish the Supermind on earth. One must know how to renounce immediate success in order to create the new world, the supramental world in its integrality.”

With my inner consciousness I understood immediately: a few hours later the creation was gone...and from that moment we started anew on other bases.

Well, I announced to you all that this new world was born. But it has been so engulfed, as it were, in the old world that so far the difference has not been very perceptible to many people. Still, the action of the new forces had continued very regularly, very persistently, very steadily, and to a certain extent, very effectively. And one of the manifestations of this action was my experience—truly so very new—of yesterday evening. And the result of all this I have noted step by step in almost daily experiences. It could be expressed succinctly, in a rather linear way:

First, it is not only a “new conception” of spiritual life and the divine Reality. This conception was expressed by Sri Aurobindo, I have expressed it myself many a time, and it could be formulated somewhat like this: the old spirituality was an escape from life into the divine Reality, leaving the world just where it was, as it was; whereas our new vision, on the contrary, is a divinisation of life, a transformation of the material world into a divine world. This has been said, repeated, more or less understood, indeed it is the basic idea of what we want to do. But this could be a continuation with an improvement, a widening of the old world as it was—and so long as this is a conception up there in the field of thought, in fact it is hardly more than that—but what has happened, the really new thing, is that a new world is *born born, born*. It is not the old one transforming itself, it is a *new* world which is *born*. And we are right in the midst of this period of transition where the two are entangled—where the other still persists all-powerful and entirely dominating the ordinary consciousness, but where the new one is quietly slipping, still very modest, unnoticed—unnoticed to the extent that outwardly it doesn’t disturb anything very much, for the time being, and that in the consciousness of most people it is even altogether imperceptible. And yet it is working, growing—until it is strong enough to assert itself visibly.

In any case, to simplify things, it could be said that characteristically the old world, the creation of what Sri Aurobindo calls the Overmind, was an age of the gods, and consequently the age of religions. As I said, the flower of human effort towards what is above it gave rise to innumerable religious forms, to a religious relationship between the best souls and the invisible world. And at the very summit of all that, as an effort towards a higher realisation there has arisen the idea of the unity of religions, of this “one single thing” which is behind all these manifestations; and

this idea has truly been, so to speak, the extreme limit of human aspiration. Well, that is at the frontier, it is something that still belongs *completely* to the Overmind world, the Overmind creation and which from there seems to be looking towards this "other thing" which is a new creation it cannot grasp—which it tries to reach, feels coming, but cannot grasp. To grasp it, a reversal is needed. It is necessary to leave the Overmind creation. It was necessary that the new creation, the supramental creation should take place.

And now all these old things seem so old, so out-of-date, so arbitrary—such a travesty of the real truth.

In the supramental creation there will *no longer be any religions*. The whole life will be the expression, the flowering into forms of the divine Unity manifesting in the world. And there will no longer be what men now call gods.

These great divine beings themselves will be able to participate in the new creation; but to do so, they will have to put on what we could call the "supramental substance" on earth. And if some of them choose to remain in their world as they are, if they decide not to manifest physically, their relation with the beings of a supramental earth will be a relation of friends, collaborators, equals, for the highest divine essence will be manifested in the beings of the new supramental world on earth.

When the physical substance is supramentalised, to incarnate on earth will no longer be a cause of inferiority, quite the contrary. It will give a plenitude which cannot be obtained otherwise.

But all this is in the future; it is a future...which has *begun*, but which will take some time to be realised integrally. Meanwhile we are in a very special situation, extremely special, without precedent. We are now witnessing the birth of a new world; it is very young, very weak—not in its essence but in its outer manifestation—not yet recognised, not even felt, denied by the majority. But it is here. It is here, making an effort to grow, absolutely *sure* of the result. But the road to it is a completely new road which has never before been traced out—nobody has gone there, nobody has done that! It is a beginning, a *universal beginning*. So, it is an absolutely unexpected and unpredictable adventure.

There are people who love adventure. It is these I call, and I tell them this: "I invite you to the great adventure."

It is not a question of repeating spiritually what others have done before us, for our adventure begins beyond that. It is a question of a new creation, entirely new, with all the unforeseen events, the risks, the hazards it entails—a *real adventure*, whose goal is certain victory, but the road to which is unknown and must be traced out step by step in the unexplored. Something that has never been in this present universe and that will *never* be again in the same way. If that interests you...well, let us embark. What will happen to you tomorrow—I have no idea.

One must put aside all that has been foreseen, all that has been devised, all that has been constructed, and then...set off walking into the unknown. And—come what may! There.

SOME NOTES ON THE MOTHER'S PRIÈRES ET MÉDITATIONS

(5)

September 30, 1914

"THE barriers of thought." Thought has a definite form, *est une forme définie*. That is a barrier. What is needed is a suppleness, a capacity for constant change, so that there may be no barriers.

"Any limitation, any restriction." The limitation comes when one stops at a certain point and refuses to move forward. The "restrictions" are the moral rules, the rules that say, 'you should do this and not do that', the generally accepted notion that one can do only one thing well, that one should not attempt more than one thing if one is to do anything well, that one should do that much and no more, *il faut faire cela et pas plus*.

"The most material external world of sense." This is the physical world and the most material of the vital worlds. Our field of perceptions is extremely limited. For example, we can all feel the air, but it is impossible for the ordinary man to feel the ether pervading the air. So is the case with all other objects of sense, colour, sound, smell, etc. The ordinary, untrained man cannot even perceive anything more than a very limited range of sensible phenomena. He misses all the fine shades of colour, the subtle tones of sound, etc., which to a trained mind are clearly perceptible. But even with a proper training of the senses, much remains beyond our ken. Very soon, we reach a limit beyond which we cannot go; there is even a kind of painful sensation when we try to overpass these limits.

"Indra, Soma, Agni." They were originally the symbolisation of certain states of consciousness. The gods have a more or less material form, made up of man's imaginations for the greater part, *en grande partie formé par l'imagination humaine*.

October 5, 1914

"The three ways of life" are represented by the Hindu Trinity: Brahma the creator, Vishnu the preserver, and Shiva-Rudra the destroyer.

Brahma creates eternally. Vishnu preserves things, makes them last, *garde les choses, les rend durables*. Shiva is the transformer and destroyer, he prepares new creations, *prépare les nouvelles créations*.

All of them act in each individual, but the relative proportion of their preponderance varies with each individual. It is this relative proportion that determines the individual's nature. In fact, each could be classed according to this relative proportion. There are some who are always creating and creating. There are others who would

keep intact what they have and all that exists and would not like anything to be changed or moved from its place. In the third category are those in whom the destructive element is so strong that they would always break whatever they have and everything they come across; they themselves and their circumstances are always in a state of flux and there is nothing stable about them.

"A point of support." Have you ever seen the Divine or spoken to Him, except through His embodied form? The Incarnation takes place in order that the Divine and the world come into direct contact, *pour être tout à fait tangible dans le monde*. Without the physical Embodiment, there could hardly be a means whereby the beings of the material plane could enter into a direct relation or contact with the Divine.

The Incarnation is the *point d'appui*, the Centre or point in the material world on which the Divine Consciousness gathers up all Its strands, *les faisceaux se concentrent sur un point*. It is not only a centre of reception; it is also a centre of radiation, a point around which and from which the Divine Consciousness spreads through the world.

October 7, 1914

"Occupied with these material contingencies", that is, the movements of the body.

"Mental life." Those who live in their mind have no knowledge of the Truth, *aucune conscience de la Vérité*; they have no base on which to build. That is why they are incapable of building anything, *rien construire*.

"Transformations of which they dream", and "the calm vision of Thy eternity." The Mother described dreams as a dance of memories, *danse des souvenirs*. All the thoughts and images and impressions we have during the waking state are recorded in the convolutions of the brain; they in fact form those convolutions. During the waking state we manage to keep some sort of control over these thoughts and images. But when we go to sleep this control disappears, *s'en va*, and everything gets into a confusion, *sans ordre*. Then all begin to move as they please, *selon leurs fantaisies*. The dream state is a sleep of the physical consciousness, a state of activity without any control. We are all the time dreaming at night when we sleep; but we do not remember them clearly, because between the dream state and the waking consciousness, there is an empty space, a hole or gap, *trou*, which makes it difficult for us to recall the dreams in a precise manner.

Visions on the other hand are seen with eyes that are not physical, *avec d'autres yeux que les yeux physiques*. They are images of worlds that are not physical, *d'autres mondes que le monde physique*. But the images are more concrete than the things we see with the physical eye. There are worlds other than the physical world; and we have within us organs of cognition corresponding to each of these worlds. The visions are seen by these non-physical organs. These organs are not necessarily behind the physical eyes. They may be anywhere: in the middle of the forehead, at the back of the head, anywhere. One is fully conscious when seeing a vision, not

asleep as in a dream. With the proper training, one may have visions at will. Visions have always a meaning, *elles ont un sens*; but one needs a key in order to understand their significance. Some are symbolic; some point to things that have taken place in the past; some point to the future. In the vision of things close to the material world, there is an aura of light around the things seen; these are seen by the subtle-physical eyes. Some visions are premonitory; they indicate things one should know.

October 12, 1914

"It was their pain and suffering that my physical being was feeling." This was in answer to the question put in the Prayer of the previous day: why this persistent impression with its tinge of uneasiness and expectancy? "Their" pain and suffering are those of the people who live on earth.

"Grant that each element of the universe may become conscious of its principle of being", that is, may all and everything that constitutes the universe become conscious of its Truth. This Truth is the Divine Will, the Divine Presence, that is in each thing; otherwise nothing could exist. This is what the Buddhists call the "dharma" of each being and thing. The Divine is there in all His splendour. He exists by Himself. We cannot see Him because of our egoism, the self-seeking, *la recherche de soi*; these are the "veils of egoistic blindness".

"The absolute silence" is the Silence beyond and above the creation, *au dehors de la creation*. The "infinite progression" is the unfoldment, *déroulement*, the growth of consciousness till it can have the experience of both what is beyond and all that is in the manifestation.

October 14, 1914

"Cradled on the immensity of the eternal becomings." There was an impression of being wafted along, *une impression de floter*.

October 23, 1914

The physical being is "an instrument" of the Divine. It is there to do a certain work, *il est fait pour accomplir un certain œuvre*. If it does not do it, it is of no use, *il ne sert à rien*.

October 25, 1914

"My aspiration to see, O Lord, has taken the form of a beautiful rose..." This was an experience the Mother actually had, *c'était une expérience réelle*.

"If my sensations are ignorant..." Our sensations are always necessarily ignorant; they are extremely limited. There are thousands of things that exist of which we are unaware. There are colours, sounds, vibrations, forces all around us; they play in us and about us, but we know nothing of them.

It is always possible to extend the limits of our sensorial perception. Many methods have been prescribed in the various forms of discipline. Whatever method one chooses must be the one that comes naturally to him. There are only three things that are necessary for success: will, methodical practice, and concentration. With these one can arrive always.

The Mother described how she had developed the faculty of seeing at a distance, and even looking at things that were behind her. (The details have not been recorded in these Notes, but her *Entretiens* of 3rd February, 1954, and her *Commentaires* on Sri Aurobindo's *Thoughts and Aphorisms*, on 27th February, 1962, which appeared respectively in the *Ashram Bulletins* of April '73 and April '62 provide interesting details.)

November 3, 1914

“And this is no longer a fugitive condition.” A state of consciousness is a thing which one does not think out but is lived, *qu'on ne pense pas mais qu'on vit*.

“One of Thy divine stones is laid by the power of conscious and formative thought.” This is an imaged description of what the Mother was doing for the world. Powerful thoughts were being given form in the minds of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and they were being projected to the most important places, *projetées aux endroits les plus importants*, in fact throughout the whole world. They have been at work in the earth atmosphere, and whoever is open in the slightest degree catches something of them and expresses them in his own way, in his thoughts and writings, without knowing where he got them from.

For instance, Sri Aurobindo wrote *The Ideal of Human Unity* (in a series of essays in the *Arya*) during the first World War; and the ideas expressed there have been at work in the atmosphere ever since. It is after a long interval, of nearly forty years, that in America they have recently founded a group of some forty thousand people to give concrete shape to the idea of world government. A gentleman recently came to the Ashram as a delegate of this group, and when he read Sri Aurobindo's book, he was astonished to find there many or most of the ideas he had expressed in a book on the subject. The Mother had to explain to him that Sri Aurobindo had expressed these ideas in writing some forty years ago. (This was spoken in 1953).

(To be continued)

SANAT K. BANERJI

PAGES FROM A SADHAK'S DIARY

IN her childhood, said the Mother, she was afraid of fires. One day a lamp fell from her hand, on her bed, and the bed caught fire. She managed to extinguish the fire. But her heart beat fast on account of fear.

