

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

DECEMBER 2017

PRICE: Rs. 30.00

SUBSCRIPTIONS

INLAND

Annual: Rs. 200.00

For 10 years: Rs. 1,800.00

Price per Single Copy: Rs. 30.00

OVERSEAS

Sea Mail:

Annual: \$35

For 10 years: \$350

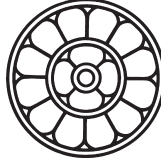
Air Mail:

Annual: \$70

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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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Publishers: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust

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Published by: MANOJ DAS GUPTA

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM TRUST

PUBLICATION DEPARTMENT, PONDICHERRY 605 002

Printed by: SWADHIN CHATTERJEE

at Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, Pondicherry 605 002

PRINTED IN INDIA

Registered with the Registrar of Newspapers under No. R.N. 8667/63

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXX

No. 12

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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THE INCONSCIENT

Artist of cosmos wrapped in thy occult shadow,
Godhead sole awake in the dreams of Matter,
Thee and thy truth men searching for ever vainly,
Find and are baffled.

Always thou workst and seemst not to know thy workings,
Yet thy touch, Geometer, wide-wayed Builder,
Vastest things can shape and minutest, potent,
Patient, unerring.

All is thou or is thine but who art thou, Dreamer,
Paradox ensouling the soulless spaces,
Self-creator weaving thy magic figures,
Mechanist Mystic?

Who thou art none knoweth, ungrasped thy nature,
Ever we see thee veiled by thy titan forces,
Only some dim greatness we feel, a mute-eyed
Inscrutable Presence.

Ageless, formless, nameless and uncreated,
Lost in night where never was seed of living,
Ancient, mighty, lone is thy wordless spirit,
Blind and immortal.

All at first was only thy giant shadow;
Time then was not, space was not yet imagined,
Thoughtless, soundless lay the inconscient ocean
Emptily brooding.

What compelled thee, O Void, to create and labour,
Or who rose up in thee, a living Maker?
How could thought begin in thy vacant silence
Measureless, dateless?

All these stars that spin in the fields of Nothing,
Tiny Time-fires lit in thy untuned darkness

Faintly hailing through the enormous distance
 Aimless and lifeless, —

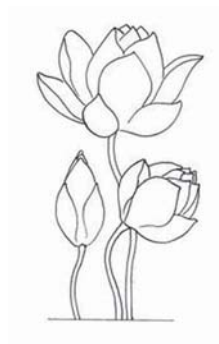
Why were they made, for what are their wheels and turnings,
 Splendid desert-hearted disastrous burnings,
 Mindless hopeless fierce inarticulate yearnings
 Fruitless for ever?

All these waves of forces that running circling
 Leap by discontinuous starts through Nowhere,
 Strangely born in quantum of causeless Matter
 Wombed out of Nihil —

Each is a lawless entity chance-directed,
 Yet a law prevails in their sum of movement;
 Is thy soul released in these particles forwards,
 Thy thought that governs?

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, CWSA Vol. 2, pp. 671-72)



THE THREE STEPS OF NATURE

We recognise then, in the past developments of Yoga, a specialising and separative tendency which, like all things in Nature, had its justifying and even imperative utility and we seek a synthesis of the specialised aims and methods which have, in consequence, come into being. But in order that we may be wisely guided in our effort, we must know, first, the general principle and purpose underlying this separative impulse and, next, the particular utilities upon which the method of each school of Yoga is founded. For the general principle we must interrogate the universal workings of Nature herself, recognising in her no merely specious and illusive activity of a distorting Maya, but the cosmic energy and working of God Himself in His universal being formulating and inspired by a vast, an infinite and yet a minutely selective Wisdom, *prajñā prasṛtā purāṇī* of the Upanishad, Wisdom that went forth from the Eternal since the beginning. For the particular utilities we must cast a penetrative eye on the different methods of Yoga and distinguish among the mass of their details the governing idea which they serve and the radical force which gives birth and energy to their processes of effectuation. Afterwards we may more easily find the one common principle and the one common power from which all derive their being and tendency, towards which all subconsciously move and in which, therefore, it is possible for all consciously to unite.

The progressive self-manifestation of Nature in man, termed in modern language his evolution, must necessarily depend upon three successive elements. There is that which is already evolved; there is that which, still imperfect, still partly fluid, is persistently in the stage of conscious evolution; and there is that which is to be evolved and may perhaps be already displayed, if not constantly, then occasionally or with some regularity of recurrence, in primary formations or in others more developed and, it may well be, even in some, however rare, that are near to the highest possible realisation of our present humanity. For the march of Nature is not drilled to a regular and mechanical forward stepping. She reaches constantly beyond herself even at the cost of subsequent deplorable retreats. She has rushes; she has splendid and mighty outbursts; she has immense realisations. She storms sometimes passionately forward hoping to take the kingdom of heaven by violence. And these self-exceedings are the revelation of that in her which is most divine or else most diabolical, but in either case the most puissant to bring her rapidly forward towards her goal.

That which Nature has evolved for us and has firmly founded is the bodily life. She has effected a certain combination and harmony of the two inferior but most fundamentally necessary elements of our action and progress upon earth, — Matter, which, however the too ethereally spiritual may despise it, is our foundation and the

first condition of all our energies and realisations, and the Life-Energy which is our means of existence in a material body and the basis there even of our mental and spiritual activities. She has successfully achieved a certain stability of her constant material movement which is at once sufficiently steady and durable and sufficiently pliable and mutable to provide a fit dwelling-place and instrument for the progressively manifesting god in humanity. This is what is meant by the fable in the Aitareya Upanishad which tells us that the gods rejected the animal forms successively offered to them by the Divine Self and only when man was produced, cried out, "This indeed is perfectly made," and consented to enter in. She has effected also a working compromise between the inertia of matter and the active Life that lives in and feeds on it, by which not only is vital existence sustained, but the fullest developments of mentality are rendered possible. This equilibrium constitutes the basic status of Nature in man and is termed in the language of Yoga his gross body composed of the material or food sheath and the nervous system or vital vehicle.¹

If, then, this inferior equilibrium is the basis and first means of the higher movements which the universal Power contemplates and if it constitutes the vehicle in which the Divine here seeks to reveal Itself, if the Indian saying is true that the body is the instrument provided for the fulfilment of the right law of our nature, then any final recoil from the physical life must be a turning away from the completeness of the divine Wisdom and a renunciation of its aim in earthly manifestation. Such a refusal may be, owing to some secret law of their development, the right attitude for certain individuals, but never the aim intended for mankind. It can be, therefore, no integral Yoga which ignores the body or makes its annulment or its rejection indispensable to a perfect spirituality. Rather, the perfecting of the body also should be the last triumph of the Spirit and to make the bodily life also divine must be God's final seal upon His work in the universe. The obstacle which the physical presents to the spiritual is no argument for the rejection of the physical; for in the unseen providence of things our greatest difficulties are our best opportunities. A supreme difficulty is Nature's indication to us of a supreme conquest to be won and an ultimate problem to be solved; it is not a warning of an inextricable snare to be shunned or of an enemy too strong for us from whom we must flee.

