

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

MARCH 2019

PRICE: Rs. 30.00

SUBSCRIPTIONS

INLAND

Annual: Rs. 200.00

For 10 years: Rs. 1,800.00

Price per Single Copy: Rs. 30.00

OVERSEAS

Sea Mail:

Annual: \$35

For 10 years: \$350

Air Mail:

Annual: \$70

For 10 years: \$700

All payments to be made in favour of *Mother India*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. DD/Cheque should be sent by speed post only. For outstation cheques kindly add Rs. 15 for annual membership and Rs. 50 for 10-year subscription.

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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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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXXII

No. 3

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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RENEWAL

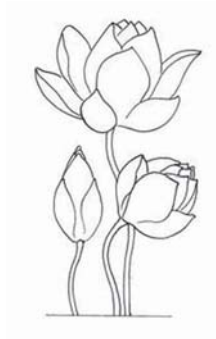
When the heart tires and the throb stills recalling
 Things that were once and again can be never,
When the bow falls and the drawn string is broken,
 Hands that were clasped, yet for ever are parted,

When the soul passes to new births and bodies,
 Lands never seen and meetings with new faces,
Is the bow raised and the fall'n arrow fitted,
 Acts that were vain rewedded to the Fate-curve?

To the lives sundered can Time bring rejoining,
 Love that was slain be reborn with the body?
In the mind null, from the heart's chords rejected,
 Lost to the sense, but the spirit remembers!

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 580)



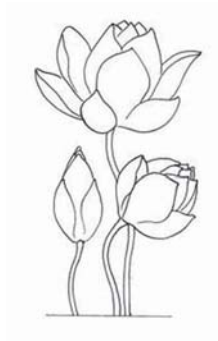
‘FILL OUR HEARTS . . .’

June 19, 1914

Fill our hearts with the delight of Thy love. Flood our minds with the splendour of Thy light. Grant that we may effectuate Thy Victory!

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 178)



PERFECTION IS A GLOBAL WAY OF APPROACHING THE DIVINE

63 – God is great, says the Mahomedan. Yes, He is so great that He can afford to be weak, whenever that too is necessary.

64 – God often fails in His workings; it is the sign of His illimitable godhead.

65 – Because God is invincibly great, He can afford to be weak; because He is immutably pure, He can indulge with impunity in sin; He knows eternally all delight, therefore He tastes also the delight of pain; He is inalienably wise, therefore He has not debarred Himself from folly.

Sri Aurobindo
(*Thoughts and Aphorisms*)

Why does God need to be weak?

Sri Aurobindo does not say that God has any need of weakness. He says that in any particular whole, for the perfection of the play of forces, a moment of weakness may be just as necessary as a display of strength. And he adds, somewhat ironically, that since God is almighty force, He can at the same time afford to be weak, if necessary.

This is to widen the outlook of certain moralists who attribute definite qualities to God and will not permit Him to be otherwise.

Strength as we see it and weakness as we see it are both an equally distorted expression of the Divine Truth which is secretly present behind all physical manifestations.

*

*Does God ever really fail? Is God ever really weak? Or is it simply a game?*¹

It is not like that! That is precisely the distortion in the Western attitude as opposed to the attitude of the Gita. It is extremely difficult for the Western mind to understand in a living and concrete manner that *everything* is the Divine.

People are so deeply imbued with the Christian idea of “God the Creator” — the creation on one side and God on the other. When you think about it you reject it,

1. The Mother replied orally to this question.

but it has penetrated into the sensations and feelings; so, spontaneously, instinctively, almost subconsciously, you attribute to God everything you consider to be best and most beautiful and, above all, everything you want to attain, to realise. Naturally, each one changes the content of his God according to his own consciousness, but it is always what he considers to be best. And that is also why instinctively and spontaneously, subconsciously, you are shocked by the idea that God can be things that you do not like, that you do not approve of or do not think best.

I put that rather childishly, on purpose, so that you can understand it properly. But it is like that — I am sure, because I observed it in myself for a very long time, because of the subconscious formation of childhood, environment, education, etc. You must be able to press into this body the consciousness of Oneness, the absolute exclusive Oneness of the Divine — exclusive in the sense that nothing exists except in this Oneness, even the things we find most repulsive.

And this is what Sri Aurobindo is fighting, for he too had this Christian education, he too had to struggle; and these aphorisms are the result — the flowering, as it were — of this necessity of fighting a subconscious formation. For that is what makes you ask such questions: “How can God be weak? How can God be foolish? How . . . ?” But there is nothing other than God, only He exists, there is nothing outside Him. And if something seems ugly to us, it is simply because He no longer wants it to exist. He is preparing the world so that this thing may no longer be manifested, so that the manifestation can move from that state to something else. So naturally, within us, we violently repulse everything that is about to go out of the active manifestation — there is a movement of rejection.

But it is Him. There is nothing but Him. This is what we should repeat to ourselves from morning to evening and from evening to morning, because we forget it at each moment.

There is only Him. There is nothing but Him — He alone exists, there is no existence without Him, there is only Him!

So, to ask a question like this is still to react like those who make a distinction between what is and what is not Divine or rather between what is and what is not God. “How can He be weak?” It is a question I cannot ask.

I understand, but they speak of the Lila, the divine play; so He is standing back, as it were. He is not really entirely “involved”, not really absolutely in the play.

Yes, yes, He is! He is totally in it. He himself is the Play.

We speak of God, but we should remember that there are all these gradations of consciousness; and when we speak of God and His Play, we mean God in His transcendent state, beyond all the levels of matter, and when we speak of the Play we speak of God in his material state. So we say: Transcendent God is watching and

playing — in Himself, by Himself, with Himself — His material game.

But all language is a language of ignorance. Our entire way of expressing ourselves, everything we say and the way in which we say it, is necessarily ignorance. And that is why it is so difficult to express something which is concretely true; this would require explanations which would themselves be full of falsehood, of course, or else extremely long. This is why Sri Aurobindo's sentences are sometimes very long, precisely because he strives to escape from this ignorant language.

Our very way of thinking is wrong. The believers, the faithful, all of them — particularly in the West — when they speak of God, think of Him as “something else”, they think that He cannot be weak, ugly or imperfect — they think wrongly, they divide, they separate. It is subconscious, unreflecting thought; they are in the habit of thinking like this instinctively; they do not watch themselves thinking. For example, when they speak of “perfection” in a general way, they see or feel or postulate precisely the sum-total of everything they consider to be virtuous, divine, beautiful, admirable — but it is not that at all! Perfection is something which lacks nothing. The divine perfection is the Divine in His entirety, which lacks nothing. The divine perfection is the Divine as a whole, from whom nothing has been taken away — so it is just the opposite! For the moralists divine perfection means all the virtues that they represent.

From the true point of view, perfection is the whole (*Mother makes a global gesture*), and it is precisely the fact that there can be nothing outside the whole. It is impossible that anything should be missing, because it is impossible for anything not to form part of the whole. There can be nothing which is not in the whole. Let me explain. A given universe may not contain everything, for a universe is a mode of manifestation; but there is every possible kind of universe. So I always come back to the same thing: there can be nothing which does not form part of the whole.

Therefore one can say that each thing is in its place, exactly as it should be, and that relations between things are exactly as they should be.

But perfection is only one special way of approaching the Divine; it is one side, and in the same way there are innumerable sides, angles or aspects, innumerable ways of approaching the Divine, for example: will, truth, purity, perfection, unity, immortality, eternity, infinity, silence, peace, existence, consciousness, etc. The number of approaches is almost unlimited. With each one you approach or draw near or enter into contact with the Divine through one aspect and if you really do it, you find that the difference is merely in the most external form, but the contact is identical. It is as if you were turning around a centre, a globe, and seeing it from many different angles as in a kaleidoscope; but once the contact is made, it is the same thing.

Perfection is therefore a global way of approaching the Divine: everything is there and everything is as it should be — “should be”, that is to say, a perfect expression of the Divine; one cannot even say of His Will, for if you say “His Will”

it is still something outside Him.

One can also say — but this is far, far below it — that He is what He is and exactly as He wants to be — with this “exactly as He wants to be”, one has come down by a considerable number of steps! But this is to give you the point of view of perfection.

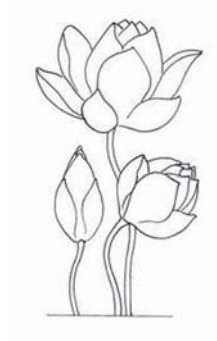
Besides, divine perfection implies infinity and eternity; that is to say, everything coexists outside time and space.

It is like the word “purity”; one could hold forth interminably on the difference between divine purity and what people call purity. The divine purity, at the lowest, allows no influence other than the divine influence — at the lowest. But that is already very much distorted; the divine purity means that there is only the Divine, nothing else — it is perfectly pure, there is only the Divine, there is nothing other than Him.

And so on.

THE MOTHER

(On Thoughts and Aphorisms, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 10, pp. 100-05)



THE KNOWLEDGE AND RIGHT USE OF THE HIDDEN FORCES OF NATURE

Occult causes?

Human science makes very exact observations; but the field is open to imagine the true causes — why not occult causes? (M10: 352)

*

Ancient knowledge

The ancient knowledge in all countries was full of the search after the hidden truths of our being and it created that large field of practice and inquiry which goes in Europe by the name of occultism, — we do not use any corresponding word in the East, because these things do not seem to us so remote, mysterious and abnormal as to the occidental mentality; they are nearer to us and the veil between our normal material life and this larger life is much thinner. In India, Egypt, Chaldea, China, Greece, the Celtic countries they have formed part of various Yogic systems and disciplines which had once a great hold everywhere, but to the modern mind have seemed mere superstition and mysticism, although the facts and experiences on which they are founded are quite as real in their own field and as much governed by intelligible laws of their own as the facts and experiences of the material world. It is not our intention here to plunge into this vast and difficult field of psychical knowledge. But it becomes necessary now to deal with certain broad facts and principles which form its framework, for without them our Yoga of knowledge cannot be complete. We find that in the various systems the facts dealt with are always the same, but there are considerable differences of theoretic and practical arrangement, as is natural and inevitable in dealing with a subject so large and difficult. Certain things are here omitted, there made all-important, here understressed, there over-emphasised; certain fields of experience which are in one system held to be merely subordinate provinces, are in others treated as separate kingdoms. But I shall follow here consistently the Vedic and Vedantic arrangement of which we find the great lines in the Upanishads, first because it seems to me at once the simplest and most philosophical and more especially because it was from the beginning envisaged from the point of view of the utility of these various planes to the supreme object of our liberation. It takes as its basis the three principles of our ordinary being, mind, life and matter, the triune spiritual principle of Sachchidananda

and the link principle of *vijñāna*, supermind, the free or spiritual intelligence, and thus arranges all the large possible poises of our being in a tier of seven planes, — sometimes regarded as five only, because, only the lower five are wholly accessible to us, — through which the developing being can rise to its perfection. (S23: 447-48)

*

Receptivity

Sweet Mother, last time you said that stones have a kind of receptivity.

Yes.

What kind of receptivity?

Perhaps they have even something resembling sensitivity. For instance, if you have a precious stone — precious stones of course have a much more perfect structure than ordinary ones, and with perfection consciousness increases — but if you take a precious stone, you can charge it with consciousness and force; you can put, accumulate force within it. So it is receptive, otherwise it will not receive it, it could not keep it. You can charge it. As one charges an electric battery, you can charge a stone with force, put conscious force into a stone; it keeps it and can transmit it to someone. Therefore this stone has a receptivity. Otherwise it could not do this.

Flowers are extremely receptive. All the flowers to which I have given a significance receive exactly the force I put into them and transmit it. People don't always receive it because most of the time they are less receptive than the flower, and they waste the force that has been put in it through their unconsciousness and lack of receptivity. But the force is there, and the flower receives it wonderfully.

I knew this a very long time ago. Fifty years ago. . . . There was that occultist who later gave me lessons in occultism for two years. His wife was a wonderful clairvoyant and had an absolutely remarkable capacity — precisely — of transmitting forces. They lived in Tlemcen. I was in Paris. I used to correspond with them. I had not yet met them at all. And then, one day, she sent me in a letter petals of the pomegranate flower, "Divine's Love". At that time I had not given the meaning to the flower. She sent me petals of pomegranate flowers telling me that these petals were bringing me her protection and force.

Now, at that time I used to wear my watch on a chain. Wrist watches were not known then or there were very few. And there was also a small eighteenth century magnifying-glass . . . it was quite small, as large as this (*gesture*). . . . And it had two lenses, you see, like all reading-glasses; there were two lenses mounted on a small

golden frame, and it was hanging from my chain. Now, between the two glasses I put these petals and I used to carry this about with me always because I wanted to keep it with me; you see, I trusted this lady and knew she had power. I wanted to keep this with me, and I always felt a kind of energy, warmth, confidence, force which came from that thing. . . . I did not think about it, you see, but I felt it like that.

And then, one day, suddenly I felt quite depleted, as though a support that was there had gone. Something very unpleasant. I said, "It is strange; what has happened? Nothing really unpleasant has happened to me. Why do I feel like this, so empty, emptied of energy?" And in the evening, when I took off my watch and chain, I noticed that one of the small glasses had come off and all the petals were gone. There was not one petal left. Then I really knew that they carried a considerable charge of power, for I had felt the difference without even knowing the reason. I didn't know the reason and yet it had made a considerable difference. So it was after this that I saw how one could use flowers by charging them with forces. They are extremely receptive. (M6: 229-30)

*

Magic — white or black or whatever colour

Sweet Mother, what is white magic?

What we call "white magic" is a beneficial magic and "black magic" is a harmful magic. But in fact these are mere words, they have no meaning.

Magic? . . . It is a knowledge that has been reduced to purely material formulas. They are some kind of words or numbers or combinations of words and numbers, which, if they are simply pronounced or written, even by someone who has no inner power, must act. In occultism, this is what corresponds to chemical formulas in science. You see, in science you have chemical formulas for combining certain elements and producing others from them; even if you do not have any mental or vital or even physical power, if you just follow to the letter the formula you have, you obtain the required result — it is enough simply to have a memory. Well, the same thing has been tried in occultism, making combinations of sounds, letters, numbers, words, which, by their inherent qualities, have the power to obtain a certain result. In this way, any fool, if he learns this and does exactly what he is told, obtains — or believes he will obtain — the result he wants. While . . . let us take the mantra, for instance, which is a form of occultism; unless the mantra is given by a guru and the guru transmits his occult or spiritual power to you with the mantra, you may repeat your mantra thousands of times, it will have no effect.

That is to say, in true occultism, one must have the quality, the ability, the inner gift in order to use it, and that is the safeguard. True occultism cannot be

practised by any fool. And this is no longer magic — neither white magic nor black nor golden — it is not magic at all, it is a spiritual power which must be acquired by long discipline; and finally, it is given to you only by a divine grace.

This means that as soon as one draws near the Truth, one is safe from all charlatanism, all pretension and falsehood. Of this I have had numerous and extremely conclusive proofs. And so someone who has the true occult power possesses at the same time, by the strength of this inner truth, the power to undo any magic, white or black or whatever colour it may be, simply by applying a drop of that truth, one might say. There is nothing that can resist that power. And this is very well known to those who practise magic, for they always take very great care, in all countries but especially in India, never to try out any of their formulas against yogis and saints, because they know that these formulas which they send out with their little mechanical, very superficial power, will go and strike, like a ball on a wall, the true power that protects one who leads a spiritual life, and quite naturally their formula will rebound and fall back on them.

The yogi or saint doesn't need to do anything, he doesn't even have to want to protect himself: it is something automatic.

He is in a state of consciousness and inner power which automatically protects him from everything that is inferior. Naturally, he can also use his power deliberately to protect others. This rebounding of the bad formation from his atmosphere automatically protects him, but if this bad formation is made against someone he is protecting or simply someone who asks for his help, then he can, by a movement of his own atmosphere, his own aura, surround the person who is exposed to the evil magic spells, and the rebounding process acts in the same way and causes the bad formation to fall back quite naturally on the one who made it. But in this case the conscious will of the yogi or saint or sage is needed. He has to be informed about what has happened and he must decide to intervene.

That is the difference between true knowledge and magic.

Anything else? . . . Is that all?

...

Sweet Mother, they say hypnotism has a bad after-effect on the hypnotised person?

No, no! If somebody practises hypnotism to impose his will on another, it can obviously do much harm to the other person, but we are speaking of a hypnotism which is practised in a humanitarian way, it might be said, and for precise reasons.

All the bad effects can be avoided if the one who does it has no bad intentions.

If you use chemical formulas in an ignorant way, you can cause an explosion (*laughter*), and that is very dangerous! Well, if you use occult formulas ignorantly

— or egoistically, which is even worse than ignorantly — you can also have harmful results. But that doesn't mean that occultism is bad or hypnotism is bad or chemistry is bad. You are not going to ban chemistry because there are people who cause explosions! (*Laughter*)

To learn occultism one must have special qualities, whereas for learning science . . .

But for everything one must have special qualities!

Scientific knowledge is accessible to all.

Listen, if you are not an artist, you may work for years with paint-brushes, colours, canvases, and spend much money and much effort, and yet produce horrible things. If you are not a musician, you may labour hard for hours at playing the piano and you will never do anything worthwhile. Special qualities are always needed. . . . Why, even for an athlete — if you are not born an athlete, you may try as hard as you like, you will only succeed in doing something quite mediocre and ordinary. It will be better than someone who does not try at all, but that does not mean that you are automatically going to succeed. Besides, if we go a step further, everyone has countless possibilities within him of which he is unaware and which develop only if he does what is to be done in the way it should be done. . . . But there are two types of progress, not only one; there is the progress that consists in perfecting more and more the capacities, possibilities, faculties and qualities you have — this is what is normally obtained by education; but if you go in for a little more thorough development by approaching a deeper truth, you can add, to the qualities you already have, other new ones which seem to be asleep in your being.

You can multiply your possibilities, enlarge and increase them; you can suddenly bring up something you did not think you had. I have already explained this to you several times. When one discovers one's psychic being within, at the same time there develop and manifest, quite unexpectedly, things one could not do at all before and which one didn't think were in one's nature. Of this too I have had numerous examples. I have given you this one, but I am repeating it to you once more to make myself understood.

I used to know a young girl who was born in a very ordinary environment, who had not received much education and wrote rather clumsy French, who had not developed her imagination and had absolutely no literary sense: that seemed to be among the possibilities she did not have. Well, when she had the inner experience of contact with her psychic being, and as long as the contact was living and very present, she wrote admirable things. When she fell back from that state into an ordinary one, she could not even put two sentences together correctly! And I saw examples of both kinds of her writing.

