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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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All correspondence to be addressed to:

MOTHER INDIA, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry - 605 002, India

Phone: (0413) 2233642

e-mail: motherindia@sriurobindoashram.org.in

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Founding Editor: K. D. SETHNA (AMAL KIRAN)

Editor: S. RAVI

Associate Editors: HEMANT KAPOOR & RANGANATH RAGHAVAN

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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

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No. 1

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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‘IT COMES AT LAST, THE DAY FORESEEN OF OLD’

. . . He rises now; for God has taken birth.
The revolutions that pervade the world
Are faint beginnings and the discus hurled
Of Vishnu speeds down to enring the earth.

The old shall perish; it shall pass away,
Expunged, annihilated, blotted out;
And all the iron bands that ring about
Man’s wide expansion shall at last give way.

Freedom, God, Immortality; the three
Are one and shall be realised at length,
Love, Wisdom, Justice, Joy and utter Strength
Gather into a pure felicity.

It comes at last, the day foreseen of old,
What John in Patmos saw, what Shelley dreamed,
Vision and vain imagination deemed,
The City of Delight, the Age of Gold.

The Iron Age is ended. Only now
The last fierce spasm of the dying past
Shall shake the nations, and when that has passed,
Earth washed of ills shall raise a fairer brow.

This is man’s progress; for the Iron Age
Prepares the Age of Gold. What we call sin,
Is but man’s leavings as from deep within
The Pilot guides him in his pilgrimage.

He leaves behind the ill with strife and pain,
Because it clings and constantly returns,
And in the fire of suffering fiercely burns
More sweetness to deserve, more strength to gain.

He rises to the good with Titan wings:
And this the reason of his high unease,

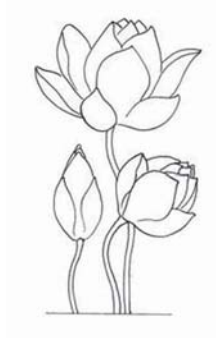
'IT COMES AT LAST, THE DAY FORESEEN OF OLD'

Because he came from the infinities
To build immortally with mortal things;

The body with increasing soul to fill,
Extend Heaven's claim upon the toiling earth
And climb from death to a diviner birth
Grasped and supported by immortal Will.

SRI AUROBINDO
'In the Moonlight'

(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, pp. 243-44)



DIVERSITY IN ONENESS

It is essential to keep constantly in view the fundamental powers and realities of life if we are not to be betrayed by the arbitrary rule of the logical reason and its attachment to the rigorous and limiting idea into experiments which, however convenient in practice and however captivating to a unitarian and symmetrical thought, may well destroy the vigour and impoverish the roots of life. For that which is perfect and satisfying to the system of the logical reason, may yet ignore the truth of life and the living needs of the race. Unity is an idea which is not at all arbitrary or unreal; for unity is the very basis of existence. The oneness that is secretly at the foundation of all things, the evolving spirit in Nature is moved to realise consciously at the top; the evolution moves through diversity from a simple to a complex oneness. Unity the race moves towards and must one day realise.

But uniformity is not the law of life. Life exists by diversity; it insists that every group, every being shall be, even while one with all the rest in its universality, yet by some principle or ordered detail of variation unique. The over-centralisation which is the condition of a working uniformity, is not the healthy method of life. Order is indeed the law of life, but not an artificial regulation. The sound order is that which comes from within as the result of a nature that has discovered itself and found its own law and the law of its relations with others. Therefore the truest order is that which is founded on the greatest possible liberty; for liberty is at once the condition of vigorous variation and the condition of self-finding. Nature secures variation by division into groups and insists on liberty by the force of individuality in the members of the group. Therefore the unity of the human race to be entirely sound and in consonance with the deepest laws of life must be founded on free groupings, and the groupings again must be the natural association of free individuals. This is an ideal which it is certainly impossible to realise under present conditions or perhaps in any near future of the human race; but it is an ideal which ought to be kept in view, for the more we can approximate to it, the more we can be sure of being on the right road. The artificiality of much in human life is the cause of its most deep-seated maladies; it is not faithful to itself or sincere with Nature and therefore it stumbles and suffers.

The utility, the necessity of natural groupings may be seen if we consider the purpose and functioning of one great principle of division in Nature, her insistence on diversity of language. The seeking for a common language for all mankind was very strong at the close of the last and the beginning of the present century and gave rise to several experiments, none of which could get to any vital permanence. Now whatever may be the need of a common medium of communication for mankind and however it may be served by the general use either of an artificial and conven-

tional language or of some natural tongue, as Latin, and later on to a slight extent French, was for some time the common cultural tongue of intercourse between the European nations or Sanskrit for the Indian peoples, no unification which destroyed or overshadowed, dwarfed and discouraged the large and free use of the varying natural languages of humanity, could fail to be detrimental to human life and progress. The legend of the Tower of Babel speaks of the diversity of tongues as a curse laid on the race; but whatever its disadvantages, and they tend more and more to be minimised by the growth of civilisation and increasing intercourse, it has been rather a blessing than a curse, a gift to mankind rather than a disability laid upon it. The purposeless exaggeration of anything is always an evil, and an excessive pullulation of varying tongues that serve no purpose in the expression of a real diversity of spirit and culture is certainly a stumbling-block rather than a help: but this excess, though it existed in the past,¹ is hardly a possibility of the future. The tendency is rather in the opposite direction. In former times diversity of language helped to create a barrier to knowledge and sympathy, was often made the pretext even of an actual antipathy and tended to a too rigid division. The lack of sufficient interpenetration kept up both a passive want of understanding and a fruitful crop of active misunderstandings. But this was an inevitable evil of a particular stage of growth, an exaggeration of the necessity that then existed for the vigorous development of strongly individualised group-souls in the human race. These disadvantages have not yet been abolished, but with closer intercourse and the growing desire of men and nations for the knowledge of each other's thought and spirit and personality, they have diminished and tend to diminish more and more and there is no reason why in the end they should not become inoperative.

Diversity of language serves two important ends of the human spirit, a use of unification and a use of variation. A language helps to bring those who speak it into a certain large unity of growing thought, formed temperament, ripening spirit. It is an intellectual, aesthetic and expressive bond which tempers division where division exists and strengthens unity where unity has been achieved. Especially it gives self-consciousness to national or racial unity and creates the bond of a common self-expression and a common record of achievement. On the other hand, it is a means of national differentiation and perhaps the most powerful of all, not a barren principle of division merely, but a fruitful and helpful differentiation. For each language is the sign and power of the soul of the people which naturally speaks it. Each develops therefore its own peculiar spirit, thought-temperament, way of dealing with life and knowledge and experience. If it receives and welcomes the thought, the life-experience, the spiritual impact of other nations, still it transforms them into something

1. In India the pedants enumerate I know not how many hundred languages. This is a stupid misstatement; there are about a dozen great tongues; the rest are either dialects or aboriginal survivals of tribal speech that are bound to disappear.

new of its own and by that power of transmutation it enriches the life of humanity with its fruitful borrowings and does not merely repeat what had been gained elsewhere. Therefore it is of the utmost value to a nation, a human group-soul, to preserve its language and to make of it a strong and living cultural instrument. A nation, race or people which loses its language cannot live its whole life or its real life. And this advantage to the national life is at the same time an advantage to the general life of the human race.

How much a distinct human group loses by not possessing a separate tongue of its own or by exchanging its natural self-expression for an alien form of speech, can be seen by the examples of the British colonies, the United States of America and Ireland. The colonies are really separate peoples in the psychological sense, although they are not as yet separate nations. English, for the most part or at the lowest in great part, in their origin and political and social sympathy, they are yet not replicas of England, but have already a different temperament, a bent of their own, a developing special character. But this new personality can only appear in the more outward and mechanical parts of their life and even there in no great, effective and fruitful fashion. The British colonies do not count in the culture of the world, because they have no native culture, because by the fact of their speech they are and must be mere provinces of England. Whatever peculiarities they may develop in their mental life tend to create a type of provincialism and not a central intellectual, aesthetic, spiritual life of their own with its distinct importance for mankind. For the same reason the whole of America, in spite of its powerfully independent political and economic being, has tended to be culturally a province of Europe, the south and centre by their dependence on the Spanish, and the north by its dependence on the English language. The life of the United States alone tends and strives to become a great and separate cultural existence, but its success is not commensurate with its power. Culturally, it is still to a great extent a province of England. Neither its literature, in spite of two or three great names, nor its art nor its thought, nor anything else on the higher levels of the mind, has been able to arrive at a vigorous maturity independent in its soul-type. And this because its instrument of self-expression, the language which the national mind ought to shape and be in turn shaped by it, was formed and must continue to be formed by another country with a different mentality and must there find its centre and its law of development. In old times, America would have evolved and changed the English language according to its own needs until it became a new speech, as the mediaeval nations dealt with Latin, and arrived in this way at a characteristic instrument of self-expression; but under modern conditions this is not easily possible.²

2. It is affirmed that now such an independent development is taking place in America; it has to be seen how far this becomes a truly vigorous reality: at present it has amounted only to a provincial turn, a sort of national slang or a racy oddity. Even in the farthest development it would only be a sort of dialect, not a national language.

Ireland had its own tongue when it had its own free nationality and culture and its loss was a loss to humanity as well as to the Irish nation. For what might not this Celtic race with its fine psychic turn and quick intelligence and delicate imagination, which did so much in the beginning for European culture and religion, have given to the world through all these centuries under natural conditions? But the forcible imposition of a foreign tongue and the turning of a nation into a province left Ireland for so many centuries mute and culturally stagnant, a dead force in the life of Europe. Nor can we count as an adequate compensation for this loss the small indirect influence of the race upon English culture or the few direct contributions made by gifted Irishmen forced to pour their natural genius into a foreign mould of thought. Even when Ireland in her struggle for freedom was striving to recover her free soul and give it a voice, she has been hampered by having to use a tongue which does not naturally express her spirit and peculiar bent. In time she may conquer the obstacle, make this tongue her own, force it to express her, but it will be long, if ever, before she can do it with the same richness, force and unfettered individuality as she would have done in her Gaelic speech. That speech she had tried to recover but the natural obstacles have been and are likely always to be too heavy and too strongly established for any complete success in that endeavour.

Modern India is another striking example. Nothing has stood more in the way of the rapid progress in India, nothing has more successfully prevented her self-finding and development under modern conditions than the long overshadowing of the Indian tongues as cultural instruments by the English language. It is significant that the one sub-nation in India which from the first refused to undergo this yoke, devoted itself to the development of its language, made that for long its principal preoccupation, gave to it its most original minds and most living energies, getting through everything else perfunctorily, neglecting commerce, doing politics as an intellectual and oratorical pastime, — that it is Bengal which first recovered its soul, re-spiritualised itself, forced the whole world to hear of its great spiritual personalities, gave it the first modern Indian poet and Indian scientist of world-wide fame and achievement, restored the moribund art of India to life and power, first made her count again in the culture of the world, first, as a reward in the outer life, arrived at a vital political consciousness and a living political movement not imitative and derivative in its spirit and its central ideal.³ For so much does language count in the life of a nation; for so much does it count to the advantage of humanity at large that its group-souls should preserve and develop and use with a vigorous group-individuality their natural instrument of expression.

A common language makes for unity and therefore it might be said that the unity of the human race demands unity of language; the advantages of diversity

3. Now, of course, everything has changed and these remarks are no longer applicable to the actual state of things in India.

must be foregone for this greater good, however serious the temporary sacrifice. But it makes for a real, fruitful, living unity, only when it is the natural expression of the race or has been made natural by a long adaptation and development from within. The history of universal tongues spoken by peoples to whom they were not natural, is not encouraging. Always they have tended to become dead tongues, sterilising so long as they kept their hold, fruitful only when they were decomposed and broken up into new derivative languages or departed leaving the old speech, where that still persisted, to revive with this new stamp and influence upon it. Latin, after its first century of general domination in the West, became a dead thing, impotent for creation, and generated no new or living and evolving culture in the nations that spoke it; even so great a force as Christianity could not give it a new life. The times during which it was an instrument of European thought, were precisely those in which that thought was heaviest, most traditional and least fruitful. A rapid and vigorous new life only grew up when the languages which appeared out of the detritus of dying Latin or the old languages which had not been lost took its place as the complete instruments of national culture. For it is not enough that the natural language should be spoken by the people; it must be the expression of its higher life and thought. A language that survives only as a patois or a provincial tongue like Welsh after the English conquest or Breton or Provençal in France or as Czech survived once in Austria or Ruthenian and Lithuanian in imperial Russia, languishes, becomes sterile and does not serve all the true purpose of survival.

Language is the sign of the cultural life of a people, the index of its soul in thought and mind that stands behind and enriches its soul in action. Therefore it is here that the phenomena and utilities of diversity may be most readily seized, more than in mere outward things; but these truths are important because they apply equally to the thing which it expresses and symbolises and serves as an instrument. Diversity of language is worth keeping because diversity of cultures and differentiation of soul-groups are worth keeping and because without that diversity life cannot have full play; for in its absence there is a danger, almost an inevitability of decline and stagnation. The disappearance of national variation into a single uniform human unity, of which the systematic thinker dreams as an ideal and which we have seen to be a substantial possibility and even a likelihood if a certain tendency becomes dominant, might lead to political peace, economic well-being, perfect administration, the solution of a hundred material problems, as did on a lesser scale the Roman unity in old times; but to what eventual good if it leads also to an uncreative sterilisation of the mind and the stagnation of the soul of the race? In laying this stress on culture, on the things of the mind and the spirit there need be no intention of undervaluing the outward material side of life; it is not at all my purpose to belittle that to which Nature always attaches so insistent an importance. On the contrary, the inner and the outer depend upon each other. For we see that in the life of a nation a great period of national culture and vigorous mental and soul life is

always part of a general stirring and movement which has its counterpart in the outward political, economic and practical life of the nation. The cultural brings about or increases the material progress but also it needs it that it may itself flourish with an entirely full and healthy vigour. The peace, well-being and settled order of the human world is a thing eminently to be desired as a basis for a great world-culture in which all humanity must be united; but neither of these unities, the outward or inward, ought to be devoid of an element even more important than peace, order and well-being, — freedom and vigour of life, which can only be assured by variation and by the freedom of the group and of the individual. Not then a uniform unity, not a logically simple, a scientifically rigid, a beautifully neat and mechanical sameness, but a living oneness full of healthy freedom and variation is the ideal which we should keep in view and strive to get realised in man's future.

But how is this difficult end to be secured? For if an excessive uniformity and centralisation tends to the disappearance of necessary variations and indispensable liberties, a vigorous diversity and strong group-individualism may lead to an incurable persistence or constant return of the old separatism which will prevent human unity from reaching completeness or even will not allow it to take firm root. For it will not be enough for the constituent groups or divisions to have a certain formal administrative and legislative separateness like the States of the American union if, as there, there is liberty only in mechanical variations and all vivid departures from the general norm proceeding from a profounder inner variation are discouraged or forbidden. Nor will it be sufficient to found a unity plus local independence of the German type; for there the real overriding force was a unifying and disciplined Prussianism and independence survived only in form. Nor will even the English colonial system give us any useful suggestion; for there is there local independence and a separate vigour of life, but the brain, heart and central spirit are in the metropolitan country and the rest are at the best only outlying posts of the Anglo-Saxon idea.⁴ The Swiss cantonal life offers no fruitful similitude; for apart from the exiguity of its proportions and frame, there is the phenomenon of a single Swiss life and practical spirit with a mental dependence on three foreign cultures sharply dividing the race; a common Swiss culture does not exist. The problem is rather, on a larger and more difficult scale and with greater complexities, that which offered itself for a moment to the British Empire, how, if it is at all possible, to unite Great Britain, Ireland, the Colonies, Egypt, India in a real oneness, throw their gains into a common stock, use their energies for a common end, help them to find the account of their national individuality in a supra-national life, yet preserve that individuality, — Ireland keeping the Irish soul and life and cultural principle, India the Indian soul and life and cultural principle, the other units developing theirs, not united by a common Anglicisation, which was the past empire-building ideal, but held together

4. This may be less so than before, but the improvement does not go very far.

by a greater as yet unrealised principle of free union. Nothing was suggested at any time in the way of a solution except some sort of bunch or rather bouquet system, unifying its clusters not by the living stalk of a common origin or united past, for that does not exist, but by an artificial thread of administrative unity which might at any moment be snapped irretrievably by centrifugal forces.

But after all, it may be said, unity is the first need and should be achieved at any cost, just as national unity was achieved by crushing out the separate existence of the local units; afterwards a new principle of group-variation may be found other than the nation-unit. But the parallel here becomes illusory, because an important factor is lacking. For the history of the birth of the nation is a coalescence of small groups into a larger unit among many similar large units. The old richness of small units which gave such splendid cultural, but such unsatisfactory political results in Greece, Italy and India was lost, but the principle of life made vivid by variative diversity was preserved with nations for the diverse units and the cultural life of a continent for the common background. Here nothing of the kind is possible. There will be a sole unity, the world-nation; all outer source of diversity will disappear. Therefore the inner source has to be modified indeed, subordinated in some way, but preserved and encouraged to survive. It may be that this will not happen; the unitarian idea may forcefully prevail and turn the existing nations into mere geographical provinces or administrative departments of a single well-mechanised State. But in that case the outraged need of life will have its revenge, either by a stagnation, a collapse and a detrition fruitful of new separations or by some principle of revolt from within. A gospel of Anarchism might enforce itself, for example, and break down the world-order for a new creation. The question is whether there is not somewhere a principle of unity in diversity by which this method of action and reaction, creation and destruction, realisation and relapse cannot be, if not altogether avoided, yet mitigated in its action and led to a more serene and harmonious working.

SRI AUROBINDO

(The Ideal of Human Unity, CWSA, Vol. 25, pp. 513-22)

INTERNATIONALISM

The idea of humanity as a single race of beings with a common life and a common general interest is among the most characteristic and significant products of modern thought. It is an outcome of the European mind which proceeds characteristically from life-experience to the idea and, without going deeper, returns from the idea upon life in an attempt to change its outward forms and institutions, its order and system. In the European mentality it has taken the shape known currently as internationalism. Internationalism is the attempt of the human mind and life to grow out of the national idea and form and even in a way to destroy it in the interest of the larger synthesis of mankind. An idea proceeding on these lines needs always to attach itself to some actual force or developing power in the life of the times before it can exercise a practical effect. But usually it suffers by contact with the interests and prepossessions of its grosser ally some lesser or greater diminution of itself or even a distortion, and in that form, no longer pure and absolute, enters on the first stage of practice.

The idea of internationalism was born of the thought of the eighteenth century and it took some kind of voice in the first idealistic stages of the French Revolution. But at that time, it was rather a vague intellectual sentiment than a clear idea seeing its way to practice; it found no strong force in life to help it to take visible body. What came out of the French Revolution and the struggle that grew around it, was a complete and self-conscious nationalism and not internationalism. During the nineteenth century we see the larger idea growing again in the minds of thinkers, sometimes in a modified form, sometimes in its own pure idealism, till allying itself with the growing forces of socialism and anarchism it took a clear body and a recognisable vital force. In its absolute form, it became the internationalism of the intellectuals, intolerant of nationalism as a narrow spirit of the past, contemptuous of patriotism as an irrational prejudice, a maleficent corporate egoism characteristic of narrow intellects and creative of arrogance, prejudice, hatred, oppression, division and strife between nation and nation, a gross survival of the past which the growth of reason was destined to destroy. It is founded on a view of things which looks at man in his manhood only and casts away all those physical and social accidents of birth, rank, class, colour, creed, nationality, which have been erected into so many walls and screens behind which man has hidden himself from his fellow-man; he has turned them into sympathy-proof shelters and trenches from which he wages against him a war of defence and aggression, war of nations, war of continents, war of classes, war of colour with colour, creed with creed, culture with culture. All this barbarism the idea of the intellectual internationalist seeks to abolish by putting man face to face with man on the basis of their common human sympathy, aims,

highest interests of the future. It is entirely futurist in its view; it turns away from the confused and darkened good of the past to the purer good of the future when man, at last beginning to become a truly intelligent and ethical being, will shake away from him all these sources of prejudice and passion and evil. Humanity will become one in idea and feeling, and life be consciously what it now is in spite of itself, one in its status on earth and its destiny.

