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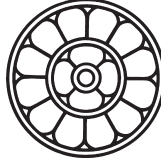
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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BHAVANI

(A Translation — from a Sanskrit Hymn of Shankaracharya)

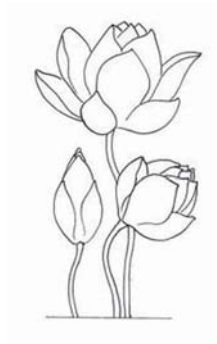
Father nor mother, daughter nor son are mine,
I obey no master, served am I by none,
Learning or means I have not, wife nor kin;
My refuge thou, Bhavani, thou alone!

Charity I have not learned, Yoga nor trance,
Mantra nor hymn nor Tantra have I known,
Worship nor dedication's covenants:
My refuge thou, Bhavani, thou alone!

Virtue is not mine nor holy pilgrimage,
Salvation or world's joy I have never won,
Devotion I have not, Mother, no vows I pledge:
My refuge thou, Bhavani, thou alone!

SRI AUROBINDO

(Translations, CWSA, Vol. 5, p. 383)



EXPERIENCES AND REALISATIONS IN THE INTEGRAL YOGA

(Continued from the issue of May 2017)

PART FOUR THE FUNDAMENTAL REALISATIONS OF THE INTEGRAL YOGA

SECTION FOUR THE SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Chapter Four The Descent of the Higher Powers

The Descent of Peace, Force, Light, Ananda

The descent of Peace, the descent of Force or Power, the descent of Light, the descent of Ananda, these are the four things that transform the nature.

*

Light, Peace, Force, Ananda constitute the spiritual consciousness; if they are not among the major experiences, what are?

*

Presence, Peace, Force, Light, Ananda, these are five things that most commonly come down.

*

The being is not supposed to remain always empty. When the calm and peace of the pure existence is established, Force also has to descend as well as Light, Ananda and other things.

*

Wideness is only the first step — there must be the descent of light, knowledge, peace, force or power and the settling of these things and their constant development.

*

There is no rule, but the most normal course is for a certain Peace and Force and Light which is above the mind to descend and as the result of its workings the cosmic consciousness opens and in it higher and higher levels above mind. Many people get an opening into the cosmic consciousness first but without the basis of the higher Peace and Light it brings only a mass of unorganised experiences.

*

It is not really the plane that descends, it is the Power and Truth of it that descends into the material and then the veil between the material and it no longer exists.

Peace, Calm, Quiet as a Basis for the Descent

Peace and movement on the basis of peace are the first aspects of the One to establish themselves. Bliss and light do not fix so easily or so early — they have to grow.

*

The Peace, Purity and Calm of the Self must be fixed — otherwise the active Descent may find the forces it awakes seized on by lower Powers and a confusion created. That has happened with many.

*

It is not a matter of any particular act or feeling, but a sort of excited vibration with which the vital and physical consciousness meets the vital disturbance — it is evident in the tone and language of what you write when there is the stress of vital suggestion — but it used also to rise when you got the experiences in an excited vibration and bubbling of joy which would easily lapse into some rajasic movement or be replaced by the opposite excitement of suffering and disturbance. Quiet, quiet and more quiet, calm strength, calm gladness are what are needed in mind and nerves and body as a basis for the siddhi — precisely because the Force, the Light, the Ananda that come down are extremely intense and need a great stillness in the being to bear and support them.

*

It is the right fundamental consciousness that you have now got. The *tamas* and other movements of the lower universal Nature are bound to try to come in, but if one has the calm of the inner being which makes them felt as something external to the being, and the light of the psychic which instantly exposes and rejects them, then that is to have the true consciousness which keeps one safe while the more positive transformation is preparing or taking place.

That transformation comes by the descent of the Force, Light, Knowledge, Ananda etc. from above. So you are right in your feeling that you should open with a quiet *śānta samāhita* aspiration or invocation for the descent of the Light from above. Only it must be an aspiration in this calm and wideness, not disturbing it in the least — and you must be prepared for the result being not immediate — it may be rapid, but also it may take some time.

*

Yes, when things begin to descend, they must come down on a solid basis. That is why it is necessary to have peace as the first descent and that it should become as strong and solid as possible. But in any case to contain is the first necessity — then more and more can come and settle itself. Once these two things are settled — peace and strength, one can bear any amount of everything else, Ananda, Knowledge, or whatever it may be.

*

The experience of this “solid block” feeling indicates the descent of a solid strength and peace into the external being, — but into the vital physical most. It is this always that is the foundation, the sure basis into which all else (Ananda, light, knowledge, bhakti) can descend in the future and stand on it or play safely. The numbness was there in the other experience because the movement was inward; but here the Yogashakti is coming *outward* into the fully awake external nature, — as a first step towards the establishment of the Yoga and its experiences there. So the numbness, which was a sign of the consciousness tending to draw back from the external parts, is not there.

*

It is good — the strength is the next thing that has to come down after the peace and join with it. Eventually the two become one.

The Descent of Peace

When one has gone so far that peace from above can descend, that is a considerable progress.

*

Yes, surely the peace can come into the outer consciousness also; it is meant to do so. It is perfectly possible for the body to bear the peace and stillness. It is more difficult for it to bear the full play of the Force; but if the peace is first established in it, then there is no difficulty of that kind.

*

It [*peace*] has to be brought down to the heart and navel first. That gives it a certain kind of inner stability — though not absolute. There is no method other than aspiration, a strong quiet will and a rejection of all that is not turned towards the Divine in those parts into which you call the peace — here the emotional and higher vital.

*

They [*the mind and vital*] are always more open to the universal forces than the material. But they can be more restless than the material so long as they are not subjected to the peace from above.

*

The movement of universality by itself cannot prevent the vital from disturbing — it is the complete surrender and the complete descent of peace into all the being down to the most material that can do it.

*

Nobody said that you should not take the higher being as a first station. The question was about enforcing the peace of the higher being in the lower parts down to the physical so as to

- (1) create that separateness which would prevent the inner being from being affected by the superficial disturbance and resistance,
- (2) make it easier for the force and other powers of the higher being to descend.

*

Peace can be brought down into the physical to its very cells. It is the active transformation of the physical that cannot be *completely* done without the supramental descent.

*

The peace that descends from above can stop the lower action, if it settles in all the being. But that is not sufficient if one wants to develop the dynamic side of the being also on the lines of Yoga.

*

After the body is accustomed to the peace, the peace itself can become dynamic.

The Descent of Silence

What is trying to come down in you is the silence and peace of the Self — when that comes fully, then there is no ego-perception, it is drowned in the wideness of the silence and peace of the Self. But this realisation is at first in the static condition of the Self only — in the dynamic movements the ego may still be there owing to past habits — but each time an ego-movement is abandoned, the sense of the loss of ego becomes deeper and more complete. It is perhaps some impression of what is trying to come that has touched you.

*

It must have been the descent of the higher silence, the silence of the Self or Atman. In this silence one perceives, but the mind is not active, — things are sensed, but without any responsive connection or vibration. The silent Self is there as a separate reality, not bound or involved in the activity of Nature, aloof, detached and self-existent. Even if thoughts come across this silence, they do not disturb it; the Self is separate from the thinking mind also. In this connection the feeling “I think” is a survival from the old consciousness; in the full silence what one feels is “thought occurs in me” — the identification with thoughts as well as with the perception of objects ceases.

*

To still the mind *absolutely* is not so easy. It can be done usually only by the descent of the Silence from above and even then it is not complete until the whole system has been occupied by the higher silence and peace.

*

It is the silence and calm of the higher consciousness pressing down into the body. When it comes down fully then there is the “still statue” feeling at first. Afterwards the calm or silence becomes free and normal.

*

It is the wideness and silence of the being which makes transformation possible, because the lower movements disappear and in the emptiness the Truth from above can descend.

*

Who told you that whenever there was silence or genuine silence knowledge would come down? The silence is a fit vessel for anything from above, but it does not follow that when there is silence, everything is bound to come down automatically.

*

In what may be called the first silence, it is like that — silence alone with no emotion or other inner activity. When it deepens one can feel the Nirvana of the Buddhists or the Atmabodha of the Vedantins. Both force and bliss or either can descend into the silence, filling it with calm Tapas or silent Ananda.

The Descent of Force or Power

The experiences you have had are very clear evidence that you have the capacity for Yoga. The first decisive experiences in this Yoga are a calm and peace that is felt, first somewhere in the being and in the end in all the being, and the descent of a Power and Force into the body which will take up the whole adhar and work in it to transform mind, life and body into the instrumentation of the Divine Consciousness. The two experiences of which you wrote in your letter are the beginning of this calm and the descent of this Force. Much has to be done before they can be established or persistently effective, but that they should come at this stage is a clear proof of capacity to receive. It must be remembered however that the Yoga is not easy and cannot be done without the rising of many obstacles and much lapse of time — so if you take it up it must be with a firm resolve to carry it through to the end with a whole-hearted sincerity, faith, patience and courage.

*

It is the Mother's force that descended to work in the system. There are two things that have to be established in order to make a foundation for the workings of the sadhana in the waking consciousness, 1st a descent of Peace from above, 2nd a descent of the Force. If one has these two things permanently established in the consciousness, then one has the basis.

*

By Force I mean not mental or vital energy but the Divine Force from above — as peace comes from above and wideness also, so does this Force (Shakti). Nothing, not even thinking or meditating can be done without some action of Force. The Force I speak of is a Force for illumination, transformation, purification, all that has to be done in the Yoga, for removal of the hostile forces and the wrong movements — it is also of course for external work, whether great or small in appearance does not matter — if that is part of the Divine Will. I do not mean any personal force egoistic or rajasic.

*

Yes, it [*the Force*] is quite concrete. Usually at first it descends of itself from time to time — and also one calls it in face of a difficulty. But eventually it is always there supporting or determining all the action of the being.

*

The Force comes down as soon as it finds an opening and acts in the Adhara whenever it is ready. What determines the descent cannot always be mentally fixed. Aspiration, call, will, prayer, etc. create a favourable precondition in the head or heart or anywhere else and are sometimes the determining cause.

*

What you feel in the head is probably the first conscious descent into the body of the divine Force from above. Up to now it must have been working unfelt by you from behind the heart. If the concentration takes place naturally in the head you must allow it to do so, but the possibility of this has been prepared by the previous concentration in the heart, so that also need not be discontinued unless the force working in you insists on the upper concentration only. Aspiration can be continued in the same way until the conduct of the sadhana by the Mother's power is clearly felt and becomes to you the normal thing.

*

The experience you had was simply the descent of the Divine Force into the body. By your attitude and aspiration you called for it to work in you, so it came. Such a descent brings naturally a deep inward condition and a silence of the mind, and it may bring much more — peace, a sense of liberation, happiness, Ananda. It is very often attended as in this experience by a light or luminosity. It was felt enveloping the upper part of the body down to the cardiac centre, because it is these centres, the head and heart centres that are first invaded and occupied by whatever descends from above, Consciousness, Force, Light or Ananda. Usually, there is at first a pressure from above on the head, then one feels something entering the higher part of the head and then the whole head is occupied, as you feel now with the *foumillement* at the time of concentration. Once the head with its mental centres is open and occupied, the Force descends rapidly to the heart centre, unless there is some obstacle or a resistance in the higher vital parts. From there it sends its stream into the whole body and begins to occupy the vital and physical centres — from the navel to the Muladhara. The coming of this experience, occupation of the body by the Force from above, is a great step forward in the sadhana.

The fear of a syncope was due only to the sanskara in the mind; it must be dismissed. The Force can very well come down in the full waking consciousness; if it brings a kind of samadhi, it is usually a conscious inner condition — the consciousness taken away from outward things, but in full power within. Even if a trance came, it would be a trance and not a swoon.

*

The good condition of openness with the Force descending and the constant remembrance — or whatever other form the condition takes — is the beginning of the true consciousness and its duration is always short at the beginning, because the ordinary consciousness is not accustomed to it, but to something else. But it always increases in duration and power until it is able to maintain itself even when the outer consciousness is occupied with other things. At first it remains there as something behind which emerges as soon as the outer preoccupation ends; afterwards it remains behind, but as something just felt, and in a later stage it is always there, so that there are two consciousnesses, the inner consciousness always connected with the Mother and full of her working or her presence or both and the surface consciousness occupied with outer things. Finally, even the surface consciousness begins to feel the direct connection in action itself. One need not mind if there are intervals when the true condition is not there. It does not prove that you are unfit; it is only a period in which what is not yet changed comes up to be worked upon and prepared for change. When the inner consciousness is well established, then these periods take place only in the surface consciousness and are no longer troublesome as before.

P. S. Probably the difficulty you feel is in the externalising mind the centre of

which is in the throat. When there is no resistance there, the Force comes down to the heart level and below.

*

As for the dynamic descent, you say that the Force has descended to your forehead (inner mind) centre. It seems to be very slow in coming through. It has to come down to the heart centre and below before it can begin to be fully effective. Probably there must be something either in the physical mental (throat) or the emotional vital that obstructs the descent. That may be the reason of the union of the upper Agni and the psychic fire and the push on the psychic centre — something is trying to remove the difficulty.

*

The Power above the head is of course the Mother's — it is the power of the Higher Consciousness which is preparing its way of descent. This Higher Consciousness carrying in it a sense of wide and boundless existence, light, power, peace, Ananda etc. is always there above the head and when something of the spiritual Force comes down to work upon the nature, it is from there that it comes. But nothing like the full descent of the peace, bliss etc. can come so long as the being is not ready. Very usually the first preparation is to work on the mind and vital and physical nature in such a way that the soul, the psychic being can have a chance of manifesting itself and influencing the rest of the nature; for that purpose all the main darkneses in the mind and vital have to be combated and thrown out and the physical also prepared in an initial way so that the descent may be possible. This is what has been done so long in you. It has to be made stronger and more complete; but sufficient has been done for it to be possible to prepare the descent of the higher consciousness. There are two things that take place; an ascent of one's consciousness to the higher levels in and above the head, and a descent of the higher consciousness which is above into one's mind, vital and body. How it is done or by what stages or how long it will take varies with each person. But this new consciousness is very different from the ordinary one and many things happen in its coming which would not happen to the mind and might seem strange to it — e.g. the dissolution of the ego and the opening into a wider self or spirit not limited by the body, to which the body is only a small instrument and nothing more. One must therefore dismiss all fear of new things and accept with calm and confidence each field of new experience, relying on the Divine Mother-Force for guidance and support and protection throughout the change.

*

The sadhana is a difficult one and time should not be grudged; it is only in the last stages that a very great and constant rapidity of progress can be confidently expected. As for Shakti, the descent of Shakti before the vital is pure and surrendered, has its dangers. It is better for him to pray for purification, knowledge, intensity of the heart's aspiration and as much working of the Power as he can bear and assimilate.

*

Power can be everywhere, on any plane. What descends from above is power of the higher Consciousness — but there is a Power of the vital, mental, physical planes also. Power is not a special characteristic of the psychic or of the spiritual plane.

The Descent of Fire

The fire is the divine fire of aspiration and inner tapasya. When the fire descends again and again with increasing force and magnitude into the darkness of human ignorance, it at first seems swallowed up and absorbed in the darkness, but more and more of the descent changes the darkness into light, the ignorance and unconsciousness of the human mind into spiritual consciousness.

The Descent of Light

The descent of the Light producing a concrete illumination of the consciousness is always one of the decisive experiences of the sadhana.

*

You can tell her that Light like peace is one of the things that come down from the higher consciousness. It is the light of the Truth that is there — it is sometimes golden, sometimes white, sometimes blue of various shades, sometimes sunlight.

*

It is a true experience and the Light that you felt is the Light of the Truth from above. These things indicate that there is already an opening, but it takes time to become constant and complete. That always happens at first — there are periods in which the consciousness or something in it opens, there are others in which the opening is clouded until something more opens. This goes on until the whole consciousness has been sufficiently worked upon for the full opening and lasting experience to be there.

*

These are special forces of the Light and there is a play of them according to need, but the Light in itself can be lived in as much as one can live in Peace or Ananda.¹ As Peace and Ananda can pour through the whole system and fully stabilise themselves so that they are in the body and the body and the whole being are in them — one might almost say, are that, are the Peace and Ananda — so it can be with Light. It can pour into the body, make every cell luminous, fix itself and surround on all sides in one constant mass of Light.

*

It depends upon the colour of the Light. In any case it is the light of a Force from above. All lights are indications of a Force or Power. It is the work of the Lights and the Forces they represent to act in their descent on the lower nature and change it.

The Descent of Knowledge

The knowledge comes from above like the light and peace and everything else. As the consciousness progresses, it comes from a higher and higher level. First it is the higher or illumined mind that predominates, then the intuition, next the overmind, lastly the supermind; but the whole consciousness has to be sufficiently transformed before the supramental knowledge can begin to come.

The Descent of Wideness

Like everything else, peace, Light, Power, so wideness descends.

*

Ananda comes afterwards — even if it comes at the beginning it is not usually constant. Wideness does not come because the consciousness is not yet free from the body. Probably when what is felt above the head comes down, it will be liberated into the wideness.

The Descent of Ananda

It is quite possible that if a too intense Ananda is allowed before the purity and peace are in the nature, it may disturb the system — though I don't know whether there is any instance of madness as a consequence. At any rate it is a fact that

1. The correspondent asked how one can "live in" the different forces of the Light such as the white light of the Mother, the pale blue light of Sri Aurobindo, the golden light of the Truth and the pink light of the psychic. — Ed.

normally Ananda comes (in the natural course, I mean, if not pulled down) only occasionally so long as the peace and purity are not there as a base. It is probably right that it should be so.

*

You are dealing in the right way with the sex feeling. As to why it rose when you were using the name there are two reasons. One is that when you use the name, it is the Mother's power that you call there and the first result often is that the difficulty rises like a snake whose head is touched to resist the pressure or — if you look at it from another point of view — it rises to be dealt with. The other is that when what is to be brought down is the Ananda — of the force, light etc., but especially of the love — then the vital-physical passion rises up to try and mix with and get hold of the Ananda hoping to turn it to a sort of sublimated vital pleasure. It is well known that this happens to Vaishnavas very often when they do the Sankirtan. In your case it is probably the first reason, because the love-Ananda or any other is not yet coming, so that explanation is improbable. As for the Force descending into the head, it has two sides to it — one is peace and when that is prominent, there is the sense of coolness; when there is a strong dynamic action instead, the feeling may be of heat, Agni-power. Most people feel these two things; they are not imagination.

*

I did not say it [*a descent of Ananda*] was vital and mental, but that it was Ananda manifesting itself in the mental and vital — a quite different thing — for the one Ananda (the true thing) can manifest in any part of the being.

The Flow of Amrita

It [*a flow of sweet liquid in the mouth*] is a form of the flow of Ananda from above — when it takes a quite physical form the Yogins call it Amrita.

*

Sudhā is nectar or Amrita, the food or drink of the gods. It is applied in Yoga to something that flows down from the Brahmarandhra into the palate when there is strong concentration. But this is psychological, so it must be the psychic sweetness flowing into the system.

* * *

Chapter Five **Descent and Other Kinds of Experience**

Descent and Experiences of the Inner Being

It is good that you felt the peace within and the movement in the heart. That shows the force is working not only from above but inside you, and this promises a farther progress. The full opening will come in time — the important thing is that you are on the right way and advancing more quickly than you realise.

*

Your experiences seem to be sound. The first is that of the higher (Yogic or spiritual) consciousness coming down into the body from above the head. It is felt often like a current flowing through the head into the whole body and the first thing it brings is a descent of peace. One result of this descent is that one feels an inner being in oneself which is detached from the outer action, supports it from behind, but is not involved in it — that is the second experience. The third about the sleep is also felt when one has confidence in the Mother and goes to sleep under her protection, as if in her lap, surrounded by her presence. As for the dream the legs indicate the physical consciousness which is still under a double pull, one upward to the higher consciousness so that the physical consciousness may unite itself with the spiritual, the other downward towards the lower consciousness. The looking towards me indicates the choice of the being for the upward movement.