There is a genius within every one of us — we don't know it. We must find the way to make it come out — but it is there sleeping, it asks for nothing better than to manifest; we must open the door to it. (M9: 391-96)

*

Fear

Why does one feel afraid?

I have been told — and this was one of the teachings of a very old tradition — that it was the influence of the adverse forces upon earth that had created fear, for it was their way of acting on human beings. But animals also feel fear. So that takes away a little from the strength of the argument, for I don't think the adverse beings have any special interest in creating fear in animals.

Fear is a phenomenon of unconsciousness. It is a kind of anguish that comes from ignorance. One does not know the nature of a certain thing, does not know its effect or what will happen, does not know the consequences of one's acts, one does not know so many things; and this ignorance brings fear. One fears what one does not know. Take a child, if it is brought before someone it does not know (I am not speaking of a child with an awakened inner consciousness, I am speaking of an ordinary child), — you bring it before someone it does not know, its first movement will always be one of fear. Only very rare children — and they have another consciousness — are very bold. It may also be a mixture of apprehension, a kind of instinct. When one instinctively feels that something is dangerous and hasn't the means to remedy it, when one does not know what to do to protect himself from it, then he is afraid. There are, I believe, countless reasons for fear. But it is a movement of unconsciousness, in every case.

That which knows has no fear. That which is perfectly awake, which is fully conscious and which knows, has no fear. It is always something dark that is afraid.

One of the great remedies for conquering fear is to face boldly what one fears. You are put face to face with the danger you fear and you fear it no longer. The fear disappears. From the yogic point of view, the point of view of discipline, this is the cure recommended. In the ancient initiations, especially in Egypt, in order to practise occultism, as I was telling you last time, it was necessary to abolish the fear of death completely. Well, one of the practices of those days was to lay the neophyte in a sarcophagus and leave him in there for a few days, as though he were dead. Naturally, he was not left to die, neither of hunger nor suffocation, but still he remained lying there as though he were dead. It seems that cures you of all fear.

When fear comes, if one succeeds in putting upon it consciousness, knowledge, force, light, one can cure it altogether. There is indeed the Christian religion which

says that fear comes of our having eaten the apple in the Garden of Eden — that with knowledge came fear; and upon earth it is always this fear which governs all life, for all human beings. Only, here again I repeat my argument that animals also have fear — animals have not sinned, haven't eaten the apple, so they shouldn't have any fear! It is a half-consciousness mixed with a sort of ignorant instinct which stresses a danger and at the same time does not know its remedy. But certainly, the fact is that the adverse beings, beings of the vital world who fight against the divine Work, make an extensive use of fear. It is through that that they have the strongest hold on human beings. Besides, they are not the only ones: there are also all the political and religious means which are of that type. There are religions which found their power over the believers simply through the fear of death and of what will happen thereafter, and of all catastrophes which await you after death if you do not obey blindly the laws they dictate to you.

This fear may also come from an antipathy, that is, a lack of affinity with something. Some people are especially afraid of fire, some especially fear water, others have a special fear of one animal or another. It comes from a disharmony between the vital vibrations. And then it is translated in this body-unconsciousness by fear. The body is a terribly unconscious thing. How one has to work to give it just a very little consciousness! It lives automatically, by habit. It is terribly unconscious. (M6: 49-51)

*

Problem of transformation

This problem of transformation, I see more and more clearly that there are three approaches to it, three ways of proceeding, and to be complete the three must be combined.

One, naturally the most important one, is the way that may be called "spiritual", which is that of contact with the Consciousness — Love-Consciousness-Power, yes, it is that; it is these three aspects: the supreme Love-Consciousness-Power, and the contact, the identification: to render all the material cells capable of receiving That and expressing That — to *be* That.

Of all the means, this is the most powerful, and the most indispensable.

There is the occult way, which makes all the intermediary worlds intervene. There is a very detailed knowledge of all the powers and personalities, all the intermediary regions, and it uses all that. It is there that one makes use of the divinities of the Overmind. This is in the second way. Shiva, Krishna, all the aspects of the Mother form part of this second way.

And then there is the higher intellectual approach, which is the projection of a spirit transcending the scientific, which seizes the problem from below, and which has its importance also. From the viewpoint of detailed handling, this approach

diminishes the approximations, brings a more direct and precise action.

If the three can be combined, then evidently the thing will go faster.

Without the first nothing is possible, without it the others are even illusory: they lead nowhere, you turn round and round indefinitely. But if you clothe the first with the other two, then I think the action becomes much more precise and direct and rapid.

This is the result of the “studies” these days. (M11: 60)

*

An old tradition

. . . In the very, very old traditions — there was a tradition more ancient than the Vedic and the Chaldean which must have been the source of both — in that ancient tradition there is already mention of a “glorious body” which would be plastic enough to be transformed at every moment by the deeper consciousness: it would express that consciousness, it would have no fixity of form. It mentioned luminosity: the constituent matter could become luminous at will. It mentioned a sort of possibility of weightlessness which would allow the body to move about in the air only by the action of will-power and by certain processes of control of the inner energy, and so on. Much has been said about these things.

I don’t know if there ever were beings on earth who had partially realised this, but in a very small way there have been partial instances of one thing or another, examples which go to prove that it is possible. And following up this idea, one could go so far as to conceive of the replacement of material organs and their functioning as it now is, by centres of concentration of force and energy which would be receptive to the higher forces and which, by a kind of alchemy, would use them for the necessities of life and the body. We already speak of the different “centres” in the body — this knowledge is very widespread among people who have practised yoga — but these centres could be perfected to the point where they replace the different organs by a direct action of the higher energy and vibrations on matter. Those who have practised occultism well enough, in its most integral form, it could be said, know the process of materialisation of subtle energies and can put them in contact with physical vibrations. Not only is it something that can be done, but it is something which *is* done. And all that is a science, a science which must itself be perfected, completed, and which will obviously be used for the creation and setting in action of new bodies which will be able to manifest the supramental life in the material world.

But, as Sri Aurobindo says, before this can be done, it is good to utilise all that we have in order to increase and make more exact the control of physical activities.

(M9: 86-87)

*

Love is the saviour

Consciousness is indeed the creatrix of the universe, but love is its saviour. Conscious experience alone can give a glimpse of what love is, of its purpose and process. Any verbal transcription is necessarily a mental travesty of something which eludes all expression in every way. Philosophers, mystics, occultists, have all tried to define love, but in vain. I have no pretension of succeeding where they have failed. But I wish to state in the simplest possible terms what in their writings takes such an abstract and complicated form. My words will have no other aim than to lead towards the living experience, and I wish to be able to lead even a child to it.

Love is, in its essence, the joy of identity; it finds its ultimate expression in the bliss of union. Between the two lie all the phases of its universal manifestation.

At the beginning of this manifestation, in the purity of its origin, love is composed of two movements, two complementary poles of the urge towards complete oneness. On one hand there is the supreme power of attraction and on the other the irresistible need for absolute self-giving. No other movement could have better bridged the abyss that was created when in the individual being consciousness was separated from its origin and became unconsciousness. (M12: 65-66)

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Not talk but experience

To talk about occult things is of little value; one must gain experience of them. And this experimentation demands not only special capacities that very few men possess but also a psychological development that very few people can achieve. In the modern world, this knowledge is hardly recognised as scientific, and yet it is so, for it fulfils the conditions usually required for a science. It is a system of knowledge organised according to certain principles; it follows precise processes, and by reproducing exactly the same conditions, one obtains the same results. It is also a progressive knowledge; one can devote oneself to studying it and develop it in a regular and logical way, just like any other recognised science of today. But this study deals with realities which do not belong to the most material world. In order to take it up, one must possess special senses, for the domain in which it moves lies beyond our ordinary senses. These special senses are latent in men. Just as we have a physical body, so too we have other more subtle bodies with their own senses; these senses are much more refined and precise, much more powerful than our physical senses. But of course, as education does not usually deal with this domain, these senses are not normally developed and the worlds in which they function elude our ordinary knowledge. And yet children spontaneously live a great deal in this domain. They see all kinds of things that are as real for them as physical objects.

When they speak about them, most often they are told that they are stupid or liars, because they mention phenomena of which others have no experience, but which for them are as true, as tangible, as real as what everyone can see. The dreams that children so often have either in sleep or while they are awake are extremely vivid and have a great importance in their lives. Only with intensive mental development do these capacities fade away in children and even sometimes disappear in the end. Yet there are people who have the good fortune to be born with spontaneously developed inner senses and nothing can prevent these senses from remaining awake and even developing. If these people, before it is too late, meet someone who has the knowledge and can help them in the methodical education of the subtle senses, they will become very interesting instruments of research and discovery in the occult worlds.

In all ages, there have been isolated individuals or small groups on earth who were the guardians of a very ancient tradition, corroborated by their own experiences, and who practised this type of science. They sought out especially gifted individuals and gave them the necessary training. Usually these groups lived more or less in secret or in hiding, because ordinary men are very intolerant of this kind of capacity and activity, which is beyond them and frightens them. But there have been great periods in human history when recognised schools of initiation were established and were highly esteemed and respected, as in ancient Egypt, ancient Chaldea, ancient India, and even to some extent in Greece and Rome. Even in Europe, in the Middle Ages, there were institutions that taught occult science, but they had to conceal themselves very carefully, for they were pursued and persecuted by the official Christian religion. And if by chance it was discovered that a man or a woman practised this occult science, they were burnt alive at the stake as sorcerers. Now this knowledge is almost lost; very few people possess it. But with the knowledge, the intolerance has gone too. In our times, it is true, most educated people prefer to deny the existence of this science or to dub it imagination or even fraud in order to hide from themselves their own ignorance and the uneasiness they would feel if they had to recognise the reality of a power over which they have no control. And even among those who do not deny it, most of them are not very fond of these things; they are disturbed and troubled by them. However, they are obliged to admit that it is not a crime. And people who practise occultism are no longer burnt at the stake or thrown into prison. Only, since it is no longer necessary to hide, many people claim to have the knowledge, but very few of them really know anything. Some unscrupulous and ambitious people take advantage of the mystery which formerly used to shroud occult science and use it as a means of mystification and deceit. But it is not by these people that we should judge the knowledge which they wrongly claim to possess. In every domain of human activity, there are charlatans and imposters, but we should not allow their tricks to throw discredit upon a true science which they falsely claim to possess. That is why, during the great periods when this science was flourishing, when there were recognised schools where it

could be practised, before anyone was allowed to undertake this study, he had to undergo for a very long time, sometimes for many years, a very strict twofold discipline of self-development and self-mastery. On one hand, the sincerity and disinterestedness of the aspirant's intentions, the purity of his motives, of his capacity for self-forgetfulness and self-abnegation, his sense of sacrifice and unselfishness were ascertained, as far as possible. In this way the loftiness and nobility of the candidate's aspiration were proved, while on the other hand he was subjected to a series of ordeals intended to show that his capacities were adequate and that he could without danger practise the science to which he wished to devote himself. These ordeals laid a special emphasis on the mastery of passions and desires, on the establishment of an unshakable calm, and above all on the absence of all fear, for in this endeavour an unflinching fearlessness is an essential condition of safety.

In one of its aspects, occult science is like a kind of chemistry applied to the play of forces and the structure of the worlds and individual forms of the inner dimensions. Just as in the chemistry of Matter the manipulation of certain substances is not without danger, so too in the occult worlds the wielding of certain forces and contact with them involve risks which only a great self-control and an unshakable calm can render innocuous.

In another of its aspects, occult science is, for the individual seeker, like the discovery and exploration of unknown countries whose laws and customs one often learns at one's own cost. Some of these realms are even rather terrifying for the beginner, who finds himself surrounded by new and unexpected perils. However, most of these dangers are more imaginary than real, and if one faces them without fear they lose the greater part of their reality.

In any case, at all times it has been recommended that one should take up these studies only under a very reliable guide who can point out the paths to follow, put you on guard against dangers, whether illusory or not, and give protection when needed.

Thus it is difficult to give more details here about the science itself, except to say that the indispensable basis of occult studies is a recognition of the concrete and objective reality of the many states of being and the inner worlds, which is a psychological application of the theory of four-dimensional or multi-dimensional space.

Occult science could thus be defined as a concrete objectification, in the world of forms, of what spiritual disciplines teach from the purely psychological point of view. The two should complement each other for the perfection of self-development and integral action. Occult knowledge without spiritual discipline is a dangerous instrument, for the one who uses it as for others, if it falls into impure hands. Spiritual knowledge without occult science lacks precision and certainty in its objective results; it is all-powerful only in the subjective world. The two, when combined in inner or outer action, are irresistible and are fit instruments for the manifestation of the supramental power. (M12: 88-92)

(A compilation)

“MAGNITUDES” — CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

Sri Aurobindo —

Some more blank verses:

MAGNITUDES

Each drop of beauty brings a power to slake
The fire-abysses of the human soul
Yearning for infinite ecstasy through clay.
But some vague distance ever cleaves apart
The hungry dreamer and the nectarous dream —
A distance dwarfing to pale starry quiver
The dance of universes everywhere . . .

~~this~~¹

O pierce with mystic love the outward veil:

~~that~~¹

Draw close by trance your heart to the deep heart
Of each clay-mote and feel its intimate throb
A paradisal cataract of the Vast!

Are the vision and word-movement purely mental? Even if they are, what sort of poetry do they make? I wonder if the central idea is expressed with sufficient clarity and force.

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

1. [*Sri Aurobindo crossed out “this” and “that”.*]

Mental, yes, but it is fine poetry. The ideas, I think, quite clearly brought out.

27 June 1937

* * *

Sri Aurobindo —

This is a poem you have seen before — only, its last line I have changed, because the original form seemed to me rather stereotyped in manner and not vivid enough, though possibly just a whit more significant than what I have put now. That form was: “A paradisal cataract of the Vast!”

MAGNITUDES

| Each drop of beauty brings a power to slake
 | The fire-abysses of the human soul
 || Yearning for infinite ecstasy through clay.
 || But some vague distance ever cleaves apart
 | The hungry dreamer and the nectarous dream —
 || A distance dwarfing to pale starry quiver
 | The dance of universes everywhere . . .

|| O pierce with mystic love the outward veil:
 || Draw close by trance your heart to the deep heart
 | Of each clay-mote and feel its intimate throb
 A cataracting laughter of the Vast!

Is the line really an improvement? And another thing I'd like to know is whether on its own plane — that is to say, the mental — this poem is as successful as it ought to be. Not comparing it to my highest spiritual reach of inspiration but judging it by itself, what would you say is the degree of excellence reached by its thought-expression? Also, are any lines worth marking?

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

[*The single and double marks are Sri Aurobindo's.*]

No, the old final line was much better.

The poem is very successful throughout — it expresses with great power and beauty what it wants to say. All the lines are markable — the original final line would deserve the double line also.

12 July 1937

MAGNITUDES

Each drop of beauty brings a power to slake
 The fire-abysses of the human soul
 Yearning for infinite ecstasy through clay.
 But some vague distance ever cleaves apart
 The hungry dreamer and the nectarous dream —
 A distance dwarfing to pale starry quiver
 The dance of universes everywhere . . .

O pierce with mystic love the outward veil:
 Draw close by trance your heart to the deep heart
 Of each clay-mote and feel its intimate throb
 A paradisaal cataract of the Vast!

AMAL KIRAN
 (K. D. SETHNA)

If there were not different sources of inspiration, every poet would write the same thing and in the same way as every other, which would be deplorable. Each draws from a different realm and therefore a different kind and manner of inspiration . . .

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Poetry and Art, CWSA, Vol. 27, p. 14)

FOOTPRINTS OF THE FUTURE

(A few reflections on the Ashram School on its 75th anniversary)

A New Creation

A Bliss, a Light, a Power, a flame-white Love
Caught all into a sole immense embrace;
Existence found its truth on Oneness' breast
And each became the self and space of all.
The great world-rhythms were heart-beats of one Soul,
To feel was a flame-discovery of God,
All mind was a single harp of many strings,
All life a song of many meeting lives;
For worlds were many, but the Self was one.
This knowledge now was made a cosmos' seed:
This seed was cased in the safety of the Light,
It needed not a sheath of Ignorance.
Then from the trance of that tremendous clasp
And from the throbbings of that single Heart
And from the naked Spirit's victory
A new and marvellous creation rose.¹

The year 2018 marks the 75th anniversary of the Ashram School, better known as the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. The Ashram School, like the Ashram itself is the Divine Mother's creation and therefore fundamentally differs from human creations. Human creations start and finish in the mind and therefore are limited by context and circumstances and the inherent inability of the human mind (reason) to foresee through vast spaces of Time. Human creations generally aim to satisfy our needs or even desires, to equip us with human capacities to survive and excel, at best to be the best among human beings, the noble, the *srestha* of the ancient Aryan world. But the Ashram strives to go beyond all that humanity has attained and can achieve while still remaining human. It aims at an integral growth and all-round progress rather than outer achievement and material success, it endeavours to bring into play new and unknown forces of a higher order rather than perpetuate the old ways of being and thinking and living. It looks at far-off results now invisible to human sight and even mocked at by ignorant minds that cannot

1. *Savitri*, pp. 322-23.

understand how the future unfolds. There are many other ways in which the Mother's creation differs from the way we as humans conceive and create. Even though instruments of the Divine, we distort the original Will by bringing in our own limited ideas and preferences for certain ways of life we are accustomed to. But here, the Mother aims at resetting the balance between the original Divine Will and its distortions that have taken place through the human journey, in fact through the unfolding of the epic drama of creation itself. We have missed the original intention thereby turning the play into something tragic and painful instead of a joyous unfolding. Neither success nor failure, happiness nor sorrow, personal comforts and pleasures nor pain are the real purpose of the game. Its aim is progress and progress to the eye of the Divine means growing into the likeness of the Divine, a manifestation of the divine possibilities latent and inherent within us. But here too we limit by our own ideas and conceptions of the Divine, ideas that mankind has developed in its search for the ultimate Reality. This is no easy task, nor one that can be accomplished in a limited period of time. Most would not even conceive of its possibility. But it is precisely this seemingly impossible work that the Divine Mother has undertaken upon Herself. All that She needs is our openness and receptivity, in one word collaboration so that Her Will may be accomplished with the least distortion. The conditions for such a collaboration is the whole process of the Integral Yoga. In other words, the teachers here are not necessarily simply professionally trained experts in a subject; they are supposed to undertake the great journey of yoga along with the knowledge of the subject. This is the great challenge and also the limitation. No more the old way of life but something new, an unprecedented new is being brought into the human play. This is so new that even the best of human intelligence is baffled. Yet sure are Her footsteps and what She Wills, that the universe is bound to eventually create.

