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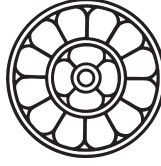
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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All correspondence to be addressed to:

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

Phone: (0413) 2233642

e-mail: motherindia@sriarobindoashram.org.in

Publishers: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust

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

Editors: RAVI, HEMANT KAPOOR, RANGANATH RAGHAVAN

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No. 10

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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URVASIE

CANTO I

Pururavus from Titan conflict ceased
Turned worldwards, through illimitable space
Had travelled like a star 'twixt earth and heaven
Slowly and brightly. Late our mortal air
He breathed; for downward now the hooves divine
Trampling out fire with sound before them went,
And the great earth rushed up towards him, green.
With the first line of dawn he touched the peaks,
Nor paused upon those savage heights, but reached
Inferior summits subject to the rain,
And rested. Looking northwards thence he saw
The giant snows upclimbing to the sky,
And felt the mighty silence. In his ear
The noise of a retreating battle was,
Wide crash of wheels and hard impetuous blare
Of trumpets and the sullen march of hosts.
Therefore with joy he drank into his soul
The virgin silence inaccessible
Of mountains and divined his mother's breasts.
But as he listened to the hush, a thought
Came to him from the spring and he turned round
And gazed into the quiet maiden East,
Watching that birth of day, as if a line
Of some great poem out of dimness grew,
Slowly unfolding into perfect speech.
The grey lucidity and pearliness
Bloomed more and more, and over earth chaste again
The freshness of the primal dawn returned,
Life coming with a virginal sharp strength,
Renewed as from the streams of Paradise.
Nearer it drew now to him and he saw
Out of the widening glory move a face
Of dawn, a body fresh from mystery,
Enveloped with a prophecy of light
More rich than perfect splendours. It was she,

The golden virgin, Usha, mother of life,
Yet virgin. In a silence sweet she came,
Unveiled, soft-smiling, like a bride, rose-cheeked,
Her bosom full of flowers, the morning wind
Stirring her hair and all about her gold.
Nor sole she came. Behind her faces laughed
Delicious, girls of heaven whose beauties ease
The labour of the battle-weary Gods;
They in the golden dawn of things sprang gold,
From youth of the immortal Ocean born,
They youthful and immortal, and the waves
Were in their feet and in their voices fresh
As foam, and Ocean in their souls was love.
Laughing they ran among the clouds, their hair
And raiment all a tempest in the breeze.
The sky grew glorious with them and their feet
A restless loveliness and glad eyes full
Of morning and divine faces bent back
For the imperious kisses of the wind.
So danced they numberless as dew-drops gleam,
Ménaca, Misracayshie, Mullica,
Rumbha, Nelabha, Shela, Nolinie,
Lolita, Lavonya and Tilôttama, —
Many delightful names; among them she.
And seeing her Pururavus the king
Shuddered as of felicity afraid,
And all the wide heart of Pururavus
Moved like the sea — when with a coming wind
Great Ocean lifts in far expectancy
Waiting to feel the shock, so was he moved
By expectation of her face. For this
Was secret in its own divinity
Like a high sun of splendour, or half seen
All troubled with her hair. Yet Paradise
Breathed from her limbs and tresses wonderful,
With odours and with dreams. Then for a space
Voiceless the great king stood and, troubled, watched
That lovely advent, laughter and delight
Gaining upon the world. At last he sighed
And the vague passion broke from him in speech
Heard by the solitude. “O thou strong god,

Who art thou graspest me with hands of fire,
 Making my soul all colour? Surely I thought
 The hills would move and the eternal stars
 Deviate from their rounds immutable,
 Never Pururavus; yet lo! I fall.
 My soul whirls alien and I hear amazed
 The galloping of uncontrollable steeds.
 Men said of me: 'The King Pururavus
 Grows more than man; he lifts to azure heaven
 In vast equality his spirit sublime.'
 Why sink I now towards attractive earth?
 And thou, who art thou, mystery! golden wonder!
 Moving enchantress! Wast thou not a part
 Of soft auspicious evenings I have loved?
 Have I not seen thy beauty on the clouds?
 In moonlight and in starlight and in fire?
 Some flower whose brightness was a trouble? a face
 Whose memory like a picture lived with me?
 A thought I had, but lost? O was thy voice
 A vernal repetition in some grove,
 Telling of lilies clustered o'er with bees
 And quiet waters open to the moon?
 Surely in some past life I loved thy name,
 And syllable by syllable now strive
 Its sweetness to recall. It seems the grace
 Of visible things, of hushed and lonely snows
 And burning great inexorable noons,
 And towns and valleys and the mountain winds.
 All beauty of earthliness is in thee, all
 Luxurious experience of the soul.
 O comest thou because I left thy charm
 Aiming at purity, O comest thou,
 Goddess, to avenge thyself with beauty? Come!
 Unveil thyself from light! limit thyself,
 O infinite grace, that I may find, may clasp.
 For surely in my heart I know thou bearest
 A name that naturally weds with mine,
 And I perceive our union magically
 Inevitable as a perfect verse
 Of Veda. Set thy feet upon my heart,
 O Goddess! woman, to my bosom move!

I am Pururavus, O Urvasie.”
As when a man to the grey face of dawn
Awaking from an unremembered dream,
Repines at life awhile and buffets back
The wave of old familiar thoughts, and hating
His usual happiness and usual cares
Strives to recall a dream’s felicity; —
Long strives in vain and rolls his painful thought
Through many alien ways, when sudden comes
A flash, another, and the vision burns
Like lightning in the brain, so leaped that name
Into the musing of the troubled king.
Joyous he cried aloud and lashed his steeds:
They, rearing, leaped from Himalaya high
And trampled with their hooves the southern wind.

But now a cry broke from the lovely crowd
Of fear and tremulous astonishment;
And they huddled together like doves dismayed
Who see the inevitable talons near
And rush of cruel wings. ’Twas not from him,
For him they saw not yet, but from the north
A fear was on them, and Pururavus
Heard a low roar as of a distant cloud.
He turned half-wrathful. In the far northwest
Heaven stood thick, concentrated in gloom,
Darkness in darkness hidden; for the cloud
Rose firmament on sullen firmament,
As if all brightness to entomb. Across
Great thundrous whispers rolled, and lightning quivered
From edge to edge, a savage pallor. Down
The south wind dropped appalled. Then for a while
Stood pregnant with the thunderbolt and wearing
Rain like a colour, the monumental cloud
Sublime and voiceless. Long the heart was stilled
And the ear waited listening. Suddenly
From motionless battalions as outride
A speed disperse of horsemen, from that mass
Of livid menace went a frail light cloud
Rushing through heaven, and behind it streamed
The downpour all in wet and greenish lines.

Swift rushed the splendid anarchy admired,
And reached, and broke, and with a roar of rain
And tumult on the wings of wind and clasp
Of the o'erwhelmed horizons and with bursts
Of thunder breaking all the body with sound
And lightning 'twixt the eyes intolerable,
Like heaven's vast eagle all that blackness swept
Down over the inferior snowless heights
And swallowed up the dawn. Pururavus,
Lost in the streaming tumult, stood amazed:
But as he watched, he was aware of locks
Flying and a wild face and terrible
And fierce familiar eyes. Again he looked
And knew him in a hundred battles crossed,
The giant Cayshie. It seemed but yesterday
That over the waves of fight their angry eyes
Had met. He in the dim disguise of rain,
All swift with storm, came passionate and huge,
Filling the regions with himself. Immense
He stooped upon the brides of heaven. They
Like flowers in a gust scattered and blown
Fled every way; but he upon that beauty
Magical sprang and seized and lifted up,
As the storm lifts a lily, and arrow-like
Up towards the snow-bound heights in rising cloud
Rushed with the goddess to the trembling East.
But with more formidable speed and fast
Storming through heaven King Pururavus
Hurled after him. The giant turned and knew
The sound of those victorious wheels and light
In a man's face more dangerous to evil
Than all the shining Gods. He stood, he raised
One dreadful arm that stretched across the heavens,
And shook his baffling lance on high. But vast,
But magnified by speed came threatening on
With echoing hooves and battle in its wheels
The chariot of the King Pururavus
Bearing a formidable charioteer,
Pururavus. The fiend paused, he rolled his eyes
Full of defiance, passion and despair
Upon the swooning goddess in his arms

And that avenger. Violence and fear
Poised him a moment on a wave of fate
This way to death cadent, that way to shame.
Then groaning in his great tumultuous breast
He dropped upon the snow heaven's ravished flower
And fled, a blackness in the East. New sky
Replenished from the sullen cloud dawned out;
The great pure azure rose in sunlight wide.
Nor King Pururavus pursued but checked
His rushing chariot on the quiet snow
And sprang towards her and knelt down and trembled.
Perfect she lay amid her tresses wide,
Like a mishandled lily luminous,
As she had fallen. From the lucid robe
One shoulder gleamed and golden breast left bare,
Divinely lifting, one gold arm was flung,
A warm rich splendour exquisitely outlined
Against the dazzling whiteness, and her face
Was as a fallen moon among the snows.
And King Pururavus, beholding, glowed
Through all his limbs and maddened with a love
He feared and cherished. Overawed and hushed,
Hardly even breathing, long he knelt, a greatness
Made stone with sudden dread and passion. Love
With fiery attempt plucked him all down to her,
But fear forbade his lips the perfect curls.
At length he raised her still unknissed and laid
In his bright chariot, next himself ascended
And resting on one arm with fearful joy
Her drooping head, with the other ruled the car; —
With one arm ruled, but his eyes were for her
Studying her fallen lids and to heart-beats
Guessing the sweetness of the soul concealed.
And soon she moved. Those wonderful wide orbs
Dawned into his, quietly, as if in muse.
A lovely slow surprise crept into them
Afterwards; last, something far lovelier,
Which was herself, and was delight, and love.
As when a child falls asleep unawares
At a closed window on a stormy day,
Looking into the weary rain, and long

Sleeps, and wakes quietly into a life
 Of ancient moonlight, first the thoughtfulness
 Of that felicitous world to which the soul
 Is visitor in sleep, keeps her sublime
 Discourtained eyes; human dismay comes next,
 Slowly; last, sudden, they brighten and grow wide
 With recognition of an altered world,
 Delighted: so woke Urvasie to love.

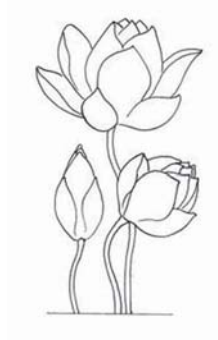
But, hardly now that luminous inner dawn
 Bridged joy between their eyes, laughter broke in
 And the returning world; for Ménaca,
 Standing a lily in the snows, laughed back
 Those irresistible wheels and spoke like song; —
 She tremulous and glad from bygone fear;
 But all those flowerlike came, increasing light,
 Their bosoms quick and panting, bright, like waves
 That under sunshine lift remembering storm.
 And before all Ménaca tremulously
 Smiling: “Whither, O King Pururavus,
 Bear’st thou thy victory? Wilt thou set her
 A golden triumph in thy halls? But she
 Is other than thy marble caryatids
 And austere doors, purity colourless.
 Read not too much thy glory in her eyes.
 Will not that hueless inner stream yet serve
 Where thou wast wont to know thy perfect deeds?
 But give her back, give us our sister back,
 And in return take all thyself with thee.”
 So with flushed cheeks and smiling Ménaca.
 And great Pururavus set down the nymph
 In her bright sister’s arms and stood awhile
 Stormily calm in vast incertitude,
 Quivering. Then divine Tilôttama:
 “O King, O mortal mightier than the Gods!
 For Gods change not their strength, but are of old
 And as of old, and man, though less than these,
 May yet proceed to greater, self-evolved.
 Man, by experience of passion purged,
 His myriad faculty perfecting, widens
 His nature as it rises till it grows

With God conterminous. For one who tames
His hot tremulousness of soul unblest
And feels around him like an atmosphere
A quiet perfectness of joy and peace,
He, like the sunflower sole of all the year,
Images the divine to which he tends:
So thou, sole among men. And thou today
Hast a high deed perfected, saved from death
The great Gods of the solar world the first,
And saved with them the stars; but her today
Without whom all that world would grow to shade
Or grow to fire, but each way cease to live.
And thou shalt gather strange rewards, O King,
Hurting thyself with good, and lose thy life
To have the life of all the solar world,
Draw infinite gain out of more infinite loss,
And, for the lowest, endless fame. Today
Retire nor pluck the slowly-ripening fates;
Since who anticipates the patient Gods,
Finds his crown ashes and his empire grief.
So choose blind Titans in their violent souls
Unseeing, forfeiting the beautiful world
For momentary splendours." She was silent,
And he replied no word, but gathering
His reins swept from the golden group. His car
Through those mute Himalayan doors of earth
And all that silent life before our life
Solitary and great and merciless,
Went groaning down the wind. He, the sole living,
Over the dead deep-plunging precipices
Passed bright and small in a wide dazzling world
Illimitable, where eye flags and ear
Listening feels inhuman loneliness.
He tended towards Gungotri's solemn peaks
And savage glaciers and the caverns pure
Whence Ganges leaps, our mother, virgin-cold.
But ere he plunged into the human vales
And kindlier grandeurs, King Pururavus
Looked back upon a gust of his great heart,
And saw her. On a separate peak, divine,
In blowing raiment and a glory of hair

She stood and watched him go with serious eyes
And a soft wonder in them and a light.
One hand was in her streaming folds, one shaded
Her eyes as if the vision that she saw
Were brighter even than deathless eyes endure.
Over her shoulder pressed a laughing crowd
Of luminous faces. And Pururavus
Staggered as smitten, and shaking wide his reins
Rushed like a star into the infinite air;
So curving downwards on precipitate wheels,
His spirit all a storm, came with the wind
Far-sounding into Ila's peaceful town.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, pp. 67-76)



SOME OBSERVATIONS ABOUT ‘URVASIE’

Q. On an old advertisement page of the *Arya* I find: “*The Hero and the Nymph*, a translation in verse of Kalidasa’s *Vikramorvasie*.”

A. Yes, I had forgotten the *Hero and the Nymph*.

Q. Our library hasn’t got this translation, nor your poem *Urvasie*, both of which are out of print.

A. I don’t think I have the *Urvasie*, neither am I very anxious to have this poem saved from oblivion.

5 February 1931

Q. Was *Love and Death* your first achievement in blank verse, or did a lot of trial and experiment precede it? Was the brilliant success of your translation from Kalidasa its forerunner?

A. There was no trial or experiment — as I wrote, I did not proceed like that, — I put down what came, changing afterwards, but there too only as it came. At that time I had no theories, no methods or process. But *Love and Death* was not my first blank verse poem — I had written one before in the first years of my stay in Baroda which was privately published, but afterwards I got disgusted with it and rejected it. I made also some translations from the Sanskrit (in blank verse and heroic verse); but I don’t remember to what you are referring as the translations of Kalidasa. Most of all that has disappeared into the unknown in the whirlpools and turmoil of my political career.

4 July 1933

* * * *

On Sunday also I shall look at the *Urvasie*. It is a poem I am not in love with — not that there is not some good poetry in it, but it seems to me as a whole lacking in originality and life. However, I may be mistaken; a writer’s opinions on his productions generally are.

5 April 1935

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Letters on Poetry and Art*, CWSA, Vol. 27, pp. 223-24)

EXPERIENCES AND REALISATIONS IN THE INTEGRAL YOGA

(Continued from the issue of September 2016)

PART FOUR THE FUNDAMENTAL REALISATIONS OF THE INTEGRAL YOGA

SECTION TWO THE PSYCHIC OPENING, EMERGENCE AND TRANSFORMATION

Chapter One The Psychic Being and Its Role in Sadhana

The Importance of the Psychic Change

What is meant in the terminology of the Yoga by the psychic is the soul element in the nature, the pure psyche or divine nucleus which stands behind mind, life and body (it is not the ego) but of which we are only dimly aware. It is a portion of the Divine and permanent from life to life, taking the experience of life through its outer instruments. As this experience grows it manifests a developing psychic personality which insisting always on the good, true and beautiful, finally becomes ready and strong enough to turn the nature towards the Divine. It can then come entirely forward, breaking through the mental, vital and physical screen, govern the instincts and transform the nature. Nature no longer imposes itself on the soul, but the soul, the Purusha, imposes its dictates on the nature.