*

The Power and Peace that come down come down from the higher consciousness above your head, from a greater self of which your mind, the human mind generally, is unaware. They are the power and peace of the Divine. When they envelop you from outside the body (therefore you feel them external), it is as a protection and an atmosphere. But also they descend into the body, into the head (mind), heart and navel (vital) and through the whole body working in you and doing what is necessary to change the consciousness. When you do not feel it there, when you feel it only as external, it is because you are very much in the external physical consciousness — but in reality it is there in your inner being working in you. When you recover the inner consciousness, you feel it again within and it wakes in you your own true consciousness, the psychic — and it is only the psychic that gives faith and devotion. It is however a great progress if, even when in the external physical consciousness, you feel the Peace enveloping you.

Descent and Psychic Experiences

The infinite calm you felt coming down was the calm of the Divine Consciousness — the higher or spiritual consciousness above the head, which descends as the higher parts of the being open to it. The experience of faith, love or aspiration come from the psychic being. It is when the psychic being is in front and governs all the nature and the Higher Consciousness descends through an open mind, vital and physical that the transformation of the nature begins to take place. The opposite experience of dryness, despair etc. comes from the resistance of the ordinary lower nature (lower vital, physical consciousness, especially). This resistance is to be got rid of — and one condition of that is never to indulge the desires of the lower vital and the body. You must turn them on the contrary wholly to the Divine.

*

The descent of the Silence is not usually associated with sadness, though it does bring a feeling of calm detachment, unconcern and wide emptiness, but in this emptiness there is a sense of ease, freedom, peace. The absorption as if something were drawing deep from within is evidently the pull of the inmost being, the psychic. There is a psychic sadness often when this inmost soul opens and feels how far the nature and the world are from what they should be, but this is a sweet and quiet sorrow, not distressing. It must be something in the mind and vital which is not yet awake to what has happened within you and gives this colour of dissatisfied and distressed seeking.

*

It is only by peace and light coming down there [*into the subconscious*] and by the rule of the psychic being over the physical that the subconscious parts of the being can be changed entirely. Before that only a certain control can be established.

*

Your description of the solid cool block of peace pressing on the body and making it immobile makes it certain that it is what we call in this Yoga the descent of the higher consciousness. A deep, intense or massive substance of peace and stillness is very commonly the first of its powers that descends and many experience it in that way. At first it comes and stays only during meditation or, without the sense of physical inertness or immobility, a little while longer and afterwards is lost; but if the sadhana follows its normal course, it comes more and more, lasting longer, and in the end an enduring deep peace and inner stillness and release becomes a normal

character of the consciousness, the foundation indeed of a new consciousness, calm and liberated.

Your idea of the psychic is certainly a mental construction which should be avoided. The psychic has indeed the quality of peace — but that is not its main character as it is of the Self or Atman. The psychic is the Divine element in the individual being and its characteristic power is to turn everything towards the Divine, to bring a fire of purification, aspiration, devotion, true light of discernment, feeling, will, action which transforms by degrees the whole nature. Quietude, peace and silence in the heart and therefore in the vital part of the being are necessary to reach the psychic, to plunge in it, for the perturbations of the vital nature, desire, emotion turned ego-wards or world-wards are the main part of the screen that hides the soul from the nature. It is better therefore to be free from the mental constructions when you take the plunge and have only the sense of aspiration, of devotion, of self-giving to the Divine.

*

Yes, it is a very encouraging progress. If you keep the wideness and calm as you are keeping it and also the love for the Mother in the heart, then all is safe — for it means the double foundation of the Yoga — the descent of the higher consciousness with its peace, freedom and security from above and the openness of the psychic which keeps all the effort or all the spontaneous movement turned towards the true goal.

Descent and Other Experiences

The more important of the experiences you enumerate are those below.

(1) The feeling of calm and comparative absence of disturbing thoughts. This means the growth of quietude of mind which is necessary for a fully effective meditation.

(2) The pressure on the head and the movements within it. The pressure is that of the Force of the higher consciousness above the mind pressing on the mind (the mind centres are in the head and throat) and penetrating into it. Once it enters there it prepares the mind for opening to it more fully and the movements within the head are due to this working. Once the head centres and spaces are open one feels it descending freely as a current or otherwise. Afterwards it opens similarly the centres below in the body. The physical movement of the head must be due to the body not being accustomed to the pressure and penetration of the Force. When it is able to receive and assimilate, these movements no longer take place.

(3) The effect of the meditation in the heart extending itself to the head and creating movements there is normal — in whatever centre the concentration takes

place the Yoga force generated extends to the others and produces concentration or workings there.

(4) The sudden cessation of thought and all movements — this is very important, as it means the beginning of the capacity for the inner silence. It lasts only for a short while at the beginning of its manifestation but increases afterwards its hold and duration.

The direction of the sadhana is the right one and you have only to continue upon it.

We cannot say anything definitively about the outside affairs — I suppose in the circumstances you have to think about these things, but the sadhana has the greater importance.

We do not include Hathayoga practices in this sadhana. If you use only for health purposes, it must be as something separate from sadhana — on your own choice.

*

The last experience carries its own meaning. The first is a dream-experience in which the figures of the dream are probably symbols, — unless the Tibetan priest is an impression from a past life. The experience itself is that of concentration in a flame of aspiration with the result of an ascension into the higher planes of consciousness where the separative self disappears into the universal. The second is an experience of the descent of the higher consciousness through the spinal cord from the mental to the vital centres with the result of a momentary experience of that higher consciousness in its wide universality. The experience once had repeated itself but always with the same momentariness. It is the permanence of this experience that is in this Yoga the foundation of the spiritual consciousness and the spiritual transformation — as distinguished from the psychic which proceeds from the inner heart.

*

They are elementary experiences in the practice of Yoga and there is not much to be said about them, — still I will say this much, if it can help him.

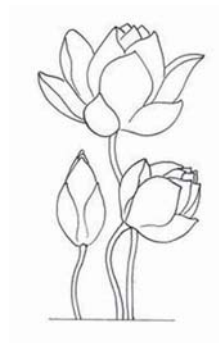
(1) What does he mean by concentrating in the heart? I suppose not the physical heart? When we speak of concentrating in the heart in Yoga, we are speaking of the emotional centre and that like all the others is in the middle of the body in a line corresponding to the spinal cord. The places he speaks of are four centres — (1) crown of head = higher mental centre, (2) between the eyebrows = centre of will and vision, (3) throat = centre of externalising mind, (4) heart = (mental-vital) emotional centre with the psychic behind it (the soul, Purusha in the heart).

(2) The lights he sees indicate not some mere “physiological” phenomenon, but the first opening of an inner subtle vision which sees things that are not physical. At a later stage a descent of Light is one of the capital phenomena of the opening of the greater Yogic experience and of the working of the Divine Power on the adhar.

(3) What does he mean by chitta when he speaks of the force? Chitta as opposed to Chit or Vijnana etc. is only the basic mind-life consciousness out of which rises the stuff of (ordinary) thought, feelings, sensations etc. The Force which he feels is something quite different; it is the larger force exceeding the individual and when one feels it in its fullness, it is experienced as the cosmic force or something out of the cosmic force or else the Divine Force from above, according to its nature. His mind is not yet ready for the action of a greater Force, because it is full of mental notions and activities and it is for this reason that heat is generated in the friction between the two; when the other force withdraws and no longer tries to lay hold of the brain then the personal mind-action feels released (that is the reason for the sense of coolness) and goes about its ordinary motions. It is only in a silent (quiet — not necessarily empty) mind that the greater force can be received and work upon the system without too much reaction and resistance.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Letters on Yoga – III, CWSA, Vol. 30, pp. 449-68)



THE MEANING OF OUR EXISTENCE HERE

This is the meaning of our existence here, its futuristic value and inherent trend of power, to rise above ourselves, to grow into gods, to reveal God in a world of material forms and forces.

Earth and conscious life upon earth are not a freak of cosmic Chance, a meaningless accident in the vacant history of nebula and electron and gas and plasm; they are the field of a game of the Gods with the destiny of our souls as the stake of their wager.

To evolve Godhead out of the mud of matter, some divinest consciousness out of a primal inconscience and a struggling ignorance, immortality out of death, undying bliss out of pain and sorrow, the everlasting Truth out of the falsehoods and denials of this relative world is their great and daring gamble.

All life upon earth is the evolution of a divine Spirit that is concealed as by a self-formed mask and robe in the appearance of Matter. Out of that involution it evolves, manifests by a series of ascendent steps its suppressed powers and, once this process has begun, will not cease till the Godhead is manifest in Matter.

Man is a struggling transitional term, an intermediate being who has gathered up into himself the consciousness of the mineral and the vegetable, of the insect and the animal, and is fashioning and refining in the confused twilight and chaos of a half knowledge founded on Ignorance the materials of the god that is to be born.

The instrument of man is mind and thinking and willing mind-force — just as the instrument of the animal is life instinct and feeling and remembering life force and the instrument of the plant and tree existence is the vital push and the dynamism of material energy turning into force of life. As these lower states developed up to a point at which Mind-intelligence could descend into the organised living body and take up the earth-past to mentalise and transform it, so Mind in man has to develop up to a point at which a consciousness greater than Mind can descend into the mind and living body and take up the human material to supramentalise and transform it into godhead. This is man's rise to the Infinite.

An air from a consciousness greater than mind has already been felt by many of those who have climbed to the human summits and to the glow that has come from above they have given many names, *bodhi*, intuition, gnosis. But these things are only the faint edge of that greater light thrust into the pallid twilight that we call mind. Only when the lid between mind and supermind has been utterly rent apart and the full power of the sun of a divine Gnosis can pour down — not trickling through mind as in diminished and deflected beams — and transform the whole mind and life and body of the human creature, can man's labour finish. Then only shall begin the divine play and the free outpouring of the liberated self-creating Spirit.

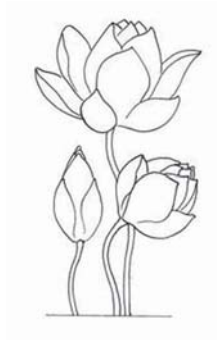
To rise into this greater consciousness above our mental level of humanity as man has risen above the level of the life-mind of the beast, to grow from mind into supermind, from twilight into light, from the mind's half-consciousness into what is now to us superconscious, from a narrow imprisoned ego into the transcendent and universalised individual, from a struggling half effective into a throned and master power, from little transient joys and sorrows into an unalloyed divine delight, this is the goal of our journey, the secret of our struggle.

This is our way of emergence from the now dark riddle of the earth and unsolved problem of human life. If there were not this secret sense in all we are and do, there would be no significance in the material world and no justification for our earth-existence.

A gnostic superman is the future master of the earth and rescuer of the divine meaning out of the ambiguous terms of this great world-enigma.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, pp. 261-62)



‘THREE MODES OF THE DIVINE’

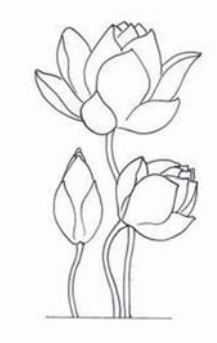
May 27, 1914

In each one of the domains of the being, the consciousness must be awakened to the perfect existence, knowledge and bliss. These three worlds or modes of the Divine are found in the physical reality as well as in the states of force and light and those of impersonality and infinitude, of eternity. When one enters with full consciousness into the higher states, to live this existence, light and bliss is easy, almost inevitable. But what is very important, as well as very difficult, is to awaken the being to this triple divine consciousness in the most material worlds. This is the first point. Then one must succeed in finding the centre of all the divine worlds (probably in the intermediate world), whence one can unite the consciousness of these divine worlds, synthetise them, and act simultaneously and with full awareness in all domains.

I know that it is a very long way from these incomplete and imperfect explanations to the sublime reality which manifests Thee, O Lord. Thy splendour, Thy power and Thy magnificence, Thy incommensurable love are above all explanation and comment. But my intellect needs to represent things to itself at least a little schematically, in order to allow the most material states of the being to enter as completely as possible into harmony with Thy Will.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 158)



ON THE DHAMMAPADA

Evil

Hasten towards the good, leave behind all evil thoughts, for to do good without enthusiasm is to have a mind which delights in evil.

If one does an evil action, he should not persist in it, he should not delight in it. For full of suffering is the accumulation of evil.

If one does a good action, he should persist in it and take delight in it. Full of happiness is the accumulation of good.

As long as his evil action has not yet ripened, an evildoer may experience contentment. But when it ripens, the wrong-doer knows unhappiness.

As long as his good action has not yet ripened, one who does good may experience unhappiness. But when it ripens, the good man knows happiness.

Do not treat evil lightly, saying, "That will not touch me." A jar is filled drop by drop; even so the fool fills himself little by little with wickedness.

Do not treat good lightly, saying, "That will not touch me." A jar is filled drop by drop; even so the sage fills himself little by little with goodness.

The merchant who is carrying many precious goods and who has but few companions, avoids dangerous roads; and a man who loves his life is wary of poison. Even so should one act regarding evil.

A hand that has no wound can carry poison with impunity; act likewise, for evil cannot touch the righteous man.

If you offend one who is pure, innocent and defenceless, the insult will fall back on you, as if you threw dust against the wind.

Some are reborn here on earth, evil-doers go to the worlds of Niraya, the just go to the heavenly worlds, but those who have freed themselves from all desire attain Nirvana.

Neither in the skies, nor in the depths of the ocean, nor in the rocky caves, nowhere upon earth does there exist a place where a man can find refuge from his evil actions.

Neither in the skies, nor in the depths of the ocean, nor in the rocky caves, nowhere upon earth does there exist a place where a man can hide from death.

People have the habit of dealing lightly with thoughts that come. And the atmosphere is full of thoughts of all kinds which do not in fact belong to anybody in particular, which move perpetually from one person to another, very freely, much too freely, because there are very few people who can keep their thoughts under control.

When you take up the Buddhist discipline to learn how to control your thoughts, you make very interesting discoveries. You try to observe your thoughts. Instead of letting them pass freely, sometimes even letting them enter your head and establish themselves in a quite inopportune way, you look at them, observe them and you realise with stupefaction that in the space of a few seconds there passes through the head a series of absolutely improbable thoughts that are altogether harmful.

You believe you are so good, so kind, so well disposed and always full of good feelings. You wish no harm to anybody, you wish only good — all that you tell yourself complacently. But if you look at yourself sincerely as you are thinking, you notice that you have in your head a collection of thoughts which are sometimes frightful and of which you were not at all aware.

For example, your reactions when something has not pleased you: how eager you are to send your friends, relatives, acquaintances, everyone, to the devil! How you wish them all kinds of unpleasant things, without even being aware of it! And how you say, “Ah, that will teach him to be like that!” And when you criticise, you say, “He must be made aware of his faults.” And when someone has not acted according to your ideas, you say, “He will be punished for it!” and so on.

You do not know it because you do not look at yourself in the act of thinking. Sometimes you know it, when it becomes a little too strong. But when the thing simply passes through, you hardly notice it — it comes, it enters, it leaves. Then you find out that if you truly want to be pure and wholly on the side of the Truth, then that requires a vigilance, a sincerity, a self-observation, a self-control which are not common. You begin to realise that it is difficult to be truly sincere.

You flatter yourself that you have nothing but good feelings and good intentions and that whatever you do, you do for the sake of what is good — yes, so long as you are conscious and have control, but the moment you are not very attentive, all kinds of things happen within you of which you are not at all conscious and which are not very pretty.

If you want to clean your house thoroughly, you must be vigilant for a long

time, for a very long time and especially not believe that you have reached the goal, like that, at one stroke, because one day you happened to decide that you would be on the right side. That is of course a very essential and important point, but it must be followed by a good many other days when you have to keep a strict guard on yourself so as not to belie your resolution.

4 April 1958

Punishment

All tremble when faced with punishment; all fear death. Seeing others as ourselves, do not strike, do not cause another to strike.

All tremble when faced with punishment; life is dear to all. Seeing others as ourselves, do not strike, do not cause another to strike.

Whosoever hurts creatures eager for happiness for the sake of his own happiness, nevertheless will not obtain it after his death.

Whosoever does not hurt creatures eager for happiness for the sake of his own happiness, will obtain it after death.

Never speak harsh words to anyone, for they will be returned to you. Angry words cause suffering and one who utters them will bear them in return.

If you remain as silent as a broken gong, you have already entered Nirvana, for violence no longer abides in you.

As the cowherd, with his stick, drives the herd to pasture, so old age and death drive the life out of all living beings.

The fool does evil without knowing it; he is consumed and tormented by his actions as by a fire.

One who does harm to one who does none, one who offends one who offends not, will soon suffer one of the ten states that follow:

He will endure intense pain, he will suffer disastrous losses and terrible injury, serious illness, madness.

Or he will come in conflict with authority, he will be the object of gross calumny, he will lose his near ones or his possessions.

Or else fire will destroy his dwelling-place; and at the time of the dissolution of his body he will be reborn in Hell.

Neither going naked or with matted hair, nor remaining dirty, nor fasting, nor sleeping on the bare ground, nor smearing the body with ashes, nor the practice of ascetic postures, can purify the mortal who has not cast away all doubt.

However richly he is dressed, if a man cultivates tranquillity of mind, if he is calm, resigned, master of himself, pure, if he does no harm to any creature, he is a Brahmin, he is an ascetic, he is a Bhikkhu.

Is there in this world a man beyond reproach that merits no blame, as a thoroughbred needs no blow from the whip?

Like a spirited horse, be quick and eager for the goal. By trust, virtue, energy, meditation, the quest for truth, perfection of knowledge and conduct, by faith destroy in you all suffering.

Those who build waterways lead the water where they want; those who make arrows straighten them; carpenters shape their wood; the sage controls himself.

One has the impression that these things were written for rather primitive people. The series of calamities that will befall you if you do harm is quite amusing.

It would seem — provided of course that this is an exact record of the words that the Buddha spoke — that he must have changed the terms of his talks according to his audience and if he had to do with rustic people without education, he would speak a very material language with very practical and concrete comparisons so that they might understand him. There is a considerable difference of level in these verses. Some have become very famous, as, for example, the last verse here, where it is said that the artisan shapes his material to achieve what he has to do, and this striking conclusion: the sage controls himself.

Truly one has the impression that human mentality has progressed since that age. Thought has become more complex, psychology more profound, to the extent that these arguments appear almost puerile. But when we mean to practise them, then we realise that we have remained almost on the same level, and that if thought has progressed, practice, far from being better, seems to have become worse. And here there is a childlike simplicity, something rather healthy, an absence of perversion that unfortunately the human race no longer possesses.

There was a moral healthiness in those days which has now completely disappeared. These arguments make you smile, but the practice of what is taught here is much more difficult now than it was at that time. A kind of hypocrisy, pretension, underhand duplicity seems to have taken possession of the human mind and especially its way of being, and men have learnt to deceive themselves in a most pernicious way.

In those times, one could say, “Don’t do harm, you will be punished”; hearts were simple and the mind as well, and one said, “Yes, it is better not to do harm, because I will be punished.” But now, with an ironical smile, you say, “Oh! I shall surely find a way to avoid punishment.”

Mental capacity seems to have grown, mental power seems to have developed, men seem to be much more capable of playing with ideas, of having mental command over all principles, but at the same time they have lost the simple and healthy candour of people who lived closer to Nature and knew less how to play with ideas. Thus humanity as a whole seems to have reached a very dangerous turning-point. Those who are trying to find a solution to the general corruption preach a return to the simplicity of yore, but of course that is quite impossible: you cannot go back.

We must go farther on, we must advance, climb greater heights and go beyond the arid search for pleasure and personal welfare, not through fear of punishment, even punishment after death, but through the development of a new sense of beauty, a thirst for truth and light, through understanding that it is only by widening yourself, illumining yourself, setting yourself ablaze with the ardour for progress, that you can find both integral peace and enduring happiness.

One must rise up and widen — rise up . . . and widen.

18 April 1958

Old Age

Why this joy, this gladness, when the world is forever burning? O you who are enveloped in shadows, why do you not seek the light?

See then this poor decorated form, this mass of corruptible elements, of infirmities and vain desires in which nothing is lasting or stable.

This fragile body is but a nest of misery, of decrepitude and corruption; for life ends in death.

What pleasure is there in contemplating these white bones strewn like gourds in autumn?

In this fortress made of bone and covered with flesh and blood, only pride and jealousy, dissolution and death are established.

Even the gorgeous chariots of kings are worn out in the end. It is the same with this body which at last is worn out with age; but the true Law is never worn out and so one sage can pass it on to another.