The manifestation of God in Earth

If earth can look up to the light of heaven
 And hear an answer to her lonely cry,
 Not vain their meeting, nor heaven's touch a snare.
 If thou and I are true, the world is true;
 Although thou hide thyself behind thy works,
 To be is not a senseless paradox;
 Since God has made earth, earth must make in her God;
 What hides within her breast she must reveal.²

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 692-93.

We may say that in a way the whole drama of creation is being worked out in its last details. It is being carried to its logical possibility. In a sense our stories of life are intimately linked with the story of creation itself. The Origin of creation, whatever or whoever it be, dwells within each atom of existence and therefore within us too. But man has the unique capacity to enter into conscious contact with this origin and reclaim his lost parentage. That is the first axiomatic principle of any genuine yoga. It is a principle at once sound and logical as also replicable and reproducible in practice. At the same time, it is not just the origin but all the forces that have gone into creation continue to live and linger within us in some shady corner of our nature. The dinosaur has not become extinct, only the form has. Its habits and memories continue to stamp and seize human life, modified by the action of the mind and feelings within us. The ghosts of our past continue to haunt us as phantom realities. Human beings are like a melting pot of all the forces that have gone into creation. But even more importantly, they are also pulled unknowingly by the forces of the future that seek to manifest through them. Until now it is the forces of the past that have continued to thwart and frustrate the forces of the future. Yet these attempts were needed to prepare matter. Many approximations are needed before one can arrive at the goal. But the time has now come to resolve this long-standing original conflict that tears at our very souls. It is with this view that the Ashram and the Integral Yoga have been given to man: not to perpetuate the human ways, even the best of human ways, but to discover the pathways of the future and a new way to live. Yes, in principle it has been discovered and given to us by the intense tapasya of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, yet this discovery has to be made afresh in each one of us and lived by each person in his or her own unique way. Or else it will have little meaning for the earth beyond becoming yet another religion that colours our life without really transforming it. But no more of that old story, the bad ending, the end of a great and profound truth in a religious creed, an ideological cult or a dry philosophical system that kills the truth by preserving it too rigidly in strait-jackets of human thought and a set of external rituals and rules. No more of the old fiasco as Sri Aurobindo remarked, or the same old wine in a new bottle.

A seed in endless Time

This was a seed cast into endless Time.
 A Word is spoken or a Light is shown,
 A moment sees, the ages toil to express.
 So flashing out of the Timeless leaped the worlds;
 An eternal instant is the cause of the years.
 All he had done was to prepare a field;
 His small beginnings asked for a mighty end:
 For all that he had been must now new-shape

In him her joy to embody, to enshrine
 Her beauty and greatness in his house of life.
 But now his being was too wide for self;
 His heart's demand had grown immeasurable:
 His single freedom could not satisfy,
 Her light, her bliss he asked for earth and men.³

People often doubt whether what has been initiated by Her will arrive at full fruition. This is of course one of the natural limitations of our human vision. We cannot see beyond a single lifetime. We are glued to the surfaces and tied to events and circumstances that change like a cinema on the vast endless canvas of life. What She has done is sown a seed of the New Consciousness, watered it by Her Divine Love, nourished it by Her Light and the Breath of Grace. As time rolls by and seasons change, the seed will sprout forth and blooms appear. True the spring may still be far but the first buds and new leaves already indicate the sign of blossoming that is going to follow. Each sphere of the Ashram life including the School bears testimony to Her Love and Grace. As She said, it is not a place for justice but for Grace. One breathes Grace and drinks Her Love, basks in the sunshine of Her luminous smile and receives Her Divine Touch simply by treading the soil where Her lotus Feet have pressed. It takes a special Grace and a deeper vision to understand the way the Ashram has been created. It is not one of those human comfort zones of thought and sentimental idealism where we often wish to rest and call it utopia. No utopia can be created as long as human ego and money govern life. It is rather a dream, the dream of the Supreme that She has planted here and these dreams are bound to emerge as realities in their own time. She Herself has best described this dream:

There should be somewhere on earth a place which no nation could claim as its own, where all human beings of goodwill who have a sincere aspiration could live freely as citizens of the world and obey one single authority, that of the supreme truth; a place of peace, concord and harmony where all the fighting instincts of man would be used exclusively to conquer the causes of his sufferings and miseries, to surmount his weaknesses and ignorance, to triumph over his limitations and incapacities; a place where the needs of the spirit and the concern for progress would take precedence over the satisfaction of desires and passions, the search for pleasure and material enjoyment. In this place, children would be able to grow and develop integrally without losing contact with their souls; education would be given not for passing examinations or obtaining certificates and posts but to enrich existing faculties and bring forth

3. *Ibid.*, p. 315.

new ones. In this place, titles and positions would be replaced by opportunities to serve and organise; the bodily needs of each one would be equally provided for, and intellectual, moral and spiritual superiority would be expressed in the general organisation not by an increase in the pleasures and powers of life but by increased duties and responsibilities. Beauty in all its artistic forms, painting, sculpture, music, literature, would be equally accessible to all; the ability to share in the joy it brings would be limited only by the capacities of each one and not by social or financial position. For in this ideal place 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. In short, it would be a place where human relationships, which are normally based almost exclusively on competition and strife, would be replaced by relationships of emulation in doing well, of collaboration and real brotherhood.

The earth is certainly not ready to realise such an ideal, for mankind does not yet possess sufficient knowledge to understand and adopt it nor the conscious force that is indispensable in order to execute it; that is why I call it a dream.

And yet this dream is in the course of becoming a reality; that is what we are striving for in Sri Aurobindo's Ashram, on a very small scale, in proportion to our limited means. The realisation is certainly far from perfect, but it is progressive; little by little we are advancing towards our goal which we hope we may one day be able to present to the world as a practical and effective way to emerge from the present chaos, to be born into a new life that is more harmonious and true.⁴

Indeed, one of the things that strikes one engaged with the Ashram is that all binaries are resolved into the original binary of that which is open and responsive to the Light, Truth, Peace, Harmony, Beauty, in one word, to the forces of a higher progressive order working for the ascent of creation towards the Divine, as against all that revolts and resists the advent and manifestation of these divine qualities in creation. And even this original binary that wears many a mask and makes of our human heart and mind a conflict-ridden battlefield is dissolved into the singularity of Her Love. The Ashram and the School are held together despite the complex many-layered heterogeneity by the power of Her Love. Whether openly recognised or not, this is the secret Power of transformation that is ever at work in this geographi-

4. CWM, Vol. 12, pp. 93-94.

cally small but psychologically immense field of spiritual evolution created by the Mother.

Yes, it is an evolutionary field which means that everything is being pushed towards the 'evolution next'. Experiences, events, circumstances, even people one meets and gets associated with are all designed to help man evolve towards his inevitable destiny. Any other classification and mental categorisation of these is an ignorant perception of the occult arrangement of forces that work here. The School developed within the larger context of the Ashram, thriving in its divine atmosphere, shares this dream, this aspiration and the complex play of forces that move within its occult formations.

This is the cosmic backdrop and the divine context in which the Ashram School has developed and continues to do so. It is an experimental programme which is yet going on and is far from being over. All the forces at work in the world are here but directly under the watchful gaze of the Divine. They are here so that they can be healed and transformed by the pressure and power of Her Love. That is why in certain ways this is a non-replicable experiment. Unlike human creations it is not a system fixed and formulated by thought and transplanted elsewhere by following the general guidelines and duplicating the methods. Perhaps there is no one method, no fixed rule, no binding system. It is a wide and complex movement that is taking place under the impulsion of the Infinite that recreates the universe each moment. The core is the Divine Love, the divine atmosphere that envelops all, the power radiating as a result of the divine tapasya of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the Grace that is ever active shifting the different elements of our nature incalculably towards the great consummation. This core is difficult, almost impossible to establish or create anywhere. The only way one can come a little close to replicating the Ashram School to have a core body of sadhaks fully open to Her Love and Grace and Light through whom She can pour Her Force upon all. All other mere mental ways will not suffice, in fact not even come close to what the Ashram School represents.

Giant dance of Shiva

A giant dance of Shiva tore the past;
 There was a thunder as of worlds that fall;
 Earth was o'errun with fire and the roar of Death
 Clamouring to slay a world his hunger had made;
 There was a clangour of Destruction's wings:
 The Titan's battle-cry was in my ears,
 Alarm and rumour shook the armoured Night.
 I saw the Omnipotent's flaming pioneers
 Over the heavenly verge which turns towards life

Come crowding down the amber stairs of birth;
 Forerunners of a divine multitude,
 Out of the paths of the morning star they came
 Into the little room of mortal life.
 I saw them cross the twilight of an age,
 The sun-eyed children of a marvellous dawn,
 The great creators with wide brows of calm,
 The massive barrier-breakers of the world
 And wrestlers with destiny in her lists of will,
 The labourers in the quarries of the gods,
 The messengers of the Incommunicable,
 The architects of immortality.
 Into the fallen human sphere they came,
 Faces that wore the Immortal's glory still,
 Voices that communed still with the thoughts of God,
 Bodies made beautiful by the spirit's light,
 Carrying the magic word, the mystic fire,
 Carrying the Dionysian cup of joy,
 Approaching eyes of a diviner man,
 Lips chanting an unknown anthem of the soul,
 Feet echoing in the corridors of Time.
 High priests of wisdom, sweetness, might and bliss,
 Discoverers of beauty's sunlit ways
 And swimmers of Love's laughing fiery floods
 And dancers within rapture's golden doors,
 Their tread one day shall change the suffering earth
 And justify the light on Nature's face.⁵

Historically, the School, like all other activities in the Ashram, started quite informally following the influx of devotees during the Second World War. Families came seeking refuge at the Feet of the Divine Mother. But as is Her Way, the Divine Mother turned this challenge into a divine opportunity to initiate a new project of preparing the children for the coming Future. Her gaze turned always towards the Future, She began pouring Her Consciousness into this new project so that the children may be made ready to embody the New Consciousness that was pressing for manifestation upon Earth. This New Consciousness made its own demands. For its manifestation upon earth, it needed not only the awakening of the soul and enrichment of the inner being through the influx of spiritual experiences but the entire being had to open to its working and made ready for the leap towards the inevitable Future. It

5. *Savitri*, pp. 343-44.

may be noted that the Mother did not once doubt about the luminous Future that awaits man at the end of the present cycle of ignorant seeking and struggles through toil and wants and hopes and cataclysms and wars. She knew that all the trouble and the turmoil that the earth experienced is the tilling of the human soil so that the divine seed hidden in its folds of darkness can burst forth and blossom. She knew this luminous future not only because She saw it but also because She along with Sri Aurobindo worked for it through many lives. Now the hour had come and the New Force was pressing upon earth in response to Their tapasya. The question before them was not whether this New Consciousness would manifest or not, but even more importantly whether man will be ready to receive It when It comes and tries to establish Itself upon earth in and through man. Therefore they called some representative souls to prepare mankind, through them, for this New Consciousness. This became the beginnings of the Ashram, again formed spontaneously under the creative pressure of the incarnate Mahashakti as souls came drawn towards them as flowers are attracted by the light of the Sun. But the sun of Divine Consciousness that they were bringing down was not the morning glory nor the twilight ray but the fullness of the Supermind much like the mid-day sun of summer that initially warms up and then heats the earth for the sowing of flowers that would survive the approaching winter and usher the new spring. A new cycle of evolution had to begin of which they were the heralds.

But while the first sun of summer is a welcome touch, the heat gets intolerable as it grows in intensity and light. Yet the seeds that survive through this intense love of the sun for the golden earth will eventually ripen and bear the flowers of the spring. As the pressure of the New Consciousness mounted up, the resistances of humankind tied down to the old philosophies, old thinking and the old ways began to show up. This was of course not unusual. Men get crusted over after adulthood. They are trapped in the illusion of knowledge and suffer from the sense of self-importance. It needs just a little sincere observation to see through this brilliant illusion that paints the interior chambers of our mind with colourful utopian dreams about ourselves and our role in the world. Some go beyond the little personality of the moment and dream of an ideal earth, a perfect utopia. But a utopia is not created by dreaming in sleep and mere wishful thinking when awake. Whatever age of mankind has seen even a little momentary glimpse of an ideal collective life, it has come through hard sacrifice and relentless toil. The cup of man has to be ready to receive the gifts of heaven. Men are easily drawn towards the promise of an ideal world but they want to step into it ready-made. Very few want to labour and build the utopia they conceive and dream of. Perhaps that is what happened to a few and still happens to those who come to the Ashram and Auroville dreaming of entering a ready-made utopian world. What people need to know is that it takes centuries to build an ideal and establish it upon earth, capable of bearing the onrush of weather and winds and the fury of all that resists the Ideal. The same happened and continues

to happen with the gifts that the New Consciousness has brought for man as a consequence of the tapasya of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Little do we realise that the joy of working for a 'seemingly impossible' Ideal actually makes us truly ready to receive and enjoy the gift better. The danger and delight of a New Discovery go hand-in-hand and often complement each other.

The War was destroying the past like a veritable dance of Shiva. All the cherished old values of man, his cherished ways of life, his systems of philosophy and even his religions were put as if under a gigantic grinding machine, either to be pulverised and provide material for the future or else to pass away into the shadows of a bygone era over the next century or so. It was a pressure for everything to reinvent itself or else to transfigure and return with a new form more adapted for the future. But there was, along with the world-shaking dance of Shiva, the saving Grace of the Divine Mother setting into motion a new rhythm of life. A future was being silently shaped, unseen by human eyes, unrecognised by the human, hidden from the glitter and glamour of powers that imitate the new while perpetuating the old. But even as the old was dying there were descending upon earth through the stairs of birth new children who would be needed to build the future. After the bad dreams of the night there was to shine the new and golden dawn. This then was the opportunity hidden behind the dance of death and destruction that the Divine Mother seized upon to bring a new rhythm into the life of humanity. The Ashram School was meant precisely to serve this purpose. Of course the Divine Mother very well knew the difficulty and the challenge. Children are not a blank slate. Apart from being impacted by the collective life around them, each child also brings with him his own unique past. The seeds of old deeds lurk still in our subconscious terrains, hidden from human sight yet ready to spring a surprise any moment. All this had to be tackled forthwith in this new venture.

All shall be done

Although Fate lingers in the high Beyond
 And the work seems vain on which our heart's force was spent,
 All shall be done for which our pain was borne.
 Even as of old man came behind the beast
 This high divine successor surely shall come
 Behind man's inefficient mortal pace,
 Behind his vain labour, sweat and blood and tears:
 He shall know what mortal mind barely durst think,
 He shall do what the heart of the mortal could not dare.⁶

6. *Ibid.*, p. 344.

Thus began the next phase of the Divine experiment in the Divine laboratory. Its purpose was not to turn 'little sprouts' into budding yogis. Even the Ashram was not meant for that. Difficult to understand though from a human angle that sees only the surfaces and has certain fixed notions of life, the Ashram had only a few, a very small percentage so to say, who came impelled by the aspiration for the yoga. In the beginning, yes, but soon it was evident that this yoga of world transformation is difficult, if not impossible even for the strongest and the best. The aspiration and tapasya required are too constant and intense, the sincerity needed nearly impossible for human nature as it stands today with its many-sided complexities where each part seeks its own satisfaction and moves at its own pace, even the faith and surrender which are the indispensable elements needed for the yoga were not so easy for the human ego that always wants things to happen in its own way and its own time. That is why the endeavour of transforming human nature into a divine nature was undertaken only when the Divine Mother decided to take charge of the yoga. This meant a massive shift in the process itself. It meant a progressive opening and receptive surrender to the Mother who would then 'do the yoga' in others. Of course even in the earlier writings of Sri Aurobindo, notably *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo emphasises the need for surrender to the Divine Shakti. But it is quite a different thing when the Divine Shakti, still a matter of faith for many, was here, right in front, in an embodied human form. With Her coming, Sri Aurobindo stepped into the background so that He could work upon the world forces from behind, act upon the cosmic agencies that were raging to spoil the work for it meant taking away their long-established reign and, as far as possible hasten the hour of supramental manifestation through an intense yoga that needed some kind of an inner seclusion. The stage was now set to launch the extreme experiment. The Ashram had taken birth.

Even as the experiment was underway and progressing reasonably well there arose, as if from the darkest gulfs of nature the forces of falsehood and darkness and death engulfing the world in its flames. To counteract their effects there came into the world-play Rudra and Kali, portions of Shiva and the power of Krishna to throw back the attack. The Ashram became the spiritual epicentre of the inner battle even as the world went through the purifying fires of hell. Finally the flames of destruction began to recede but the smoke that had arisen was a poison that needed to be absorbed. It is then that Sri Aurobindo offered His own body as a sacrifice, drinking the poison fumes of jealousy and hate and rage and fear and the blatant dance of evil upon earth. Both knew this and hence the Mother had already started working upon a new strategy for the Divine Victory. The coming of children during the war provided this opportunity and though the Ashram School took roots in 1943, it was made known to the world in 1952.

Death's tremendous hour

A seed shall be sown in Death's tremendous hour,
 A branch of heaven transplant to human soil;
 Nature shall overleap her mortal step;
 Fate shall be changed by an unchanging will.⁷

These prophetic lines from *Savitri* remind us also of the ways of God's working. When all seems to be lost, it is then that the intervention takes place and the earth is saved. The loss is as much part of the grand plan, the larger picture, so to say. It ploughs the field, prepares us by pushing us out of our comfort zones and the illusory paradise of the ego-self and its confused values of good and bad. We see this thrice with Sri Aurobindo and His work. The hour of death is also the hour of God. Whether it be the Gita, the song of immortality or the Sermon on the Mount, both are given during death's tremendous hour. The first tremendous hour of death is during the first Great War. It is during this that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother came together and through the *Arya* started the first sowing in the mind and soul of man. Soon thereafter the first grand experiment called the Ashram would start with the Mother's permanent arrival. The second tremendous hour came during the second Great War. It is during this hour that the seed of a New Creation was jointly sown in the children of the future. That is when the Ashram School started. *Savitri* is completed soon thereafter even as India gains independence so that over the next century she can prepare herself for the role she must play towards the New Creation, a task unique and formidable which perhaps India alone is equipped to play given her long and deep and many-sided history of spiritual knowledge. The third and final tremendous hour is when Sri Aurobindo withdraws, leaving the Mother in our hearts and *Savitri* in our hands. It is in this hour that the Mother formally inaugurates the Sri Aurobindo university centre as a memorial in His Name. Soon thereafter there is going to be the Supramental manifestation as if the Heavens as well as the great Adversary conceded Her untiring tapasya.