The height and nobility of the idea is not to be questioned and certainly a mankind which set its life upon this basis would make a better, purer, more peaceful and enlightened race than anything we can hope to have at present. But as the human being is now made, the pure idea, though always a great power, is also afflicted by a great weakness. It has an eventual capacity, once born, of taking hold of the rest of the human being and forcing him in the end to acknowledge its truth and make some kind of attempt to embody it; that is its strength. But also because man at present lives more in the outward than in the inward, is governed principally by his vital existence, sensations, feelings and customary mentality rather than by his higher thought-mind and feels himself in these to be really alive, really to exist and be, while the world of ideas is to him something remote and abstract and, however powerful and interesting in its way, not a living thing, the pure idea seems, until it is embodied in life, something not quite real; in that abstractness and remoteness lies its weakness.

The sense of this abstractness imposes on the idea an undue haste to get itself recognised by life and embodied in a form. If it could have confidence in its strength and be content to grow, to insist, to impress itself till it got well into the spirit of man, it might conceivably become a real part of his soul-life, a permanent power in his psychology and might succeed in remoulding his whole life in its image. But it has inevitably a desire to get as soon as possible admitted into a form of the life, for until then it does not feel itself strong and cannot quite be sure that it has vindicated its truth. It hurries into action before it has real knowledge of itself and thereby prepares its own disappointment, even when it seems to triumph and fulfil its object. For in order to succeed, it allies itself with powers and movements which are impelled by another aim than its own, but are glad enough to get its aid so that they may strengthen their own case and claim. Thus when it realises itself at last, it does it in a mixed, impure and ineffective form. Life accepts it as a partial habit, but not completely, not quite sincerely. That has been the history of every idea in succession and one reason at least why there is almost always something unreal, inconclusive and tormented about human progress.

There are many conditions and tendencies in human life at present which are favourable to the progress of the internationalist idea. The strongest of these favourable forces is the constant drawing closer of the knots of international life, the multiplication of points of contact and threads of communication and an increasing community in thought, in science and in knowledge. Science especially has been a

great force in this direction; for science is a thing common to all men in its conclusions, open to all in its methods, available to all in its results: it is international in its very nature; there can be no such thing as a national science, but only the nations' contributions to the work and growth of science which are the indivisible inheritance of all humanity. Therefore it is easier for men of science or those strongly influenced by science to grow into the international spirit and all the world is now beginning to feel the scientific influence and to live in it. Science also has created that closer contact of every part of the world with every other part, out of which some sort of international mind is growing. Even cosmopolitan habits of life are now not uncommon and there are a fair number of persons who are as much or more citizens of the world as citizens of their own nation. The growth of knowledge is interesting the peoples in each other's art, culture, religion, ideas and is breaking down at many points the prejudice, arrogance and exclusiveness of the old nationalistic sentiment. Religion, which ought to have led the way, but owing to its greater dependence on its external parts and its infrarational rather than its spiritual impulses has been as much, or even more, a sower of discord as a teacher of unity, — religion is beginning to realise, a little dimly and ineffectively as yet, that spirituality is after all its own chief business and true aim and that it is also the common element and the common bond of all religions. As these influences grow and come more and more consciously to cooperate with each other, it might be hoped that the necessary psychological modification will quietly, gradually, but still irresistibly and at last with an increasing force of rapidity take place which can prepare a real and fundamental change in the life of humanity.

But this is at present a slow process, and meanwhile the internationalist idea, eager for effectuation, allied and almost identified itself with two increasingly powerful movements which have both assumed an international character, Socialism and Anarchism. Indeed, it is this alliance that most commonly went by the name of internationalism. But this socialistic and anarchistic internationalism was recently put to the test, the fiery test of the European war, and thus tried, it was found sadly wanting. In every country, the Socialist party shed its internationalist promise with the greatest ease and lightness, German socialism, the protagonist of the idea, massively leading the way in this formidable abjuration. It is true that a small minority in each country either remained heroically faithful to its principles or soon returned to them, and as the general weariness of the great international massacre grew, even the majority showed a sensible turn in the same direction; but this was rather the fruit of circumstance than of principle. Russian socialism, it may be said, has, at least in its extremer form, shown a stronger root of internationalistic feeling. But what it has actually attempted to accomplish is a development of Labour rule on the basis of a purified nationalism, non-aggressive except for revolutionary purposes and self-contained, and not on the larger international idea. In any case, the actual results of the Russian attempt show only up to the present a failure of the idea to

acquire the vital strength and efficiency which would justify it to life; it is possible to use them much more as a telling argument against internationalism than as a justification of its truth or at least of its applicability in the present stage of human progress.

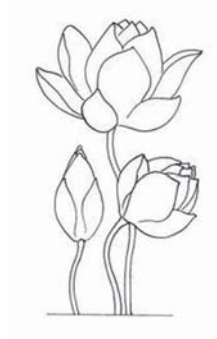
But what is the cause of this almost total bankruptcy of the international ideal under the strong test of life? Partly it may be because the triumph of socialism is not necessarily bound up with the progress of internationalism. Socialism is really an attempt to complete the growth of the national community by making the individual do what he has never yet done, live for the community more than for himself. It is an outgrowth of the national, not of the international idea. No doubt, when the society of the nation has been perfected, the society of nations can and even must be formed; but this is a later possible or eventual result of Socialism, not its primary vital necessity. In the crises of life it is the primary vital necessity which tells, while the other and remoter element betrays itself to be a mere idea not yet ready for accomplishment; it can only become powerful when it also becomes either a vital or a psychological necessity. The real truth, the real cause of the failure is that internationalism is as yet, except with some exceptional men, merely an idea; it is not yet a thing near to our vital feelings or otherwise a part of our psychology. The normal socialist or syndicalist cannot escape from the general human feeling and in the test he too turns out, even though he were a professed *sans-patrie* in ordinary times, in his inner heart and being a nationalist. As a vital fact, moreover, these movements have been a revolt of Labour aided by a number of intellectuals against the established state of things, and they have only allied themselves with internationalism because that too is an intellectual revolt and because its idea helps them in the battle. If Labour comes to power, will it keep or shed its internationalistic tendencies? The experience of countries in which it is or has been at the head of affairs does not give an encouraging answer, and it may at least be said that, unless at that time the psychological change in humanity has gone much farther than it has now, Labour in power is likely to shed more of the internationalist feeling than it will succeed in keeping and to act very much from the old human motives.

No doubt, the European war itself was an explosion of all that was dangerous and evil in successful nationalism, and the resulting conflagration may well turn out to have been a purificatory process that has burned up many things that needed to die. It has already strengthened the international idea and forced it on governments and peoples. But we cannot rely too greatly on ideas and resolutions formed in a moment of abnormal crisis under the violent stress of exceptional circumstances. Some effect there may be in the end, some first recognition of juster principles in international dealings, some attempt at a better, more rational or at least a more convenient international order. But until the idea of humanity has grown not only upon the intelligence but in the sentiments, feelings, natural sympathies and mental habits of man, the progress made is likely to be more in external adjustments than in

the vital matters, more in a use of the ideal for mixed and egoistic purposes than at once or soon in a large and sincere realisation of the ideal. Until man in his heart is ready, a profound change of the world conditions cannot come; or it can only be brought about by force, physical force or else force of circumstances, and that leaves all the real work to be done. A frame may have then been made, but the soul will have still to grow into that mechanical body.

SRI AUROBINDO

(The Ideal of Human Unity, CWSA, Vol. 25, pp. 548-53)



‘THOU SHINEST RESPLENDENT IN ALL THINGS . . .’

June 4, 1914

O Thou who triumphest over all obstacles, Thou shalt be in us the victory over all that would be an obstacle to the accomplishment of Thy divine law. Thou wilt dispel the darkness of ignorance and the black smoke of egoistic ill-will; Thou wilt dissolve all wrong suggestions and strengthen in us a pure and clear vision and the perspicacity which does not let itself be deceived by disruptive thoughts and conflicting wills for disorder.

O my sweet Master, Thy infinite love is the reality of our being; who can struggle against its all-powerful action? It penetrates everything, it passes through every obstacle, whether it be the inertia of a heavy ignorance or the resistance of an uncomprehending ill-will. O my sweet Master, through and by this love, Thou shinest resplendent in all things, and this splendour of Thine, ever-increasing in its force, shall radiate its action over all the earth and become perceptible to every consciousness.

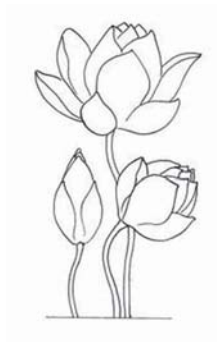
Who can resist Thy divine power?

Thou art the sole and supreme Reality.

My being is ingathered in a mute adoration and everything disappears that is not Thou.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 166)



IT CAN BE DONE AGAIN

Sri Aurobindo has written: “The descent of the Supermind will bring to one who receives it and is fulfilled in the truth-consciousness all the possibilities of the divine life. It will take up not only the whole characteristic experience which we recognise already as constituting the spiritual life but also all which we now exclude from that category. . . .”

*The Supramental Manifestation,
SABCL, Vol. 16, p. 47*

So, what are you asking? What is excluded?
What do we exclude! . . . It depends on the person.
But what are you asking, really?

I don't see what we are excluding.

Ah! that's sensible. Here we profess we are excluding nothing. That's precisely the reason. We have taken up all human activities, whatever they may be, including those that are considered the least spiritual. But I must say it is very difficult to change their nature! But still, we are trying, we put all possible goodwill into it.

It is also said that the descent will make the change easier.¹

There are two points which resist strongly — all that has to do with politics and all that has to do with money. These are the two points on which it is most difficult to change the human attitude.

In principle we have said that we have nothing to do with politics, and it is true that we have nothing to do with politics as it is practised at present. But it is quite

1. “A divine life on earth need not be a thing apart and exclusive having nothing to do with the common earthly existence: it will take up human being and human life, transform what can be transformed, spiritualise whatever can be spiritualised, cast its influence on the rest and effectuate either a radical or an uplifting change, bring about a deeper communion between the universal and the individual, invade the ideal with the spiritual truth of which it is a luminous shadow and help to uplift into or towards a greater and higher existence. . . . It is obvious that if the Supermind is there and an order of supramental being is established as the leading principle in earth-nature, as mind is now the leading principle, but with a sureness, a complete government of the earthly existence, a capacity of transformation of all upon their level and within their natural boundaries of which the mind in its imperfection was not capable, an immense change of human life, even if it did not extend to transformation would be inevitable.” *The Supramental Manifestation*, SABCL, Vol. 16, pp. 47-49

obvious that if politics is taken in its true spirit, that is, as the organisation of human masses and all the details of government and regulation of the collective life, and relations with other collectivities — that is, with other nations, other countries — it must necessarily enter into the supramental transformation, for so long as national life and the relations between nations remain what they are, it is quite impossible to live a supramental life on earth. So it will just have to change; we shall have to deal with that too.

As for financial matters, that is, finding a means of exchange and production which is simple — “simple”, well, which should be simple, simpler than the primitive system of exchange in which people had to give one thing to get another — something which could in principle be world-wide, universal; this is also altogether indispensable for the simplification of life. Now, with human nature, just the very opposite is happening! The situation is such that it has become almost — intolerable. It has become almost impossible to have the least relation with other countries, and that much-vaunted means of exchange which should have been a simplification has become such a complication that we shall soon reach a deadlock — we are very, very close to being unable to do anything, to being tied up in everything. If one wants the smallest thing from another country, one has to follow such complicated and laborious procedures that in the end one will stay in one’s own little corner and be satisfied with the potatoes one can grow in one’s garden, without hoping to know anything at all about what is going on and happening elsewhere.

Well, these two points are the most resistant. In the human consciousness this is most subject to the forces of ignorance, inconstancy and, I must say, quite generally, ill-will. This is what most refuses all progress and all advance towards the truth; and unfortunately, in every human individual this is also the point of resistance, the point that remains narrowly stupid and refuses to understand anything it is not used to. There it is truly a heroic act to want to take up these things and transform them. Well, we are trying this also, and unless it is done, it will be impossible to change the conditions of the earth.

It is relatively — very relatively — easier to change economic and social conditions than political and financial ones. There are certain general, global ideas from the economic and social point of view which are accessible to human thought: certain liberations, a certain widening, a certain collective organisation, which do not seem absolutely senseless and unrealisable; but as soon as you touch on the other two questions, which are however of capital importance, especially the political question, it is quite otherwise. . . . For, one might imagine a life which would get rid of all financial complications — although, without playing on words, it would be a veritable impoverishment. In what financial possibilities and processes bring, there is a very considerable wealth of possibilities, for if they were used in the right way and in the true spirit, that would simplify all human relations and undertakings to a

very great extent and make possible a complexity of life which would be very difficult under other conditions. But I don't know why — except that the worst usually precedes the best — instead of taking the way of simplification, men have followed the way of complication to such a point that, in spite of the aeroplanes which carry you from one end of the world to the other in two days, in spite of all the modern inventions which try to make life so “small”, so “close” that we could go round the world not in eighty days now but in a very few days, in spite of all that, the complications of exchange, for instance, are so great that many people can't get away from home — I mean from the country they live in — because they have no means of going to another one and if they ask for the money they need to live in another country they are told, “Is it very important for you to go? You could perhaps wait a little, because it is very difficult for us at the moment. . . .” I am not joking, it is quite serious, this does happen. That means we are becoming more and more the prisoners of the place where we are born, while all the scientific trends are towards such a great proximity between countries that we could very easily belong to the universe or, at any rate, to the whole world.

There. This is the situation. It has grown considerably worse since the last war; it grows worse year by year, and one finds oneself in such a ridiculous situation that, unfortunately, as one is at the end of one's resources, to simplify what has been made so complicated, there is an idea in the earth-atmosphere — an idea which might be called preposterous, but unhappily it is much worse than preposterous, it is catastrophic — the idea that if there were a great upheaval, perhaps it would be better afterwards. . . . One is so jammed between prohibitions, impossibilities, interdictions, rules, the complications of every second, that one feels stifled and really gets the admirable idea that if everything were demolished perhaps it would be better afterwards! . . . It is in the air. And all the governments have put themselves in such impossible conditions; they have become so tied up that it seems to them they will have to break everything to be able to move forward. . . . (*Silence*) This is unfortunately a little more than a possibility, it is a *very* serious threat. And it is not quite certain that life will not be made still more impossible because one feels incapable of emerging from the chaos — the chaos of complications — in which humanity has put itself. It is like the shadow — but unfortunately a very active shadow — of the new hope which has sprung up in the human consciousness, a hope and a need for something more harmonious; and the need becomes so much more acute as life, as it is at present organised, becomes more and more contrary to it. The two opposites are facing each other with such intensity that one can expect something like an explosion. . . .

(*Silence*)

This is the condition of the earth, and it is not very bright. But for us one possibility remains — I have spoken about it to you several times already — even if, outside, things are deteriorating completely and the catastrophe cannot possibly be avoided, there remains for us, I mean those for whom the supramental life is not a vain dream, those who have faith in its reality and the aspiration to realise it — I don't necessarily mean those who have gathered here in Pondicherry, in the Ashram, but those who have as a link between them the knowledge Sri Aurobindo has given and the will to live according to that knowledge — there remains for them the possibility of intensifying their aspiration, their will, their effort, to gather their energies together and shorten the time for the realisation. There remains for them the possibility of working this miracle — individually and to a small extent collectively — of conquering space, duration, the time needed for this realisation; of replacing time by intensity of effort and going fast enough and far enough in the realisation to liberate themselves from the consequences of the present condition of the world; of making such a concentration of force, strength, light, truth, that by this very realisation they can be above these consequences and secure against them, enjoy the protection bestowed by the Light and Truth, by Purity — the divine Purity through the inner transformation — and that the storm may pass over the world without being able to destroy this great hope of the near future; that the tempest may not sweep away this beginning of realisation.

Instead of falling asleep in an easy quietude and letting things happen according to their own rhythm, if one strains to the utmost one's will, ardour, aspiration and springs up into the light, then one can hold one's head higher; one can have, in a higher region of consciousness, enough room to live, to breathe, to grow and develop above the passing cyclone.

This is possible. In a very small way, this was already done during the last war, when Sri Aurobindo was here. It can be done again. But one must want it and each one must do his own work as sincerely and completely as he can.

7 August, 1957

THE MOTHER

(Questions and Answers 1957-1958, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 9, pp. 166-71)

**‘IF YOU GO DEEP ENOUGH INSIDE YOU,
YOU WILL FIND IT THERE,
LIKE A FLAME THAT IS ALWAYS BURNING
STRAIGHT UP’**

You see, in the present condition of the world, circumstances are always difficult. The whole world is in a condition of strife, conflict, between the forces of truth and light wanting to manifest and the opposition of all that does not want to change, which represents in the past what is fixed, hardened and refuses to go. Naturally, each individual feels his own difficulties and is faced by the same obstacles.

There is only one way for you. It is a total, complete and unconditional surrender. What I mean by that is the giving up not only of your actions, work, ambitions, but also of all your feelings, in the sense that all that you do, all that you are, is exclusively for the Divine. So, you feel above the surrounding human reactions — not only above them but protected from them by the wall of the Divine’s Grace. Once you have no more desires, no more attachments, once you have given up all necessity of receiving a reward from human beings, whoever they are — knowing that the only reward that is worth getting is the one that comes from the Supreme and that never fails — once you give up the attachment to all exterior beings and things, you at once feel in your heart this Presence, this Force, this Grace that is always with you.

And there is no other remedy. It’s the only remedy, for *everybody* without exception. To all those who suffer, it is the same thing that has to be said: all suffering is the sign that the surrender is not total. Then, when you feel in you a “bang”, like that, instead of saying, “Oh, this is bad” or “This circumstance is difficult,” you say, “My surrender is not perfect.” Then it’s all right. And then you feel the Grace that helps you and leads you, and you go on. And one day you emerge into that peace that nothing can trouble. You answer to all the contrary forces, the contrary movements, the attacks, the misunderstandings, the bad wills, with the same smile that comes from full confidence in the Divine Grace. And that is the *only* way out, there is no other.

This world is a world of conflict, suffering, difficulty, strain; it is made of it. It has not yet changed, it will take some time before changing. And for each one there is a possibility of getting out. If you lean back on the presence of the Supreme Grace, that is the *only* way out. That I have been telling you since two or three days, like that constantly.

Now?

What to do?

What? For your work there is nothing to say. You are doing it perfectly well, exactly as it has to be done; it is all right. Your work is quite all right.

That is what I wanted to ask: whether this work is in any manner needed or not? Why should I go on doing it?

Excellent, go on doing it. You do it perfectly well. Don't expect human appreciation — because human beings don't know on what grounds to appreciate something, and, moreover, when there is something that is superior to them, they don't like it.

But where to get such a strength?

Within you. The Divine Presence is in you. It is in you. You look for it outside; look inside. It is in you. The Presence is there. You want the appreciation of others to get strength — you will never get it. The strength is in you. If you want, you can aspire for what seems to you the supreme goal, supreme light, supreme knowledge, supreme love. But it is in you — otherwise you would never be able to contact it. If you go deep enough inside you, you will find it there, like a flame that is always burning straight up.

And don't believe that it is so difficult to do. It is because the look is always turned outside that you don't feel the Presence. But if, instead of looking outside for support, you concentrate and you pray — inside, to the supreme knowledge — to know at each moment what is to be done, the way to do it, and if you give all you are, all you do in order to acquire perfection, you will feel that the support is there, always guiding, showing the way. And if there is a difficulty, then instead of wanting to fight, you hand it over, hand it over to the supreme wisdom to deal with it — to deal with all the bad wills, all the misunderstandings, all the bad reactions. If you surrender completely, it is no more your concern: it's the concern of the Supreme who takes it up and knows better than anybody else what is to be done. The only way out, only way out. There, my child.