Equally, the vital and nervous energies in us are there for a great utility; they too demand the divine realisation of their possibilities in our ultimate fulfilment. The great part assigned to this element in the universal scheme is powerfully emphasised by the catholic wisdom of the Upanishads. "As the spokes of a wheel in its nave, so in the Life-Energy is all established, the triple knowledge and the Sacrifice and the power of the strong and the purity of the wise. Under the control of the Life-Energy is all this that is established in the triple heaven."² It is therefore no integral

1. *amakoṣa* and *prāṇakoṣa*.

2. Prasna Upanishad II. 6 and 13.

Yoga that kills these vital energies, forces them into a nerveless quiescence or roots them out as the source of noxious activities. Their purification, not their destruction, — their transformation, control and utilisation is the aim in view with which they have been created and developed in us.

If the bodily life is what Nature has firmly evolved for us as her base and first instrument, it is our mental life that she is evolving as her immediate next aim and superior instrument. This in her ordinary exaltations is the lofty preoccupying thought in her; this, except in her periods of exhaustion and recoil into a reposeful and recuperating obscurity, is her constant pursuit wherever she can get free from the trammels of her first vital and physical realisations. For here in man we have a distinction which is of the utmost importance. He has in him not a single mentality, but a double and a triple, the mind material and nervous, the pure intellectual mind which liberates itself from the illusions of the body and the senses, and a divine mind above intellect which in its turn liberates itself from the imperfect modes of the logically discriminative and imaginative reason. Mind in man is first emmeshed in the life of the body, where in the plant it is entirely involved and in animals always imprisoned. It accepts this life as not only the first but the whole condition of its activities and serves its needs as if they were the entire aim of existence. But the bodily life in man is a base, not the aim, his first condition and not his last determinant. In the just idea of the ancients man is essentially the thinker, the *Manu*, the mental being who leads the life and the body,³ not the animal who is led by them. The true human existence, therefore, only begins when the intellectual mentality emerges out of the material and we begin more and more to live in the mind independent of the nervous and physical obsession and in the measure of that liberty are able to accept rightly and rightly to use the life of the body. For freedom and not a skilful subjection is the true means of mastery. A free, not a compulsory acceptance of the conditions, the enlarged and sublimated conditions of our physical being, is the high human ideal. But beyond this intellectual mentality is the divine.

The mental life thus evolving in man is not, indeed, a common possession. In actual appearance it would seem as if it were only developed to the fullest in individuals and as if there were great numbers and even the majority in whom it is either a small and ill-organised part of their normal nature or not evolved at all or latent and not easily made active. Certainly, the mental life is not a finished evolution of Nature; it is not yet firmly founded in the human animal. The sign is that the fine and full equilibrium of vitality and matter, the sane, robust, long-lived human body is ordinarily found only in races or classes of men who reject the effort of thought, its disturbances, its tensions, or think only with the material mind. Civilised man has yet to establish an equilibrium between the fully active mind and the body; he does not normally possess it. Indeed, the increasing effort towards a more intense mental

3. *manomayah prāṇaśarīranetā*. *Mundaka Upanishad* II. 2. 8.

life seems to create, frequently, an increasing disequilibrium of the human elements, so that it is possible for eminent scientists to describe genius as a form of insanity, a result of degeneration, a pathological morbidity of Nature. The phenomena which are used to justify this exaggeration, when taken not separately, but in connection with all other relevant data, point to a different truth. Genius is one attempt of the universal Energy to so quicken and intensify our intellectual powers that they shall be prepared for those more puissant, direct and rapid faculties which constitute the play of the supra-intellectual or divine mind. It is not, then, a freak, an inexplicable phenomenon, but a perfectly natural next step in the right line of her evolution. She has harmonised the bodily life with the material mind, she is harmonising it with the play of the intellectual mentality; for that, although it tends to a depression of the full animal and vital vigour, need not produce active disturbances. And she is shooting yet beyond in the attempt to reach a still higher level. Nor are the disturbances created by her process as great as is often represented. Some of them are the crude beginnings of new manifestations; others are an easily corrected movement of disintegration, often fruitful of fresh activities and always a small price to pay for the far-reaching results that she has in view.

We may perhaps, if we consider all the circumstances, come to this conclusion that mental life, far from being a recent appearance in man, is the swift repetition in him of a previous achievement from which the Energy in the race had undergone one of her deplorable recoils. The savage is perhaps not so much the first forefather of civilised man as the degenerate descendant of a previous civilisation. For if the actuality of intellectual achievement is unevenly distributed, the capacity is spread everywhere. It has been seen that in individual cases even the racial type considered by us the lowest, the negro fresh from the perennial barbarism of Central Africa, is capable, without admixture of blood, without waiting for future generations, of the intellectual culture, if not yet of the intellectual accomplishment of the dominant European. Even in the mass men seem to need, in favourable circumstances, only a few generations to cover ground that ought apparently to be measured in the terms of millenniums. Either, then, man by his privilege as a mental being is exempt from the full burden of the tardy laws of evolution or else he already represents and with helpful conditions and in the right stimulating atmosphere can always display a high level of material capacity for the activities of the intellectual life. It is not mental incapacity, but the long rejection or seclusion from opportunity and withdrawal of the awakening impulse that creates the savage. Barbarism is an intermediate sleep, not an original darkness.

Moreover the whole trend of modern thought and modern endeavour reveals itself to the observant eye as a large conscious effort of Nature in man to effect a general level of intellectual equipment, capacity and farther possibility by universalising the opportunities which modern civilisation affords for the mental life. Even the preoccupation of the European intellect, the protagonist of this tendency, with

material Nature and the externalities of existence is a necessary part of the effort. It seeks to prepare a sufficient basis in man's physical being and vital energies and in his material environment for his full mental possibilities. By the spread of education, by the advance of the backward races, by the elevation of depressed classes, by the multiplication of labour-saving appliances, by the movement towards ideal social and economic conditions, by the labour of Science towards an improved health, longevity and sound physique in civilised humanity, the sense and drift of this vast movement translates itself in easily intelligible signs. The right or at least the ultimate means may not always be employed, but their aim is the right preliminary aim, — a sound individual and social body and the satisfaction of the legitimate needs and demands of the material mind, sufficient ease, leisure, equal opportunity, so that the whole of mankind and no longer only the favoured race, class or individual may be free to develop the emotional and intellectual being to its full capacity. At present the material and economic aim may predominate, but always, behind, there works or there waits in reserve the higher and major impulse.