*

The soul, the psychic being, is in direct touch with the divine Truth, but it is hidden in man by the mind, the vital being and the physical nature (*manas, prāṇa, anna* of the Taittiriya Upanishad). One may practise Yoga and get illuminations in the mind and the reason; one may conquer power and luxuriate in all kinds of experiences in the vital; one may establish even surprising physical siddhis; but if the true soul-power behind does not manifest, if the psychic nature does not come into the front, nothing genuine has been done. In this Yoga, the psychic being is that which opens the rest of the nature to the true supramental light and finally to the supreme Ananda. Mind can open by itself to its own higher reaches; it can still itself and widen into the Impersonal; it may too spiritualise itself in some kind of static liberation or

Nirvana; but the supramental cannot find a sufficient base in spiritualised mind alone. If the inmost soul is awakened, if there is a new birth out of the mere mental, vital and physical into the psychic consciousness, then this Yoga can be done; otherwise (by the sole power of the mind or any other part) it is impossible. If there is a refusal of the psychic new birth, a refusal to become the child new born from the Mother, owing to attachment to intellectual knowledge or mental ideas or to some vital desire, then there will be a failure in the sadhana.

*

It seems to me that you must know by this time about the psychic being — that it is behind the veil and its consciousness also; only a little comes out into the mind and vital and physical. When that consciousness is not concealed, when you are aware of your soul (the psychic being), when its feelings and aspirations are yours, then you have got the consciousness of the psychic being. The feelings and aspirations of the psychic being are all turned towards truth and right consciousness and the Divine; it is the only part that cannot be touched by the hostile forces and their suggestions.

*

Everything is dangerous in the sadhana or can be, except the psychic change.

*

That [*feeling the Mother's Presence, Love, Joy, Beauty*] is one part of the psychic experience — the other is a complete self-giving, absence of demand, a prominence of the psychic being by which all that is false, wrong, egoistic, contrary to the Divine Truth, Divine Will, Divine Purity and Light is shown, falls away, cannot prevail in the nature. With all that the increase of the psychic qualities, gratitude, obedience, unselfishness, fidelity to the true perception, true impulse etc. that comes from the Mother or leads to the Mother. When this side grows, then the other, the Presence, Love, Joy, Beauty, can develop and be permanently there.

The Role of the Psychic in Sadhana

The contribution of the psychic being to the sadhana is: (1) love and bhakti, a love not vital, demanding and egoistic but without conditions or claims, self-existent; (2) the contact or the presence of the Mother within; (3) an unerring guidance from within; (4) a quieting and purification of the mind, vital and physical consciousness

by their subjection to the psychic influence and guidance; (5) the opening up of all this lower consciousness to the higher spiritual consciousness above for its descent into a nature prepared to receive it with a complete receptivity and right attitude — for the psychic brings in everything right thought, right perception, right feeling, right attitude.

One can raise up one's consciousness from the mental and vital and bring down the power, ananda, light, knowledge from above; but this is far more difficult and uncertain in its result, even dangerous if the being is not prepared or not pure enough. To ascend with the psychic for the purpose is by far the best way. If you are thus rising from the psychic centre, so much the better.

What you say indicates that the psychic and mental centres are in communication and through them you are able to bring down things from the higher consciousness. But you have not changed your head centre for the above-head centre or for the above-head wideness. That usually comes by a gradual rising of the consciousness first to the top of the head and then above it. But this must not be strained after or forced; it will come of itself.

*

The psychic being not only helps openly, when it is strong and in front, but can govern the mind and vital and physical nature, give it the clear intimation of what is true and false, divine or undivine, right or wrong and repel all invasion of the hostile forces.

*

It is true that if the consciousness remains quiet, the psychic will manifest more and more from deep inside and a clear feeling will come of what is true and spiritually right and what is wrong or untrue and with it also will come the power to throw away what is hostile, wrong or untrue.

*

If the psychic is active — or in so far as it is active, there is something in it which is like an automatic test for the universal forces — warning against (not by thought so much as by an essential feeling) and rejecting what should not be, accepting and transmuting what should be.

*

That is the special work of the psychic being, to receive the true things from above and to send away the false things from below.

*

This is the function of the psychic — it has to work on each plane so as to help each to awaken to the true truth and the divine reality.

*

You are right in thinking that this psychic attitude is your true need; it is that which can make the progress simple, happy and easy.

Persevere; there is no reason for giving up. Let no uprising of difficulties discourage you. At the end there is victory and lasting peace.

The Psychic Deep Within

The place of the psychic is deep within the heart, — but *deep within*, not on the surface where the ordinary emotions are. But it can come forward and occupy the surface as well as be within, — then the emotions themselves become no longer vital things, but psychic emotions and feelings. The psychic so standing in front can also extend its influence everywhere, to the mind for instance so as to transform its ideas or to the body so as to transform its habits and its reactions.

*

The psychic being is in the heart centre in the middle of the chest (not in the physical heart, for all the centres are in the middle of the body), but it is deep behind. When one is going away from the vital into the psychic, it is felt as if one is going deep deep down till one reaches that central place of the psychic. The surface of the heart centre is the place of the emotional being; from there one goes deep to find the psychic. The more one goes, the more intense becomes the psychic happiness which you describe.

*

If it was something in the heart, it must be the psychic being which is often felt as if deep down somewhere or rising out of a depth. If one goes to it, it is felt often as if one were going into a deep well.

The shock must have been the psychic force trying to open the mental and vital lid which covers the soul.

*

It is evidently the psychic — it is often seen as a deep well or abyss into which one plunges and finds no end; but here it is evidently the psychic penetrating down into all the lower planes and also rising up to the higher planes above.

*

The empty condition by itself is not called samadhi — it is when one goes inside, is conscious within but not conscious of outside things. What you describe yourself as doing involuntarily is this going inside and being conscious there. It was into the psychic centre inside that you were going, the place that you saw as a luminous *maidān* in a former experience. When one goes there it is just this peace and sweetness that one feels and also this sense of the Mother being there not far away or very near. So it is a very good development of the sadhana.

The Psychic and the Mental, Vital and Physical Nature

The mind, life and body are the instruments for manifestation. Of course the psychic can manifest things by itself inwardly or in its own plane, but for manifestation in the physical plane the instrumentality of the other parts is needed.

*

These [*questions about the transformation of the lower worlds*] are questions with which we need not concern ourselves at present. To answer them would be to stimulate merely the curiosity of the mind — what is important now is to liberate the psychic from its veils and to open the mind and vital and body to the higher consciousness. Until that is done, there can be no individual transformation and so long as there is not the individual transformation what is the use of speculating about the transformation of worlds and its results?

*

The soul is the witness, upholder, inmost experiencer, but it is master only in theory, in fact it is not-master, *anīśa*, so long as it consents to the Ignorance. For that is a general consent which implies that the Prakriti gambols about with the Purusha and does pretty well what she likes with him. When he wants to get back his mastery, make the theoretical practical, he needs a lot of tapasya to do it.

The psychic has always been veiled, consenting to the play of mind, physical and vital, experiencing everything through them in the ignorant mental, vital and physical way. How then can it be that they are bound to change at once when it just

takes the trouble to whisper or say, “Let there be Light”! They have a tremendous negating power and can refuse and do refuse point-blank. The mind resists with an obstinate persistency in argument and a constant confusion of ideas, the vital with a fury of bad will aided by the mind’s obliging reasonings on its side, the physical resists with an obstinate inertia and crass fidelity to old habit, and when they have done, the general Nature comes in and says, “What, you are going to get free from me so easily? Not if I know it,” and it besieges and throws back the old nature on you again and again as long as it can.

*

You should never listen to these suggestions of unfitness or anything else that denies the possibility of progress and fulfilment. Whatever the difficulties or the slowness or periods of emptiness, keep before you the firm idea that succeed you must and will. Do not be discouraged by the time taken. There are people who have laboured for many years together thinking they were making no progress and yet finally the opening has come. The Force is there working behind the veil to remove difficulties and prepare the Adhar — if one is constant, finally the result will appear.

It does not matter with what motive you or anyone began the sadhana. There are always two elements, the psychic within which wants the Divine, and the mind, vital, physical which are pushed to enter the way through some idea, desire or feeling — it may be the feeling of *vairāgya* with the ordinary life, disgust of it and a desire for freedom and peace, or it may be something else, the idea of a greater knowledge or joy or calm which mind and life cannot give, or the seeking of Yoga power for one object or another. All that does not matter — for as the psychic pushes one farther on the way, these things drop away and the one longing for the Divine takes their place, or else they themselves are transformed and put in their proper place. The only thing you must be careful about is that, when the experience develops, you do not replace the first motives by Yogic ambition or desire for greatness or get misled by vital desires; but this can always be avoided if your mind knows and holds to it firmly that union with the Divine alone is the true central object of sadhana.

The Psychic Awakening

The psychic being is always there, but is not felt because it is covered up by the mind and vital; when it is no longer covered up, it is then said to be awake. When it is awake, it begins to take hold of the rest of the being, to influence it and change it so that all may become the true expression of the inner soul. It is this change that is called the inner conversion. There can be no conversion without the awakening of the psychic being.

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The experiences that are coming cannot be permanent at the beginning; they come and go and do their work and afterwards there is a permanent result. What must be permanent is the psychic awakening, the psychic condition and attitude and what you have written in your letter is an exact description of this psychic condition and psychic attitude. One has to keep this and see what happens and the Mother's Force will do the rest.

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Let the sweetness and the happy feeling increase, for they are the strongest sign of the soul, the psychic being awake and in touch with us. Let not mistakes of thought or speech or action disturb you — put them away from you as something superficial which the Power and Light will deal with and remove. Keep to the one central thing — your soul and these higher realities it brings with it.

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That is good — the awakening of the psychic consciousness and its control over the rest is one of the most indispensable elements of the sadhana.

Living in the Psychic

The division of the being of which you speak is a necessary stage in the Yogic development and experience. One feels that there is a twofold being, the inner psychic which is the true one and the other, the outer human being which is instrumental for the outward life. To live in the inner psychic being and in union with the Divine while the outer does the outward work, as you feel, is the first stage in Karmayoga. There is nothing wrong in these experiences; they are indispensable and normal at this stage.

If you feel no bridge between the two, it is probably because you are not yet conscious of what connects the two. There is an inner mental, an inner vital, an inner physical which connect the psychic and the external being. About this, however, you need not be anxious at present.

The important thing is to keep what you have and let it grow, to live always in the psychic being, your true being. The psychic will then in due time awaken and turn to the Divine all the rest of the nature, so that even the outer being will feel itself in touch with the Divine and moved by the Divine in all it is and feels and does.

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If it is the sense of the presence that you have, then you are living in the consciousness of the psychic centre. Thinking with the mind is good because it leads towards that but it is not in itself that living in the psychic centre.

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It is necessary [*in order to be constantly aware of the psychic*] to accustom oneself to do things from within, not to let the consciousness be thrown outward. If it is thrown outward, then to step back inwardly and regard the action or movement from within. Of course there must be the habit of self-offering too or turning all to the Divine.

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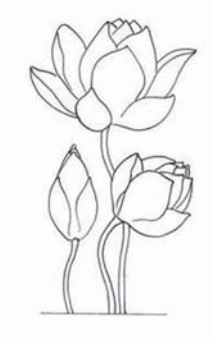
It [*the psychic being*] has to be surrendered consciously and with more and more knowledge. The psychic aspires to the Divine or answers to things divine, it is surrendered in principle, but it has to develop its surrender in detail carrying with it the surrender of all the being.

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There are always unregenerate parts tugging people backwards and who is not divided? But it is best to put one's trust in the soul, the spark of the Divine within and foster that till it rises into a sufficient flame.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Letters on Yoga — III*, CWSA Vol. 30, pp. 335-46)



INDIAN POLITY

(Continued from the issue of September 2016)

3

The socio-political evolution of Indian civilisation, as far as one can judge from the available records, passed through four historical stages, first the simple Aryan community, then a long period of transition in which the national life was proceeding through a considerable variety of experimental formations in political structure and synthesis, thirdly, the definite formation of the monarchical state coordinating all the complex elements of the communal life of the people into regional and imperial unities, and last the era of decline in which there was an internal arrest and stagnation and an imposition of new cultures and systems from western Asia and Europe. The distinguishing character of the first three periods is a remarkable solidity and stability in all the formations and a sound and vital and powerful evolution of the life of the people rendered slow and leisurely by this fundamental conservative stability of the system but all the more sure in its building and living and complete in its structure. And even in the decline this solidity opposes a strong resistance to the process of demolition. The structure breaks up at the top under foreign pressure, but preserves for a long time its basis, keeps, wherever it can maintain itself against invasion, much of its characteristic system and is even towards the end capable of attempts at revival of its form and its spirit. And now too though the whole political system has disappeared and its last surviving elements have been ground out of existence, the peculiar social mind and temperament which created it remains even in the present social stagnation, weakness, perversion and disintegration and may yet in spite of immediate tendencies and appearances, once it is free to work again at its own will and after its own manner, proceed not along the Western line of evolution, but to a new creation out of its own spirit which may perhaps lead at the call of the demand now vaguely beginning to appear in the advanced thought of the race towards the inception of the third stage of communal living and a spiritual basis of human society. In any case the long stability of its constructions and the greatness of the life they sheltered is certainly no sign of incapacity, but rather of a remarkable political instinct and capacity in the cultural mind of India.

The one principle permanent at the base of construction throughout all the building and extension and rebuilding of the Indian polity was the principle of an organically self-determining communal life, — self-determining not only in the mass and by means of the machinery of the vote and a representative body erected on the surface, representative only of the political mind of a part of the nation,

which is all that the modern system has been able to manage, but in every pulse of its life and in each separate member of its existence. A free synthetic communal order was its character, and the condition of liberty it aimed at was not so much an individual as a communal freedom. In the beginning the problem was simple enough as only two kinds of communal unit had to be considered, the village and the clan, tribe or small regional people. The free organic life of the first was founded on the system of the self-governing village community and it was done with such sufficiency and solidity that it lasted down almost to our own days resisting all the wear and tear of time and the inroad of other systems and was only recently steam-rolled out of existence by the ruthless and lifeless machinery of the British bureaucratic system. The whole people living in its villages mostly on agriculture formed in the total a single religious, social, military and political body governing itself in its assembly, *samiti*, under the leadership of the king, as yet without any clear separation of functions or class division of labour.

It was the inadequacy of this system for all but the simplest form of agricultural and pastoral life and all but the small people living within a very limited area that compelled the problem of the evolution of a more complex communal system and a modified and more intricate application of the fundamental Indian principle. The agricultural and pastoral life common at first to all the members of the Aryan community, *kr̥ṣṭayah*, remained always the large basis, but it developed an increasingly rich superstructure of commerce and industry and numerous arts and crafts and a smaller superstructure of specialised military and political and religious and learned occupations and functions. The village community remained throughout the stable unit, the firm grain or indestructible atom of the social body, but there grew up a group life of tens and hundreds of villages, each under its head and needing its administrative organisation, and these, as the clan grew into a large people by conquest or coalition with others, became constituents of a kingdom or a confederated republican nation, and these again the circles, *maṇḍala*, of larger kingdoms and finally of one or more great empires. The test of the Indian genius for socio-political construction lay in the successful application of its principle of a communal self-determined freedom and order to suit this growing development and new order of circumstances.

The Indian mind evolved, to meet this necessity, the stable socio-religious system of the four orders. Outwardly this might seem to be only a more rigid form of the familiar social system developed naturally in most human peoples at one time or another, a priesthood, a military and political aristocracy, a class of artisans and free agriculturalists and traders and a proletariat of serfs or labourers. The resemblance however is only in the externals and the spirit of the system of Chaturvarna was different in India. In the later Vedic and the epic times the fourfold order was at once and inextricably the religious, social, political and economic framework of the society and within that framework each order had its natural portion and in none of

the fundamental activities was the share or position of any of them exclusive. This characteristic is vital to an understanding of the ancient system, but has been obscured by false notions formed from a misunderstanding or an exaggeration of later phenomena and of conditions mostly belonging to the decline. The Brahmins, for example, had not a monopoly either of sacred learning or of the highest spiritual knowledge and opportunities. At first we see a kind of competition between the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas for the spiritual lead and the latter for a long time held their own against the pretensions of the learned and sacerdotal order. The Brahmins, however, as legists, teachers, priests, men who could give their whole time and energy to philosophy, scholarship, the study of the sacred writings, prevailed in the end and secured a settled and imposing predominance. The priestly and learned class became the religious authorities, the custodians of the sacred books and the tradition, the interpreters of the law and Shastra, the recognised teachers in all the departments of knowledge, the ordinary religious preceptors or gurus of the other classes and supplied the bulk, though never the totality of the philosophers, thinkers, literary men, scholars. The study of the Vedas and Upanishads passed mainly into their hands, although always open to the three higher orders; it was denied in theory to the Shudras. As a matter of fact, however, a series of religious movements kept up even in the later days the essential element of the old freedom, brought the highest spiritual knowledge and opportunity to all doors and, as in the beginning we find the Vedic and Vedantic Rishis born from all classes, we find too up to the end the yogins, saints, spiritual thinkers, innovators and restorers, religious poets and singers, the fountain-heads of a living spirituality and knowledge as distinguished from traditional authority and lore, derived from all the strata of the community down to the lowest Shudras and even the despised and oppressed outcastes.