It is against this background that one has to understand the origins of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. Its 75th anniversary was observed in December 2018. The programme was modest to begin with. The Mother revealed it in a series of messages.

Inaugural Message for the Sri Aurobindo Memorial Convention

Sri Aurobindo is present in our midst, and with all the power of his creative genius he presides over the formation of the University Centre which for years

7. *Ibid.*, p. 346.

he considered as one of the best means of preparing the future humanity to receive the supramental light that will transform the élite of today into a new race manifesting upon earth the new light and force and life.

In his name I open today this convention meeting here with the purpose of realising one of his most cherished ideals.⁸

24 April 1951

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A few broad ideas will serve as a basis for the organisation of this university centre and will govern its programme of studies. Most of them have already been presented in the various writings of Sri Aurobindo and in the series of articles on education in this *Bulletin*.

The most important idea is that the unity of the human race can be achieved neither by uniformity nor by domination and subjection. Only a synthetic organisation of all nations, each one occupying its true place according to its own genius and the part it has to play in the whole, can bring about a comprehensive and progressive unification which has any chance of enduring. And if this synthesis is to be a living one, the grouping should be effectuated around a central idea that is as wide and as high as possible, in which all tendencies, even the most contradictory, may find their respective places. This higher idea is to give men the conditions of life they need in order to be able to prepare themselves to manifest the new force that will create the race of tomorrow.

All impulsions of rivalry, all struggle for precedence and domination must disappear and give way to a will for harmonious organisation, for clear-sighted and effective collaboration.⁹

*

To make this possible, the children should be accustomed from a very early age not merely to the idea itself, but to its practice. That is why the international university centre will be international; not because students from all countries will be admitted here, nor even because they will be taught in their own language, but above all because the cultures of the various parts of the world will be represented here so as to be accessible to all, not merely intellectually in ideas, theories, principles and language, but also vitally in habits and customs, art in all its forms — painting, sculpture, music, architecture, decoration —

8. CWM, Vol. 12, p. 112.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

and physically through natural scenery, dress, games, sports, industries and food. . . .

In this way, international education will not be merely theoretical, in the classroom, but practical in all the details of life.¹⁰

*

The first aim will therefore be to help individuals to become aware of the fundamental genius of the nation to which they belong and at the same time to bring them into contact with the ways of life of other nations, so that they learn to know and respect equally the true spirit of all the countries of the world. For, in order to be real and workable, any world-organisation must be based on this mutual respect and understanding between nation and nation as well as between individual and individual. Only in order and collective organisation, in collaboration based on mutual goodwill, is there any possibility of lifting man out of the painful chaos in which he finds himself now. It is with this aim and in this spirit that all human problems will be studied at the university centre; and the solution to them will be given in the light of the supramental knowledge which Sri Aurobindo has revealed in his writings.¹¹

*

Usually, those who become conscious of their psychic being expect that it will liberate them from vital and physical attractions and activities; they seek to escape from the world in order to live in the joy of contemplation of the Divine, and in the immutable peace of constant contact with Him. The attitude of those who want to practise Sri Aurobindo's integral yoga is quite different. When they have found their psychic being and are united with it, they ask it to turn its gaze towards the physical being in order to act on it with the knowledge that comes from the contact with the Divine, and to transform the body so that it may be able to receive and manifest the divine consciousness and harmony.

This is the goal of our efforts here; this will be the culmination of your studies in the International University Centre.

So, to all those who come to join the University Centre, I shall say once more: never forget our programme and the deeper reason of your coming here. And if in spite of all your efforts the horizon sometimes darkens, if hope and joy fade away, if enthusiasm flags, remember that it is a sign that you have drawn away from your psychic being and lost contact with its ideal. In this way you will avoid making the mistake of throwing the blame on the people

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

and things around you and thus quite needlessly increasing your sufferings and your difficulties.¹²

*

Later, as are Her ways, the work expanded. In fact, always Her work is many-sided and multi-dimensional, something that the linear and limited human mind glued to the moment cannot understand. She sees centuries and millenniums ahead while we cannot take our eyes off the tip of our nose and our little or big personal troubles. She boldly and prophetically declared:

I am perfectly sure, I am quite confident, there is not the slightest doubt in my mind, that this University, which is being established here, will be the greatest seat of knowledge upon earth.

It may take fifty years, it may take a hundred years, and you may doubt about my being there; I may be there or not, but these children of mine will be there to carry out my work.

And those who collaborate in this divine work today will have the joy and pride of having participated in such an exceptional achievement.¹³

Children of the future

Inheritor of the toil of human time,
 He shall take on him the burden of the gods;
 All heavenly light shall visit the earth's thoughts,
 The might of heaven shall fortify earthly hearts;
 Earth's deeds shall touch the superhuman's height,
 Earth's seeing widen into the infinite.¹⁴

Of course one may say, "But where is the truth of what She prophesied?" First and foremost, one needs to have the vision of Truth to understand Its manifestation. Otherwise we shall not be able to see it even when it manifests before our eyes. Secondly, one understands best when one consciously participates in the process. Conscious participation is not just to join the Ashram or teach in the School. That is at best an opportunity given to each one to join hands in the building of the New Creation. To consciously participate means to become the future, to engage within oneself in the process of transformation. The two are obviously not synonymous.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

14. *Savitri*, p. 344.

As with the Ashram so too with the School, merely staying or studying is not enough. Though one must say, without a doubt, that something does take place, however imperceptibly and slowly, within the consciousness of all who begin to live here, something that is new and not felt before in earth and humanity. It is intangibly tangible. Intangible if we look only at the surface, tangible and even concretely felt if we look carefully within and behind the phenomenal appearance. Nolini-da beautifully called it the golden chain that the Mother puts around all who study here and breathe and grow in this atmosphere. It is regardless of the incapacity of human beings and all the issues that the teachers and students may face. It is indeed like a gift of Grace that is given to all who have the rare privilege and fortune just to be here. What is most important however is to reflect upon the symbol that She gave for the SAICE. A symbol as we know is not just another way of depicting a Reality; it is also a power. The symbol of the SAICE is as below:



*The effective manifestation
of Ishwara and Ishwari
in union.*

*The effective manifestation of Ishwara and Ishwari in union.*¹⁵

One is reminded of the story of Kartikeya. He is born out of the twin energy of Shiva and Parvati, his divine parents. He is born with the mission of slaying an Asura whom only the combined energies of the two can bring to dust. Though he is outwardly brought up by six mothers who shape his outer personality, within, he is being secretly prepared by the Lord for the work he has to do. He is a born rebel but

15. CWM, Vol. 12, p. 111.

that is simply because he reacts strongly against injustice and unfair dealings. Rightly directed and brought under Wisdom's calm control he is the prospective conqueror of the world. So too these children, rebel though some of them may seem when we try to look at them from the lens of our limited understanding and traditional beliefs, are the torchbearers of the future, born of the combined divine energy that sets them apart. Even when they do not know it, just as Kartikeya's life when it was spent in oblivion, yet are they marked out for a future scheme that will unfold itself in this life or another. No wonder their daily prayer may well go as the prayer of Kartikeya, the warrior god leading the army of Light:

Make of us the hero warriors we aspire to become. May we fight successfully the great battle of the future that is to be born, against the past that seeks to endure; so that the new things may manifest and we may be ready to receive them.¹⁶

The field of battle had of course shifted. The war was not only inner, psychological, but had to be fought and won in the physical world conditions. It was the last seat of resistance that had to be prepared and we see here too the Divine Mother pouring Her Energies of Love and the transforming Grace into this most obscure substance by engaging the children and disciples alike in a well-planned, meticulous physical education. Its purpose is not to prepare some world-class athletes or Olympic-level gymnasts but to prepare the body to grow conscious of the Divine within its very cells and to open it to the Divine Forces that are working for the intended transformation. The preparation of this base can be considered the penultimate part of the yogic preparation. Of course what each one does with this wonderful preparation is the unique choice and destiny of each soul. But the opportunity is given equally to all, irrespective of all outer distinctions. This itself is a great achievement. Our worldly position and outer achievements do not count here; money is no more the lord. All that matters and counts is how much each one opens to Her in mind and heart and body, how much one is able to direct the energies of life towards this divine consummation of humanity, how much one's heart of love moves to Her divine rhythms and to the touch and tune of the New Creation, how much our soul has awakened to the divine possibilities of the future. Nothing else is worthy of Sri Aurobindo's help, as She declared:

We are not here to do (only a little better) what the others do.

We are here to do what the others *cannot do* because they do not have the idea that it can be done.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

We are here to open the way of the Future to children who belong to the Future.

Anything else is not worth the trouble and not worthy of Sri Aurobindo's help.¹⁷

The 2nd December programme, where young and old, children and elders, students and inmates of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram participate together is to remind us of this tremendous work that we as children of earth in our bodies and children of Divine Mother in our souls have inherited. It is to bring these two poles together and fuse them in a mystic union that is enriching and beneficial to both. This is the last and final condition of a divine life upon earth. It is an awakening of the very cells of the body to the Divine Influx and the joy of victory beautifully captured in this prayer of the cells:

The prayer of the cells in the body

Now that, by the effect of the Grace, we are slowly emerging out of inconscience and waking to a conscious life, an ardent prayer rises in us for more light, more consciousness,

“O Supreme Lord of the universe, we implore Thee, give us the strength and the beauty, the harmonious perfection needed to be Thy divine instruments upon earth.”¹⁸

The last long stretch

The base of matter being progressively made ready, the Supermind was now ready to enter into earthly life. And indeed it did begin to manifest since the momentous event of 29th February 1956. Since then, we have started living in a New Age whose far-reaching implications will unfold with the passage of time. Those who are part of the process can see it happening right here and now, within them and around them and everywhere. For those who are still curious onlookers, nothing much is happening. After all, nothing happens to the outer surface. But the supramental bird of the New Creation has already emerged from the golden womb and its Light and Consciousness are spreading far and wide. It is towards this end that various organisations bearing Their Divine Name and carrying Their Divine Force are working. The Sri Aurobindo Society and its offshoot Auroville (now an independent organisation) are embodying this dream of the Lord that is more real than earth's concrete realities. This dream is awakening in more and more souls spread far and

17. *Ibid.*, p. 113.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 282.

wide but of one divine family and tied to this single work of building the Next Future. Indeed the Future is already built and ready. It is right behind us, within us, like a thin lining behind this gross outer world. It is beginning to precipitate here, and there bursting through the hard shell and crust of matter. In every field of human endeavour a new aspiration and a new energy is awakening. It is the far-reaching result of the Divine project initiated here in this divine laboratory directly under the supervision and guidance of the Divine Mother. Every sphere of the Ashram bears a testimony to Her Grace, carries the stamp of Her Love, has within its roots the mighty Breath of Her Ananda that sustains its manifold life. All that is needed now is to have faith and endurance and go on until the victory that has been won in principle is generalised in each and every detail of the individual existence and the collective life of humanity:

The spirit ensnared by thee force to delight
 Of creation's oneness sweet and fathomless,
 Compelled to embrace my myriad unities
 And all my endless forms and divine souls.
 O Mind, grow full of the eternal peace;
 O Word, cry out the immortal litany:
 Built is the golden tower, the flame-child born.¹⁹

ALOK PANDEY

19. *Savitri*, p. 702.

We are now witnessing the birth of a new world; it is very young, very weak — not in its essence but in its outer manifestation — not yet recognised, not even felt, denied by the majority. But it is here. It is here, making an effort to grow, absolutely sure of the result.

The Mother

(Questions and Answers 1957-1958, CWM, Vol. 9, p. 151)

AUROVILLE — A CITY FOR THE FUTURE

(Continued from the issue of January 2019)

7. BUILDING THE SOUL

PROGRAMME

Research through experience
of the Supreme Truth
A life divine
but
NO RELIGIONS¹

Experience of the Supreme Truth begins from the soul. The human soul is a spark of the Divine that enters into the manifestation of the self, and consents to be a part of its natural phenomenal becoming. It carries the power of the divine consciousness. “Consciousness is . . . the fundamental thing in existence,”² its energy, motion, movement and substance create the universe.

One could hazard then that the soul is like a thumbprint of the universe at the birth of a human being. This thumbprint becomes the interface through which they can communicate with each other — the individual soul and the conscious universe.

The Matrimandir would be the soul of the city.

Let us return for a minute to 7 February 1968 as the Mother wrote the first segment of the Charter of Auroville: “*Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. . .*”³ Addressing Satprem she said: “I don’t say anything about ‘citizens’ and all that. I say: *But to live in Auroville one must be a willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness . . .* They will all wince at ‘Divine’ but I don’t care. You understand, it is the explanation of the Matrimandir at the centre. The Matrimandir represents the Divine Consciousness. All that goes unsaid, but it’s like that.”⁴

28 February 2017. I sit in the amphitheatre watching a magnificent fire and listening to the 1968 recording of the Mother reading the Charter. It is just a little before the dawn. In the semi-darkness her voice is molten gold, like the flames rising from the

1. CWM, Vol. 13, p. 206.

2. CWSA, Vol. 28, p. 22.

3. The Mother’s conversation of 7 February 1968; *The Mother’s Agenda*, Vol. 9.

4. *Ibid.*

fire before us, firm, powerful and irrefutable in its command as she says: “But to live in Auroville one must be the willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness.”⁵ There’s no feel-good music to support her voice, no gentle, soaring strings, for Consciousness is the main business of Auroville.

How does one build the soul of a city meant to house the Divine Consciousness? With sustainable brick or with unsustainable steel and concrete? Were we supposed to get moralistic with matter? Judge it by political correctness alone? Were there any experts out there with PhDs in such things? The only one with any knowledge and experience of the Supramental Consciousness and how it worked was the ninety-two-year-old being watching the future from her chair, in a small airy room in Pondicherry, and who was now all set to build it in concrete. What is the soul of a city?

*It is like the Force, the central Force of Auroville, the cohesive Force of Auroville.*⁶

In Roger’s archival notes we find the following record of a conversation with the Mother.

“Would the Force be more present here than at other places?” Roger asks.

“Build Matrimandir,” the Mother replies. “I take it upon myself to make it into a very powerful centre. Only those who are capable will perceive it.”

The Mother had already broached the idea of Matrimandir with Roger several times but he was preoccupied with the general planning. Towards December 1969, Paolo Tomasi, the Italian designer, communicated a need for something at the centre of Auroville. Something was missing. A city like Auroville had to unfold from the centre. People were confused and scattered. Could they not come together and build something beautiful, like a church as in ages before? “Theoretically he is right” the Mother agreed, but resisted any religious implication. “That’s why I’ve left people very free. That is why I did not insist on the construction of the centre right away, because it would be the old cathedral again, the old temple, all that old stuff right away . . .”⁷

Her plan for the Inner Chamber was ready and on New Year’s Day, 1970, she summoned Roger, explained her vision and asked him to start working on a model of the Matrimandir. Over the next weeks a number of discussions followed regarding the design of the Inner Chamber which can be found in the *Mother’s Agenda*. Discussions about the entrance to the building, access to the Inner Chamber, its twelve facets and twelve columns, the ray of light that would fall on the crystal at

5. CWM, Vol. 13, p. 193.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 342.

7. The Mother’s conversation of 31 December 1969; *The Mother’s Agenda*, Vol. 10.

the centre, the carpet on the floor, how the place was to be used, who could come and when.

In principle not for visitors . . . People will not come for ‘regular meditations’ or anything of the kind, it will be a place for concentration. Not everyone will be allowed in; there will be a time of the week or the day when visitors will be allowed to come, but anyway without mixture. There will be a fixed time or a fixed day to show the visitors, and the rest of the time only for those who are . . . serious — serious, sincere, who truly want to learn to concentrate . . . in silence and concentration . . .⁸

Evidently, the Matrimandir was an inner workstation for Aurovilians.

Of course, the name Matrimandir created misunderstandings and still does. Translated literally, it means the Mother’s Temple, though she called it the Mother’s Shrine. “And for God’s sake let it not become a religion.”⁹

In *The Human Cycle*, Sri Aurobindo would write: “History has exhibited more than once the coincidence of the greatest religious fervour and piety with darkest ignorance . . . with the unquestioned reign of cruelty, injustice and oppression . . .”¹⁰ The Mother would go further: “So long as religions exist, atheism will be indispensable to counter-balance them. Both must disappear to make way for a sincere and disinterested search for Truth . . .”¹¹

To Roger, trying to understand her stance as he worked on the building, she explained that religion was

“any concept of the world or the universe which is presented as the exclusive Truth in which one must have an absolute faith . . . Man’s right is a free pursuit of the Truth with the liberty to approach it in his own way. But each one must know that his discovery is good for him alone and it is not to be enforced upon others.”¹²

Everything in Auroville hinged on this. “We replace religion by the spiritual life, which is truer, deeper and higher at the same time, that is to say, closer to the Divine. For the Divine is in everything, but we are not conscious of it. This is the immense progress that man must make.”¹³

8. The Mother’s conversation of 3 January 1970; *Ibid.*, Vol. 11.

9. The Mother’s conversation of 31 December 1965; *Ibid.*, Vol. 10.

10. CWSA, Vol. 25, pp. 225-26.

11. CWM, Vol. 10, p. 284.

12. The Mother’s conversation of 13 May 1970; *The Mother’s Agenda*, Vol. 11.

13. CWM, Vol. 13, p. 110.

By the end of March 1970, Roger brought her five different models. From these, she chose a slightly elliptical sphere covered with gold discs. The Inner Chamber would follow the Mother's vision. Roger continued to work on it for another year till the banyan tree, amphitheatre, the gardens and the lake were integrated with the Matrimandir to complete the Peace area.