And when the preliminary conditions are satisfied, when the great endeavour has found its base, what will be the nature of that farther possibility which the activities of the intellectual life must serve? If Mind is indeed Nature's highest term, then the entire development of the rational and imaginative intellect and the harmonious satisfaction of the emotions and sensibilities must be to themselves sufficient. But if, on the contrary, man is more than a reasoning and emotional animal, if beyond that which is being evolved, there is something that has to be evolved, then it may well be that the fullness of the mental life, the suppleness, flexibility and wide capacity of the intellect, the ordered richness of emotion and sensibility may be only a passage towards the development of a higher life and of more powerful faculties which are yet to manifest and to take possession of the lower instrument, just as mind itself has so taken possession of the body that the physical being no longer lives only for its own satisfaction but provides the foundation and the materials for a superior activity.

The assertion of a higher than the mental life is the whole foundation of Indian philosophy and its acquisition and organisation is the veritable object served by the methods of Yoga. Mind is not the last term of evolution, not an ultimate aim, but, like body, an instrument. It is even so termed in the language of Yoga, the inner instrument.⁴ And Indian tradition asserts that this which is to be manifested is not a new term in human experience, but has been developed before and has even governed humanity in certain periods of its development. In any case, in order to be known it must at one time have been partly developed. And if since then Nature has sunk back from her achievement, the reason must always be found in some unrealised harmony, some insufficiency of the intellectual and material basis to which she has

4. *antaḥkāraṇa*.

now returned, some over-specialisation of the higher to the detriment of the lower existence.

But what then constitutes this higher or highest existence to which our evolution is tending? In order to answer the question we have to deal with a class of supreme experiences, a class of unusual conceptions which it is difficult to represent accurately in any other language than the ancient Sanskrit tongue in which alone they have been to some extent systematised. The only approximate terms in the English language have other associations and their use may lead to many and even serious inaccuracies. The terminology of Yoga recognises besides the status of our physical and vital being, termed the gross body and doubly composed of the food sheath and the vital vehicle, besides the status of our mental being, termed the subtle body and singly composed of the mind sheath or mental vehicle,⁵ a third, supreme and divine status of supra-mental being, termed the causal body and composed of a fourth and a fifth vehicle⁶ which are described as those of knowledge and bliss. But this knowledge is not a systematised result of mental questionings and reasonings, not a temporary arrangement of conclusions and opinions in the terms of the highest probability, but rather a pure self-existent and self-luminous Truth. And this bliss is not a supreme pleasure of the heart and sensations with the experience of pain and sorrow as its background, but a delight also self-existent and independent of objects and particular experiences, a self-delight which is the very nature, the very stuff, as it were, of a transcendent and infinite existence.

Do such psychological conceptions correspond to anything real and possible? All Yoga asserts them as its ultimate experience and supreme aim. They form the governing principles of our highest possible state of consciousness, our widest possible range of existence. There is, we say, a harmony of supreme faculties, corresponding roughly to the psychological faculties of revelation, inspiration and intuition, yet acting not in the intuitive reason or the divine mind, but on a still higher plane, which see Truth directly face to face, or rather live in the truth of things both universal and transcendent and are its formulation and luminous activity. And these faculties are the light of a conscious existence superseding the egoistic and itself both cosmic and transcendent, the nature of which is Bliss. These are obviously divine and, as man is at present apparently constituted, superhuman states of consciousness and activity. A trinity of transcendent existence, self-awareness and self-delight⁷ is, indeed, the metaphysical description of the supreme Atman, the self-formulation, to our awakened knowledge, of the Unknowable whether conceived as a pure Impersonality or as a cosmic Personality manifesting the universe. But in Yoga they are regarded also in their psychological aspects as states of subjective existence to which

5. *manah-koṣa*.

6. *viññānakoṣa* and *ānandakoṣa*.

7. *saccidānanda*.

our waking consciousness is now alien, but which dwell in us in a superconscious plane and to which, therefore, we may always ascend.

For, as is indicated by the name, causal body (*kāraṇa*), as opposed to the two others which are instruments (*karāṇa*), this crowning manifestation is also the source and effective power of all that in the actual evolution has preceded it. Our mental activities are, indeed, a derivation, selection and, so long as they are divided from the truth that is secretly their source, a deformation of the divine knowledge. Our sensations and emotions have the same relation to the Bliss, our vital forces and actions to the aspect of Will or Force assumed by the divine consciousness, our physical being to the pure essence of that Bliss and Consciousness. The evolution which we observe and of which we are the terrestrial summit may be considered, in a sense, as an inverse manifestation, by which these supreme Powers in their unity and their diversity use, develop and perfect the imperfect substance and activities of Matter, of Life and of Mind so that they, the inferior modes, may express in mutable relativity an increasing harmony of the divine and eternal states from which they are born. If this be the truth of the universe, then the goal of evolution is also its cause, it is that which is immanent in its elements and out of them is liberated. But the liberation is surely imperfect if it is only an escape and there is no return upon the containing substance and activities to exalt and transform them. The immanence itself would have no credible reason for being if it did not end in such a transfiguration. But if human mind can become capable of the glories of the divine Light, human emotion and sensibility can be transformed into the mould and assume the measure and movement of the supreme Bliss, human action not only represent but feel itself to be the motion of a divine and non-egoistic Force and the physical substance of our being sufficiently partake of the purity of the supernal essence, sufficiently unify plasticity and durable constancy to support and prolong these highest experiences and agencies, then all the long labour of Nature will end in a crowning justification and her evolutions reveal their profound significance.

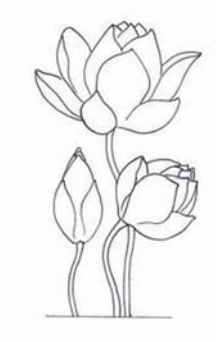
So dazzling is even a glimpse of this supreme existence and so absorbing its attraction that, once seen, we feel readily justified in neglecting all else for its pursuit. Even, by an opposite exaggeration to that which sees all things in Mind and the mental life as an exclusive ideal, Mind comes to be regarded as an unworthy deformation and a supreme obstacle, the source of an illusory universe, a negation of the Truth and itself to be denied and all its works and results annulled if we desire the final liberation. But this is a half-truth which errs by regarding only the actual limitations of Mind and ignores its divine intention. The ultimate knowledge is that which perceives and accepts God in the universe as well as beyond the universe; the integral Yoga is that which, having found the Transcendent, can return upon the universe and possess it, retaining the power freely to descend as well as ascend the great stair of existence. For if the eternal Wisdom exists at all, the faculty of Mind also must have some high use and destiny. That use must depend on its place in the

ascent and in the return and that destiny must be a fulfilment and transfiguration, not a rooting out or an annulling.

We perceive, then, these three steps in Nature, a bodily life which is the basis of our existence here in the material world, a mental life into which we emerge and by which we raise the bodily to higher uses and enlarge it into a greater completeness, and a divine existence which is at once the goal of the other two and returns upon them to liberate them into their highest possibilities. Regarding none of them as either beyond our reach or below our nature and the destruction of none of them as essential to the ultimate attainment, we accept this liberation and fulfilment as part at least and a large and important part of the aim of Yoga.