The ignorant man grows older like a bullock; his weight increases but not his intelligence.

Many times have I passed in vain through the cycle of births in search of the builder of this house. And how painful is this cycle of births!

At last, I have found you, builder; never again shall you build this house that is my body. All the beams are shattered and the ridge of the roof has crumbled.

My liberated mind has attained the extinction of all desires.

Those who have not lived a life of self-control and who, in their youth, have not known how to gather the true riches, perish like aged herons beside a lake with no fish.

Those who have not lived a life of self-control and who, in their youth, have not known how to gather the true riches are like shattered bows; they grieve for their lost strength.

There is one thing certain which is not clearly stated here, but which is at least as important as all the rest. It is this, that there is an old age much more dangerous and much more real than the amassing of years: the incapacity to grow and progress.

As soon as you stop advancing, as soon as you stop progressing, as soon as you cease to better yourself, cease to gain and grow, cease to transform yourself, you truly become old, that is to say, you go downhill towards disintegration.

There are young people who are old and there are old people who are young. If you carry in you this flame for progress and transformation, if you are ready to leave everything behind so that you may advance with an alert step, if you are always open to a new progress, a new improvement, a new transformation, then you are eternally young. But if you sit back satisfied with what has been accomplished, if you have the feeling that you have reached your goal and you have nothing left to do but enjoy the fruit of your efforts, then already more than half your body is in the tomb: it is decrepitude and the true death.

Everything that has been done is always nothing compared with what remains

to be done.

Do not look behind. Look ahead, always ahead and go forward always.

25 April 1958

The Ego

If a man holds himself dear, let him guard himself closely. The sage should watch through one of the three vigils of his existence (youth, maturity, or old age).

One should begin by establishing oneself in the right path; then, one will be able to advise others. Thus the sage is above all reproach.

If one puts into practice what he teaches to others, being master of himself, he can very well guide others; for in truth it is difficult to master oneself.

In truth, one is one's own master, for what other master can there be? By mastering oneself, one acquires a mastery which is difficult to achieve.

The evil done by himself, originated by himself, emanating from him, crushes the fool as the diamond crushes a hard gem.

Just as the creeper clings to the Sal tree, even so one entrapped by his own evil actions does to himself the harm his enemy would wish him.

It is so easy to do oneself wrong and harm, but how difficult it is to do what is good and profitable!

The fool who, because of his wrong views, rejects the teachings of the adepts, the Noble Ones and the Just, brings about his own destruction, as the fruit of the bamboo kills the plant.

Doing evil, one harms oneself; avoiding evil, one purifies oneself; purity and impurity depend on ourselves; no one can purify another.

No man should neglect his supreme Good to follow another, however great. Knowing clearly what is his best line of conduct, he should not swerve from it.

The question here seems to be more about egoism than ego.

Egoism is a relatively easy thing to correct, because everyone knows what it is. It is easy to discover, easy to correct, if one truly wants to do it and is bent on it.

But the ego is much more difficult to seize, because, in fact, to realise what the ego is one must already be out of it, otherwise one cannot find it out. You are wholly moulded from it, from head to foot, from the outermost to the innermost, from the physical to the spiritual, you are steeped in ego. It is mixed with everything and you are not aware of what it is. You must have already conquered it, come out of it, freed yourself from it, at least partially, at least in some little corner of your being somewhere, in order to realise what the ego is.

The ego is what helps us to individualise ourselves and what prevents us from becoming divine. It is like that. Put that together and you will find the ego. Without the ego, as the world is organised, there would be no individual, and with the ego the world cannot become divine.

It would be logical to conclude, "Well, let us first of all become conscious individuals and then we shall send away the ego and become divine." Only, when we have become conscious individuals, we have grown so accustomed to living with our ego that we are no longer able to discern it and much labour is needed to become aware of its presence.

On the other hand, everyone knows what egoism is. When you want to pull everything towards you and other people do not interest you, that is called egoism; when you put yourself at the centre of the universe and all things exist only in relation to you, that is egoism. But it is very obvious, one must be blind not to see that one is egoistic. Everybody is a little egoistic, more or less, and at least a certain proportion of egoism is normally acceptable; but even in ordinary life, when one is a little too egoistic, well, one receives knocks on the nose, because, since everyone is egoistic, no one much likes egoism in others.

It is taken for granted, it is part of public morality. Yes, one must be a little bit egoistic, not too much, so it is not conspicuous! On the other hand, nobody speaks of the ego, because nobody knows it. It is such an intimate companion that one does not even recognise its existence; and yet so long as it is there one will never have the divine consciousness.

The ego is what makes one conscious of being separate from others. If there were no ego, you would not perceive that you are a person separate from others. You would have the impression that you are a small part of a whole, a very small part of a very great whole. On the other hand, every one of you is most certainly quite conscious of being a separate person. Well, it is the ego that gives you this impression. As long as you are conscious in this way, it means that you have an ego.

When you begin to be aware that everything is yourself, and that this is only a very small point in the midst of thousands and thousands of other points of the same

person that you are everywhere, when you feel that you are yourself in everything and that there is no separation, then you know that you are on the way towards having no more ego.

There even comes a time when it is impossible to conceive oneself and say, "It is not I", for even to express it in this way, to say that the All is you, that you are the All or that you are the Divine or that the Divine is you, proves that something still remains.

There is a moment — this happens in a flash and can hardly stay — when it is the All that thinks, it is the All that knows, it is the All that feels, it is the All that lives. There is not even . . . not even the impression that . . . you have reached that point.

Then it is all right. But until then, there is still a little remnant of ego somewhere; usually it is the part which looks on, the witness that looks on.

So do not assert that you have no more ego. It is not accurate. Say you are on the way towards having no more ego, that is the only correct thing to say.

I do not believe that it has happened to you, has it? — not yet! And yet it is indispensable, if you truly intend to know what the supramental is. If you are a candidate for supermanhood, you must resolve to dispense with your ego, to go beyond it, for as long as you keep it with you, the supermind will be for you something unknown and inaccessible.

But if through effort, through discipline, through progressive mastery, you surmount your ego and go beyond it, even if only in the tiniest part of your being, this acts like the opening of a small window somewhere, and by looking carefully through the window, you will be able to glimpse the supermind. And that is a promise. When you glimpse it, you find it so beautiful that you immediately want to get rid of all the rest . . . of the ego!

Please note that I am not saying that you must be totally free from all ego in order to have a glimpse of the supramental; for then that would be something almost impossible. No, to be free from ego, just a little bit somewhere, in some corner of your being, even only a little corner of the mind; if it is the mind and the vital, it is well and good, but if by chance — oh! not by chance — if by repeated efforts you have entered into contact with your psychic being, then the door is wide open. Through the psychic you can suddenly have a very clear and beautiful vision of what the supermind is, only a vision, not a realisation. That is the great way out. But even without going so far as this beautiful realisation, the psychic realisation, if you succeed in liberating some part of your mind or your vital, that makes a kind of hole in the door, a keyhole; through this keyhole you have a glimpse, just a little glimpse. And that is already very attractive, very interesting.

2 May 1958

The World

Do not follow the way of evil. Do not cultivate indolence of mind. Do not choose wrong views. Do not be of those who linger in the world.

Arise. Cast off negligence. Follow the teaching of wisdom. The sage knows happiness in this world and the other.

Follow the teaching of wisdom and not that of evil. The sage knows happiness in this world and the other.

One who looks upon the world as a bubble or a mirage, Yama the King of Death cannot find him.

Come, look upon the world as the brightly-coloured chariot of a Raja, which attracts the foolish, but where, in truth, there is nothing attractive.

One who, having been negligent, becomes vigilant, illumines the earth like the moon coming forth from behind the clouds.

One whose good actions efface the evil he has done, illumines the earth like the moon coming forth from behind the clouds.

The world is wrapped in darkness and few are those who find their way, who, like a bird escaping from a net, soar up towards heaven.

The swans take the path of the sun. Those who possess occult powers fly through the air. The sages leave this world after defeating Mara and his army of evil.

No evil is impossible to him who transgresses one law of the Doctrine, who utters falsehood and who disdains the higher world.

In truth, misers do not attain to the world of the gods and fools do not know the happiness of giving. But the sage delights in giving and thus knows happiness in the other world.

Rather than ruling the earth, rather than reaching heaven, rather than reigning over the worlds, it is better to enter the upward current.

There are four pieces of advice here which I would like to retain for our meditation. “Do not cultivate indolence of mind.” “Do not choose wrong views” — unfortunately

this is something one does all the time. And, “Arise. Cast off negligence.”

The world has been so made — at least up to now, let us hope that it will not be so for much longer — that, spontaneously, a man who is not cultured, when he is brought into contact with ideas, always chooses wrong ideas.

And a child who is not educated always chooses bad company. It is a thing I experience constantly and concretely. If you keep a child in a special atmosphere and if, from a very early age, you instill in him a special atmosphere, a special purity, he has a chance of not making a wrong choice. But a child who is taken from the world as it is and is placed in a society where there are good and bad elements will go straight to those who can spoil him, teach him wrong things, that is to say, towards the worst company.

A man who has no intellectual culture, if you give him some mixed ideas, just at random, to choose from, he will always choose the stupid ones; because, as Sri Aurobindo has told us, this is a world of falsehood, of ignorance and an effort is needed, an aspiration; one must come in contact with one’s inmost being — a conscious and luminous contact — if one is to distinguish the true from the false, the good influence from the bad. If you let yourself go, you sink into a hole.

Things are like that because what rules the world — oh! let us put it in the past tense, so that it becomes true — what ruled the world was falsehood and ignorance.

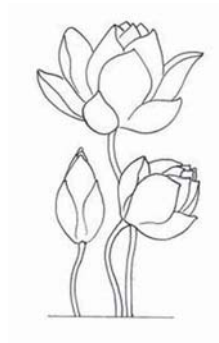
In fact, for the moment, it is still like that; one should have no illusions about it. But perhaps with a great effort and great vigilance we shall be able to make it otherwise . . . soon — the “perhaps” is for “soon”.

Surely it will come one day, but we want it soon, and that is why the last two recommendations please me: “Arise. Cast off negligence.”

9 May 1958

THE MOTHER

(*Questions and Answers 1929-1931*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 3, pp. 229-45)



FOUR PRINCIPAL CATEGORIES

Human beings could be classified under four principal categories according to the attitude they take in life:

(1) Those who live for themselves. They consider everything in relation to themselves and act accordingly. The vast majority of men are like this.

(2) Those who give their love to another human being and live for him. As for the result, everything naturally depends on the person one chooses to love.

(3) Those who consecrate their life to the service of humanity through some activity done not for personal satisfaction but truly to be useful to others without calculation and without expecting any personal gain from their work.

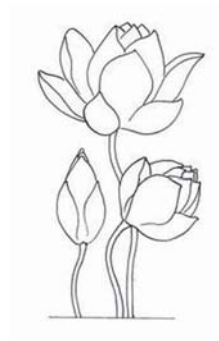
(4) Those who give themselves entirely to the Divine and live only for Him and through Him. This implies making the effort required to find the Divine, to be conscious of His Will and to work exclusively to serve Him.

In the first three categories, one is naturally subject to the ordinary law of suffering, disappointment and sorrow.

It is only in the last category — if one has chosen it in all sincerity and pursued it with an unflinching patience — that one finds the certitude of total fulfilment and a constant luminous peace.

THE MOTHER

(Some Answers from the Mother, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 16, pp. 428-29)



THE SCIENCE OF LIVING

TO KNOW ONESELF AND TO CONTROL ONESELF

An aimless life is always a miserable life.

Every one of you should have an aim. But do not forget that on the quality of your aim will depend the quality of your life.

Your aim should be high and wide, generous and disinterested; this will make your life precious to yourself and to others.

But whatever your ideal, it cannot be perfectly realised unless you have realised perfection in yourself.

To work for your perfection, the first step is to become conscious of yourself, of the different parts of your being and their respective activities. You must learn to distinguish these different parts one from another, so that you may become clearly aware of the origin of the movements that occur in you, the many impulses, reactions and conflicting wills that drive you to action. It is an assiduous study which demands much perseverance and sincerity. For man's nature, especially his mental nature, has a spontaneous tendency to give a favourable explanation for everything he thinks, feels, says and does. It is only by observing these movements with great care, by bringing them, as it were, before the tribunal of our highest ideal, with a sincere will to submit to its judgment, that we can hope to form in ourselves a discernment that never errs. For if we truly want to progress and acquire the capacity of knowing the truth of our being, that is to say, what we are truly created for, what we can call our mission upon earth, then we must, in a very regular and constant manner, reject from us or eliminate in us whatever contradicts the truth of our existence, whatever is opposed to it. In this way, little by little, all the parts, all the elements of our being can be organised into a homogeneous whole around our psychic centre. This work of unification requires much time to be brought to some degree of perfection. Therefore, in order to accomplish it, we must arm ourselves with patience and endurance, with a determination to prolong our life as long as necessary for the success of our endeavour.

As you pursue this labour of purification and unification, you must at the same time take great care to perfect the external and instrumental part of your being. When the higher truth manifests, it must find in you a mind that is supple and rich enough to be able to give the idea that seeks to express itself a form of thought which preserves its force and clarity. This thought, again, when it seeks to clothe itself in words, must find in you a sufficient power of expression so that the words reveal the thought and do not deform it. And the formula in which you embody the truth should be manifested in all your feelings, all your acts of will, all your actions,

in all the movements of your being. Finally, these movements themselves should, by constant effort, attain their highest perfection.

All this can be realised by means of a fourfold discipline, the general outline of which is given here. The four aspects of the discipline do not exclude each other, and can be followed at the same time; indeed, this is preferable. The starting-point is what can be called the psychic discipline. We give the name “psychic” to the psychological centre of our being, the seat within us of the highest truth of our existence, that which can know this truth and set it in movement. It is therefore of capital importance to become conscious of its presence in us, to concentrate on this presence until it becomes a living fact for us and we can identify ourselves with it.

In various times and places many methods have been prescribed for attaining this perception and ultimately achieving this identification. Some methods are psychological, some religious, some even mechanical. In reality, everyone has to find the one which suits him best, and if one has an ardent and steadfast aspiration, a persistent and dynamic will, one is sure to meet, in one way or another — outwardly through reading and study, inwardly through concentration, meditation, revelation and experience — the help one needs to reach the goal. Only one thing is absolutely indispensable: the will to discover and to realise. This discovery and realisation should be the primary preoccupation of our being, the pearl of great price which we must acquire at any cost. Whatever you do, whatever your occupations and activities, the will to find the truth of your being and to unite with it must be always living and present behind all that you do, all that you feel, all that you think.

To complement this movement of inner discovery, it would be good not to neglect the development of the mind. For the mental instrument can equally be a great help or a great hindrance. In its natural state the human mind is always limited in its vision, narrow in its understanding, rigid in its conceptions, and a constant effort is therefore needed to widen it, to make it more supple and profound. So it is very necessary to consider everything from as many points of view as possible. Towards this end, there is an exercise which gives great suppleness and elevation to the thought. It is as follows: a clearly formulated thesis is set; against it is opposed its antithesis, formulated with the same precision. Then by careful reflection the problem must be widened or transcended until a synthesis is found which unites the two contraries in a larger, higher and more comprehensive idea.

Many other exercises of the same kind can be undertaken; some have a beneficial effect on the character and so possess a double advantage: that of educating the mind and that of establishing control over the feelings and their consequences. For example, you must never allow your mind to judge things and people, for the mind is not an instrument of knowledge; it is incapable of finding knowledge, but it must be moved by knowledge. Knowledge belongs to a much higher domain than that of the human mind, far above the region of pure ideas. The mind has to be

silent and attentive to receive knowledge from above and manifest it. For it is an instrument of formation, of organisation and action, and it is in these functions that it attains its full value and real usefulness.

There is another practice which can be very helpful to the progress of the consciousness. Whenever there is a disagreement on any matter, such as a decision to be taken, or an action to be carried out, one must never remain closed up in one's own conception or point of view. On the contrary, one must make an effort to understand the other's point of view, to put oneself in his place and, instead of quarrelling or even fighting, find the solution which can reasonably satisfy both parties; there always is one for men of goodwill.

Here we must mention the discipline of the vital. The vital being in us is the seat of impulses and desires, of enthusiasm and violence, of dynamic energy and desperate depressions, of passions and revolts. It can set everything in motion, build and realise; but it can also destroy and mar everything. Thus it may be the most difficult part to discipline in the human being. It is a long and exacting labour requiring great patience and perfect sincerity, for without sincerity you will deceive yourself from the very outset, and all endeavour for progress will be in vain. With the collaboration of the vital no realisation seems impossible, no transformation impracticable. But the difficulty lies in securing this constant collaboration. The vital is a good worker, but most often it seeks its own satisfaction. If that is refused, totally or even partially, the vital gets vexed, sulks and goes on strike. Its energy disappears more or less completely and in its place leaves disgust for people and things, discouragement or revolt, depression and dissatisfaction. At such moments it is good to remain quiet and refuse to act; for these are the times when one does stupid things and in a few moments one can destroy or spoil the progress that has been made during months of regular effort. These crises are shorter and less dangerous for those who have established a contact with their psychic being which is sufficient to keep alive in them the flame of aspiration and the consciousness of the ideal to be realised. They can, with the help of this consciousness, deal with their vital as one deals with a rebellious child, with patience and perseverance, showing it the truth and light, endeavouring to convince it and awaken in it the goodwill which has been veiled for a time. By means of such patient intervention each crisis can be turned into a new progress, into one more step towards the goal. Progress may be slow, relapses may be frequent, but if a courageous will is maintained, one is sure to triumph one day and see all difficulties melt and vanish before the radiance of the truth-consciousness.

Lastly, by means of a rational and discerning physical education, we must make our body strong and supple enough to become a fit instrument in the material world for the truth-force which wants to manifest through us.

In fact, the body must not rule, it must obey. By its very nature it is a docile and faithful servant. Unfortunately, it rarely has the capacity of discernment it ought

to have with regard to its masters, the mind and the vital. It obeys them blindly, at the cost of its own well-being. The mind with its dogmas, its rigid and arbitrary principles, the vital with its passions, its excesses and dissipations soon destroy the natural balance of the body and create in it fatigue, exhaustion and disease. It must be freed from this tyranny and this can be done only through a constant union with the psychic centre of the being. The body has a wonderful capacity of adaptation and endurance. It is able to do so many more things than one usually imagines. If, instead of the ignorant and despotic masters that now govern it, it is ruled by the central truth of the being, you will be amazed at what it is capable of doing. Calm and quiet, strong and poised, at every minute it will be able to put forth the effort that is demanded of it, for it will have learnt to find rest in action and to recuperate, through contact with the universal forces, the energies it expends consciously and usefully. In this sound and balanced life a new harmony will manifest in the body, reflecting the harmony of the higher regions, which will give it perfect proportions and ideal beauty of form. And this harmony will be progressive, for the truth of the being is never static; it is a perpetual unfolding of a growing perfection that is more and more total and comprehensive. As soon as the body has learnt to follow this movement of progressive harmony, it will be possible for it to escape, through a continuous process of transformation, from the necessity of disintegration and destruction. Thus the irrevocable law of death will no longer have any reason to exist.

When we reach this degree of perfection which is our goal, we shall perceive that the truth we seek is made up of four major aspects: Love, Knowledge, Power and Beauty. These four attributes of the Truth will express themselves spontaneously in our being. The psychic will be the vehicle of true and pure love, the mind will be the vehicle of infallible knowledge, the vital will manifest an invincible power and strength and the body will be the expression of a perfect beauty and harmony.

THE MOTHER

(On Education, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 12, pp. 3-8)

ILION: AN EPIC IN QUANTITATIVE HEXAMETERS

In the poetry of sheer spiritual Light we have two kinds of work by Sri Aurobindo. One makes an individual use of traditional forms: here the greatest achievement is the blank-verse *Savitri*. The other makes experiments in new forms: here the outstanding accomplishment is compositions solving the problem of quantitative metre which has baffled so many English poets. But these compositions are themselves of two kinds — those that deal with directly spiritual experiences and an unfinished epic of about five thousand lines, entitled *Iliion*, that is based on Homer's theme in the *Iliad*. Only some four hundred and odd lines of this fragment were subjected to thorough revision by Sri Aurobindo, but the whole of it is memorable both as poetry and as technique. And even if this were not so and only the few thoroughly revised verses were worth attention, we should have to devote some space to them and to an exposition of their main metrical principles. For these verses are an astonishing piece and in general their metric applies also to other forms than theirs and the form they bear is itself central to the problem of quantity, attempting as it does to bring the Olympian pace of the ancient hexameter into English.