While she was in Japan, there was a factory just by the side of her house. It was a house built of wood like most houses in Japan in those days. One day, a fire broke out in the factory, and cinders began to fall on her house. Flames were also spreading fast.

But she remained absolutely calm and full of peace, and there was no fear.

*
**

Gratitude is the surest means to Grace, and Grace is the surest means of success. But is true gratitude possible in this earth-consciousness of ours?

The Mother said:

“Even in my childhood I was full of gratitude. And I am even now grateful for the things that I received during my childhood. People will always say, ‘Oh, the Mother is divine, and so that is quite easy for the Mother.’ But I have taken this human body in order to see and experience all things of life.... Every beautiful landscape, any beautiful object I saw filled me with gratitude. I was filled with gratitude on seeing children play.

“You cannot be fully grateful, because of two main reasons: ego or vanity, and selfishness.

“In the first case, you always think that it is you who are doing this and doing that; you are the centre of everything that goes on around you or in the world. In the second case, you are always asking things for yourself: ‘Give me this, give me that.’ These are the two things that stand in the way.”

*
**

“Could I have a hat, to protect me in the hot sun?”

“While I was in China,” replied the Mother, “I saw a man who used to walk about in the sun, without a hat.¹ At first he had a sun-stroke. After he had recovered from it, he suffered from a headache for a long time. But after that, he got free from all sickness, and he could do without a hat. I tell you, ninety *per cent* of men die because of fear.”

*
**

“Who are the people who displease you most?”

¹ This shows that the Mother must have spent some little time in China, perhaps on her way back from Japan in early 1920.—Editor

The Mother enumerated them as follows:

- 1) Those who are against the Divine—in our case those who are against Sri Aurobindo.
- 2) Those who are cruel to children.
- 3) Those who are unkind to weak and helpless persons.
- 4) Those who misuse their power.
- 5) Those who are cruel to animals and birds.
- 6) Those who lack sincerity.
- 7) Those who are harsh towards their subordinates.

If we take the word “sincerity” in the sense in which Sri Aurobindo and the Mother use it, we must feel helpless; because very few people possess that quality. We have to take the Mother here to imply that those who really do not make an effort to be sincere are the ones who lack sincerity.¹

*
**

“What are the things that help one to keep open to the Mother?”

The Mother mentioned the following:

- 1) Taking the Mother's Name is helpful.
- 2) Meditation also helps; but it is more difficult if one is not accustomed to meditation.
- 3) Reading the Mother's books is good.
- 4) It is very good to spend time in thoughts about the Mother.
- 5) Sincere prayer is helpful.

*
**

On the question of food, the Mother's comments ran:

To judge people from their external movements is a foolishness. Those who are capable of transforming themselves will be transformed, no matter whether they eat fish or meat or drink wine.

One may lead the life of an ascetic for a hundred years, living on a vegetarian diet, and may not get transformed if one has not the capacity for it.

Sri Aurobindo once said that it is not possible in this world to observe complete *ahimsa* (non-killing). We kill living things at every step.

He gave up taking fish, meat and wine simply because of the Mother's request.

The kind of food served in the Ashram is for the sake of convenience and for no other reason.

The Mother breaks the mental and moral principles of people, because this yoga is not based on mental and moral principles.

There are some developed souls here in the Ashram, who have been known to

¹ This seems to be a purely personal appreciation.—Editor

the Mother since the beginning of Creation. They are here for the Work of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. There are some who are on the way to full development. There are others who are souls that are just budding:

The Mother has promised her help to all, and she has been giving them all her utmost help. Some may die and some may go away. But nothing will stop the progress of their souls.

In future, if she thinks it necessary, she can create the necessary form of body for many of these souls who are here, and can bring them back to the physical world for the sake of her Work.

It is wrong to imagine however that the Mother will do everything for us. Very often, we are lazy and we expect the Mother to do things for us. But if we try sincerely, the Mother's help will be there, and we can progress endlessly.

Our progress is not in a straight line; it follows a zig-zag course. We find an obstruction and turn to one side. And then the Mother gives us a push and we move to the other side.

But we should know it for certain that once we are here, there is no escape. We have no other alternative but to go on till the end is reached, in this life or in another.

(To be continued)

O SOUL

If yearnest thou for God's sun-blaze,
O soul, amble not in the languid ways.
Ascend the peaks to which our thoughts can scarcely wing.

Waken to a luminous sphere beyond man's eye
Where constant breathes thy unattained divinity.
Upbear thyself until this Light is King.

Renounce all earthly lures and passion's spell,
Enwrap each vein and nerve and tiny cell
With dreams supernal, widen thy orbs to the infinities.

Keep ever alight thy ethereal flame,
O Sovereign of all high aim,
Golden sun-ray, immortal in Life's secrecies.

LALITA

THE MOTHER'S TWO BODIES

(This is an exact transcript of a dream-vision seen by Chaundona some time after the Mother had left her physical frame.)

I SAW the Mother lying curled up on the floor—not on a bed. Her body was covered with a biscuit-coloured shawl.

The gloom was thick. Everyone was weeping, as if the world had come to an end. Preparations were going on to place her body in the coffin—and finally inside the vault.

There were some steps leading into the vault, and a huge arch above. The coffin was to be laid below the steps. People were assembled on one side of the coffin; there was no one on the other sides.

Suddenly the Mother appeared under the arch in her supramental body. The body was golden, radiating a golden light. The surface of the body was opaque enough to look like a skin. Yet no human skin could ever look like that.

She was simply magnificent. Her beauty was quite indescribable. We had never seen anything like it before.

She looked like a girl of eighteen. Her hair was held on top with a ribbon, yet some loose strands were hanging about her shoulders.

There was a hush, and everybody looked up at her.

My mother, unable to contain herself, ran towards Her. The Mother smiled and came forward down the steps to where my husband and I were standing. My mother and the Mother went on talking, a smile always on Her lips. They were holding hands.

Finally, the Mother looked at me, and said to my mother, "I shall talk to Chaundona when she gets rid of her fear."

Then She disappeared among the crowd.

I was not at all afraid, but stood spell-bound and supremely happy.

OUR LIGHT AND DELIGHT

RECOLLECTIONS OF LIFE WITH THE MOTHER

(Continued from the issue of November 24, 1978)

13

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: "This man has a remarkable psychic development. We are prepared to take up his sadhana at once."

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 ever 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 of that phrase of Sri Aurobindo's: "remarkable 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 experi-

ences 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 to 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 outflowered. 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 of self, 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 because of his unusual 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."¹ Again, we have the words: "No sadhak can reach the supermind by his own efforts 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."²

(b)

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

¹ *On Yoga II*, Tome Two (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 1958), pp. 206-07.

² *Ibid.*, p. 329.

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 to 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 towards 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 than those who come to live in the Ashram. Not only I but several friends of mine have observed the admirable intensity with which young girls and boys 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 com-

fort 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."¹ 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. The supermind or the overmind either is not so easy to reach as that..."² 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."³ 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 once said, even a poor Indian villager may have a better understanding of the spiritual life than many an elaborately educated foreigner wanting to do Yoga. 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 awakened 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 1938: "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:

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 327. ² *Ibid.*, pp. 228-30. ³ *Ibid.*, p. 330.

“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.” 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 his 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 at-

tendant 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".

(To be continued)

AMAL KIRAN

**A POEM BY NIRODBARAN
WITH SRI AUROBINDO'S CORRECTIONS**

was *a*

My heart (is) athirst for beauty

to be

Nowhere on earth (is) found;

In no land of mystery,

land

In no (womb) of sight or sound.

On *the* *glass of my longing*

(In my soul's) crystal (star)

I have

(Were) mirrored many faces;

But

(Behind) time's veiling bar *was there*

And there were

(Each carried) the shadow-traces

Of unseen death *and* deceiving

Figures of vain delight,

(Its earthly vanity,)

A *with*

(Each) glimmering flame (was) only

An *e*

(A brief) insistent(y) *of brief light.*

through Time I wander

No more (a wanderer)

To a void

(In voids) of Eternity;

I have found the eternal beauty

Embodied *here* in thee.

THE SAMADHI

I

THE Samadhi of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is our temple of delight. Just after the passing of Sri Aurobindo some time in 1951, I happened to meet a visitor from the Punjab, who said to me in the course of a casual talk:

“Formerly we had to put our problems in writing and wait for an answer; now we just stand before the Samadhi, close our eyes and the answer is there.” There was a ring of sincerity in what he said.

At another time the same feeling was voiced by an industrialist: “Whenever you are worried, go to the Samadhi; the burden is taken off your head, you grow quiet and a way is found.”

It was thought that after a time a monument would be erected on the Samadhi. But our attraction and adoration for the Samadhi was so great and spontaneous that the idea was abandoned. From early dawn people felt impelled to rush to the Samadhi and offer themselves with the simplicity of a child drawing spiritual solace. What inner sustenance we draw from the air pervading the Samadhi will be better understood by the experiences of an inmate of the Ashram.

From the very beginning (1951), whenever he stood before the Samadhi, he felt the flow of a Force right from the head to the feet. He would keep on standing motionless, unmindful of the press of people around him. Often it so happened that he never knew how an hour had passed.

One day while offering pranam by placing his head on the top of the Samadhi, he found to his utter amazement that his mind had fallen so quiet that there was not even one disturbing thought.

This had not been possible before despite hard struggle for years. It was not a momentary experience. The state of void continued and he could remain seated in one fixed pose indefinitely. This was something hitherto unknown to him. It formed the root of a new life. Since then the sapling has grown into a healthy plant. Other signs are there of a new future, which make him feel his spiritual hopes will be fulfilled. In his life there can be no frustration any more.

The tremor that the Ashram felt at the passing of Sri Aurobindo was almost an earthquake in our lives. A year had to elapse before we could find our feet securely planted again. That was the time when we were almost cut off from the world. At the Darshans¹ of the next February and April there were hardly any visitors. We were not sure whether Darshans would continue as before. “Darshan? Whose Darshan? Can there be any Darshan without Sri Aurobindo?” Such painful remarks were in the air. Those who allowed themselves to be thus tortured left the Ashram for good. We were oppressed by the fear that even the Mother might withdraw. We could not feel at ease till the assurance came from the Mother her-

¹ On August 15, 1978, 3773 people went to Sri Aurobindo's room for Darshan.

self that she had no desire to leave her body so soon.

We did not know what lay in store for us. The day Sri Aurobindo's body was to be put in the Samadhi, exactly at 4 p.m. we received 10 tons of rice by a steamer hailing from Rangoon. I still remember the prophetic words spoken by Dyuman: "While passing away, the Master has given us food; we shall never be in want of food." The Ashram had to pass through many ups and downs, prices of provisions rocketed, but our needs were met without a break. The Mother never allowed any of her children to share her burden. She carried the whole burden on her lone shoulders. Whatever the circumstances, the standard of the Ashram was never lowered.

In the beginning some of the Ashram properties stood in Sri Aurobindo's name and later on in the Mother's. Those standing in her name would legally go to her son after her. This was the situation after the passing of Sri Aurobindo and it was not agreeable to the sentiments of the Government of India. To relieve the whole difficult situation Monsieur André Morisset, the Mother's son, renounced all claims by one stroke of the pen. "I have nothing to do with the Ashram properties," he declared. This led to the formation of the Ashram Trust with the Mother as the President.

Part of the property was in the Tamil Nadu State. So the Mother had to go to the Lake Estate (part of which was in Tamil Nadu) to sign the papers. The Sub-Registrar came to the Lake Estate from Vanur (Cuddalore). The Mother signed the papers there in 1955. The Tamil Nadu Government exempted the document from Registration fees. This was notified in the then Madras Gazette. It was K. M. Munshi who had suggested this arrangement for the good of the Ashram when he had come here in 1951. On his return he wrote a very moving article in *Bhavan's Journal* about the Ashram.

In 1951, on the August Darshan, the Mother distributed apples¹ to each of us in the Playground. They had come from an orchard which had been named Mountain Paradise. It had been purchased by Dr. Indra Sen in 1936 and offered by him to the Mother in 1946 when he made the Ashram his permanent home.

To the surprise of us all, she increased the wages of the Ashram employees by Rs.5/- a month and went on adding one spacious building after another to the body of the Ashram. All this gave us a new lease of life. Day by day the activities of the Ashram increased beyond our imagination and it rose to the status of a world organisation. Auroville, the last gift of the Mother to humanity, has captured the imagination of the Western mind.

At the State Civil Reception on April 16, 1976, Shri Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, then President of India, said: "Sri Aurobindo Ashram has given Pondicherry an international reputation. More than that, the Ashram represents man's striving for a higher spiritual consciousness which according to Sri Aurobindo should be the supreme aim of life."

¹ All who participated in the August Darshan of (1978) had an apple at lunch-time.