One thing is that whatever I do there, it is not liked by my own people.

Your own people are all mixed up, as everybody is.

But my feeling is so strong — not only strong but it is as clear as daylight, as if I am just sitting in your presence — that I do not do anything myself. This is such a great, clear experience to me for all these years. Whatever is being done by me, it is being done by some Force and not by me at all. And it gets it

done, but then the . . .

What! You expect the world to understand that?

No. They may not understand, I don't want any credit for that. But you see, the obstacles and the . . .

If you consider this: that I can understand and know, then you have my full support. I never told you that you were doing wrong, did I? Now, once and for all you must understand that unless people are true yogis, out of the ego, completely surrendered to the Supreme, they can't understand. How could they? They see with all the exterior eyes and knowledge; they see exterior things and appearances. They don't see the inside. When we have stopped expecting appreciation from the outside, that is from human beings, we have no reason to complain. They appreciate, so much the better for them. They don't appreciate, it doesn't matter. It's their own look-out. We do things not to please them, we do things because we feel that that is to be done.

I have never expected appreciation, Mother.

Perhaps things are coming to compel you to take up that position — because that is the liberation, that is the true liberation.

Not from ego, but I am a sadhu by nature. I don't need anything at all.

That is all right, but also you must not need the appreciation of your own family.

With all my failings and weaknesses, I don't need anything at all. I don't need any appreciation.

Then you can't suffer. Because the only thing that you need is the support of the Divine, and you have it. Then you can't suffer.

But I am suffering very much.

Yes, there is a conflict in your being. One part of your consciousness knows but there is still one part that is the slave of circumstances.

(Silence)

Perhaps all that has been coming upon you for the supreme and the total liberation. And if you take it as the expression of the Grace, you will see the result. Peace, a

peace that nothing can disturb, perfect equanimity and a strength that never fails.

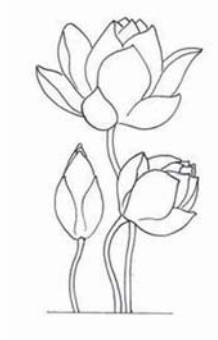
(Long silence)

Take it as a new birth today. The new life that is beginning.

11 May 1967

THE MOTHER

(Words of the Mother – III, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 15, pp. 398-402)



WHAT MUST BE DONE TO PULL THE COUNTRY OUT OF ITS DIFFICULTY?

What must be done to pull the country out of its difficulty? Sri Aurobindo has foreseen all the troubles and he has given the solution. Just now we are approaching his Centenary; it seems arranged, you know, divinely arranged, because this would be a wonderful occasion to spread his teaching all over the country: the teaching, the practical teaching, his teaching about India, how to organise India, the mission of India. It seems to me that taking the Centenary as an occasion, his teaching could be spread all over the country with a little more organising — so that his ideas get spread. Those people who are interested can take it up and teach it, hold meetings and give the light and the knowledge to the people. It is a wonderful occasion. And it is only this that gives a clue to all these difficulties.

About all that has happened and all that is happening now, he has said clearly that to go back to it is useless. We must give the country its true position, that is, the position of relying on the Divine. Naturally, this is at the other end of what people try to believe now. But Sri Aurobindo explains it in such a way that even those who are against it can agree. You understand? He has found a way of saying it which can be understood by everybody. That's the only solution, as far as I can see; it is the only solution. All the rest will mean complication, contradiction and fighting.

Just now we have two years in front of us to organise a kind of demonstration of what he was teaching. And this is above politics, you see. It is not a question of party, it's not that: because some are for it, others will naturally not be. It is above all politics. It is to organise the country beyond politics. And it is the only way. In politics it is always fight and ugly fight — ugly. And it has become so bad. He was telling me always that things would become worse and worse, because it is the *end* of this age. We are entering into an age where things must be organised differently. It is a difficult time because of that.

Because we know what will come, we can help to make it come sooner and with less turmoil. There is no hope in going backwards; it would make things last endlessly. We must go forward, absolutely, and go beyond, beyond party. And nobody can explain that better than Sri Aurobindo, because he was so much, *so* much beyond party; he saw the advantages and disadvantages of all parties and he stated them exactly.

If you read carefully what he has written — so much — you will find the answer to all these questions. And at the same time you will know that you will have the full support of the Divine Power. The Power that was behind him is behind this transformation. It is time for transformation. We can't cling to the past.

The best way to go beyond politics is to spread the message of Sri Aurobindo.

Because he is no more a political element wanting to take power; there are only his ideas and ideals. And, of course, if people could understand and realise his programme, the country could be very strong, very strong.

Those who understand the teaching can take up the work of organising and spreading it.

But Mother, unless Mother's children come into the government . . .

(Mother laughs) They will break. And they themselves will feel so restricted.

If there is a man who feels like going in for politics, that is different; but I think the others will be stronger without being inside.

But the government will be there in any case. If Mother . . .

But they must be political people in temperament.

Politics is always limited by party, by ideas, by duties also — unless we prepare a government that has no party, a government that admits all ideas because it is above parties. Party is limitation; it is like a box: you go into the box *(Mother laughs)*. Of course, if there were some people who had the courage to be in the government without a party — “We represent no party! We represent *India*” — that would be magnificent.

Pull the consciousness up, up, above party.

And then, naturally, certain people who couldn't come into political parties — that! that is truly working for tomorrow. Tomorrow it will be like that. All this turmoil is because the country must take the lead, must go above all these old political habits. Government without party. Oh, it would be magnificent!

25 May 1970

THE MOTHER

(Words of the Mother – III, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 15, pp. 405-07)

TWO THINGS DIFFICULT TO CHANGE

Mother reads *The Great Secret*:¹ The Statesman.

Sweet Mother, what should be the attitude of a true politician?

But it's just the attitude of a true politician which I have given here. It's the ideal politician, my child. One can't make a better one. It is the circumstances, he says that himself: "a greater force than mine . . ." it's the way the world is organised; he started with the best intentions, he tried his very best, he could do nothing, because one can't do anything in the present circumstances and with politics as it is practised at present. Usually people are not frank enough to say what I have made him say. I have made him speak the truth and this proves that he is extremely frank; otherwise, usually they cover all their misdeeds with beautiful words, but the misdeeds are there all the same. The world is organised in such a way that one can't be otherwise. If one were a man who did not accept any kind of compromise, one could not remain in politics; one would quite simply be pushed out by the very force of things. There will be a time when all this will change, but not yet. Politics is perhaps the last thing which will change. There are many others which must change before. It is certainly one of the most recalcitrant things.

There are two things which it is very difficult to change: finance and politics; the field of money and the field of government are the two points where man is weakest and most attached to falsehood. So, probably, transformation will come there last of all. One can hope for a social transformation, an economic transformation, a transformation of education; one can hope for all this long before the transformation of politics and of finance. I wrote this precisely to show people what the real state of the world is, and to give an indication of the way to get out of it. But when we are at the point of coming out, you will see that it is not so easy. Perhaps the first thing that will be transformed will be the scientific world, it is possible; because there a very great sincerity is required and a very persevering effort, and these already are qualities which open for you the door to a higher life. . . . But we shall come to this next time . . . no, not next time, after two lessons.

Here we are, my children. No other questions? Nobody has anything to say?

1. A drama arranged and partly written by Mother, in six monologues and a conclusion, staging six of the most famous men of the world and an Unknown Man in a life-boat in which they have taken refuge after the ship which was taking them to a World Conference on Human Progress capsized on the high seas.

On Education, CWM, Vol. 12, pp. 471-96

Sweet Mother, the politician in the world today who is on the level of the one in the drama, one who is trying to do his best, isn't he guided by the Divine? Will he find the means of . . .

He has not said that he was religious at all. He hasn't told us that. He hasn't said that it was for spiritual or religious reasons that he was trying to do this.

Note that they are all going to a congress on human progress, they are not going to a religious conference at all. In fact your question makes no sense, because there is nothing in the universe which is not made by the Divine, so from that point of view the question makes no sense. Consciously, in himself, he should be a religious man for him to do something for religious reasons. It is not mentioned, and deliberately not mentioned, so as not to introduce another factor in the problem. He is not doing this at all as a service to the Divine. He is doing it because he has humanitarian ideas and is trying to improve the human situation upon earth, that's all. All of them, by the way, all are in the same condition.

Mother, as during the war, the last war, there were great statesmen who . . .

But this is taken almost exactly after one of them, a famous figure.

But they became the Divine's instruments during the war!

All, all are the Divine's instruments, if you want to look at it in a certain way. No, they were not at all consciously the Divine's instruments; not conscious at all, at all, at all. They used to mouth big religious words. I took them away because they were insincerities and I wanted to make my fellow as sincere as possible, and their big religious words were absolutely insincere, it was blackmail; the proof is that they forgot them all immediately as soon as they were victorious.

Mother, how did he know at the end that he had not found the truth if he had not been open . . .

What! How did he. . . ?

(Pavitra) How did he know that he had not found the truth . . . if he had not been open to something higher?

But who knew it, my man or the other . . .

(Pavitra) The moment he is conscious that there is something which he has not found, it means that he was open to something else.

Yes, naturally, all goodwill is open to a deeper consciousness. That goes without saying. I tell you, I have taken very exceptional persons who are ready to understand, otherwise it could not be done. I have made them better than they really are, because all had something else behind their aspiration; they are not aware of it, but these are people on the point of understanding and it is in this way, you see, that I could organise the thing; it is not an exact copy of nature, it is something arranged to prove something — that's all — as always in literature.

Mother, this gives us the hope that in the world today and especially in India, there are . . .

Gives the hope! I think that it's not this that gives the hope; if one had before oneself only the model of those who exist in the world, there wouldn't be much hope.

Mother, in the present world politics is divided into two big camps, that of America and that of Russia. How will the reconciliation come?

Oh! It is very easy. It's simply because they don't at all understand that it is very easy that I say that it is the last thing that will happen. These things are only appearances and superficial ideas and interests — interests! not even true interests: ideas which they have about their interests. But if the true solution were found . . . not if it were found — perhaps it is found — if the true economic solution were applied, the very basis of their problems would collapse, there would remain only the political attitude which is very, very superficial. It is very shallow, it has no depth, it is above all just words, very hollow words; it sounds very loud because it is hollow, they are big words. But, you see, the only fairly true support of their attitude lies in the two things I have spoken about: a financial support and an economic support. Well, if the economic problem were solved, that is, if the solution were applied, the major part of the support of these political differences would disappear. It is based almost exclusively on an opposite way of looking at the problems of life and the solution of these problems: these think that it is like this, the others think that it is like that. I am speaking of the most sincere ones, not of those who have constructed things out of nothing at all, precisely, as I said, to make a lot of noise and have a lot of influence. But if we go to the heart of the question, there isn't so much difference.

There are many people — I am speaking of people, not of individuals but governments — who pretend that they are not communists and have a way of acting that's absolutely communistic, still more drastic than the communists'. Therefore all this is a matter of words. One puts words as one puts a certain cloak on the things one does, it changes just the appearance, but the inside is not very different. Besides,

one thing is quite simple, that the whole of mankind follows an evolution, an evolutionary curve, and that there are ages, certain ages in which there is a certain experience which becomes almost universal, that is, terrestrial, entirely terrestrial, but indeed under different names, labels, words; it is nearly the same experience which continues. So there are the old ones which are in the course of disappearing and yet cling on, which yet change the appearance and the substance of certain new things. But it's only like the tail of something. The whole new movement is going towards an experience which becomes as common as possible, because it is useful only if it is common. If it is localised, it is like a mushroom, it gives no fruit for the general human consciousness. The great human experiences have to be gone through, more or less thoroughly, by the whole of mankind, and it is done in this way. It is only man's thoughts which fix other words, other forms, other reasons, other justifications, other legitimisations on what they do; but when one comes to the fact it is very similar. Only, in order to do that, particularly, it is necessary to see beyond the simple appearances.

During the war between Germany and England it was known on which side the Divine was, the divine Force which was fighting against the asuric forces . . .

Known to whom?

Here.

Ah, of course!

In present-day politics can we say in which camp . . .

Unfortunately, things become completely clear-cut in this way — to the extent that one can say these are for and these against — only when there is that frightful materialisation of a war, because at that moment it is obvious that the victory of one side is preferable to the victory of the other, not that these are better than the others — this is understood, that from the divine point of view all are equal in worth, it's the same thing — but because the consequences of the victory are such that the victory of one side is better than that of another. But this is when the thing becomes absolutely brutal, a reciprocal extermination. Otherwise, to tell the real truth, the divine Force acts for its work everywhere, in men's errors as in their goodwill, through ill-will as through favourable things. There is nothing that's not mixed; nowhere is there something which could be said to be truly a pure instrument of the Divine, and nowhere is there an absolute impossibility of the Divine's using a man or action to go forward on the path. So, as long as things are uncertain, the Divine works everywhere almost equally. If men go in for such a great madness, then it is

different. But it is truly a “great madness”, in the sense that it precipitates a whole mass of individuals and wills into an activity which leads straight to destruction — their own destruction. I am not speaking of bombs and the destruction of a city or a people, I am speaking of destruction as it is spoken about in the Gita, you see, when it is said that the Asura goes to his own destruction. That’s what happens, and this is a very great misfortune, because it is always better to be able to save, illumine, transform, than to have to destroy brutally. And it is this terrible choice of the war which is its true horror; it’s that it materialises the conflict so brutally and totally that some elements which could have been saved during peace are, because of war, necessarily destroyed — and not only men and things but forces, and consciousness.

Has India a special role to play in present-day politics?

Politics! I told you at the very beginning that politics is something completely . . . unconverted. Then how can there be a true political role?

India has a role to fulfil in the world. But this is something ideal and one that requires a conversion which . . . in any case, it has not yet taken place, as far as I know. From the superficial, external point of view she could play her part if she were sincere. That’s all that I can say. But it is also necessary to have the precise knowledge.

(Long silence)

These things cannot be spoken about.

When this Statesman finds the truth, the problems won’t be the same, will they?

What? My Statesman! All must find the truth. Then naturally when they have all found the truth, things will be different. So! . . . We are going to ponder over this problem!

14 September 1955

THE MOTHER

(Questions and Answers 1955, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 7, pp. 297-303)

A CALL FOR THE NEW YEAR: THE GAYATRI

The most sacred Mantra of the Rigveda is the Gayatri, directing us towards the Solar Godhead — Surya-Savitri — and this spiritual signpost is the one Mantra that has been on the lips of Indians throughout the millennia.

Even at the present moment every Brahmin utters it morning after morning. From the foot-hills of the Himalayas down to Cape Comorin the Gayatri goes ringing at each daybreak. And it suffices to show that, as Sri Aurobindo maintains, the Rigveda is not a mere system of religious ritualism or a hymnal of primitive priests to deified Nature-powers but a mighty symbolic scripture couching in semi-ritualistic semi-naturalistic terms an inward movement towards mystical illumination.

But, with the advent of Sri Aurobindo, not only has the secret of the Rigveda been revealed: its very Yoga has been taken higher and deeper. Sri Aurobindo has re-coined the Truth-gold of Rishi Vishwamitra's great formula.

The old chant reads:

*Tat savitur vareṇyaṁ
bhargo devasya dhīmahi
dhiyo yo naḥ prachodayāt.*¹

Let us meditate
on that most excellent light
of the divine Savitri
that it may impel our minds.

The new Mantra, with Sri Aurobindo's own translation of the recast, runs:

*Tat savitur varam rūpam
jyotiḥ parasya dhīmahi
yannaḥ satyena dīpayet.*

Let us meditate
on the most auspicious (best) form of Savitri,
on the Light of the Supreme
which shall illumine us with the Truth.²

Vishwamitra's Gayatri seeks the Sun of the Divine Consciousness to invoke it as a radiant drive to our intelligence from the Beyond. Sri Aurobindo's version seeks it to draw its revelatory Power towards us and make that "most auspicious

form” descend into our being and radiate there the Perfection which the seers at the dawn of India’s spiritual history called *Satyam Ritam Brihat* — “the True, the Right, the Vast” — and which Sri Aurobindo designates Supermind.

We cannot start the New Year better than by answering his call to fix our hearts on the all-beautiful and transformative Shakti of the supramental Godhead:

O Wisdom-Splendour, Mother of the universe,
Creatrix, the Eternal’s artist Bride,³

whose world-saving incarnation he set before us not only in the heroine of his epic *Savitri* where these lines occur, but also in real life, within the Ashram of his Integral Yoga: his companion and co-worker amongst us whom we have daily adored over the years as the Mother.

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

(Reprinted from *Mother India*, January 1976, p. 5)

References

1. Rigveda, III. 62-10.
2. *On Himself*, SABCL, Vol. 26, p. 513.
3. *Savitri*, SABCL, Vol. 28, p. 345.

AUROVILLE — A “WORLD CITY” IS BORN

(In reporting in some detail the momentous event that took place on February 28 this year we cannot do better than reproduce with grateful acknowledgements the article written by the “Special Correspondent”, Mr. N. S. Ramaswami, of The Indian Express for the issue of that daily from Madras on the very next day.)

“Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole.”

The voice of the Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram transmitted from her room in the Ashram about six miles away, speaking in French, the tongue of liberty, equality and fraternity, set the tone for the foundation ceremony of Auroville, the city of dawn and also the city of Sri Aurobindo.

Over three centuries ago François Martin had founded the city of Pondicherry. Yesterday the Mother founded Auroville which, while drawing some part of its inspiration from Pondicherry, will be animated by far nobler ideals.

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of the Mother’s project. When the world is torn asunder by suspicion and hostility, when India itself is forgetting its great ideals, she has come forward to set up nothing less than a “world city”, to live in which is needed, not mundane qualifications, but, in her own beautiful phrase, a spirit to be “the willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness”.

Auroville is a dramatic extension of the practical working of the ideals of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

The ceremony was at once imaginative and moving. A few miles from Pondicherry town, but in Madras State, a newly laid road takes off from the Tindivanam road. It led to a temporary amphitheatre. In the midst was a tall urn, which looked like a lotus bud. Into this urn was deposited the soil of the 23 States of the Indian Union and of the 124 country-members of UNESCO, which is distinguishing itself by participating in the Mother’s venture.

At the end of 75 minutes of symbolical adding of the world’s earth so that it could form the foundation of the new city, Mr. Nolini Kanta Gupta, a stalwart of the Ashram, sealed the urn.

THE CHARTER

The function was organised with the efficiency one expects of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. On the stroke of 10-30 a.m., as scheduled, the commencement gong was sounded. It was a sweet bar of music. Then the entire gathering was electrified by

the message of the Mother as she said in French, “India has become the symbol representing all the difficulties of modern humanity. India will be the land of its resurrection, the resurrection to a higher, truer life.”

This was followed by the Mother reading the Charter of Auroville in French. It deserves to be quoted in full for its noble utterances:

“Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. But to live in Auroville one must be the willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness.

“Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress, and a youth that never ages.

“Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future. Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly spring toward future realisations.

“Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual research for a living embodiment of actual human unity.”

EARTH AND BANNER

As the Mother’s teachings are nothing if not of universal provenance, the organisers emphasised this in a most striking fashion. After the Charter had been placed in the foundation structure, a procession of young people, mostly in twos, but in threes towards the end, deposited a handful of symbolic earth from their homeland and (in the case of the Indians) from their States into the urn. As the groups, one of the representatives holding a decorated banner with the name of their country or State inscribed on it, advanced in solemn measure towards the urn, translations of the Charter were read in sixteen languages.

The first was a Tamil version by Amrita, a respected member of the Ashram. He was followed by Mr. M. P. Pandit who brought out the spirit of the Charter in sonorous Sanskrit. Then an English version rose and fell in the South Arcot air. Arabic must be a musical language, for the rendering sounded as if it were a poem.