Sri Aurobindo holds it essential for the classical hexameter's typical pace that not only a suggestive rhythmical function but also a full metrical value should be given, as in the ancient languages, to quantity, to the time taken by the voice to pronounce the vowel on which a syllable is supported. English builds on stress, the vertical weight on a vowel. In quantity we deal with the horizontal vowel-mass. A word like "shadows" is by stress prominent in the first syllable; by quantity in the second. So it would seem that the two linguistic modes can be completely at loggerheads. One cannot blindly attempt to solve the problem by seeing to it that words are chosen so that quantity and stress may coincide. First of all, words like "poet" and "rival" in which they do coincide are not frequent enough to supply the basis of a metre: words like "mother" and "rivet" are quite frequent. Secondly, according to Sri Aurobindo, the unstressed long is the very soul of the quantitative movement. Unless it comes into its own in English, there can be in that tongue no avatar of the Greek or Latin harmony: to build the Homeric hexameter without it as an important part of a foot on many occasions is to miss Homer's tone and rhythm. But it cannot get its full value if stress dominates the metrical arrangement. Realising this, experimenters have tried to do away with stress-value and built their lines totally on classical principles. But to un-stress English is to un-English the language. The one way out, in Sri Aurobindo's view, is: the metre must somehow assimilate stress to a quantitative system.

Sri Aurobindo suggests that, within a certain recent sphere of English poetic expression, this has already been done, though mostly in an unconscious way. The sphere is that of so-called Free Verse, where Whitman is the most impressive figure.

Looking at “the greatest effects” with the new instrument, Sri Aurobindo¹ comments on Whitman and other writers: “we find that consciously or unconsciously they arrive at the same secret principle, and that is the essential principle of Greek choric and dithyrambic poetry turned to the law of a language which has not the strong resource of quantity. Arnold deliberately attempted such an adaptation but, in spite of beautiful passages, with scant success; still when he writes such a line as

The too vast orb of her fate,

it is this choric movement that he reproduces. Whitman’s first poem in *Sea-Drift* and a number of others are written partly or throughout in this manner. When he gives us the dactylic and spondaic harmony of his lines,

Out of the cradle endlessly rocking,
Out of the mocking-bird’s throat, the musical shuttle,
Out of the ninth-month midnight,

one of them wanting only one foot to be a very perfect hexameter, or the subtly varied movement of this other passage,

Over the hoarse surging of the sea,
Or flitting from brier to brier by day,
I saw, I heard at intervals the remaining one, the he-bird,
The solitary guest from Alabama,

one has almost the rhythmical illusion of listening to a Sophoclean or Aeschylean chorus. In the opening stanzas of the noble *Prayer of Columbus*, there is a continuous iambic metrical stress, but with the choric movement. One finds the same thing sometimes in French *vers libre*, — one poem at least of the kind I have seen of wonderful beauty, — though the success is not so easy in that language. Tagore has recently attempted a kind of free verse in Bengali, not so good as his regular metres, though melodious enough, as everything must be that is written by this master musician of the word, and throughout there is the same choric or dithyrambic principle of movement. This then seems to be the natural high-water mark of free poetical rhythm; it is a use of the poetic principle of measure in its essence without the limitations of a set form.”

To trace in Free Verse a choric or dithyrambic movement as in the Greek masters is to imply that although this movement happens to be no straight imitation of its ancient original which was quantitative it adapts the natural disposition of a stressed language to that original. In brief: stress is taken up as if it created some kind of quantity along with quantitative combinations of the old type. We may see this by

scanning two of the lines from Whitman:

$\bar{O} \bar{u} \bar{t} \bar{o} \bar{f} \bar{t} \bar{h} \bar{e} \mid \bar{n} \bar{i} \bar{n} \bar{t} \bar{h} \bar{m} \bar{o} \bar{n} \bar{t} \bar{h} \mid \bar{m} \bar{i} \bar{d} \bar{n} \bar{i} \bar{g} \bar{h} \bar{t} \dots$
 $\bar{I} \bar{s} \bar{a} \bar{w}, \mid \bar{I} \bar{h} \bar{e} \bar{a} \bar{r} \bar{d} \bar{a} \bar{t} \mid \bar{i} \bar{n} \bar{t} \bar{e} \bar{r} \bar{v} \bar{a} \bar{l} \bar{s} \mid \bar{t} \bar{h} \bar{e} \bar{r} \bar{e} \bar{m} \bar{a} \bar{i} \bar{n} \bar{i} \bar{n} \bar{g} \bar{o} \bar{n} \bar{e}, \mid \bar{t} \bar{h} \bar{e} \bar{h} \bar{e} \bar{b} \bar{i} \bar{r} \bar{d} \dots$

A third Whitman-line, from outside Sri Aurobindo's quotations, may be adjoined for being a full unconscious hexameter

$\bar{S} \bar{i} \bar{l} \bar{e} \bar{n} \bar{t}, \mid \bar{a} \bar{v} \bar{o} \bar{i} \bar>d \bar{i} \bar{n} \bar{g} \bar{t} \bar{h} \bar{e} \mid \bar{m} \bar{o} \bar{o} \bar{n} \bar{b} \bar{e} \bar{a} \bar{m} \bar{s}, \mid \bar{b} \bar{l} \bar{e} \bar{n} \bar>d \bar{i} \bar{n} \bar{g} \bar{m} \bar{y} \mid \bar{s} \bar{e} \bar{l} \bar{f} \bar{w} \bar{i} \bar>t \bar{h} \bar{e} \mid \bar{s} \bar{h} \bar{a} \bar>d \bar{o} \bar>w \bar{s}.$

Sri Aurobindo works out the conscious and complete theory of true English quantity in which stress suffers no cavalier dismissal and yet serves a quantitative end.

It can so serve, he says, because by its hammer-stroke on a syllable it masses the voice there and confers on it a special sort of length. Hence we may distinguish a length through vertical weight in addition to a length by horizontal volume. True quantity in English must reckon with two varieties of longs, that are valid under all circumstances. And in the genuine English hexameter — as also in other forms, like Sapphics and Alcaics — both the syllables of a word such as “shadows” must be taken, each for a different reason, as legitimately long.

A pair of important points emerges from this example. As the first half of “shadows” is, by classical measures, intrinsically short, a stress must be seen as constituting a long by vertical weight irrespective of the intrinsic quantity of a syllable. Not that a stressed intrinsic short is equal in value to the intrinsic long under the ictus; yet their difference is only a matter of *nuance* within the same prosodic category. Again, as the second half of “shadows” is, by English measures, a short — or a “slack”, as the current terminology goes — in spite of its intrinsic length, “slack”-shortness must be seen as no bar to length when the horizontal volume is present.

In the English hexameter, however, the classical rule about length accruing from a collection of consonants after a short vowel has to be scrapped except where the voice is naturally stretched out by them, as in the word “stretched” itself. In English, according to Sri Aurobindo, the voice is carried away by the stress from all “slack” syllables that are intrinsically short: it is not allowed to dwell unless an intrinsic long meets it and, on some occasions, even the latter tends to be a little shortened. Hence, for example, to make the second syllable of “strident” long because of the two consonants at the end is to artificialise English. All the more is artificiality invited if we take a slack short vowel as lengthened by a throw-back influence from the opening consonant or consonants of the next word. To consider the preposition of a phrase like “loveliness of spring” as long because its *o* is followed not only by its own *f* but also by the *spr* of the next word is absurd. Words in English are individual units with a greater separateness and independence than in Greek and Latin where the inflections interconnect the words and where the voice is more uniformly and continuously

spread out over the phrases. Even sensitive students of the language like Bridges have fallen into the error of employing spurious lengths as well as slurring over the stress-factor, just as poets like Longfellow have ignored the intrinsic long when unstressed. Avoiding either oversight, Sri Aurobindo reaches a form in tune both with the spirit of the classical languages and with the genius of English.

Along with syllables about which a clear rule can be laid down, there are many sounds in English which are doubtful or variable in quantity and some whose quantitative value may alter with position or some other circumstance. Sri Aurobindo wants the ear to be the sole judge in such cases and therefore a certain latitude is conceded to the poet.

As a result of all these factors the form Sri Aurobindo arrives at is much more plastic in foot-modulation than those of the past. Here plasticity is most necessary, since English, unlike Greek and Latin, is by nature prone to a diverse play on the metrical base. To un-English the hexameter by denying it that play on the ground that it will not duplicate the classical type is to see the structure and form of poetry with a scholarly instead of a creative eye. The usual English type is a run of five dactyls (long-short-short) with a closing spondee (long-long) or trochee (long-short) and a spondaic or trochaic substitution anywhere in the line, except perhaps in the fifth foot. Sri Aurobindo, regarding stress as a part of quantity and admitting the unstressed long as vital to the technique, automatically gets other trisyllabic feet than the dactyl: for instance, the words “shadows of” would constitute for him an antibacchius (long-long-short). Nor then is there any reason why a non-dactylic trisyllable should contain one stress alone: there can be more than one stress in a foot, as in “fire leaping” or “golden fire” or “calm god-eyes”. None of these, and still less four-syllabled feet, have any acknowledged role in the existing English hexameter. Sri Aurobindo legitimises them into organic effective components.

It might be objected in general that, English being a stress-language and tending to slur over the unstressed syllables, we introduce an artificiality by giving importance to unstressed intrinsic longs. But verse is always a departure, to some degree, from natural speech. And to read verse with complete naturalness is to make it lose all its *raison d'être*. Why adopt verse if it is to be read wholly like prose? Of course it must not be made sing-song or too artificial in any other way — and, even with the stress-system, we have always to cross the metrical pattern with the pattern of spoken language and not adhere strictly to the former. But some extra attention is to be given to the metrical pattern and in several other ways the reading of verse has to be a little “unnatural”. Thus the line from Meredith’s *Lucifer in Starlight* —

The army of unalterable law —

cannot afford to have “unalterable” read as usually spoken in English. No doubt, it is

composed of 5 syllables — or, more correctly, 4 whole ones and a final half — with the accent on the second, *al*, but the last three tend to be slurred together. Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren,² after noting the latter fact, remark: “in the iambic pentameter line in which the word occurs in the poem, two of the regular metrical beats fall on alternative syllables of the word

/ /
unalterable.

This means that the entire word is given more force than is usual; and this is effective, because of the importance of the word in relation to the subject of the poem.” At least, in order to keep a five-foot scheme, the ordinary slurring together cannot and should not be done. Even the final half-syllable — *ble* — counts as a complete one. And the long quantity of a word like “able” in its first syllable — the long *a* which in speech becomes subdued in the occurrence of this dissyllable in the adjective “unalterable” — is restored in spite of the tendency in speech to pass over it because the main accent falls on *al*. What Sri Aurobindo’s quantity demands is similar departures from ordinary articulation. The departures may be less near in certain respects to those commonly made but they are in keeping with the essence of the latter and stem from the same principle as they.

In the lines from Landor’s *Rose Aylmer* —

A night of memories and signs
I consecrate to thee —

“the word ‘consecrate’,” say the authors of *Understanding Poetry*³ “is accented in ordinary usage on the first syllable. But when the word is used in this poem, meter dictates an additional accent on the last syllable, for the line is to be scanned as follows:

˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
I consecrate to thee.

Thus the metrical situation tends to give the word an emphasis which it would not possess in ordinary prose usage; and this is appropriate because of the importance of the word in the poem.”

In the examples given so far, the syllables gaining full value have come in a position where a second accent could be given to them and they are themselves slurred longs. But once the claims of “the metrical situation” are conceded there is no reason why unstressed longs should not come into their own even when they stand next door to an accented syllable. Take “contemplative” as in Milton’s

nor aught

By me proposed in life contemplative

Or active . . .

Here the word is accented on the second syllable and, wherever it is so accented, the *a* of the third syllable is, as a rule, pronounced like the first *a* in “awake”. But what can prevent us in poetry from giving this *a* its full due if some metrical need calls for it? The prevention would be all the more arbitrary since an unstressed intrinsic long does not always lose its clear length even in spoken language: a word like “decade”, stressed in the first syllable, retains its long *a* in the second, however slurred it may tend to be. The same holds for the *o* of the word we have already mentioned: “shadows”. The *u* preceding the stressed syllable in “brutality” also stays long. By analogy from such instances, all longs, be they distant from or next door to a stressed syllable, might be given their full value in a quantitative scheme like Sri Aurobindo’s. No linguistic law of poetic expression would really be violated.⁴

So much for the technique. But what is technique without the life-breath of inspiration? Sri Aurobindo’s merit lies in providing at the same time an imaginative vitality and a plastic metrical mould readily responding to it. The two are adequate to all moods and moments. And the adequacy has the extra interest of being not only characteristically Aurobindonian but also recognisably Homeric in Homer’s own metre. How it can be both we may understand by noting some remarks of Sri Aurobindo’s on Whitman.

Whitman is part of the modern movement in which the mind has become complex and subtle — setting comprehensively to work, opening to various possibilities of truth, admitting a crowded stream and mass of interests. But he brings, says Sri Aurobindo,⁵ into the stress and energy of his intellectual seeking “an element which gives them another potency and meaning . . . He has the intimate pulse and power of life vibrating in all he utters, an almost primitive force of vitality, delivered from the enormous mechanical beat of the time by a robust closeness to the very spirit of life, — that closeness he has more than any other poet since Shakespeare . . . But . . . Whitman, by the intensity of his intellectual and vital dwelling on the things he saw and expressed, arrives at some first profound sense of the greater self of the individual, of the greater self in the community of the race and in all its immense past action opening down through the broadening eager present to an immenser future, of the greater self of Nature and of the eternal, the divine Self and Spirit of existence who broods over these things, who awaits them and in whom they come to the sense of their oneness. That which the old Indian seers called the *mahān ātmā*, the Great Self, the Great Spirit, which is seen through the vast strain of the cosmic thought and the cosmic life, . . . is the subject of some of his highest strains.”

Adverting to Whitman in the context of Free Verse, Sri Aurobindo⁶ declares: “He is a great poet, one of the greatest in the power of his substance, the energy of

his vision, the force of his style, the largeness at once of his personality and his universality. He is the most Homeric voice since Homer, in spite of the modern's ruder, less elevated aesthesis of speech and the difference between that limited Olympian and this broad-souled Titan, in this that he has the nearness to something elemental which makes everything he says, even the most common and prosaic, sound out with a ring of greatness, gives a force even to his barest or heaviest phrases, throws even upon the coarsest, dullest, most physical things something of the divinity; and he has the elemental Homeric power of sufficient straightforward speech, the rush too of oceanic sound though it is here the surging of the Atlantic between continents, not the magic roll and wash of the Aegean around the isles of Greece. What he has not, is the unfailing poetic beauty and nobility which saves greatness from its defects — that supreme gift of Homer and Valmiki — and the self-restraint and obedience to a divine law which makes even the gods more divine.”

Thus, in Sri Aurobindo's estimate, Whitman, with the help of his modern intellectualism, is a pioneer of things beyond the mind and is one who blends his contemporary thought not only with the ageless Indian perception but also with the Shakespearean throb and the Homeric attitude and intonation. *A fortiori* then can a giant at the same time of intellectuality and spirituality like Sri Aurobindo, with his vibrant touch on life and his mastery of that language of fire and ether which the Elizabethan age carried to its climax in Shakespeare, prove Homeric, particularly in the Greek poet's own metrical mould, if we can show in him the qualities he reads in common between Homer and Whitman.

First let us take the American *vers-librist*'s elemental power of sufficient straightforward speech in spite of having a greater complexity and subtlety of mind than the ancient Greek. Has not Sri Aurobindo the same power even to a higher degree? *Ilion* begins majestically with a new day breaking over the besieged city and rousing once more the world:

Earth in the dawn-fire delivered from starry and shadowy vastness
 Woke to the wonder of life and its passion and sorrow and beauty,
 All on her bosom sustaining, the patient compassionate Mother.
 Out of the formless vision of Night with its look on things hidden
 Given to the gaze of the azure she lay in her garment of greenness,
 Wearing light on her brow. . . .⁷

Against a natural background of mystery without any mystification Sri Aurobindo sketches clearly and spontaneously the dawn's advent upon the beloved earth of mortals. But his spontaneity is as if primeval phenomena were themselves at large in its disclosures.

Next we may glance at the nearness to something elemental which makes everything come with a ring of greatness. Talthybius, the messenger of Achilles to Troy,

is briefly conjured up as he rides in his chariot to the just-stirring city:

One and unarmed in the car was the driver; grey was he, shrunken.
Worn with his decades. To Pergama cinctured with strength Cyclopean
Old and alone he arrived, insignificant, feeblest of mortals,
Carrying Fate in his helpless hands and the doom of an empire.⁸

The very frailness, the very infirmity of the aged envoy seems to add to the momentousness of his mission: the drabness of his look, the prose of his posture are, as it were, lifted into glory and made the chief motif of the picture. A transfiguration of the commonplace is again there when Talthymbius is taken to a room to be refreshed before the Trojan people rise and meet in the morning to give their reply:

Brought to a chamber of rest in the luminous peace of the mansion,
Grey he sat and endured the food and the wine of his foemen,
Chiding his spirit that murmured within him and gazed undelighted,
Vexed with the endless pomps of Laomedon. Far from those glories
Memory winged it back to a sward half-forgotten, a village
Nestling in leaves and low hills watching it crowned with the sunset.⁹

And what shall we say of the supreme poetic vividness by a simple significant gesture? Sometimes just a phrase is the transparent garb of a whole world of proud pathos, as in a line on another old man, now Troy's lord, Priam:

Lonely, august he stood, like one whom death has forgotten . . .¹⁰

A subtler expression, but with as much economy and as direct a stress of dignified feeling, is the phrase about Priam's wife Hecuba who has suffered the loss of her most virile and valiant son as well as of the son who was most boyishly beautiful:

Mother once of Troilus, mother once of Hector . . .¹¹

An entire history of rare happiness unremittingly snatched away is touched off, with a supreme restraint twice repeated, by that diminutive pregnancy, the adverb "once". And a long persistent mass of pitiful ordinary experience is gathered up, with a deft display of knowledge of human nature, in the moving yet poised phrases:

Helped by the anxious joy of their kindred supported their anguish
Women with travail racked for the child who shall rack them with sorrow.¹²

The irony here is of personal life; an irony of martial interrelations strikes its note,

both stern and tragic, in the vision of death's day-to-day events in a war:

Ajax has bit at the dust; it is all he shall have of the Troad;
Tall Meriones lies and measures his portion of booty.¹³

Again and again, the drift of the least impulse, the lightest act, the most familiar situation is charged with the heroic, the high-souled, the unforgettable. This burdening of even the smallest casual turn we may indirectly describe through the two lines put into the mouth of Deiphobus about the sudden actualisation of Fate:

Always man's Fate hangs poised on the flitting breath of a moment;
Called by some word, by some gesture it leaps, then 'tis graven, 'tis granite.¹⁴

And these lines with their closing compactness and sublimity bring us to the verses that remain fastest in our memory — those where the thought or the image hurls upon us with a wide yet controlled grandeur as in Homer at his most energetically inspired. The impact, in one manner, is at its effective best in the harangues by Antenor, Laocoön and Paris in the Trojan assembly. These are masterpieces of political oratory that yet miss nothing of the poetic in the political and of the personal in the public, whether it is the old statesman who advises a strategy of temporary surrender in order to prepare covertly a future revolt —

. . . be as a cavern for lions;
Be as a Fate that crouches! Wordless and stern for your vengeance
Self-gathered work in the night and the secrecy shrouding your bosoms¹⁵ —

or it is the temple-rapt enthusiast with his huge reveries and god-gilded delusions, brave with a desperate passion —

Storm is the dance of the locks of the God assenting to greatness,
Zeus who with secret compulsion orders the ways of our nature; . . .
Death? I have faced it. Fire? I have watched it climb in my vision
Over the timeless domes and over the rooftops of Priam;
But I have looked beyond and have seen the smile of Apollo. . . .
Troy has arisen before, but from ashes, not shame, not surrender!¹⁶ —

or it is the young lover and warrior setting aside both caution and self-censure and evoking happy confident heroism in what seems a world of iron caprice —

Power is divine; divinest of all is power over mortals. . . .
Conscious dimly of births unfinished hid in our being

Rest we cannot; a world cries in us for space and for fullness. . . .
 All is injustice of love or all is injustice of battle. . . .
 You cannot utterly die while the Power lives untired in your bosoms;
 When 'tis withdrawn, not a moment of life can be added by virtue . . .
 Proudly determine on victory, live by disaster unshaken.
 Either Fate receive like men, nay, like gods, nay, like Trojans.¹⁷

The essential Homeric impact is no less when it is single-lined, as in the verse about the cripple god Hephaestus — the verse whose beginning is reminiscent of several of Homer's "Olympian descents" (*Bē de kat' Oulumpoio . . .*):

Down upon earth he came with his lame omnipotent motion . . .¹⁸

The rush of oceanic sound is here too about us. It grows immense as well as intense in a passage which we may prelude with an allusion to one of Homer's which Sri Aurobindo classes among the absolute and ultimate inevitabilities of poetry. It is a description of Apollo's earthward sweep, starting with the line:

Bē de kat' Oulumpoio karēnōn chōōmenos kēr.