For 23 years (1950 to 1973) the Mother remained the sole presiding deity of the Ashram. Even while Sri Aurobindo was there, she was in the forefront for us. Now she took on herself the work of Sri Aurobindo as well. The Grace that flowed from her pen, mostly from then on, has given birth to a new body of literature now coming out in fifteen volumes as the Mother's Centenary Edition.

Through her intensified presence, Sri Aurobindo himself often seemed to be with us. A very devoted person, given to the service of the Mother, died. The van carrying his dead body, after going around the Ashram, made a halt on the road, facing Sri Aurobindo's room. Of a sudden one of us, seated in a car which was following the van, happened to have a vision of Sri Aurobindo extending his right hand and blessing the lifeless body.

2

I recall here what I heard from one who enjoyed the privilege of frequent access to the Mother.

Once someone had ventured a question to Sri Aurobindo: "Is there any chance of your leaving the body?" Sri Aurobindo's answer was: "There are two chances of my leaving the body: either the decision comes from the Supreme or it is felt that nothing more can be done with this body."

When the Mother left her body the situation was unlike the one in December 1950. There was no panic in the Ashram. It was as if we had been prepared by an unknown power to face the ordeal.

A woman teacher spoke feelingly:

"Don't you see, something in us refuses to be grief-stricken? Someone is holding us from behind!"

Mention may be made here of a significant experience X had on the day the Mother passed away. After the first shock was over he felt the descent of a Force which kept him so withdrawn that there remained no sense of the need for food. The experience repeated itself when the Mother's body in a casket was to be placed in the vault that similarly held Sri Aurobindo's body. It was morning-time. Unable to find a seat in the Ashram courtyard he plunged into meditation in his own room and got completely absorbed losing all sense of time and space. He found it difficult to stop meditating. The pressure of the descent was so strong that even the lower parts of the body felt its impact and gladly welcomed it. When he opened his eyes it was 4 p. m. Thus passed twelve hours in one steady state.

Such descents have since then grown frequent, at times arousing the first feeling of an inner release.

When one is able to free oneself from the clutches of the lower nature and acquires the strength to station the consciousness at the crown of the head, the surface mind cannot describe what silent joy emanates from that peaceful state. And this joy is granted to us while doing sadhana through works as well as while practising

concentration.

For a considerable time a fear haunted our unripe minds: "Would many of the Ashram activities be curtailed or dropped for good? Something must have dawned on those who were nourished under the protective wings of the Mother, which made them take a very bold decision. The Trustees took upon themselves the task of carrying on the Ashram as it had been done in the time of the Mother following in her footsteps to the best of their capacities.

"How does the Ashram go on?" This is the question that still agitates the minds of many. Here is a moving conversation with one:

"Wonderful! Blessed was I to have lived to see such a miracle!"

"What makes you struck with wonder?"

"We are so happy, the Ashram goes on as in the time of the Mother."

"How do you yourself view the position? What is your personal impression?"

"Who has the capacity to carry the Himalayan burden of the Ashram?"

"None of us."

"This shows the Mother herself is guiding the destiny of the Ashram."

The Mother left her body in November 1973. In the next February Darshan 8494 persons came in a spirit of pilgrimage, many more than had been seen even when she had been among us. Even on the days when there is no Darshan the number of visitors goes on increasing as the months roll by. All this has created in us a new confidence.

A question was put to one of the Trustees:

"How is our Ashram organisationally run nowadays? Are important decisions collectively taken? In case of divergence of opinion among those who count, who gives the final decision?"

The answer was: "No one gives the final decision. The decisions are collective but not forced. How is it possible? you may ask. Well, it is possible because the real impetus does not lie with any person's private views. It comes from the deeply felt correctness of the decision envisaged."

"Can the Ashram become a self-sufficient community, economically, without depending heavily on financial offerings from outside?"

In reply to this poignant question the Trustee said: "In 1957 the Mother told me, 'If people do not appreciate the necessity of this Ashram and do not give the money that is necessary, then I will disband the Ashram and go to the Himalayas!' The money came and she did not go."

But how could the forces of darkness accept defeat and suffer to see the higher forces gaining the upper hand unchallenged? In order to take a leap forward one must first bear their blows. The forces tried to disrupt the smooth working of the Ashram and create a turmoil but so far all seems to be on the surface. Nothing, we are sure, would shake the foundation of this institution. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother saw things not from the mind's eye but with the inner yogic eye. The significant words of Sri Aurobindo of the Swadeshi days might be repeated here: "The

hammer of God is to build not destroy.”

So long as the “troublesome vital being is the dominant power” in our nature and “the ego-sense reigns in full force”, one cannot escape the hammering, “for it is necessary for the evolution of the lower life”.¹ Without a beating one cannot evolve into a “higher life”.

3

Before we go forward, a word by Sri Aurobindo about the status of the Ashram:

“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 movement of that Truth. Sri Aurobindo and the Ashram form one integral whole. His living presence 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 Sadhaks or to look at it as having a life or an aspiration or an aim that does or 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.”²

The following instances might give a glimpse of the present-day mental make-up of some of us:

N wanted to get something done through M. There arose a hesitation in him. The mind insisted but the heart resisted. One day he felt a strong urge to get it done. It did not strike him to refer it inwardly to the Mother. To his utter bewilderment there came to his ears a sharp voice while at the Samadhi: “Why do you intend to do a thing which you know the Mother will not like?” He was struck dumb. “Even now the Mother reads our thoughts and knows what goes on in our minds!”, he spoke out to himself in wonder.

Another experience of his:

He loved his cousin because of the largeness of his heart and the purity of his character. The cousin had helped many to rise in life. He was now confined to bed. One day N saw him in a dream. He felt inclined to send a telegram. Before going to the Telegraph Office he went to the Samadhi. Of a sudden he heard: “He died two days ago.” And it was found true.

Whenever K is confronted with an untoward circumstance he says that he refers

¹ “... the hammer of God that is beating us into shape so that we may be moulded into a mighty nation and an instrument for his work in the world. We are iron upon his anvil and blows are showering upon us not to destroy but to recreate. Without suffering there can be no growth.”

(Jhalkati Speech, Sri Aurobindo Centenary Volume 2, pp. 61-62)

² This letter was written, probably in 1930, by a Sadhak under Sri Aurobindo's directions and corrected by him. It was first published in *Mother India*, January 1978

it to the Mother and seeks her aid. "First I turn my gaze inward to detect my mistakes and then the help comes unasked if needed."

To draw him out further I questioned: "This was possible when the Mother was among us physically. How can you do so now?"

"There lies the difference between your way of thinking and mine. Has the Mother left us?"

The experiences of those living outside the Ashram are not less elevating. A French lady who had spent some delightful years in the Ashram wrote from France to one of her friends:

"Off and on I am blessed with the vision of the Samadhi. I find myself seated nearby. I see Dyuman and others passing by me. There is no place in the world like the Ashram. One who has lived there some years cannot feel happy elsewhere. For us even the worst person in the Ashram is like a saint.

"These days we often hear on radio some extract from Sri Aurobindo rendered into French. O! it is a joy to hear his words."

Translations of Sri Aurobindo's books are available in French, German, Italian, and of some in Chinese.

On his return from his fifth visit to America, a professor in whom Sri Aurobindo's ideal of the future is ingrained spoke with conviction:

"I hold the West has no sure vision of the future. There is no clear goal of life before its eyes. India alone can show the way of a New Life provided she can translate into action Sri Aurobindo's vision of the future."

NARAYAN PRASAD

CORRECTION

On page 743 of last month's *Mother India*, please read 1937 instead of 1973 after the letter by Sri Aurobindo quoted from the forthcoming Volume III of *Guidance from Sri Aurobindo* at the end of Nagin Doshi's article "The Mother's Force".

AT THE SAMADHI

ALL is silent, save
for a constant twittering
of birds on the wing.
The opalescent haze
of twilight spreads,
embracing with fragrant incense
all who gaze, entranced,
eyes riveted on Thy resting place.

Beneath the Service Tree's
darkening canopy,
in glimmering hues
the flowers smile,
scenting the air
with ethereal blends,
lifting the spirit heavenward.
In splendour cool
the marble glows,
radiating Thy blessings
in countless forms,
The mantle of Love enfolding all.

Devotion wells up
in grateful hearts and flows
into the soft-gleaming night.
Laden with promise
The stillness and silence—
the ineffable Bliss
of Thy outpouring Grace:
In hushed awe
Thy blessed touch
we await
while all Nature holds its breath.

U.

AN HISTORIC OCCASION

On 15 August 1978 a marble bust of Sri Aurobindo was installed in the central Hall of Parliament House in New Delhi. The bust was sculpted by Shri R. V. Wagh at Bombay, presented by Dr. Karan Singh M. P., Chairman of Sri Aurobindo Centre, New Delhi, and unveiled by Shri K. S. Hegde, Speaker, Lok Sabha. We are glad to publish the two speeches made on that historic occasion.

Speech by Dr. Karan Singh

Mr. Speaker, Sir, fellow parliamentarians, distinguished guests and young friends,

Today, on the 15th of August, we all rejoice because it is the birthday of our nation, and after many centuries of servitude and degradation it was on this day in 1947 that India emerged into the sunlight of freedom. Today also, by an interesting coincidence, is the birthday of one of the great patriots, revolutionaries and freedom fighters of this century, Sri Aurobindo. Although Sri Aurobindo was never in a legislature I make bold to say that his contribution to our freedom struggle was a very important one and anybody who reads the history of the early freedom movement cannot fail to be impressed by the unique role that Sri Aurobindo played in a period when the formative stages of the national movement were upon us and about a decade before the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, emerged on the scene.

As you know, Sir, Sri Aurobindo was born on the 15th of August 1872. He was sent to England at the age of seven, and for 14 years he was educated in England where he imbibed revolutionary ideas from the Sinn Fein movement of Irish liberation headed by De Valera and others, and also the Italian Risorgimento of Mazzini and Garibaldi. These were the ideas which he imbibed during his 14 years' stay abroad, and when he returned to India in 1893 he went first straight to the Baroda College where he joined as Professor of English.¹

It is presumptuous for me to say very much about the freedom struggle because I see in the audience people who have actually participated in the struggle. But for the younger generation, I would, with your permission, very briefly point out that by then, by the time Sri Aurobindo returned from England, the Indian renaissance had begun to gather momentum. From Raja Ram Mohan Roy who founded the Brahma Samaj in Bengal, Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore who founded the Adi Brahma Samaj, Keshub Chandra Sen with the Brahma Samaj of India, the social reform movements had begun. They were the spearhead, as it were, of the new awakening. In Maharashtra, M. G. Ranade and R. K. Bhandarkar started the Prarthana Samaj, the Deb Samaj was developed, and in the North Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati started the Arya Samaj. These reform movements gave a new impetus to

¹ Editor's Note. There is a slight omission here. Sri Aurobindo first entered the service of the Maharajah of Baroda. At some time during its period he assumed professorship.

the awakening that was taking place in India. One of the special features of Indian history has been that after every period of degradation there is a renaissance, and this renaissance had begun aided by a number of other factors, the Orientalists, the Theosophical Society, and Ramakrishna/Vivekananda and other great leaders. They had all brought about a cultural awakening and intellectual stirring.

Politically, as you know, the main implication was the founding in 1885 of the Indian National Congress by Alan Octavian Hume, and very soon after its founding, two main trends emerged in the Congress Party. These were the 'moderates' led by Dadabhai Naoroji, Pherozshah Mehta, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, M.G. Ranade and others. They were very fine people, they were great patriots, but they did not believe in a revolutionary struggle. They thought that the British could be petitioned to give more power and they passed resolutions and played a valuable role. As against these moderates, there was another group that came to be known as the 'radicals', and that group was headed by Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, Lala Lajpat Rai and Sri Aurobindo. So this grouping in Indian politics, if I may say so, is not new. Even from the beginning of the movement there were these two different trends in our nation. Soon after Sri Aurobindo returned from England, he published in a journal known as *The Indu Prakash* a series of articles called "New Lamps for Old", which was a very strong, frontal attack upon what he termed the policy of "petition, prayer and protest" of the moderates, and it created a great furore. He remained in touch with the revolutionary movement and, in 1905 when the imperious Lord Curzon pushed through the Partition of Bengal, the 'Banga bhanga', in the face of opposition, it gave the opportunity to Sri Aurobindo and others to jump into the political movement.

There was, for the first time, a radicalisation of the whole political movement, the masses became involved, Sri Aurobindo left his job in Baroda and moved to Calcutta where he began to edit two journals, the *Karma Yogin* and the *Bande Mataram*. I would submit that even today if you read those editorials of his, particularly in the *Bande Mataram*, you will not fail to be moved. I think there is hardly any other parallel in the journalism of any country in the world where a person with such a tremendous mastery over the language and such a powerful intellect and commitment week after week came out with editorials which galvanised the youth of Bengal and the whole of India at that time. And when the Congress finally split in the Surat Session on the 30th of December 1906, when the moderates and the extremists finally split, it was Sri Aurobindo who presided over the separate convention that was called by the extremists.