Then there followed translations in Chinese, Dutch, German, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Norwegian, Russian, Spanish, Swedish, and Tibetan. That is, the languages of Bharathi, Kalidasa, Shakespeare, Goethe, Voltaire, Dante and the Hebrew prophets were brought together in a striking testimony to the universality of Auroville, the city of world unity.

All the while background music specially composed by Mr. Sunil Bhattacharya added to the impressiveness of the occasion. The music was truly universal in tone.

The ceremony concluded with the sealing of the urn by Mr. Gupta, a solemn moment.

EXPERIMENT IN UNITY

Thus was a great experiment in human unity launched. To judge from the large number of foreigners present, it has evidently set off to a good start. The countryside near Pondicherry is, to be frank, not very prepossessing; it is not today a land of milk and honey. But, considering what the Ashram has done in Pondicherry, it is reasonable to expect that Auroville would become a model of its kind.

An exhibition at the site showed what striking developments are in store. Auroville will certainly be different from anything to be seen in India today, including Chandigarh, the work of that genius of a Frenchman, Le Corbusier.

M. Roger Anger, the French architect of Auroville, is a man of vision. A student of ‘pan-social architectural forms’, he intends to utilise the principles of urbanism in Auroville. “Volumetric urbanism” is the ideal. “The town consists of a macro-structure, created with terraces on successive levels, that looks like a real pyramid when stripped to its essentials. The pyramid is fitted on its exterior planes with levels of habitation which give an extraordinary contact with nature.”

“An extraordinary contact with nature” — that is the key phrase. For, that contact, while essential throughout the world, is absolutely necessary in India where most townsmen are still villagers at heart.

In a relatively flat countryside artificial levels are to be built, a “circular macro-structure”. About 25,000 people could live in this “ring”. The ring will be encircled by a canal and it will be the “intersection of all sectors, the town’s centripetal focus”.

This bare summary of M. Anger’s plans is enough to show that Auroville, notable as an expression of confidence in human destiny, will also be striking in urban architecture. It is a very exciting thing that happened in our country on Wednesday.

It remains to acknowledge the perfect arrangements made for the spectators. In and around Pondicherry the inauguration was something like a public festival. Many tourist buses brought eager crowds. To them and to those who had come from farther afield it was a memorable occasion. It is the chance of many lifetimes to be present at the birth of a city, and of a city, too, that will be in tune with the noblest ideals of India and the world.

(Reprinted from the March 1968 issue of *Mother India*)

FROM AUROVILLE TO ANY INDIAN — A LETTER

Dear Brother,

I want to write to you from Auroville — the unborn city which ‘belongs to no-one in particular’, which ‘belongs to humanity as a whole’ which yet is rooted in India, not only physically (for it stands in the State of Tamil Nadu, about 7 km north of Pondicherry) but, with greater importance, spiritually, for it owes its conception to the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and was founded by the Mother of his Ashram in 1968. But what to convey to you?

First of all, gratitude; warm, deep-felt gratitude. What other country in the world, in this age of tension and suspicion between nations, could have the sincere, trusting, open-hearted generosity to give hospitality to an experimental project whose declared aim is to become an international township, beyond all national claims and rights — belonging to humanity as a whole? Coming from the West, I know well how impossible it would have been for this experiment to have been started in the U.S. or in any of the European countries, even the most well-intentioned — and we can all imagine its fate had it been attempted in any of the Communist countries. Yet here it is possible. Mother India, who has so often received with her characteristic warmth and tolerance the outcasts and homeless, the wanderers and seekers of different kinds, from all over our planet, opened her arms again.

Perhaps it is unwise, the prudent may object, to be so welcoming. Perhaps India should scrutinise her guests more carefully before giving them the freedom of her house. Maybe — but in the past she has shown herself resilient enough, secure enough in her own unique identity to seize the best that all her guests could give her, whether they came as refugees or conquerors. Always in the end it has been she who has conquered, enriching her own many-sided culture with the new stimuli they brought. For me, this ability to receive and synthesise, to harmonise and reform, is the genius of India — and it is the product of her innate spiritual strength.

For a European like myself it is saddening to meet highly educated cultured Indians who have mentally turned their backs on their spiritual heritage because they see it as merely ritualistic religion, a meaningless relic of an obsolete past. They have turned to more materialistic Western idols, unaware that the greatest figure of this century is an Indian, who after receiving a thoroughly Western education, turned back to the ancient well-springs of his native culture to find the basis for the inspiring synthesis of oriental and occidental, spiritual and material insights which will guide the evolution of world culture into the coming era of human unity. Sri Aurobindo is known in India as a freedom-fighter and revered as a spiritual figure in the vast Pantheon of the nation’s sages and seers, but the

astonishing newness of his vision, the message that gives a clue to the Future, is apparently attracting more attention among the youth of the West than in this country.

And yet this vision is so sorely needed here. The country is full of energetic, idealistic young people, who are wasting their energies in futile rebellion, or in more futile pleasure-seeking, for lack of the ideal which can inspire them to lay down their lives in the service of the Motherland and the race. It must be discouraging for elders who had the burning ideal of national liberation as a battle-cry to see their children leading such aimless lives. And for a westerner who has rejected the materialistic preoccupations of her own culture, it is disappointing to see that the major dynamism in India today is directed to the commercial sphere. This is more than a national concern. As an Indian, you may be troubled at the disunity and other obstacles to progress which retard the nation's growth, but for us the whole future of the human race depends on the health of India.

'Whatsoever the Best doeth, that the rest of the folk put into practice; the standard He creates the people follow,' says Sri Krishna. India is destined to be the Guru of the world, and the world is beginning to recognise that ancient truth. If India cannot give the example, from where will it come? Speaking more practically we can say that since many of the world's problems are seen in their most acute forms in India, if once they can be demonstrably solved here, this decisive step will represent a tremendous progress for the whole world. And since the rational and scientific mind is beginning to recognise its limitations, its inability to solve the pressing practical problems that face humanity today, perhaps it would be worthwhile examining more carefully an approach which brings a higher level of consciousness, another type of power, to bear on our material world.

Indians have spoken to me about the 'spiritual' and the 'secular' aspects of the life of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, and they see Auroville perhaps as a development of the 'secular' side. This is a fundamental misconception. The Mother has said, 'The opposition between spirituality and material life, the division between the two, has no sense for me, as in truth life and the spirit are one and it is in and by the physical work that the highest spirit must be manifested.' It is the will to express the highest spiritual consciousness in the most external dealings with matter, which has led the Sri Aurobindo Ashram to develop industries, shops and farms, as well as an education system which places great emphasis on physical development. It is the same will which has led to the attempt to build a city, which not only in the minds and bodies of its inhabitants, but in its very buildings, gardens and open spaces will be 'the embodiment of an actual human unity'. The only way in which true human unity can be known and expressed in matter will be by the realisation in a community of people of the Divine Unity which is vast enough to encompass and enjoy all our diversities.

A high aim, you may say — an ideal beyond our reach. But it is ideals that are most needed in the world today — ideals so high, so out of reach that the attempt to

reach them lifts us right out of our present limitations into the future realisations. How else are we to make true progress, a true betterment of the life of the race — not merely an increased affluence which satisfies no-one?

Anyway, attracted by these ideals, and above all by the opportunity to work towards their realisation, 400 people, roughly half and half Indians and Westerners, have come together on this scrap of earth which ‘belongs to no-one in particular’ to make the attempt. We have left our homes, our families, our security, our comfortable cultural formations, and find ourselves in a larger home, a wider family, another culture, dictated by our ideal. But though we have left all those things, not without a wrench of the heart perhaps, but easily enough, simply by taking a train or a plane, it has not been so easy to leave behind the human limitations, the egoism, the little mental habits we must painfully outgrow, together . . . for we must become the living cells of one organism, motivated by one all-encompassing aspiration. This process, the individual and communal sadhana, takes time. And we are not allowed the luxury of a hermitage, a secluded retreat, for we have a city to build, with hard physical labour and conscious effort. So the process is slow, slower than we thought; and we have no choice but to go on, for there is nothing left to us in the world but this — to work for the realisation of the dream.

And whatever progress is made here, is first of all for India. How? On the most material plane it’s obvious — if a successful industry or farm, a new technique or approach in education is developed here, the whole region benefits. Economically speaking, there have already been some benefits to the surrounding local population. But that would be meaningless if at the same time a stable social structure were being broken down and nothing put in its place. But just as we, the residents of Auroville, stimulate one another to overpass our limitations, whether by encouragement or by friction, similarly new horizons of possible effort and achievement have been opened up to young villagers simply by the existence of an international community on their doorstep, and a new spirit of endeavour has entered the static rural situation. Such a spirit can spread like a forest fire from one village to another throughout the country.

India, with the longest unbroken line of culture of all nations, mighty and rich in her past achievements, has still a master role to play in the development of humanity. It is the sense of this greatness that has given force to India’s prestigious role in international statesmanship. But her situation at home still draws perplexed compassion from the rest of the world. Who can solve India’s problems? It will be by the liberation of her own inner resources, at present locked up in stereotyped social moulds and in individuals who are prevented from realising their full potential by faulty education and lack of incentive or opportunity to develop and express themselves, that India’s problems will be solved. That liberation can begin wherever Indians feel and affirm the value of their unique heritage; it can only be completed by the fusion of values at present dichotomised into Eastern and Western, spiritual

and material, intuitive and rational — the synthesis which, Sri Aurobindo tells us, was the foundation of India's ancient greatness, and which must become the guiding light of the future world.

What young India needs is the ideal which can draw all her manifold richness into one upward-pointing effort. What the world needs is India united in the expression of her highest ideal. The ideal has been stated. Auroville is to provide a field where it can be worked out in the most mundane, practical details of everyday existence, in a way which has meaning for every human being. Auroville's realisations will be communicated to the world by their expression in the life of the Indian nation.

So far the effort here has been in-turned, concentrated; we have been so occupied with the engrossing task of physically establishing a base, that we have been mostly oblivious to the world around us. But it is time for things to change, and they are changing. We in Auroville are feeling strongly the impulsion to turn around, to express our gratitude for the unique opportunity we have been given and to express something of what we have been doing, something of what we feel has been achieved. In the spring of 1975 the first groups of students from Indian universities came for visits of 'Auroville Discovery', of work and exploration with Aurovilians. Now the programme continues in each vacation. It is a small beginning, but the experience confirms our conviction that more interchange with young India will be valuable on both sides, at every level.

Dear Brother, I have spoken with you very intimately, but I think you will understand. I have had a love affair with India since my first hour here, more than ten years ago. Now I understand that, like many love affairs, this one is based on an affinity of souls. It is the soul of India which must nourish Auroville, and mine is privileged to be a part of Auroville's growth — so you, whoever you are, are truly my brother, for we are both nourished by the same Mother. And we can only truly fulfil ourselves in Her service — *Vande Mataram!*

SHRADDHAVAN

(Reprinted from the April 1976 issue of *Mother India*)

THE VISION OF AUROVILLE

On February 28, at 10.30 a.m., the foundation-stone of a new city, Auroville, was symbolically laid on the outskirts of Pondicherry. But the building up of Auroville will not signify merely the addition of another township after the fashion of Chandigarh or Brasilia. Its life will not move, in however novel a fashion, in the grooves of the past. It will be the city of a New Humanity. For, it is founded by one who stands for an unprecedented development of the Yogic Consciousness — the Mother who guides the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and who has turned to this project in order to realise on a large scale the spiritual work of Sri Aurobindo: the establishment upon earth of what he has called the Divine Supermind. In the words of the Mother:

Humanity is not the last rung of terrestrial creation. Evolution continues and man will be surpassed. It is for each one to know whether he wants to participate in the advent of this new species.

For those who are satisfied with the world as it is, Auroville has evidently no reason for existence. (August 1966)

Indeed, in this world torn asunder by strifes and discords, Auroville will be the first 'world city' wherein will be realised in a most concrete way the ideal of human unity and universal brotherhood. Released from all possible fetters of divisive creeds and propensities, of whatever sort, men will meet here their fellow-beings on the plane of joyous collaboration. Harmony will be the keynote around which everything else would turn. Not the clashes and conflicts of contending egos but the free self-expression of the unitary spiritual consciousness will shape and govern the Life of Auroville. Thus, many of the values intrinsic to the present social organisation of man will be discarded in this 'City of Dawn'; there will grow up instead altogether new values that will help to usher a truer and nobler individual and collective existence for man.

*

If Auroville may strike the sceptic and the worldly-wise as a dream, we should reply that it is a dream of the Spirit and we may digress a little to point out an occult mystery as regards the nature of spiritual dreams.

This externally visible world tangible to the physical senses is not the only world of reality. It is rather the truth that before getting manifested in the physical, things take shape and become realised in the subtle realms. Time and space of the gross domain are not the only time and space possible. As a matter of fact, each

plane of consciousness and every world of manifestation have their respective times and spaces. And these different times bear to each other certain 'phase-differences', to borrow the picturesque expression used by the physicists. The present of the gross is the past of the subtle and the present of the latter is the future of the former. Thus, when the blinkers fall off from our consciousness and the windows of our inner gaze are opened wide, we are apt to awake to

A world unseen, unknown by outward mind . . .
Where all things dreamed by the mind are seen and true
And all that the life longs for is drawn close.¹

It is because of this gift of supreme spiritual vision that the Mother can assuredly declare that she can see the future of Auroville in its totality. And it is highly significant that even in January 1966 when there was not the slightest visible sign of the building up of the city, the Mother announced with all her characteristic simple directness:

Auroville is going well and becomes more and more real, but its realisation does not advance in the habitual manner, and it is more visible for the interior consciousness than for the exterior vision.

The very name 'Auroville' given by the Mother to this city of new Humanity represents as it were the graph of its destiny. Auroville has two derivative meanings: (i) the 'City of Sri Aurobindo', and (ii) the 'City of Dawn'. Let us humbly seek to unravel the symbolic mystery of these two names.

Auroville aspires to become the city of Sri Aurobindo. The Bengali word '*aurobindo*' signifies a lotus and the red lotus symbolises the Avatar. Sri Aurobindo is the supramental Avatar and hence a red lotus represents for us the Consciousness of Sri Aurobindo. Exactly at 10.30 hours of the morning of February 28, when the Mother was consecrating the birth of this 'City of Red Lotus' in her vibrant live voice brought by wire transmission directly to the spot of dedication from her room upstairs six miles away in Sri Aurobindo Ashram, the following two glowing stanzas from Arjava's poem 'Red Lotus: Sri Aurobindo's Consciousness' rang and reverberated in our inner ear:

When spirit-sense to the last high peak gyring
Finds all Thy mountain-bud aflame with rose —
Touched by the eager hues of Dawn's aspiring —
What raptured Silence watches Thee uncloset!

1. *Savitri*, p. 27

Then the vast span of those Truth-petals reaching
 To the utmost arc of Being's finitude
 With vibrant answer to dark's wan beseeching
 Transforms a world, from Thy grave beauty hued.²

The life of Auroville will be shaped by the Sri Aurobindo-Consciousness, for it is the City of Sri Aurobindo. And what the Sri Aurobindo-Consciousness represents for the world at large can only be glimpsed through the words of the Mother whose consciousness, in the words of Sri Aurobindo himself, "and mine are the same, the one Divine Consciousness in two, because that is necessary for the play."³ Here are a few revelations on Sri Aurobindo made by the Mother (italics ours):

(1) "What Sri Aurobindo represents in the world's history is not a teaching, not even a revelation; it is *a decisive action direct from the Supreme*."⁴

(2) "Since the beginning of earth history, Sri Aurobindo has always presided over the great earthly transformation, under one form or another, one name or another."⁵

(3) "Sri Aurobindo has come announcing to the world *the realisation of tomorrow*."⁶

(4) "Sri Aurobindo does not belong to the past or to history. Sri Aurobindo is *the future marching towards its realisation*."

We must then clothe ourselves with *eternal youth* in order to be able to advance with the desired rapidity and not linger upon the way."⁷

It is now abundantly clear that Auroville, the City of Sri Aurobindo, will not be a new retreading of the old walks; its whole orientation will be towards the future — a future renewing itself at every moment. Hence the unambiguous statements of the Mother on the nature of Auroville:

(a) "At last a place where one will be able to think of the future only." (January 1967)

(b) Condition for living in Auroville: "To have the will to collaborate in all that favours the future realisation."

It is worth noting in this connection that the following message of the Mother will be carved in block letters on a stone which is to be placed in Auroville in

2. Arjava (J. A. Chadwick): *Poems*, p. 177.

3. *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother*, p. 361.

4. *The Mother on Sri Aurobindo*, p. 1.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

7. The Mother's message addressed on 31.3.67 to the teachers of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education.

or by the side of a pool with *red lotuses*:

“Auroville is the shelter built for all those who want to hasten towards a future of knowledge, peace and unity.” (16-3-1967)

This then is Auroville, the City of Sri Aurobindo, the City of the Red Lotus. But this is also the ‘City of Dawn’. In the symbolic consciousness of the Vedic Seers, Dawn is the divine Power representing the medium of awakening the activity and the growth of all other divine Powers. Dawn is the symbol for the advent of a new divine Splendour breaking out in the mortal consciousness of man. The two main functions that Dawn fulfils are (i) to elevate humanity to the full force of the Light of Knowledge, and (ii) to reveal the Truth and pour the Bliss of Amrita into the lower triple existence of man. Hence the Rishis proclaimed in one voice that Dawn divine is the great Awakener, *bodhayantī* (Rig Veda V.80.2); she leads the way and walks in front, *yātyagre* (V.80.2); she it is who brings down the heavenly Light into us, *svarāvahantī*; she makes our path easy of walking, *sugām pathaḥ kṛṇvati* (V.80.2); for she is the carrier of Truth, *ṛtāvari* (V.80.1) — indeed, she is born of Truth, *ṛtejāḥ* (I.113.12).

All the aforesaid epithets are equally applicable to the Dawn-City Auroville. Borrowing the voice of the Seers of old we too can declare that in the midst of the disintegrating world-scene, the City of Dawn will act as the beacon-light to all, *netrī* (I.113.4); for in her will be operative the power of conscious Knowledge, *cikitvit* (IV.52.4). Hence the founding of Auroville betokens the possibility of dispelling the earth’s ignorance and gloom, *bādhamānā tamāmsi* (VII.77.1). We hold aloft the hope that the life of Auroville will awaken into action all the dynamisms of the Truth, *sūnṛtānām acetī* (I.113.4) and open the doors of variegated creation, *citrā vi duro na āvaḥ* (I.113.4). The City of Dawn will ever propel the world to the resplendent future, *prārpyā jagadvyu* (I.113.4); for, in the luminous words of the Mother:

“Auroville must be at the service of the Truth, beyond all convictions, social, political and religious.” (20-9-1966)

Yes, Truth will be the talisman of the Dawn-City Auroville. We all know that Truth and Love are the key-words of many of the Mother’s recent messages. Let us remember the New-Year message for the year 1965:

Salute to the advent of the Truth.

Then the exhortation for 1966:

Cling to Truth.

And the message for the year after (1967):

Men, countries, continents, The choice is imperative: Truth or the Abyss.

This year too, both on the occasion of her birthday and on the anniversary of the Day of Supramental Manifestation, the Mother's messages revolve around the two alchemic words "Truth" and "Love". Here is the message of February 21:

The best way to hasten the manifestation of the Divine's Love is to collaborate for the triumph of the Truth.

And the message of the 29th of February:

Truth alone can give to the world the power of receiving and manifesting the Divine's Love.

In the light of the sequence of these messages of the Mother we can discern the import of the birth of Auroville. This City of Sri Aurobindo, the City of Dawn, is indeed born of Truth (*ṛta-prajātā*), will ever have its foundation on Truth (*ṛtāyini*); and being ever on guard for the preservation of Truth (*ṛtapā*), she will collaborate in the growing manifestation of Truth (*ṛtavṛdhā*).