The four orders grew into a fixed social hierarchy, but, leaving aside the status of the outcastes, each had attached to it a spiritual life and utility, a certain social dignity, an education, a principle of social and ethical honour and a place and duty and right in the communal body. The system served again as an automatic means of securing a fixed division of labour and a settled economic status, the hereditary principle at first prevailing, although here even the theory was more rigid than the practice, but none was denied the right or opportunity of amassing wealth and making some figure in society, administration and politics by means of influence or status in his own order. For, finally, the social hierarchy was not at the same time a political hierarchy: all the four orders had their part in the common political rights of the citizen and in the assemblies and administrative bodies their place and their share of influence. It may be noted too that in law and theory at least women in ancient India, contrary to the sentiment of other ancient peoples, were not denied civic rights, although in practice this equality was rendered nugatory for all but a few by their social subordination to the male and their domestic preoccupation; instances have yet survived in the existing records of women figuring, not only as queens and

administrators and even in the battlefield, a common enough incident in Indian history, but as elected representatives on civic bodies.

The whole Indian system was founded upon a close participation of all the orders in the common life, each predominating in its own field, the Brahmin in religion, learning and letters, the Kshatriya in war, king-craft and interstate political action, the Vaishya in wealth-getting and productive economical function, but none, not even the Shudra, excluded from his share in the civic life and an effective place and voice in politics, administration, justice. As a consequence the old Indian polity at no time developed, or at least it did not maintain for long, those exclusive forms of class rule that have so long and powerfully marked the political history of other countries. A priestly theocracy, like that of Tibet, or the rule of a landed and military aristocracy that prevailed for centuries in France and England and other European countries or a mercantile oligarchy, as in Carthage and Venice, were forms of government foreign to the Indian spirit. A certain political predominance of the great Kshatriya families at a time of general war and strife and mobile expansion, when the clans and tribes were developing into nations and kingdoms and were still striving with each other for hegemony and overlordship, seems to be indicated in the traditions preserved in the Mahabharata and recurred in a cruder form in the return to the clan nation in mediaeval Rajputana: but in ancient India this was a passing phase and the predominance did not exclude the political and civic influence of men of the other orders or interfere with or exercise any oppressive control over the free life of the various communal units. The democratic republics of the intermediate times were in all probability polities which endeavoured to preserve in its fullness the old principle of the active participation of the whole body of the people in the assemblies and not democracies of the Greek type; the oligarchical republics were clan governments or were ruled by more limited senates drawn from the dignified elements of the society and this afterwards developed into councils or assemblies representing all the four orders as in the later royal councils and urban bodies. In any case the system finally evolved was a mixed polity in which none of the orders had an undue predominance. Accordingly we do not find in India either that struggle between the patrician and plebeian elements of the community, the oligarchic and the democratic idea, ending in the establishment of an absolute monarchical rule, which characterises the troubled history of Greece and Rome or that cycle of successive forms evolving by a strife of classes, — first a ruling aristocracy, then replacing it by encroachment or revolution the dominance of the moneyed and professional classes, the regime of the bourgeois industrialising the society and governing and exploiting it in the name of the commons or masses and, finally, the present turn towards a rule of the proletariat of Labour, — which we see in later Europe. The Indian mind and temperament less exclusively intellectual and vital, more intuitively synthetic and flexible than that of the occidental peoples arrived, not certainly at any ideal system of society and politics, but at least at a wise and

stable synthesis — not a dangerously unstable equilibrium, not a compromise or balance — of all the natural powers and orders, an organic and vital coordination respectful of the free functioning of all the organs of the communal body and therefore ensured, although not against the decadence that overtakes all human systems, at any rate against any organic disturbance or disorder.

The summit of the political structure was occupied by three governing bodies, the King in his ministerial council, the metropolitan assembly and the general assembly of the kingdom. The members of the Council and the ministers were drawn from all orders. The Council included a fixed number of Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra representatives. The Vaishyas had indeed numerically a great preponderance, but this was a just proportion as it corresponded to their numerical preponderance in the body of the people: for in the early Aryan society the Vaishya order comprised not only the merchants and small traders but the craftsmen and artisans and the agriculturists and formed therefore the bulk of the commons, *viśaḥ*, and the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Shudras, however considerable the position and influence of the two higher orders, were later social growths and were comparatively very inferior in number. It was only after the confusion created by the Buddhist upheaval and the Brahminic reconstitution of the society in the age of cultural decadence that the mass of the cultivators and artisans and small traders sank in the greater part of India to the condition of Shudras with a small Brahmin mass at the top and in between a slight sprinkling of Kshatriyas and of Vaishyas. The Council, representing thus the whole community, was the supreme executive and administrative body and its assent and participation necessary to all the action and decrees of the sovereign in all more important matters of government, finance, policy, throughout the whole range of the communal interests. It was the King, the ministers and the council who aided by a system of boards of administration superintended and controlled all the various departments of the State action. The power of the king undoubtedly tended to grow with time and he was often tempted to act according to his own independent will and initiative; but still, as long as the system was in its vigour, he could not with impunity defy or ignore the opinion and will of the ministers and council. Even, it seems, so powerful and strong-willed a sovereign as the great emperor Asoka was eventually defeated in his conflict with his council and was forced practically to abdicate his power. The ministers in council could and did often proceed to the deposition of a recalcitrant or an incompetent monarch and replace him by another of his family or by a new dynasty and it was in this way that there came about several of the historic changes, as for example the dynastic revolution from the Mauryas to the Sungas and again the initiation of the Kanva line of emperors. As a matter of constitutional theory and ordinary practice all the action of the king was in reality that of the king in his council with the aid of his ministers and all his personal action was only valid as depending on their assent and in so far as it was a just and faithful discharge of the functions assigned to him by

the Dharma. And as the Council was, as it were, a quintessential power body or action centre taking up into itself in a manageable compass, concentrating and representing in its constitution the four orders, the main elements of the social organism, the king too could only be the active head of this power and not, as in an autocratic regime, himself the State or the owner of the country and the irresponsible personal ruler of a nation of obedient subjects. The obedience owed by the people was due to the Law, the Dharma, and to the edicts of the King in council only as an administrative means for the service and maintenance of the Dharma.

At the same time a small body like the Council subject to the immediate and constant influence of the sovereign and his ministers might, if it had been the sole governing body, have degenerated into an instrument of autocratic rule. But there were two other powerful bodies in the State which represented on a larger scale the social organism, were a nearer and closer expression of its mind, life and will independent of the immediate regal influence and exercising large and constant powers of administration and administrative legislation and capable at all times of acting as a check on the royal power, since in case of their displeasure they could either get rid of an unpopular or oppressive king or render his administration impossible until he made submission to the will of the people.¹ The Paura or metropolitan civic assembly sat constantly in the capital town of the kingdom or empire — and under the imperial system there seem also to have been similar lesser bodies in the chief towns of the provinces, survivals of the assemblies that governed them when they were themselves capitals of independent kingdoms — and was constituted of representatives of the city guilds and the various caste bodies belonging to all the orders of the society or at least to the three lower orders. The guilds and caste bodies were themselves organic self-governing constituents of the community both in the country and the city and the supreme assembly of the citizens was not an artificial but an organic representation of the collective totality of the whole organism as it existed within the limits of the metropolis. It governed all the life of the city, acting directly or through subordinate lesser assemblies and administrative boards or committees of five, ten or more members, and, both by regulations and decrees which the guilds were bound to obey and by direct administration, controlled and supervised the commercial, industrial, financial and municipal affairs of the civic community. But in addition it was a power that had to be consulted and could take action in the wider affairs of the kingdom, sometimes separately and sometimes in cooperation with the general assembly, and its constant presence and functioning at the capital made it a force that had always to be reckoned with by the king and his

1. The facts about these bodies — I have selected only those that are significant for my purpose — are taken from the luminous and scrupulously documented contribution of Mr. Jayaswal to the subject.

ministers and their council. In a case of conflict with the royal ministers or governors even the distant civic parliaments in the provinces could make their displeasure felt if offended in matters of their position or privileges or discontented with the king's administrators and could compel the withdrawal of the offending officer.

The general assembly was similarly an organic representation of the mind and will of the whole country outside the metropolis; for it was composed of the deputies, elective heads or chief men of the townships and villages. A certain plutocratic element seems to have entered into its composition, as it was principally recruited from the wealthier men of the represented communities, and it was therefore something of the nature of an assembly of the commons not of an entirely democratic type, — although unlike all but the most recent modern parliaments it included Shudras as well as Kshatriyas and Vaishyas, — but still a sufficiently faithful expression of the life and mind of the people. It was not however a supreme parliament: for it had ordinarily no fundamental legislative powers, any more than had the king and council or the metropolitan assembly, but only of decree and regulation. Its business was to serve as a direct instrument of the will of the people in the coordination of the various activities of the life of the nation, to see to the right direction of these and to the securing of the general order and welfare of the commerce, industry, agriculture, social and political life of the nation, to pass decrees and regulations to that purpose and secure privileges and facilities from the king and his council, to give or withhold the assent of the people to the actions of the sovereign and, if need be, to oppose him actively and prevent misgovernment or end it by the means open to the people's representatives. The joint session of the metropolitan and general assemblies was consulted in matters of succession, could depose the sovereign, alter the succession at his death, transfer the throne outside the reigning family, act sometimes as a supreme court of law in cases having a political tincture, cases of treason or of miscarriage of justice. The royal resolutions on any matter of State policy were promulgated to these assemblies and their assent had to be taken in all matters involving special taxation, war, sacrifice, large schemes of irrigation etc., and all questions of vital interest to the country. The two bodies seem to have sat constantly, for matters came up daily from them to the sovereign: their acts were registered by the king and had automatically the effect of law. It is clear indeed from a total review of their rights and activities that they were partners in the sovereignty and its powers were inherent in them and even those could be exercised by them on extraordinary occasions which were not normally within their purview. It is significant that Asoka in his attempt to alter the Dharma of the community, proceeded not merely by his royal decree but by discussion with the Assembly. The ancient description seems therefore to have been thoroughly justified which characterised the two bodies as executors of the kingdom's activities and at need the instruments of opposition to the king's government.

It is not clear when these great institutions went out of existence, whether

before the Mahomedan invasion or as a result of the foreign conquest. Any collapse of the system at the top leaving a gulf between the royal government, which would grow more autocratic by its isolation and in sole control of the larger national affairs, and the other constituents of the socio-political body each carrying on its own internal affairs, as was to the end the case with the village communities, but not in any living relation with the higher State matters, would obviously be, in an organisation of complex communal freedom where coordination of the life was imperatively needed, a great cause of weakness. In any case the invasion from Central Asia, bringing in a tradition of personal and autocratic rule unfamiliar with these restraints would immediately destroy such bodies, or their remnants or survivals wherever they still existed, and this happened throughout the whole of Northern India. The Indian political system was still maintained for many centuries in the south, but the public assemblies which went on existing there do not seem to have been of the same constitution as the ancient political bodies, but were rather some of the other communal organisations and assemblies of which these were a coordination and supreme instrument of control. These inferior assemblies included bodies originally of a political character, once the supreme governing institutions of the clan nation, *kula*, and the republic, *gaṇa*. Under the new dispensation they remained in existence, but lost their supreme powers and could only administer with a subordinate and restricted authority the affairs of their constituent communities. The *kula* or clan family persisted, even after it had lost its political character, as a socio-religious institution, especially among the Kshatriyas, and preserved the tradition of its social and religious law, *kula-dharma*, and in some cases its communal assembly, *kula-saṅgha*. The public assemblies that we find even in quite recent times filling the role of the old general assembly in Southern India, more than one coexisting and acting separately or in unison, appear to have been variations on this type of body. In Rajputana also the clan family, *kula*, recovered its political character and action, but in another form and without the ancient institutions and finer cultural temper, although they preserved in a high degree the Kshatriya dharma of courage, chivalry, magnanimity and honour.

A stronger permanent element in the Indian communal system, one that grew up in the frame of the four orders — in the end even replacing it — and acquired an extraordinary vitality, persistence and predominant importance was the historic and still tenacious though decadent institution of caste, *jāti*. Originally this rose from subdivisions of the four orders that grew up in each order under the stress of various forces. The subdivision of the Brahmin castes was mainly due to religious, socio-religious and ceremonial causes, but there were also regional and local divisions: the Kshatriyas remained for the most part one united order, though divided into *kulas*. On the other hand the Vaishya and Shudra orders split up into innumerable castes under the necessity of a subdivision of economic functions on the basis of the hereditary principle. Apart from the increasingly rigid application of the hereditary

principle, this settled subdivision of function could well enough have been secured, as in other countries, by a guild system and in the towns we do find a vigorous and efficient guild system in existence. But the guild system afterwards fell into desuetude and the more general institution of caste became the one basis of economic function everywhere. The caste in town and village was a separate communal unit, at once religious, social and economic, and decided its religious, social and other questions, carried on its caste affairs and exercised jurisdiction over its members in a perfect freedom from all outside interference: only on fundamental questions of the Dharma the Brahmins were referred to for an authoritative interpretation or decision as custodians of the Shastra. As with the *kula*, each caste had its caste law and rule of living and conduct, *jāti-dharma*, and its caste communal assembly, *jāti-saṅgha*. As the Indian polity in all its institutions was founded on a communal and not on an individualistic basis, the caste also counted in the political and administrative functioning of the kingdom. The guilds equally were self-functioning mercantile and industrial communal units, assembled for the discussion and administration of their affairs and had besides their united assemblies which seem at one time to have been the governing urban bodies. These guild governments, if they may so be called, — for they were more than municipalities, — disappeared afterwards into the more general urban body which represented an organic unity of both the guilds and the caste assemblies of all the orders. The castes as such were not directly represented in the general assembly of the kingdom, but they had their place in the administration of local affairs.

The village community and the township were the most tangibly stable basis of the whole system; but these, it must be noted, were not solely territorial units or a convenient mechanism for electoral, administrative or other useful social and political purposes, but always true communal unities with an organic life of their own that functioned in its own power and not merely as a subordinate part of the machinery of the State. The village community has been described as a little village republic, and the description is hardly an exaggeration: for each village was within its own limits autonomous and self-sufficient, governed by its own elected Panchayats and elected or hereditary officers, satisfying its own needs, providing for its own education, police, tribunals, all its economic necessities and functions, managing itself its own life as an independent and self-governing unit. The villages carried on also their affairs with each other by combinations of various kinds and there were too groups of villages under elected or hereditary heads and forming therefore, though in a less closely organised fashion, a natural body. But the townships in India were also in a hardly less striking way autonomous and self-governing bodies, ruled by their own assembly and committees with an elective system and the use of the vote, managing their own affairs in their own right and sending like the villages their representative men to the general assembly of the kingdom. The administration of these urban governments included all works contributing to the material or other

welfare of the citizens, police, judicial cases, public works and the charge of sacred and public places, registration, the collection of municipal taxes and all matters relating to trade, industry and commerce. If the village community can be described as a little village republic, the constitution of the township can equally be described as a larger urban republic. It is significant that the Naigama and Paura assemblies, — the guild governments and the metropolitan bodies, — had the privilege of striking coins of their own, a power otherwise exercised only by the monarchical heads of States and the republics.

Another kind of community must be noted, those which had no political existence, but were yet each in its own kind a self-governing body; for they illustrate the strong tendency of Indian life to throw itself in all its manifestations into a closely communal form of existence. One example is the joint family, prevalent everywhere in India and only now breaking down under the pressure of modern conditions, of which the two fundamental principles were first a communal holding of the property by the agnates and their families and, as far as possible, an undivided communal life under the management of the head of the family and, secondly, the claim of each male to an equal portion in the share of his father, a portion due to him in case of separation and division of the estate. This communal unity with the persistent separate right of the individual is an example of the synthetic turn of the Indian mind and life, its recognition of fundamental tendencies and its attempt to harmonise them even if they seemed in their norm of practice to be contradictory to each other. It is the same synthetic turn as that which in all parts of the Indian socio-political system tended to fuse together in different ways the theocratic, the monarchic and aristocratic, the plutocratic and the democratic tendencies in a whole which bore the characteristics of none of them nor was yet an accommodation of them or amalgamation whether by a system of checks and balances or by an intellectually constructed synthesis, but rather a natural outward form of the inborn tendencies and character of the complex social mind and temperament.