In 1907 he was arrested in the celebrated Alipore bomb case. It is a very fascinating case in the annals of jurisprudence. But the only point I wish to make here is that Deshabandhu Chittaranjan Das was his defence lawyer and he argued in his final peroration for 8 days in favour of Sri Aurobindo. And the closing words that he said need to be recorded, I think, on this occasion. This is what C.R. Das, whose portrait is in this hall, said to the court:

My appeal to you is this, that long after the controversy will be hushed in silence, long after this turmoil and agitation will have ceased, long after he is dead and gone, he will be looked upon as the poet of patriotism, as the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity. Long after he is dead and gone, his words will have echoed and re-echoed not only in India but across distant seas and lands. Therefore I say that a man in his position is not only standing before the bar of this court but before the bar of the High Court of history.

This famous peroration of C.R. Das will live long in the annals of Indian history. Of course, Sri Aurobindo was later acquitted.

His political thought has many features. Very briefly I would like to point out four or five salient features of it. There was a clear recognition of the role of the masses and of the proletariat. He was perhaps one of the first politicians in India to realise that the freedom movement could not remain simply a formal affair of resolutions and petitions. It was he who realised that the masses had to be awakened and, in 1905 with the partition of Bengal, you get the first major mass involvement in modern Indian politics.

He was a staunch supporter of the concept of *Purna Swaraj* and he used to say that we could not expect the British to give us the loaf of freedom crumb by crumb, it had to be taken from them in full. He put forward the bold theory of spiritual nationalism. He had a deep love for the motherland, and "Bande Mataram", which has just now been so beautifully rendered by the students and staff of the Mother's International School, became his rallying cry. That was the *mantra* that Bankim Chandra had given in his novel *Ananda Math*. "Bande Mataram", became the battle cry of the Indian freedom movement, and Sri Aurobindo did a great deal to make this the central feature of the struggle.

He had tremendous intellectual capacity and his attempts to re-discover and re-assess the intellectual and cultural heritage of India helped to break the bonds of inferiority that had developed, as a result of many decades of British rule.

Above all, Sir, he put forward a positive programme of political action based on the concept of boycott. He advocated economic boycott; its correlate Swadeshi; judicial boycott, its correlate national arbitration courts; executive boycott with its correlate national organisation; and social boycott as the lever in order to pressurize the British. There is a misconception that the concept of boycott and Swadeshi began with Gandhiji. In fact it was in the 1905 movement that you will find very clearly enunciated the concept of boycott and Swadeshi. Of course, the Father of the Nation later gathered up this concept and made it a very potent weapon.

Such is the great revolutionary, patriot and freedom fighter, whose memory we honour today. Of his even more remarkable work after 1910, the theory of supramental manifestation and his message to humanity, I will not, on this occa-

sion, speak to a captive audience. If M.Ps. are interested, I would be very happy at any time to give them whatever I know of it. But on this occasion, Sir, I would like to say that we are predominantly honouring a man who loved his motherland very deeply, a man who suffered, sacrificed and went to jail, and a man who gave a new charter of intellectual power and organisation to the freedom movement.

The marble bust which has been prepared is outside. If I may strike a personal note, in 1967 I became a Minister before I became a Member of Parliament. So, unfortunately, I always entered from Gate No.4 for ten years and came in here. This time happily I was no longer a Minister and so I used Gate No.1. As soon as I entered from Gate No.1, I noticed that on the right there was a statue and on the left there was a flower pot. So I went up to the statue and saw that it was the bust of Gopala Krishna Gokhale, the great leader of the moderates. Immediately it struck me that if the great leader of the moderates is there, there is no reason why the great leader of the radicals should also not be represented on the other side. As you know, Gopala Krishna Gokhale, appropriately enough, is on the right, and Sri Aurobindo, appropriately enough, is on the left, and therefore I thought it was a good idea that we should have a bust. I met you, Sir, and you were very kind to agree. The Executive Committee of the Sri Aurobindo Centre, which we have set up in Hauz Khas and which I would like the Members to visit whenever they are free, met—the Vice-Chairman and other Members of the Executive Committee are here—and we decided to present the bust. We commissioned a very famous sculptor, Shri B.Y. Wagh, to do the bust which is now ready. I would like now to formally present to you and through you to Parliament, on this birthday of our nation and of Sri Aurobindo, the marble bust of this great patriot in the hope that his flaming nationalism and his deep cultural and spiritual commitment will guide us and help us to clarify our own minds and thoughts at this hour of crisis in our nation's history.

Thank you.

Speech by Shri K. S. Hegde

Dr. Karan Singh, Fellow Members of Parliament, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I must at the outset convey our gratitude to Dr. Karan Singh, who thought of having a bust of Sri Aurobindo outside this historic Central Hall of Parliament. Here we already have a bust of Gopala Krishna Gokhale, another eminent son of India.

To many of us it is a matter of great significance as well as gratification that our country became a free nation on a day which also happens to be the birthday of Sri Aurobindo. It is only appropriate that his bust is being installed today which marks the 106th birth anniversary of Sri Aurobindo and the 31st anniversary of our Independence.

Sri Aurobindo was indeed a rare human phenomenon. He was a sage, a thinker, a revolutionary, a humanist and a visionary. He represented, in the words of Romain Rolland, "The completest synthesis that has been realised to this day of the genius of Asia and the genius of Europe."

Sri Aurobindo was one of the pioneers of political awakening in India and led the revolutionary movement until he left for Pondicherry in 1910. Between the years 1904 and 1909, he gave a new shape in form and content to India's nationalism.

His call to sacrifice was a new gospel, it thrilled us in the first decade of this century as nothing else did. May I recall his own memorable and inspiring words?—

Political freedom is the life-breath of a nation. Without it a nation cannot grow, cannot expand... The work of national emancipation is a great and holy "yajna" of which boycott, Swadeshi, national education and every other activity, great and small, are only major and minor parts. Liberty is the fruit we seek from the sacrifice, and the Motherland is the goddess to whom we offer it.

Sri Aurobindo was one of the first Indians to have a vision of future India. On the eve of his retirement to Pondicherry in 1910, he predicted that after a long period of war, world-wide upheaval and revolution, to begin in about four years, India would achieve her freedom.

In his message to the country on the dawn of Freedom on August 15, 1947, Sri Aurobindo urged:

A revolution which would achieve India's freedom and her unity; the resurgence and liberation of Asia and her return to the great role which she had played in the progress of human civilisation; the rise of a new, a greater, brighter and nobler life for mankind which for its entire realisation would rest outwardly on an international unification of the separate existence of the peoples, preserving and securing their national life but drawing them together into an overriding and consummating oneness; the gift by India of her means for the spiritualisation of life to the whole race; and, finally, a new step in the evolution which, by uplifting the consciousness to a higher level, would begin the solution of the many problems of existence which have perplexed and vexed humanity, since men began to think and to dream of individual perfection and a perfect society.

These aims and ideals he pursued consistently.

Pondicherry, where Sri Aurobindo lived for almost forty years—till he passed away on 5 December 1950—was his *tapobhoomi*. During his first years of intense

Yoga at Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo saw with lucid clarity and certainty the evolutionary movement from Mind to Supermind—"a step in evolution," as he called it in his Independence Day message.

Sri Aurobindo drew men to the Almighty, and he showed the way for man and society alike to move towards the Life Divine upon the earth. He inspired mankind with a new hope towards the fulfilment of age-long aspirations. It is but appropriate that we instal his bust outside this historic Hall in order to remind ourselves daily of his dedicated life and ideals.

I have great pleasure in unveiling the bust of this patriot-saint. I feel privileged to pay my tribute on this historic day to this great Yogi-philosopher.

IN THE INNER WORLD HIS MEETING WITH THEE WOKE THE TONGUE OF ALL MYSTIC ECSTASY—

HE, who will stop all writing poetry
Only that Thou mayst send Thy own word and sign,
he who will leave all that he has called his own
and who feels, vague and pale, already
the melodic theme of the Divine,
through whom a word has passed a burning seed—

he knows
how not to attach himself
to the outer world
and silently is one
with an exact metre,
quite soft,
a mission,
a tender lucid well,
an unbending well—
Thy Love.

ASTRID

SRI AUROBINDO'S POETRY

C. V. Devan Nair of Sri Aurobindo Society, Singapore, wrote to the editor: "Attached is a copy of the transcript of a talk given by an Englishwoman resident in Singapore, Mrs. Sonia Dyne, on 13 February this year, to the local Sri Aurobindo Society, on Sri Aurobindo's poetry. Mrs. Dyne has never been to Pondicherry. But she is a member of the local Society, and has become a serious student of Sri Aurobindo's works, and his poetry in particular. We found her talk extremely stimulating and her recitation beautiful by any standard. It occurred to me that you would like it sufficiently for publication in Mother India."

I

"A NEW kind of poetry demands a new mentality in the recipient as well as in the writer." These words occur in one of Sri Aurobindo's letters: they form part of his reply to a critic of his poetry. Tonight I should like to explore a little the meaning of Sri Aurobindo's phrase "a new mentality". It is not my intention to speak to the expert, or to the person who knows Sri Aurobindo's poems well. I want to speak to the person who considers Sri Aurobindo's poetry difficult—more difficult perhaps than his great philosophical works like *The Life Divine* or *The Synthesis of Yoga*. This attitude is quite widespread, unfortunately.

I believe it results from a misunderstanding about the difference between poetry and prose. In today's world we are deluged with written material, most of it of little or no interest and very poor quality from a literary point of view. Out of self-defence we form the habit of skimming through what we read in order to extract the "meaning" as rapidly as possible—we pay no attention to anything else, for indeed nothing else of value is being offered. In great poetry, something else *is* being offered to us and, if we read the works of a great poet in the same way as we read a newspaper or a textbook, *we may miss the essential part* of what he is trying to convey to us.

Here is an extract from a recent commentary on Sri Aurobindo's poems. It is an excellent commentary, but some lines from the introduction will suffice to show the kind of misunderstanding that can arise: "Unlike the poems of the Western metaphysicals, Sri Aurobindo's poems are hard to analyse. They are built up through a recondite symbolism and result in a certain obscurity of expression. As the poems are a record of his own inner vision and experience, they defy analysis. A reader who has the right equipment of mind and spirit and a knowledge of the ancient Indian metaphysics...alone can reap some reward from a study of Sri Aurobindo's poems." And the same writer goes on to say: "There is little of deliberate obscurity, obscurity for its own sake, in the poems."

I would go much further, and say that there is no deliberate obscurity in Sri Aurobindo's poetry at all. If he uses a difficult word or image, it is because that

is the right word, the right image, and no other will do. Obscurity of any kind is quite foreign to the aim of Sri Aurobindo, which was always to bring light and understanding to the mind.

"A reader who has some knowledge of ancient Indian metaphysics alone can reap some reward..." Here is another assertion which surely requires some qualification. A knowledge of Indian metaphysics would perhaps be an advantage to the reader—the same could be said for a knowledge of English literature, or metrical technique. These things *may* enhance our enjoyment, but they can also be an obstacle to our enjoyment: if we become so preoccupied with them that we fail to see the "new kind of poetry" that Sri Aurobindo is offering to us. What is certain is that the appeal of Sri Aurobindo's poetry far exceeds national or cultural boundaries.

These are minor points. The core of the misunderstanding is revealed in the words: "they defy analysis." Yes indeed, but then the poems are not meant to be analysed. They defy analysis not because they are obscure in expression, but because *they are not the creation of mind*. Sri Aurobindo himself tells us: "thinking has nothing to do with it." To subject the poems to rational analysis is to greatly reduce their ability to communicate directly to the heart. Sri Aurobindo makes this clear in his letters and his commentaries.

It is true that he himself often replied to questions about his poems with a detailed analysis. However, one senses his impatience with this method. To one such questioner he wrote: "All that is to mentalize too much, and mentalizing always takes most of the life out of spiritual things. That is why I say it can be seen, but nothing said about it."

If we take Sri Aurobindo's words seriously—as we should—we must assume that it is unprofitable to seek first for a mental understanding of the poems: to seek to grasp the intellectual content first, as we would with a piece of prose writing, where it is often all that matters. We must realise clearly that, in his poetry, Sri Aurobindo uses language not just to express a mental idea, but to bypass the mind, as it were, and to bring about a response in the reader or listener which is nearer to direct sight, a direct grasp of the truth. How does he do this?

We need to ask ourselves three questions: the first, "What is poetry?"—the second, "How is it written?"—the third, "What is the special relationship between the form of the poem and its meaning?"

What is poetry? There are as many types of poetry as there are poets, but here we need concern ourselves with only one. Sri Aurobindo himself gave it a name—he called it Overhead poetry. By this he meant that the originating impulse or inspiration comes not from the rational mind but from planes of consciousness beyond mind, which use the mind for their self-expression.