We, who witnessed the ceremony of the laying of the Foundation Stone of Auroville on that sun-bathed morning of February 28, 1968, could not but be reminded of the prophetic lines of *Savitri*, when the Mother heralded the birth of the City of Dawn by reading the 'Charter of Auroville':

A gold supernal sun of timeless Truth
 Poured down the mystery of the eternal Ray
 Through a silence quivering with the word of Light
 On an endless ocean of discovery.⁸

"Through a silence quivering with the word of Light": it was so indeed! Here are the words of Light of the Mother ringing in the silence of the expectant hearts:

8. *Savitri*, Book II, Canto XI, p. 264.

Auroville salutes all men of good will.

Are invited to Auroville all those who have thirst for progress and aspire after a higher and truer life.

Auroville will be the field of self-expression of ageless youth.

Almost as a symbolic reminder of the destiny of Auroville a contingent of about three hundred young people hailing from different corners of the globe actively participated in its ceremony of dedication. But this is no more than a symbol; for, as the Mother has so often pointed out, true youth and age are attributes of consciousness and not of the body. How beautifully does She express this truth when she declares:

It is not the number of years you have lived that makes you old. You become old when you stop progressing.

As soon as you feel you have done what you had to do, as soon as you think you know what you ought to know, as soon as you want to sit and enjoy the results of your effort, with the feeling you have worked enough in life, then at once you become old and begin to decline.

When, on the contrary, you are convinced that what you know is nothing compared to all that remains to be known, when you feel that what you have done is just the starting-point of what remains to be done, when you see the future like an attractive sun shining with the innumerable possibilities yet to be achieved, then you are young, howsoever many are the years you have passed upon earth, young and rich with all the realisations of tomorrow.⁹

Auroville aspires to be the playfield of such unaging youth. And it is not without significance that the Mother's New-Year message for this year of the birth of Auroville is as follows:

Remain young, never stop striving towards perfection.

Auroville will be the city of peace and unity — not the simulacrum of peace imposed from outside, not the unity whose other name is uniformity, but the peace and unity arising out of the truth of Spirit's oneness. Hence the pertinency of the Mother's messages:

Auroville is the effort towards peace in sincerity and Truth.

*

9. *Bulletin*, February 1968, p. 19.

Auroville is an attempt towards peace, friendship, fraternity, unity.

Even at the risk of being dubbed day-dreaming idealists, we feel tempted to quote here a few lines from Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*, occurring in a Canto bearing the highly significant title 'The House of the Spirit and the New Creation'. These lines may be taken to represent the life of the citizens of future Auroville, the dream-child of the Divine Mother:

None was apart, none lived for himself alone,
 Each lived for God in him and God in all,
 Each soleness inexpressibly held the whole.
 There oneness was not tied to monotone;
 It showed a thousand aspects of itself . . .

*

Each gave its powers to help its neighbours' parts,
 But suffered no diminution by the gift;
 Profiteers of a mystic interchange,
 They grew by what they took and what they gave,
 All others they felt as their own complements,
 One in the might and joy of multitude.¹⁰

This then is Auroville, the City of Sri Aurobindo and the City of Dawn, wherein after their immemorial divorce Matter will be consciously wedded to Spirit again, and this mystic marriage of Earth and Heaven will be the harbinger of a divinised life here upon the face of our globe.

Hail, Auroville, City of promise and resurrected humanity. We salute your advent and pray with fervent hearts that your journey of glory prosper day by day and your very presence in this benighted world act as a catalyst for the welfare of all.
Ayam ārambhaḥ śubhāya bhavatu!

JUGAL KISHORE MUKHERJEE

(Reprinted from the April 1968 issue of *Mother India*)

10. *Savitri*, pp. 324, 326.

THE NEW BEING AND THE NEW SOCIETY

(A compilation of the Mother's words and archival material during the formative years of Auroville)

INTRODUCTION

Between 1986 and 1990 I put together a series of compilations on Auroville during the Mother's years. Financed with grants from the Government of India, as with most of my research and book publication, these were distributed for free to the whole community. The purpose for the initiative was to share the attitude the Mother expected from us, along with the Mother's concept and reasons for the establishment of an ideal town of 50,000 inhabitants.

In the course of that five-year research I was handed over precious documents, many of which were never disclosed before, by Roger Anger (the Mother's architect, with whom she also went on discussing all aspects of life in Auroville) and Suresh Hindocha (who informed the Mother, and she accepted, of the possibility of building the town in five years through systems engineering). I also received photographs and drawings. . . .

The approach I take for *The New Being and the New Society* is that of an historian aiming at providing as exhaustive documentation as possible; this includes little known or never published material from original sources. . . .

The world is undergoing an unprecedented upheaval. Not only is the survival of our planet jeopardised in terms of wildlife habitat and natural resources due to pollution and greed, but the present political, economic and financial structures and functioning are being seriously put into question by an ever-growing population of disaffected individuals, particularly in affluent countries, where more and more people have to struggle to make a living and the youth perceive an uncertain future, ecologically, economically, financially and in terms of equal access to jobs and education.

The question arises whether the age of "the religion of humanity" — with its social legislation and provisions for a more humane face to the socio-economic apparatus, according to Sri Aurobindo a major achievement of the West — is over even before reaching its completion. All ideologies and political organisations seem to be faltering. Behind the volatile realities and grim perspectives of contemporary economies and social orders, where old organisational structures are being seriously challenged but new ones are not yet in place, a new consciousness with a concomitant force appears to be at work, foreshadowing the end of an era, while calling for a

new definition and order of society. This, however, is not yet clearly articulated. A radical shift of values and an entirely new paradigm of existence, for both individuals and nations, are essential, where the sole hierarchy is based on the power of consciousness, the lever of human evolution.

At this historical crossroads, are the Mother's comments on what passed into history as "the French May"¹ prophetic, heralding a mutation of consciousness that inevitably brings about momentous changes that deeply impact society?

It's clearly the future which is awakening and trying to drive away the past. . . . Naturally, on the mental level there's a whole mixture of all kinds of ideas, but the Force behind . . . And they themselves are unaware of it, but they are driven by a force that wants the manifestation of a truer truth. . . . It's the higher Power *compelling* people to do what they must do. Between now and that (which is a long way ahead), there must be the power of an *immobile* number. . . . But it was a very clear vision: an occupation by the mass, but a mass all-powerful in its immobility, imposing its will through sheer numbers, with intellectual representatives for negotiations. . . . It's clearly (not in the detail of it, but in the direction of the movement), clearly a will to have done with the past and to open the door to the future. . . . It's like a sort of revulsion with stagnation. That's it. A thirst for something which is ahead and appears more luminous, better. And indeed there *is* something — it's not just imagination: there *is* something. That's the beauty of it, it's that there is something. There *is* a Response. There *is* a Force that wants . . . to express itself.

She concludes her remarks as follows:

And now, the state of the earth would seem to be precisely such that what is at the very least being prepared (if it's not yet actually like that) is the manifestation of the mass in a kind of silent and immobile will . . . And that's an intermediate period to reach the condition in which this mass will be held under the control and directly driven by the Power from above.

That's where we are heading.

Three months before the May 1968 events, which have marked a whole generation, the Mother founded Auroville, a universal town of human unity named after Sri Aurobindo. Calling for the advent of a new consciousness where the sole hierarchy is based on spiritual truth, she appeals to people from all over the world to

1. "A sort of general strike by some eight million people, which began with a student revolt and the occupation of the Sorbonne University in Paris." (Satprem's footnote in the *Agenda's* conversation on May 22, 1968, from which these excerpts are reproduced.)

build an international community above race, above creed, above class, above politics, free from the slavery of money and private property. While acknowledging both the natural order of society and individual soul-types as seen from a spiritual perspective, she planted seeds for in-depth changes to the very ordering and functioning of societal life. This transmutation can only be brought about by evolved individuals who undergo an inner transformation of being in dynamic interaction with others, while simultaneously fostering the emergence of the community's soul.

Forty-three years have elapsed since the founding of Auroville. Have we yet reached the end of the rope as individuals and as a human species, propelled at last to find the strength and relentless determination to have done with the past — with all the pasts, whatever the 'isms' and beliefs — , ready to plunge boldly into the future? The key is to be found within oneself, where the true revolution commences. At a time when confusion and cultural dissolution make it difficult to discover one's inner voice and find a place to nurture humanity's age-long dream of an ideal society, Auroville may be the answer. The Mother's undiluted vision and her pragmatic instructions, which changed according to circumstances, offer important guidelines to living and help to find the answer to the riddle of new life.

The New Being and the New Society is an invitation to people of good-will from all over the world, seeking a higher consciousness involving the transformation of life itself. Not by way of an ashram or an ascetic life of renunciation or having as goal some remote beyond, but through the gradual, progressive transformation of human nature, to be brought about by attending the chores of one's day-to-day existence in the spirit of service to Auroville's micro-society, in a state of inner awareness and self-scrutiny. This is the sadhana of works, karmayoga — but it also is the sadhana of self-perfection, requiring relentless psychological work upon oneself, including both the superconscious and subconscious levels of being. For Auroville, in principle a microcosmic specimen of the world at large, encompasses the entire gamut of its contradictions and impossibilities for the sake of potentially integrating every conceivable opposite into new modes of consciousness and creative possibilities. . . .

This book wishes to address a new generation of youth with high ideals, along with the eternally young, people for whom the Ideal manifests in life itself and not in some distant Utopia, people aware that human evolution goes hand in hand with the metamorphosis and self-perfection of individuals. The purpose of this book, which is inspiringly educational, is to draw inspiration from the practical set-up of Auroville as it began to emerge during the Mother's years under her guidance, as an attempt to achieve on earth a slightly more ideal life. The objective is to highlight the preliminary stages of the ideal society in-the-making, seen as an apprenticeship towards the "cradle of the superman" that, by the Mother's definition, is the true Auroville.

Paulette H.
Auroville, February 2012

NOTE. When the quotes are reproduced in several publications, normally the reference used is the one that is most well-known. The parts in italic refer to someone other than the Mother; I have applied this rule to the entire book, otherwise retaining the different formats of the original sources. MCWCE refers to the Mother's Collected Works, Centenary Edition. When quoting from the Mother's Agenda, Satprem, I refer to the last edition, while noting the year of the English translation. When I feel it is helpful for the reader, I introduce the chapter using a different font.

APPRENTICESHIP FOR THE IDEAL SOCIETY

The Avatar's Model Town

The Mother had been dreaming of an ideal society since she was a young girl. When she was thirteen years old, she experienced going out of her body every night, for nearly a year, healing suffering human beings with their touching her golden robe, which stretched over the city like an immense roof. In her youth she came across people who wished to consecrate their life to the pursuit of a noble, spiritual existence but were stuck in the dire struggle for material necessities; she had wished since then to create a place where all basic necessities were freely provided so that those spiritual travellers could concentrate full time on the inner quest.

The Mother's words to a group of women in Paris, in 1912, with hints of the supramental society of Gnostic beings heralded by Sri Aurobindo, her talks in 1920 to some Japanese women, all point in the same direction. Not only in terms of Yoga, but also in terms of a new world and society, the Mother was Sri Aurobindo's equal partner, as he repeatedly stressed. How is the pursuit for a new world to manifest? Sri Aurobindo wrote:

... there has even been the dream or a psychic prevision of a fulfilment exceeding the individual transformation, a new earth and heaven, a city of God, a divine descent upon earth, a reign of the spiritually perfect, a kingdom of God not only within us but outside, in a collective human life. However obscure may have been some of the forms taken by this aspiration, the indication they contain of the urge of the occult spiritual being within to emergence in earth-nature is unmistakable.

If a spiritual unfolding on earth is the hidden truth of our birth into Matter, if it is fundamentally an evolution of consciousness that has been taking place in Nature, then man as he is cannot be the last term of that evolution: he is too imperfect an expression of the Spirit, Mind itself a too limited form and instrumentation; Mind is only a middle term of consciousness, the mental being

can only be a transitional being. If, then, man is incapable of exceeding mentality, he must be surpassed and Supermind and superman must manifest and take the lead of the creation. But if his mind is capable of opening to what exceeds it, then there is no reason why man himself should not arrive at Supermind and supermanhood or at least lend his mentality, life and body to an evolution of that greater term of the Spirit manifesting in Nature.²

And the Mother:

The work of achieving a continuity which permits one to go up and down and bring into the material what is above, is done inside the consciousness. He who is meant to do it, the Avatar, even if he were shut up in a prison and saw nobody and never moved out, still would he do the work, because it is a work in the consciousness, a work of connection between the Supermind and the material being. He does not need to be recognised, he need have no outward power in order to be able to establish this conscious connection. Once, however, the connection is made, it must have its effect in the outward world in the form of a new creation, beginning with a model town and ending with a perfect world.³

Sri Aurobindo foresaw the big change to be initiated by a spiritual community or *sangha*. The mutational transformation that is the object of Integral Yoga cannot happen through just a few people. It needs a preliminary nucleus of individuals, eventually to be enlarged to the whole of humankind, as this turns progressively more receptive. The transforming Force acts both individually, and collectively by contagion; all individual progress (or regression) reflects automatically on the outer environment. Hence the initial necessity of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, where the disciples followed the path chartered by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Significantly, it was none other than the Mother herself, her Shakti that created its organisational structure, supervising it down to the least detail. Sri Aurobindo followed the work from his room, where he lived in seclusion for the last twenty-four years of material existence.

Since early on the Mother's vision was that of an ideal town. In all traditions the symbol of the Self has often been expressed in the form of a mandala. In the Thirties the Mother consistently envisioned the formation of a town where Sri Aurobindo was to live at the centre surrounded by his disciples. Encircled by walls isolating it from the external world, the town was conceived as being economically self-sufficient. The Mother considered it to be a real potential; having the dimensions

2. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, SABCL XIX, pp. 846-47.

3. MCWCE 3, p. 179, 1930-1931.

of an ideal country, it was to be established on a much larger scale than her conception of Auroville three decades later. Sir Akbar Hydari, the Dewan to the Nizam, had offered to the Mother a large land with a river flowing at the foot of a hillock, in the state of Hyderabad. This early vision marks the first conception of Auroville, named after Sri Aurobindo. The town was meant to develop as an ideal settlement reflecting spiritual transformation that includes the material world.

At that time the architect Antonin Raymond was drawing the plans for the construction of the Golconde guest house. On the Mother's request he drew a mandala-like layout for Sri Aurobindo's town, which was the material realisation of the Mother's symbol. Significantly, thirty years later, a similar plan resurfaced with the first layout designed by Roger Anger, from whom the Mother had requested a layout plan for Auroville with its spiritual centre.

In the Fifties and early Sixties the Mother had disclosed to a few people the urge for the realisation of such a town. On July 18, 1961 she unveiled her vision of an ideal city as preliminary to the advent of the supramental world, foreseeing as well the tremendous challenge that this event implies:

Is it possible to find a place where the embryo or seed of the future supramental world might be created? What I myself have seen . . . was a plan that came complete in all details, but that doesn't at all conform in spirit and consciousness with what is possible on earth now (although, in its most material manifestation, the plan was based on existing terrestrial conditions). It was the idea of an ideal city, the nucleus of a small ideal country, having only superficial and extremely limited contacts with the old world. One would already have to conceive (it's possible) of a Power sufficient to be at once a protection against aggression or bad will (this would not be the most difficult protection to provide) and a protection (which can just barely be imagined) against infiltration and admixture . . . From the social or organisational standpoint, these problems are not difficult, nor from the standpoint of inner life; the problem is the relationship with what is not supramentalised — preventing infiltration or admixture, keeping the nucleus from falling back into an inferior creation during the transitional period.

(silence)

All who have considered the problem have always imagined some place like a Himalayan gorge, unknown to the rest of humanity, but this is no solution. No solution at all. No, the only solution is occult power. But that . . . Before anything at all can be done, it already demands a certain number of individuals who have reached a great perfection of realisation. Granting this, a place is conceivable (set apart from the outside world — no actual contacts) where

each thing is exactly in its place, setting an example. Each thing exactly in its place, each person exactly in his place, each movement in its place, and all in its place in an ascending, progressive movement without relapse (that is, the very opposite of what goes on in ordinary life). Naturally, this also means a sort of perfection, it means a sort of unity; it means that the different aspects of the Supreme can be manifested; and, necessarily, an exceptional beauty, a total harmony; and a power sufficient to keep the forces of Nature obedient: even if this place were encircled by destructive forces, for example, these forces would be powerless to act — the protection would be sufficient. It would all require the utmost perfection in the individuals organising such a thing.⁴

Concluding with these words, while hitting straight at the core of the problem, the Mother observes:

But the problem remains: Buddha and all the rest have *first* realised, then resumed contact with the world. That makes it very simple. But for the total realisation of what I envisage, isn't it indispensable to remain in the world?

No longer an ideal town to be encircled by walls to carry on an extreme experiment in isolation from the external world, but right in the midst of it: was this the answer? This corresponds to a radical shift in the Mother's occult strategy. When she envisioned the early town, where she would have re-located the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, the rapid progress of the ashramites demanded isolating the Sri Aurobindo Ashram from the outer world. The number of Ashram inmates had settled at around one hundred twenty; there were no new admissions and the gates were closed to most visitors. The situation changed entirely with the war, by the will of both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Auroville was founded with even further complexities. It was meant to be not an ashram but a town; its citizens could still have a family life and were not necessarily engaged in the yogic pursuit. Simple goodwill, the thirst for progress and the ideal of human unity were sufficient to gain admittance. On such a broad basis, with all the risks that this entails, the experiment was launched.

In 1963 the Mother requested the Sri Aurobindo Society to announce at a conference her call for a new town and to begin fundraising. Gathering people from all nationalities as living expressions of human unity, Auroville was founded on February 28, 1968. In March 1968 the Mother approved the final lay-out of the town, popularly known as the 'galaxy'. Repeatedly stating that no one was to interfere, the Mother herself being the sole authority on both the town and its 'soul' — the Matrimandir or the Mother's shrine — she delegated the execution of the plans to

4. *Mother's Agenda*, II, 18.7.1961.

her chief architect, Roger Anger. For this purpose Roger Anger, from 1965 onwards, met daily with the Mother, for six months a year; after discussing the detailed plans with her, he then returned to his studio in Paris to work out their execution with his collaborators. Nor was Roger's task confined to working on the town and the Matrimandir alone. Along with these responsibilities the Mother instructed him on how life in Auroville was to be organised. In fact, Roger's archive is a gold mine for the researcher trying to reconstruct the atmosphere of Auroville during the Mother's years, under her direct guidance.

The Mother had temporarily delegated management of Auroville to the Pondy-based Administrative Committee of Auroville (CAA). The Sri Aurobindo Society, of which the Mother was the President, and Navajata the Secretary, was entrusted with the financial and material assets of the planned town. From 1971 onwards, day-to-day affairs were carried on through Shyam Sundar Jhunjhunwala, a lawyer who had surrendered his belongings to the Mother. He met with her daily, acting as the liaison between her and the Aurovilians to whom he conveyed the Mother's messages and instructions, often in writing, he received.

The Mother's early messages for Auroville may appear to have been very general, perhaps in order to attract a large variety of people on the basis of goodwill and human unity. However, as the abyss between vision and reality kept widening, the messages became more and more sharp, until, in her latest years, the Mother shifted the focus to the unique purpose of Auroville, to be "the cradle of the superman" heralding the advent of the supramental world and a society governed by it.

Humanity is not the last rung of the terrestrial creation. Evolution continues and man will be surpassed. It is for each individual to know whether he wants to participate in the advent of this new species.

For those who are satisfied with the world as it is, Auroville obviously has no reason to exist.⁵

We would like to make Auroville the cradle of the Superman.⁶

This is Auroville — and the consciousness to be achieved. For Auroville, named after Sri Aurobindo, is "the Avatar's model town", "the city of God" that has been sought down the ages. But the Avatar cannot fulfil his mission alone; a preliminary nucleus of individuals is needed. To provide this was the function of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, a spiritual community or *sangha*. But Auroville, conceived as a town of 50,000 inhabitants, exceeds the dimensions of a *sangha*. In fact, it is

5. MCWCE 13, p. 197, August 1966.

6. *Ibid.*

meant to be the incubator of the ideal society, the new *satyayuga* or ‘golden age’ that a spiritualised humanity alone can make true. It is this ideal that defines the destiny of Auroville; its realisation or failure determining its fate.