At the other end, forming the ascetic and purely spiritual extreme of the Indian life-mind, we find the religious community and, again, this too takes a communal shape. The original Vedic society had no place for any Church or religious community or ecclesiastical order, for in its system the body of the people formed a single socio-religious whole with no separation into religious and secular, layman and cleric, and in spite of later developments the Hindu religion has held, in the whole or at least as the basis, to this principle. On the other hand an increasing ascetic tendency that came in time to distinguish the religious from the mundane life and tended to create the separate religious community, was confirmed by the rise of the creeds and disciplines of the Buddhists and the Jains. The Buddhist monastic order was the first development of the complete figure of the organised religious community. Here we find that Buddha simply applied the known principles of the Indian society and polity to the ascetic life. The order he created was intended to be a

dharmā-saṅgha, and each monastery a religious commune living the life of a united communal body which existed as the expression and was based in all the rules, features, structure of its life on the maintenance of the Dharma as it was understood by the Buddhists. This was, as we can at once see, precisely the principle and theory of the whole Hindu society, but given here the higher intensity possible to the spiritual life and a purely religious body. It managed its affairs too like the Indian social and political communal unities. An assembly of the order discussed debatable questions of the Dharma and its application and proceeded by vote as in the meeting-halls of the republics, but it was subject still to a limiting control intended to avoid the possible evils of a too purely democratic method. The monastic system once thus firmly established was taken over from Buddhism by the orthodox religion, but without its elaborate organisation. These religious communities tended, wherever they could prevail against the older Brahminic system, as in the order created by Shankaracharya, to become a sort of ecclesiastical head to the lay body of the community, but they arrogated to themselves no political position and the struggle between Church and State is absent from the political history of India.

It is clear therefore that the whole life of ancient India retained even in the time of the great kingdoms and empires its first principle and essential working and its social polity remained fundamentally a complex system of self-determined and self-governing communal bodies. The evolution of an organised State authority supervening on this system was necessitated in India as elsewhere partly by the demand of the practical reason for a more stringent and scientifically efficient coordination than was possible except in small areas to the looser natural coordination of life, and more imperatively by the need of a systematised military aggression and defence and international action concentrated in the hands of a single central authority. An extension of the free republican State might have sufficed to meet the former demand, for it had the potentiality and the necessary institutions, but the method of the monarchical State with its more constricted and easily tangible centrality presented a more ready and manageable device and a more facile and apparently efficient machinery. And for the external task, involving almost from the commencement the supremely difficult age-long problem of the political unification of India, then a continent rather than a country, the republican system, more suited to strength in defence than for aggression, proved in spite of its efficient military organisation to be inadequate. It was, therefore, in India as elsewhere, the strong form of the monarchical State that prevailed finally and swallowed up the others. At the same time the fidelity of the Indian mind to its fundamental intuitions and ideals preserved the basis of communal self-government natural to the temperament of the people, prevented the monarchical State from developing into an autocracy or exceeding its proper functions and stood successfully in the way of its mechanising the life of the society. It is only in the long decline that we find the free institutions that stood between the royal government and the self-determining communal life of

the people either tending to disappear or else to lose much of their ancient power and vigour and the evils of personal government, of a bureaucracy of scribes and officials and of a too preponderant centralised authority commencing to manifest in some sensible measure. As long as the ancient traditions of the Indian polity remained and in proportion as they continued to be vital and effective, these evils remained either sporadic and occasional or could not assume any serious proportions. It was the combination of foreign invasion and conquest with the slow decline and final decadence of the ancient Indian culture that brought about the collapse of considerable parts of the old structure and the degradation and disintegration, with no sufficient means for revival or new creation, of the socio-political life of the people.

At the height of its evolution and in the great days of Indian civilisation we find an admirable political system efficient in the highest degree and very perfectly combining communal self-government with stability and order. The State carried on its work administrative, judicial, financial and protective without destroying or encroaching on the rights and free activities of the people and its constituent bodies in the same departments. The royal courts in capital and country were the supreme judicial authority coordinating the administration of justice throughout the kingdom, but they did not unduly interfere with the judicial powers entrusted to their own courts by the village and urban communes and, even, the regal system associated with itself the guild, caste and family courts, working as an ample means of arbitration and only insisted on its own exclusive control of the more serious criminal offences. A similar respect was shown to the administrative and financial powers of the village and urban communes. The king's governors and officials in town and country existed side by side with the civic governors and officials and the communal heads and officers appointed by the people and its assemblies. The State did not interfere with the religious liberty or the established economic and social life of the nation; it confined itself to the maintenance of social order and the provision of a needed supervision, support, coordination and facilities for the rich and powerful functioning of all the national activities. It understood too always and magnificently fulfilled its opportunities as a source of splendid and munificent stimulation to the architecture, art, culture, scholarship, literature already created by the communal mind of India. In the person of the monarch it was the dignified and powerful head and in the system of his administration the supreme instrument — neither an arbitrary autocracy or bureaucracy, nor a machine oppressing or replacing life — of a great and stable civilisation and a free and living people.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(The Renaissance in India and Other Essays on Indian Culture,
CWSA, Vol. 20, pp. 407-24)*

‘ . . . THOU ALONE LIVEST . . . ’

May 20, 1914

From the height of that summit which is the identification with Thy divine infinite Love, Thou didst turn my eyes to this complex body which has to serve Thee as Thy instrument. And Thou didst tell me, “It is myself; dost thou not see my light shining in it?” And indeed I saw Thy divine Love, clothed in intelligence, then in strength, constituting this body in its smallest cells and shining so brightly in it that it was nothing but a combination of millions of radiant sparks, all manifesting that they were Thyself.

And now all darkness has disappeared, and Thou alone livest, in different worlds, in different forms but with an identical life, immutable and eternal.

This divine world of Thy immutable domain of pure love and indivisible unity must be brought into close communion with the divine world of all the other domains, right down to the most material in which Thou art the centre and very constitution of each atom. To establish a bond of perfect consciousness between all these successive divine worlds is the only way to live constantly, invariably in Thee, accomplishing integrally the mission Thou hast entrusted to the entire being in all its states of consciousness and all its modes of activity.

O my sweet Master, Thou hast caused a new veil to be rent, another veil of my ignorance and, without leaving my blissful place in Thy eternal heart, I am at the same time in the imperceptible but infinite heart of each of the atoms constituting my body.

Strengthen this complete and perfect consciousness. Make me enter into all the details of its perfection and grant that, without leaving Thee for a single moment, I may constantly move up and down this infinite ladder, according to the necessity of the work Thou hast prescribed for me.

I am Thine, I am in Thee, Thyself, in the plenitude of eternal bliss.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, pp. 148-49)

A CONVERSATION OF 2 APRIL, 1951

You have said: "By Yoga the inner transformation that is in slow constant process in the creation is rendered more intense and rapid, but the pace of the outer transformation remains almost the same as in ordinary life. As a result, the disharmony between the inner and the outer being in one who is doing Yoga tends to be all the greater, unless precautions are taken. . . ."

Questions and Answers 1929 (16 June)

What are these precautions?

That depends upon people. Each case is different. Individual precautions would be different according to individual reactions, difficulties, resistances. For each one there is a programme to follow which is good only for him. There is no general rule. These things cannot be distributed as one distributes sweets. If someone asks me "What should I do?" — well that, yes.

What are the causes of accidents? Are they due to a disequilibrium?

If one answers deeply . . . Outwardly there are many causes, but there is a deeper cause which is always there. I said the other day that if the nervous envelope is intact, accidents can be avoided, and even if there is an accident it won't have any consequences. As soon as there is a scratch or a defect in the nervous envelope of the being and according to the nature of this scratch, if one may say so, its place, its character, there will be an accident which will correspond to the diminution of resistance in the envelope. I believe almost everybody is psychologically aware of one thing: that accidents occur when one has a sort of uncomfortable feeling, when one is not fully conscious and self-possessed, when one feels uneasy. In any case, generally, people have a feeling that they are not fully themselves, not fully aware of what they are doing. If one were fully conscious, the consciousness wide awake, accidents would not occur; one would make just the right gesture, the necessary movement to avoid the accident. Hence, in an almost absolute way, it is a flagging of consciousness. Or quite possibly it may be that the consciousness is fixed in a higher domain; for example, not to speak of spiritual things, a man who is busy solving a mental problem and is very concentrated upon his mental problem, becomes inattentive to physical things, and if he happens to be in a street or in a crowd, his attention fixed upon his problem, he will not make the movement necessary to avoid the accident, and the accident will occur. It is the same for sports, for games; you can observe this easily, there is always a flagging of the consciousness when

accidents occur, or a lack of attention, a little absent-mindedness; suddenly one thinks of something else, the attention is drawn elsewhere — one is not fully conscious of what one is doing and the accident happens.

As I was telling you at the beginning, if for some reason or other — for example, lack of sleep, lack of rest or an absorbing preoccupation or all sorts of things which tire you, that is to say, when you are not above them — if the vital envelope is a little damaged, it does not function perfectly and any current of force whatever which passes through is enough to produce an accident. In the final analysis, the accident comes always from that, it is what one may call inattentiveness or a slackening of consciousness. There are days when one feels quite . . . not exactly uneasy, but as though one were trying to catch something which escapes, one can't hold together, one is as though half-diluted; these are the days of accidents. You must be attentive. Naturally, this is not to tell you to shut yourself up in your room and not to stir out when you feel like that! This is not what I mean. Rather I mean that you must watch all the more attentively, be all the more on your guard, not allow, precisely, this inattentiveness, this slackening of consciousness to come in.

Are there not accidents which are almost inevitable? I just read of a case cited by an American who had the gift of clairvoyance. A child was playing on a railway track, it was in danger. Suddenly the witness saw an apparition beside the child and he breathed a sigh of relief, thinking, "The child will be saved." But to his great astonishment the apparition put its hand over the eyes of the child and threw it in some way under the train. This man was much troubled, he could not understand why a being whom he had taken for a higher being would push a child to its death.

Certainly this may be true, but without having the vision oneself, one can't explain it.

It may be a question of two absolutely different things. Perhaps, indeed, it was its destiny, in the sense that it was the end of the life necessary for its psychic being, it was a death which had been predestined for some reason, because that can happen. Or perhaps it could be an adverse force which he took to be an angel of light, for generally people make this mistake — when they see an apparition they always think it is something heavenly. It is heavenly if you like, but it depends on what heaven it comes from!

It is a strange thing because. . . . Yes, the moment of unconsciousness, the slackening of consciousness may be translated by this someone putting the hand over the eyes.

One of the most common activities of these intolerable little entities which are in the human physical atmosphere and amuse themselves at men's expense, is to blind you to such an extent that when you look for something, and the thing is staring you in the face, you do not see it! This happens very often. You search in

vain, you turn everything over, you look into all possible corners, but you don't find the thing. Then you give up the problem and some time later (precisely when "the hand over the eyes" is removed), you come back to the same place and it is exactly there where you have looked, quietly lying there, it had not stirred! Only you were unconscious, you did not see. This is a very, very frequent amusement of these little entities. They also take pleasure in removing things, then they put them back, but at times they also don't put them back! They displace them, indeed they have all sorts of little pranks. They are intolerable. Madame Blavatsky made much use of them, but I don't know how she managed to make them so amiable, because generally they are quite unpleasant.

I had the experience — among innumerable instances — but precisely of two very striking cases, of two opposite things, only it was not the same beings. . . . There are little beings like fairies who are very sweet, very obliging, but they are not always there, they come from time to time when it pleases them. I remember the time I used to cook for Sri Aurobindo; I was also doing many other things at the same time, so I often happened to leave the milk on the fire and go for some other work or to see something with him, to discuss with somebody, and truly I was not always aware of the time, I used to forget the milk on the fire. And whenever I forgot the milk on the fire, I felt suddenly (in those days I used to wear a sari) a little hand catching a fold of my sari and pulling it, like this. Then I used to run quickly and would see that the milk was just on the point of boiling over. This did not happen just once, but several times, and very clearly, like a little child's hand clutching and pulling.

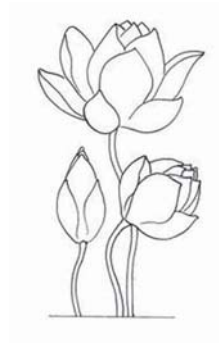
The other story is of the days Sri Aurobindo had the habit of walking up and down in his rooms. He used to walk for several hours like that, it was his way of meditating. Only, he wanted to know the time, so a clock had been put in each room to enable him to see the time at any moment. There were three such clocks. One was in the room where I worked; it was, so to say, his starting-point. One day he came and asked, "What time is it?" He looked and the clock had stopped. He went into the next room, saying, "I shall see the time there" — the clock had stopped. And it had stopped at the same minute as the other, you understand, with the difference of a few seconds. He went to the third room . . . the clock had stopped. He continued walking three times like that — all the clocks had stopped! Then he returned to my room and said, "But this is impossible! This is a bad joke!" and all the clocks, one after the other, started working again. I saw it myself, you know, it was a charming incident. He was annoyed, he said, "This is a bad joke!" And all the clocks started going again!

It is said that the material world in its unconsciousness has forgotten the Divine. Has it forgotten Him from the beginning?

It is concomitant. One cannot say that the material world is the result of obscurity and ignorance; one cannot say either that the obscurity and ignorance are the result of the world of Matter; but the two are concomitant, in the sense that both have exactly the same cause. What we call the material world came into being at the same time as the obscurity and ignorance, they are closely bound, but there is no cause and effect in the sense of a sequence in time. It is concomitant, both the things are the concomitant result of another cause: what has brought about obscurity and ignorance has at one go and at one time brought about the material world as we know it.

THE MOTHER

(*Questions and Answers 1950-51*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 4, pp. 272-76)



A CONVERSATION OF 26 OCTOBER, 1968

I have nothing to say. I can speak, but I have nothing to say!

Are you all right?

I hardly cough anymore. . . . But I have nothing to say.

(silence)

This physical, this physical consciousness (I don't think it's a personal physical consciousness), the general physical consciousness was, in this body, seized with such a pity, oh! . . . I can't say "pity" . . . it's something very special: a very intimate, very tender compassion for the human physical condition. But it seized me in massive proportions! Nothing else remained in the consciousness, and if I hadn't controlled it, I would have started crying and crying. . . .

That has been the dominant note of these last few days.

And as if underneath, as if coming from the depths, beneath, the perception of this Compassion — the divine Compassion — the perception of the way the thing is seen and felt by the Divine. . . . That was wonderful.

It really was a dominant note.

And there are so to speak no contradictions from outside — I don't see many people: among them, there is only *one* person, one person who lives in a joyous consciousness. Only one among all the people I know. Even then, it's because that person lives in a very harmonious vital-mental consciousness and is contented. . . . Besides, I feel that if one were to scratch a little . . . [the person's joy would vanish].

Yes, the condition of human bodies is very miserable.

It's miserable.

Yes, very much so.

It's really miserable.

Oh, it's not at all, it has nothing to do with vital or mental difficulties or any of that. . . . The body isn't conscious of that, not interested in that — not interested: when people recount vital or mental difficulties, it finds them quite childish. But the *misery* this body lives in — that's what is awful.

There have even been moments . . .

There is, as I said, a *constant* call — constant call to the Divine, and even the strong (how can I put it?) perception of his Presence, so then there is a sort of contradiction. . . . When it began, I said, “How can You want this?”

You see, for a very long time — for years — the spontaneous attitude (it’s not the result of an effort), the body’s spontaneous attitude has been, “It’s my incapacity, my ignorance, my helplessness, my stupidity . . . that bring about my misery.” It considers itself to be solely responsible for all its miseries. But then, that’s the difficulty, it’s this contradiction: “Why, why do You want things to be like this? Why?”

So I spend almost entire days and nights in silence (I mean, without speaking), but seeing — seeing. . . . And there isn’t any sensation or perception of a separate individuality; there are innumerable experiences, dozens of them every day, showing that it’s the identification or unification with other bodies that makes you feel this person’s misery, that person’s misery, the misery of . . . It’s a fact. And it’s not felt as being another body’s misery, it’s felt as your own. Which means it has become difficult to make a distinction on a plane . . . (*Mother stretches her hands out into the distance*). There is a plane ever so slightly more subtle than the quite material plane. . . . So one isn’t complaining about one’s own misery, it’s that *everything* is one’s misery.

In other words, it’s not an egoistic complaint.

There is a very clear and spontaneous perception that it’s impossible to extract a small part from the whole and make something harmonious out of it when the whole isn’t harmonious.

But why, why? . . . I can’t understand. . . . As long as the body felt separate (in the past — very long, very long ago), when it felt itself to be a body separate from others, and more importantly, separate from the Divine, then it made sense: there’s nothing to say, it’s quite natural, it makes sense. But now that for it *everything* truly is the Divine, how, how can that fail to bring about Harmony? . . . You understand, when on the vital or mental level (and above, of course), you have the experience of identity, you have at the same time the Bliss. Here [*in the body*], there is the experience of identity, but No Bliss. Why?

Maybe if the body had managed to remain separate, it could have felt something — but that’s not true! It would have been a falsehood. . . . You see, this identity isn’t the result of an effort, not the result of a will: it’s a *fact* — a spontaneous fact, I didn’t make the least attempt to get it. It began like that. And this body itself is in a state . . . which I can’t call “precarious”, but which is nothing particularly cheering. It hasn’t resulted in a physical harmony for the body.

Because there’s all the rest.

Precisely!