A great French writer once called poetry "Perle de la pensée"—the pearl of thought. I believe Sri Aurobindo would have approved of this definition. The seed of the pearl comes from outside, from the wideness of the sea; and the oyster, within its dark interior, patiently clothes it with layer upon layer of gleaming sub-

tance until the gem is fully formed.

So too the poet clothes his original inspiration in layers of meaning, symbol, image, allusion and association—until more can be said in a single line or a single phrase than in a page of prose. Let me give you an example.

The poem called “In a Mounting of Sea Tides” is a prayer of aspiration. It contains these lines:

If once given were but a touch of thy feet on the thrilled bosom of
my longing,
But a glance of thy eyes mingling with mine in the recesses and the
silence,
Such a rapture would envelop me.....

All this could seem rather pretentious speech in the worst nineteenth-century manner if we fail to recognise that here Sri Aurobindo evokes an incident from the life of Ramakrishna. (This is something Sri Aurobindo often does in his poems: he recalls to our minds, by means of a phrase or a startling image, an incident from history or legend—sometimes even the work of another poet.) The story referred to here is as follows: before the death of Ramakrishna, his disciple Vivekananda begged him for some realisation of the presence of God. Vivekananda relates that Ramakrishna put his foot on the chest of his disciple, causing him to lose consciousness of the outside world. He then obtained the realisation he desired.

Sri Aurobindo, in a single line, recalls this incident to our minds in order to illustrate the theme of his poem. Poetry is indeed a “power-packed” form of expression—we should not expect it to yield up all its secrets at first reading. Neither should we set the mind to work on it, laboriously taking it apart word by word. Sri Aurobindo’s poetry needs to be contemplated—or at least meditated upon—for it has a very real power to bypass mere mental understanding *if we will allow this power to work in us*.

This is the power of which Sri Aurobindo writes:

Its message enters, stirring the blind brain...

The *blind* brain. Such mantric power is the essence of poetry.

Let us now turn to our second question: how is such poetry written? It begins with a perception of what Sri Aurobindo called “the great creative world rhythms”. Entering the mind of the poet, these rhythms take the form of poetic metre and rhyme, and find expression in words which somehow directly convey an inspiration essentially beyond words...beyond rational analysis. Sri Aurobindo describes the creative process thus:

“I don’t think about technique, because thinking is no longer in my line. But I see and feel for it when the lines are coming through...the inspiration provides

what I want according to standing orders. If there is a defect, I appeal to headquarters till a proper version comes along or the defect is removed by a word or a phrase substitute that flashes—with the necessary sound and sense. These things are not done by thinking or seeking for the right thing—the two agents are sight and call. Also feeling—the solar plexus has to be satisfied, and, until it is, revision after revision has to continue. I may add that the technique does not go by any set mental rule—for the object is not perfect technical elegance according to precept—but sound significance filling out word significance.”

In many similar passages from his letters, Sri Aurobindo indicates to us the way in which we should approach his poetry. In another place, he writes of what the poet does:

“He does not make a mere intellectual or philosophical statement of the truth, it is his vision of its beauty, its power, his thrilled reception of it, his joy in it that he tries to convey by an utmost perfection in word and rhythm. If he has the passion, then even a philosophical statement of it he can surcharge with this sense of power, force, light, and beauty.”

Power, force, light, beauty: we shall not find these by looking up Sri Aurobindo's words in a dictionary. And if we truly want to penetrate the meaning of his symbols and images, then we must let the *poems themselves* teach us, or turn for help to Sri Aurobindo's own comments. (For example, the section on “Visions and Symbols” in Part iii of the *Letters on Yoga* very clearly explains most of the symbolism used in the poems, and it is a great help to read them both together.)

However, even if we read nothing outside the poems themselves, they will still reveal their meaning to us to a greater or lesser extent if we will only look carefully at our *own spontaneous response* to them, instead of trying to take them apart mentally. As our understanding grows with familiarity, so the meaning will unfold like a bud opening slowly until all the petals are disclosed.

I have noticed, too, that even where Sri Aurobindo draws upon his enormous vocabulary for some really exotic word, there is always a key-word or phrase—something very simply put—which gives us a clue to the meaning of the whole passage. This is true even of the so-called “difficult” passages of *Savitri*. It is a good idea to look for these “key-words” and use them to unlock the sense of the more difficult lines.

2

It is time to return to our three questions, for we have not yet considered the third question: what is the special relationship between the form and the meaning of a poem? I have chosen a few passages to use as illustrations. Before we consider them in detail, I should like to remind you of something Sri Aurobindo said in a letter quoted above. He spoke of “sound significance filling out word significance”. What does he mean?

Many poets have followed Pope's famous maxim “the sound must seem an

les on a leaf or a bird on a branch, because it is a subtle consciousness which illumines the material form but cannot be contained by it—it is “nothing”... *No thing*... Hence it eludes our grasp; and yet it is “all” for nothing else matters to us when finally “it is found”.

I have gone into some detail about *In Horis Aeternum* in order to show an alternative method of approach to the poems through the sound and the pure enjoyment of sound. Thus the first question to ask should be “How does it sound?” and not “What does it mean?” If we know how to read a poem, we are already half way to understanding the poet's meaning.

(I am not speaking here of the numerous modern poets who appear to regard rhythm, metre and rhyme as frivolous, unnecessary, or even childish. They are not writing Overhead poetry, and their work is to be read for its intellectual content, if any. However, I have noticed that when a poet like Yeats or Dylan Thomas reads his own work, he does so quite differently from the way in which the same poems are read by an actor. The actor feels he should try to interpret—bring out the sense of the lines in his voice. On the other hand the poet stresses the musical element, often reading his poems in a kind of chant.)

Let us turn now to the opening lines of *Ahana*. Sri Aurobindo prefaces this poem with a note which sets the scene for the dialogue that follows. It begins as an invocation to the dawn, personified as a radiant Goddess glimpsed by humanity on the mountain tops—on the borders of human consciousness. The speakers in the name of all mankind implore Ahana to descend into world-being. Their invocation becomes a long meditation on the nature of the world and of life. The poem ends with Ahana's reply: “but I descend at last”... “but I come, and midnight shall sunder.”

AHANA

Vision delightful alone on the hills whom the silences cover,
 Closer yet lean to mortality human, stoop to thy lover.
 Wonderful, gold like a moon in the square of the sun where thou strayest
 Glimmers thy face amid crystal purities; mighty thou playest
 Sole on the peaks of the world, unafraid of thy loneliness. Glances
 Leap from thee down to us, dream-seas and light-falls and magical trances;
 Sun-drops flake from thy eyes and the heart's caverns packed are with pleasure
 Strange like a song without words or the dance of a measureless measure.

What is one's first response to these lines? Is it—“there is something mysterious here, something that can't quite be grasped”? If so, the essential meaning of the lines has been understood. This sense of mystery is what they are all about, for their theme is the dawning of a greater power of consciousness, at present beyond the reach of man's analysing mind. Sri Aurobindo tells us: “Dawn always means an opening of some kind... the coming of something that is not yet fully

there. .” All this is “strange, like a song without words”—something as yet incomplete.

How does Sri Aurobindo describe Ahana? She is “Gold like a moon in the square of the sun...” These words *are* mysterious, but there is no “deliberate obscurity” here. There is rather a play of many possibilities—many potential meanings and associated images or ideas which play upon the symbol moon like so many rays of light. Perhaps the word “square” is used in its astrological sense (a plane is said to “square” another planet when it comes into a certain relationship to it). Here the symbolic moon, or spiritual consciousness in man, comes into relationship with the “gold sun” of the supramental consciousness and reflects its golden light. As ever we can turn to Sri Aurobindo’s letters for help; he tells us: “The moon is spiritual mind, mind in contact with the truths of the spirit and reflecting them.” And again: “When you see a square, that is a symbol of complete creation”.... “In my experience, the square symbolises the supermund. I cannot say how it came to do so. Perhaps somebody or some force may have built it before I came into my mind.” It does not matter if the reader has no idea what the square meant to Sri Aurobindo, because all his poems can be understood and appreciated on many different levels. Each level is valid and important in its own right. It is impossible, moreover, for any two individuals to respond in exactly the same way to a work of art, so there can be no question of a “right” or “wrong” interpretation. There is only a more or less complete response to all the possibilities offered to us.

The possibilities are many. A whole world of associations opens out to us through the few lines from *Ahana* quoted above. The student of Indian metaphysics will recognise that “sun” and “moon” are terms belonging to the language of yoga, and will speculate about the way in which Sri Aurobindo uses them here. The student of English literature may notice that Sri Aurobindo uses the same words as Coleridge in *Kubla Khan* and wonder why.

We saw earlier that Sri Aurobindo sometimes uses a historical incident or words that recall the work of another poet as a kind of illustration to his theme, or else to add a further dimension to his idea. In this way he often evokes the classical poets of Europe and India, and some of the more modern poets like Vaughan or Shelley. In doing this, Sri Aurobindo invariably enables us to see the work of the *other* poet in a new light: it is as if he brought out the hidden sense of the word from the past.

We have seen how Sri Aurobindo used one line to evoke an incident in the life of Ramakrishna, because it was relevant to what he wanted to say. Now, in these first few lines of *Ahana* he echoes Coleridge’s words from *Kubla Khan*... ‘pleasure’ ‘caverns’ ‘measureless’. Coleridge uses the same words thus:

...a stately pleasure dome decree
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man...

f we want to know how Coleridge's poem could possibly be relevant to *Ahana*, we have to consider the odd circumstances in which it was written. By Coleridge's own account, the poem came to him in a dream as he slept in his garden, and took the form of a song sung by a girl on a mountain top, a song which filled him with "a strange delight". On waking he immediately set about writing down the words he had heard in his dream. He was interrupted by a visitor and later he could remember nothing. The poem is unfinished. Like the "strange song" of *Ahana*, Coleridge's "strange song" retreated just beyond the borders of consciousness and could not come fully to birth.

All that is by the way, however, and is mentioned here only to show that Sri Aurobindo's poetry is so rich in meaning that it is like a treasury open to all comers. There is something for everyone and it is certainly not necessary to have Sri Aurobindo's knowledge of language and literature and metaphysics in order to read his work with enjoyment and profit. As far as *Ahana* is concerned, its theme is expressed in the simple phrase "song without words" and the image of the dawn, the coming light, expresses Sri Aurobindo's meaning as effectively as the more "recondite symbolism". Through such simple imagery, as through the rhythm of the words, we are given an insight into the poem's meaning which does not depend upon intellectual knowledge for its working.

The Island Sun shows us how Sri Aurobindo uses symbols. It is very simple in both form and expression. The symbols used in the poem are drawn from nature: sun and moon, mountain and sea—and the "Island of the Blest". I am not sure what Sri Aurobindo means by "Island of the Blest" and I believe that, like so many of his symbols, it is capable of more than one interpretation, all of which are correct in their own "level". To a European, the phrase "Island of the Blest" recalls the mysterious "Isles of the West" of Celtic myth. These were inhabited by the souls of the saints, and yet had a physical existence somewhere beyond the boundaries of the known world. In old documents the "Island of the Blest" is sometimes called "the not yet discovered land".

If there is some doubt about the island, Sri Aurobindo tells us explicitly how he uses the symbols of moon and sun. He writes: "The sun is the truth from above, in the last resort the supramental truth." Of the relationship between this sun and the human mind he states: "Supermind is not mind at all. It is something different. The sun indicates truth directly perceived, in whatever plane it may be. It is the symbol of the supermind, but the truth may come down into other planes—and when it is no longer supramental but modified to the substance of other planes—still it is the direct light of truth."

Here we have what one might call a philosophical statement of the meaning of "Island Sun". Can we not say that the poem is not only more beautiful than the bald prose statement—it speaks to us more directly (to the heart as well as the mind)—and it is also easier to understand?

THE ISLAND SUN

I have sailed the golden ocean
 And crossed the silver bar;
 I have reached the Sun of knowledge,
 The earth-self's midnight star.

Its fields of flaming vision,
 Its mountains of bare might,
 Its peaks of fiery rapture,
 Its air of absolute light.

Its seas of self-oblivion,
 Its vales of Titan rest
 Became my soul's dominion,
 Its Island of the Blest.

Alone with God and silence,
 Timeless it lived in Time;
 Life was His fugue of music,
 Thought was truth's ardent rhyme.

The light was still around me
 When I came back to earth
 Bringing the Immortal's knowledge
 Into man's cave of birth.

In Sri Aurobindo's poetry, different levels of consciousness constantly appear figured as skies and seas. We can easily appreciate that *The Island Sun* is a record of his own experience in his attempt to bring down the light of a higher consciousness "in to man's cave of birth". To the Sanskrit scholar, this cave is the cave of the Vedas; to the Classical scholar it is Plato's cave on whose walls eternal truth was glimpsed as if reflected; to the Christian it is the cave of birth of Christ, in whom human and divine were perfectly joined in one nature.