“The Wider is the Consciousness . . . the Less the Material Needs”

Always behind even the Mother’s simplest messages to the Aurovilians, those quoted over again and again, is the Truth-Consciousness or Supramental Gnosis. The guidelines given to us by the Mother are those of a spiritual society. As she observes, a truly spiritual being has [few] material needs. The treasure is within; it is a jewel that no outer riches can buy. Thus, commenting on the nature of the true hierarchy in Auroville, the Mother stated:

Théon⁷ said something in this regard, he said, “Those who are all the way up” (he was referring to the *true* hierarchy, the hierarchy based precisely on each one’s power of consciousness), “one who is all the way up (one or those) necessarily has the least amount of needs; his material needs decrease as his capacity of material vision increases.” And it’s perfectly true. It’s automatic and spontaneous; it’s not the result of an effort: the vaster the consciousness and the more things and realities it embraces, the smaller the material needs become — automatically so — because they lose all their importance and value. It’s reduced to a minimal need of material necessities, which will itself change with the progressive development of Matter. And that’s easily recognisable, of course. It’s difficult to feign.⁸

There’s something very interesting on a psychological level: it’s that material needs decrease in proportion to the spiritual growth. Not (as Sri Aurobindo said), not through asceticism, but because the focus of attention and concentration of the being moves to a different domain . . .⁹

Did not the Mother stress that the first necessity is the inner discovery, and that this should happen *before* coming to Auroville? The way pointed to by the Mother is that of material needs progressively shrinking to basic necessities, for this goes hand in hand with inner progress, both being interdependent and equally necessary for the establishment of the spiritual society into which Auroville is meant to grow.

7. A Cabbalist and an occultist, Max Théon was considered by some to be an epitome of Gnosticism. He was the master who taught occultism to the Mother, at the time a young woman by the name of Mirra Alfassa, who had met him in Paris in 1905.

8. *Mother’s Agenda*, IX, 10.4.1968.

9. *Mother’s Agenda*, XI, 25.3.1970.

Then things make sense, as this statement by the Mother, which translates the full significance of her vision of Auroville into one's mode of life, reveals:

It's a kind of adaptation of the Communist system, but not in a spirit of leveling: according to everyone's capacity, his position (not a psychological or intellectual one), his *inner* position.

In democracies and with the Communists, there's a levelling down: everyone is pulled down to the same level.

Yes, that's just the point.

The true part is that every human being has the material right . . . (but it's not a "right". . .). The organisation should be such, arranged in such a way, that everyone's material need should be met, not according to notions of right and equality, but on the basis of the most elementary necessities; then, once that is established, everyone must be free to organise his life, not according to his monetary means, but according to his inner capacities.¹⁰

For average human beings there is no ceiling to their 'needs', nor is money ever enough. But as one advances on the path a moment comes when there is nothing to renounce. Material cravings collapse, effortlessly, giving way to the real thing: sadhana as service to the Divine, without expecting anything in return, being just content to serve. When the spiritual conversion takes place a few square metres to rest at night, simple food and inexpensive clothing are enough. The Mother stated that money is in the hands of asuric forces and must be returned to the Divine, and only those in contact with a higher consciousness can administer it. The Mother established Auroville on two essential principles: the first being no private property, as everything belongs to Auroville as a whole. The second principle articulated by the Mother, which penetrates to the very foundation of life in Auroville, regards minimum needs, to be provided by the 'Auroville Prosperity' Service. These two principles differentiate Auroville, according to the Mother's vision, from what is happening elsewhere, where the satisfaction of material desires is a major goal. Everything in Auroville belongs to the community as a whole, while those who work for the common well-being are taken in charge on the basis of minimum needs.

What the Mother meant by 'minimum needs' is elucidated by an attentive study of all that she said, wrote or approved on Auroville. The 'Auroville Prosperity' system, like the Mother's guidelines, is but an expression in material terms of the inner revolution a true Aurovilian is called to live. At first, simplicity and frugality

10. *Mother's Agenda*, VIII, 30.12.1967.

may be dictated because of limited means; but the more one evolves, the more this becomes a natural way of life. When concentrated within material cravings become irrelevant and all that is not essential loses value.

Auroville is not an ashram, nor are rigours demanded. Making no distinction between Westerners and foreigners in general, and the native population wanting to join Auroville, the Mother wished that everybody had a decent place to live. A major difference from the Ashram was that, at the very inception of Auroville, living in basic huts was common practice (in some parts of the 'green belt' this still happens). This was the case with the pioneering community of Aspiration, and afterwards with the Matrimandir Camp and mushrooming new communities. At the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, under the Mother's direct supervision, life was simplified to the utmost thanks to the efficient organisation of even the smallest details, allowing the sadhak to fully concentrate on the inner quest, where work as service to the Divine played the major role. But in contrast to life at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, life in Auroville was so tough that even obtaining a drop of water was a conquest. When a choice needed to be made between watering the newly planted vegetables and trees versus satisfying human needs, it was often the trees and vegetables that won. Most of the year, scorched by the burning sun, the place was a barren desert, only to be flooded by torrential rains during the monsoon season. Due to the primitive conditions of the newly-founded community and, needless to say, the absence of infrastructure and facilities still required to be built, coupled with extreme weather conditions and difficult environment, the pioneers had to undergo considerable hardship, which they faced in a spirit of youthful resilience.

Those who did useful work for the community were taken care of on the basis of minimum needs; this meant free food, toiletries, basic items, simple clothing (shorts and T-shirts were the most popular), day-to-day necessities — plus a little pocket money. The Mother's message for the recipients of these essential items, distributed to Aurovilians through the 'Auroville Prosperity' system, was: "Auroville is not meant for the satisfaction of desires but for the growth of the true consciousness." Three years later the Mother gave this message to be displayed in the rooms where the Prosperity items were distributed: "One does not live in Auroville to be comfortable but to grow in consciousness and to serve the Divine."

To someone asking, "How will work be organised and distributed in Auroville?" the Mother replied, speaking in terms of work as a way of expressing oneself and developing one's capacities and possibilities, but also in terms of people's so-called 'subsistence' needs:

Money would no longer be the sovereign lord; individual worth would have a far greater importance than that of material wealth and social standing. There, work would not be a way to earn one's living but a way to express oneself and to develop one's capacities and possibilities while being of service to the

community as a whole, which, for its own part, would provide for each individual's subsistence and sphere of action.¹¹

In the Mother's true [. . .] Auroville needs drop to "the most elementary necessities", to be met by the community at large in exchange for a minimum of five hours a day work for the community (six hours, if Sunday is taken as a holiday). Work for oneself or one's family is not counted. Farmers and industrialists would contribute in kind, while sales of surplus goods to the outside would bring in cash for the township. Money comes last and is the medium of exchange only if there is nothing else of value to be offered in exchange. To be an Aurovilian truly means to be a willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness. The way is self-government by the psychic being, individually and collectively, which creates what the Mother calls a "divine anarchy".

In the Mother's vision there are no servants. She commented to Satprem that a new world cannot be built with coolies. As for the workers and skilled technicians, these were to be hired on a temporary basis only, while waiting for an Aurovilian to pick up the job, or the worker's/technician's integration as an Aurovilian. The Mother emphasised the need for manual work as the body's prayer. Thus, the pioneers worked in the fields, built their own huts and, from 1971 on, worked at the Matri-mandir construction site. Many offered their services to work there, at least on shifts, or on special occasions like pouring concrete on a full moon or *darshan* day.

The Mother's True Guidelines

In the course of my five-year archival research I came across the guidelines formulated during the Mother's time and approved by her. The admission form is a simple document revolving around the Mother's text "To be a true Aurovilian"; some basic information and questions are also included. Auroville's first inhabitants were admitted on the basis of these guidelines.

Life in Auroville was meant to begin with the inner quest, which would have a determining effect on the outer life. This transformation was to proceed hand in hand with the coming forward of those minimum needs in the name of which the Mother had started the 'Auroville Prosperity' system in March 1968, two weeks after founding Auroville. What, then, were the Mother's true guidelines in their practical aspect (outlining the inward quest would take volumes)? What were they, not only as they were presented in the original application form, but taking into account other essential documents, such as statements by the Mother as well as draft documents by her chief architect Roger Anger, her designated Auroville liaison

11. MCWCE 13, pp. 195-6, 1965.

officer Shyam Sundar and other people, all which she commented upon and finally approved?

1. The inner discovery: the psychic opening.
2. Aspiration to reach Auroville's true consciousness.
3. Goodwill.
4. Nurturing human unity.
5. Working for the community at least five hours a day, including Sundays; this was later changed into a minimum of six hours a day, if Sunday was excluded. One's activity should correspond to the effective needs of the community. Work for oneself or one's family doesn't count. Pregnant women and nursing mothers should work as receptionists at guesthouses, kindergartens etc.
6. Newcomers who have no money but do a useful work are taken in charge by Auroville right away and basic accommodations are allotted to them.
7. Minimum needs. "When Auroville meets the individual's needs and requirements, one is expected to offer to Auroville all that he has and can in terms of material possessions."¹²
8. The children born in Auroville are naturally Aurovilians and Auroville has the full responsibility to care for them; this ceases if the parents take them away.
9. All is collective property, to be utilised for the wellbeing of all, with the Mother's blessings.

*

1. All industries/productive units etc. belong to Auroville as a whole; each case is to be considered separately, but within a context where private property and money circulation have no place.
2. Paid workers and paid technicians are allowed only on a temporary basis, until an Aurovilian picks up the job, and anyhow for not more than one year.
3. No servants.
4. No politics.
5. No drugs, no alcohol and ideally no tobacco.
6. No violence.
7. No police, only battalions of Auroville guards made up of athletes and gymnasts.
8. Integration of the villagers. As long as the workers weren't ready to join Auroville, the Mother instituted for them and their families an in-kind system

12. *Mother's Years* [A Compilation].

similar to that of ‘Auroville Prosperity’, preferably replacing wages. Their children are to attend school together with the Auroville children.

9. No polluting traffic. Collective transport, bicycles, electric cars etc. [now, using solar energy] at a speed of no more than 15 kilometres per hour.

10. No chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

11. A need to abide by the laws of India, the country hosting Auroville, with regard to the whole spectrum of life.

12. During the Mother’s years people with a turbulent history were accepted both at the Ashram and Auroville, along with the caveat that this was their past to be worked out. As for those undergoing a period of stress and mental imbalance, the Mother had agreed upon a protected, secluded place for them for purposes of rest and putting themselves together. Having fulfilled these basic conditions the individual was accepted as an Aurovilian within one year, although this period could be shortened or lengthened according to the peculiarities of the situation.

It should be noted that the Mother did not enforce the practice of Integral Yoga as an absolute necessity for Aurovilians. Auroville, where simple goodwill is sufficient to gain admission, is not the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. In the application form one was simply asked, “*How did you come in contact with the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Sri Aurobindo Society and/or Auroville?*” and, “*Have you studied any literature of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother? Which books?*” Nothing more was asked. In fact, in connection to Auroville the Mother referred to Sri Aurobindo’s yoga only twice. But she also replied, significantly, when a TV crew wanted to interview the residents of Aspiration on various subjects, “It would perhaps be better to ask people who, by a serious practise of yoga, have had at least a glimpse of the Higher Wisdom.”

From Aspiration to Auromodel: Quest for the Group-Soul Identity

The Aspiration experiment was a preliminary attempt at collective living. Along with other recorded comments in many archival documents, as well in the weekly ‘Aspiration talks’ with the Mother, what follows presents glimpses of how early Aurovilians recall their experiences during the Mother’s years.

The inhabitants lived in graceful huts with electricity, running water and toilets. Boiled water, filters and strict hygienic norms became a necessity after an outburst of gastro-intestinal and other problems. The huts were paid for by an Aurovilian who lived there as well. There was no money exchanged and no servants, the Mother having stated that neither had their place in the true Auroville. There were no paid workers either and gardening was done by the residents. The laundry service was provided by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. The meals were taken collectively in the

cafeteria. At the beginning, and as long as financial conditions permitted it, the food was excellent and included meat, fish, various salads, fruits and sometimes dessert. The few powered vehicles at the disposal of the community were meant for work only. People travelling to Madras would do so by taking the ordinary inter-city bus; the ticket was booked through an Auroville service. Daily transportation to and from Pondy was operated by a community bus service. While in Pondy the Aurovilians had free access to the bicycles kept in the yard of the Sri Aurobindo Society. They could also have free meals there and sleep on mats on the floor of the roof-terrace.

Life was simple and everybody shared in the work. Some worked in productive units, while others attended to the chores of the community's daily life, often until ten in the evening. The more intensely they worked, the happier they professed to be; while those who did not work felt out of place and were made to leave or left on their own. Bicycles were available, but only in limited number; they belonged to the community as a whole and had to be shared because there was an insufficient quantity. On Sundays, after lunch, a group of residents used to walk to the Matri-mandir Nursery, a few kilometers away, to attend classes on *Savitri*. As tape-recorded in one of the Aspiration talks, due to the shortage of huts the Mother proposed night shifts elsewhere, at a four kilometers distance. Given the emergency situation, the Mother also approved the construction of a dormitory, considered indispensable at the time, to house twenty-five people. Roger Anger also made a request to the C.A.A. (Comité Administratif d'Auroville) for the construction of a dormitory of 50 beds, and this too was granted.

The Aurovilian chosen by the Mother for book-keeping and management of Aspiration, as well as for liaison with the Pondicherry-based members of the C.A.A. received money for the community once a month. The residents were provided with basic needs, within the limits determined by the possibilities of the moment. The system was similar to that of Sri Aurobindo Ashram 'Prosperity' but with a larger selection of items. When the first productive unit, *Toujours Mieux*, began operating, the Aspiration 'Prosperity' system continued to provide for all members of the community.

Organisational issues, the search for simpler and truer modes of living and the many challenges Aspiration's pioneers had to face were reported and discussed with the Mother. Her comments were displayed on the community's blackboard. It was eventually envisioned that the whole community was to shift to Auromodel, an evolution out of this first collective experiment, and the huts in Aspiration relocated and given to villagers. This was to mark the beginning of a pilot experiment for model villages that the Mother had foreseen. She had also envisaged co-operatives of villagers farming together with Aurovilians on an equal basis. In fact, the Mother considered the local villagers to be Auroville's first inhabitants. She wrote:

A relationship that is not only cordial but friendly with the inhabitants of the neighbouring village is absolutely indispensable. For the realisation of Auroville the first step is to establish a true human fraternity — any shortcoming in this regard is a grave mistake which can compromise the whole work.¹³

. . . a simple and ignorant peasant here is, in his heart, closer to the Divine than all the intellectuals of Europe.

All those who want to become Aurovilians must know this and behave accordingly; otherwise they are unworthy of being Aurovilians.¹⁴

Tamilian integrated families were given huts like the rest of the community. Asked whether “*at the beginning of Auroville, the Westerners’ houses would be different from those foreseen for the Tamils (experimental hut)*”, the Mother replied, “Those who can’t accept to have the same houses are not ready to live in Auroville. Meanness must cease. It is not only houses, but the soul state that must be built in Auroville.”¹⁵ If, at times, the transition seemed too sudden for the adults, it proved to be a more spontaneous process for the children.

***“The Selflessness of a Tribe . . .
Tomorrow’s Freedom Depends on Today’s Sacrifice”***

In February 1969 Roger Anger submitted to the Mother a text, which some people attribute to the Aurovillian who had paid for thirty-four huts in Aspiration, and who is remembered for his poignant questions to the Mother and uplifting comments. This document is powerful evidence of the churning in a newly-born community in search of its embryonic group-soul. The Mother wrote, “I am in full agreement and my blessings accompany this realisation.”

By the nature of its ideal, and the answer it offers to the present needs of our world in evolution, Auroville addresses a large portion of humanity aspiring for a better life. The people attracted by Auroville are very varied, and varied too [are] their conceptions of what Auroville ought to be. Many will think, of course, that their experiences and inner visions are the only true ones. They are true on a certain level, but no individuals can claim that their own experience

13. CWMCE 13, p. 249, 23 November 1969.

14. CWMCE 13, p. 251, 8 February 1972.

15. Roger Anger’s archive, February 1968.

is the only valid one. Even if a person has a valid experience, still it must be adapted to the outer situation so that it does not clash with the vision of others, creating disharmony, altogether undesirable in Auroville. A vision or an experience about Auroville may have its own reality, and not merely a poetic one; but many factors may intervene before it is called to be realised. A vision rarely remains free of errors and misinterpretations by the person who receives it. This is unavoidable at humanity's present level of consciousness. If everybody insists on living out their vision, exactly the way they received it and interpreted it, Auroville will become a second Tower of Babel, where confusion will reign and nobody will be able to communicate with their neighbour. Auroville is the meeting point between the inner and the outer worlds. In fact the two are but one and Auroville wants to be a living example of this truth, the concrete proof that spirit and matter are one. This can happen only if the first Aurovilians are determined to subordinate their personal convictions to the common goal/aim, in total self-abnegation. Auroville aims at the greatest possible freedom, but to reach there people must make the effort. At the beginning the Aurovilians as a collectivity will need to have the same self-abnegation as have the members of a tribe. As the collective develops according to its own pace and rhythm, evolving from a village to a small town, and then a large city, for each individual it will become progressively easier, to evolve in a less limited way. Tomorrow's freedom depends on today's sacrifice.¹⁶

The Sociology of the Group-Soul

Not unlike Sri Aurobindo's system of Integral Yoga, Auroville begins with average humankind and its unregenerate human nature. Individually as well as collectively the ideal is attained step by step. Auromodel, expected to house some 2,000-3,000 technicians and staff members needed to build the town, was meant to be a prototype to experiment with the day-to-day life, work and evolving modes of organisation of an embryo society in-the-making. The 'ideal town' was to be built on the basis of this collective experience. Free from impositions of external rules and authorities, being a citizen of Auroville was seen as a path to progressively reach the goal by the force of 'inner discovery' that, in fact, the Mother saw as preliminary requirement, even before joining Auroville. The transition from Aspiration as a village, to Auromodel as a preliminary urban settlement, and finally to Auroville as a futuristic town, was to take place along with the individual and collective evolution into the

16. Two pages follow, entitled "Major options and directives for an overall management plan for the territory of Auroville". Source: Auroville Archives, 13.2.1969. The last three paragraphs were reproduced, much later, in the *Gazette Aurovilienne* VIII, VA, December 1981. [Comp.]

Auroville consciousness informing the whole of life and society. This is the task of Auroville's group-soul, a term first introduced by Sri Aurobindo. The Mother had approved for publication in the Auroville Gazette the following quotation from *The Human Cycle*, chapter XXIII, along with her comment:

Therefore if the spiritual change of which we have been speaking is to be effected, it must unite two conditions which have to be simultaneously satisfied but are most difficult to bring together. There must be the individual and the individuals who are able to see, to develop, to re-create themselves in the image of the Spirit and to communicate both their idea and its power to the mass. And there must be at the same time a mass, a society, a communal mind or at least the constituents of a group-body, the possibility of a group-soul which is capable of receiving and effectively assimilating, ready to follow and effectively arrive, not compelled by its own inherent deficiencies, its defect of preparation to stop on the way or fall back before the decisive change is made. Such a simultaneity has never yet happened, although the appearance of it has sometimes been created by the ardour of a moment. That the combination must happen someday is a certainty. . . .

Udar read the preceding quotation to Mother and asked her if the time has come when the conditions of which Sri Aurobindo writes, and of which a simultaneity has never yet happened, will now happen. The first condition has been fulfilled regarding the individual and the individuals, in this case Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. But what about the second condition, that of a mass, society, communal mind or group-body, group-soul capable of receiving and assimilating?