SRI AUROBINDO

(The Synthesis of Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 23, pp. 9-19)



THE IDEAL SOLUTION — A FREE GROUPING OF MANKIND

These principles founded on the essential and constant tendencies of Nature in the development of human life ought clearly to be the governing ideas in any intelligent attempt at the unification of the human race. And it might so be done if that unification could be realised after the manner of a Lycurgan constitution or by the law of an ideal Manu, the perfect sage and king. Attempted, as it will be, in very different fashion according to the desires, passions and interests of great masses of men and guided by no better light than the half-enlightened reason of the world's intellectuals and the empirical opportunism of the world's statesmen and politicians, it is likely to be done by a succession of confused experiments, recoils and returns, resistances and persistences; it will progress in spite of human unreason in the midst of a clamour of rival ideas and interests, stumble through a war of principles, advance by a clash of vehement parties ending in more or less clumsy compromises. It may even, as we have said, be managed in the most unideal, though not the most inconvenient method of all, by a certain amount of violence, the domination of a few vast and powerful empires or even the emergence of a single predominant world-empire, a king-state that will be accepted or will impose itself as the arbiter, if not the ruler of mankind. Not any intelligent principle, but necessity and convenience, not urgent light, but urgent power is likely to be the effective force in any political, administrative and economic unification of the race.

Still, though the ideal may not be immediately practicable, it is that to which our action ought more and more to move. And if the best method cannot always be employed, it is well to know the best method, so that in the strife of principles and forces and interests something of it may enter into our dealings with each other and mitigate the errors, stumblings and sufferings which our ignorance and unreason compel us to pay as the price of our progress. In principle, then, the ideal unification of mankind would be a system in which, as a first rule of common and harmonious life, the human peoples would be allowed to form their own groupings according to their natural divisions of locality, race, culture, economic convenience and not according to the more violent accidents of history or the egoistic will of powerful nations whose policy it must always be to compel the smaller or less timely organised to serve their interests as dependents or obey their commands as subjects. The present arrangement of the world has been worked out by economic forces, by political diplomacies, treaties and purchases and by military violence without regard to any moral principle or any general rule of the good of mankind. It has served roughly certain ends of the World-Force in its development and helped at much cost of bloodshed, suffering, cruelty, oppression and revolt to bring humanity more together.

Like all things that, though in themselves unideal, have been and have asserted themselves with force, it has had its justification, not moral but biological, in the necessity of the rough methods which Nature has to use with a half-animal mankind as with her animal creation. But the great step of unification once taken, the artificial arrangements which have resulted would no longer have any reason for existence. It would be so in the first place because the convenience and good of the world at large and not the satisfaction of the egoism, pride and greed of particular nations would be the object to be held in view, in the second because whatever legitimate claim any nation might have upon others, such as necessities of economic well-being and expansion, would be arranged for in a soundly organised world-union or world-state no longer on the principle of strife and competition, but on a principle of cooperation or mutual adjustment or at least of competition regulated by law and equity and just interchange. Therefore no ground would remain for forced and artificial groupings except that of historical tradition or accomplished fact which would obviously have little weight in a great change of world conditions impossible to achieve unless the race is prepared to break hundreds of traditions and unsettle the great majority of accomplished facts.

The first principle of human unity, groupings being necessary, should be a system of free and natural groupings which would leave no room for internal discords, mutual incompatibilities and repression and revolt as between race and race or people and people. For otherwise the world-state would be founded in part at least upon a system of legalised injustice and repression or at the best upon a principle of force and compulsion, however mitigated. Such a system would contain dissatisfied elements eager to seize upon any hope of change and throw their moral force and whatever material power they might still keep on the side of any velleities that might appear in the race towards disorder, secession, dissolution of the system and perhaps a return to the old order of things. Moral centres of revolt would thus be preserved which, given the restlessness of the human mind, could not fail to have, in periods favourable to them, a great power of contagion and self-diffusion. In fact, any system which would appear to stereotype anomalies, eternise injustice and inequality or rest permanently on a principle of compulsion and forced subjection, could have no security and would be condemned by its very nature to transience.

This was the principal weakness of the drift during the war towards the settlement of the world on the basis of the actual *status quo* that followed the recent world convulsion. Such a settlement must have had the vice of fixing conditions which in their nature must be transient. It would mean not only the rule of this or that nation over dissatisfied foreign minorities but the supremacy of Europe over most of Asia and all Africa. A league or incipient unity of the nations would be equivalent under such conditions to the control of the enormous mass of mankind by an oligarchy of a few white races. Such could not be the principle of a long-enduring settlement of the world. For then one of two alternatives would be inevitable.

The new system would have to support by law and force the existing condition of things and resist any attempt at radical change; but this would lead to an unnatural suppression of great natural and moral forces and in the end a tremendous disorder, perhaps a world-shattering explosion. Or else some general legislative authority and means of change would have to be established by which the judgment and sentiment of mankind would be able to prevail over imperialistic egoisms and which would enable the European, Asiatic and African peoples now subject to make the claims of their growing self-consciousness felt in the councils of the world.¹ But such an authority, interfering with the egoisms of great and powerful empires, would be difficult to establish, slow to act and not by any means at ease in its exercise of power or moral influence or likely to be peaceful or harmonious in its deliberations. It would either reduce itself to a representative of the sentiments and interests of a ruling oligarchy of great Powers or end in such movements of secession and civil war between the States as settled the question of slavery in America. There would be only one other possible issue, — that the liberal sentiments and principles at first aroused by the war in Europe should become settled and permanent forces of action and extend themselves to the dealings of European nations with their non-European dependencies. In other words, it must become a settled political principle with European nations to change the character of their imperialism and convert their empires as soon as might be from artificial into true psychological unities.

But that would end inevitably in the recognition of the principle we have advanced, the arrangement of the world in a system of free and natural and not as hitherto of partly free and partly forced groupings. For a psychological unity could only be assured by a free assent of nations now subject to their inclusion in the imperial aggregate and the power of free assent would imply a power of free dissent and separation. If owing to incompatibility of culture, temperament or economic or other interest the psychological unity could not be established, either such separation would be inevitable or else there must be a resort to the old principle of force, — a difficult matter when dealing with great masses of men who must in the course of the new process have arrived at self-consciousness and recovered their united intellectual force and vitality. Imperial unities of this kind must be admitted as a possible, but by no means an inevitable next step in human aggregation easier to realise than a united mankind in present conditions; but such unities could have only two rational purposes, one as a half-way house to the unity of all the nations of the world and an experiment in administrative and economic confederation on a large scale, the other as a means of habituating nations of different race, traditions, colour, civilisation to dwell together in a common political family as the whole

1. The League of Nations started with some dim ideal of this kind; but even its first halting attempts at opposing imperial egoisms ended in secession and avoided a civil war among its members only by drawing back from its own commitments. In fact, it was never more than an instrument subservient to the policy of a few great Powers.

human race would have to dwell in any scheme of unity which respected the principle of variation and did not compel a dead level of uniformity. The imperial heterogeneous unit has a value in Nature's processes only as a means towards this greater unity and, where not maintained afterwards by some natural attraction or by some miracle of entire fusion, — a thing improbable, if possible, — would cease to exist once the greater unity was accomplished. On this line of development also and indeed on any line of development the principle of a free and natural grouping of peoples must be the eventual conclusion, the final and perfect basis. It must be so because on no other foundation could the unification of mankind be secure or sound. And it must be so because once unification is firmly accomplished and war and jealous national competition replaced by better methods of intercourse and mutual adjustment, there can be no object in maintaining any other more artificial system, and therefore both reason and convenience would compel the change. The institution of a natural system of grouping would become as much a matter of course as the administrative arrangement of a country according to its natural provinces. And it would be as much a necessity of reason or convenience as the regard necessarily paid in any system of devolution or free federation to race or national sentiment or long-established local unities. Other considerations might modify the application of the principle, but there would be none that could be strong enough to abrogate it.