Savitri is the most complete account of Sri Aurobindo's experience and his spiritual teaching. But why did he write this tremendous epic? Had he not already made a complete statement of his philosophy in *The Life Divine* and *The Synthesis of Yoga*? The answer to this question is yes—taken together these and his letters give as complete an account as it is possible to give in rational terms. Yet, if Sri Aurobindo had not felt that he could say more—express himself more profoundly—by casting his experience into the form of a poem, we may be sure that he would not have written *Savitri*. We cannot expect to understand *Savitri* as Sri Aurobindo

understood it. It is at once too profound and too personal. Whatever it is that evokes a response in each individual reader—that will be its meaning for him, its message for him. Vivekananda, in a very fine sonnet, once wrote:

All in my universe hath measured place.

Savitri is like a universe in miniature—everything is there, and we may start where we will; take much or little from it according to our needs and nature.

If Sri Aurobindo wrote *Savitri* because through poetry he could express more than he could say in prose, then we should respect his intention and not try to read *Savitri* as if it were prose. All the poems were written to be spoken aloud, not read silently—this is particularly true of *Savitri*. The music of the words is deliberately monotonous, like the breaking of sea waves on the shore...and yet, if one pays attention, full of subtle variations of pace and stress which themselves convey their message. Let us remember again what Sri Aurobindo himself tells us about the mantra, which indeed his poetry is:

Its message enters, stirring the blind brain
And keeps in the dim ignorant cells its sound;
The hearer understands a form of words
And musing on the index thought it holds,
He strives to read it with the labouring mind,
But finds bright hints, not the embodied truth:
Then, falling silent in himself to know
He meets the deeper listening of the soul....

It is to this “deeper listening of the soul”, and not to the “blind brain” or to the “labouring mind”, that Sri Aurobindo’s poetry is primarily addressed.

SONIA DYNE

TOWARDS THE HIGHER LIFE

(Continued from the issue of November 24, 1978)

Chapter V

Descent into the Inconscient

(4)

AFTER the days of excitement, the intensity of the reaction to the descent into the Inconscient can be gauged from the fact that for more than one year I had to remain away from the Ashram atmosphere. It was during this period that it dawned on me what peace, purity, power, serenity were there in this divine land of ours.

There was a complete breakdown of my nervous system. To divert my attention from the horrors of my condition, it was found necessary that I should be kept away from the pressure pervading the Ashram. Whatever balance was gained in the hospital must not be disturbed. The ruffled state of the inner being might again find the pressure unbearable. It should be allowed to reach the normal state.

I did not know all this. Since my heart had been pining to reach the Ashram and was counting the days, nay hours, great was my disappointment when I was told: "The Mother wants you to go for a change of climate along with Professor Agarwal for the restoration of your health." The heart accepted it not in a spirit of surrender but helplessness. The same was my state of mind when on return after a month-long tour I was asked to stay at Madras. After a six months' stay there when I was fervently looking for the day to be in Pondicherry I was told to go to the Lake Estate—six miles away from the Ashram.

When the Mother had graced my department with her visit to open the newly built construction, I had prayed with my head on her feet: "May I live to have my realisation in this life, in this body and in this room!" Just at the time of departure from Madras this prayer came back to my sleeping memory, flooding my eyes with tears. I actually broke into sobs. In a choked voice I cried from a broken heart: "Why, for what fault of mine is the Mother depriving me of her immediate Presence?" The more I gazed at her picture the more living it looked. Suddenly a loving voice like a "flute of heaven" came to my ears:

"Go, my child, and return. It is for your good that you are sent out."

We have the Mother's own words to tell us what her photograph contains:

"In each photo I am different. To each one I reveal myself in a distinctly different way which is the right one for that individual. You must feel it and find out. It is not just a picture on a piece of paper but a living Presence, a vibrant force and an entity or an emanation which has tremendous power of action. Anyway, it is a part of myself, materialised, concrete, which is revealed in such a way that the Force

acts through the photo itself, because my Presence is living there.”¹

The truth enshrined in these words is open to experiment by any longing heart.

The first real inner contact that was established at the time of leaving Madras grew in intensity during my long stay in the Lake Estate. Time and again her photographs sprang to life and her affectionate touch was felt from her face lit up with different shades of smiles, from her beaming eyes, the movement of her pupils, the sometimes stern look whenever I went astray. The vibration that emanated from these gestures served as guiding lines in the solution of intricate problems.

It took me more than three years to realise that, had I not been sent out and kept away from the pressure of the Ashram for months together, I should have never recovered.

As long as I was in the hospital my memory was void of any trace of the Ashram. It revived in Kanpur. On hearing of my arrival at Lucknow a friend of mine came to take me to his place. He took me by car to various places but nothing appeared pleasing to my eye. No sight-seeing gave me any kind of reprieve. I could not apply my mind even to a film-show and so those who were with me had to deny themselves the joy of seeing any picture. My friend had to go to Bombay. He generally travelled by plane and wished to take me with him if I liked. But again and again I requested him to take me back to the Ashram and nowhere else.

Had I fallen into the temptation of a trip by air and left the company of Professor Agarwal to whose hands the Mother had entrusted me I would have never returned to the Ashram. My Kanpur friend was a very busy man. How could he make time to be with me? The best he could do was to readmit me to a hospital. One false step and a steep fall can be there!

On being discharged from the hospital I was to go to Lucknow. In order to give me the joy of seeing the famous Buddhist stupa at Sanchi Professor Agarwal had planned to break the journey at Bhopal. We were nearing our destination. The sun had begun to pour new life, new energy to enable all to begin their day's work with fresh vigour. Just then we were rudely shaken by an abrupt halt of the fast-running train far away from the station. On both sides of the railway line there were lovely plants of sugarcane ready for harvesting. Some unscrupulous passengers plundered them and started chewing them during a two-hour halt. We came to know that a serious accident had been averted by the axle of the engine getting thrust into the ground, or else the engine along with the adjoining bogies would have derailed. (I was in the first bogey. Mr. Morarji Desai was travelling by the same train. His bogey was attached at the end. He was at the time our Finance Minister.) When we found ourselves miraculously saved and the train began to move at last, escorted by another engine, a passenger exclaimed: "God knows who is that blessed soul among us in saving whom He has saved all of us."

Mine is not a solitary instance. Such things do happen. Because one has to be saved others are automatically saved. The following accident bears testimony

¹ *Sweet Mother*: Mona Sarkar

to this result which was authenticated by the Mother herself.

X was returning from Orissa to Madras when the train in which he was travelling collided, due to wrong point changing, with a goods train standing at the station. As the train was running at a high speed the driver put the brakes on but since it could not be stopped in time he leaped out of the engine and escaped unhurt. In spite of the collision, the train jumped right off the rails instead of being thrown over; it stood still by the side of the rails. The passengers, including X, were merely flung out of their seats. Thus all were saved miraculously. On enquiry it was found that none had been injured. All were brought to their destination by a relief train.

When X reached the Ashram he went straight to the Mother to speak about the accident and the way he had been saved. Before he could utter a word, the Mother spoke: "Yes, I knew of the danger threatening you and in order to save you I had to save the whole train."

The first to bless the mental wreck that was I at the time was Lord Buddha who had made India the shrine of the Buddhist world. The moment I bent my knees before his newly installed bronze statue at Sanchi I saw him giving his blessings with an outstretched right palm. The massive stupa built on a hill-top leaves an indelible impression on the mind. The scene of the sun setting behind the Vindhya hills is equally unforgettable.

The statues of Shivaji erected on a house-top at a central place in Nagpore and of Rani Lakshmi Bai in front of her fort at Jhansi made me forget my mental trouble. I had not yet recovered my equilibrium of mind, so could not apprehend and appreciate what was best in Lucknow and its Muslim culture. Only a few things created interest in me. I admired the life-like oil-paintings of the Nawabs in the Art Gallery and stood amazed before the huge skeleton of a whale in the Lucknow Museum. The whale's gorge was so wide that a man could pass into it like a fish, and a baby elephant could find space to sleep comfortably in its stomach. More amusing was the sight of an ostrich in a Zoo, whose legs were as long as the height of a man.

During my stay at Lucknow, whenever I closed my eyes I was forced to witness fearful visions. In one of them I saw myself rising to the top of mountainous waves only to be dashed to the depth of the sea the very next moment. Gathering all my scattered energy I managed to write just one letter to the Mother about my plight and that proved to be the last as long as I was away from the Ashram.

My mind had lost not only the power of thinking but also the capacity to apply itself to anything. People might feel surprised that the same man would be made an instrument to write a book of 300 pages and that too in English not very long after—though he had no academic background. There are several such strange and contrary episodes in my life.

Sight-seeing did much to save me from nervous collapse. The structural beauty of the world-renowned Taj Mahal gave me so much joy that I could not con-

tain it and I sat down to assimilate my impression. The outer view of the Red Forts at Agra and Delhi is very impressive but their inner grandeur and splendour defy description, in spite of the fact that only a portion of them is open to the public. The Qutab Minar has a story of its own. Standing before it we appear like Lilliputians. To reach its summit one has to pass through a very narrow passage, step by step and it was a feat on my part to reach the top. The passage inside the Minar often got blocked up by a constant stream of visitors passing in and out. On one such occasion when I felt nonplussed, the Qutab Minar disappeared from my sight and there stood the figure of Sri Aurobindo and I reached the top with ease. Those were the days I could not walk without a stick in hand and I climbed the Minar.

The Mother did not leave me to my fate. Not once but three or four times she appeared before my open eyes in the form of Goddess Durga. About the first and second I have spoken earlier. I shall tell a story about the third time.

One day Professor Agarwal decided to go to his brother's place. He took me with him thinking village-life might bring some cheer to my mind. To the devotees of Ram, Chitrakute is as dear as Ayodhya. It is only 12 miles from there. But the only means of transportation is a hackney carriage and one cannot escape severe jerks and jolts, for the road runs through a hilly tract. This greatly frightened me but prompted by an invisible Force and irresistible inner urge I made up my mind not to accept defeat. Till now I had been meekly accepting defeat after defeat as I had not the strength to take a stand and give fight. It was decided that we would start the next day in the early hours of the dawn and return by evening.

Seated on a rope-cot facing the cow-shed I was enjoying the pure and fresh country breeze. The cows had returned home and were tied to their mangers for food. The lights from the tiny doors and windows of the village-huts dimly dotted the darkness that was fast engulfing the earth. Suddenly there flashed before my eyes, a little above my head, the full figure of Goddess Durga as if to prepare me to face the future. As the darkness of the night deepened, the knee pain grew more and more acute, but without minding it I left the bed at daybreak and got ready for the day's tedious journey. Each time the pain was aggravated due to jolting there rose to my lips the cry "Victoire à la Douce Mère", which had got currency in the Ashram during the War-time. Many of us repeated it in greeting each other on different occasions.

The tranquillity that permeated the mountainous region gave me a faint glimpse of hermit life. Yearning souls can still discover some traces of the past in these quiet retreats. I too had the darshan of a Rishi in a seated position at the hill-side.

Moving slowly with measured steps we reached the place where Rama used to sit with Sita on a platform besides a running pool. The moment I lowered my head to pay homage to the specified place I felt the sweet touch of Goddess Sita. It brought solace to the heart.

But quite contrary was the case when we went to Brindavan a few days later.

That was the place which I had yearned to visit from my childhood.

Once I had accosted a visitor, saying: "How lucky you are! You belong to Mathura!"

"I felt blessed when I was permitted to come to Pondicherry," he had been quick to reply.

Now my adoring heart had an "eager hope" that in Brindavan I would have some lofty experiences that would enrich the soul, but I was not granted the joy of even one that awakened the consciousness.

The *lacuna* was removed by a vivid experience I had at Birla Mandir in New Delhi. The rays that emanated from the eyes, set in the marble statue of Sri Krishna, so enamoured me that even when I left the temple I found myself lost in the thought of Him. All along the way back home there remained no sense that I was passing through the streets of New Delhi. I was awakened as if from sleep when the hired carriage reached its halting place.

I had fervently hoped that I should be able to reach the Ashram before the February Darshan 1959. When the last day passed and there remained no chance of my reaching in time for the Darshan my heart became all prayer to vouchsafe to me an experience which would abide with me all the time.

On the morning of the Darshan day I had an experience of which there is no memory. In the evening something unusual dawned on me. There are hundreds of anecdotes floating in the air of religious India which eloquently speak about one's "inner relation with the Divine".¹ They are not man-made stories. They are manifestations of the Divine Grace. When I was in prayer something softly entered into my consciousness and I forgot all about my environment. Since I had been helpless and vanquished and could not reach Pondicherry, it may not be wrong to say: "Pondicherry came to me." The whole scene of the Ashram appeared before my eyes—the main courtyard, the Samadhi covered with rose petals, as usually on Darshan days, people forming long queues and Darshanites receiving a message from the Mother. I remember the name of some of them. I saw Pavitra and Pranab standing near her and Mrityunjoy receiving the message from the Mother, and then in my turn I knelt before her. I felt I was in the Ashram at Pondicherry, though physically I was at Lucknow.