Now and then, for . . . not even a few minutes (it's a few seconds), there is a clear perception of the true Identity, which is perfect Harmony, and then all disorders cease to exist — but . . . materially they exist! Take a very simple instance: my teeth are all loose in my mouth — it's a *fact* — and it's true that logically, such a condition should be very painful: it's not. And I see that it is so because of a Presence — that I understand very well. But it doesn't get cured, far from it! It's incurable.

This physical is truly . . . a mystery.

I understand people who have said, "It must be abolished, it's a falsehood." Yet that's not true, it's not a falsehood, it's . . . what is it? If we say "a deformation", it doesn't mean anything.

(*silence*)

But the power to relieve (not to heal: the power to relieve), far from having diminished, has increased. When I am told that someone is ill, at least ninety-nine times in a hundred, I have already *experienced* the thing, and what I am told makes me say, "Ah, it's so and so." I have already experienced it as being part of my physical being (*gesture in the distance*), an immense physical being, you know, immense and without precise form. And it's this precision and this division that are . . . (what should I say?) . . . are they the obstacle or the cause (probably both) that prevent the Harmony from being established? It's because we *really* are separate.

But then, can you conceive how a world that's not really separate would be? . . . Because, you understand, the question is serious: if for the world to exist as it is, it has to be really separate, and if being really separate is the cause of all misery, then . . . And yet, in another way (I don't know how), in another way I know (it's not "I" who knows: there's no "I" there), I know, I *know* (it's the great "I" who knows) that the desertion, the disappearance of this world is *not* the solution. . . . But what is it? . . .

This is the only world where division is no longer the result of a state of consciousness, but a *fact*. So? . . . Everywhere else, it's the result of a state of consciousness: if the consciousness changes, the state changes — not here. It's the only world: here. And yet . . . it [*division*] is a falsehood.

(*silence*)

One can easily conceive of a considerable improvement with the establishment of the true Consciousness, because, as I said, there are experiences (quite fleeting, but still) that are very concrete, of even a material harmonisation which, seen in that way, looks very much like a miracle. But one conceives that re-establishing the True Consciousness and, along with it, the Harmony it brings, would make a considerable difference. . . . Probably a difference sufficient for a harmonious and progressive state to be realised — in harmony, not in misery.

That may be the supreme miracle the Divine is trying to achieve: separation — an existing fact — and the state of consciousness of Oneness.

(silence)

Now, at any rate, I know . . . The work in the other states (even, even in a subtle physical) is relatively child's play. The difficulty is here.

(silence)

So one may conceive of an improvement, even a considerable improvement, a state far more harmonious than the existing one. The existing state . . . it's hell, really; it's only thanks to this Possibility that it's not hell. It's because behind that hell, there is this Possibility — which is living, real, existing, tangible, livable — otherwise it's infernal. . . . You understand, one gets the impression that all the states of being have been whipped together (you know, like when you make mayonnaise!), all the states of being well mixed together like that, in a great confusion, so naturally the "horrible thing" is bearable . . . because of all the rest in there. But if you start separating . . . Oh! (*gesture of horror*)

What do *you* have to say?

Well, it means that the consciousness of the whole must change. It's always the same problem: when the whole totality has progressed, changed its consciousness, the material "fact" should become different.

It appears to be like that.

That's the problem.

There's no escape, no way to divide that.

Everything *must change*.

Individuality is merely a means of action for the transformation of the whole.

I understand why they said one had to escape! It demands such a transformation . . . it's almost an eternity of time.

Once you've got out of it, you're out of it, but all the time you've spent to . . .

"One" can't be transformed without everything being transformed!

Yes, that's it. That's right.

That is to say, “one” accelerates the transformation of the whole.

Yes.

But that means the great *surrender*: “It’s like that, it’s like that. . . .” Frightful.

That’s why there are people who escape (even though it’s no use, because they’ll have to come back): it’s to get some rest! (*Mother laughs*)

It’s perfectly obvious that if it weren’t unbearable, it would never change. And if it’s unbearable, well . . . it really makes you feel like running away — which is impossible, of course, it’s foolish to think you can get out of it: it’s not possible. Only, for a time . . . you rest.

It means abandoning the work. It delays the result.

And yet . . . yet you feel that if by some miracle one individual succeeded in physically supramentalising himself, it would be such an example for the rest of the world that . . . I don’t know, it would change it radically.

But that would still be partial.

Yes, but it would strike consciousnesses so much . . .

It wouldn’t be general, it could only be partial. But it *will* be. It’s part of the Plan. But the perfection of *one* realisation depends on a total realisation. There may be a certain “quantum” of realisation, that’s undeniable — that’s precisely what the supramental race will realise, obviously. It’s obvious.

But I mean that if, now, through some miracle, one became luminously true, it would strike the rest of mankind so much that it would be turned back onto the path of Truth — one example.

Yes, of course. But that . . .

(*silence*)

Let’s hope for it!

(*silence*)

That’s the true surrender . . . oh! . . .

(*long contemplation*)

Maybe the miracle of true surrender? . . . (It's not even *surrender*, it's something like an acceptance, which is at the same time the abolition of any separation.) That would be perfect . . . maybe. It has to be seen. There. So the next time is your birthday — a new birth.

(*silence*)

Since you have conceived of it . . . it means you must try to do it.

ADDENDUM: A CONVERSATION OF 30 OCTOBER, 1968

(*Regarding the message Mother has given to Satprem for his birthday.*)

Here are the Light and the Divine Love which are always with you on the path, every outcome of which is only the starting point for a new stage.

It's precisely the experience I've had these last few days (yesterday, I think), just before writing the card. We always set an end to things — but there isn't any. There isn't any. The truth is, one rises like this (*Mother draws a curve that reaches a point in space*), but it's in order to go like this (*gesture of a new curve rising higher from that point on*), and again like this — for ever and ever.

It may be an individual consciousness, not necessarily an impersonal one; for the individual consciousness, too, it's like this: a great curve (*Mother draws a trajectory up to a point*), and like a springboard to go farther. So it was a vision like that, of something developing — developing while it expands and grows illumined.

We might say, the Consciousness growing more and more conscious of itself. That was the impression.

And everything is a means for it to grow conscious of itself.

That explains everything, besides. That's what explains everything.

The means for the Consciousness to become conscious of itself.

(*silence*)

And this work of growing awareness (self-awareness) in the body is really very interesting. Very interesting.

THE MOTHER

“APPEAL” — CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

Sri Aurobindo —

Anything special in this lyric? Is not the language too commonplace and the rhythm too hackneyed?

APPEAL

My feet are sore, Belovèd,
With agelong quest for Thee;
Wilt Thou not choose for dwelling
This lonesome heart of me?

Is it too poor a mansion?
But surely it is poor
Because Thou never bringest
Thy beauty through its door!

It lies all bare and darksome,
To hold nought save Thy light:
The door is shut because, Love,
It craves no lesser sight!

Though void, a fulness richens
The heart I give to Thee —
For, what more can I offer
Than all my penury?

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

I like it very well.

A rhythm or language can never be hackneyed or commonplace when it is beautiful and makes a direct inner appeal.

27 August 1934

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

SRI AUROBINDO: LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MAHAYOGI

(Continued from the issue of September 2016)

Chapter: LV

Glimpses of the Unrevealed

Sri Aurobindo: A Yogi doesn't say all that he knows. He says only what is necessary. If I wrote all that I know, then it would be ten times the amount I have written.

Satyendra: People will judge you by what you have written.

Sri Aurobindo: (Laughing): That does not matter.

Purani: *Lok na Pok!*

Nirodbaran: Then we shan't know all that you know?

Sri Aurobindo: Well, realise first what I have written.

— Nirodbaran

*Talks with Sri Aurobindo*¹

The spirit was prepared and the time had come: Sri Aurobindo must turn his attention to the unique and great task Providence had assigned him. The indication had come earlier, but he had rather kept it aside, engrossed as he was in the hectic politics of the time, his immediate goal being achievement of unconditional freedom for his country. Hence the strange and seemingly sad turn given to the course of his life — he being arrested and put behind bars, in a solitary cell for a considerable length of time. But he alone knew what the incarceration meant to him — that it was to serve as his cloister for Yoga, his realisations secret — till he revealed it to some extent to a spellbound ten thousand strong audience at Uttarpara, on the outskirts of Kolkata, on the 30th of May 1909.

Before we return to the sequence of external events in his life, may we try to trace, however inadequately, depending on the surface signs and a few utterances, the life that he was living within, while beating against the tumultuous tides of this time.

We have seen from the several accounts left by his fellow prisoners that even when he shared a dormitory with them, he appeared to them to be living in a world far away from his physical situation. Yet he was very much there with them in those sickening and crass surroundings; he never grudged a word of solace or an answer to a question for anyone who needed it and once in a while even participated in the

playful activities of the fearless and jovial young men around him. Of course all could probably feel the presence of an invisible wall-like aura surrounding him and, without exception, everybody conducted himself towards him with a spontaneous sense of reverence and left him alone for the most part of their time together.

Sri Aurobindo himself did not care to take note of the effect of his Yoga on his body. He would not know that his locks glistened even though no oil had been applied to them for months until someone questioned him about it. He would not know that his body was having as rare an experience as levitation but for waking up to the phenomenon in a casual way.² Simply a stern look from him at an impudent guard who misbehaved with him and the fellow would run away and complain to his boss — in the absence of anything substantial to report — that the prisoner gave him “an insubordinate look”! The poor chap understood that the nervous shock he received was not from anything palpable or audible and, surely, he could not have defined it in any other way.³

That the ordinary physical laws had ceased to operate on him was evident from the fact that even after ten days of total fasting in Alipore Jail he could raise a pail of water on to his head, which he could not have done in his normal state.⁴ There were several other signs of his having extraordinary experiences, as observed by his fellow-prisoners and jail officials. But such signs hardly indicate the profundity of the experience behind them. We develop some idea about it from his own statement (given in the third person) much later:

During this period his view of life was radically changed; he had taken up Yoga with the original idea of acquiring spiritual force and energy and divine guidance for his work in life. But now the inner spiritual life and realisation which had continually been increasing in magnitude and universality and assuming a larger place took him up entirely and his work became a part and result of it and besides far exceeded the service and liberation of the country and fixed itself in an aim, previously only glimpsed, which was world-wide in its bearing and concerned with the whole future of humanity.⁵

After Sri Aurobindo came over to Pondicherry several reports were published based on hearsay that he had been “initiated” into Yoga by X or Y. Sri Aurobindo was obliged to clarify:

Those who spread these legends seem to be ignorant that at this time he was not a spiritual novice or in need of any initiation or spiritual direction by anybody. Sri Aurobindo had already realised in full two of the four great realisations on which his Yoga and his spiritual philosophy are founded. The first he had gained while meditating with the Maharashtrian Yogi Vishnu Bhaskar Lele at Baroda in January 1908; it was the realisation of the silent,

spaceless and timeless Brahman gained after a complete and abiding stillness of the whole consciousness and attended at first by an overwhelming feeling and perception of the total unreality of the world, though this feeling disappeared after his second realisation which was that of the cosmic consciousness and of the Divine as all beings and all that is, which happened in the Alipore jail and of which he has spoken in his speech at Uttarpara. To the other two realisations, that of the supreme Reality with the static and dynamic Brahman as its two aspects and that of the higher planes of consciousness leading to the Supermind he was already on his way in his meditations in the Alipore jail. Moreover, he had accepted from Lele as the principle of his Sadhana to rely wholly on the Divine and his guidance alone both for his Sadhana and for his outward actions. After that it was impossible for him to put himself under any other guidance and unnecessary to seek help from anyone. In fact Sri Aurobindo never took any formal initiation from anyone; he started his Sadhana on his own account by the practice of *prāṇāyāma* and never asked for help except from Lele.⁶

Uttarpara on the banks of a stretch of the Ganga known as the river Hoogly, is now looked upon as a satellite town of Kolkata. But it had its own claims to eminence and the foremost among them is a library set up in a huge building by a renowned philanthropic landlord Jaykrishna Mukhopadhyay (1808-1888). This dignified landmark of the town could hardly be rivalled by any institution in the great city that was the capital of India. Opened in 1859, it was India's first free public library.

Several leading citizens of the town, young and old, were dedicated nationalists and they adored Sri Aurobindo. We can appreciate this attitude of theirs only if we accept the hypothesis that even though their contact with Sri Aurobindo could not but be brief, they were touched by something inexplicably charming in him.

Foremost among these admirers was Amarendranath Chattopadhyay (1880-1957), a young native of the town. He was the leader of the Swadeshi movement at Uttarpara. Attractive by his physique and demeanour, always genial and pleasant in his speech, he had no enemy even among those opposed to his political ideology.⁷

Amarendranath had met Sri Aurobindo, courtesy some of the latter's lieutenants. He reminisces, "The very first meeting not only charmed me, but also made me strong. Then I realised straightaway that initiation (*Deeksha*) was possible through sight (*Darshan*) only, without any physical touch or even the use of mind."⁸

He was unquestionably the most loved leader of the youth of the region and he would identify himself as a member of "Aurobindo's Party"!

Once Surendranath Bannerjea, the supreme leader of the Moderates, took him aside and told him, "I hear that you have become a devotee of Aurobindo. Better suggest to him that he should go slow. Otherwise he may have to spend his whole life in jail! How can he work? After all, he is the leader after me!"

Replied Amarendranath, "Why don't you advise him to do so? How can he be

expected to listen to me?”

The great leader avoided answering him directly. “He is going too fast!” was the observation with which he ended the dialogue.⁹

The most noteworthy among the young friends and followers of Amarendranath at Uttarpara was Rajendranath, popularly known as Michhri Babu, scion of an influential feudal lord, Raja Pyarimohun Mukhopadhyay. He was the President of the Dharmarakshini Sabha that resolved to accord a grand reception to Sri Aurobindo and listen to him. Amarendranath escorted Sri Aurobindo from Kolkata to Uttarpara. At the Railway Station Sri Aurobindo asked the escort why must he travel in a higher class instead of in the third class.

Amarendranath replied that such decisions were the prerogative of the hosts; the guest could not have any say in it. Sri Aurobindo laughed and protested no more.¹⁰

Amarendranath observes that Sri Aurobindo sat as if absorbed in deep peace and in a state of trance. The young escort was conscientious enough to leave him undisturbed.

This is the sequence of events that emerges from the accounts left by Amarendranath himself, his biographer Satyabrata Chattopadhyay as well as the newspaper *The Bengalee*:

On the Railway platform at Uttarpara along with Sri Aurobindo and Amarendranath alighted almost the entire train-load of passengers, for they all had travelled from Kolkata and other stations on the way to see and listen to Sri Aurobindo!

Led by Raja Pyarimohun Mukhopadhyay, the entire élite of Uttarpara and several important men who had earlier arrived from different places received the guest with great love and enthusiasm. The Raja garlanded him. There were tumultuous shouts of *Bande Mataram*. Sri Aurobindo was led to the residence of Surendranath Chattopadhyay, a procession formed impromptu trailing him. There he took food and rest.

Late in the afternoon he was taken in an organised procession, huge and disciplined, to the spacious library ground by the river, amidst the ceremonial bursting of ten cracker bombs.

It passed through the main streets which had been sumptuously decorated by the residents of the town with flowers and leaves while womenfolk blew conch-shells and poured flowers and petals welcoming the guest.

As the President of the Sabha, Rajendranath, garlanded him and prostrated himself before him, through deafening bursts of the sound of conch-shells and cries of *Bande Mataram*, approximately ten thousand people hailed him.¹¹ The envious tone of *The Bengalee* remarked that “the sound of the conch-shells and the explosively loud shouts of *Bande Mataram* shook the atmosphere so terribly that it ought to have torn asunder the heart of the enemy. Twenty bombs were exploded in this gala

reception.” The garland, according to that newspaper, hung from Sri Aurobindo’s “neck and touched his feet”.¹²

The garland had been commissioned by Rajendranath and was an example of craftsmanship. Shortly before the event commenced it was detected that one of the several delicate strands projecting from the garland had been pilfered by someone. A furious Rajendranath burst out saying, “I won’t mind even if someone had detached the sacred thread from the idol of Narayan in my house. But this mischief is maddening!”

In no time the strand was restored to the garland.¹³

This author’s purpose in citing a princely Brahmin’s outburst of this nature, which could be interpreted as sacrilegious, is to exemplify the magnitude of reverence in which Sri Aurobindo was held by those who came in contact with him. He was more than a deity for them despite his unassuming and shy manners and words.

The programme opened with Amarendranath reciting a poem in honour of Sri Aurobindo. The moment Sri Aurobindo stood up to speak, the mantric phrase *Bande Mataram* rent the sky rising from ten thousand throats. But “once the speaker raised his finger such was the silence that as if there was not a soul present there! And Sri Aurobindo began to speak — like the soothing murmurings of the Gangotri!”¹⁴

The Uttarpada Speech is widely read; it is also a highly homogeneous piece, even though spoken without any prior preparation. In fact, the speaker was obliged to abandon the line he wished to take and follow the inspiration he received on the spot. We can read and re-read the speech and we can experience the speaker himself merging with his speech and before long realise the speaker and the speech merging into a horizon sublime — a tenderly profound and precise preface to his great vision of the future to unfold shortly later through the pages of the *Arya*.