The foundation stone of Matrimandir was laid at sunrise, on 21 February 1971. It was the Mother's ninety-third birthday. Roger had designed an invocatory fire flanked by tall columns of brick for the meditation accompanied by Sunil's soaring music and a short recorded message: "*Let the Matrimandir be the living symbol of Auroville's aspiration for the Divine.*"¹⁴

The excavation began with about two dozen Aurovilians with crowbars coming out to dig the parched red earth as the sun rose high and blazed. It was a heroic gesture of faith, but the means were undersize. Given the size and volume of the crater that had to be dug it was soon clear that this would take years, Alain G. recounts, and it was not considered realistic at all. Two other options were then put forward to the Mother: hiring earthmovers, which could get the work done in a few weeks, or villagers. The Mother opted for the villagers, much to the chagrin of some Aurovilians who suspected it was Roger's idea, Alain laughs. Roger-bashing had already come into vogue. She opted for the second solution to give the villagers work and allow a contact with the people of the land, and to get to know them. The villagers worked much faster than anticipated. At a certain point there were more than four hundred workers digging the foundations along with a small number of Aurovilians. The excavation was completed in a record four months. The massive red crater was like a giant earth cradle, waiting.

A year later exactly, on 21 February 1972, the actual construction began with a meditation. People gathered around the vast excavated site as the sun rose quietly over the crater. It was also Sri Aurobindo's centenary year.

I was fifteen that year, attending high school in Benares, when I saw a picture in a magazine. It was a black-and-white image of a group of people, sitting with their backs to the camera. They seemed to be seated on a high place. There were steps going down, a little rough, like an old archaeological site, except that it looked freshly dug, its history yet to happen. The people in the foreground seemed to be waiting for something, deep in concentration, as they watched the sun rise above the crater. The picture had such a silence, I couldn't stop staring at it. Who were those people? What were they doing? Where was it? *I want to go there . . .* But of course, with exams around the corner I soon forgot.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 223.

Work had begun on the four support pillars that would hold the sphere. The pillars were named after the four powers of the Universal Mother, described by Sri Aurobindo in *The Mother*: Mahakali representing divine strength, was to the north; Maheshwari representing divine wisdom, to the south; Mahalakshmi, or divine harmony, to the east and Mahasaraswati, or divine perfection, to the west.

The site became a bustling, fascinating place, reminiscent of a time when people gathered together to build the great temples and cathedrals in the past, but none of us working there felt we were doing anything religious. There was joy on the construction site, there was bickering and laughter, often irreverent, and there was always this other presence that we felt as we worked there, something free, yet very close inside us. The sacredness was in the steel and concrete and in the air; like a presence all around us.

Two years went by and the work progressed steadily. On 17 November 1973, at exactly 7.25 p.m., as a full day of concreting for the fourth support pillar ended, news arrived that the Mother had passed away in Pondicherry.

It was a terrible shock.

No one had imagined that the Mother would leave, even though people were aware of her declining condition. She was ninety-five. For many it left a gaping wound from which they never recovered. Some lost faith or courage or both and left. The Supreme Lord was still in charge of Auroville, but without her, physically, without the messages and comments that arrived regularly from that little room in Pondicherry, the adventure suddenly seemed impossible to navigate.

“Let’s agree that the first anchor on Earth was lifted and the second one too,” Ruud would tell his friend Alain G., in his book, *A House for the Third Millennium*, referring to the departure of both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother,

but there is a *third* anchor: Matrimandir. That, precisely, is the point, a big concrete-and-golden point in *matter, on the Earth*, where it has a hold, where the flow through, the transformation takes place. We don’t know what it is, we don’t understand fully what we are building, but for myself I call it the ‘transformer’. . . it is alive and growing and nothing has failed; it is taking place on the Earth, it’s evolving in matter.”¹⁵

We are building the body of the Mother, Ruud would say, a body that was ostensibly the soul of Auroville. The *third anchor* was not God, not belief, but a material transformer:

15. Ruud Lohmann, *A House for the Third Millennium*, Auroville: Alain Grandcolas, 1986, p. 60.

The Matrimandir wants to be the symbol of the Divine's answer to man's aspiration for perfection.

Union with the Divine manifesting in a progressive human unity.¹⁶

In a *Matrimandir Newsletter* I came across an interaction between Roger and the Matrimandir workers.

What I understood from the Mother was that Matrimandir is to be a place, a receptacle in which to receive the Supramental consciousness-force. The Truth-consciousness. This is the starting point, the centre, the spirit *of the city* that wants to be the living embodiment of an actual human unity, Matrimandir, is its soul . . . so that the city may be guided by Truth in all its aspects.¹⁷

Naturally, such an experiment cannot be built by regular "citizens" with all their attendant rights and opinions, but "willing servitors" capable of both the surrender and the freedom that this city was going to need.

With the Mother gone physically, who was in charge? Who would oversee and manage the project? Could the Aurovilians be trusted? What if they ruined everything? The Sri Aurobindo Society moved in to take control. We need to understand why that should have happened.

The Sri Aurobindo Society (SAS) was set up in 1960, "strictly an external thing organised by businessmen to bring in money — exclusively, this has nothing to do with working for the ideal," the Mother said in March 1961. Her name was there as president "to give an entirely material guarantee that the money donated will really and truly be used for the work and nothing else."¹⁸ A month later she received a draft brochure from the SAS which was to be distributed among all disciples. It was the kind of thing she abhorred. "And . . . I come across this: '*We have the great fortune to have the Mother among us and we propose to be the intermediary for all those who wish to come in direct contact with her.*'" She put a stop to it at once. The SAS were "people of goodwill who volunteered to collect money to help the Ashram", which she supported, but had strong objections to their "posing . . . almost as teachers."¹⁹

It is interesting to note that the SAS was started only in 1960, even as Auroville was back in her focus. The project would need considerable finances and a legal structure, so it is not surprising to hear in 1965 that "the financial organisation", of Auroville, "for the moment, is looked after by Navajata, who receives money through

16. CWM, Vol. 13, p. 223.

17. *Matrimandir Newsletter*, February 2008.

18. The Mother's conversation of 4 March 1961; *The Mother's Agenda*, Vol. 2.

19. The Mother's conversation of 25 April 1961; *Ibid.*

the Sri Aurobindo Society”,²⁰ and who had started buying land. In fact, she put a group in charge of Auroville: of these, Navajata for fund-raising, Roger for town planning, to be joined by Shyam Sundar for legal issues. But there were differences and egoisms that got in the way threatening to block the work, which led her to summon all three of them:

It is difficult . . . but we are here to do difficult things. We are in a period of transition . . . For centuries humanity has waited for this time. It has come. But it is difficult . . . we are (not) here on earth to rest and enjoy ourselves, now is not the time for that. We are here to prepare the way for the new creation . . . Now is the time to be heroic. Heroism is not what people say, it is to be completely united . . . You must make an effort, you must conquer pettiness and limitations and above all tell your ego: your time is up. We want a race without ego, with the divine consciousness in place of the ego. That is what we want.²¹

But such things rarely change overnight. After the Mother’s passing, Navajata, till then the general secretary of the SAS asserted proprietorial right over Auroville as the project had been registered under its legal umbrella. This brought objections, even from the Ashram: Auroville was a divine creation and the Mother’s status as president was permanent, even if symbolically. No one could override that. Navajata then renamed himself chairman and continued to assert authority over the running of Auroville. In due course relations between Aurovilians and some members of the SAS grew strained. It is important to state here that the SAS is a separate body from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram of Pondicherry. It has a large membership, most of whom are dedicated to the work of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and some of whom continued to help Auroville after the crisis was over. But this was a special juncture, and a first lesson had to be learnt about the nature of the Supreme authority. People across the “divide”, especially those in management positions, were strongly tested, all egoisms and errors revealed. With funds cut and other threats, it was a time of survival. There were rumours that the SAS was planning to close Auroville down. It was above all, about the survival of the Dream. There was only one thing we could rely on, the Divine, whatever or wherever s/he was now, and a first rough unity started to coalesce.

Interestingly, when the Nobel laureate V. S. Naipaul travelled through India in 1962, researching his first book on the country, he passed through Pondicherry. China had just attacked India. In Pondicherry he learnt of Sri Aurobindo’s warning regarding such a strike and about the occupation of Tibet. Naipaul’s book also

20. The Mother’s conversation of 23 June 1965; *Ibid.*, Vol. 6.

21. The Mother’s conversation of 2 April 1972; *Ibid.*, Vol. 13.

records some Ashram activities, the Mother's presence in the day-to-day affairs, a meeting with the general secretary of the SAS and then there is an astonishing statement: "And the Ashram was only part of the Aurobindo Society . . . the Society seemed to be the only flourishing thing in Pondicherry. It had estates outside town; it had workshops, its library and printing press. It was a self-contained organisation, efficiently run by its members."²² Given that the SAS had been formed only two years before, in 1960, and given that the Mother had been at work setting up all these things and much more since 1920, and very much in charge, this apparent misconception is surprising.

Their new assertion of authority over Auroville brought a corresponding resistance, and also, for a while, a standstill in its growth.

"There was a very strong connection between us," Gloria recalled of the years that followed soon after the Mother's passing, "a very intense collective life, but in spite of this the divisions were deep."²³ Funds were cut or diverted, people threatened, some beaten up, some issued quit notices and a court case slapped against Auroville. It was a passage that had to be crossed. The Aurovilians were far from perfect, mostly young, sometimes openly rebellious. The only thing to hold on to, in the physical absence of both the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, was the soul of Auroville, to keep working there, to keep letting it dream inside us, and keep our faith alive for the future. Our education had just begun.

10. CENTRED KNOWLEDGE

*We must face life as a whole, with all the ugliness, falsehood and cruelty it still contains, but we must take care to discover in ourselves the source of all goodness, all beauty, all light and all truth, in order to bring this source consciously into contact with the world so as to transform it.*²⁴

*

*If the growth of consciousness were considered as the principal goal of life, many difficulties would find their solution.*²⁵

*

The starting point for everything in Auroville is always consciousness, its real birthmark, beauty — two things that shape the human soul. They do not depend on

22. V. S. Naipul, *An Area of Darkness*, London: Andre Deutsch, 1964, pp. 304-05.

23. Christine Devin (ed.), *Turning Points*, Auroville: Auroville Press Publishers, 2009, p. 8.

24. CWM, Vol. 12, p. 243.

25. CWM, Vol. 16, p. 432.

the mind and usually surpass it, their truth is often physical, or in the heart, the psychic space.

An integral education spans not only a mental, vital and physical education, but is a psychic and spiritual education as well. “To become conscious of your psychic being . . . you must abolish all egoism; but to live a spiritual life you must no longer have an ego. . . . the supramental education will result . . . in a transformation of the [human] nature itself . . .”²⁶ This education is for the long haul.

“In this Yoga,” Sri Aurobindo wrote, “the psychic being is that which opens the rest of the nature to the true supramental light . . .”²⁷ No assertion of the human will or egoistic insistence can claim that light, except through psychic aspiration and a calm and surrendered physical consciousness. The psychic being, or the soul, has the capacity to detect the “ego-knots” inside us and dissolve them, burn or transmute them with psychic fire, enabling the descent of consciousness into the physical being and capable of spiritual transformation.

The truth we seek, the Mother wrote, “is made up of four major aspects: Love, Knowledge, Power and Beauty. These four attributes of the Truth will express themselves spontaneously in our being. The psychic will . . . manifest an invincible power and strength and the body will be the expression of a perfect beauty and harmony.”²⁸ This is an education for the wide schoolroom of life.

Auroville was created as a physical city, but it is a city with a soul. Here goodwill is seemingly enough to get us by. But there is a catch: it is a goodwill for a higher and truer life, that thing for which Auroville’s education is just a preparation. Today, both the outer honeycomb of gold discs and the silent inner chamber of the Matri-mandir trigger deep transformations. A large variety of people pass through it every day, for each it is a different experience: powerful, marvellous, transforming, sometimes even unnerving, yet for most it is its beauty that leaves an undeniable signature.

Did we really build it? Who knows. Our memories often get jammed in technical details and controversies and marathon meetings but, it did get built through us. Despite us.

Goodwill sounds like such an innocent word fronting our individual egoisms and that of the world, but it might just be the starting antidote. The world reels under the effects of religious, national and political egoism, right down to the pride, prejudice and prestige of clans, castes, families and individuals, all of which have brought interminable Kurukshetras in the world, without a real way out. Goodwill for a higher, truer life may sound like a vague fairy tale right now, but it is an antidote that might one day be potent.

26. CWM, Vol. 12, pp. 35-36, 38.

27. CWSA, Vol. 32, p. 161.

28. CWM, Vol. 12, p. 8.

Hindsight can help us reconsider how and why and where we have travelled in Auroville, the hurdles and battles that had to be crossed, and the rewards, a little more dispassionately.

Fronting an opposition that he could not handle or really understand, Roger went back to France in 1975 and Aurofuture folded. The city was seemingly cast into oblivion. Fortunately, the construction of Matrimandir did not stop. In his absence, the work went on, and right up to the time when the Inner Chamber was complete, there was one person we all looked up to: Piero, the project engineer.

Piero had apprenticed under Alvar Alto, in Finland, before returning to Italy to work, but as the social and political situation worsened, there seemed no possibility of any real change. “The hope was hollow,”²⁹ Piero would say. At this time he and his wife Gloria happened to meet a person in their neighbour’s apartment who had just returned from Pondicherry and soon they were reading up whatever was available in translation from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry. “Politically we belonged to the left,” Gloria recalled, “since the milieu of architects were very aware of social problems. We were also anti-Catholic. So to discover that there was an inner world, so different, so deep, was very exciting.”³⁰

Piero and Gloria, both architects, arrived just a week after the inauguration of Auroville.

Piero was soon involved in work. As the chief architect of Auroville, Roger was building as well as coordinating projects by other young architects and he invited Piero to design a first set of thatch-roofed polyhedric houses, without foundations,³¹ which would allow, within six months, a group of ninety people to live there. Caravans of new people were arriving soon and were eager to try a simple, collective living experiment. So far, apart from Roger’s buildings, there had been two or three stand-out trials like Bob and Deborah’s circular capsule in Forecomer’s, or the portable and rotating polyester rhomboid, made by Jean-Pierre (Bhagvandas), but mostly it was the basic *keeth* house or else, Johnny’s raised triangular capsule that was typical of the Greenbelt.

But Aspiration was something else. “The roof of the huts and dining hall were made out of wood rafters and coconut leaves. The windows were nothing more than light flaps, lined with cloth or thin plywood.” This modest description by Piero gives nothing away of the breakthrough achieved for a collective cluster that was both simple and elegant and intelligently designed, giving the huts a beautiful clarity of line which sat harmoniously with the barren surroundings. Aspiration had taken the hut forward from its primitive, rustic standard and given it a new form and sensibility despite its simplicity. Though a temporary experiment, Roger had hoped

29. Christine Devin (ed.), *Turning Points*, Auroville: Auroville Press Publishers p. 9.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

31. Franz Fassbender and John Mandeem (eds.), *Auroville Architecture*, Auroville: Prisma Publication, 2011, p. 18.

that the Aspiration model could be multiplied and spread to other communities with additions like cultural and sports facilities in the first years. He wanted to first experiment with urban models of collective living in Auromodel, so as not to create a haphazard growth in the city area, particularly while land, maps, funds and so many other factors were not yet in place.

However, Frederick wanted to build an independent house in the city area, but this was not possible yet, thus Certitude began at the edge of the Greenbelt. The Mother advised him not to make a temporary structure but a *real* building, in brick and cement, to show that “we are here to stay”. The city of the future had to be anchored on earth and she was in a hurry to get it going.

Following the house for Frederick, which came to be known as Auroson’s Home, Piero and Gloria built several independent residences in Certitude, and over the years, Transition and Future School and the Health Centre. But much before all that, in 1969, as soon as “we got news about this till-then mysterious Matrimandir”,³² Piero offered his work.

The Inner Chamber especially fascinated him and he was determined to accomplish the Mother’s vision as exactly as possible. When Roger returned some years later, he gave Piero the go-ahead to complete the Inner Chamber while he began studying possibilities for both the inner and outer skins of the structure.

The final touch to the pristine, white chamber is a ray of light that falls on the crystal directed by a heliostat, meticulously designed and built by Piero, and placed on the roof of the Matrimandir.

What is it for you, the Inner Chamber?

Piero: I found absolutely astonishing the extraordinary invention of the ray of the sun. How could Mother see something like that? Where does it come from? In a way, it is a stroke of genius. A symbol which is not only a physical thing, but made out of light . . . Go to temples, go to churches, you always find an altar, but it is dead . . . The ray is alive . . . That has always given me an immense curiosity and a lot of energy: how to do this ray, what are the means to do that.³³

The Inner Chamber is, in a sense, the starting point of Auroville’s education, where both the spiritual and the material meet. It is true that Aurovilians and workers built the Matrimandir in steel and concrete, but what she has put in there, as she told Roger, we cannot take credit for. The experience people receive inside the Matrimandir is built by something else. Yet the building is looked down upon by some as unsustainable and environmentally criminal, worthy of being scrapped, and yet it sustains Auroville in many different ways, as well as hundreds of living souls who

32. Christine Devin (ed.), *Turning Points*, p. 10.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

visit it, each day.

Perhaps Ruud understood this best as he stood with his crowbar, and looked across the barren earth that had to be dug and brought back to life. We were digging nothing less than the first capital city of a New World. Everything it had to teach was going to be different, provided we could rein in our minds from falling into the ditch of preconceived negations and other stupidities and learn to walk with that which was still ahead, still invisible. A capital city, or a cradle for a new consciousness did not need our ego, nor our fears, nor our ignorance. Ruud had spent fifteen years as a Roman Catholic priest in a Franciscan order in Holland. In 1968, he was sent as a missionary and a sociologist to set up an institute for community development in central India. Curious to explore other paths of yoga he landed in Pondicherry, and inevitably, in Auroville. When he left after ten days he knew that he had left the innermost part of himself behind. It took three years of coming and going to finally break away from the religious order. Ruud describes a night watch at Matrimandir soon after he returned. The base pillars for the sphere were being built:

The four pillars, two of which are completed and the other two nearing completion, are like four huge ships coming together from the four corners of the earth . . . A part of the person may feel lost in this great world: coming from the other end of the globe, and now sitting on the edge of a deep crater in the middle of nowhere, somewhere in south India . . . (it was a) night watch at the soul of a new creation . . .³⁴

Many visitors there recalled a strange sort of memory, Ruud noted, of the pyramids, or of Delphi. Though history is usually a record of kings and their conquests, there is another history of the soul that has always expressed itself through time, through art or architecture, for those who have eyes to see and those who know how to learn.