Sri Aurobindo¹⁹ comments: "Homer's passage translated into English would be perfectly ordinary. He gets the best part of his effect from his rhythm. Translated it would run merely like this: 'And he descended from the peaks of Olympus, wroth at heart, bearing on his shoulders arrows and doubly pent-in quiver, and there arose the clang of his silver bow as he moved, and he came made like unto the night.' His words too are quite simple but the vowellation and the rhythm make the clang of the silver bow go smashing through the world into universes beyond while the last words give a most august and formidable impression of godhead."

Sri Aurobindo's own poetic burst of "inevitability" may be divided into two parts. In the first the superhuman beings move before us in their outward forms and dynamisms:

. . . not only the mortal fighters,
 Heroes half divine whose names are like stars in remoteness,
 Triumphed and failed and were winds or were weeds on the dance
of the surges,
 But from the peaks of Olympus and shimmering summits of Ida
 Gleaming and clanging the gods of the antique ages descended.
 Hidden from human knowledge the brilliant shapes of Immortals
 Mingled unseen in the mellay, or sometimes, marvellous, maskless,
 Forms of undying beauty and power that made tremble the heart-strings

Parting their deathless secrecy crossed through the borders of vision,
 Plain as of old to the demigods out of their glory emerging,
 Heard by mortal ears and seen by the eyeballs that perish.²⁰

This is Sri Aurobindo turned Homer — the Indian intimacy with occult presences is riding on the Aegean’s “dance of the surges”. Now comes Homer turned Sri Aurobindo. The inner consciousness which the depicted superhuman forms and dynamisms symbolise and focus is evoked with all its tremendous breadth and plunge. The Greek “Immortals” are borne upon the heavenward heave of the profundities that are the Indian Ocean:

Mighty they came from their spaces of freedom and sorrowless splendour.
 Sea-vast, trailing the azure hem of his clamorous waters,
 Blue-lidded, maned with the Night, Poseidon smote for the future,
 Earth-shaker who with his trident releases the coils of the Dragon,
 Freeing the forces unborn that are locked in the caverns of Nature.
 Calm and unmoved, upholding the Word that is Fate and the order
 Fixed in the sight of a Will foreknowing and silent and changeless,
 Hera sent by Zeus and Athene lifting his aegis
 Guarded the hidden decree. But for Ilion, loud as the surges,
 Ares impetuous called to the fire in men’s hearts, and his passion
 Woke in the shadowy depths the forms of the Titan and demon;
 Dumb and coerced by the grip of the gods in the abyss of the being,
 Formidable, veiled they sit in the grey subconscious darkness
 Watching the sleep of the snake-haired Erinnys. Miracled, haloed,
 Seer and magician and prophet who beholds what the thought cannot witness.
 Lifting the godhead within us to more than a human endeavour,
 Slayer and saviour, thinker and mystic, leaped from his sun-peaks
 Guarding in Ilion the wall of his mysteries Delphic Apollo.
 Heaven’s strengths divided swayed in the whirl of the Earth-force.²¹

A curious point in connection with these Aurobindonian illustrations of the Homeric rush of oceanic sound is the reference again and again to the sea. And the next passage which renders clear the reason of the long indecisive siege of Troy — the divine forces working out their own play through the human clashes — we have again the sea-simile for the to-and-fro of the war’s fortunes:

Vain was the toil of the heroes, the blood of the mighty was squandered,
 Spray as of surf on the cliffs when it moans unappeased, unrequited
 Age after fruitless age.²²

But finally the Gods withdrew, recognising the rules of Time's workings: "the anguish ends like the rapture." The Olympians,

Artists of Nature content with their work in the plan of the transience,²³

turned from the carnage,

Leaving the battle already decided, leaving the heroes
Slain in their minds, Troy burned, Greece left to her glory and downfall.

And, while they reposed in their blissful ether,

Lifted was the burden laid on our wills by their starry presence:
Man was restored to his smallness, the world to its unconscious labour.
Life felt a respite from height, the winds breathed freer delivered;
Light was released from their blaze and the earth was released from
their greatness.

But their immortal content from the struggle titanic departed.
Vacant the noise of the battle roared like the sea on the shingles;
Wearily hunted the spears their quarry; strength was disheartened;
Silence increased with the march of the months on the tents of the leaguer.²⁴

Here too the ocean-comparison figures. And we discover that Sri Aurobindo was aware of the association of Homer and sea, for he has in more than one place introduced a reflex of Homer's most famous line apropos of the Aegean's roll and cry:

Bē d'akeōn para thīna poluphloisboio thalassēs.

Sri Aurobindo has himself even Englished this line with the true Homeric blend of simplicity and splendour:

Silent he walked by the shore of the many-rumoured ocean.²⁵

Haunted by the mute sorrow of Chryses, Apollo's high-priest, listening to the ocean's roar, Achilles is made by Sri Aurobindo to say in his message through Talthybius:

Day after day I walked at dawn and in blush of the sunset,
Far by the call of the seas and alone with the gods and my dreaming.²⁶

Again Achilles voices his solitude — and now with a direct memory of Homer Sri Aurobindo gives him the words:

Lonely I paced o'er the sands by the thousand-throated waters.²⁷

And in the closing phrase here Sri Aurobindo has produced after Homer's *poluphlois boïo thalassēs* the grandest poetic *multum in parvo* about the sea in terms of a modern mind's complexity of verbal art which yet has an elemental force.

We may add that the same is true in connection with Homer's evocation of the rhythm of Apollo's silver bow. What Sri Aurobindo remarks of its tremendous suggestion we may repeat about his own phrase at the end of an account of the Sun-god leaving the divine mountain in suppressed anger because Zeus denies him continuance of his supremacy and decides the future in favour of Pallas Athene. A more psychological tinge is imparted by Sri Aurobindo with a symbolic gleam, but a "smashing through the world into universes beyond" is Homericly achieved through sheer pressure of poetic sound:

Clang of his argent bow was the wrath restrained of the mighty.²⁸

When we encounter in *Iliad* either one-line masterpieces or manifold sustained perfections, we cannot help somewhat modifying Sri Aurobindo's Homeric apotheosis of Whitman. For, in such excerpts as we have made, we have on the whole an aesthesis finer than that broad-souled Titan's — and there is in addition the absence of the one un-Homeric feature in Whitman, the intermittence of poetic beauty and nobility. The more concentrated exaltation of metrical rhythmic movement, without which "even his greatest things do not go absolutely and immediately home, or having entered they do not so easily seize on the soul, take possession and rest in a calm yet vibrating mastery",²⁹ is constantly with Sri Aurobindo, ensuring a greater total Homericism.

However, the worth of *Iliad* lies ultimately in this Homericism being Aurobindonian without ceasing to be itself. What is unique is that the spirit of Greek myth and epic goes hand in hand with the spirit of Indian Yoga: flawless word and rhythm embody a vision packed with the light of the occult Orient yet tempered and naturalised to the atmosphere of heroic Hellas. The uniqueness shows out most in the lines where a deeper sense of the Divine is expressed than Helen-drunk Paris or even religion-intoxicated Laocoön can reach for all their instinct of powers beyond man. There is then a pressing forward to a large picture of Heaven's dealings with earth. Apart from the passage about the Gods joining the mellay and a few others, perhaps this sense comes closest to us in the declarations of Gods and Goddesses when Zeus summons them together in Book VIII. Apropos of Zeus himself Sri Aurobindo says:

Not alone the mind in its trouble
 God beholds, but the spirit behind that has joy of the torture.
 Might not our human gaze on the smoke of a furnace, the burning

Red, intolerable, anguish of ore that is fused in the hell-heat,
 Shrink and yearn for coolness and peace and condemn all the labour?
 Rather look to the purity coming, the steel in its beauty,
 Rather rejoice with the master who stands in his gladness accepting
 Heat of the glorious god and the fruitful pain of the iron.³⁰

Among the speeches given to Zeus a passage affords a rare insight into the nature of the deific. When Hera says that Zeus's sons Apollo and Ares forget the supreme purpose, he replies:

“Hera, queen of the heavens, they forget not, but choose to be mindless.
 This is the greatness of gods that they know and can put back the knowledge;
 Doing the work they have chosen they turn not for fruit nor for failure,
 Griefless they walk to their goal and strain not their eyes towards the ending.
 Light that they have they can lose with a smile, not as souls in the darkness
 Clutch at every beam and mistake their one ray for all splendour.
 All things are by Time and the Will eternal that moves us,
 And for each birth its hour is set in the night or the dawning.
 There is an hour for knowledge, an hour to forget and to labour.”³¹

In the course of this Book we have even a direct reminiscence of spiritual India. Narrating how the Gods and Goddesses called by Zeus ascend to him through various subtle kingdoms, he pictures their entry into the Mind-world which from its own splendours looks up to a greater Light and to

. . . bliss from ineffable kingdoms
 Where beyond Mind and its rays is the gleam of a glory supernal:
 There our sun cannot shine and our moon has no place for her lustres,
 There our lightnings flash not, nor fire of these spaces is suffered.³²

Sri Aurobindo has here rendered some famous phrases of the Mundaka Upanishad.

Such passages may leave us most satisfied, but we should not miss in our love of them the fact that *Iliion* develops in a new way part of the story of Troy after the death of Hector and the coming of the Eastern Queen Penthesilea to the city's succour. *Iliion* deals with the events on the last day of the siege of Troy. The nature of these events and the many-sided play they involve of physical circumstance, human character, psychological motive, individual action, no less than hidden world-forces and inscrutable destiny, may be inferred from the names of the several sections of the poem: we have Books successively of the Herald, the Statesman, the Assembly, Partings, Achilles, the Chieftains, the Woman, the Gods — and a final unnamed Book presumably of Battle and Doom.

Ilion is a true epic in breadth and depth and height. If any one work of Sri Aurobindo's could be the spearhead of his poetic fame in the West, it should be *Ilion*. Unfortunately, there has been little open appreciation so far, in spite of enthusiastic pronouncements in private by men like Christopher Martin, once assistant editor of *Encounter*, and by the eminent art-critic and thinker, Sir Herbert Read. Martin wrote: "I certainly am impressed by this masterly achievement in hexameters" (Letter, December 9, 1959). Sir Herbert stated: "Sri Aurobindo's *Ilion* is a remarkable achievement by any standard and I am full of amazement that someone not of English origin should have such a wonderful command not only of our English language as such, but of its skilful elaboration into poetic diction of such high quality" (Letter, June 5, 1958).

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

(Sri Aurobindo — *The Poet*, second edition 1999, pp. 98-121)

Notes and References

1. *The Future Poetry* (Pondicherry, 1953), pp. 214-16.

2. *Understanding Poetry* (New York, 1952), p. 327.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

4. To appreciate in full and in all its nuances his conception of quantity and particularly of the hexameter one must read his long essay 'On Quantitative Metre' included in *Collected Poems and Plays*, two volumes published in 1942. Here he touches also upon several problems related to poetry at large. An English reviewer, Banning Richardson, writing in *The Aryan Path* of March 1944, remarks about this "admirable essay" that it is "an essay which deserves wide currency and consideration by all those interested in the future of English poetry and of poetry in general". It is further remarked: "In it he seems to have struck at the root of the problem which modern poets have been attempting to solve by recourse to free verse forms. Both argument and example are convincing, and one wonders whether poets like Eliot, Auden and Spender have reached similar conclusions. At least, they should be made aware of this considerable contribution to English prosody by an Indian poet."

5. *The Future Poetry*, pp. 253-55.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 212.

7. *Ilion: An Epic in Quantitative Hexameters* (Pondicherry, 1957), p. 1.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 48, 49 & 51.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 121.
19. *Letters of Sri Aurobindo*, Third Series (Bombay, 1949), p. 16.
20. *Ilion*, p. 4.
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.
25. *Letters*, p. 46.
26. *Ilion*, p. 12.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
29. *The Future Poetry*, p. 219.
30. *Ilion.*, p. 105.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 110.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

SRI AUROBINDO: LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MAHAYOGI

(Continued from the issue of May 2017)

Chapter: LXII

At Pondicherry: Now for a Greater Adventure of Consciousness

In the unfolding process of the Self
Sometimes the inexpressible Mystery
Elects a human vessel of descent.

Sri Aurobindo
(*Savitri*, Book 1, Canto 4)

The British administration could not have remained unconcerned at Sri Aurobindo's going out of sight abruptly. After perhaps a couple of days' watch, the detectives who guarded both his College Square residence and the *Karmayogin* office day and night must have nervously reported about his neither entering nor leaving any of the places, and before long their anxiety must have leaked out to the public and the press. Rumours galore must have floated in the air as is evident from this rejoinder published in the *Karmayogin* of 19 March 1910 while Sri Aurobindo was still at Chandernagore:

We are greatly astonished to learn from the local Press that S. J. Aurobindo Ghose has disappeared from Calcutta and is now interviewing the Mahatmas in Tibet. We are ourselves unaware of this mysterious disappearance. As a matter of fact S. J. Aurobindo is in our midst and, if he is doing any astral business with Kuthumi or any of the other great Rishis, the fact is unknown to his other Koshas. Only as he requires perfect solitude and freedom from disturbance for his Sadhan for some time, his address is being kept a strict secret. This is the only foundation for the remarkable rumour which the vigorous imagination of a local contemporary has set floating. For similar reasons he is unable to engage in journalistic works, and *Dharma* has been entrusted to other hands.¹

We are not sure whether Sri Aurobindo sent a message to Sister Nivedita to edit the *Karmayogin* just when he was leaving for Chandernagore or soon after his arrival there. The second guess seems more probable. She did her best, but Sri

Aurobindo had left a number of manuscripts for the journal to lighten the new editor's burden. Probably he even managed to send a piece or two from Chandernagore. That must have become a factor for the experts in the government who recognised his style, to wonder if the amusing notice in the journal was indeed not true: if Sri Aurobindo was not very much there in the city itself.²

A small scrap of paper, about 2 x 2 inches in size, bearing Sri Aurobindo's instruction to the eighteen-year old Moni (alias Suresh Chandra Chakravarti) who had never ventured out of Bengal, to proceed to Pondicherry launched him on a journey to that foreign destination without the slightest hesitation. He was to alert the nationalists in that crown-town of French India about Sri Aurobindo's arrival there. He left Calcutta on the 28th of March and reached Pondicherry, the main territory of French India, on the 31st of March, a couple of hours before dawn.³

After Sri Aurobindo's departure for Chandernagore, those young men who resided at the office of the *Karmayogin* at 4 Shyamapukur Lane dispersed to different addresses. Suresh was camping in a mess at 6 Crouch Street, as the guest of a mysterious young man who was known by an unusual name, 'Kanistha Pandav', which stood for the last of the five Pandava brothers in the *Mahabharata*, Sahadeva.⁴ It was Sukumar Mitra who was vested with the task of executing the plan for Sri Aurobindo's second departure, this time from one French colony to another. Suresh who had led Sri Aurobindo to Chandernagore along with Biren, was Sri Aurobindo's choice for acting as his messenger for his would-be hosts.

Obviously, a network of contacts among the revolutionaries was active. Everything worked out according to the plan: Sourin buying a ticket for Suresh in the 2nd Class for a train bound for Madras and waiting at the platform of Howrah Station with a suitcase containing the items the young man would need for his travel and stay at Pondicherry. This was done because Suresh should not be seen to be going out of his mess for a long-distance journey. He was likely to be watched. There could be an informer among those camping in the building. 'Kanistha', who rarely talked to him, had casually told the inmates of the mess that Suresh was going to attend a relative's wedding by a train from Sealdah. In fact, Suresh first proceeded to Sealdah and from there went to Howrah. He carried with him three ten-rupee notes and some change and his secret treasure, Sri Aurobindo's message to his contacts in Pondicherry scribbled on that tiny slip of paper. Either Sourin or Kanistha had gifted him a nickel pocket-watch, with silver chain attached — that was a luxury — in keeping with his status as a passenger in the 2nd Class compartment. While the average Indian used the 3rd Class (bare wooden benches and no fan overhead until much later) and those with claims to wealth or position travelled by the 'Inter Class', the 2nd and the 1st Class compartments were, barring rare exceptions, the domain of Englishmen or of those at least convincingly looking like them in dress and demeanour. To top it all, Sourin — he must have been instructed to do so — bought for him a novel sporting the romantic title *Love Made Manifest* by Guy Boothby.⁵

Needless to say, all this was to create the impression that an easy-going chap blessed with an indulgent father was out on a trip to an uncle's abode or had simply embarked on a pleasure trip. An emissary of "the most dangerous man" proceeding to a foreign territory with a secret mission? There was no question of any such suspicion arising in the minds of any average-calibre spy peeping into the compartments.

Suresh entered the platform bare-handed, clad in a new set of clothes that "had been bought" for him. Luckily for him, the only other Bengali passenger in the compartment was a Trichy-bound engineer, an amiable young man who carried *loochi* and *sandesh* in sufficient quantity for him to generously share with his younger travel-mate three times a day. At Egmore they changed into what was then known as the Boat Mail and had their last dinner together at Villupuram where they parted company.

Suresh reached Pondicherry railway station at about 2.30 a.m. on the 31st of March and slept in the waiting room. At day-break he set out in a novel kind of rickshaw known as '*pousse-pousse*' (push-push) in search of the addressee at 10 rue Valdour (later rue Dupleix and still later Jawaharlal Nehru Street). But that building housed a printing press and he was directed to Muthumariamman Covil Street where he was received by Thiru Srinivasachariar.⁶ The host readily accommodated him and assured him that Sri Aurobindo was most welcome.

The ancient name of Pondicherry was Vedapuram or Vedapuri which suggests that the place was a seat of Vedic learning and culture. The inscriptions found on Sri Moolanathar temple at Bahur (12.5 km south of Pondicherry) and on the Shiva temple at Thiruvandar Kovil (21 km east of Pondicherry) provide ample proof of this. In fact, the 'Bahur Plates' issued in the 8th century speak of a Sanskrit University that was there from an earlier period. Vedapuriswara (Lord Shiva) was the presiding spirit of Vedapuri. . . . Legend has it that the great sage Agastya came to Vedapuri to worship Vedapuriswara. The sage did not go back. . . .

The French archaeologist, Prof. Jouveau Dubreuil said that he had reasons to believe that the Ashram of Agastya was situated on the very spot where stands today the main building of Sri Aurobindo Ashram.⁷

Pondicherry had gone through tumultuous centuries, passing from one ruling power to another — native Rajas and Nawabs as well as counterfeit Nawabs⁸ and colonial powers, chiefly the English and the French. At the beginning of the 20th century, it was a sleepy little town, the French having consolidated their ownership of the region along with a few smaller pockets inside the present-day Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Bengal, Kerala and Odisha. The atmosphere was overtly peaceful, barring spurts of violence during elections. We read in the *Gazetteer* that in the

Municipal Elections held in September 1908 — that was about a year and a half before Sri Aurobindo's arrival — that “the whole atmosphere was surcharged with violence” and that “Lemaire, the venerable ex-Governor was assaulted in the course of a fracas” by the supporters of his rival.