The natural unit in such a grouping is the nation, because that is the basis natural evolution has firmly created and seems indeed to have provided with a view to the greater unity. Unless, therefore, unification is put off to a much later date of our history and in the meanwhile the national principle of aggregation loses its force and vitality and is dissolved in some other, the free and natural nation-unit and perhaps the nation-group would be the just and living support of a sound and harmonious world system. Race still counts and would enter in as an element, but only as a subordinate element. In certain groupings it would predominate and be decisive; in others it would be set at nought partly by a historic and national sentiment overriding differences of language and race, partly by economic and other relations created by local contact or geographical oneness. Cultural unity would count, but need not in all cases prevail; even the united force of race and culture might not be sufficiently strong to be decisive.

The examples of this complexity are everywhere. Switzerland belongs by language, race and culture and even by affinities of sentiment to different national aggregations, two of sentiment and culture, the Latin and the Teutonic, three of race and language, the German, French and Italian, and these differences worked sufficiently to bewilder and divide Swiss sympathies in the clash of nations; but the decisive feeling overriding all others is the sentiment of Helvetian nationality and that would seem to forbid now and always any idea of a voluntary partition or dissolution of Switzerland's long-standing natural, local and historic unity. Alsace belongs predominantly by race, language and early history to a Germanic union,

but the German appealed in vain to these titles and laboured in vain to change Alsace-Lorraine into Elsass-Lothringen; the living sentiments and affinities of the people, national, historical, cultural, bound it still to France. Canada and Australia have no geographical connection with the British Isles or with each other and the former would seem to belong by predestination to an American group-unity; but certainly, in the absence of a change of sentiment not now easily foreseen, both would prefer to belong to a British grouping rather than the one fuse itself into an increasingly cosmopolitan American nation or the other stand apart as an Australasian union. On the other hand the Slavonic and Latin elements of Austro-Hungary, though they belonged by history, geographical position and economic convenience to that empire, moved strongly towards separation and, where local sentiments permitted, to union with their racial, cultural and linguistic kin. If Austria had dealt with her Slav subjects as with the Magyars or had been able to build a national culture of her own out of her German, Slav, Magyar and Italian elements, it would have been otherwise and her unity would have been secure against all external or internal forces of disruption. Race, language, local relations and economic convenience are powerful factors, but what decides must be a dominant psychological element that makes for union. To that subtler force all others, however restless they may be, must succumb; however much they may seek for free particularist expression and self-possession within a larger unity, they must needs subordinate themselves to the more powerful attraction.

For this very reason the basic principle adopted must be a free grouping and not that of some abstract or practical rule or principle of historic tradition or actual status imposed upon the nations. It is easy to build up a system in the mind and propose to erect it on foundations which would be at first sight rational and convenient. At first sight it would seem that the unity of mankind could most rationally and conveniently arrange itself upon the basis of a European grouping, an Asiatic grouping, an American grouping, with two or three sub-groups in America, Latin and English-speaking, three in Asia, the Mongolian, Indian and West-Asian, with Moslem North Africa perhaps as a natural annexe to the third of these, four in Europe, the Latin, Slavonic, Teutonic and Anglo-Celtic, the latter with the colonies that still chose to adhere to it, while Central and Southern Africa might be left to develop under present conditions but with the more humane and progressive principles upon which the sentiment of a united humanity would insist. Certain of the actual and obvious difficulties might not be of great importance under a better system of things. We know, for instance, that nations closely connected by every apparent tie, are actually divided by stronger antipathies than those more ideative and less actual which separate them from peoples who have with them no tie of affinity. Mongolian Japan and Mongolian China are sharply divided from each other in sentiment; Arab and Turk and Persian, although one in Islamic religion and culture, would not, if their present sentiments towards each other persisted, make an

entirely happy family. Scandinavian Norway and Sweden had everything to draw them together and perpetuate their union, — except a strong, if irrational sentiment which made the continuance of that union impossible. But these antipathies really persist only so long as there is some actual unfriendly pressure or sense of subjugation or domination or fear of the oppression of the individuality of one by the other; once that is removed they would be likely to disappear. It is notable, for instance, that since the separation of Norway and Sweden the three Scandinavian States have been increasingly disposed to act together and regard themselves as a natural grouping in Europe. The long antipathy of the Irish and English nations is declining in the actuality of a juster, though still imperfect relation between these two national individualities, as the antipathy of Austrian and Magyar gave way when once a just relation had been established between the two kingdoms. It is easily conceivable therefore that with a system in which the causes of hostility would disappear, natural affinities would prevail and a grouping of the kind imagined might become more easily practicable. It is arguable also that the trend of mankind under a great stress of tendency towards unification would naturally move to the creation of such a symmetry. It may be that a great change and revolution in the world would powerfully and rapidly abolish all the obstacles, as the obstacles of the old regime to a uniform democratic system were abolished in France by the French Revolution. But any such arrangement would be quite impracticable unless and until the actual sentiments of the peoples corresponded with these systems of rational convenience: the state of the world is at present far removed from any such ideal correspondence.

The idea of a new basis founded on the principle of national sentiment seemed at one time to be taking within a limited field the shape of a practical proposition. It was confined to a European resettlement and even there it was only to be imposed by the logic of war and force upon defeated empires. The others proposed to recognise it for themselves only in a restricted form, Russia by the concession of autonomy to Poland, England by Home Rule in Ireland and a federation with her colonies, while other denials of the principle were still to persist and even perhaps one or two new denials of it to be established in obedience to imperial ambitions and exigencies. A name even was given to this new principle and for a time the idea of self-determination received an official sanction and almost figured as a gospel. However imperfect the application, this practical enforcement of it, if effected, would have meant the physical birth and infancy of a new ideal and would have held forth to the hopes of mankind the prospect of its eventual application in a larger field until it came to be universalised. Even if the victory of the Allies put an end to these high professions, it is no longer possible to consider this ideal of a rearrangement of the world on the basis of free national groupings as an impossible dream, an altogether chimerical ideal.