In a meeting with Roger, Mother emphasised: “Matrimandir is here to *teach* people that it is not by escaping from the world or ignoring it that we will realise the Divine in life. Matrimandir must be the symbol of this Truth.”³⁵

Ruud passed away in 1985, some years before the Matrimandir was completed, but he left behind his book as a testimony, unravelling the symbolism of the Matrimandir and the city that goes with it. “I don’t know how or why I am here, but I know it is a joy and a blessing to be at the cradle of the new world, safely in the arms of the divine Mother.”³⁶ An eternal youth is surely Ruud’s field of dreams.

For John it was the magnet.

In 1969, John was at the University of British Columbia, in Canada, where he

34. Ruud Lohmann, *A House for the Third Millennium*, Auroville: Alain Grandcolas, 1986, p. 1.

35. <http://www.auroville.org/contents/3512> Last Accessed on 25 September 2016.

36. Ruud Lohman, *A House for the Third Millennium*, p. 6.

found a bunch of books by Sri Aurobindo, as though they were waiting for him. As he read more he realised that there was an ashram “out there”, so he began writing to the Mother and getting back some answers via Pavitra, one of the oldest French disciples.

At that time John shared a basement flat with two other people. By chance or design one was following Yogananda, another reading Sri Ramakrishna and the landlady was a devotee of Sri Chinmaya. After a few years of reading everything he could, John was not sure where all this was going for him, when he had a strange dream in which the Mother told him that his life would truly unfold when he would be touched by someone from Montreal. It left him quite perplexed but, a few months later, someone from Montreal came to visit one of his roommates in the basement. The man was on his way to the first Auroville meeting in California, in June Maher’s home. John went with him to the California meeting and four months later, he was on a bus trundling up to Auroville, and on his way to Ami.

That is when John saw it, rising out of the desert landscape, the Matrimandir. “It was like a magnet,” John tells me, half wondering, half smiling, and that is what it still is for him, for John started working in Matrimandir straightaway and never left. “I’ve never understood why it’s been like that. This was the place I had to be and I’m very grateful to have been given that opportunity. We are instruments at whatever level we are, so that we can serve as instruments as well as we can.”

Many of us were reading Satprem’s books through the 1970s and 1980s: *Mind of the Cells*, *On the Way to Supermanhood*, and *The Adventure of Consciousness*, and also translations of *Mother’s Agenda*.

A resounding gap was felt by many after the Mother’s passing: no new messages arrived from the little room in Pondicherry, no further indications as to how Auroville should grow, or what was to be done in her absence. The listening had to shift inward and, as Gloria recalls. “Suddenly we felt the Mother was everywhere, all around us . . . her presence was so strong, so strong! As if she was telling us: My children, I gave you this to do, do it!”³⁷ The “inner pressure” through which she always worked on us had not changed or gone away, only her physical presence.

But real change is rarely a ready-made affair, nor of equal degree for all. Each one represented a different timescale and speed of the soul. We were a motley lot though, mostly French, Anglo-Saxon and Indian of every type and temperament, some with oversized egos, some with undersize courage, some with missing grammar, things in common or, things in disagreement. Yet, there was a thread running through all this, an invisible light, which was not democratic at all, yet it searched in us for ways by which we could all live and move together.

37. Christine Devin (ed.), *Turning Points*, p. 8.

Satprem wrote:

The earth is unequally prepared, men are spiritually unequal despite all our democratic protests to the contrary — though they are essentially equal in the great Self and are only one body with millions of faces — they have not all become the greatness that they (truly) are. They are on the way, some dawdle while others seem to travel more swiftly, but the detours of the former are also part of the great geography of our indivisible domain, their delays or the brakes they seem to apply to our motion is part of the fullness of perfection that we seek and which compels us to a greater meticulousness of truth.³⁸

We recognised what Satprem was saying about our trials, and though things were difficult it was also a time of idealism and innocence.

They are no longer from a country, a family, a religion or a party; they belong to their own party, which is no one else's and yet is the party of the world, because what becomes true at one point becomes true for the whole world and brings the whole world together. They are from a family to be invented, from a country yet to be born . . . From one end of the world to the other, he touches his own body.³⁹

In the midst of all this, children were born. We said they were special and in many ways, they were, delightful and fierce as they grew up amongst us, climbing all over the Matrimandir as though it was their own circus tent.

“The child of that City will be born with a flame consciously, voluntarily, without having to undo millennia of animality or the abysses of prejudice.”⁴⁰

How far have we come? Did children grow up with that flame or did they fall into the drift of our incertitude?

Ideas of the future, Sri Aurobindo wrote in *The Human Cycle*, “are likely first to declare their trend in philosophy, in psychological thinking, in the arts, poetry, painting, sculpture, music . . . in the application of subjective principles by thinkers . . .”⁴¹

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38. Satprem, *On the Way to Supermanhood*, Mysore: Mira Centre, 2002.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 141.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

41. CWSA, Vol. 25, p. 248.

PRACTICE OF SURRENDER IN SRI AUROBINDO'S AND THE GITA'S YOGAS

Surrender to God, the Divine, is a very powerful and essential spiritual practice in all religions, and all highly spiritual personalities of the world practised it themselves. They include Jesus Christ, Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, and Sri Aurobindo. There is a prayer in the Bible known as the Lord's prayer, and it includes the words "Thy Will be done". [Surrender is for the individual; "Let Thy Will be done in me, I put myself in your hands" would be surrender.] These words represent the concept of surrendering to God. Surrender is an essential requirement of Sri Aurobindo's yoga; it is also an essential aspect of the yoga of Bhagavad Gita (or, simply the Gita). In this short article I will discuss Sri Aurobindo's views on surrender and also those of the Gita. Sri Aurobindo's yoga has strong similarities with that of the Gita as he was very much guided by the Gita.

Surrender is self-giving, or "*atmasamarpana*" in Sanskrit. It also means taking refuge, or "*saranagati*" in Sanskrit. In Sri Aurobindo's own words, "Surrender means to consecrate everything in oneself to the Divine, to offer all one is and has, not to insist on one's ideas, desires, habits etc., but to allow the divine Truth to replace them by its knowledge, will and action everywhere." (p. 67, *Letters*) It is easy for one to think or say that she/he has surrendered to God, but to do so truly is not easy. "Surrender cannot be made at once — it is not so easy; for there is much in the being that resists. But one must have the will to surrender." (p. 69, *Letters*) One must put it into practice continuously in everyday life. This article will discuss various aspects of surrender with a focus on how to do it.

Sri Aurobindo answered a variety of questions of his disciples related to surrender, and these are presented in the *Letters on Yoga - II*. Sri Aurobindo also wrote about surrender in the books *The Mother (with Letters on the Mother)*, and *The Synthesis of Yoga*. He presented the Gita's views on how to surrender in his book *Essays on the Gita*. In this article I will refer to these books as *Letters*, *The Mother*, *Synthesis*, and *Essays* respectively. My discussion of the various aspects of surrender will be based primarily on these four sources. I will also refer to a few other sources, which will be referenced.

Why Surrender? and Does God Respond?

There is a truth behind the concept of surrendering to God. Surrendering done either based just on intellectual curiosity about something higher and beyond or based just on emotion may not have a lasting value. Intellectual seeking must be supported by the heart's yearning, and the heart's feeling and emotion must be

supported by an understanding of why and to whom one is surrendering. One's mind, heart and will have to participate simultaneously.

In our ordinary life we identify ourselves with our ego, and we feel that each of us is a separate independent individual. Furthermore, most of the time what we want to do and have is for our own satisfaction. We also expect others to act the way we like them to. We think that we are in control of our life. This outlook is superficial. It does not recognise what our true self is and where our place really is in relation to the entire world and its inhabitants. As long as we have this egoistic outlook and attitude the concept of surrendering to God is meaningless and we will not find true peace and happiness.

The 'ego' is not our true self. It is a temporary construction of Nature (*Prakriti*) for the purpose of unifying or centralising the experiences of an individual. It is controlled by Nature. We have the illusory feeling that we have free will and what we do is of our own choice. In reality all actions are done by Nature. The Gita says, "While all kinds of work are done by the modes of Nature (*gunas*), he whose soul is bewildered by the self-sense thinks that he is the doer." (verse III – 27) Sri Aurobindo amplified this concept when he wrote, "Truly, we do not think, will or act but thought occurs in us, will occurs in us, impulse and act occur in us; our ego-sense gathers around itself, refers to itself all this flow of natural activities. It is cosmic Force, it is Nature that forms the thought, imposes the will, imparts the impulse." (p. 214, *Synthesis*) Unfortunately, this Nature, which controls us, is the lower Nature (*Aparā Prakriti*), and it is covered by ignorance, which results in anguish and strife. But we can change our present condition if we recognise that there is a higher Nature or Power (*Parā Prakriti*), which is trying to remove the ignorance and establish its rule, if only we consent. This higher power is the *Shakti* (Power) of the supreme Divine, the universal Mother. To be liberated from our narrow egoistic life and suffering we have to open to this power. We must understand that behind our frontal ego there is another self, which is our true self and it is aware of the higher power that is at work covertly in the manifested world. Surrender has to be made to this Power or *Shakti*, the Mother, so that we can follow the dictates of the Her Will and attain liberation.

It should also be recognised that when an individual surrenders sincerely to the higher Power or *Shakti*, She responds and guides him through the vicissitudes of life and helps him progress toward a higher life. Sincere surrender to the Divine *Shakti*, the Mother, removes the pressures and uncertainties of life. However, one must not expect his wishes to be fulfilled from the very beginning. It should be understood clearly that one should not surrender expecting that the Divine would fulfil one's hidden desires and ambitions. Instead it is God's will that a surrendered person should carry out. It should be noted that it takes a lot of spiritual practice (*sadhana*) for one to be truly surrendered. Sri Aurobindo wrote, "If behind your devotion and surrender you make a cover for your desires, egoistic demands and

vital insistences, if you put those things in place of the true aspiration or mix them with it and try to impose them on the Divine Shakti, then it is idle to invoke the divine Grace to transform you.” (pp. 3-4, *The Mother*) He also pointed out that “The more complete your faith, sincerity and surrender, the more will grace and protection be with you. And when the grace and protection of the Divine Mother are with you, what is there that can touch you or whom need you fear?” (p. 8, *The Mother*) Sri Aurobindo also wrote, “The Divine gives itself to those who give themselves without reserve and in all their parts to the Divine. For them the calm, the light, the power, the bliss, the freedom, the wideness, the heights of knowledge, the seas of Ananda.” (p. 67, *Letters*)

One example of how God and His power protects a truly surrendered person is the case of a very difficult time in Sri Aurobindo's life — the time when he was kept in prison by the British government for his alleged revolutionary activities against the government. In the midst of severe doubt and agony he experienced the protection of Srikrishna. He narrated his experiences in a speech given in Uttarpara after his release from jail. I am presenting a few excerpts from the speech. Readers are encouraged to read the full speech included in *Karmayogin*. (pp. 3-12, *Karmayogin*)

When I was arrested and hurried to the Lal Bazar hajat I was shaken in faith for a while, for I could not look into the heart of His intention. Therefore I faltered for a moment and cried out in my heart to Him, “What is this that has happened to me? I believed that I had a mission to work for the people of my country and until that work was done, I should have Thy protection. Why then am I here and on such a charge?” A day passed and a second day and a third, when a voice came to me from within, “Wait and see.” Then I grew calm and waited. I was taken from Lal Bazar to Alipore and was placed for one month in a solitary cell apart from men.

. . . He turned the hearts of my jailers to me and they spoke to the Englishman in charge of the jail, “He is suffering in his confinement; let him at least walk outside his cell for half an hour in the morning and in the evening.” So it was arranged, and it was while I was walking that His strength again entered into me. I looked at the jail that secluded me from men and it was no longer by its high walls that I was imprisoned; no, it was Vasudeva who surrounded me. I walked under the branches of the tree in front of my cell, but it was not the tree, I knew it was Vasudeva, it was Srikrishna whom I saw standing there and holding over me His shade. I looked at the bars of my cell, the very grating that did duty for a door and again I saw Vasudeva. It was Narayana who was guarding and standing sentry over me. Or I lay on the coarse blankets that were given me for a couch and felt the arms of Srikrishna around me, the arms of my Friend and Lover. This was the first use of the deeper vision He gave me. I looked at the prisoners in the jail, the thieves, the murderers, the swindlers,

and as I looked at them I saw Vasudeva, it was Narayana whom I found in these darkened souls and misused bodies.

. . . When the case opened in the lower court and we were brought before the Magistrate I was followed by the same insight. He said to me, "When you were cast into jail, did not your heart fail and did you not cry out to me, where is Thy protection? Look now at the Magistrate, look now at the Prosecuting Counsel." I looked and it was not the Magistrate whom I saw, it was Vasudeva, it was Narayana who was sitting there on the bench. I looked at the Prosecuting Counsel and it was not the Counsel for the prosecution that I saw; it was Srikrishna who sat there, it was my Lover and Friend who sat there and smiled. "Now do you fear?" He said, "I am in all men and I overrule their actions and their words. My protection is still with you and you shall not fear. This case which is brought against you, leave it in my hands. It is not for you. It was not for the trial that I brought you here but for something else. The case itself is only a means for my work and nothing more." (pp. 5-7)

It is worth noting that sometime after Sri Aurobindo came out of jail he was guided by God to leave politics and go to Pondicherry for intense *sadhana*. In the following sections I will discuss the process of surrender.

Process of Surrender: Initial Steps and Partial Surrender

For most persons surrender is to be made in a progressive manner, and usually there are stages of surrender that one goes through. To begin with, the surrender must be free and not under any compulsion. It is not imposed on any individual. "Each person has his own freedom of choice up to a certain point — unless he makes the full surrender — and as he uses the freedom, has to take the spiritual or other consequences. The help can only be offered, not imposed." (p. 68, *Letters*)

The free choice to surrender must be backed up by a sincere and strong will to surrender. There are different circumstances that lead one to make a mental resolution (*samkalpa*) to surrender to God. Some are moved to approach God for help and shelter after having a bad experience such as the loss of a very dear person. Some seek help and shelter when facing a very difficult situation in life such as being unemployed or having a serious health problem. In these and similar cases the mental resolution may not be backed up by a sincere call from inside, and the resolution may slowly fade away after one's situation improves. This type of transitory surrender can be avoided only when one is truly sincere and vigilant.

There are several stages of surrender. If one goes past the very initial stage of surrender where he makes a mental resolution to surrender to God and keeps the resolution, he then moves into a stage where surrender is not on a shaky or uncertain ground. However, at first it is likely to be a partial surrender and not a complete

surrender. One must recognise that to a partial surrender one cannot expect divine Grace to respond fully. Sri Aurobindo wrote in his book *The Mother* very clearly about the ineffectiveness of partial surrender:

The surrender must be total and seize all the parts of the being. It is not enough that the psychic should respond and the higher mental accept or even the inner vital submit and the inner physical consciousness feel the influence. There must be in no part of the being, even the most external, anything that makes a reserve, anything that hides behind doubts, confusions and subterfuges, anything that revolts or refuses.

If part of the being surrenders, but another part reserves itself, follows its own way or makes its own conditions, then each time that that happens, you are yourself pushing the divine Grace away from you. (p. 3, *The Mother*)

Sri Aurobindo's advice is:

Let your sincerity and surrender be genuine and entire. When you give yourself, give completely, without demand, without condition, without reservation so that all in you shall belong to the Divine Mother and nothing be left to the ego or given to any other power. (p. 8, *The Mother*)

Total Surrender

For one to move from the stage of partial surrender to that of total or complete surrender a lot of spiritual practice is needed in most cases. "A complete surrender is not possible in so short a time, — for a complete surrender means to cut the knot of the ego in each part of the being and offer it, free and whole, to the Divine." (p. 72, *Letters*) Surrender has to be at all levels of one's being — mental, emotional, vital, and physical, which is difficult to attain. However, if one can attain complete surrender one will be fully united with Divine consciousness.

One thing that should be pointed out in the context of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and yoga is the role of the "psychic being", which is the innermost self or soul (*purusha*) of a person. Usually for most persons it stays hidden deep in one's consciousness. When one turns to God sincerely and continues spiritual practice (*sadhana*), one's psychic being begins to influence the outer consciousness, and it eventually comes to the front. When that happens surrendering to God becomes natural because the psychic being by its nature is turned toward God. For most it takes a long time before their psychic beings are fully awake. However, there are also some persons for whom it does not take a long time for their psychic beings to come to the front; for them complete surrender is attained swiftly.

Personal Effort and Divine Grace

Surrender to God's power and will does not mean an inert passivity and inaction. One must act, and in the beginning one has to rely on one's best judgement to decide what to do. One must be very vigilant as to whether or not the thoughts and actions are being guided by one's ego and personal desires. It may be difficult to detect if egoistic desire is behind an impulse for a certain action, but if egoistic desire is detected, one must re-examine his decision to pursue that action. It takes a considerable time and spiritual practice (*sadhana*) for someone to unite with the divine consciousness and know His/Her will. It is only a highly spiritual person, a *siddha* yogi, who can receive inspiration from the higher Power, *Shakti*, on a continuous basis because he lives in a higher plane of consciousness.

Until a person attains a higher level of consciousness he must try to maintain "an absolute equality of the mind and the heart to all results, to all reactions, to all happenings". (p. 103, *Synthesis*) This is Gita's way. It is only when the mind is silent and there is no bias in one's attitude that one can know what the will of God is and also detect what is false and obscure in one's consciousness. In his magnum opus *Savitri* Sri Aurobindo wrote,

This Light comes not by struggle or by thought;
In the mind's silence the Transcendent acts
And the hushed heart hears the unuttered Word.
A vast surrender was his only strength. (p. 315)

If any falsehood is detected in one's thoughts it must be rejected immediately. "The personal effort required is a triple labour of aspiration, rejection and surrender . . ." (p. 6, *The Mother*) Aspiration for receiving divine guidance must be unceasing. One also must reject all movements of the lower nature and egoistic mental ideas.

Even Swami Vivekananda, a *siddha* yogi, had to be vigilant. Before deciding finally to go to America (for the first time) he was wondering, "Am I following my own will? Am I being carried away by enthusiasm? Or is there a deep meaning in all that I have thought and planned?" He prayed, "O Mother, show me Thy will! It is Thou who art the Doer. Let me be only Thy instrument." (p. 372, *Life of Swami Vivekananda*)

With regard to complete surrender and surrender with personal effort Sri Ramakrishna's comments are highly enlightening. On December 27, 1883, he was having a conversation with some of his disciples and the subject of surrender and *sadhana* (spiritual practice) came up. He said, "Of course, there is a need for *sadhana*; however, there are two types of *sādhaks* (spiritual practitioners). One type of *sādhak* behaves like a baby monkey, and the other type of *sādhak* behaves like a baby cat. The baby monkey makes an effort to embrace and hold on to its mother; and similarly,

some *sādhaks* believe that one has to practise *japa*, meditation, and askesis in order to find God. This type of *sadhaks* make a personal effort to reach God. But a baby cat does not try to grab its mother by itself; it only keeps yearning and crying for its mother. The mother picks it up by her mouth and moves it from place to place. Similarly, some *sādhaks* cannot do spiritual practice, such as meditation, and cannot make personal effort. They only yearn and cry for the Mother, and She responds to their call and appears in front of them.”