In the compilations of the world’s memorable speeches we rarely, if at all, come across a beginning as down-to-earth, as frank and as direct in its approach to the theme as the following:

When I was asked to speak to you at the annual meeting of your Sabha, it was my intention to say a few words about the subject chosen for today, the subject of the Hindu religion. I do not know now whether I shall fulfil that intention; for as I sat here, there came into my mind a word that I have to speak to you, a word that I have to speak to the whole of the Indian Nation. It was spoken first to myself in jail and I have come out of jail to speak it to my people.¹⁵

The speech has several dimensions. He sets an example in humility when he says “I the man was a mass of weakness,” but the truth that he was more than “the man” becomes unobtrusively revealed to us when he summarily states in one short sentence, “I knew I would come out.” And he would come out as one who knows, no longer a medium kept guessing.

While he speaks of his human failings in the Uttarpara Speech he speaks of his feelings of bitterness against the situation in which Providence had placed him, in his *Karakahini* or the Tales of Prison Life. The following piece by K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran) may be of interest to readers who may wonder at such traits in Sri Aurobindo:

While reading Sri Aurobindo's Bengali book of jail reminiscences *Karakahini* (Tales of Prison Life), many readers have been puzzled by certain passages depicting the distressed state of mind in which Sri Aurobindo found himself.

Knowing that already before going to jail he had the experience of Nirvana shortly after his meeting with the Maharashtrian Yogi Lele in Baroda, one is apt to wonder how the distressed state could ever occur.

The answer could be derived from a statement of Sri Aurobindo's in the course of the talks which Nirodbaran has recorded. On December 22, 1938 Sri Aurobindo refers to the Nirvanic realisation and explains:

"My experience of peace and calm after my first contact with Lele never left me, but in my outer nature there were many agitations and every time I had to make an effort to establish peace and calm there. Ever since that early experience the whole object of my Yoga has been to change the nature into the mould of an inner realisation."¹⁶

From his experience of a great peace that descended on him the moment he set his foot on the Indian soil in 1893 till his hearing Vivekananda speaking to him for a fortnight in jail,¹⁷ we have known of his several amazing experiences only when he had cared to refer to them. But all that could be only a fragment of what he had had within. He knew that speaking of them would hardly benefit anybody. Once in a private letter to a disciple where he was required to advise him regarding the latter's attitude towards Ramakrishna Mission, he almost casually wrote, "For myself it was Ramakrishna who personally came and first turned me to this Yoga."¹⁸

But independent of whatever little he had revealed of the abundance within, numerous sensitive souls had had a feel of it and many could not refrain themselves from expressing what they felt. For example, at the Surma Valley Political Conference, Sylhet, (September 11-12, 1909), which Sri Aurobindo attended as the Chief Guest, he was addressed as "Yogiraj Rishi" by author and educationist Sharat Chandra Choudhury, President of the Conference.¹⁹

(To be continued)

MANOJ DAS

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There is a coward in every human being — precisely the part in him which insists on “safety” — for that is certainly not a brave attitude. I admit however that I would like safety myself if I could have it — perhaps that is why I have always managed instead to live dangerously and follow the dangerous paths dragging so many poor X’s in my train.

5 January 1935

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Himself and the Ashram, CWSA, Vol. 35, pp. 21-22)

I WANT TO TELL A STORY

I want to tell a story.

When Mother was here in the physical, it was a very sweet privilege to take whatever money we had to place on her lap.

On our birthday specially we enjoyed emptying our purses.

On one occasion in 1971 Mother said: "But you won't have anything left for yourself."

"Oh, Mother," I remonstrated, "don't you know the story that Rabindranath tells about Sri Ram and the beggar?"

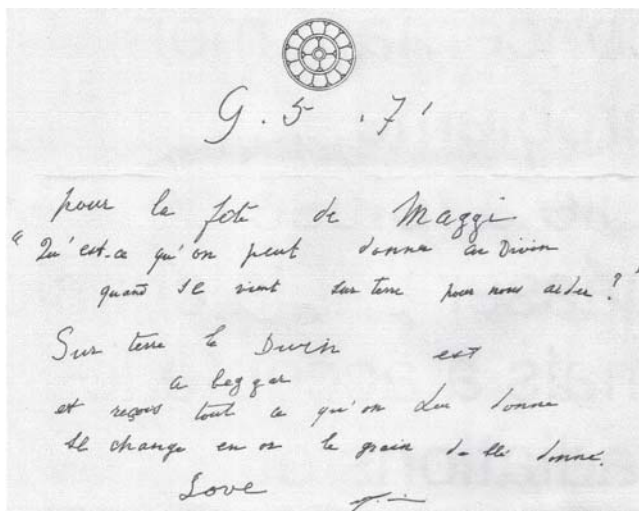
"Tell."

"Well, there was a wretchedly poor beggar, a devotee of Sri Ram who ardently aspired to have His Darshan. One day Sri Ram did come and the beggar was sure his miserable condition would change. He touched Sri Ram's feet and then held out his hand. In return, Sri Ram held out his palm in the gesture of a beggar. What was this jest? At last reluctantly the beggar took a grain of rice and placed it in the Divine palm. Sri Ram passed on.

That night when our beggar opened his little bag of rice to prepare his meal something twinkling caught his eye. One grain of rice had turned to gold.

"Oh, that he had only given his all."

Mother pondered this for a good while. Then she took out a sheet of paper. Here is the facsimile.



9.5.71

For Maggi's birthday

“What can one give to the Divine when He comes to earth to help us?”
On earth the Divine is a beggar and receives all that one gives Him.
He turns to gold the grain of wheat given to Him.
Love,
Mother

MAGGI

I HAD GONE A-BEGGING

(POEM No. 50 FROM *GITANJALI*)

I had gone a-begging from door to door in the village path, when thy golden chariot appeared in the distance like a gorgeous dream and I wondered who was this King of all kings!

My hopes rose high and methought my evil days were at an end, and I stood waiting for alms to be given unasked and for wealth scattered on all sides in the dust.

The chariot stopped where I stood. Thy glance fell on me and thou camest down with a smile. I felt that the luck of my life had come at last. Then of a sudden thou didst hold out thy right hand and say “What hast thou to give to me?”

Ah, what a kingly jest was it to open thy palm to a beggar to beg! I was confused and stood undecided, and then from my wallet I slowly took out the least little grain of corn and gave it to thee.

But how great my surprise when at the day's end I emptied my bag on the floor to find a least little gram of gold among the poor heap. I bitterly wept and wished that I had had the heart to give thee my all.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

THE MOTHER IN THE PLAYGROUND

(Continued from the issue of July 2016)

THE MOTHER IN THE SPORTS GROUND

Games in the Sports Ground

The Sports Ground was opened by the Mother in 1951, and in 1952 the Mother inaugurated the new football field there. This field is surrounded by the 400-metre cinder track. On the day of the opening of the Sports Ground, there was a grand March Past with music played by the Ashram Brass Band. A football match between the J.S.A.S.A. eleven and a team of veteran players of the Ashram had been arranged. The game was started by the Mother herself giving the first “kick-off”. The photograph of this event appeared in the *Bulletin*: we see the Mother kicking the ball and Nolini-da, the captain of the veterans’ team, watching the Mother with a smile. It was a highly entertaining game and provided a good deal of excitement and amusement to the spectators.

The handball games were also shifted from the Tennis Ground to the Sports Ground. The girls had their handball tournaments there and in 1959 they also played the Indian game, kho-kho. In 1960, there were two divisions for handball: Division I consisted of teams of men and a few girls; the other division consisted of E group girls and the boys and girls from group B. This arrangement continued for two years. The German game, Schlag-ball, was introduced in 1960. The teams for Schlag-ball consisted of players from group E and the young men.

Much later, in the mid-sixties, the Sports Ground was further extended. A nearby ground was acquired and hockey was introduced. Girls too participated in it. Another game, softball, a modified version of the American baseball, was introduced for the girls. Once these games became a regular feature in the schedule for the girls, handball and kho-kho were discontinued as it was difficult to fit them all into the general programme. Football too was introduced as an optional game for the girls’ group. A few girls, including Anjou, Millie and Paru also participated in the game of cricket which used to be played in the Sports Ground on Sunday mornings.

Reorganisation of the Groups

In 1949 with the increase in the number of participants, a reshuffling of the groups was done and the Mother decided the uniforms for each group.

Group A	: Green shorts and white vest.
Group B	: Red shorts and white vest.
Group C	: Dark-grey shorts and white vest.
Group D	: Navy-blue shorts and white shirt.
Group DG	: Khaki shorts and white shirt.
Group DK	: Khaki shorts and white shirt.
Group E	: White shorts and white shirt.

All the girls and women wore a 'kitty cap' — net-cloth — for their physical activities.

The Uniform of the Girls' Group

Here is the interesting history of the evolution of the uniform used by the girls' group:

In 1945, when the children of the School started using the Playground for evening games, the girls wore their usual dress or saris; a few of them also wore *salwar-kameez* for the games. In 1946, the first uniform, in white cotton, was given to them — long pyjamas, a blouse with magyar-cut sleeves and a belt about two inches wide with a metal buckle to be tied on the waist over the pyjamas and the blouse. As was the custom then, the girls had long hair which would be plaited. Some girls would tie their plaits around the head and secure them neatly with hair-pins, while others left them hanging. Some ladies, our elders, preferred to continue using *salwar-kameez* for their activities.

We have already mentioned the special uniform — trousers and half-sleeved jackets — we had received for our marching on July 13, 1947. This was used by a few girls on special occasions like the March Past on Darshan days and for the second of December display, while the other girls wore their everyday uniform.

Pranab-da would regularly add new items for gymnastics and athletics for the girls. How would they progress otherwise? Those were days when we were full of energy and joyfully participated in whatever we were asked to do. We wanted to progress and be the Mother's true children. There was nothing impossible for us! The gymnastics figures were made to suit our capacities. We did all the items except Pommel Horse and the Horizontal Bar which were considered to be suitable only for men.

However, it was soon apparent that this uniform was not practical for all the activities that the girls had started doing. One day, doing her exercises in long pyjamas in the Playground, one of the girls fell down owing to the inconvenient dress and got hurt.

Nirod-da writes:

When the Mother was told about it, she listened quietly. After a couple of

days, she called a sadhika (Bratati) of her intimate circle, and said, “I have thought over that problem of the dress. I want you to find some sort of a uniform that would be suitable for girls’ exercises. Pyjamas are unwieldy, think over it and tell me when you are ready.”

(Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo, pp. 116-17)

At that time a Gujarati lady was visiting the Ashram. She used to always wear shorts and shirts. When she would come to the Meditation Hall for the Mother’s blessing in the morning, the Mother would watch her walk away even after she had received her flower and had moved away. Perhaps at that time the Mother decided to change the uniform of the girls. The sadhika to whom the Mother had assigned the task was pondering over the problem. Suddenly she said to herself, “Why not white shorts?” She “caught hold of [the Gujarati lady], borrowed her shorts, tried them on herself and looking in the mirror, found the dress quite decent and convenient. . . . When everything was ready, she informed the Mother and a day was fixed for the rehearsal in strict privacy. The Mother was pleased with the design.” (*Ibid.*, p. 117)

One evening, after the Mother arrived in the Playground we were pleasantly surprised to see Milli-di entering the Playground by the small southern door dressed in white shorts, white shirt, white kitty cap. The outfit was completed with white socks and white shoes. The Mother was somewhere near the present map of India on the southern wall of the Playground. Milli-di walked towards the Mother and stood before her. She was smiling, perhaps conscious of her unusual attire in front of so many people! We found her looking very smart. The Mother approved of the dress as a suitable uniform for the girls’ group. We heard that Milli-di was wearing Sunil-da’s (her brother-in-law’s) shorts and Anil-da’s (her husband’s) shirt! Where else would she have got these from?

Soon after this, one day the Mother entered the Playground and asked me to call all our girls to assemble near her. She told me, “I have made a list of girls who would be wearing the new uniform. Your name is there.” She wanted to tell all the girls about the new uniform. How beautifully she explained to us the reason of this change. She said that wearing it was not compulsory. Only those who wished to could change to this new uniform. And, naturally, everybody wanted the new uniform!

But what was the reaction to this drastic step? Some, particularly old people, were shocked to see their daughters scantily dressed and doing exercises jointly with boys; a few conservative guardians were planning to take their wards away from such a modernised Ashram. I, personally, admired, on the one hand, the revolutionary step taken by the Mother far in advance of the time in Eastern countries in anticipation of the modern movement in dress; on the

other hand, my cautious mind . . . could not but feel the risk involved in this forward venture . . . whenever we had tried to argue with her that we were doing new things which were not done outside, she replied sharply, "Why should we follow the others? They have no ideas, we have ideas. I have come to break down old conventions and superstitions."

We can realise now the wisdom of her vision in taking that revolutionary step. Further, I think it was one of the most effective means to eliminate sex-consciousness between the male and the female. We are in this respect much better than before now that shorts have become almost our normal dress.

(*Ibid.*, pp. 117-18)

The Mother had once told Pranab-da that she had observed that as a rule, the Indian girls did not have well-shaped legs. Now, in shorts they would be aware of their legs and would try to improve their appearance. Sushila, one of the captains of the girls' group remembers that one day before going for her group activities, she had gone to the Mother's room for some work in her uniform. The Mother had commented, "I like this outfit very much."

Kitty cap was now a part of our regular uniform. We were told that the Mother had seen some pictures of a kitty cap worn by a lady. She instructed Mona how it was to be done. Mona got it ready for the Mother. When she came in the evenings to the grounds the Mother herself used to wear a kitty cap with *salwar-kameez*. The name kitty cap was given by the Mother — it is a simple bag-like net-cloth with two broad bands stitched at the end. One puts the cap on the head, takes the two bands, one on each side around the head, then ties a knot on the forehead and then the two ends are neatly tucked in. This is meant to keep the hair securely tied and protected from dust. All the girls with long hair had to wear this cap during their physical activities.

Pranab-da, a very conscientious coach, would take great care of us, the newly chosen girl-captains, during the gymnastics class. He would help us perform handspring on the "buck", a small apparatus used for vaulting. Often, in the middle of the performance, the long plaits tied round the head of some girls, would slip off and thus, when they completed their figure, Pranab-da who had his palm behind the back to support the performer would get his hand entangled in the hair. Sushila remembers:

On the vaulting days, I had to keep my plaits tucked nicely in my pyjamas so that they did not come out when I did hand-stand, vault, or somersault on the ground. I always had a fear that my plaits would slip out. Our sweet Mother had understood my fear. She called me one day and said: "I wear kitty cap which is very convenient. If you want you may wear it also!" I was really surprised to hear it. Now, what a relief! To do the [gymnastic] items with my

hair tied so nicely inside the kitty cap! I immediately told Her: “Yes Mother, I shall wear it.” The next day She gave me one to try on when I did vaulting. When we did vaulting, sometimes I felt that some force was coming and doing it.”

The captains received their kitty caps and Sushila was the first one to receive a kitty cap from the Mother.

We appreciated very much the inclusion of the kitty cap in our uniform. It was so convenient now! For safety’s sake, we were asked not to use hair pins as the kitty cap would keep the hair in place.

After a few days, when a sufficient number of them had been stitched by Kusum-ben Patel (Mona’s assistant) all the group members were given kitty caps and they were supposed to start wearing them from the following day. Pushpa remembers:

When I wanted to tie my kitty cap I found it was not completely stitched. Fearing that it would open out even more while trying to wear it, I went to the ‘group’ without tying it. But I took it with me. It was our basketball day, I was playing in the first court which was near the tennis courts. After finishing Her game of tennis, the Mother came out and saw me playing without the kitty cap. She called me and asked me the reason. I told her why I did not wear it. She asked me if I had brought it with me. I ran and brought it and showed it to her. She took it and examined it and tied it on my head very carefully, very graciously and while tying she explained very sweetly, softly to me in French why we should wear the kitty cap. She said, “You see it protects the head, it protects the forehead, the eyes and keeps the hair well tied up.” She had tied it very low, covering all the parts that a kitty cap is supposed to. My eyebrows were completely covered. After basketball, we used to go to the Playground for other exercises and gymnastic marching. When I went to the Playground that day, many of my friends and others came to me and said how low I had tied my kitty cap. To some I said that the Mother had done it. For many others, I swallowed their comment quietly.

Pushpa also tells:

Once the Mother had said very strongly to us, “Do you think that it looks very nice, hanging your kitty cap in your hand or putting it round your neck?”