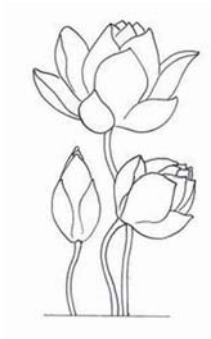
Still, the forces against it are considerable and it is idle to hope that they will be overcome except after long and difficult struggles. National and imperial egoism is

the first and most powerful of the contrary forces. To give up the instinct of domination and the desire still to be rulers and supreme where rule and supremacy have been the reward of past efforts, to sacrifice the advantages of a commercial exploitation of dependencies and colonies which can only be assured by the confirmation of dominance and supremacy, to face disinterestedly the emergence into free national activity of vigorous and sometimes enormous masses of men, once subjects and passive means of self-enrichment but henceforth to be powerful equals and perhaps formidable rivals, is too great a demand upon egoistic human nature to be easily and spontaneously conceded where concession is not forced upon the mind by actual necessity or the hope of some great and palpable gain that will compensate the immediate and visible loss. There is, too, the claim of Europe, not yet renounced, to hold the rest of the world in the interests of civilisation, by which is meant European civilisation, and to insist upon its acceptance as a condition for the admission of Asiatic races to any kind of equality or freedom. This claim which is destined soon to lose all its force in Asia, has still a strong justification in the actual state of the African continent. For the present, let us note that it works strongly against a wider recognition of the new-born ideal and that until the problems it raises are resolved, the settlement of the world on any such ideal principle must wait upon the evolution of new forces and the coming to a head both in Asia and Europe of yet unaccomplished spiritual, intellectual and material revolutions.²

SRI AUROBINDO

(*The Ideal of Human Unity*, CWSA, Vol. 25, pp. 427-36)

2. These revolutions have now happened and these obstacles, though not yet entirely, have faded or are fading out of existence.



‘THE MESSENGER FLAME OF THY BEATITUDES’

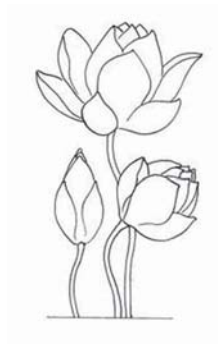
June 2, 1914

In a silent contemplation, in a mute adoration, uniting myself with all this dark and painful substance, I hail Thee, O Lord, as the divine saviour; I bless Thy love as the supreme liberator, I offer thanks for its countless boons, and I give myself fully to Thee so that Thou mayst complete Thy work of perfecting. Then identifying myself with Thy love, I am nothing but Thy inexhaustible love; I penetrate all things; living within the heart of each atom I kindle therein the fire which purifies and transfigures, the fire that never burns out, the messenger flame of Thy beatitudes, realiser of all perfections.

Then this very love grows silently contemplative, and turning to Thee, O unknowable Splendour, awaits in ecstasy Thy New Manifestation . . .

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 164)



IMAGINATION

Sweet Mother, the other day you told me that it was necessary to learn how to discipline the imagination.

Yes.

How is it done?

Imagination is something very complex and manifold — what is vaguely called “imagination”.

It can be the capacity for seeing and recording, noting the forms in some mental or other domain. There are artistic, literary, poetic domains, domains of action, scientific domains, all belonging to the mind — not a very high and abstract mind, a mind above the physical mind which, without our knowing it, pours out constantly through the individual and collective mind to manifest in action.

Some people, through a special faculty, are in contact with these domains, take up one formation or other that is there, draw them to themselves and give them an expression. This power of expression is different in different people, but those who can open themselves to these domains, to *see* things there, to draw these forms towards themselves and express them — either in literature or in painting or music or in action or science — are, according to the degree of their power of expression either very highly talented beings or else geniuses.

There are higher geniuses still. They are people who can open to a higher region, a higher force which, passing through the mental layers, comes and takes a form in a human mind and reveals itself in the world as new truths, new philosophical systems, new spiritual teachings, which are the works and at the same time the actions of the great beings who come to take birth on earth. That is an imagination which can be called “Truth-imagination”. These higher forces, when they come down into the earth-atmosphere, take living, active, powerful forms, spread throughout the world and prepare a new age.

These two kinds of imagination are what could be called higher imaginations.

And now, to come down to a more ordinary level, everyone has in him, in a greater or lesser measure, the power to give form to his mental activity and use this form either in his ordinary activity or to create and realise something. We are all the time, *always*, creating images, creating forms. We send them into the atmosphere without even knowing that we are doing so — they go roaming about, pass from one person to another, meet companions, sometimes join together and get on happily, sometimes create conflicts, and there are battles; for often, very often, in these mental

imaginations there is a small element of will which tries to realise itself, and then everyone tries to send out his formation so that it can act, so that things can happen as he wants and, as everyone does this, it creates a general confusion. If our eyes were open to the vision of all these forms in the atmosphere, we would see very amazing things: battlefields, waves, onsets, retreats of a *crowd* of small mental entities which are constantly thrown out into the air and always try to realise themselves. All these formations have a common tendency to want to materialise and realise themselves physically, and as they are countless — they are far too many for there to be room enough on earth to manifest them — they jostle and elbow one another, they try to push back those which do not agree with them or even form armies marching in good order, always to take up the available room both in time and space — it is only a very small space compared with the countless number of creations.

So, individually, this is what happens. Some people do all that without knowing it — perhaps everybody — and they are constantly tossed from one thing to another, and hope, wish, desire, are disappointed, sometimes happy, sometimes in despair, for they don't have any control or mastery over these things. But the beginning of wisdom is to look at ourselves thinking and to see this phenomenon, become aware of this constant projection into the atmosphere of small *living* entities which are trying to manifest. All this comes out of the mental atmosphere which we carry within ourselves. Once we see and observe, we can begin to sort them out, that is, to push back what is not in conformity with our highest will or aspiration and allow to move towards manifestation only the formations which can help us to progress and develop normally.

This is the control of active thought, and that was what I meant the other day.

How many times you sit and become aware that the thought is beginning to form images for itself, to tell itself a story; and so, when you have become a little expert at it, not only do you see unfolding before you the history of what you would like to happen in life, in your own life, but you can take something away, add a detail, perfect your work, make a really *fine* story in which everything conforms with your highest aspiration. And once you have made a complete harmonious construction, as perfect as you can make it, then you open your hands and let the bird fly away.

If it is well made, it always realises itself in the end. And that is what one doesn't know.

But the thing is realised in the course of time, sometimes long afterwards, when you have forgotten your story, can no longer remember having told it to yourself — you have changed much, are thinking about other things, making other stories, and the first one no longer interests you; and if you are not very attentive, when the result of the first story comes, you are already very far away from it and no longer remember at all that this is the result of your own story. . . . And that is

why it is so important to control yourself, for if within you there are multiple and contradictory wills — not only wills but tendencies, orientations, levels of life — all this causes battles in your life. For example, at your highest level you have fashioned a beautiful story which you send out into the world, but then, perhaps the next day, perhaps on the very same day, perhaps a little later, you have come down to a much more material level, and these things from above seem to you a little . . . fairylike, unreal; and you begin to make very concrete, very utilitarian formations which are not always very pretty . . . and these too go out.