(p. 465, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*)

Practical Steps for Surrender

Sri Aurobindo outlined the practical steps of self-surrender in *The Synthesis of Yoga* (pp. 101-05) based on the principles of the Gita. I will present here briefly these steps.

Surrendering to God and His Will has two aspects — one is inward or psychological, and the other involves action and dynamism. First, one surrenders mentally or psychologically, and it involves the development of the mental attitude for surrendering and also one's understanding as to why and to whom one surrenders. Then this inward surrender has to be made dynamic and expressed through every action in life. It is possible that one can surrender inwardly and withdraw from the activities of the world and live totally absorbed in God, but that ignores certain needs of the real life in the world. In Sri Aurobindo's words,

For to withdraw from his work, to take refuge in a saintly inactivity and leave the imperfect world with its unsatisfying methods and motives to take care of itself is one possible solution easy to envisage, easy to execute, but this is the very cutting of the knot that has been insistently forbidden by the Teacher. Action is demanded of man by the Master of the world who is the master of all his works and whose world is a field of action, whether done through the ego and in the ignorance or partial light of the limited human reason or initiated from a higher and more largely seeing plane of vision and motive.

(pp. 451-52, *Essays*)

These words represent the views of the Gita, and Sri Aurobindo agrees with this view. Sri Krishna did not want Arjuna to run away from the war, and he gave him the knowledge as to how he could participate in the war and also follow God's Will. Sri Aurobindo himself participated in India's freedom movement. Swami Vivekananda was as active as anyone can be in promoting the wisdom of Vedanta. The Gita presented the way to act spiritually in the world and at the same time be surrendered to God. The Gita's way is psychological as well as dynamic. Sri Aurobindo explained further the Gita's way:

To live inwardly calm, detached, silent in the silence of the impersonal and universal Self and yet do dynamically the works of dynamic Nature, and more largely, to be one with the Eternal within us and to do all the will of the Eternal in the world expressed through a sublimated force, a divine height of the personal nature uplifted, liberated, universalised, made one with God-nature, — this is the Gita's solution. (p. 451, *Essays*)

The first step toward surrendering to God requires getting rid of two things from our consciousness; these are desire and ego sense. But how do we accomplish that? What steps should we take to control these two powers? Sri Aurobindo believed in the Gita's way to deal with desire and ego, and he pointed out that, "In the field of action desire takes many forms, but the most powerful of all is the vital self's craving or seeking after the fruit of our works." (p. 102, *Synthesis*) So the first rule of action laid down by the Gita is to do the work that should be done without any desire for the fruits (i.e., doing *niṣkāma karma*). This message can be found in one of the famous verses of the Gita, verse 47 of chapter 2, which says, "You have a right only to action, never at all to its fruits; do not let the fruits of action be your motive; neither should there be in you any attachment for inaction." This seems to be a simple rule, but it is not easy to carry out this task successfully. One needs to know how one can stop hankering for the results or fruits of actions and still continue to act. Usually we believe that attaining success is an essential motive of all actions, and the suggestion that one should not hanker for results would sound strange and impractical for our ordinary mentality. However, the Gita presents a way to accomplish its recommendation and that is to offer the work or action to the Divine, *Ishwara*. When offering an action to God one should perform the task to one's best ability but without worrying about the result. There are multiple verses in which the Gita says, "*sarvāni karmāni samnyasya*" and "*sarva-karmāni mayi samnyasya*", which means, "Giving up all works to Me". (III – 30; XVIII – 57) This offering or consecration of every action to God has to be done continuously, and it is not easy to do that. One must be dedicated and persistent to practise this until this becomes ingrained in his consciousness. One of the famous verses in the Gita regarding the offering of all actions is verse IX – 27, which says, "Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer, whatever you give away, whatever austerities you practise — do that (O Arjuna) as an offering to me."

Remembrance is a powerful spiritual action to unite one with the higher force. In the Gita Sri Krishna told Arjuna, "Therefore, at all times remember me and fight." (verse VIII – 7) The Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram said, "Remember and offer." It should be pointed out that in the beginning despite offering the fruits of action to God one maintains the sense that he is the doer of actions. However, continued practice helps remove the ego sense and then the surrendered person feels that he is not the doer but an instrument of God; he feels that God is using him as an instrument.

At the final stage one identifies with God's consciousness and the sense of being either the doer or an instrument goes away, and he becomes a channel through which God's Will is expressed. All actions of the surrendered person then become a dynamic movement of God's Will.

One way to know that one is successful in giving up desire and ego sense and that one is not seeking the fruits of action is attaining absolute equality or evenness of mind and heart to all happenings and results of work. The Gita emphasises this idea again and again. For example, in verse 48 of chapter 2, the Gita says, "Fixed in yoga do thy work, (Arjuna), abandoning attachment, with an even mind in success and failure, for evenness of mind is called yoga." Verse V – 20 says, "Having abandoned all attachment to the fruits of his works, ever satisfied without any kind of dependence, he does nothing though he engages in action". The Gita also says in verse V – 10 that if a person works without attachment and reposing his work on the Supreme he is not stained by sin (*Karma*). Sri Aurobindo wrote: "If good fortune and ill fortune, if respect and insult, if reputation and obloquy, if victory and defeat, if pleasant event and sorrowful event leave us not only unshaken but untouched, free in the emotions, free in the nervous reactions, free in the mental view, not responding with the least disturbance or vibration in any spot of the nature, then we have the absolute liberation to which the Gita points us, but not otherwise." (p. 103, *Synthesis*) Absolute equality of mind and heart under all circumstances is the sign of a completely surrendered person.

How to Approach Difficult Situations in Life?

One point needs to be made related to surrendering to God and relying on Him in every way, and it is that there may occur certain circumstances in one's life that may shake up the faith of the surrendered person. One cannot expect that every event of one's life will proceed smoothly and end happily. It is likely that crises involving serious illness, death of a dear person, loss of job, and other difficulties will arise in one's life. What is the best approach to use in these situations? A disciple of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother wrote, "Whenever any problem or difficulty will confront a *sadhak*, the very first thing he should do is to turn to the Divine and place before Him the entire situation in all its details and seek for the Divine's intervention. It is not that he will first seek the solution elsewhere through some human agencies and then only turn to the Divine as an alternative last resort." (p. 103, Mukherjee)

When presenting the difficult situation to God one must be completely honest and also must share one's own fault, if any, which may have contributed to the situation. The person seeking help and guidance is not restricted from exploring solutions, and he may indeed have to get help from a human person. But he must turn to God in the very beginning and quietly wait for His/Her guidance keeping his faith unshaken. Constant remembrance of the Divine Shakti, the Mother, will help

one to keep in contact with Her.

It should be noted that we live in a physical world, which follows physical laws, and certain problems may be impossible to solve. For example, certain illnesses may be incurable, and praying to God may not cure the disease miraculously. However, one must believe that God will give him strength to go through the ordeal and that He will do what is good for the soul. It is of utmost importance that one keeps faith, remains quiet and open to Divine's Force (*Shakti*) throughout the difficult period.

Supreme Secret of the Gita

The Gita in eighteen chapters covers a variety of topics of philosophy such as metaphysics, philosophy of self, ethics, etc. However, the most important message of the Gita deals with the spiritual practice for finding God and uniting with His Will. In the Gita Sri Krishna teaches Arjuna in a gradual and progressive manner. We have already discussed His teachings about controlling and eliminating desire, and ego sense. Two of the verses of the Gita refer to three doors of darkness, which are desire, wrath, and greed. (XVI – 21, 22) These have to be eliminated from one's consciousness. Sri Krishna suggested ways to accomplish this goal. The offering of every act of any kind to God and to leave the results in His hands is the recommended way. Verse XVIII – 57 is one of several verses in the Gita that present this idea and it says, "Giving up consciously all actions to Me, regarding me as the Supreme, and resorting to the yoga of *buddhi* (intellect), focus your thoughts constantly on Me." The teachings reach their climax toward the end of chapter XVIII, and I will conclude this article with a few verses that present the essence of the Gita's teaching. I also will present Sri Aurobindo's explication of these verses from *Essays on the Gita*.

A couplet of verses that are very important for our subject are verses XVIII – 61 and 62, which say, "The Lord is seated in the heart of all existences and turns them all round and round by His power (*Maya*) as if mounted on a machine. In him only take refuge in every way of thy being; by His grace you will obtain supreme peace and eternal abode."

Sri Aurobindo's comments and explication of this verse are:

These are lines that carry in them the innermost heart of this Yoga and lead to its crowning experience and we must understand them in their innermost spirit and the whole vastness of that high summit of experience. The words express the most complete, intimate and living relation possible between God and man; [. . .] It is no abstract Absolute of the philosopher, no indifferent impersonal Presence or ineffable Silence intolerant of all relations to whom this complete surrender of all our works can be made and this closeness and intimacy of oneness with him in all the parts of our conscious existence imposed as the

condition and law of our perfection or of whom this divine intervention and protection and deliverance are the promise. It is a Master of our works, a Friend and Lover of our soul, an intimate Spirit of our life, an indwelling and overdwelling Lord of all our personal an impersonal self and nature who alone can utter to us this near and moving message. (p. 541, *Essays*)

Finally, the Gita presents a verse of utmost importance, which again emphasises the need for surrendering to God. This is the verse XVIII – 66, which says “*Sarvadharmā parityajya mām ekam saranam vraja*”, which means “Abandon all duties and take refuge in Me alone”. This is the climax of the Gita’s teaching, which is that surrendering to God is the best way to live our own lives and attain spiritual fulfilment.

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MAN OF A MOMENTOUS MOMENT — MANDELA

(Continued from the issue of January 2018)

Leadership

To those who observed him closely, Nelson Mandela always carried himself as one who was born to lead. As his former cellmate and longtime friend, Ahmed Kathrada, said: “He was born into a royal house and there was always that sense about him of someone who knew the meaning of leadership.”

Helen Suzman, the lone parliamentary voice of opposition to the nationalist government, went to Robben Island to check if the prisoners were being treated fairly. She wrote:

He had an amazing way of communicating with people, particularly the young. He mesmerised them. It was not a politician’s way: unlike many politicians he had a warmth to him, a real warmth.

When I arrived I was taken to the single cells where the political prisoners were. Eddie Daniels’ cell was the closest to the door. When I went to him, he said: “We know who you are. Go right to the end and you will find our leader, Nelson Mandela.”

So even then his leadership was acknowledged. I remember that even in that first meeting I thought that he was a man who exuded a lot of authority. His understanding of the situation in the country, just from a few minutes of discussion, convinced me that he would be an essential component of any negotiation process on the country’s future. I did not realise that it would take so long to get there, of course.

Mandela was very courageous in that meeting. The head of the prison was with me and yet he was not cowed. . . .

I continued to see Mandela at Robben Island and later when he was moved to Pollsmoor and Victor Verster prisons. Seeing and chatting to him made me stronger in certain ways — I made speeches every year in parliament calling for the release of all political prisoners. . . .

I do not think that our country would have become what it is without the magnanimity that he and FW de Klerk showed in the late 1980s and early 90s. That is their greatest achievement.¹

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/06/nelson-mandela-remembered-south-africa>.

Mandela once said: “When there is danger, a good leader takes the front line; but when there is celebration, a good leader stays in the back of the room.” He added: “Sometimes a leader has to criticise those with whom he works — it cannot be avoided. I like a leader who can, while pointing out a mistake, bring up the good things the other person has done. If you do that, then the person sees that you have a complete picture of him. There is nobody more dangerous than one who has been humiliated, even when you humiliate him rightly.”²

British Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, considered Mandela’s courtesy as one of his leadership qualities: “Mandela’s courtesy in small things derived more widely from his underlying belief that the way forward for South Africa lay in discussion and reconciliation.”³

One of the great qualities of leadership is humility. In an interview Mandela was asked, “You once told me that humility is one of the greatest qualities a leader can have. Did you come out of prison a more humble man?” He replied: “If you are humble, you are no threat to anybody. Some behave in a way that dominates others. That’s a mistake. If you want the cooperation of humans around you, you must make them feel they are important — and you do that by being genuine and humble. You know that other people have qualities that may be better than your own. Let them express them.”⁴

Thomas Friedman in an article in *The New York Times* speaks of Dov Seidman who advises C.E.O.’s on governance and is the author of the book *How*. Friedman writes: “‘What is so inspiring about Mandela,’ explained Seidman, ‘is that he did not make the moment of South Africa’s transition about himself. It was not about *his* being in jail for 27 years. It was not about *his* need for retribution.’ It was about seizing a really big moment to go from racism to pluralism without stopping for revenge. ‘Mandela did not make himself the hope,’ added Seidman. ‘He saw his leadership challenge as inspiring hope in others, so they would do the hard work of reconciliation. It was in that sense that he accomplished big things by making himself smaller than the moment.’ ‘Through his uncommon humility and his willingness to trust his people with the truth,’ explained Seidman, ‘Mandela created a hopeful space where enough South Africans trusted each other enough so *they* could unite and do the hard work of transition together.’ ‘Finally,’ said Seidman, ‘Mandela did big things by making himself small.’”⁵

Mandela also said: “I learned to have the patience to listen when people put forward their views, even if I think those views are wrong. You can’t reach a just decision in a dispute unless you listen to both sides, ask questions, and view the evidence placed before you. If you don’t allow people to contribute, to offer their

2. <http://www.oprah.com/world/Oprah-Interviews-Nelson-Mandela/>

3. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/06/nelson-mandela-remembered-south-africa>.

4. <http://www.oprah.com/world/Oprah-Interviews-Nelson-Mandela/>

5. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/11/opinion/friedman-why-mandela-was-unique.html>.

point of view, or to criticise what has been put before them, then they can never like you. And you can never build that instrument of collective leadership.”⁶

ANC stalwart, Mac Maharaj, writes of Mandela: “One of his strengths was his ability to look at himself; this was something he deepened and broadened during 27 years in prison. He had a willingness in our discussions in jail to say ‘maybe we were wrong,’ which didn’t play well in many quarters.”⁷ Maharaj also wrote, “His strength is not simply to change his views but also to acknowledge his adversary when he did make the shift.”⁸

Former South African president F.W. de Klerk wrote:

My first meeting with Nelson Mandela was on the evening of 13th December 1989 . . . I was immediately struck by his charm and his leadership qualities.

We discussed the ANC demand for majority rule on the one hand and the need for structural guarantees for minorities on the other. At the end of our brief meeting I concluded he was a man with whom I would be able to do business.

He had a great sense of dignity. He was courteous and self-confident. Later in my relationship with him I learned that he could also be remorseless and harsh — but then we were, after all, political opponents. He had the leadership of a natural aristocrat. . . .

He showed the power of perseverance and of reconciliation. . . . His great contribution lies in the fact that he emerged from 27 years of imprisonment with so little bitterness and was able to make such a great contribution to national reconciliation and to the birth of the new South Africa.⁹

Jessie Duarte, anti-apartheid activist and assistant to Mandela, speaks of the time when Mandela called him to his office with a job offer:

I was very struck by his humility. He said: “Would you like to work for me?” I got to know him quite well after that and never once did I see him being unkind or inconsiderate to people. I worked with him through the negotiations for democracy and saw him, on many occasions, listen to people and change his views.

. . . I think his key legacy is dialogue. He got the bitterest of enemies to speak to each other. He was never afraid of opening up debate and talking things through until there was a possibility of a solution.

6. <http://www.oprah.com/world/Oprah-Interviews-Nelson-Mandela/>

7. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/06/nelson-mandela-remembered-south-africa>.

8. <http://www.politicsweb.co.za>.

9. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/06/nelson-mandela-remembered-south-africa>.

He did not have much patience for narrow interests and believed in consulting everyone. He was a very big human, with a big heart, yet always saw himself as the smallest of people.¹⁰

When Mandela was asked, “What other characteristics do you abhor?” he replied: “Ignorance — and a person’s inability to see what unites us instead of only those things that divide us. A good leader can engage in a debate frankly and thoroughly, knowing that at the end he and the other side must be closer, and thus emerge stronger. You don’t have that idea when you are arrogant, superficial, and uninformed.”¹¹

Justice Malala, a political analyst and journalist, writes how Mandela’s leadership healed a divided nation:

On the evening of 6 August 1990 I sat around a small radio with a group of young activists and wept. Nelson Mandela had just announced that the African National Congress’s armed struggle had been suspended.

“This is the only weapon we have. How could he do this?” Joseph Mogale, a leader of the local ANC Youth League branch, asked. It was a debilitating announcement. For the angry youths we were then, it meant capitulation. In our view, Mandela had offered everything, even though the apartheid regime had offered nothing in return. We cursed him.

. . . In the townships, thousands of black people were dying as a result of action by the armed forces and government-sponsored “black-on-black violence”.

This would not be the last time that we, the young ones, would be angry with Mandela. In 1996, when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission got into its stride, we wondered again: has Mandela gone soft? Why is he bending over backwards to accommodate white people?

Numerous black people took to the TRC stage and told of the torture and hunger they had suffered at the hands of the apartheid government. . . .

And Mandela? Well, Mandela, now president of our country, kept saying that the commission would, in time, be of benefit to all South Africans.

And he was right, of course, just as he had been when he signed the Pretoria Minute six years earlier. Despite the fact that we have not uncovered the truths of the deaths of many of our friends, many of us now recognise the beauty of the TRC: it was for us — to bring about our own confrontation with what happened, and to enable our own healing.

For those who had stood against apartheid, emotions had been largely

10. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/06/nelson-mandela-remembered-south-africa>.

11. <http://www.oprah.com/world/Oprah-Interviews-Nelson-Mandela/>

suppressed or ignored in the march towards victory. In the TRC we finally spoke among ourselves about what happened. It was about us and not about our former oppressors. . . .

It was at this time that I and other young South Africans discovered the power of Mandela. . . .

Mandela hauled the young ones into a new South Africa. Along the way, particularly in the 1990s, he was called everything from soft to a stooge of the regime. But today we know the necessity of his actions.