The Mother was very particular about tying the kitty cap properly. It had to be tied a little over the brow so that no strand of hair would be seen from outside. She was particular in maintaining the discipline regarding our uniforms. I remember

that as the captain of the girls' group, I was pulled up for not noticing that an American lady visitor who was allowed to participate in our group activities during her stay here, had tied her kitty cap in such a way that a little of the hair was exposed at the centre of her forehead. She was also wearing strapped sandals instead of the usual canvas shoes; (marching barefoot as some of us did was also fine!) The Mother had immediately noticed this! Some of the girls after their group activities were over, would remove their kitty caps, and let their plaits hang when they were going back from the grounds. The Mother did not approve of this either. We were told to come out of the house in our full uniform which was to be removed only after reaching home.

Prayer of the Girls' Group

Minoo's birthday was on March 15 and Tapati's on 16. Both of them received their new uniform (white shorts, white shirt and white kitty cap) from the Mother and started using it in the Playground. The rest of the group members received their uniforms from the Mother on March 20, 1949. We were to start using it from the following day. At about 9.30 a.m. on the 21st I had gone to the Mother for pranam and to receive her blessings. That was the time when we went to her everyday. She would choose some flowers for me from the tray kept on a table beside her. She said, "So, it is today!" — meaning thereby that this was the day when we would all start our activities in the new uniform. But, somewhere within me, I was not happy. I said, "Yes, Ma, but . . . you know . . . but, Ma, what I mean . . . it is an outer change only, doing something externally. But what change happens inside?" I had a feeling of some intense movement of dissatisfaction in my heart. But I could not express it. She looked at me intently and gave words to my prayer — "'We want to be what Thou wantest us to be.' That is what you want to say isn't it?" I replied: "Yes, Ma, Yes!" Oh, I felt so happy.

She instructed me that after our group activity in the Tennis Ground was over, all the girls should come to the Playground. They should leave their footwear in an orderly fashion on the northern side of the Playground behind the wall bars, form two files on the northern side of the ground. She would come out and stand in front of the southern wall of the ground and the girls should come marching and stand in front of her. "Then you say the prayer. That over, give the command, 'Group, Salute!' and everyone should raise their hand in salute. You see they would also like to do something! And then, you lead the group out." She organised everything for us, and, that is what we did. After keeping our footwear in place, we formed two rows. The Mother came out of her room and stood in front of the southern wall of her room. We marched up to her. Then with the order "Group, Halt" they all stopped in front of the Mother and turned to face her. I said loudly our prayer, "We want to be what Thou wantest us to be" and the Mother answered, "I have full trust in your

goodwill. Trust in my help.” Then, with the order: “Group, Salute!” everyone briskly placed their right palm on the chest and immediately raised the arm sideways up — this was the sports salute of the group to the Mother. Then we turned and marched away.

So the girls willingly adopted the new uniform.

In 1951, we were given an outfit for our athletics competitions which we shall discuss when the topic of the Athletics Season comes up.

Reorganisation of the Girls’ Group

In 1960, the number of girls in E group increased. There were young girls below 20 as well as ladies above 40. Sub-groups had to be made. Suitable activities for each of the groups had to be introduced. A little variation in the colour of the collar of their shirts was introduced to distinguish the sub-groups.

In March 1961, the E group was formally divided into 3 separate sub-groups — C, E, and G. I was given the charge of the girls’ group and was helped by small teams of captains for each sub-group:

Group C — Young ladies from 20 to 25 yrs, 45 in number. The uniform chosen was white shorts and shirt with a blue collar and the Mother’s symbol in blue and kitty cap.

Group E — Ladies from 26 to 40 yrs, 49 in number. The uniform was the same only the shirt collar and the Mother’s symbol were in pink.

Group G — Women above 40 yrs, 89 in number. The uniform was white shorts and shirt and kitty cap.

After about 20 years there was again a change. Young girls from group B promoted to group E expressed their wish to Dada that they would like coloured shorts instead of white for their uniform. In July 1981, there was a further reorganisation which continues till date:

Group C — Girls 18 to 21 years. Grey shorts, white shirt and kitty cap.

Group E — Women 22 to 50 years. Khaki shorts, white shirt and kitty cap

Group G — Women 50 years and above. White shorts, white shirt and kitty cap.

Prayers for each Group

We shall go back now to the year 1949. By the end of March, before we received our new uniforms, we came to know that all the other groups would also be getting new uniforms. After receiving these, each group stood in formation in front of the Mother and recited a prayer to her. The Mother accepted the prayers and answered to each prayer with all her love and grace.

The prayers for Group A and B were written by the Mother herself. The captains of the other groups formulated their own prayers.

Group A: (Captains: Tara, Namita, Aruna) Children 6 to 10 years of age; green shorts and white vest.

Sweet Mother, for us Thou hast kept the path free from all dangers and difficulties, the path that surely leads to the goal; and when the final victory will be won, it will reach out to infinity.

Mother, keep us always green, so that we may advance without stop on the road Thou hast with such labour prepared for us.

The Mother's reply:

My little ones, you are the hope, you are the future. Keep always this youth which is the faculty to progress, for you the phrase 'it is impossible' will have no meaning.

(April 22, 1949)

Group B: (Captains: Ajit, Parul, Sumedha) Children from 10 to 14 years; red shorts and white vest.

Sweet Mother, we want to be Thy faithful soldiers to fight for Thy final victory. Victory to Sweet Mother.

The Mother's reply:

I salute you, my brave little soldiers, I give you my call to the rendezvous with Victory.

(April 3, 1949)

Group C: (Captain: Mona) Boys from 14 to 18 years; dark grey shorts and white vest.

Lord, free from all ignorance Thy supreme workers and guide their standard of purity by the shortest way towards the Realisation.

May Thy will be done and not ours.

The Mother's reply:

The Lord will name 'supreme' only those of his workers who will have wholly surmounted and overpassed in them all animality. Let us be at the outset his faithful and sincere workers and when this more modest programme is accomplished we shall prepare ourselves for greater realisation.

(April 23, 1949)

Group D: (Captain: Udar) Men above 18 years; navy-blue shorts and white shirt.

Sweet Mother, we want to be Thy valiant warriors, we will follow Thee to the final Victory.

The Mother's reply:

With a single sincere heart we all will for Victory, but it is by stages that it can be achieved. A scrupulous discipline is the first step. Let your new uniform be the symbol of its fulfilment.

(17 April, 1949)

In group D, two ladies — Sutapa and Millie Pinto — participated with the sanction of the Mother.

Group DG: (Captain: Biren-da) Men above 18 years; khaki shorts and white shirt.

Sweet Mother, we are Thy little children aspiring for Thy all-powerful Light. And Thou, Sweet Mother, hast given us the assurance of the final Victory; it is Thy will that we should be Thy faithful, sincere, brave and disciplined soldiers.

Sweet Mother, here is our pledge. We are determined to be so, and above all, to place ourselves, without reserve in Thy hands. Give us the power to do it.

The Mother's reply:

I accept your pledge and you can rely upon my help to realise it. Age exists only for those who choose to become old.

Forward, ever forward, without fear and without hesitation.

(April 22, 1949)

Group DK: (Captain: Dayakar) Men above 18 years; khaki shorts and white shirt.

Mother Divine, here is our prayer:

Grant that we may always be Thy obedient and sincere soldiers, may Thy force enable us to fight the hostile powers and win Thy victory.

Victory to the Mother!

The Mother's reply:

Be always faithful and persevering and you will have your share of the realisation.

(April 22, 1949)

Group E: (Captain: Chitra) Girls and women above 14 years; white shorts and white shirt.

We want to be what Thou wantest us to be.

The Mother's reply:

I have full trust in your goodwill. Trust in my help.

(March 21, 1949)

We have already said that a few members in each group were chosen by the Mother as captains. They wore the usual uniform of their groups. But in 1961, these captains together formed a new group. This was after the Mother had withdrawn from all her outer activities and was not coming to the Playground regularly. She, however, sent a special message to the Captains' group:

All you Captains of Physical Education:

You can and must be the élite. I was thinking that, in the Ashram, there should be a nucleus around which all will be organised. The Captains of Physical Education can be the nucleus of Physical Education. They need not be many in number but a good selection, first class people, true candidates for supermanhood, ready to give themselves entirely, unreservedly to the big divine work. This is what is expected from you. This must be your programme.

(February 5, 1961)

On April 24, 1961, a new uniform of olive green shirt and shorts was given to the captains. As April 24 is one of the Darshan days, the Mother had come to the Playground. After the general March Past, she took her seat in front of the map of India. The captains stood in formation in front of her and prayed to her (Richard Pearson recited the prayer on behalf of the captains):

Sweet Mother,

We aspire to work together towards the aim Thou hast set before us.

Give us the straightforwardness, the courage, the perseverance and goodwill that is necessary to accomplish this sublime task.

Illumine in us the flame that can burn all resistance and make us worthy to be Thy faithful servitors.

The Mother's reply:

My children,

We are united towards the same goal and for the same accomplishment — for a work unique and new, that the divine Grace has given us to accomplish. I hope that more and more you will understand the exceptional importance of this work and that you will sense in yourselves the sublime joy that the accomplishment will give you.

The divine force is with you — feel its presence more and more and be careful never to betray it.

Feel, wish, act, that you may be new beings for the realisation of a new world and for this my blessings shall always be with you.

(April 24, 1961)

(This message was recorded in the Mother's residence and was played in the Playground after the prayer.)

Special privilege granted to the Girls' Group

We shall now touch upon a special privilege which was granted to the girls' group.

We had the opportunity to go twice for Darshan on that day. The Mother decided that on April 24, 1947 the girls would march and salute the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. We wore our uniform — white blouse and long white pyjamas — and we were instructed not to march but to walk smartly in two files. So we paid our homage to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo seated in the Darshan room with 'Eyes right' (*tête droite*). After that, we rushed back home, changed into our everyday attire (the sari that the Mother had given) and joined the queue and went individually for Darshan again. The following year, on April 24, 1948 we had the same opportunity — what a great blessing! However, those of us who had participated in the March Past of July 13, 1947, led the group wearing our special outfit. Others followed in the usual uniform. At that time, it seemed a very happy and special occasion for us. We went for Darshan twice, on the same day! Now, when the memory of those events comes back to us, we wonder why this special grace was showered on the girls' group only — not on the others? What was their work in planes not visible to our physical senses?

All the Groups salute Sri Aurobindo and The Mother

In 1949, when we received our new uniforms, we came to know that all the 'groups' would go for Darshan in group formation and salute the Mother and Sri Aurobindo on the coming Darshan Day, April 24. We looked forward eagerly for this special event.

April 24, 1949, is the most memorable golden day for all the participants as well as for the Department of Physical Education. Prior to the general line of devotees going for Darshan, the 'group' members, had the privilege to march in their respective uniforms saluting Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The groups assembled in two columns on the streets to the north and to the east of the main Ashram building. The groups were positioned as follows: first the two standard bearers — Abhay Singh led the files carrying the Mother's flag in blue with the Mother's symbol in gold; next Light Ganguli, standard bearer for the girls' group, with a smaller flag, white with a light blue symbol. They stood on the top step of the staircase facing the door to the Darshan room. They were followed by the girls' group. All the members stood in two columns. They stood on the steps and the queue continued till the Meditation Hall. Next came the Groups D, DK, DW followed by the Groups C and B, and finally, the little ones of Group A.

We marched into the long room and reached in front of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo who were seated as usual for Darshan. We did two counts of 'mark time' on spot facing Them, then in the next two counts turned left, our heads turned to the right, looking at Them — this turning of the head to the right was the salute. Then, we marched forward into the long passage, took a left turn, and marched straight to the west till we reached the staircase door. We turned again and came down the stairs.

This was the day when J.S.A.S.A. as a whole made its obeisance and paid homage to our dear Lord and our Sweet Mother.

All the participants walked quickly back home, changed into normal attire and came back to join the general line for Darshan. Thus the members of Physical Education had the privilege of having two Darshans of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on the same day.

One group member had asked Vasudha-ben (the Mother's attendant), "How was our March Past?" She answered: "The Mother has said that Sri Aurobindo liked the performance. Then She added that you people were looking very smart!"

To Mona Sarkar (Captain of Group C) the Mother had said that Sri Aurobindo found the marching of the boys' group to be the best!

This programme was repeated the following year on April 24, 1950.

The programme was different in 1951. In the August number of the *Bulletin of Physical Education* we read:

In 1951, as Sri Aurobindo had left His physical body, this programme was rather different. We lined up in uniform and in formation on the street outside the Mother's balcony and at 7.00 a.m. the Mother appeared and we gave her our salute. We then marched into the Ashram and formed a square around the Samadhi — the resting place of the body of our Master. The two standard-bearers stood near the Samadhi, Abhay Singh on the western side and Light on

the eastern side. Pranab-da, also beside the Samadhi, stood facing north. The Mother joined us by coming down the western stairs of the Ashram building. She stood between the open doors. Then we gave our salute to Sri Aurobindo and our Mother in a complete and enthralling silence.

It was indeed an extraordinary experience to all who were present including a number of visitors and guests. Even the whisper of the leaves in the Service tree above was stilled and in that quiet silence His sweet Presence filled the air, living and vivid and powerful as ever before, filling our hearts with joy and giving us the assurance that we are marching on to Victory.

(August, 1951, p. 40)

After the concentration was over, all the members quietly walked up in line to the Mother to receive her blessings.

‘Gymnastic Marching’

An interesting development occurred after the March Past and salute to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo on April 24, 1949.

Pranab-da writes:

About ten days before this great day, (April 24, 1949) we received the permission of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo for the march past. The grown up people wanted to present themselves in good form. So they asked whether a training course of marching could be arranged for them. Until then only the younger members had had the marching training as part of their general physical education curriculum, and not the elderly people. So a time was fixed in the evening and a regular training in marching was given to the elderly ones; and after ten days when we marched past the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, it was a great success.

Then the elderly people wanted to continue their marching training, as they liked it. That is why the training was continued even after the 24th. Gradually the number of trainees began to increase very much and it was getting extremely difficult to conduct proper marching for so many people in such a small ground. But as no one wanted to stop this movement, the idea came to continue it by mixing some simple free-hand exercises with the marching. It was highly successful and everybody liked it. As an all-round general exercise for the whole body, it proved very useful. The participants began to notice marked improvement in their general health. As it was a combination of marching and gymnastic movements, it was called “Gymnastic Marching”. Thus “Gymnastic Marching” was born.

(Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya, *Gymnastic Marching*, p. 1)

This ‘Gymnastic Marching’ was meant for the elderly members of the men’s group. They marched in four columns. First the group would march in front of the Mother, and salute her. She would then sit on a chair, in front of the map of India which is on the wall of her room in the Playground. A few lady inmates who were with her at that time would be sitting on the ground on either side of her chair. After the salute the columns separated and spread out in the whole ground and continued their exercises. She sometimes watched the whole programme of the ‘Gymnastic Marching’ being performed.

The boys’ and the girls’ groups had their regular items of games in the Volley Ball Ground or games or athletics in the Tennis Ground. When our sports activities were over there, we would rush to the Playground and join the ‘Gymnastic Marching’ which would have already started. How happy we would be if we could join the line which was in front of the Mother. Twice a week there would be a variation. After performing some initial movements, a long time after that was devoted to what was called ‘*Pas gymnastique*’. This was a movement of running steps with the knees raised high performed to the rhythm of Pranab-da’s counts. This gave the participants cardio-vascular exercise. Often this gymnastic running would continue for quite a long time. Pranab-da was waiting for the Mother, who was occupied with interviews in the easternmost room of the Playground. Only after her arrival to her place near her room was the last part of the marching done and concluded.

I remember on one such occasion after a rather long session of gymnastic running I had told the Mother, “Ma, while doing marching today, I was wondering if I would be able to complete the *pas gymnastique*. It continued for a rather long time. But I let my body just run with the rhythm and though it continued for a long duration I was not tired, I felt energetic.” Her short answer to me was, “Yes, it is like that!” I also remember how a doctor from U.K. who was visiting us, was much impressed watching the elderly people performing the ‘Gymnastic Marching’. He commented to someone that this is one of the reasons that you hardly have any cardiac problem here! (This was true then!)

Periodically, Pranab-da would add new movements for the marching. Is not that picture vivid in our minds? All the participants, the elderly men, some members of group C and group E standing in a circle in the Playground, a little to the north of the Mother’s room. Pranab-da standing in the centre of the circle. The Mother comes out and joins the circle formed by the girls who would normally be standing in that part of the ground. She would stand there in the circle, a midst us, just like one of us, watching Pranab-da demonstrate the particular new movements which he would include in that day’s marching. I have a very cherished, precious memory of one occasion when she was standing beside me, her left arm placed on my shoulder, as sometimes friends stand together. Physically I am watching Pranab-da but my whole being is aware of her divine presence and inwardly one line from Sri Aurobindo’s book *The Mother* is repeating itself, “You must keep the temple clean if you wish to install there the living Presence.”