The young Suresh was quite amazed by his experience of this famous French colony. Vehicles drawn by horses looked like bullock carts and had only a pair of wheels. There were no more than two or three motor cars in the town and His Excellency the Governor of French India was not fortunate enough to possess or entitled to have one. Monsieur Martineau, the then Governor, was seen moving about in a *pousse-pousse*. Records Suresh:

One day I saw the Governor in white pantaloons and plain coat that had been repaired at the back with a patch. A native passer-by had a look at him and, lips curled, muttered contemptuously, “*Quel Gouverneur!*” — What a Governor!

Suresh was accommodated by Srinivasachariar at his own residence. Early in the afternoon, while he was resting after his lunch, a gentleman sporting a rather fierce-looking moustache entered the house. The stranger who looked older than what he should at 26 — Suresh learnt his age later — was the great Tamil poet and nationalist, Subramania Bharati. Within the next couple of days came Thiru Rangachary, the host's brother-in-law, who had met Sri Aurobindo at Calcutta.

Suresh felt embarrassed because he did not know Tamil and he was not even reasonably fluent in English. However, despite such difficulties he managed to articulate his irrepressible anxiety to have a glimpse of the shelter they proposed to offer the celebrated guest, scheduled to arrive on the 4th of April. But Srinivasachariar's gesture or muttering indicated that it was hardly of any consequence to them! However, as the lovable forerunner proved insistent in his query, someone led him through a swampy lane to an area of the town as if deliberately chosen for its most ungraceful condition, and showed a small cage-like cabin atop a printing press. Its walls had been clumsily covered with pictures of freedom fighters young and old, from Tilak and Lala Lajpat to the martyr Kanai Dutt, — obviously clippings from newspapers. That special artistry had been employed probably to establish its eligibility to house Sri Aurobindo.

Suresh stood stunned and speechless — and worse, undone too!

To his greater dismay, Srinivasachariar and his compatriots excitedly planned a grand reception for Sri Aurobindo on his setting foot on the soil of Pondicherry. Suresh must have exhausted his entire vocabulary and genius for histrionics to impress upon the hosts that Sri Aurobindo was arriving incognito and must remain so till he decided otherwise.

“How absurd! Aurobindo Ghose would arrive and none in Pondicherry would

know about it! Is that possible?” they demanded with a touch of bewilderment. Suresh took great pains to convince them that it could of course be possible if not many, but only one or two persons went into the ship to receive him and quietly brought him ashore and led him to his proposed residence without fanfare.

Their enthusiasm dampened, the hosts murmured but agreed to do as suggested by Suresh.

Here is Suresh’s account of Sri Aurobindo’s arrival:

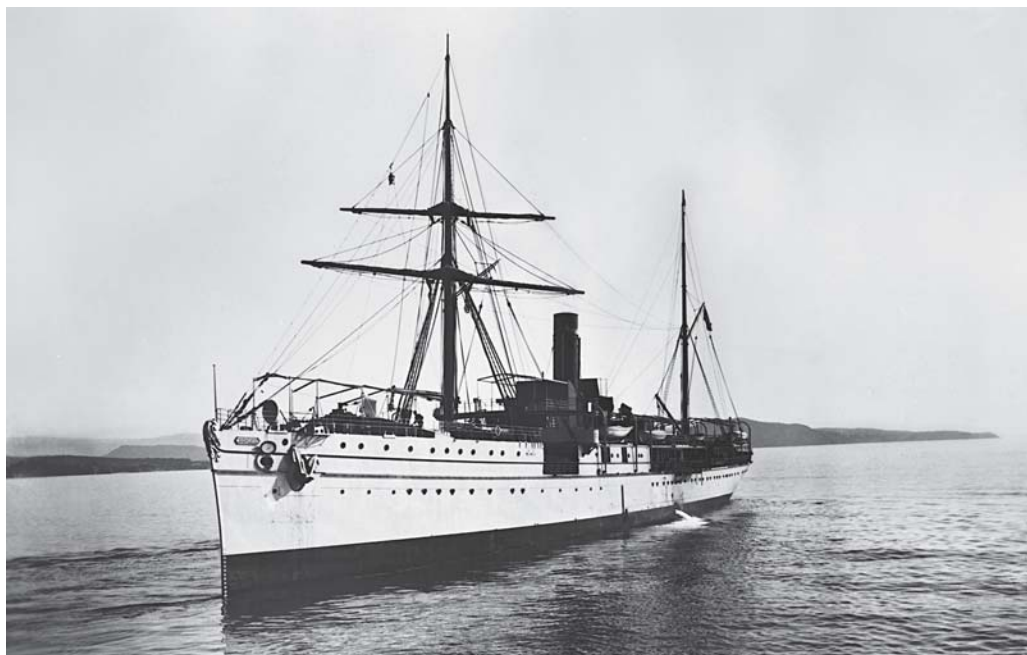
The ship *Dupleix* anchored at the Pondicherry port at about 4 p.m. on the 4th of April. The sea near the port was not deep enough to let a ship come close to the jetty. Passengers had to cover by boat one-fourth to half-a-mile between the jetty and the ship. Descending from the ship and ascending to it exercised one’s physical abilities quite a bit. And if the wind was strong and the surface of the sea was turbulent with violent waves, the exercise would become as strenuous as the practice of the parallel or the horizontal bar.

A rowing boat, absolutely bare, was provided by either the travel agency or the French government for ferrying passengers between the ship and the shore. . . . Srinivasachariar and I managed to descend into the boat by a ladder, balancing ourselves with a good deal of effort amidst the furiously breaking waves. . . . The boat proceeded towards the ship.

As we came closer to the ship I saw Sri Aurobindo and Bijoy standing on the deck, their gaze fixed on the boat. Probably they were anxious about the success of my mission, about my safe arrival at Pondicherry, locating our friends, etc. As our swaying boat touched the ship, we climbed the hanging ladder; once again with a good deal of balancing exercise we reached the spot where Sri Aurobindo and Bijoy stood. Then, descending a few steps, we entered their cabin.

The management of the ship was courteous enough to serve the passengers with farewell tea and biscuits. Suresh made good use of the stuff though Srinivasachariar did not touch the biscuits because they were shaped like some varieties of fish! Then all of them descended into the boat, along with them their luggage. Srinivasachariar had borrowed a horse-drawn carriage, known as *jetka*, from a friend of his. Accompanied by Srinivasachariar Sri Aurobindo proceeded to the lodge arranged for him. Suresh does not remember whether Bijoy boarded the *jetka* or joined Suresh in his ‘push-push’ along with the luggage. As a local friend directed the ‘push-push’ to its destination along a way that certainly did not lead to the press-cage shown to him, Suresh was intrigued.

Their vehicle stopped in front of an elegant building of impressive size — in fact the only three-storied mansion in this capital of French India. Suresh was led by his accompanying guide to the top floor of the house.



SS Duplex



View of the pier as it was around the time of Sri Aurobindo's arrival



Shankar Chetty



Shankar Chetty House



Suresh Chandra Chakravarty (Moni)



Bijoy Nag



Srinivasachariar

As he reached the end of the staircase, what opened up before him was a decent and spacious room, neat and clean, placed at the guest's disposal. Why then had he been shown its very caricature earlier? He stood mystified though at the same time he felt relieved and delighted, his heart full of admiration for the noble hosts. Shortly, someone unravelled to him the mystery of the deception played upon him: His claim to be Sri Aurobindo's emissary had been received with a pinch of salt. Who knew if he was not a spy of the British Raj? Had Sri Aurobindo not arrived on the date announced by him, he would have probably received a brutal thrashing before being kicked out.

So, all these few days he had moved about comfortably, totally unaware that he was under a dark cloud of suspicion! He realised, he says, how much wisdom was concealed in the saying, "Ignorance is bliss"!

Suresh saw, on an easy chair inside a decent room, its walls not cluttered by any picture, Sri Aurobindo sitting majestically while "Srinivasachariar and four or five others stood before him reverentially".

Thus began the second and new phase of the Mahayogi's life.

Sri Aurobindo had ignited the flame of patriotism across the nation and had inspired in innumerable hearts an irresistible aspiration to fight for freedom. As the earliest historian of the National Congress recorded, "Aurobindo's genius shot up like a meteor. He was on the high sky only for a time. He flooded the land from Cape to Mount with the effulgence of his light."¹⁰ By now, he had envisioned India's achievement of independence as a *fait accompli*. According to the memoirs of a dedicated worker in the *Karmayogin* establishment, he had been certain about it on the eve of leaving Calcutta for Chandernagore.¹¹ That account could be questioned, but before us lies the indisputable record of his assurance to the young A. B. Purani in 1918 about the absolute certainty of the realisation of that goal:

You can take it from me, it is as certain as the rising of the sun tomorrow. The decree has already gone forth; it may not be long in coming.¹²

Now that the freedom of India had been decreed, at Pondicherry began his unprecedented adventure in consciousness — his Yoga for the freedom of mankind from its primeval bondage to ignorance that alone could enable its ascent to a new phase of evolution.

(We end here the main text of our narrative. It will be followed by a few post-script chapters.)

MANOJ DAS

Notes and References

1. Sri Aurobindo: *Karmayogin*, CWSA, Vol. 8; Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.
2. "Writings (essays, translation and poems) that Sri Aurobindo had left behind in Calcutta continued to be published in the journal until it was discontinued on 2 April 1910." Editorial 'Notes on the Text'; *Ibid*.
3. The author's obvious observations apart, most of the factual statements in this chapter are culled from the invaluable memoirs of Suresh Chandra Chakravarty (1885-1954) in Bengali, *Smritikatha*, originally published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram. While some passages have been translated and quoted, some others have been summarised.
4. *Kanistha*'s real name was Satish Sarkar. Later he became known as Nirvana Swami. (From Prithwindranath Mukherjee in *Mother India*, September, 1971.)
5. Guy Boothby (1867-1905), noted for sensational fiction, was born in South Australia, but lived in Britain for the most part of his life.
6. Srinivasachariar, also referred to as Srinivasa Achari, was a dedicated nationalist, connected with the poet Subramania Bharati and the magazine *India*.
7. P. Raja: *A Concise History of Pondicherry*; Busy Bee Books, Pondicherry.
8. Dupleix, the French Governor of Pondicherry (1742-1754) held "a Durbar at Pondicherry on 27 February 1747, at which European and Indian residents of Pondicherry were encouraged to present Dupleix with gold mohurs as 'Nazar Salami' to the Nawab. At the Durbar Dupleix sported a turban bedecked with pearls and precious stones. Five days after the Durbar a messenger from the Mughal Emperor at Delhi arrived in Pondicherry conferring on Dupleix the title of Khan Bahadur. Madame Jeanne Dupleix consequently became Johanna Begum." *Gazetteer of India: Union Territory of Pondicherry*; Vol. 1.
9. *Ibid*.
10. Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya: *History of Indian National Congress*.
11. Upendrachandra Bhattacharya: *Amar Elomelo Jibaner Kayekti Adhyay* (Bengali); Modern Book Agency, Kolkata.
12. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar: *Sri Aurobindo — A Biography and a History*, among other sources.

FOREWORD TO *SRI AUROBINDO — A HOMAGE*

[A booklet with this title was first published by Prof. Tan Yun-Shan of Santiniketan in 1940 for private circulation. The second revised and enlarged edition was published in 1942 by Debidas Ray from Dhakuria. A third enlarged and revised edition was published by Sri Aurobindo Library, Madras in April 1950.

It contained a Foreword by Prof. Tan and an essay, 'Sri Aurobindo and his Asrama' by Sisir Kumar Mitra. A second essay, 'Sri Aurobindo and the Future World-Order' by Sisir Kumar Mitra was also added.

We reproduce below the text from the third edition. — Ed.]

I am a pilgrim to India. But unlike other pilgrims, I have come to regard her as my second motherland. Indeed, the Mother in her is so kind and so great. India to me is that country in the world where man has always undertaken his highest spiritual endeavours, the fruits of which have no parallel in the history of human thought.

During my stay in India, I have always made it a point to meet and pay my humble tribute of love and respect to those of her representative sons who have kept burning the lamp of her soul. I was therefore exceedingly happy when I was able to go to Pondicherry in November, 1939, and pay my deepest homage to Sri Aurobindo, the Maha-Yogi of India, in company with my esteemed friend and colleague Professor Sisir Kumar Mitra.

I returned from Pondicherry with a heart full of feelings which are too deep for words. From what I have seen and felt there, I am convinced that Sri Aurobindo has evolved a practical philosophy of life which is singular in the history of man's spiritual achievement, and which is sure to fulfil its purpose, *viz.* the inner regeneration of man. The powerful personality of Sri Aurobindo and his vast wisdom are the greatest assets of humanity. It is my hope and prayer that he will keep on extending his inspiring influence till mankind awakes and responds to the truth of his mission.

The Mother of the Asrama is so sweet. She is a force too, which one is bound to feel. I felt as if I was talking to one who was nearest to me in spirit. She is indeed the Mother of all, and everything in the Asrama is taking shape under her direct guidance. There are no written rules or instructions, yet the order, discipline and devotion with which every inmate does his duty are striking enough to indicate the unique character of the Asrama. The atmosphere is full of peace and harmony. I would like to say that the Asrama overflows in its peace which pervades the atmosphere of Pondicherry. The inmates seemed to be doing their work under an inspiration. I shall not forget their kindness to me. There are among them poets,

litterateurs, artists, engineers and scientists. Everyone has perfect freedom to develop his talent. The pictures done by some inmates and the songs that some of them gave me are among the best of their kind. Sri Dilip Kumar Roy, whose kindness I shall always cherish with love and respect, sang several moving songs whose spiritual appeal went home to me. The Asrama is the centre of a new life, and has, I am sure, a great future.

The world is in sore need of a message like Sri Aurobindo's. Man has laid an exclusive emphasis on the satisfaction of his material ambitions, to the utter neglect of the spiritual values of his life, with the result that he is today a sorry victim of the worst forces of darkness and evil. I feel that the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo will rekindle in man his faith in the values of the spirit, and thereby save humanity from yet greater disasters. There is yet time for man to wake up.

Prof. Mitra was full of feelings. He recorded his impressions in a beautiful article which, I am glad, has been published in the form of this booklet and made available to all interested in Sri Aurobindo.

TAN YUN-SHAN

*Visva-Bharati, Cheena-Bhavana,
Santiniketan, Bengal.
January 23, 1940*

For those who practise the integral Yoga, the welfare of humanity can be only a consequence and a result, it cannot be the aim. And if all the efforts to improve human conditions have miserably failed in the end in spite of all the ardour and enthusiasm and self-consecration they have inspired at first, it is precisely because the transformation of the conditions of human life can only be achieved by another preliminary transformation, the transformation of the human consciousness or at least of a few exceptional individuals capable of laying the foundations for a more widespread transformation.

The Mother

(*On Education*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 12, p. 95)

SRI AUROBINDO AND HIS ASRAMA

*“Arise, O Souls, arise! Strength has come,
darkness has passed away — the Light is arriving!”*

Rig Veda, 1. 113. 16

There are moments whose meaning no language can express. There are states of mind which are beyond any human power to make others understand. Why then this impossible attempt to seek publicity for thoughts that arose in one such moment in my mind when in November last I visited Sri Aurobindo’s Yogasrama in Pondicherry? Chief among the reasons that may be put forward is my desire to share with others the *ananda* that filled my heart, and fills the heart of every pilgrim when he is privileged to enter the temple of the Lord, and see Him face to face. Moments like these are rare in the life of man. But when they come, they come in their utmost splendour. They usher in those dawns in the inner world of man when the Divine vouchsafes His Grace to the aspiring pilgrim that he may see the God of his heart, that his Ideal may be Real to him, and that the Infinite may turn into a Presence which he not only feels but also sees in the form of the finite. “The Mother of the Gods lifts up the golden lid, and Truth is revealed in its desired Manifestation.” The pilgrim feels transported, as it were, into a world where no dualities exist, a world of light, of peace and joy, a world where his spirit receives its first baptism in divine life.

I beg to preface my say as to what I saw and felt in Pondicherry by a reference to the background of my mind with which I had gone there. I should also like to point out at the outset that the instruments of knowledge which we ordinarily use do not help us much in understanding a Yogi, especially a Yogi like Sri Aurobindo whose Yoga has for its aim not only *moksha*, individual salvation, but also the preparation of man for the work of the Divine, a preparation on a scale never attempted before. “Intellect is a bar, and it is also a helper.” Involved in grossness, that it generally is, it hampers our spiritual growth; but properly trained, it helps. And that training is possible only when the heart opens. *Sraddha* — an attitude of prayerful faith and confidence — is therefore the beginning of spiritual life. For, *sraddha* begets aspiration. And aspiration, if sincere, is sure to be responded to by the Divine Grace, which works wonders in the life of the seeker. I am fully conscious of my limitations. I know how foolish and presumptuous it is on my part to try the impossible task of describing the Mother or Sri Aurobindo. For, how can human power understand divine personalities, to speak nothing of describing them? What I say about them here touches not even a fringe of what they really are. Indeed, they are infinitely great. If my experiences are inexpressible, still more so are the sources that inspire them.

I am a student of history, but I am more interested in the spiritual and cultural aspects of it than in any other. History I regard not as a mere narration of political events which the current books on the subject generally are, but as a revelation of a nation's soul, a subjective and objective study of its evolving self-expression in the varied forms of its creative activity. Histories of countries other than India are not so difficult to understand, since their achievements are but the extrinsic manifestations of their cultural life, which is mainly stimulated by the social and political aspirations of the people. But the criterion must be different in the case of India. Here is a country which rose to unique spiritual heights, yet for centuries it maintained a very high degree of material competence which could stand comparison with that of any of her progressive contemporaries. Wrong ideas and mischievous imputations about her life and culture are propagated by interested people to lower India in the estimation of the world. In my studies of Indian history, especially of the story of her civilisation, I felt stranded on a bewildering variety of conflicting materials which, though valuable in themselves, threw very little light on the real soul of this great people, till I had an opportunity of reading the "Arya" edited by Sri Aurobindo, containing his series of articles called 'A Defence of Indian Culture' written in reply to the unfounded charges of Sir William Archer. I found in them a most brilliant exposition of every aspect of India's cultural life. Sri Aurobindo accepted the challenge of that flippant vilifier of India and refuted the charges, point by point, vindicating with matter-of-fact logic that India had achieved great things, nay, the greatest, not only in the realm of the Spirit but also in the realm of Matter, and that in an equally abundant measure. His masterly and illuminating study of the whole range of India's creations including her art, literature, religion, philosophy, politics and secular sciences, made me feel that Sri Aurobindo was the only true interpreter of Indian culture. And the conviction began to grow on me that Sri Aurobindo must have some higher power than merely intellectual, and that the insight into the deeper regions of India's soul which he had brought to bear upon his writings was sadly missing in the writings of others on India. I felt that the history of India should be rewritten in the light of Sri Aurobindo's reading of it. For, he it is who with his Yogic vision has for the first time gone into the very soul of India, and in his inimitable language laid bare its unplumbed profundities to the bewildering gaze of the unbeliever. Intellect alone, unaided by a higher light, is an imperfect instrument of knowledge and is not to be relied upon as a guide to the real truth about India, since her civilisation is founded essentially, in the words of Sri Aurobindo, "on a continuously enlarging tradition of the Godward endeavour of the human spirit." Thus was opened before me a new world of hitherto-unknown wonders. The whole soul of 'Timeless' India glowed again in variegated colours in that fascinating picture drawn by the magic pen of her greatest son. The glory of old, the splendour of the days long gone by, was vividly shown again through the pages of "Arya" which unfolded in a captivating style the secrets lying behind everything India had done in the inner and outer courts of her life.