This is exactly what Auroville is for. But Auroville is still far from fulfilling the necessary conditions.¹⁷

The importance of this text, besides the Mother specifying "This is exactly what Auroville is for", is that the second condition stressed is the necessity of "a mass, a society, a communal mind or at least the constituents of a group-body, the possibility of a group-soul". To fulfill the second condition involves individual psychic transformation *per se*, as well as the formation of a group-soul. This, then, is the next transitional step: the psychic emergence, first in individuals, then as a group-soul, as *conditio sine qua non* before the ultimate stage of divine anarchy can even remotely be envisaged. The Mother's stress on discipline and organisation, versus 'freedom' intended as license and the expression of unbridled desires, is part and parcel of the package.

If we apply Sri Aurobindo's text to Auroville, as we should, given the Mother's

17. *Auroville Gazette*, I, 5/6, p. 31, 22.12.1971.

reply, it follows that all efforts have to be made to strive to manifest the Auroville group-soul. But for this there needs first to be individuals deeply engaged in what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother call psychic transformation. Otherwise there will be no conscious group-soul, and no incentive either for individuals to engage in the transformation process. Right now this is nothing more than a postulate; yet it has to become tomorrow's reality, in its being the necessary preliminary step to the full manifestation of the divine anarchy of the Gnostic being and society into which Auroville is called to evolve.

In its original purity of vision the prototype of Auromodel, 'the advanced colony' of the future Auroville, was meant to be much more than the living quarters for the technicians and volunteers called to build the town, as well as an experimentation in housing, futuristic technologies, research on alternative sources of energy and materials etc. Meant as a prototype to experiment with the multiple complexity of Auroville, Auromodel ideally embodied the necessity of learning to function as a group-soul. This implies the emergence of the psychic entity in a certain number of individuals, whom it also guides in the exploration of new modes of collective organisation, work methodologies, human exchanges, mutual sharing and interaction. Hand in hand with this, relentless introspection and self-evaluation, and consequent psychological fine-tuning, while striving inwardly to reach new dimensions of consciousness, are the essential ingredients in the long journey towards the evolution of a new being and new society.

Self-governance is an indispensable corollary of the steady evolution towards the ideal society that only the inner change can make happen. The group-soul is the missing link in the chain. Arbitrary authorities or autocratic machinery have no place, in a self-governed community where the sole ruler is the psychic being, which supports from within psychicised thoughts, feelings and actions, until the psychic being itself comes forward in individuals and thoroughly takes the lead. The psychic influence concomitantly acts on society through the psychic emergence in an avant-garde nucleus of people who have fully embraced the path. Whatever concerns organisation and civic life in Auroville requires nurturance and support for consciousness of the group-soul. Its full manifestation is a collective necessity, so as to induce societal changes forerunning the advent of the ideal society through the power of the psychic realisation.

Auroville's sadhana is the sociology of the group-soul. This is the foremost difference between the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, any Ashram for that matter, and Auroville. Its specificity is that, in addition to individual aspiration, there is a collective aspiration, and this leads to a collective realisation whose crown is the manifestation, in space and time, of the Avatar's model town. The starting point is the psychic emergence in the individuals.

The Mother said:

What human beings do not know is that we have the support of the Invisible. When they make projects they are often unsuccessful because it was not the right thing to do. When at other times their projects are accepted they are realised according to the will. But when it is the superior will itself that wants, decides, then it has to succeed; it may seem that there are “hesitations”, [but] it is certain to succeed. I am completely confident.¹⁸

She also said:

Even if you don't believe it, even if all the circumstances seem quite unfavourable, *I know that Auroville will be*. It may take a hundred years, it may take a thousand years, but Auroville will be because it is *decreed*.¹⁹

The authentic hierarchy is essentially spiritual: those at the top necessarily have the least material needs. Radiating from within, progress and unending research attain an inner dimension. Beauty, harmony, art, culture become a living part of one's daily life, a permanent education and self-education towards the new consciousness of Auroville. Exceeding their tiny selves humans become universal. Auroville is, in essence, beyond experiments in community living, beyond achievements and failures. As a long-term Auroville associate stated:

[Auroville's] true origins are in the future as well as in the past, for it exists eternally in the Consciousness that embraces time and space. To this eternal dimension, to this vast potential for a transforming action 'in the invisible' we have as yet no access; we have not found the way.²⁰

This is the task awaiting us.

Auroville is, forever. A spark in the single Vastness. Ocean Oneness.

PAULETTE HADNAGY

(*The New Being and the New Society*, Published by SAIER, Auroville, 2012.
Reproduced, courtesy Author and SAIER.)

18. Roger Anger's archive, 28.4.1969.

19. *Mother's Agenda*, VII, 21.9.1966.

20. Sonia Dyne, *The Origins of Auroville*, <http://www.auroville.org/vision/SoniaJDyne.htm>.

“THE WORLD IS PREPARING FOR A BIG CHANGE. WILL YOU HELP?”

It is strange how some images can remain vivid in one's memory forever. In 1972, as a young student, I had decided to visit North India to meet the Tibetan refugees in Himachal Pradesh. I had read a great deal about the Buddhist culture of the Roof of the World, but I wanted to discover it and 'experience' it by myself. My first stop on this planned Himalayan pilgrimage was the then small village of Manali. Unfortunately (or fortunately) for me, after the ramshackle bus had moved at a slow pace the entire day on the slippery monsoon roads alongside the river Beas, we could not make it to the hill station before sunset. The driver wisely decided to spend the night in Kullu, some 30 km away from our destination. It was my third night in India and like the two previous days, I was to experience the proverbial Indian hospitality. A kind village kid living on a small farm surrounded by apple orchards offered me a bed and some simple dinner.

Was it a coincidence that this youngster and his sister had visited Pondicherry more than 2,000 km away and were disciples of Sri Aurobindo?

When I entered the house, my eyes were immediately drawn to the photo of an old lady. Below the picture were a few words in French, “The World is preparing for a big change. Will you help?”

Though I did not know who the lady in the picture was, I could sense the deeper meaning of the message and something in me immediately said, ‘Yes’.

This was my first ‘contact’ with the Mother.

I could not guess that two years later I would land in Pondicherry and Auroville ‘for good’.

The next day, I reached Manali and I had my first contact with the Buddhist heritage of Tibet, but the image of the Lady remained in my mind.

These words about a ‘changing world’ continued to echo in my head and were partly responsible for my decision to settle in Auroville called ‘The City of Dawn’ by the Mother.

This fortuitous stop in the small Himalayan village and later the encounter with refugees in Manali changed the course of my life.

Fifty Years of Auroville

Auroville will be celebrating its 50th Anniversary next February.

It will certainly be an occasion for a number of great speeches, media coverage, cultural performances, etc. These are ephemeral events; the most important, at least for me, is that Auroville continues to strive for what it should be and that the hope it

represents for the world, continues to exist.

It is true that the world is changing . . . and changing fast.

In many cases, one could say, too fast.

Take Manali again. Now, it is daily invaded by tens of thousands of tourists. The traffic between the town and the Rothang pass some 20 km away, is so heavy that it takes hours in the traffic jam to reach the top of the pass leading to Lahaul and Spiti valleys.

I still remember a most exquisite temple in the deodar forest; named after a local goddess (Hidimba Devi), it is located a couple of kilometres outside the town. I used to walk there every morning and read a few pages of the (poor) French translation of *The Life Divine*. The fact that I couldn't understand the depth of Sri Aurobindo's writing was not so important for me, as I could experience silence and peace. Today hundreds of noisy tourists are pushing each other to be able to take a selfie on a few yaks, brought to the mandir for entertainment.

The world has changed indeed.

So has Auroville.

Living in Aspiration community, we used to be so upset when a bus of tourists would occasionally pass by. Today, several thousands of visitors daily land at the Auroville Visitors' Centre. One can always debate if it is a positive or negative change; the point is that we have to live with these outer changes.

As we will be 'celebrating' the half-century of the City of Dawn, to which we have fully dedicated our lives, one has today to make sure that the 'Spirit of Auroville' which brought us to this remote corner of India, survives.

The Mother had given Auroville a Charter: "Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. But to live in Auroville, one must be a willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness."

Once a staff member of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India who every year supervises Auroville's accounts, mistakenly wrote in his report that the Aurovilians should be the "willing survivors of the Divine Consciousness."

In a sense, it is true, we have to survive the onslaught of the world's outer change while remaining steady in our aspiration for a better world.

The World is Changing

At the end of the 60's and beginning of the 70's, the youth still believed that they could change the world. Whether it was then possible or not is another issue, but there is no doubt that the world itself has changed.

Anybody can have his own opinion on the changes required or in which direction the planet is or should be moving; however whether one sees these changes from Paris, Africa or South India, it is an indisputable fact that the planet has started shrinking.

It is said that the ancient Rishis had already experienced *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* (The World is One Family) but today with the new scientific discoveries and the latest means of communication, no special inner knowledge is required to grasp the interdependence of all things on this planet.

In these ‘shrinking’ circumstances, it is up to each individual Aurovilian to keep the banner of transformation afloat.

Personal Participation

Personally it became obvious for me that I could ‘help’ doing my bit by living in Auroville, “a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual Human Unity”, an ideal in consonance with ancient India’s wisdom. The words of Swami Vivekananda still resound: “Out of diversities we are all going towards this universal existence. Families into tribes, tribes into races, races into nations, nations into humanity.” His conclusion was: “The whole universe is one existence. There cannot be anything else.”

This ideal of human unity pushed me to start the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture in the International Zone of Auroville. It has not always been easy; though the land of India has always been the repository of the loftiest ideals, India seemed to have forgotten how to deal with the material world.

As for many things in Auroville, the process of building a Pavilion was rather slow, not to say painful; however, we were encouraged when the Dalai Lama visited Auroville in December 1993 and laid the Foundation Stone of the Pavilion with a brick that I had brought from Tibet for the purpose.

The purpose of the Pavilion like its Indian counterpart (the Bharat Nivas located next door) is to showcase the specific genius of the culture it represents.

At the time of his first visit to Pondicherry in 1973, the Dalai Lama gave a clear idea of the objectives of the cultural Pavilions: “We are deeply impressed by the spiritual aim behind the building of an international city called Auroville. The importance of the effort to achieve human unity and international co-operation by the creation of such a city cannot be over-emphasised; nor can we neglect the benefit to be acquired from it.”

For the past fifteen years, the Pavilion has greatly contributed to the cultural life of Auroville in organising regular activities, amongst others painting exhibitions, workshops, dance performances, film festivals. Since many years, a senior Tibetan doctor attends a large number of patients from Pondicherry and Auroville.

The most popular event of the year remains the Light Mandala on each New Year’s Eve; it attracts several hundred Aurovilians, visitors and Pondicherians, eager to share an aspiration for a more peaceful world.

Is Auroville a Smart City?

A couple of years ago, the Indian Prime Minister launched a mega project: the Smart City Mission. There was no doubt in anybody's mind that there is great urgency for Delhi or Mumbai to become smarter, otherwise, millions could soon suffocate with the increase in pollution, the total dysfunction of the communications and traffic and the degradation of the quality of life in general.

In this context, it is interesting to ask the question: is Auroville, 50 years after its foundation, a Smart City?

The website of the Indian Ministry of Urban Development confesses that there is no universally accepted definition for a smart city; it could mean different things to different people. Ultimately, for the Mission, a smart city “contains a wish list of infrastructure and services that describes his or her level of aspiration”.

The idea is to provide for the aspirations and needs of the citizens, in other words, a decent quality of life to the citizens, a clean and sustainable environment by using ‘smart solutions’: “The focus is on sustainable and inclusive development.” Another objective is to “create a replicable model which will act like a light house to other aspiring cities.”

This is where Auroville needs to be ‘smart’, by creating a model which can be duplicated; but additionally Auroville should not be turned ‘outward’, depending only on new technologies like the Indian cities’ project; it must be a City turned towards ‘inner values’, which are lacking so much in the world today.

It is the challenge for the next 50 years; only an inner change can make the City of Dawn meaningful for India and the World.

The waves of hundreds of volunteers and interns who come to participate in Auroville from India and all over the world is a hopeful sign for the future.

Let us hope that the ‘Spirit of Auroville’ will continue to survive in the changing world.

CLAUDE ARPI

EDUCATION IN AUROVILLE AS EXPERIENCED BY AUROVILLE'S YOUTH SINCE 1968

Education has been a significant area of activity for Auroville since its inception, with many initiatives throughout its history seeking to provide for the needs of the community's youth while attempting to actualise the foundational and the aspired-towards concept of 'Integral Education'. While we have some record of the variety of educational developments, we lacked such a record of the subjective experiences of those who underwent an Auroville education and upbringing. Interested in the question of "What is their view of growing up in Auroville, particularly once they have the maturity and perspective of age and hindsight? After all they were the subjects, the guinea pigs of this experimentation . . ." Deepti, a longtime educator in Auroville, began to pen a few "inward looking and psychological" questions to ask of Auroville youth. Inspired by the idea, a group of young Aurovilians took up the task of circulating the survey to their peers — any adult who had been raised and received some form of education in Auroville was eligible. It was the summer of 2013, and over the next two years, at least a third of those eligible to participate responded, close to half of them residing outside of Auroville at the time. The youngest respondents were born in 1991, the oldest as early as 1959, so that they collectively span over 40 years of experience throughout each of Auroville's schools in existence during that period (not including all outreach schools) — as well as schooling experiences outside of Auroville, such as at the Lycée Français and Kodaikanal International School.

Auroville as 'Life Education'

Asked "*Which part of your education, whether in Auroville or not, has been the most formative for your personality?*" the majority answered that time spent in Auroville was the most formative, many describing what one could call a 'Life Education':

"Living in Auroville is an educational experience and has been formative."

"My education in Auroville reached far beyond just the schools. I was given the freedom to grow as a person; was given responsibility in my own life. These things helped me learn from all my experiences. . . . Growing up in Auroville prepared me more than just academically for the world."

"The 'out of classroom' learning that took place in every stage of my life —

growing up with a diverse group of people, being involved in different aspects of the community, and being associated with mentors who gave a lot of individual attention.”

“The most formative part of my education for my personality was being engaged in building and creating Auroville.”

The early youth of Auroville, born in the 1960s and early 1970s, stated that Auroville was formative due to the *lack* of structured education, which pushed some to seek formal education elsewhere:

“My time without a formal education in Auroville taught me more than my attending school could ever have done. I am a maverick, a lateral thinker and pretty fearless. Life skills have made anything life today has to offer easy to deal with.”

“I think that my lack of education has made me so eager to want to learn, and want to achieve. I really worked hard to get my BA and MA, not for the sake of getting a diploma but to have a goal and reach it.”

Many of these expressed deficits in Auroville’s educational landscape at the time, characterised by the lack of training of the teachers, the lack of structure and continuity of educational opportunities, and the lack of guidance for youth in the community.

“Not having access to school and the structure of regular adult teachers made me long for that in my life. I am very disciplined when I work or study because I have had enough chaos to last a lifetime.”

“I was influenced by adults who had many idealistic views and ideas, some were my teachers. Not being qualified or trained educators they probably had no idea of the influence and impact they had on young impressionable minds . . . when I left Auroville I realised a formal education was required to be able to function in life . . . one could not but feel a sense of . . . having been cheated.”

However, these deficits were accompanied by significant benefits. In answer to the question *“Do you feel that you have benefited from the Auroville experience/upbringing?”* close to 90% answered affirmatively, many expressing how ‘grateful’ and ‘lucky’ they felt about being raised in Auroville, describing it as ‘invaluable’, ‘immeasurable’ and ‘priceless’, something they would repeat, would never trade, and could never repay. Interestingly, especially the earlier generation expressed

such a strong identification with their Auroville upbringing that they could not conceive of putting its benefit into question.

The most valued qualities of an Auroville education and upbringing were surprisingly constant across generations. They were expressed in response to the questions regarding whether it was beneficial and formative, as well as an additional question, “*Which aspect of your education has proved the most effective for your life and action (what skills, perspective, ideas do you use the most)?*” These were freedom (often correlated with responsibility), openness, teacher/community support, well-rounded personal development, exposure to the yoga of Mother and Sri Aurobindo, and a multicultural and multilingual environment.

“I feel the best part of my education was the balance of freedom in a very nurturing environment that fostered a close and personal relationship with one’s teachers while at the same time developing a strong sense of self-responsibility.”

“. . . the feeling of being allowed to be who one is.”

“. . . the broad spectrum of skills that Auroville education provides. And by this I don’t mean just practical/intellectual skills, I mean a richness of thought, a deep awareness of my self, my surroundings and a rich perspective of life and our existence.”

“The philosophy and ideals of Sri Aurobindo, The Mother and Auroville, which one becomes aware of and is surrounded by have an impact and influence on one’s life. I am happy to have been exposed to these from a young age and somehow they have become a natural part of my life.”

“Auroville widened my perspective and helped me form an outlook on life. It brought me in contact with diverse people, opinions, ways of being and functioning, ideas . . .”

Being Aurovilian: A Strong Connection

In answer to the question “*Do you have a sense of connection with the idea forces as embodied in Auroville’s founding texts (such as ‘To be a True Aurovilian’ or the Charter)? In what way do you connect with them?*” over 80% expressed a strong feeling of connection, mostly as something they embodied and applied in their daily lives, whether they were in Auroville or not:

“I feel that as children of Auroville, we were brought up with the ideas of Auroville and the Charter. Whatever much or however much we understand from the written context, I believe that we express the Charter or the ideas of Auroville better through our actions in our day-to-day life because it’s part of us, it’s deeply embedded in us whether we know it or not.”

“I try to practically implement and live the ideals of Auroville. I work to create and get involved in projects where the ideals of Auroville can manifest.”

“I connect with them on an everyday basis, whether I am in Auroville or not . . . I carry that atmosphere and those words in me. I try to let that feeling out and I try to express it in my everyday work. I am not a true Aurovilian, I am not sure what that may be, but I work towards it every day.”

Many referred to the texts as a whole, or highlighted specific concepts within them, as idea forces they felt especially personally connected to or inspired by at a personal level. And some saw them as the collective reference point for the community at large:

“A servitor of the divine consciousness is something I am not always ready for, to say the least . . . But I know that the main seed, the main drive is there, it is deeply rooted . . . I feel it is the idea of my life on earth.”

“‘To be a true Aurovilian’ makes me aspire, and I believe if one hasn’t got there yet but aspires to it or even just recognises its merits truly one can still be quite aligned with its ideal.”

“They are high ideals and, although they may not all be lived up to by everyone, or myself, I feel that they are the glue that holds us Aurovilians together. They create a common aim and a common language giving a unique sense of community and comradeship.”

A few, however, felt disconnected with ideals being interpreted in a dogmatic way by other community members:

“Yes, but in a very private way and I often feel disconnected from the way they are publicly aired in Auroville. I feel we have turned what was once an open and free sense of adventure and quest into something of a rigid religion with dogma and rules — I don’t identify with that at all.”

“I believe that the higher consciousness which Mother and Sri Aurobindo speak about is not confined to Auroville. However people who live in the community believe they are superior and righteous. This creates a barrier of ignorance and does not welcome knowledge and input from outside of AV.”

In answer to the question *“In which way do you feel Aurovilian? What are the signs of this feeling? Can you identify its characteristics?”* — all but three people identified with feeling ‘Aurovilian’, whether they lived in the community or had not even visited in years. Three common characterisations of this identification emerged throughout the answers. These were a sense of belonging and of Auroville being “home”, an attitude of striving for progress, individually and towards the realisation of Auroville, and feeling connected with others who share Auroville’s ideals and experience:

“A feeling of ‘belonging’, like I am in the presence of something that — although much too profound for me to understand — is fundamental to me.”

“I think that the characteristics of an Aurovilian is this sensation of looking towards, to always talk about what can be or what could become.”

“I feel Aurovilian in the way that I want to give my service for a higher purpose without expecting anything in return just like many other Aurovilians.”