During my long stay of six months in Madras I do not remember having had even one experience of note. Almost similar was the case when I was at the Lake Estate. Except for one, there is nothing to put on record. Once on an evening stroll I was caught unawares by a heavy downpour. In the panicky state of my mind there appeared before my open eyes the lustrous figure of Goddess Durga which kept my gaze fastened on her till I reached my house. Had she not lent a helping hand what would have been my fate in that lonely spot all through the night!

One or two more instances of her protection may not be out of place here:

In 1935 I had a terrible attack of iritis. At that time the Ashram had only a no-

¹ *The Synthesis of Yoga*, p. 146.

minal dispensary. For twenty-two days I suffered from piercing pain and passed the nights in great agony. Unable to bear the suffering I would send word to Sri Aurobindo through the Secretary even in the dead of night.

Till 11 p.m. we could write. Thereafter anything urgent we could communicate through Nolini. Whenever I sent a report I got instantaneous relief. I would feel an action in the very spot where the pain was most acute, as if the pain had been suddenly snatched away. But there was a relapse the very next day with redoubled force.

Why it so happened is thus explained in a letter of Sri Aurobindo to me:

“The illness has no doubt a physical cause but there is associated with it a strong resistance to the Force which is evidently seated in the subconscious, since you are not aware of it. This is shown by the fact that after the Mother put a concentrated force there yesterday, the whole thing returned more violently after an hour’s relief.

“That is always a sign of violent and obstinate resistance somewhere. It is only if this is overcome or disappears that complete relief can come.”

This proved true. Though nearing 78 my eyes do not feel the need of using glasses even at night.

Amid such sufferings Sri Aurobindo’s letters came like healing drops of heaven. And the waves of joy that came in their wake turned suffering into the very stuff of joy. Happy indeed was my experience on reading these two lines from his pen:

“Your experiences related in the letter were quite sound and very good. There is no delusion about the force working in the body.”

I have said I had been suffering from eye-trouble. When even after twenty-two days the disease could not be diagnosed I was sent to the local General Hospital. While among the patients, to my surprise I found that the hospital atmosphere did not touch me. I felt something of the Ashram around me.

On inquiry whether I was right in my feeling about the hospital atmosphere, Sri Aurobindo observed:

“The touch of the outside atmosphere generally tends to impair the consciousness, concentration and sadhana. In going to the hospital you were under the Mother’s special protection. It may probably indicate spirituality in the physical consciousness.”

In 1978 I had to go to the Jipmer Hospital for the extraction of a tooth. One must get himself registered first. That means standing in a queue among all sorts of patients. I felt a great hesitation but there was no alternative. The moment I stood in the line I felt the descent of peace and was encircled in an aura which made me feel I was alone in the midst of that crowd.

People might find it hard to believe that in 1958 also, while living in the dismal atmosphere of the Mental Hospital among the deranged inmates, it did not strike me even once during my one-month stay that I had gone mad. I was unable even to bring the names of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to my lips. At such a time, in

their infinite compassion, they not only came to my help, unasked, but kept me under their direct Protection. From this we may infer that even today, although they are not among us in body, we are not denied their Grace and Protection.

When I was brought to Madras, my friend dashed to Pondicherry seeking the Mother's permission for me to come home. On returning he said: "Mother wants you to stay at Madras." I was not prepared for the news but did not insist. Stay at Madras did much to restore me to normal health. Owing to different kinds of diversions, there was no tension in the mind. For the first time I began to feel a kind of mild action of the Mother's Force in the knees which had given untold trouble. Thus the Force penetrated into the very part which was the stronghold of fierce resistance. But for this opening I had to pay a very heavy price by way of reaction. The pain still continued and was constant. The knee joints grew so stiff that it was simply impossible for me to sit with crossed legs on the floor. I had to keep lying on a mattress most of the time. But, while the pain was constant, all was quiet within, so it did not affect the mind.

As days rolled on, I found myself in a child-like state. I had to begin life anew. It may come as a surprise to many that as a result of three months' near-confinement to bed I had completely forgotten to walk. In trying to walk the left foot got entangled with the right and *vice versa*. Lest I should fall I would not go out without the support of someone, as is the case with a stumbling child.

It was again a divine dispensation that at Madras I had been asked to stay in a house where one could breathe the Mother's atmosphere. It was the halting place for those who came from the Ashram to Madras to make purchases. They appeared so near and dear to me. They carried something of the air of their sacred home.

My host did all in his power to make me comfortable. In his company, over a cup of morning tea I tried to give a look at the headlines of the *Hindu*. Except for his young son, a cook and a servant, there was no one in his house. To relieve me from being bored, every now and then he would take me to his office in his car and bring me back at night.

When I was shifted to the Lake Estate, I mingled freely with the field-labourers, created in myself love for work and slowly established a sweet relation with them. My days passed mostly with them. On Sunday, my thoughts ran to the Mother at the time she would come down. One day I pleaded that at least once a week I may be granted the privilege of seeing her. I was six miles away; so how to get the opportunity? Imagine my joy when a car was sent one Saturday evening to fetch me. On Monday morning again the car came to take me back to my work. This process continued for more than six months. Can one ever forget such graciousness! This explains why we ever remain eager to enshrine the Mother in the temple of our hearts.

(To be continued)

THE FIRST HYMN OF THE RIG VEDA

A FREE POETIC RENDERING OF ITS INNER SENSE

FLAME of sacrifice, summoning priest of the Truth divine,
Agni I pray: accept in this heart thy living shrine;
Ordain the Rite and its fruits—all wealth of Heaven is thine!

Thee the mighty seers of ancient days adored;
Ever art thou, O deathless one, by their sons implored:
Thou bringest all Godheads here—to us thy grace accord!

They who invoke thy fiery Will enjoy by thee,
Day by day increasing, the treasures of deity,
Riches of hero-force, of vision and ecstasy.

The pilgrim-sacrifice wholly wrapped in thee, O Flame,
No obstacle can stay, no hostile power can maim:
Swiftly it journeys; it reaches among the Gods its aim.

O Truth-Will, lead the Rite in the steps of the Truth supreme;
From thy seer-tongue let speech of inspiration stream;
Around thee let the radiant powers of Godhead teem!

Create in us who have cast the offering, O luminous Force,
That utter blessedness of Truth whose pristine source
Art thou, immaculate one, mortality's high recourse!

Day by day, O Fire, in our dawns of wondrous light
We come to thee, and come in hours of the darkest night,
Bearing our prostrate thought, O Lord of the pilgrim-rite!

Ever in adoration and prayer to thee we cry
Who preservest for us the home of eternal Truth on high,
Who increasest in beauty and splendour mounting thy native sky.

In all thy greatness, grant us ease of approach to thee;
As father unto son bestow thy intimacy;
Admit us, O blissful Fire, to life and felicity!

RICHARD HARTZ

THE MARRIAGE OF SUNDARAMURTI

A POEM

(Continued from the issue of November 24, 1978)

THE tremulously shrill hypnotic drone
Of countless crickets, and the strident cries
Of crows and parrots and demonic owls
Reverberated through the starless air—
Voices of warning, that were sometimes joined
By the low roaring of a lioness
And the high screaming of her slaughtered prey.
The road soon narrowed to a trackless path,
Uneven, tortuous and choked with vines,
Used only by the jungle beasts. A snake's
Jewel-crested coils hissed angrily away,
As Sundaramurti, dazed, unthinkingly,
Went stumbling after the compelling man,
Who strode with confident, sure-footed steps
Through the dense underbrush. Low, jagged clouds,
Torn by a blast of wind, uncovered a wan
New moon's emaciated death-pale arms
Embracing its dark mother. Unearthly light
Filtering through the frightened, black-limbed trees,
Painted the ground with terror. They were alone,
Walking, walking, walking without respite,
Walking to no known goal. Then, all at once,
The ponderous high-tiered pyramidal pile
Of Tiruvanainallur's temple gateway
Loomed up abruptly and the indistinct
Surge of the Pennar's unseen stream was heard.
As he drew close the fear-thrilled boy could see
Grotesquely sculptured forms, whose menacing eyes
Stared out from the atrium's foreboding walls.
A voice cried, "Come no farther," but, carried along
In the wake of the sannyasi, soon the boy
Was standing amazed before the temple's door.
Huge panels, taller than the highest trees
In the surrounding jungle, silently
Swung open at a touch from the sadhu's hand.
They were inside; the madman muttered, "Let's go."

It was the boy's last chance. He froze and cried,
 "I will not, nothing could make me follow you."
 "You are a stubborn slave," the madman said.
 "I am no slave at all," the boy replied.
 "What are you then?" "A singer." "Ah, better yet.
 For singing is the service I love best."
 With that he disappeared. Now, now the boy
 Could run, escape, be free. Instead he turned
 And plunged into the torch-lit corridor
 That led into the temple. All around
 Were miracles of animated stone
 That showed the many forms of the one Lord.
 The King of Dancers, first, his rhythmic limbs
 Extended in creative ecstasy,
 Slow as the cosmic movements of the stars,
 As in his hand a tiny hourglass drum
 Beat out the cadences of life and death.
 Then Rudra took his place and the slow dance
 Became a red destructive energy,
 Intolerantly undoing all things made,
 Pulling down the columns that hold up the sky,
 Resolving all into the primal void.
 A Yogin then upon his lotus seat
 Was there, aloof, indifferent and serene,
 Lost in an endless trance of voiceless peace;
 And by his side the graceful form appeared
 Of Uma, daughter of the snowy peaks.
 In perfect limbs of chaste voluptuousness
 All beauty, all attraction, all delight
 Were gathered up for world-creation's sake.
 Then, all at once, the separate forms were merged
 In an occult Hermaphroditic shape,
 The biune body of the androgyne.
 Beneath a shoulder that drooped delicately,
 One exquisitely shaped and nipples breast
 Hung down like a ripe mango from its bough.
 One hip was full, maternal, one compact,
 A warrior's, and the trident in his hand
 Was threateningly poised to pierce and slay.
 Past these he walked, not knowing where he went,
 As if a half-awake somnambulist
 Moved through the scenery of another's dream.

Like a woman trembling on her bridal bed,
 Resisting with each fibre of his life,
 Consenting with his whole surrendered soul,
 The boy was drawn on towards the central shrine.
 He groped through passages whose twisting paths
 Bespoke some secret memory, as when
 A stretch of highway inattentively
 Seen by a traveller in a foreign land
 Reminds him of a once familiar place
 Close to the house where he was born: a range
 Of recollection unexpectedly
 Precise in detail opens upon the past—
 The crest of a wooded hill, the earth, the sky,
 The trees and every leaf—embodying
 The elementary genius of the spot
 Completely, though the years and names are blurred
 In a perspective of eternity
 Pregnant with secret meaning, so the paths
 Of the dark temple where he walked bespoke
 Some pregnant secret and he grew aware
 They soon would open into a clear space—
 The mystic centre of the mandala.
 And as he walked he felt beside him, close
 But unembodied, vague, impalpable,
 The guiding shape of one that he once knew
 And thought he heard the madman's frantic laugh.
 The walls were lost in shadow, but he could feel
 Their close and comfortable periphery.
 Then, like a river widening to the ocean,
 They were no longer there. Vast emptiness
 And utter blackness, fathering childlike fears
 And vibrant with dense silence. He had reached
 His goal, the temple's inmost secrecy,
 And before him, in the midst of the great hall
 Transcendent being's self-born integer,
 Male, massive, potent, indescribable,
 Loomed up invisibly. He stood transfixed
 Before the symbol of the formless God
 That is the generator of all forms,
 Thrilled with submissive rapture. All his soul
 Welled up in a voiceless ecstasy of prayer
 As his body fell down prone. A column of light

In instantaneous answer struck his head
 And split the oppressive veil of name and form.
 He passed into an unextended space,
 A vast simultaneity of time,
 A boundless here and now. He was alone
 With God. His mind died and the two were one.
 Light, mere, transparent, uncreated light,
 Peace, tangible, immobile, massive peace,
 Existence sheer, self-conscious, sole, divine,
 One only, Shiva only, God alone.
 One only, yet, for love, a violent soul
 Of adoration in inseverable
 Communion with the Adored broke out in song:

O Lunatic crowned with the crescent moon,
 Lord of existence, who with staff and bowl,
 Must go a-begging—giver of every boon,
 Deliverer of the triply-fettered soul,
 How could I disavow my servitude,
 O Incarnation of Infinitude,
 To you, by you alone am I made whole?...