I have known people with such opposite sides in their nature, so contradictory, that one day they could make a magnificent, luminous, powerful formation for realisation, and then the next day a defeatist, dark, black formation — a formation of despair — and so both would go out. And I was able to follow in the course of circumstances the beautiful one being realised, and while it was being realised, the dark one demolishing what the first one had done. And that is how it is in the larger lines of life as in its smaller details. And all that because one does not watch oneself thinking, because one believes one is the slave of these contradictory movements, because one says, “Oh! Today I am not feeling well. Oh! Today things seem sad to me”, and one says this as if it were an ineluctable fate against which one could do nothing. But if one stands back or ascends a step, one can look at all these things, put them in their place, keep some, destroy or get rid of those one does not want and put all one’s imaginative power — what is called imaginative — only in those one wants and which conform with one’s highest aspiration. That is what I call controlling one’s imagination.

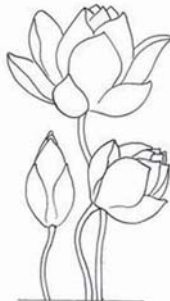
It is very interesting. When one learns to do it and does it regularly one no longer has time to feel bored.

And instead of being a cork afloat on the waves of the sea and tossed here and there by each wave, defencelessly, one becomes a bird which opens its wings, flies above the waves and goes wherever it wants. That’s all.

3 September 1958

THE MOTHER

(*Questions and Answers 1957-1958*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 9, pp. 385-88)



VALUE OF COLLECTIVE PRAYER

Sweet Mother, what is the effect and value of collective prayer?

We have already spoken about this, about collective prayers, the use that has been made of them. I believe that it has even been published in the *Bulletin*.

Besides, there are different kinds of collective prayer, just as there are different kinds of collectivities. There is the anonymous mass, the crowd, formed by chance circumstances, without any inner coordination, impelled by the force of circumstance, as for instance when a king or a person who attracts public attention is in a critical situation, either ill or the victim of an accident, and the people gather to obtain news and also to express their feelings; and through chance circumstances people have collected there, that is, there is no inner link except that of the same emotion or interest. There have been cases of crowds spontaneously beginning to pray to ask for the recovery of someone in whom they were specially interested. Of course, these very crowds can gather for a completely different purpose, out of hatred, and their cries are also a sort of prayer, a prayer to the adverse and destructive forces.

Those movements are spontaneous, not organised, unexpected.

There is also the collectivity formed by individuals who have gathered together around an ideal or a teaching or an action they want to carry out, and who have an organising link between them, the link of the same purpose, the same will and the same faith. These can gather in a methodical manner to practise common prayer and meditation, and if their aim is high, their organisation good, their ideal powerful, through their prayers or meditations these groups can have a considerable effect on world events or on their own inner development and collective progress. These groups are necessarily far superior to others, but they don't have the blind strength of the mobs, the collective action of the crowd. They replace this vehemence, this intensity by the strength of a deliberate and conscious organisation.

At all times there have been on earth groups organised in this way. Some of them have had a historical life, a historical action in the world, but as a rule they have not succeeded better with the crowd, the mass, than exceptional individuals. They have always been suspected and subjected to attacks, persecutions, and often they have also been dissolved in a very brutal, obscure and ignorant way. . . . There were those semi-religious, semi-chivalric groups, gathered around a belief or rather a creed, with a definite aim, which have had a very interesting history in the world. And certainly, they have done much for collective progress through their individual effort.

There is an ideal organisation which, if fully realised, could create a kind of very powerful unity, composed of elements all having the same aim and the same

will and with enough inner development to be able to give a very coherent body to this inner oneness of purpose, motive, aspiration and action.

At all times centres of initiation have tried this, more or less successfully, and this is always mentioned in all occult traditions as an extremely powerful means of action.

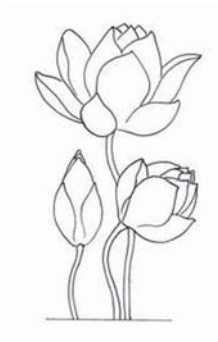
If the collective unit could attain the same cohesion as the individual unit, it would multiply the strength and action of the individual.

Usually, if several individuals are brought together, the collective quality of the group is much lower than the individual value of each person taken separately, but with a sufficiently conscious and coordinated organisation, it would be possible, on the contrary, to *multiply* the power of individual action.

6 August 1958

THE MOTHER

(Questions and Answers 1957-1958, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 9, pp. 369-70)



‘IT IS ONLY WHEN YOU BEGIN TO WALK ON THE PATH . . .’

Mother reads from *The Synthesis of Yoga*, “Self-Consecration”. [Then a clarification is requested by a disciple.]

“Often he (the sadhak) finds that even after he has won persistently his own personal battle, he has still to win it over and over again . . .”

Yes. So?

Then does this mean that others profit by his sadhana?

You understand, it’s like that for everyone.

If there was only one, it could be like this: that he alone could do it for all; but if everybody does it . . . you understand . . .

You are fifty persons doing the Integral Yoga. If it is only one of the fifty who is doing it, then he does it for all the fifty. But if each one of the fifty is doing it, each doing it for all the fifty, he does it actually for one person alone, because all do it for all.

But the work is much longer?

One must widen oneself.

The work is more complicated, it is more complete, it asks for a greater power, a greater wideness, a greater patience, a greater tolerance, a greater endurance; all these things are necessary. But in fact, if each one does perfectly what he has to do, it is no longer only one single person who does the whole thing: not one single person who does it for all, but all now form only one person who does it for the whole group.

This ought to form a kind of sufficient unity among all those who are doing it, so that they no longer feel the distinction. This is indeed the ideal way of doing it: that they now form only one single body, one single personality, working at once each for himself and for the others without any distinction.

Truly speaking, it was the first question which came up when I met Sri Aurobindo. I think I have already told you this; I don’t remember now, but I spoke about it recently. Should one do one’s yoga and reach the goal and then later take up the work with others or should one immediately let all those who have the same aspiration come to him and go forward all together towards the goal?

Because of my earlier work and all that I had tried, I came to Sri Aurobindo with the question very precisely formulated. For the two possibilities were there: either to do an intensive individual sadhana by withdrawing from the world, that is, by no longer having any contact with others, or else to let the group be formed naturally and spontaneously, not preventing it from being formed, allowing it to form, and starting all together on the path.

Well, the decision was not at all a mental choice; it came spontaneously. The circumstances were such that there was no choice; that is, quite naturally, spontaneously, the group was formed in such a way that it became an imperious necessity. And so once we have started like that, it is finished, we have to go to the end like that.

At the beginning there were five, ten, not more. There were five or six for a long time. It became ten, twelve, about twenty; then thirty, thirty-five. That remained for quite a long while. And then suddenly, you know, it started; and then here we are! The last figure was more than eleven hundred. We are growing.