“The resonance I feel with other Aurovilians is a sincere aspiration to live beyond the confines of the individual self by aspiring for spiritual growth (both personal and collective), and that this exists in the context of daily life rather than removed from it.”

One of the survey questions asked participants *“Would you say that there is an ‘Auroville type’ and, if so, how would you describe it?”* Some declined to answer, and the most significant proportion of responses negated the very premise of the question. They felt it inappropriate to conceive of an Auroville type given the diversity of people in Auroville and of a type restricted to Auroville:

“As we are all so different and all trying to achieve our goals in many different ways, I am happy that we do not have to stereotype ourselves as an AV type!”

“The Auroville type is everywhere and not only to be found in Auroville. Auroville just provides a more ‘open’ and accepting environment for the inner being to develop in practice. However you can find this in individual people and places around the planet.”

Recognition & Suggestions for Auroville's Education

An on-going concern for youth in Auroville is the lack of recognition for Auroville education. During periods where there was either no high-school education available, or no externally recognised high-school education, teenagers were faced with a painfully contradictory choice between staying in Auroville and pursuing an accredited education. The majority of respondents recommend that Auroville develop internal forms of recognition for the range of educational experiences of youth within the community, and move towards international accreditation for these. They highlight the importance for youth to be able to pursue educational, professional, and life experiences outside the community, and the benefits of interaction between young Aurovilians and the world at large (over 70% of respondents pursued higher education outside of Auroville). Many made suggestions for this proposed concept of an internal recognition system, which could be synthesised as a broad inclusion of educational experiences from academic to extracurricular, to personal development, social skills and life skills, and the embodiment of values that reflect Auroville's spiritual ethos. This would be captured in an individualised certification that could be developed into an in-depth portfolio, including self-evaluation and a presentation of the Auroville context and its educational approaches.

Other suggestions for the future of Auroville's education, in answer to the specific question "*Do you have any wishes or suggestions for the future of Auroville education?*" include upholding diversity, flexibility and orientation to the individual, and that it continue to experiment — responsibly — by supporting training of teachers and drawing inspiration from developments in educational processes and innovations worldwide. In addition, people suggested that practical skills and work experience, vocational training and apprenticeships, be emphasised and developed, and that relationships between educational actors and institutions in Auroville be improved.

That the Auroville experience as a whole was central to the synthesis of responses to this education survey is a hopeful reflection of our society. The themes that emerge evoke a rather striking resonance with the four-pointed framework of the Auroville Charter. In answer to how they felt 'Aurovilian', Auroville youth emphasised a calling and ethic of service to a "higher" ideal; in response to the question of an Auroville 'type', they welcomed a diversity of interpretations. Both correlate to the first point of the Charter:

"Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. But, to live in Auroville, one must be a willing servitor of the divine consciousness."

Many identified as 'Aurovilian', their attitudes of striving for progress, and Auroville as an educational 'life' experience, reflecting the second point:

“Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress, and a youth that never ages.”

The third point of the Charter,

“Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future. Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly spring towards future realisations.”

was echoed in recommendations for the future of Auroville’s education — to keep experimenting and draw inspiration from strides in alternative forms of education worldwide — and in support of Auroville youth interchanging and acquiring experience in a diversity of fields and contexts. Finally, the strong feeling of interconnectedness with fellow Aurovilians and valuing of Auroville’s multicultural environment are good indicators for the realisation of the fourth point:

“Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual human unity.”

SURYAMAYI

NOTE: The full analysis and report of this survey “Auroville Education Survey: 1968-2013” can be found on AuroNet, on Auroville’s research website, and in hard copy at SAIER and the Auroville Archives.

MY EARLY STORY

In 1970 I was living in London, when I became aware that I needed something other than the petty, conventional life that my education and upbringing was preparing me for. I remember standing in the park next to the Greater London Council offices where I was working and looking up at the huge office buildings around me and thinking: 'These places are full of people passing around bits of paper about a reality that they are not actually experiencing, as is my own case.' I had been working in the architecture department of the government of London, on vast housing projects designed for people I had never met and being constructed in places I had not been to. They were being housed in 'units' not houses.

I resolved to save some money and go travelling, perhaps to find that somewhere else where I might feel more in touch with life, matter, people, Reality. Certainly for the moment, just to live life more fully, to explore and experience. I yearned for somewhere, something, that would give some sense of meaning and purpose to my life. I had also begun an inner search through my reading and through random encounters with others on a similar search. Inevitably I was to discover that once one has embarked upon such an inner journey, exactly the right book, person, teacher, experience comes to you to help you on your way, as if there was someone, something that guides one. I was also drawn towards India as if by an invisible magnet.

Nearly a year later, after travelling overland to India, I was on my way to Kathmandu and was travelling on top of a truck with several other young people when I got talking with a 17-year-old man from Sweden. He had just come from Pondicherry and had met the Mother. As much as I was fascinated by his story, it was his maturity, his calm, wise manner that impressed me and I thought, whatever it is that he has got, I want some of that. He gave me Satprem's *Sri Aurobindo or The Adventure of Consciousness* to read. Whilst in Kathmandu, aside from trying to learn how to silence the mind, I also had an experience which ended any sense of belonging to the hippy trail. I was waiting in a line at the Poste Restante at American Express (the only way in those days for travellers to receive mail from family and friends). In front of me were a young American hippy couple. She was saying to him that she was desperate to receive some more money from her parents. It dawned on me that here was a lifestyle that wanted to be free from the conventional, capitalistic world, yet was utterly dependent on parents who were slaves to that world to provide the means of funding their independence and freedom. What an hypocrisy!

Pondicherry. I had arrived and I wanted to immerse myself in the Ashram world to seek the nectar that I believed was there. I soon realised that I would need to ditch my Afghan outfit if I was not to feel rejected by these folk, dressed in their

spotless white saris and dhotis, amongst whom I was now moving. I spent time at the Samadhi and felt an indescribable calm, presence and sweetness there. I heard Mother's voice drifting over the courtyard, mixing with the harsh caws of the crows that hovered over the place like restless souls. As I was an architect, I was directed to visit the architecture studio of Roger Anger but felt the process within which they worked too similar to the office in London that I had escaped from. Drawings and models for a sophisticated city, also spotlessly white, that was to be dreamed of, preconceived elsewhere and then eventually plonked onto real barren land and inhabited by real people. Too disconnected from reality for my own taste.

I was eventually directed to go to Auroville. My first work was to fix the drainage and septic tank at Aspiration, where there was no one in that community, it seems, who was able or willing to deal with it. I saw it as a symbolic cleansing of myself.

I had met Chamanlal Gupta and he had patiently answered all my questions and dealt with all of my doubts. He arranged for me to meet the Mother. I brought with me as an offering, a single red rose and a red candle, aspiring that she would light a flame inside me. As I entered her room, I was aware only of the physical reality. She was just a little old lady. Yet her skin seemed radiant, translucent and her presence filled the room. When my turn came, I gave her my rose and candle and then knelt before Mother and looked into her eyes for maybe 20 seconds (one loses the sense of time!). She did not manifest the light or the fireworks that I had perhaps imagined she might. Just a sweet little old lady with a lovely smile, who gently blessed me.

After I got up and started walking down the stairs, I had the strong sense of not being worthy, swiftly followed by the experience of my life being played out before me like a movie. 'These are the games you are playing, these the falsehoods. This is the work you must do to purify.' No words as such, just the sense that with that awareness, everything I needed would come and the work would be done.

Some weeks later I started feeling the joy and gratitude for having found Mother, Auroville, something indescribable but overwhelmingly joyful. I wrote to Mother and told her that I felt new-born and asked her to give me a name. 'Let your name be Vikas (Progress)' she replied. Then came the next public Darshan and as I stood in the street below and saw Mother emerge slowly onto the balcony, She manifested something of her true and vast power and being. The whole scene was flooded with white light. Mother was manifesting All-Love.

I wept with joy.

15th August 2017

VIKAS VICKERS

JOURNEY UNFOLDS SOME LANDMARKS

It is the first time I put pen to paper to write about myself — and, it is not easy!

I grew up in the Ashram in Pondicherry, from the age of ten, having come with my parents. I was among the first group of children who, in the space of about a year, around 1942, landed in the sacred ‘*courtyard*’ of the Ashram. We were *home*!

This ‘*courtyard*’ was our playing field. We were there all day. We went to Mother two or three times a day — and during the war years, She received us, with our parents, . . . as late as eleven at night, as She was BUSY with Her Work ‘somewhere’, we were told! Sri Aurobindo was up there . . . in His Room . . . we felt HIS Presence . . . and had HIS Darshan . . . stood in front of HIM . . . four times in the year.

This courtyard was a magic-space . . . full of great beings! They lived in room after room, all around the ‘*courtyard*’. We peeped into each room . . . to feel the ‘presence’ of the beings who lived there. We loved making these rounds. Their vibrations are embedded in our memories.

Each evening, we were in Purani-ji’s room. Our parents went to meet him and we crawled all over the smooth cement floor. The feel of that floor is still with our feet! While they spoke to him about what seemed to be serious things — Purani-ji would often turn to us and tell us stories from the epics. Those evenings are unforgettable.

Then we tip-toed past Nolini-da’s room . . . which we dared not enter, the ‘presence’ was too powerful and not for the likes of us. We only stepped past the door — and that too from a safe distance!

Then, into Amrita-ji’s room — he was all warmth and love and folded us within!

Past other rooms, just breathing in the atmospheres! And then, under the Service Tree and the two-tiered oval cement platform with flower pots, around which we played hide-and-seek!

We still go round that space . . . *the eternal round* . . . now The Samadhi!

There were also the weekly soirées in the spacious hall of Dilip-da’s (Dilip Kumar Roy) house, to which our parents took us. Some of the words of his songs still resound in our ears. The seated figure of Dilip-da, in his flowing orange robes, lost in ecstasy, is an enduring image.

We sat down on the floor near him . . . and often went to sleep. Our parents had to wake us up to go home!

And then, there were also afternoons in the elegant apartment of Nishtha, President Woodrow Wilson’s daughter who lived in the Ashram. She relaxed on a

chaise-longue and told us stories from American history from a thick orange-covered book. This was to improve our English! A lady in peace . . . and happy to have us around, playing on the floor.

And, of course, Sisir-da from Shantiniketan! Mornings were spent in his book-lined room — but we sat with him more often on a stone bench in the courtyard under a ‘champa’ tree. I do not know what we learnt . . . but he was our guide and friend. The fragrance of the champa haunts us!

The first ‘work’ Mother gave me was to be with flowers — I was all of eleven years old. I had to pick up the flowers from the ‘Service’ tree which fell on the courtyard — moving on all fours! — then count them and arrange them on big brass platters. Then, these were taken up to Sri Aurobindo’s Room.

This was our life . . . and, then, when we were about a dozen children, Mother said She would start a ‘school’ for us. It opened on December 2, 1943. There were three teachers, one classroom and no books. But She was there!

We were excited to have a ‘school’! Another life began — friends sitting together on benches, with tables in front. Teachers whom we knew. Our horizons widened — and always it was Mother who initiated and guided each step that we took together. And the small community of the Ashram upheld us with its warmth and love and watching over us as we grew up. We had classes in painting; and then in music and dance. We enacted the plays of Sri Aurobindo and some texts from his epic poem *Savitri*!

Playing fields were acquired — the Playground, the Tennis Ground, the Sports Ground — full of stone and rubble. We went to each of them to clean them up, level the ground and make them ready for use — for marching, games and track events. A swimming pool too, as time went on. We went out also to our farms for harvesting the grain.

A ‘theatre’ too came our way, as Mother bought a ‘peanut godown’ and had it converted into one with a good stage, acoustics, green rooms. What a miracle that was!

During our early school years, when we were in our early teens, as we went to Mother upstairs in the Ashram She often said to us:

“Find your psychic being.
Be conscious”

We were too young to know what that meant . . . Do we know even now!! But we tripped down the stairs, very full and happy. And walked across the ‘courtyard’ . . . always that space of the ‘courtyard’! . . . with something resounding inside us.

One day, Mother called another girl and me . . . we were all of sixteen years . . . to present in recitation/dramatic form a text from *Savitri*! She gave us typed copies of

‘The Debate of Love and Death’ . . . as the book had not yet been published. She gave me the role of ‘death’. This was rather ‘overwhelming’ at that age! I asked Her, “Why have You given me this role?” Mother drew Herself up and said, “Death is nothing to be afraid of. It is a great power that has to be conquered. Let’s get to work.” She said She would train us Herself . . . which She did in the long room upstairs in front of the Darshan Seat. She showed us how to pitch the voice, how to speak each part. Later, She brought out costumes and make-up . . . from Her own treasure-chest! . . . and dressed us for the part.

When this was done, She said to us, “Sri Aurobindo will hear us.” To have His Darshan for the ‘*fifth*’ time in the year! We could hardly believe it — for nothing meant more than ‘*seeing*’ HIM! But, HE chose to sit in the room by the side, the narrow one, to hear us! Which HE did! This ‘*Divine Dispensation*’ . . . I have never understood how this was given to us.

In the following years, the dramatisation of Sri Aurobindo’s plays and passages from *Savitri* became an annual event of our school programme.

*

Around this time, Mother asked me to take kindergarten classes along with my studies. I said to Her, “But, Mother, I don’t know how to teach!” I was about seventeen! Everything began early — there was perhaps no time to waste . . .

She replied, “It is good to be with the children . . . Give them freedom.” They were five to seven years old! I asked, “Freedom at such a young age?” She said, “It is never too young to give freedom. But one must create the right atmosphere.” I took the whole class to Her each morning and sent up to Her a written account of what we had done during the day. She returned the same with Her remarks and blessings.

So began another story! Classes as a teacher and my studies. Parallel tracks that have always continued.

Other work was given by Her from time to time, many-sided . . . to help me grow as a person from within and without. A major one was to assist my father in all that he was doing. This meant typing his writings and meeting people who came to the Ashram.

Then came the years 1954 to 1957! A great sense of ‘things happening’ was in the air! The ‘charge’ was palpable . . . and one was ‘bathed’ in it . . .

This is perhaps not the place to say more about that time — just to mention that in mid-1956, Mother asked me to move into Golconde, saying, “It is a place of great beauty. I want you to move in tomorrow.” I was then studying in the Higher Course of the Centre of Education and living with my parents.

One day, walking down a street in the town, I turned to a friend with me and said, “I would rather have lived at this moment of history than any other.” The words rushed out from somewhere deep within . . . and they remain with me.

*

After about six years in Golconde . . . I went to the Sorbonne in Paris. . . .

Completing the Higher Course in philosophy and psychology, I looked further afield. Wishing to study European thought and culture and to continue the study of the work of Sri Aurobindo. Mother supported my choice of Sorbonne to make this experience. I worked there on a doctoral thesis.

I was there for most of the 1960s — a time of great changes!

I was home for a while early in January, 1969. On leaving, I asked Mother, “The thesis is nearing completion. What do I do after that?”

She replied, “You will know when your work is finished. You will know when you are in France — but it won’t be for France!”

Later, I received a letter from M. André Morisset from the Ashram, who handled Mother’s correspondence.

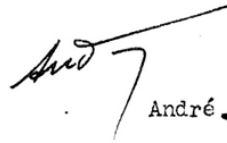
Le 8 juin 1970.

Chère Aster,

Vous savez peut-être que les Nations-Unies organisent du 9 au 18 juillet à New-York une "United Nation's world youth assembly" où doivent se réunir environ 750 jeunes gens du monde entier.

La Mère a dit qu'Auroville devait être représentée à cette réunion et a pensé à vous pour cela...

Bien affectueusement à vous.



André.

8 June 1970

Dear Aster,

You may perhaps know that the United Nations is organising from 9 to 18 July in New York a “United Nations’ World Youth Assembly” at which around 750 young people from all around the world will gather.

The Mother says that Auroville should be represented at the gathering, and has thought of you for this . . .

Most affectionately yours
André

Auroville? What is this new ‘creation’ of Mother’s? I was not in India when Auroville was founded on February 28 in 1968. I was in Paris studying at the Sorbonne. The students’ uprising of May 1968, was taking place!

The students — in their thousands — were asking for a ‘*new education*’, that will prepare them for the ‘*future*’! I walked up and down the boulevards, with a copy of *The Life Divine* in my hand, which I was studying!

The date for the ‘*soutenance*’ of my thesis was fixed by the University for February 28, 1970 — when a work on Sri Aurobindo was ‘presented’ at the Sorbonne for the first time.

*

From the Sorbonne in Paris to the United Nations in New York, where the World Youth Assembly was to be held in July 1970, to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the institution . . . that was the next step.

There were official delegations of young university people from all over the world to share their dreams of the future, to indicate the directions that world leaders could take to set their policies! Such was the aim of the 3-week-long Assembly of about 750 delegates.

I was attached to the delegation from India and landed in the great halls of the United Nations, in the midst of this world community. That is where I had to start exploring . . . “What is Auroville?” Far from the red plateau near Kuliyapalayam!

Janet Fearn, visiting from Auroville, brought me some literature. The vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother was there to guide me.

I was elected to the 18-member Steering Committee of the Assembly. Another kind of work . . . a far cry from being in the libraries of the Sorbonne!

For those three weeks . . . we poured our hearts out about the ‘*future*’ that we wished for — in education, in culture, in economy and polity. We began at noon and went on till three in the morning! And began again the same way, day after day!

There was a surprisingly common focus in our deliberations. We looked for patterns of ‘*wholeness*’ in personal growth and a spirit of ‘*oneness*’ among nations and cultures. It was a rich experience of the world trying to create its future.

*

I came home to the Ashram in November 1970. On my birthday in March 1971, Mother gave me a long interview. She confirmed that this was the work for me.

She spoke about India:

“ . . . *India that is open to the deeper consciousness, to the new Forces that wish to manifest. India represents the life divine on earth. It is this that one must show — in action, in life, in one’s way of being.*”

In July of that year, 1971, Mother started the work of construction of Bharat Nivas, the Indian Pavilion in the International Zone of Auroville. She wanted it completed by 1972, the year of Sri Aurobindo's Centenary.

*

As I had always been a student and, later, a teacher at the Centre of Education, I returned to work in '*Knowledge*', the Higher Course programme of the Centre for four hours each morning. The students were young adults and the courses all centred around '*matter*'. On Saturday mornings, I would go to Matrimandir and join the team carrying cement and pebbles in round containers called '*chetties*' or I would wield a kind of shovel called a '*mompti*'. For that was all I could do! Standing beside the skeletal structure of the emerging Matrimandir at the time, I found I could not relate to the '*matter*' in front of me, I could not enter '*into*' it! However glibly I could speak about it from Monday to Friday across a table to students at Knowledge, come Saturday morning, I could not sense the reality of its '*existence*'!

*

This was a major turning-point for me. There was here something to be explored, a '*matter*' to be made a '*substance*' of my conscious experience.

This fascination with matter settled deep within. And this work on discovering it took many forms and diverse activities as time went on. To mention a few — joining the work at Matrimandir, setting up a Centre for Research in Indian Culture at Bharat Nivas, organising study programmes and seminars, and, for almost twenty years, being a member of the Governing Board of Auroville Foundation.

Roger Anger's experimental house in Auromodèle was 'given' to me as a 'base' for life in Auroville. It was not fully finished — and much work had yet to be done. This was in mid 1970s — when there was no architect or construction team in place. I was given the key to this house and told by Roger to go ahead as he was returning to Paris! Thus began a journey of exploration — into matter, space and consciousness, as it turned out!

The house did get finished eventually. Nolini-da referred to it later as 'The house'! Thus, my first work in Auroville was of 'construction' . . . and this for someone who did not know brick from cement!

These were some of the steps of this collective experience that marked the years. The process of learning continues, as ever.

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For me, this experience has been '*rooted*' in what the Ashram holds, the Ashram that grew around Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, beginning almost a hundred years ago, as the seat of their Physical Presence and centre of Their universal action . . .

Auroville is the '*world stage*', where this direct action is taking place.

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