Sri Aurobindo has also discussed a number of other subjects in the same journal which are of equal importance to the study of history. The Master is always there in his singular brilliance. His studies in the social and political evolution of humanity have no parallel in the world of sociological literature. The forecasts that he made in them in 1916 about the destinies of modern States and nations are coming true today. He propounded a new exegesis of the Veda. He discussed the tendencies of the poetry of all ages and of all climes, and indicated the form poetry would take in the future. His dissertation on the Gita will without doubt rank him as the truest commentator of that masterly synthesis of Hindu thought. But everything he wrote pointed out his unerring vision of a glorious future for man, and his conviction that the need was greater now than before of a spiritual reconstruction of humanity. It was difficult for me then to perceive fully what Sri Aurobindo was exactly driving at in those writings of his. Indeed, Sri Aurobindo is at the present moment engaged in preparing the consciousness of man so that it may be ready to receive the Light that is descending upon the earth, the Light of which he is the supreme discoverer. Through the pages of the “Arya” was revealed a new Veda that indicated the path of self-perfection for humanity. Explaining the essential aim of these writings Sri Aurobindo wrote thus in the “Arya”:

Spirit being the fundamental truth of existence, life can be only its manifestation; Spirit must be not only the origin of life but its basis, its pervading reality and its highest total result. But the forms of life as they appear to us are at once its disguises and its instruments of self-manifestation. Man has to grow in knowledge till they cease to be disguises and grow in spiritual power and quality till they become in him its perfect instruments. To grow into the fulness of the Divine is the true law of human life, and to shape his earthly existence into its image is the meaning of his evolution. This is the fundamental tenet of the philosophy of the “Arya”. This truth had to be worked out first of all from the metaphysical point of view; for in philosophy metaphysical truth is the nucleus of the rest; it is the statement of the last and most general truths on which all the others depend or in which they are gathered up. Therefore we give the first place to the ‘Life Divine’. Here we start from the Vedantic position, its ideas of the Self and mind and life, of Sachchidananda and the world, of Knowledge and Ignorance, of rebirth and the Spirit. But Vedanta is popularly supposed to be a denial of life, and this is, no doubt, a dominant trend it has taken. Though starting from the original truth that all is the Brahman, the Self, it has insisted in the end that the world is simply not-Brahman not-Self; it has ended in paradox. We have attempted, on the contrary, to establish from its data a comprehensive Adwaita. We have shown that mind and life and Matter are derivations from the Self through a spiritual mind or supermind which is the real support of cosmic existence and by developing mind into that, man

can arrive at the real truth of the spirit in the world and the real truth and the highest law of life. The Self is Sachchidananda and there is no incurable antinomy between that and the world; only we see the world through the eyes of the Ignorance and we have to see it through the eyes of the Knowledge. Our ignorance itself is only knowledge developing out of its involution in the apparent nescience of Matter and on its way to return to its conscious integrality. To accomplish that return and manifest the spiritual life in the human existence is the opportunity given by the successions of rebirth. We accept the truth of evolution, not so much in the physical form given to it by the West as in its philosophical truth, the involution of life and mind and spirit here in Matter and their progressive manifestation. At the summit of this evolution is the spiritual life, the life divine. It was necessary to show that these truths were not inconsistent with the old Vedantic truth, therefore we included the explanations from this point of view of the Veda, two of the Upanishads and the Gita. The Gita¹ we are treating as a powerful application of the truth of the spirit to the largest and most difficult part of the truth of life, to action, and a way by which action can lead us to birth into the Spirit and can be harmonised with the spiritual life. Truth of philosophy is of merely theoretical value unless it can be lived, and we have therefore tried in the *Synthesis of Yoga* to arrive at a synthetical view of the principles and methods of the various lines of spiritual self-discipline and the way in which they can lead to an integral divine life in the human existence. But this is the individual self-development, and therefore it was necessary to show how our ideal can work out in the social life of mankind. In the *Psychology of Social Development*, we have indicated how these truths affect the evolution of human society. In the *Ideal of Human Unity*, we have taken the present trend of mankind towards a closer unification and tried to appreciate its tendencies and show what is wanting to them in order that real human unity may be achieved. (“Arya”, July, 1918)

This luminous exposition of truths that had come to the vision of Sri Aurobindo seemed to me to have been inspired by the highest wisdom; they were the last word, so to say, on the subjects the Master had taken up for discussion, — being, as they are, vitally connected with the remaking of man’s destiny. And as I tried to go deeper into them, they began to unfold to me intimations of a new meaning of all old cultural and spiritual values, a meaning that is to be found nowhere else. Sri Aurobindo’s *magnum opus*, *The Life Divine*,² which in a magnificent way gives his message, and his exceedingly illuminating discussion of the methods of Yogic discipline necessary for the attainment of the end he promises to humanity, as well

1. Sri Aurobindo’s *Essays on the Gita* are now published in book form.

2. Recently published in two volumes.

as everything that he had written in the “Arya” on the trend and future of all human affairs, brought home to me the fact that apart from their being unique spiritual treasures, they are also sublime philosophical and literary marvels of classical perfection in which reason and inner vision had so wonderfully blended to produce what I felt to be the profound utterances of hitherto-unknown verities that had sprung from a higher than the ordinary source of knowledge for the definite purpose of enlightening mankind about its divine possibilities and spiritual evolution. They are all gold, pure and sterling gold, and the Sun whose light they reveal is waiting to burst into the splendours of a New Dawn for humanity.

With this mental equipment I approached the story of Sri Aurobindo’s Yoga and spiritual teachings and in my own way tried to follow him, waiting for the day which would witness the fulfilment of my long-cherished desire to see him whose unique thought had revolutionised my mind and heart. Conditions, however, began to be favourable to my taking a very great decision in my life. But that is a different story. At last the day came for me to undertake a pilgrimage to Sri Aurobindo. I reached Pondicherry in good time for the Darshan on the 24th November, 1939, on which very date in 1926 Sri Aurobindo had achieved a notable victory in his sadhana. My fellow-pilgrim was my esteemed friend and colleague, the eminent Chinese Professor Tan Yun-Shan of Poet Tagore’s Visva-Bharati. Prof. Tan is an erudite classical scholar, deeply versed in Buddhism, and an ardent lover of India. He is the Founder-Director of Sino-Indian Cultural Society, and the Director of the Cheena-Bhavana of Visva-Bharati. He is essentially a spiritual man. His mental preparation for this pilgrimage was confined to the reading of a few books of Sri Aurobindo and to whatever information he could gather from friends familiar with the ideals of the Asrama at Pondicherry. He went there with an open mind, and returned full of feelings which he subsequently expressed in the course of an extremely interesting Press interview. Incidentally, mention may be made here of a Chinese saying to which he referred: “One should go on a pilgrimage with one’s mind emptied of its normal contents.” The Professor told me that his experiences during his stay at Pondicherry were so deep that he had no language to convey them to others. He was inwardly touched by everything he saw in the Asrama, so much so that he felt he must establish some sort of contact between the Asrama and the thought-leaders of his country. The Professor has already introduced Sri Aurobindo to China through a series of articles in the leading periodicals of his country. In one of the talks we used to have almost everyday with the sadhakas at Pondicherry, the Professor was told by one of them that China had never been conquered by any country. He made the quick retort, “But for once she was conquered by a great Indian, Lord Buddha; and she is again going to be conquered by another great Indian, Sri Aurobindo.” These are significant words from one so pure and sincere in his devotion to India.

Since my arrival at Pondicherry, I began to feel a change in me. The world that I had left behind almost vanished from my mind; and I stepped into another which

I felt was throbbing with the spiritual dynamism of a new life. One is bound to feel it and be exalted by it, if one is receptive enough to take in the subtle influences which the atmosphere of the Asrama radiates. As a matter of fact, the Chinese friend remarked that the Asrama was not in Pondicherry but Pondicherry was in the Asrama.

The Mother accepts *pronam* from the sadhakas and the pilgrims on the day previous to the one on which Sri Aurobindo gives his Darshan. I saw the Mother and felt with all my heart that she was really the Mother of the Universe. My joy that evening knew no bounds. I burst into an exuberance of ecstatic emotions; and the thrills did not stop till an inner hush overpowered them. The Chinese Professor also had a similar experience. His lovely face beamed with joy; and sometime after the *pronam* was over, he began repeating in an inspired voice, “*Namo Avalokiteswara*” (Salutation to Thee, who hast descended to the earth out of mercy for Thy children). We were both of us in our happiest mood, drinking in the delight that was everywhere in the Asrama. Feelings like these were heightened a hundred times in my case when a few days later the Mother very graciously permitted me to sit at her lotus-feet and touch them and talk to her and meditate. The pilgrim was at the feet of the Mother, the Mother who is All-Light. I felt as if a whole world of light came down flooding this tiny earth of ours, and everything in it looked up and bathed in the purifying glow of that transfiguring light. How sweet was her voice! How magical her touch! And who will not perceive the pressure of a force from above? Was it not the magnificence of heaven that had descended on earth to lead her children to their highest destiny? Who says the Mother is aged? She is ageless, and the very embodiment of eternal youth. She is verily the *Rajarajeswari*, the Divine Consort of the Lord of Lords, always offering her distressed children her gift of *abhaya* (protection), and calling them by her heavenly smile to come and accept it and be immortal. Will you not wake up, O Man, and listen to your eternal Mother? “Remember and offer” are her words. Remember that you belong to the Mother, and offer yourself, whole and entire, to Her Will. All your questions will be answered; all your seekings will be satisfied; and victory will be yours only for the asking. What a hope, what a joy the Mother is ever giving to her children! There is no fear for one who has once seen the fadeless smile in the Mother’s face, — the Mother who is All-Power, All-Beauty and All-Love. Rejoice, O Man, Rejoice; the Mother is come. “The world is thrilled with joy at the foot-fall of the Mother” — truly sings poet Nishikanto.

The Darshan of Sri Aurobindo is another momentous event. It stirred the very depths of our being. I saw before me the Master whom I had been cherishing in my heart with love and adoration from the very early days of my life. I had a memory of Sri Aurobindo when he had visited his — also my — native-place, Konnagar, in the district of Hooghly, during the Swadeshi days. But Sri Aurobindo now has completely changed out of what he had been then. I saw the Master seated on a throne, a majestic figure, full of health and radiating an aura that resembled what is believed

to have been a characteristic of Sri Krishna. I had an inkling of it a few minutes before the Darshan when I was waiting for my turn in the long row downstairs, the Darshan being held upstairs. It was a sharp flash of blue light dazzling my vision. But what did I see when the Darshan took place? Was it a human, or if at all a human, was it not the figure of the Supreme among men, the Purushottama? And the eyes of Sri Aurobindo? What a glow in them! I felt that the eyes of the Master, full of fire, pierced through my whole self, and everything in it at once became crystal clear to him. It is difficult to stand the lustre of those eyes for long. But what struck me most was an infinite calm which seemed to have concentrated and condensed itself in Sri Aurobindo. But where was the physical in it? Was it not a calm reflecting a solid peace, a quietude stabilised into a perfect equilibrium, a Soul conscious and active amid the vast silence of the Over-Soul? But my eyes failed me and my heart began to feel that there was a centre of force in Sri Aurobindo to which everything in the physical world gravitated, as if impelled by some unseen power. Nothing existed but a Presence in the midst of a blue halo shot with flashes from the smiling face of the Mother. But no, the personality was there all the same, though enveloped in a mystery which my intelligence could not penetrate.

Sri Aurobindo is a mystery *par excellence*. It is only when he has allowed us that we have been able to understand him a little, just a little and no more. Take for instance, his contributions to the political awakening in India during the Swadeshi days. Were they as spiritual as anything else? The India that he worshipped was to him the Mother in the highest acceptation of the term, the Shakti, the Timeless and Eternal India. It would not be true to say that his ideology of nationalism was wholly understood, then or now, though it was widely appreciated, and inspired tremendously the youth of the country. As a poet, Sri Aurobindo's is a voice and a rhythmic utterance of the vaster and infinite existence of man, singing of the wonder and delight of the invisible worlds. As a lover, he loves those who are to come in the future, and he loves the present because it is the forerunner of that which is to come. As an exponent of Indian culture, he revises the past of India and discovers the hidden meaning of her great creations. As a Yogi, he knows the Supermind and sees it descending to the earth to transform the nature of man; and by diving into the unknown depths of spirit, life and matter, he discovers their points of contact for a greater synthesis into which human life is going to be rebuilt. As a prophet, he speaks in unfaltering accents of the glorious future of man, a future which he always sees before him, and which he believes to be inevitable in the terrestrial evolution of man. "We do not belong to the past dawns but to the noons of the future", he says. But as a Master, Sri Aurobindo is above everything; a Master who has risen to a Supreme Consciousness, and is himself its highest manifestation; a Master who is a flaming torch to those who are in the dark, their inspirer and guide; a Master who makes heroes out of common clay and promises them the life immortal; a Master whose mission is to create a New Man, a New Civilisation, a New Kingdom of

Heaven on earth. Yet Sri Aurobindo is greater than each of these high roles in which he is helping man forward on the journey of his life. How little do we know of him through these few ways in which he has so far introduced himself to the public! The 'Real Man' in him is not wholly visible in the characters that outwardly people the drama of his life; for his life, as Sri Aurobindo himself says, "has not been on the surface for man to see". What then is really he? Will he remain a mystery for ever, a tempting, but baffling mystery? The answer he has already begun to give. His Asrama in Pondicherry and his books published so far are an earnest of it. The key to the secret of his life and message he is himself forging there in the concentrated atmosphere of his Yogic activity. Those who will go there with an open eye will see it. Those who will go there with an open heart will feel it. The Chinese Professor who was silent for a while after the Darshan remarked in a subdued tone, "He is so great, indeed greater than we can conceive of."

The site of the Asrama almost on the sea-beach adds greatly to the beauty of its delightful surroundings. The Asrama is housed in about fifty buildings all painted light grey. They cover a wide area in the very cleanest part of the town. A group of houses joined together and enclosed forms the central Asrama where Sri Aurobindo, the Mother and several sadhakas live. The Asrama everywhere is a model of cleanliness. The houses are all of them kept wonderfully clean; and every effort is made that they may look neat and nice. Lovely flower-beds adorn the houses. Flowers have a very important place in the life there, their occult significances given by the Mother have a bearing on the various stages and aspects of the sadhana. The atmosphere is exceptionally quiet and peaceful. The Asrama has its own school, its press, its library, its workshop, its bakery and its dairy, all managed by the inmates themselves. There is also an engineering section. The meals are served in a spacious hall decorated with beautiful pictures done by the sadhakas. The cooking and the cleaning of the utensils are done entirely by the inmates. There are about two hundred³ inmates of both the sexes, hailing from different parts of India and abroad. Every one of them has his or her own share of work in the management of the Asrama. It is a part of their sadhana. Everything with regard to discipline and organisation is in the hands of the Mother.

A word about the Mother. She comes of an aristocratic lineage in France. Early in life she had her spiritual awakening and commissioned in a vision, she came to Pondicherry in 1914 and found in Sri Aurobindo the Lord, the eternal Sri Krishna, who had appeared to her in many of her dreams and visions and whom she had been seeking ever since she had her highest realisation and discovered the Truth of the divine manifestation in humanity. It is supremely important to remember that long before they met each other on the physical plane, the Mother and Sri Aurobindo had been following identical lines of sadhana towards the fulfilment of that which

3. In February 1940. The number mounted up to 700 in 1949.

was their common mission. There is therefore a world of meaning in the Mother's coming back to the Asrama in 1920 where since that time she has been living as its presiding deity, the one who is adored as the very incarnation of the supreme Shakti.

Everything in the Asrama is taking shape under the Mother's direct guidance. She is always alive even to the minute details with regard to the management of the Asrama. The sadhakas cheerfully perform the duties she allots to them according to their nature and capacity. A spirit of joyous consecration inspires them in all their activities both in their personal and communal life. Every one is conscious of it: and the smile is there always in their faces when they work: for they know that they are fulfilling the Mother's will; or rather, the Mother is fulfilling her will through them. There is freedom in the midst of perfect discipline; and the whole Asrama is run on principles which are difficult for outsiders to understand easily. There are no written rules; yet everything goes on with clock-wise precision. When the Chinese Professor insisted on knowing the rules that were followed by the sadhakas, he had in mind the rules of the Buddhist Sanghas; and he was wondering all the time how things could go on so smoothly and in such an excellent way without there being any written directions for the sadhakas to follow in their spiritual life and in their work for the Asrama. A sadhaka explained to him the essential meaning of the ideal the Asrama stands for. The sadhakas there are required always to feel as if they were conscious instruments of the Divine. It is the Divine who is working through them. They have only to purify and make themselves fit for the Divine to fulfil Himself in and through them. It is the Nature's own Yoga, as Sri Nalinikanto Gupta so finely puts it. Since Nature has her own laws, rules made by man have no place in the Yoga. The Mother's guidance in the sadhana is available whenever necessary. She is ever ready to help, but she helps in her own way, even without the sadhaka's outwardly asking for or knowing it.

The personal life of the sadhakas is also very remarkable. There are many among them who are highly educated; some who have artistic and literary talents of a very high order; some who are poets and musicians, and some with some kind of education, technical or otherwise. But irrespective of any previous training or gift, some of the sadhakas surprised the writer by their exceptionally brilliant artistic and poetical productions. They confessed to their ignorance of any such talent in them before they joined the Asrama, and said that after they had taken up the Yoga, they felt an urge from within, and a gracious Help from above which combined to produce through them those marvellous works of art and poetry. A new world was opened before them from where messages came trooping into their minds in inspired moments and they became vehicles of their expression in coloured forms or rhythmic words. There are some among the sadhakas who are noted singers. It is a sublime aesthetic treat to hear their entrancing songs whose spiritual appeal is deep and dynamic. The singers become inspired when they sing, their songs having something of heaven in them. The Chinese Professor and I had opportunities of contact with

many sadhakas. Their company was very impressive and exalting. The sadhakas were very kind to us; and a certain inwardness could always be perceived in their movements. The replies that they gave to our questions about various spiritual and cultural problems were remarkably illuminating.

The only daily congregation that takes place in the Asrama is the evening meditation for which there is a separate hall exactly on the ground-floor of Sri Aurobindo's residence. There every evening the sadhakas gather and sit in silent meditation for about three quarters of an hour in the presence of the Mother. Perfect stillness reigns; and a force seems to be active in its radiation all around.

The Asrama is not a place for curiosity-mongers. It is neither a resort for rest or retirement. Only those who have the inner call are permitted to come and stay there. For, be it noted, it is a centre of a new life with the Divine as its sole Architect and Guide, the Divine who is perfecting his instruments for the greater work of the future, of which the sign is already visible in everything that can be seen in the Asrama even by casual visitors, provided that they go there with some inner preparation beforehand. Happily, men could be found today in India and abroad, and their number is steadily increasing, who are beginning to open to the deeper meaning of Sri Aurobindo's message. But the pity of it is that there should be others who with their superficial knowledge of Sri Aurobindo come forward too readily to belittle him and his work. There is no worse calamity for man than when he rejects spiritual values, and betraying the poverty of his soul, commits spiritual suicide. It is not for any personal gain that Sri Aurobindo seeks to liberate man from the bond-age of ignorance and imperfection. He loses nothing if man does not hear him. But man gains immensely, if laying aside his vanities, he approaches Sri Aurobindo with love, humility and faith. Little do we know what tremendous odds Sri Aurobindo had to fight down in his ceaseless efforts to win victory in his *tapasya*. The house is still there in the Asrama to bear witness to it. Confined to a corner in that house, day in and day out, month in and month out, year in and year out, he had steadfastly adhered to his pursuit till he attained his supreme Illumination. After he had an interview with Sri Aurobindo in 1928, Poet Rabindranath told the world that he would wait for the message of Sri Aurobindo. The message has been given; the Word has been uttered. It is for man now to come and accept it and be blessed.