Concentration

Pranab-da writes:

Something else developed since that time, parallel with the Gymnastic Marching, the whole formation was at attention for about half a minute and then, the order of ‘dismiss’ was given. When the Mother was free, we . . . [ended the session] by standing in front of Her. Then we began to get the Mother regularly at that time and in Her presence we began to observe that short period of silence. Now all the different groups wanted to join this silence and so a regular formation was arranged for the groups to stand around, with the Mother in the centre. The time was then gradually increased to about ten minutes. During this time everybody concentrated on their highest ideal, in the Mother’s presence, with Her help and guidance, and hence it was called Concentration. (*Gymnastic Marching*, pp. 3-4)

The Mother has said:

I try, first to make the atmosphere as calm, quiet, unified as possible, as though I were spreading the consciousness out wide, like this, and then from far above I bring down the Force as much as I can and put it upon you as strongly as I can.

So this depends exclusively on whether one is quite tranquil and well concentrated . . . Then the Force puts a pressure. And it’s above all for unifying, penetrating the whole and endeavouring to make of it something cohesive which can express collectively the Force from above.

(*Felicity Eternal*, p. 76)

In the *Bulletin* of August 1949, there is a photograph of this concentration. There, we find the Mother standing against the southern wall. The elderly men’s group standing in a close-knit rectangular formation facing her at the end of their ‘Gymnastic Marching’; the group of girls and that of the young boys standing in two formations on the eastern side facing west. Others, that is to say, the rest of the members of the elderly men and younger boys and girls made their formations, facing east. All these formations were positioned around an empty square in front of the Mother. In that empty space stood Pranab-da facing the Mother. All the lights were put out except the one just over the Mother. With Pranab-da’s order, all the members would stand in “Attention” position. We remained in this position in complete silence for about 8 to 10 minutes. During this time, “each one concentrates his best in an offering of his being and activities to the Divine work, to the future realisation for which we are preparing”. (*Bulletin* August, 1949)

It is our custom even now to have a brief concentration before and at the end of the activities of each group. The members assemble in a single file in front of their captains and when the order is given, stand in 'Attention' position and concentrate for a few minutes, before the starting as well as at the end of their daily activity. We quote here from Tara Jauhar's *Growing up with the Mother*, (p. 49), the Mother's guidance given to the groups for their daily concentration:

Sweet Mother,

*We have a minute of concentration before and after group every day.
What should we try to do during this concentration?*

Before, make an offering to the Divine of what you are going to do, so that it may be done in a spirit of consecration.

Afterwards, ask the Divine to increase the will for progress in us, so that we may become instruments that are more and more capable of serving Him.

You may also, before starting, offer yourselves to the Divine in silence.

And at the end, give thanks to the Divine in silence, I mean a movement of the *heart* without any words in the head.

(24 July 1961)

(To be continued)

CHITRA SEN

Spiritual ascension: fearless, regular, uninterrupted.

*

One will pass through as many stages as it is necessary to take, but one will arrive.

*

The intellectual attitude comes first and practice follows little by little. What is very important is to maintain very alert the will to live and to be what one knows to be the truth. Then it is impossible to stop and even more to fall back.

The Mother

(Words of the Mother II, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 14, p. 30)



Girls in their first uniform playing basketball
in the Tennis Ground in 1948



Girls playing handball in the Tennis Ground in 1948



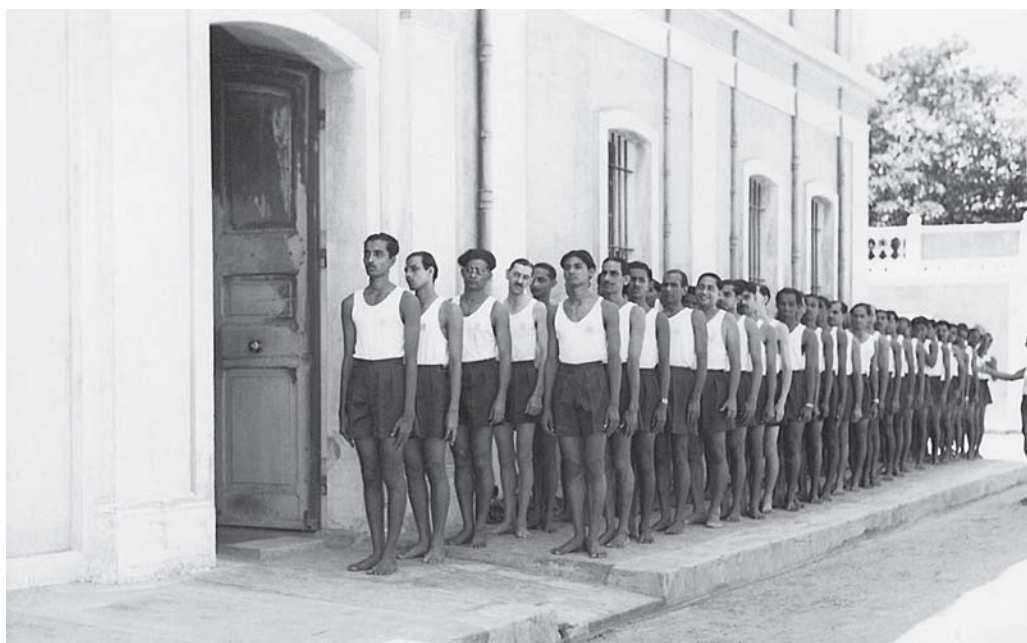
The captains in their new uniform, 1961



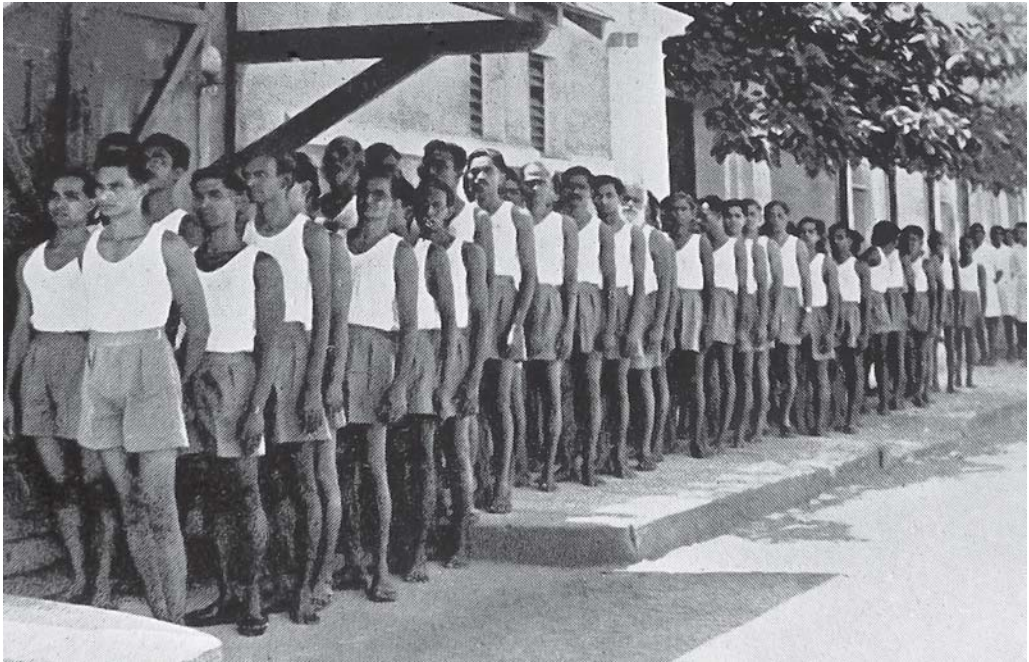
Group E going for Darshan, 24.4.1947



Group E going for Darshan



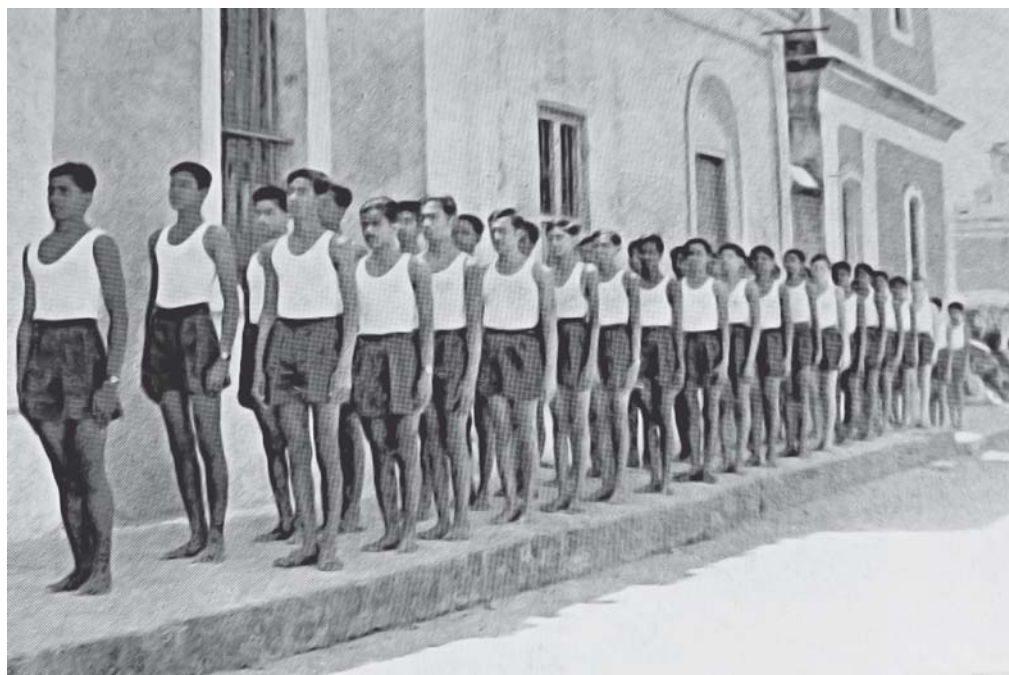
Group D going for Darshan



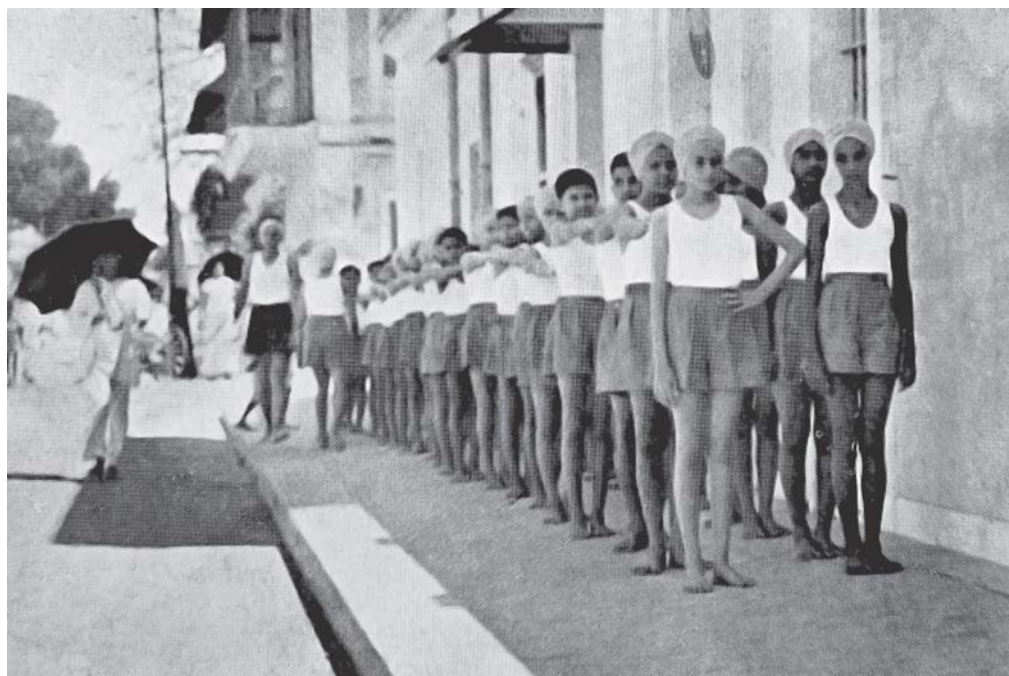
Group DK going for Darshan



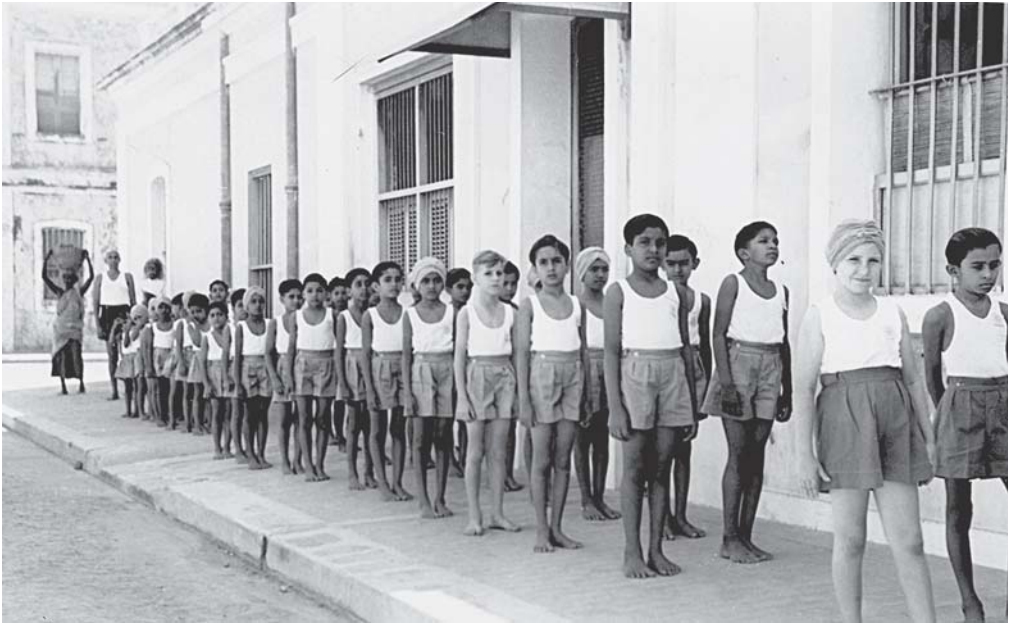
Group DW going for Darshan



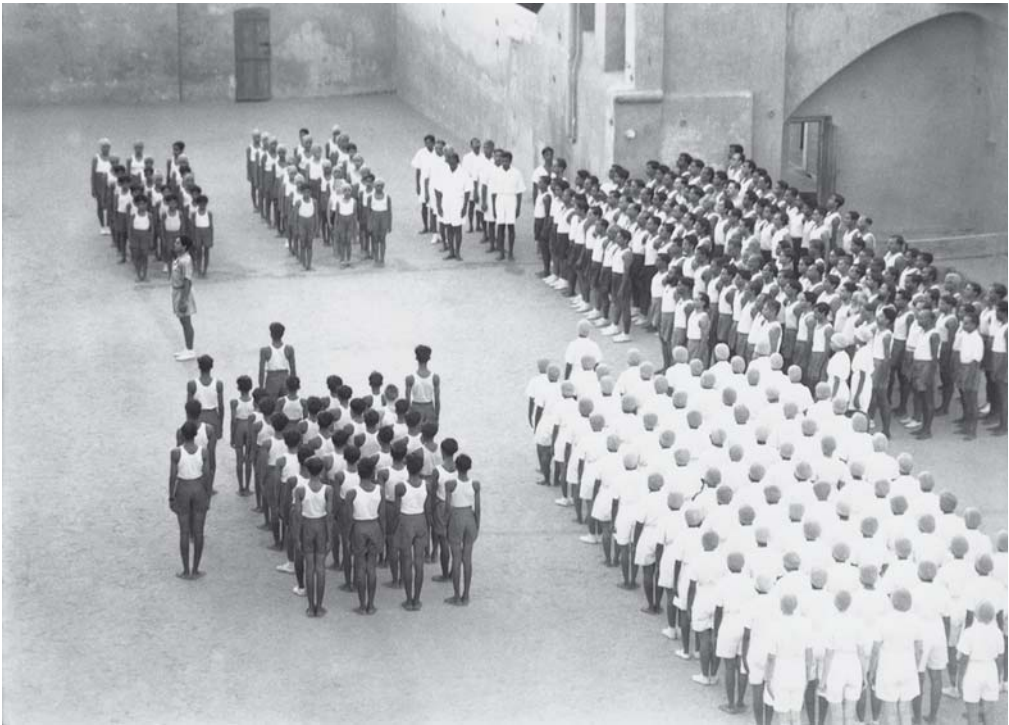
Group C going for Darshan



Group B going for Darshan



Group A going for Darshan



General concentration with the Mother in the Playground in 1949



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