Mandela managed to drag the young and angry along with him because he had once been a very angry young man himself. In the late 1940s and early 50s he had been one of the powerful young ANC leaders who installed a radical new leadership and programme of action.

How do I remember Nelson Mandela? In George Orwell's famous story a young British policeman stationed in Burma walks towards an elephant that has just killed a villager. There are 2,000 Burmese following him. He is the only one with a gun. They all want him to kill the elephant. He knows that it would be wrong to do so because the elephant no longer poses a threat to anyone. But he is scared of looking a fool — and regarded as weak — by the villagers. So he shoots the elephant.

When Mandela came out of prison there were millions of us behind him. We all urged him at the top of our voices to act radical, to shoot the apartheid elephant and cause a conflagration. He did not.

He is the greatest, most courageous and honest leader we ever had. He gave us — the so-called “lost generation” of South Africa — a future. He saved us.¹²

Mandela was instrumental in setting up the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a body created in 1995 with the purpose to uncover the truth of human rights violations that had occurred during the apartheid regime. It was believed that the truth being uncovered would lead to a healing and a national catharsis. Perpetrators of violence could also give testimony and request amnesty. It promoted reconciliation and forgiveness among perpetrators and victims of apartheid by the full disclosure of the truth. On receiving the final report in 1998 Mandela commended it.

However, they were a minority who were sceptical of the TRC findings. *The New York Times* correspondent, Rick Lyman writes: “Others questioned his decision to prioritise tranquility over justice, arguing that his embrace of a reconciliation process left human rights crimes unpunished.”¹³ Adam Habib, vice chancellor of the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, said, “The criticism has been

12. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/06/nelson-mandela-remembered-south-africa>.

13. <http://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/mandela-reverence-criticism-too-rick-lyman-new-york-times>.

that he made too many concessions, while the real victims of apartheid still have to live with the consequences.” He added, “He is a global icon, a great leader, but he was not perfect.”¹⁴

Zackie Achmat, anti-apartheid campaigner wrote: “He was a mythical figure for us activists. We did not agree with him in the early 1990s when he was reconciliatory towards the apartheid regime, but we respected and trusted him.”¹⁵

Thomas Friedman argues in *The New York Times* that great leaders can generate moral authority by challenging their own base. It is easy to lead by telling your own base what it wants to hear. It is easy to lead when things are going well. But what’s really difficult is getting your society to do something big and hard and together, to challenge your own base to do hard things, in South Africa’s case, asking blacks to avoid revenge after so many years of brutal, entrenched, white rule.¹⁶

Mandela was sensitive to criticism from certain black leaders that he has leaned over too far toward whites in his efforts to achieve reconciliation and forgiveness. In an interview at the turn of the second millennium he became emotional when defending his impressive campaign over the past few years to get business leaders to donate funds for the building of schools and clinics in the rural areas. “Why would anyone say that I am leaning too much towards whites? Tell me the record of any black man in this country who has done as much as that [for black people] . . . I am not aware of any other black man who has spent so much time addressing the problems of poverty, lack of education, and disease amongst our people,” Mandela says, adding that he had nothing but cooperation and support from the white business community.¹⁷

Indeed, one of Mandela’s greatest gift to the nation and the world was the lesson of forgiveness and reconciliation. Mr. de Klerk, who released Mandela from prison in 1990 and then negotiated the end of apartheid, called Mandela a “humane” and “compassionate” man who was able to understand the fears of South Africa’s white minority in the transition to democracy. “He was a great unifier and a very, very special man in this regard beyond everything else he did. This emphasis on reconciliation was his biggest legacy,” Mr. de Klerk said in an interview with CNN.¹⁸

Bill Keller, executive editor of *The New York Times*, writes: “But few among his countrymen doubted that without his patriarchal authority and political shrewdness, South Africa might well have descended into civil war long before it reached its imperfect state of democracy. After leaving the presidency, Mr. Mandela brought that moral stature to bear elsewhere around the continent, as a peace broker and champion of greater outside investment.”¹⁹

14. <http://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/mandela-reverence-criticism-too-rick-lyman-new-york-times>.

15. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/06/nelson-mandela-remembered-south-africa>.

16. See <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/11/opinion/friedman-why-mandela-was-unique.html>.

17. http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub_view.asp?pg=item&ItemID=NMS764&txtstr=quotes.

18. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-12-06/world-leaders-pay-tribute-to-nelson-mandela/5139536>.

19. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/06/world/africa/nelson-mandela_obit.html?pagewanted=all.

Mandela also saw the power of sports to build bridges in an apartheid-torn nation. In 1995 South Africa was hosting the Rugby World Cup. Rugby, beloved by the Afrikaners — the descendants of Dutch settlers in South Africa — was considered by many blacks to be a symbol of racist white minority rule. The emblem of the team was a Springbok and the team was called ‘Springboks’. Before the games a post-apartheid sports committee wanted to change the traditional name and colours of the almost all-white Springboks to something more reflective of black African identity. But Mandela refused emphasising that an essential part of making whites feel at home in a black-led South Africa was by not uprooting all their cherished symbols. This story of reconciliation was so inspiring that it was recounted in the 2009 film “Invictus” featuring some of the finest Hollywood actors.

For François Pienaar, captain of the South African Rugby team, everything changed when in 1994 he received an unexpected call inviting him for tea with the president. “I felt safe,” Pienaar said. “I felt like I was in the presence of a very, very wise person.” “The first thing he said to me was in Afrikaans, and most of our conversation was in Afrikaans. I tried to switch to English, which was not a great thing for me to do, and he kept steering back to Afrikaans, so we had an hour’s chat which was very special. I didn’t realise then how special it was.”²⁰

When South Africa reached the final of the World Cup Mandela went to watch the game, wearing the team’s green jersey, and 80,000 fans, mostly Afrikaners, erupted in a chant of “Nel-son! Nel-son!” He then went to meet the South African team. Pienaar relates in an interview: “And we were in the changing room, still going through these thought processes, when there was a loud knock at the door and in walked Mr. Mandela. I was just incredibly emotional because [*long pause as he regains his composure*] there was a Springbok on his heart and if you know our history, rugby was for the white people in South Africa, predominantly the Afrikaners, and became a symbol of hate for the black people — which you can understand. We love our sport and I’m a proud Afrikaner. When he walked into the dressing room wearing a Springbok on his heart, it was just ‘wow’. You saw my reaction — you bite your lip and I walked over to him and actually I didn’t even get to him and he said ‘good luck boys’ and he turned round and my number was on his back. And that was me, I couldn’t sing the anthem because I knew I would cry — I was just so proud to be a South African that day.”²¹

On winning the World Cup Pienaar said: “That was incredible, incredible — when I walked up to the podium and Mr. Mandela stuck out his hand and said to me, and I still can’t believe to this day that he said it, ‘Thank you François for what you have done for this country’. I wanted to jump over and give him a hug but I said to him, ‘No sir, thank you for what you’ve done for this country’ because if he

20. <http://www.bbc.com/sport/rugby-union/25305354>.

21. <http://www.bbc.com/sport/rugby-union/25305354>.

didn't ask — or tell — the ANC and the black people in South Africa that this is our team, they're playing for us, we're one team, we're one country, embrace them, then we wouldn't have had the support we've had."²²

There was an official reception for the Springbok World Cup-winning team in August 1995 hosted by Mandela. His first words on being introduced to Pienaar's fiancée, Nerine Winter, were: "Nerine, would you be offended if I came to your wedding in January?"²³

Pienaar was deeply touched that Mandela kept in contact long after the rugby World Cup. For example, Mandela called Pienaar and his wife to congratulate them on the birth of their first child, and to give the boy a Xhosa name. "Having had the opportunities to experience things that very few have — I'm very blessed. Very, very blessed," Pienaar said. "We have a relationship that I don't gush about and haven't for the last number of years because it's so special. Incredible, deep respect."²⁴

Pienaar added: "His love is what sets him apart from any other leader that I've met. There is a lesson I've learned from Madiba and it's his love for everyone, for his jailors, for people that did terrible things to him and his friends and colleagues when he was in prison. Some of these people were killed after he came out of prison. I remember what happened to Chris Hani [chief of the armed wing of the ANC, assassinated by a far-right extremist in 1993] this country was on its edge but his love for the goodness in people is so infectious."²⁵

Mandela's great leadership qualities were his empathy, broadmindedness and understanding of people and issues. He showed great tact in dealing with the recalcitrant Zulu leader Chief Buthelezi. He once explained that the key to peace in the Zulu nation was simple: Buthelezi had been raised as a member of the royal Zulu family, but as a nephew, not in the direct line of succession, leaving him tortured by a sense of insecurity about his position. The solution was to love him into acquiescence.²⁶

Another aspect of Mandela's leadership was courage. Mandela's friend and cell-mate, Mac Maharaj, who later became a member of his cabinet, writes of Mandela leading from the front even if it meant putting his neck on the chopping block:

His strength is not simply to change his views but also to acknowledge his adversary when he did make the shift. Often the consequences for a leader are obligations that go far beyond those that fall on the shoulders of others.

22. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/08/nelson-mandela-francois-pienaar-rugby-world-cup>.

23. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/nelson-mandela/10501078/Nelson-Mandela-Francois>.

24. <https://www.pri.org/stories/2013-12-06/mandelas-other-legacy-real-life-invictus-story>.

25. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/08/nelson-mandela-francois-pienaar-rugby-world-cup>.

26. See http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/06/world/africa/nelson-mandela_obit.html?pagewanted=all.

We are familiar with the facts. He was a founder member and first Commander-in-chief of MK and a leader in the ANC. He was arrested in August 1962 and sentenced to five years imprisonment. This meant that he had no knowledge and played no part in subsequent decisions and actions taken by MK. He joined the accused arrested in Rivonia in June 1963. In this case much hinged on how the court would view these subsequent acts of sabotage as well as the status of the document entitled ‘Operation Mayibuye’.

It was an amateurish and unrealistic military plan conceived long after Mandela had been imprisoned. Under the circumstances it would have seemed sensible that others among the accused should be left to take responsibility for actions in which Mandela had played no role.

Fellow accused Rusty Bernstein captures the issue: “Nelson”, he writes, “would have none of it. I am not surprised. As long as I have known him he has acted on the principle that leaders have no special privileges, but have special obligations and duties greater than those of others. He rejects any special protection and insists on his responsibilities as the titular head of MK. He will explain the ANC and its role in respect of MK, and defend them both in court. He will take the full fury of the state attack — it is the obligation that falls on a leader. He puts his argument forcefully, and everyone — lawyers and accused — concede he is right.”

Even when faced with the likelihood of the death penalty he did not evade his responsibilities that went with his choice to turn to the armed struggle and he did not flinch from their painful consequences.²⁷

On his 90th birthday Mandela gave an interview to *Time* magazine’s managing editor, Richard Stengel where he honestly expressed his views on leadership. We paraphrase the conversation:

“Courage is not the absence of fear — it’s inspiring others to move beyond it.”

During the 1994 presidential-election campaign one of the engines failed when Mandela was on a tiny propeller plane. Some on the plane began to panic but they were calmed looking at Mandela, who quietly read his newspaper as if nothing had happened. Fortunately the pilot managed to make an emergency landing. Soon after Mandela candidly told Stengel, who was travelling with him, “Man, I was terrified up there!”

Mandela later revealed about his time underground, during the Rivonia trial that led to his imprisonment, “Of course I was afraid!” He suggested that it would be irrational not to be. “I can’t pretend that I’m brave and that I can beat the whole

27. <http://www.politicsweb.co.za>.

world.” But as a leader, you cannot let people know. “You must put up a front.”

At Robben Island, where there was much to fear, prisoners were buoyed watching Mandela walk across the courtyard, upright and proud. Mandela knew that he was a model for others, and that gave him the strength to conquer his own fear.

“Lead from the back — and let others believe they are in front.”

As a boy, Mandela was greatly influenced by Jongintaba, the tribal king who raised him. When Jongintaba had meetings of his court, he spoke only after all had spoken. Mandela felt the chief’s job was not to tell people what to do but to form a consensus. “Don’t enter the debate too early,” he used to say.

At times, during the Cabinet meetings some of his colleagues would shout at him — to move faster, to be more radical — and Mandela would simply listen. At the end he would methodically summarise everyone’s points of view and then subtly steer the decision in the direction he wanted without imposing it. The trick of leadership is allowing yourself to be led too. “It is wise,” he said, “to persuade people to do things and make them think it was their own idea.”

“Keep your friends close — and your rivals even closer.”

Mandela believed that embracing his rivals was a way of influencing them. He cherished loyalty, but he was never obsessed by it. He was practical enough to realise that “people act in their own interest”. Mandela used his charm to neutralise those he didn’t trust. Mandela was a man of immense charm and many of his guests he did not wholly trust. Yet he invited them to dinner; he called to consult with them; he flattered them and gave them gifts. He would pick up the phone and call them on their birthdays. He would go to family funerals. He saw it as an opportunity.

On Robben Island, Mandela would always include in his brain trust men he neither liked nor relied on. One person he became close to was Chris Hani, the fiery chief of staff of the ANC’s military wing. There were some who thought Hani was conspiring against Mandela, but Mandela cozied up to him.²⁸

Conclusion

Innumerable tributes, honours and awards from educational institutions, civil society and businesses were bestowed on Mandela. In 1990 India conferred Mandela with

28. See <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,1821659-3,00.html>.

the Bharat Ratna, the nation's highest civilian honour. He was the first non-Indian recipient of this award. There have been several things related to Arts, Culture, Sports, Flora, Fauna, Science and even Human Geography named after or dedicated to Mandela. Besides several educational institutions, awards, events and organisations are named after him.

Mandela passed away on 5 December 2013, aged 95 years. Flags flew at half mast in the world's capitals. Egypt had declared three days of national mourning. Words of admiration flowed from freedom fighters, heads of state, writers, sports figures, the pope and many others including celebrities. World leaders converged in unprecedented numbers on South Africa for Nelson Mandela's funeral, one of the biggest global gatherings of powerful people in modern history.

At his memorial service U.S. President, Barack Obama, said: "And we have lost one of the most influential, courageous and profoundly good human beings that any of us will share time with on this Earth. He no longer belongs to us — he belongs to the ages. I am one of the countless millions who drew inspiration from Nelson Mandela's life."²⁹

British Prime Minister, David Cameron, said: "A great light has gone out in the world. Nelson Mandela was a hero of our time. I've asked for the flag at No. 10 to be flown at half mast."³⁰

Mandela had also established a warm friendship with Queen Elizabeth, who paid a state visit to South Africa in 1995 and appointed him an honorary member of the Order of Merit. On her invitation, he made a return state visit to Britain in 1996, when he became the first person since Charles de Gaulle in 1960 to be invited to address the Houses of Parliament in Westminster Hall.³¹

Mandela's struggle for a nonracial society in his beloved South Africa had its effects globally. Hugh Muir writes in the *Guardian*, London that "Mandela changed the course of Black history."³² The accolades, awards, honours, respect and universal recognition he received proved to the world the term "racial superiority" has no meaning.

When Mandela passed away acclaimed American poet and author Maya Angelou was asked by the U.S. State Department to write a tribute poem to him on behalf of the American people. Angelou's interview with CBS about Mandela and the poem is very touching. She mentioned that she was married to a South African freedom fighter, a member of the PAC who were the arch rivals of the ANC in the South African struggle against apartheid. She said:

29. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-25250278>.

30. <https://www.hellomagazine.com/celebrities/201312055/nelson-mandela-dies-95-celebrities>.

31. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/nelson-mandela/8286462/Nelson-Mandela-obituary>.

32. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/dec/ob/nelson-mandela-black-britain>.

“Mr. Mandela came to Egypt where I was living. And I’ve been so used to these rivals arguing and shouting in the living room and shouting in the street against each other. . . . When Mr. Mandela came here he never had a cross word to say to anyone. I was amazed. I had never seen a South African that kind. He had a compliment to give to everybody, including my housekeeper and the doorman, it was amazing. A gentle giant he was.” When asked “What did Nelson Mandela mean to you” she replied, “I know that, with the attitudes and anger in South Africa after apartheid, had there been no Mandela we would see blood running in the streets because apartheid was so brutal and the people were so angry, the black people were so angry and white people felt so guilty, until Nelson Mandela released from prison came out smiling and holding hands with whites and holding white babies and saying this is a time for friendship, this is about South Africa . . . That is the great gift of Nelson Mandela.” She adds, “There is something greater than you, and there is a good thing to do, you can stand on the good foot, you can say the kind things, you can be generous, you can, and he showed us that. He also showed us how liberating it is to forgive.” When asked, “If you were to pass on to the world one thing of Nelson Mandela, what would it be.” She replied, “I would talk about his kindness, I think you cannot really forgive if you are not really kind. And so you forgive a person or persons or systems, you forgive them and then you don’t have to drag them around every day and all day and all night long. It’s a gift to yourself to forgive and I would say Nelson Mandela’s gift to the world was his ability to forgive.”³³

One is reminded of Mother’s phrase that: “True greatness, true superiority lies in kindness and goodwill.”³⁴

We conclude the article with a saying of Nelson Mandela, which aptly can be applied to him: “What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead.”³⁵

(Concluded)

GAUTAM MALAKER

33. <https://www.cbsnews.com/video/maya-angelou-reflects-on-nelson-mandela-legacy/>

34. CWM, Vol.16, 2nd Ed., p. 21.

35. <https://www.nelsonmandela.org/content/page/learners-timeline>.

Statement about ownership and other particulars about the Periodical Mother India to be published in the first issue every year after the last day of February

Form IV (See Rule 8)

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Place of Publication | Sri Aurobindo Ashram
Pondicherry - 605 002 |
| 2. Periodicity of its Publication | Monthly |
| 3. Printer's Name
Nationality
Address | Swadhin Chatterjee
Indian
Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press
Pondicherry - 605 002 |
| 4. Publisher's Name
Nationality
Address | Manoj Das Gupta
Indian
Sri Aurobindo Ashram
Pondicherry - 605 002 |
| 5. Editor's Name
Nationality
Address | S. Ravi
Indian
Sri Aurobindo Ashram
Pondicherry - 605 002 |
| 6. Names and addresses of individuals who own the newspaper and partners or shareholders holding more than one per cent of the total capital | Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust
Pondicherry - 605 002 |

I, Manoj Das Gupta, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

March 2019

(Sd.) Manoj Das Gupta
Signature of Publisher



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New Delhi - 110 055**

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