India is the earliest in history to have started on her quest of the Infinite. The quest has always been there, as also its unique victories. But in spite of them India could not keep up the vigour of her life for long. The days of her decline began when, among other reasons, she rejected life and its material values as *maya*, and failed to catch the true significance of the saying of her ancient seers that Matter also is Brahman, and that the spiritualisation of life would be the crowning achievement of humanity. What therefore is necessary now for India to be able to new-create her destiny is to find out means by which she can purify her life and lift it up to its perfection. Sri Aurobindo has realised the oneness of spirit and matter

and in his Yogic vision has seen a Light which is descending to the earth to effect through their synthesis a change in the consciousness of man. Life, mind and body, imperfect as they are now, cannot be the vehicle of that divine manifestation. They have therefore to be transformed by the descent into them of that Light. As Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "Brass wares often require polishing, but gold ones do not." So, if by sadhana man could once open to that Force and with its help change into gold, his earth-nature would never again tarnish him, for it would no longer be earthly but transformed; and he would thenceforth be a fit instrument of the Divine. In the luminous words of Sri Aurobindo: "The one aim of our Yoga is an inner self-development by which each one who follows it can in time discover the one Self in all and evolve a higher consciousness than the mental, a spiritual and supramental consciousness which will transform and divinise human nature." Sri Aurobindo believes that "A divine Life in the manifestation is not only possible as the high result and ransom of our present life in the Ignorance but, it is the inevitable outcome and consummation of Nature's evolutionary endeavour. . . . The animal is a living laboratory in which Nature has worked out man. Man himself may well be a thinking and living laboratory in which, and with whose conscious co-operation she wills to work out the superman, the God." It is also the conviction of Sri Aurobindo that "The mind of man is now opening to an unprecedented largeness of vision of the greatness of the worlds, the wonder of life, the self of man, and the mystery of the spirit in him and the universe." Thus humanity is being prepared for the end Sri Aurobindo aims at. He says, "The earliest aspiration of man is also his last; the aspiration for God, Light, Freedom and Immortality. . . . To know, possess and be the divine being in an animal and egoistic consciousness, to convert our twilit or obscure physical mentality into the plenary supramental illumination, to build peace and a self-existent bliss where there is only a stress of transitory satisfactions besieged by physical pain and emotional suffering, to establish an infinite freedom in a world which presents itself as a group of mechanical necessities, to discover and realise the immortal life in a body subjected to death and constant mutation, — this is offered to us as the manifestation of God in Matter and the goal of Nature in her terrestrial evolution." "This supramental change (*of man*) is a thing decreed and inevitable in the evolution of the earth-consciousness; for its upward ascent is not ended and mind is not its last summit. But that the change may arrive, take form and endure, there is needed the call from below and a will to recognise and not deny the Light when it comes, and there is needed the sanction of the Supreme from above. The power that mediates between the sanction and the call is the presence and power of the Divine Mother. The Mother's power and not any human endeavour and tapasya can alone rend the lid and tear the covering and shape the vessel and bring down into this world of obscurity and falsehood and death and suffering Truth and Light and Life Divine and the immortal's Ananda." Therefore "Follow your soul and not your mind, your soul that answers to the Truth; trust the Divine

Power and she will free the godlike elements in you and shape all into an expression of Divine Nature.”

Sri Aurobindo holds out the promise that this aspiration of man is going to be fulfilled; and he has chalked out the path, the Path of Integral Yoga, through a complete self-giving to the Divine, by which man will be able to regenerate himself into his truest self. Is not his then the last and noblest word on man and his destiny? and his message, the greatest, man has ever heard from the Masters of his race?

SISIR KUMAR MITRA

There is a tendency in modern times to depreciate the value of the beautiful and overstress the value of the useful, a tendency curbed in Europe by the imperious insistence of an agelong tradition of culture and generous training of the aesthetic perceptions; but in India, where we have been cut off by a mercenary and soulless education from all our ancient roots of culture and tradition, it is corrected only by the stress of imagination, emotion and spiritual delicacy, submerged but not yet destroyed, in the temperament of the people. The value attached by the ancients to music, art and poetry has become almost unintelligible to an age bent on depriving life of its meaning by turning earth into a sort of glorified antheap or beehive and confusing the lowest, though most primary in necessity, of the means of human progress with the aim of this great evolutionary process. The first and lowest necessity of the race is that of self-preservation in the body by a sufficient supply and equable distribution of food, shelter and raiment. This is a problem which the oldest communistic human societies solved to perfection, and without communism it cannot be solved except by a convenient but inequitable arrangement which makes of the majority slaves provided with these primary wants and necessities and ministering under compulsion to a few who rise higher and satisfy larger wants.

Sri Aurobindo

(Early Cultural Writings, CWSA, Vol. 1, p. 433)

THE MOTHER'S ROOMS

(Apart from those at the Ashram Main Building)

“There are moments when the spirit moves among men and the breath of the Lord is abroad on the waters of our being . . .”

Sri Aurobindo
‘The Hour of God’

The Mother has many Rooms at various locations. They were built when she was moving about amongst us everyday — out of the Home i.e. the Ashram Main Building. The usual time for this, her coming out, was 4 p.m. She would return only around 8.30 or 9.00 p.m. (Exceptionally, we have known her to go back at 1 a.m. of the next day!! This happened on a 1st of December, after the annual Drama Programme which that particular year had a duration of 6 hrs or more. She even joked: “It is like when I was in Paris.”) It was because of these “outer” activities that these several Rooms had to come up.

The main or most important Room was undoubtedly the one at our old Playground.

The Mother's Room in the Playground

Her presence graced it every evening for several years. The Room today is the very embodiment of that Presence, with a pulse of its own, and a warmth and light. Most of those who come to the Playground feel this and stand quietly and bathe in this light and warmth. Apart from the light and warmth, just the physical impact is a “thing of beauty and a joy for ever”. The constituents of this beauty are very few and simple. Right in the centre, at the back is a table with the photo of Sri Aurobindo in Mahasamadhi. This was brought for the Playground by the Mother when she came after 12 days of absence (i.e. 5.12.1950 to 17.12.1950). Around this photo are vases tastefully arranged with flowers and leaves, quite a bit of Japanese influence is evinced, I believe, thanks to the Mother's influence, passed on through the years — Gauri-di to Bhavatarini to Chanda to Kokila and other helpers on special occasions. There are two cupboards to the right, one with drawn curtains containing paints, brushes, papers etc., and another full of trophy-cups won by our sports-persons and offered to the Mother. On the left, an alcove holds a glass-topped table and a cushioned ‘*moda*’ (an hour-glass shaped seat with no back rest or arm-rests). She often sat here and did some work (including cutting her nails). Next is a large cupboard with shutters done up with a beautiful painting of pink lotuses — ‘Avatar’ — by

Sanjiban. Then, on the left near corner, is a wooden multi-purpose table, and beside it, along the wall immediately to left of the door, is her sofa — probably the most important feature — because the one most used by her. She rested on this sofa, in a semi-reclining position, taking the weight off her feet — feet that bear our weight and that of our world. She would lean on a large cushion and relax. Many an individual soul carries indelible memories of her dispensing ‘Divine Largesse’ from this haloed seat.

The last attraction is the design on the floor. This, now, is done with paints, sprayed or brushed. The painting is changed every Darshan by two or three artists. But in the Golden era “when the Spirit moved amongst us” the design was done with flowers — jasmine (‘Purity’), marigold (‘Plasticity’), coral jasmine (‘Aspiration’) — and it was removed and recreated everyday!

This main Room is connected to an inner room to its west. This ‘Inner Room’ is rarely, if at all, seen by the public. This Room contains several chairs of the Mother and a large almirah containing capes used by the Mother during the cooler months. It was used by the Mother if she wanted to have any refreshment — fruit juice or a few cashewnuts, or . . . This Room was connected to a small bathroom, neat with a white-tiled floor and walls. Both these, the Inner Room and the bathroom, have a door each opening on to the courtyard of the Body-building Gymnasium. They are the utility doors, the normal access to the Room for all workers (i.e. Gauridi, Bhavatarini, Chanda, Kokila etc.)

This is about all on Mother’s Room in the Playground.

The Mother’s Room at the Sports Ground

This, I would opine, is the next or second-most important Room. Mother liked it very much. Also, it is the one most used by her — apart from the one in the Playground.

Mother came to the Sports Ground every day of the Athletics Competitions — these lasted a whole month or more. She also attended the 2nd of December Demonstrations, the dress rehearsal and the final day.

It is a simple room, the furniture consisting of (1) a cot with carved wooden frame and woven cane bed; (2) a simple cushioned chair; (3) a half-oval-shaped teak-wood table fixed to the wall; (4) a small wall cupboard to keep her personal toiletries. The whole Northern wall outside had a concrete trough. Flower or asparagus (‘Spiritual speech’) pots were kept in the trough as decoration during the months she came to the Sports Ground.

The Mother’s Room at the Theatre

The Mother went there often enough. She watched many a rehearsal for the 1st of December presentation. When her play, *Ascension vers la Vérité*, was being staged,

she chose the actors and was personally directing from the hall! So there is a small room for retiring with an attached toilet right next to the stage (to the right if you face the stage).

The Mother's Room at the New Horizon Sugar Mills

The Mills are situated at Ariyur, a small township eighteen kilometres away on the Villipuram Road. They were owned by Laljibhai & family. He migrated to Pondicherry from East Africa on the Mother's instructions (before Idi Amin expelled most non-natives. He is reputed to have eaten some of his enemies. Later he was himself deposed in a coup.)

The Room stands on extensive grounds (about a football-field area). One drives in up to the steps leading to the Room. A long covered walkway with two lily ponds greets the visitors. The Room itself is raised a few feet from the garden area. A spacious verandah goes all round the Room. It has a buff-coloured mosaic floor. The Room is accessed through glass doors. There is a back door too. The glass panels have etched on them a reproduction of the well-known "Annonciateurs du Monde Supramental" (a creation of the artist Promode Kumar and the title was given by Mother). The Room itself is large, airy and well-lighted by large windows opening on to the verandah. The floor inside is of grayish mosaic. A few chairs are arranged for devotees. In front, a chair for her. The small bathroom is at one end of the Room. It has pale green ceramic tiles. There is also a bathtub.

The whole Room is infused with beauty and an intense silence, so that one speaks in a subdued voice, awed and respectful.

At the entrance, a beautiful remark by the Mother says all that is to be said of this place:

“A BEAUTIFUL HOUSE

IN A BEAUTIFUL PLACE

OFFERED BY A BEAUTIFUL HEART.”

14.05.1961

The Mother has been here only twice or thrice. At first Gauri-di was the caretaker helped by Bhavatarini. At present Prafulla is the caretaker.

The Mills are no more owned by Laljibhai's family.

“An inner fullness has come in like the coming in of light in dark caves. It fills, it illumines, it vibrates the multiple strings of life . . .”¹

1. These are the opening words of the 'Hymn to the Mother of Radiances'. Although it was first published as being from Sri Aurobindo, it was later established that it was Amrita's writing corrected by Sri Aurobindo. — Ed.

A Few Anecdotes

1. The Mother's Room in the Playground

a) The Inner Room was a passage — from the Playground to the old school's Kindergarten section. There was a Malkhamb Post inside it for a short period.

b) Gauri-di was put in charge. She needed help for much of the work (sweeping, cleaning and arranging vases etc.) One day Mother pointed at Bhavatarini (who was in her group in the Playground) and told Gauri-di that she (Bhavatarini) would help her. It is about this time that she also mentioned that Gauri-di need not have the paid worker (Govindan by name) handling the vases, roses etc. So Bhavatarini was roped in — and what a 'rope'!

c) The bathroom was built some time after the Rooms were made ready. There is a small story behind — showing up our thoughtlessness.

The Mother, as mentioned earlier, left her Home at 4 p.m. and only returned at 8.30-9.00 p.m. or even later. She needed to use the bathroom at least once during these hours when she was out.

Once she cut short her programme and went Home. It was then, and only then, that we woke up. Manoranjan was assigned the job. He, a tremendous worker, sat on a chair in the Playground, day and night, supervising his team of workers, and completed the job in a day or two.

d) Jayantilal, one of the four Ashram artists of the time, was our teacher. (Students: Dhanavanti, Usha R., Kumud and me) It was his idea to seek the Mother's permission for us, his students, to make the design on the floor of the Mother's Room. On his birthday we suggested he do the design. He drew a saree-clad woman, with arms out stretched upwards releasing a dove; all this was done with jasmine flowers.

The Mother came and saw the design. She did not comment but told Gauri-di that we should not draw human figures as part of the design.

e) Once Joshi (of Laboratoire) asked the Mother about the proportions to adhere to when drawing Sri Aurobindo's symbol. She said that the relative proportions may vary, but the numbers should be strictly stuck to! — one square, two triangles, three leaves (of the lotus); four, five and six the number of the petals of the lotus, and seven for the waves of water. (There are any number of disfigured symbols strewn around by zealous devotees, well-meaning but ignorant to some degree.)

f) When the Room was renovated, the floor too was redone. It was very smooth and polished. At that time some wax polish was applied (an ill-advised move). The floor is a few inches lower than the Playground level. So, when coming in, one has to step down on to the doormat placed there inside. The Mother did so — and the doormat shot off from under her feet. She would have fallen flat on her back — but Pranab-da, ever alert, caught her and put her back on her feet! It could have been an

Earth-shaking event otherwise!

g) One may notice on the far left-hand corner, a tall stool, and on it a figure on a rearing horse. It is that of Jeanne d'Arc, the medieval heroine of France, the Maid of Orleans, who was burnt at the stake by her own countrymen, egged on by the British.

This was offered to Mother by Kameshwar Rao, an old, well-known sadhak, on a Darshan day, after he gave a dance performance, dressed as Ganesha, replete with a paunch and elephant head. What connection between Jeanne d'Arc and Lord Ganesha, you wonder? Not the faintest clue. But, many years later, I heard it said (but not in reference to the dance) that our Mother was Jeanne d'Arc in one of her previous lives.

h) I had made a design with jasmine flowers — a tiger's head in a ring of flames. I was a bit late that day and the Mother stepped in, after her tennis, before I was out. She looked at my artistic effort and asked, "*Ah! Qu'est-ce que tu m'as fais?*" (What have you done for me?)

I replied, "*Un tigre, Douce Mère.*" (A tiger, Sweet Mother.)

Mother: "*Non — ce que tu as fais est un lion sans crinière.*" (No, what you have done is a lion without the mane.)

I was silent. She surmised I had no idea of what she was saying. She took a chit pad and with a red pen, rapidly sketched a lion's head alongside a tiger's to show me the difference. I was fool enough or dumb enough not to have stretched out my hand and asked for that 'Bit' of paper. She must have balled it up and thrown into her waste-paper basket!

Once when the Mother was resting on her sofa, a lizard dropped on her (from the ceiling). Gauri-di was present, — but pulled two ways — to scream and run away (lizardphobia) or to stay duty-bound and remove the 'offensive creature'? She was bracing herself to do her duty, but the Mother made a sign to let the lizard be!! It was later told to us that the lizard is the Mother's *vāhana* or vehicle of choice. (Our ancient lore tells us of many a *vāhana*: Vishnu — Garuda; Shiva — Nandi (Bull); Brahma — Swan; Kartikeya — Peacock; Ganesha — Rat etc.)

The Mother retired by stages and stopped coming to the Playground or anywhere at all. The persons who did the art-work, Dhanavanti, Usha R, Kanak, Ranju, Joshi — all retired subsequently. At present, from among the earlier ones, I remain, and Chanda has joined the team, with Habul and Mahesh and Kokila helping out.

The designs are painted, sprayed or brushed. No longer are they done with flowers. They are done only for the four Darshans. I take charge of 21st February and 24th April. Chanda takes charge of the other two i.e. 15th August and 24th November.

Any other occasion (17th November, 1st January etc) has to be volunteered by one of us and Bhavatarini, the incumbent Head has to goad one of us.

The Room is kept as clean and neat as ever, Chanda, Kokila doing their good

bit to keep it so. The decorative flower vases are also seen to by them. On Darshan Days everything is done on a much grander scale by the same persons, but Bhavatarini chips in as she is the overall in-charge since Gauri-di's demise.

2. The Mother's Room at the New Horizon Sugar Mills

The garden has a big *champa* ('Supramental Psychological Perfection') tree. It is unusually large for a *champa*. It was bearing flowers. Laljibhai used to take at least one of its flowers to the Mother. When the Mother left her physical body in 1973, the tree stopped bearing flowers. For a time Laljibhai watched and waited — but no — the flowering did not resume. Laljibhai then prayed, spoke to the tree saying, "Why don't you give me a flower? I still give her the flower, or want to — if you give — she is there for me." And wonder of wonders — the tree started flowering again.

It continues to flower.

BATTI (PRABHAKAR R.)

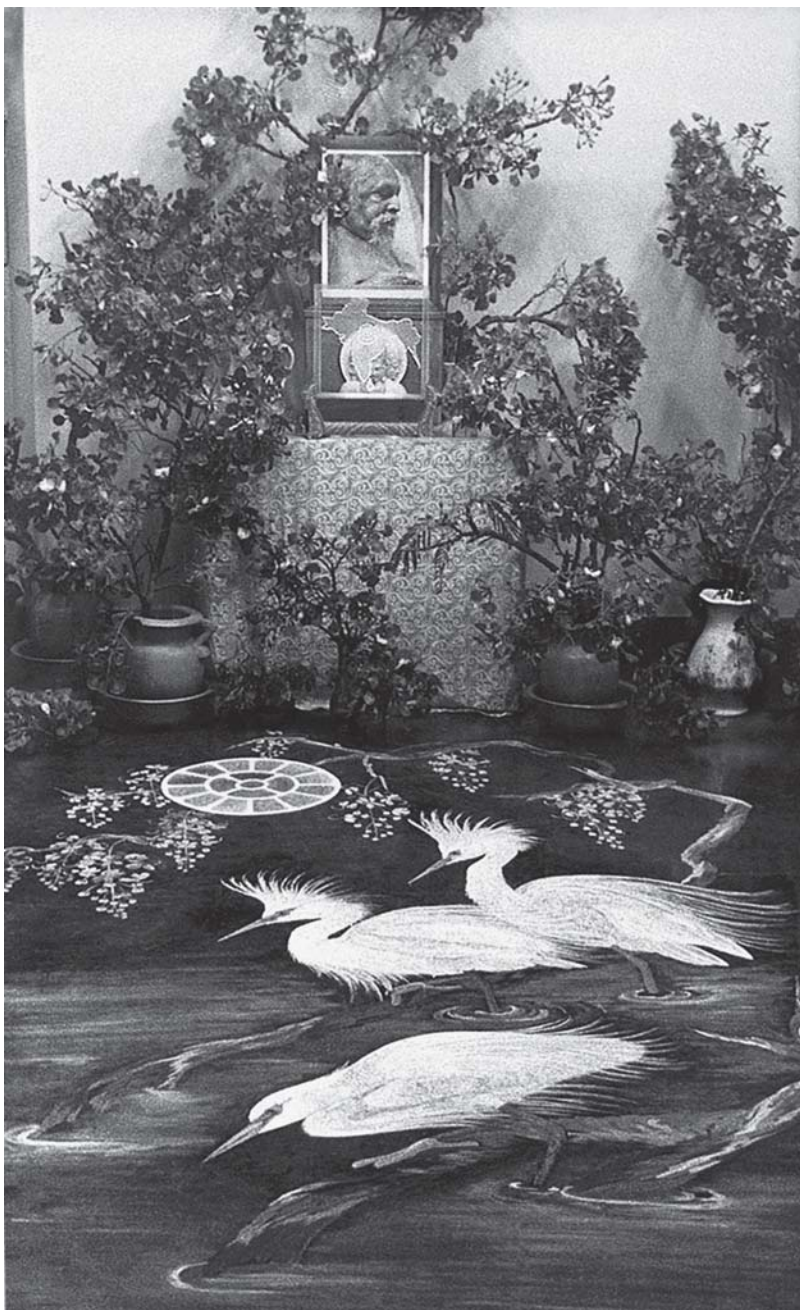
There are two great forces in the universe, silence and speech. Silence prepares, speech creates. Silence acts, speech gives the impulse to action. Silence compels, speech persuades. The immense and inscrutable processes of the world all perfect themselves within, in a deep and august silence, covered by a noisy and misleading surface of sound — the stir of innumerable waves above, the fathomless resistless mass of the ocean's waters below. Men see the waves, they hear the rumour and the thousand voices and by these they judge the course of the future and the heart of God's intention; but in nine cases out of ten they misjudge. Therefore it is said that in History it is always the unexpected that happens. But it would not be the unexpected if men could turn their eyes from superficialities and look into substance, if they accustomed themselves to put aside appearances and penetrate beyond them to the secret and disguised reality, if they ceased listening to the noise of life and listened rather to its silence.

Sri Aurobindo

(Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 13, p. 57)



Flower decoration in the Mother's Room
in the Playground



Painting of herons in the Mother's Room
in the Playground



The Mother's Room at the New Horizon Sugar Mills



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