The music's echoing receded back
 Into the world where every song exists
 Reverberating to eternity
 As he descended back towards time. He saw,
 First of the planes below the formless truth,
 Its image in the glass of illumined mind,
 The archetypal world of the Great God.
 And at its centre stood a monolith
 While with the brilliance of eternal snows.
 As he looked there flashed upon his inward eye
 A vision of his antenatal life.
 Then all returned to him; he knew himself
 The pampered favourite of Kailas's Lord!
 And in an instant of transfigured time
 He lived again the story of his fall.

(To be continued)

PETER HEERES

THE IMAGE OF MAN

HIS FOUR FACETS

Facet IV: The Spiritual Personality (3)

(Continued from the issue of November 1978)

THE marriage of Satyavan and Savitri was a secret and mystic marriage of souls and not an external ceremony of social pomp, noise and glitter.

On the high glowing cupola of the day
Fate tied a knot with morning's halo threads
While by the ministry of an auspice-hour
Heart-bound before the sun, their marriage fire
The wedding of the eternal Lord and Spouse
Took place again on earth in human forms:
In a new act of the drama of the world
The united Two began a greater age. (Ibid., p. 411)

The gamut of Vedic nuptial ceremony is here, without the bustle, the excitement, for it was not a common wedding; it was merely the re-acting of the ceremony enacted elsewhere between 'the eternal Lord and Spouse'. It was

In the silence and murmur of the emerald world
And the mutter of the priest-wind's sacred verse
Amid the choral whispering of the leaves. (Ibid.)

The image presented possesses a lyrical and unadorned simplicity but with a certain epic stress of grandeur, of elevation and loftiness that go to create a world of spiritual romance, nevertheless intense and vibrant.

Satyavan is presented by Sri Aurobindo not only as a spiritual personality but also as a figure of the future in the garb of an ancient and traditional seer. He possesses knowledge, insight, revelatory keenness of mind and heart, an emotional refinement and above all a total surrender to his soul-mate. He is opposite to the common male, domineering and self-assertive. He does not seek household pleasures, is of a sacrificial nature, a devoted, dutiful son to his blind parents and above all has a love which is pure and not tainted with lust.

The image before us is one of amazing beauty, but not bloodless or effeminate, it is endowed with the dignity of inner strength. It would be wrong to compare Satyavan to Eric, Vatsa Udayana, Achilles, Perseus or even Baji Prabhau. For his strength is of another order, his courage and valour surpass the physical and become

inner qualities. He is neither a true Kshatriya nor a true Brahmin, but has the qualities of both.

He is not a romantic hero like Pururavas or Ruru, specially the former where love tended to make the hero lose his qualities of strength. Neither is he like the prince of Edur, the typical Indian hero.

All these figures are only romantic images, as we have mentioned earlier and Satyavan rises beyond into the realm of pure spirituality. His is another type of realism of beauty and truth, but not without its drama of action, reaction, ups and downs, tragedy and joy.

Satyavan is a man of inner experience and realisation, He is a worthy mate of Savitri. But while Savitri's self-realisation has been described in the whole of Book Six, Satyavan's occupies a few pages in Book Five. This does not lessen Satyavan's importance, but brings home the great truth upon which Savitri, her character and her power, stand. Without this revealing self-discovery her conquest over death would have no justification and meaning and would have landed the poem in mythical absurdity, instead of turning it into a paramount glory of spiritual reality, action and manifestation. This reveals the magnitude of Savitri's personality and her role here upon the earth which was to be a triumph over ignorance.

Satyavan's personality is not dwarfed. Satyavan is an echo of Savitri, the occasion and ruse, the cause of the descent of Savitri, her action and manifestation. He is the active and living pawn, the deliberate move, the challenge to Death. Satyavan, by his total submission to her, becomes her agent and her force and had she not been there, his life would have been a meaningless short-lived episode, instead of the occasion of the epical intervention of the Supreme.

His submission is not an emotional self-giving to a woman, perhaps a woman of extraordinary qualities, but nevertheless a woman; it is a surrender to the World-Mother, whom he came to acknowledge as his one guiding principle of existence.

This puissance Satyavan recognises, but the great power of Death fails to grasp. This puissance she reveals gradually to Death. She at first amazes, awe-inspires It, and finally It seeks to fight against her. When ultimately It challenges her, the World-Mother herself, Savitri reaches her apex, the true self which she had so far kept veiled by a veil of *Yoga Maya* and unveils herself to It. This stupendous revelation crushes Death and It is annihilated. But the annihilation of Death solves by no means the problem and does not bring Satyavan and Savitri together.

The Supramental Power disguised as the Supramental *Purusha* seeks to test Savitri. Here is a greater challenge than Death. Death was a physical power and a power of Inconscience, and its confrontation with her was on a lower level of consciousness; this confrontation, on the other hand, is on the summit of her consciousness. It is a greater challenge, for she is offered Peace, Power and even Realisation as baits to renounce the soul of Satyavan, which the Supramental power has deliberately hidden away.

But Savitri faces the challenge, resolutely, stubbornly and with a single mind.

At last the Suprámental *Purusha* pronounces,

'Descend to life with him thy heart desires.
O Satyavan, O luminous Savitri,
I sent you forth of old beneath the stars,
A dual power of God in an ignorant world,
In a hedged creation shut from limitless self,
Bringing down God to the insentient globe,
Lifting earth-beings to immortality.'

(Ibid., p. 702)

When Satyavan awakes from his trance, he finds everything changed. There is a superhuman glow upon Savitri's face and limbs. And he exclaims:

'Whence hast thou brought me captive back, love-changed,
To thee and sunlight's walls, o golden beam
And casket of all sweetness, Savitri,
Godhead and woman, moonlight of my soul?
For surely I have travelled in strange worlds
By thee companioned, a pursuing spirit,
Together we have disdained the gates of night;
I have turned away from the celestial joy
And heaven's insufficient without thee.'

(Ibid., p. 717)

(Concluded)

ROMEN

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BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

Glimpses of the Mother's Life. Compiled by *Nilima Das*. Edited by *K. D. Sethna*. Sri Aurobindo Ashram, *Mother India*. Vol. I. 259 pp. Rs. 25.00.

HERE within a short compass and at bargain price, in view of the sheer splendour of the production one gets an authoritative account of the Mother's life and work till she assumed full charge of the Ashram in 1926—an account which for its brevity, precision, authenticity and sustained interest can hardly be matched anywhere else. In one important respect it differs from all other books published so far on the subject, except for a small brochure issued a short time ago: it is almost entirely written in the words of the Mother, in an English translation for the most part. There are short passages from Sri Aurobindo and some disciples and friends, which serve as elaborations or connecting links. Two most interesting features are Appendixes B and C. The former gives the recollections of Monsieur André Morisset, the Mother's only son whom she left in Paris during the Great War when she went to Japan, and did not meet till 1949. The latter quotes a rare piece of information regarding Sri Aurobindo's impression of the Mother at their first meeting on March 29, 1914.

The compiler, a devoted inmate of the Ashram, has worked in close collaboration with another lady, Shradhdhavan, and the veteran editor of this journal, K.D. Sethna (Amal Kiran in the Ashram). Hardly any of the published records of the Mother's talks or writings having an autobiographical interest have been omitted; this in itself was a huge task on which the compiler says she had been engaged since 1972. They had to be sorted out, arranged in a chronological order related to the various phases of the Mother's life, and given the form of a consecutive narrative. This last function has been so admirably performed by the editor, along with Nilima and Shradhdhavan, that one feels as if one were reading an autobiography. We know, of course, that the Mother never wrote one.

The Mother speaks for herself. There are no "editorial" comments. The story moves in a limpid flow. One gets glimpses of her mind and heart exactly as she discloses them. Some letters from Sri Aurobindo bring her nearer to our vision. The impressions of disciples and friends give a vividness of touch.

There seems to be only one omission of importance. The Mother has told Huta of certain visions and experiences she had in France before arriving in Pondicherry in 1914—visions and experiences answering exactly to those which Sri Aurobindo put into his *Savitri* and which she came to hear about in 1936 when he used to read to her in the early morning the revised passages of Book I which he was transcribing to send privately to Amal day after day. We are sure the omission will be made good by the compiler at some place in the second volume.

A number of rare photographs of the Mother enhance the value of the book. We see her as the photographer saw her, at the ages of 3, 4, 6 and 7, dressed in all

the finery which she appeared to detest, grave and gazing with a penetrating look at all the falsehoods of the world which she would like to abolish forever. We meet her again in Algeria and Japan with the same penetrating look, but there is now about her an aura of authority that imposes itself not by sternness but a deep compassion and sympathy for all human failings.

It is this sympathy and understanding that marks all her words that go to make this "autobiography" so very attractive. This is the first major attempt of its kind, and one feels sure that it will leave a deep impression on whoever comes to it in a spirit of reverence. To reveal all that the Mother stood for is beyond human capacity. To have afforded some glimpses is a most valuable help. The Mother never liked people to think in terms of "miracles". But her life was a perpetual miracle.

We eagerly look forward to Volume 2.

SANAT K. BANERJI

The Life of Sri Aurobindo by *A. B. Purani*. Fourth Edition (fully revised), 1978. Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. Pp. 440. Rs. 30.00.

"THOROUGH" is the word.

There is here a clarity, a balance and sense of form, an impression one gets of authenticity, that make this revised edition of Purani's work which ran to three editions in his life-time a classic in every sense of the term. A revised and enlarged edition has been fully justified.

Purani considered it best to end his story with 1926 when the Mother took direct charge of the Ashram and the sadhana. It is difficult to guess his reasons. It may be that his having been intimately connected with the Ashram and, during the last twelve years of the Master's life, with Sri Aurobindo himself might stand in the way of an impersonal appreciation so essential to a biography. It may be that the large volume of correspondence and the books already published on Sri Aurobindo's life and work by the time (1958) the first edition of this book came out might have appeared to Purani as good substitutes for a separate account of the period from 1927 to 1950.

The editor of this revised edition has thought fit to add a chapter relating to this period, for "to say nothing about this span of twenty-four years would be to leave a considerable gap". One would agree entirely with this point of view. The way he has written this chapter is admirable. There are so many things that needed to be written about, and the danger of getting bogged in details was constant. He has shown consummate skill in choosing his topics and in the space of some twenty printed pages given a fine sketch of this important period as if with a few rapid masterly strokes of the brush. Very appropriately, he ends this chapter with the Mother's words of assurance: "He is always with us, aware of what we are doing, of all our thoughts, of all our feelings and all our actions."

Among the other major changes he has incorporated in this edition are a full chronology of the events in Sri Aurobindo's life at the beginning of the book, and at the end a bibliography detailing the periodicals with which Sri Aurobindo was associated and giving a full list of his published works, including the contents of all the Birth Centenary volumes. There is now a very useful index to this book. There have been some verbal alterations here and there in the body of the original text, and an amount of rearrangement of Sri Aurobindo's letters and talks that fits them better into the context. Except for two obviously inadvertent errors about the dates (1948 for 1947 on page 233 relating to Britain's decision to quit India, and 1908 for 1918 on page 296 regarding the miraculous change in the complexion of Sri Aurobindo's body noticed by Purani), the set-up of the book is flawless.

A doubt perhaps lingers in some minds about the necessity of a book like this which professes to be no more than a record of Sri Aurobindo's external life. A word about this may not be out of place here.

Much has been made of Sri Aurobindo's dictum: "Neither you nor anyone else knows anything at all of my life; it has not been on the surface for man to see." This has been quoted on page 276 of this book, and would seem to defeat the purpose of the book. But we have also his letter (quoted on page 278), which says: "If I tolerate a little writing about myself, it is only to have a sufficient counterweight in that amorphous mass, the public mind, to balance the hostility that is always aroused by the presence of a new dynamic Truth in this world of ignorance... If and so far as publicity serves the Truth, I am quite ready to tolerate it..."

A good deal of misunderstanding and wilful non-understanding still prevails, in regard to Sri Aurobindo's life and work. Even the facts about some of the details of his purely external movements have been distorted or suppressed; some glaring instances have been given in the Appendices to this volume. It seems therefore to be of utmost importance that in the first instance the facts of his external life are clearly ascertained and presented to the reading public in a manner that leaves no doubts as to their authenticity. This has been the primary purpose of this book and, as noted in the beginning, the task has been admirably performed.

There remains the question of his inner life. That, obviously, no human being can ever fathom in all its depths. All one can do is to read what he has written, in *Savitri* and elsewhere, and try to understand—or misunderstand—as the spirit moves him. A qualified biographer can assist in the understanding, by quoting relevant passages and offering his illuminating comments. There his function ends. This too has been done in this book, within the space available.

Taken all in all, it remains a most creditable performance. One feels sure this revised edition will attract attention wherever Sri Aurobindo is admired.

SANAT K. BANERJI