Now, among these there are many who do not do the sadhana, then the problem does not come up. But for all those who do it, it is like this, it is as Sri Aurobindo has described it here. And if one wants to do the thing in a solitary way, it is absolutely impossible to do it totally. For every physical being, however complete he may be, is only partial and limited; he represents only one law in the world; it can be a very complex law, but it is only one law; what is called in India, you know, the Dharma, one Truth, one Law.

Each individual being, even if he be of a completely higher kind, even if he is made for an absolutely special work, is only one individual being; that means, the totality of the transformation cannot take place through one single body. And that is why, spontaneously, the multiplication came about.

One can reach, alone and solitary, his own perfection. One can become in one’s consciousness infinite and perfect. But when it is a question of a work, it is always limited.

I don’t know if you understand me well. But personal realisation has no limits. One can become inwardly in himself perfect and infinite. But the outer realisation is necessarily limited, and if one wants to have a general action, at least a minimum number of physical beings is needed.

In a very old tradition it was said that twelve were enough; but in the complexities of modern life it doesn’t seem possible. There must be a representative group. Which means that . . . you know nothing about it or you don’t imagine it very well, but each one of you represents one of the difficulties which must be conquered for the transformation. And this makes many difficulties! (*Mother laughs*) I have written somewhere . . . I have said that, more than a difficulty, each one represents an impossibility to be solved. And it is the whole set of all these impossibilities which can be transformed into the Work, the Realisation. Each case is an impossibility to

be solved, and it is when all these impossibilities are resolved that the Work will be accomplished.

But now I am more gentle. I take away "impossibility" and put "difficulty". Perhaps they are no longer impossibilities.

Only, from the beginning, and still more now that our group has grown so considerably, each time someone comes to tell me, "I come for *my* yoga", I say, "Oh, no! Then don't come. It is much more difficult here than anywhere else." And the reason is what Sri Aurobindo has written here.

If someone comes to tell me, "I come to work, I come to make myself useful", it is all right. But if someone comes and says, "I have many difficulties outside, I can't manage to overcome these difficulties, I want to come here because it will help me", I say, "No, no, it will be *much* more difficult here; your difficulties will increase *considerably*." And that is what it means, because they are no longer isolated difficulties; they are collective difficulties.

So in addition to your own personal difficulty you have all the frictions, all the contacts, all the reactions, all the things which come from outside. As a test. Exactly on the weak point, the thing that's most difficult to solve; it is there that you will hear from someone the phrase which was just the one you did not want to hear; someone will make towards you that gesture which was exactly the one which could shock you; you find yourself facing a circumstance, a movement, a fact, an object, anything at all — just the things which . . . "Ah, how I should have liked this not to happen!" And it's that which will happen. And more and more. Because you do not do your yoga for yourself alone. You do the yoga for everybody — without wanting to — automatically.

So when people come and tell me, "I come here for peace, quietness, leisure, to do my yoga", I say, "No, no, no! Go away immediately somewhere else, you will be much more peaceful anywhere else than here."

If someone comes and says, "Well, here I am, I feel that I should consecrate myself to the divine Work, I am ready to do any work at all that you give me", then I say, "Good, that's all right. If you have goodwill, endurance, and some capacity, it is all right. But to find the solitude necessary for your inner development it is better to go somewhere else, *anywhere else*, but not here." There we are.

I said all this just today; I had the occasion to do so. And at the same time I said, "There is an exception to this rule: that's the children." Because here the children have the advantage of living from the time when they are still unconscious, in an atmosphere which helps them to find themselves. And this one doesn't have outside. I am saying what I just said to people who are . . . not necessarily old but still . . . formed, who are past the age not only of childhood but of their first youth.

But all those who are quite small, the younger they are, the better it is for them — because from their young and most tender childhood they are in the most favourable atmosphere for an integral development, and so they can grow up,

develop more and more in the right atmosphere. It is only when one comes out of the personal development and wants to begin to do the yoga that the problem comes up. But for those who have been entirely brought up here, the problem is much less difficult, because from their very first childhood they have already been members of a whole, without knowing it, without being aware of it; and they move with the whole towards the Realisation. So it is no longer something absolutely new, which adds to the difficulty; on the contrary it is something that helps them.

Now, you see, when the problem comes up, it is for them to know whether they want to do the yoga or not. I have already told you this several times. You see, a moment comes when . . . “Well, now I am going out into life to have my experience.” — “Go, my children, with my blessings; and try to see that it is not too unpleasant.” (*Mother laughs*) But those who say, “No, now I have taken my decision, I want to do yoga”, then, well, I don’t hide it from them that the difficulty begins. From this moment, special qualities are necessary; and they must know how to profit by all the preparation that has been given to them. They are in a better position than the poor people who come from outside; much better! But all the same they will have to make an effort, because without effort nothing succeeds — unless they have learnt from the time they were very small to let themselves be carried. But there are very few who are mature enough, it can be said, or old enough, in the sense of eternity, to be able to allow themselves to be carried all at once, like that, at a single go, without needing to receive all the blows from outside in order to know that *this* is the true thing.

This depends a great deal on what they are within themselves. Here, really, comes in the question of the predestined one, the one born for this. Then indeed it is much easier.

There we are.

Sweet Mother, do you think that we make enough effort for the chance you have given us?

Ah! This, my child, is an affair between you and your own conscience. It is not I who shall say anything at all about it. I cannot answer this. This is for you to observe.

Oh, it is quite obvious that if each one of you could see this in the true light . . .

I don’t know if you have had this experience, when reading one of the wonderful stories of mankind, and of those who came to help humanity — you have perhaps heard this more here in India than people in other countries — those stories in which there was an intervention from above, there was one of those chances, one of those miraculous Graces.

And so, if one reads that when one is small, one says, “Oh, how I should like to have lived at that time!” — I don’t know if you have had this experience . . .

I knew people who had it. And then one tells them, “Well, try to imagine that

you have it, this chance, what would be your reaction?” And sometimes suddenly one perceives it; suddenly it seems as if the heavens were opened, and that something has come which was not there before. For how long, one can’t say, but in any case, it is one of those extraordinary moments of earth-life and human life when things are not as they ordinarily are, dull and lifeless. So one has the feeling of living a miracle.

If one can keep this, all goes well. Unfortunately one forgets it very quickly.

If one has had it once, it is already something; the door has been opened. Suddenly one has felt . . . yes, felt, it is something, it is an infinite Grace, it is something marvellous. All those who lived a century ago, two centuries ago, three centuries ago, hoped for it, awaited it. They had only one chance, that was to live again in a new life and in better conditions.

But now, we have these conditions, they are here: the Grace is here.

If one can manage to have the experience — not only a thought — the experience of the thing, and then keep it afterwards, then all becomes easy. Unfortunately, one forgets very soon.

Sweet Mother, here Sri Aurobindo has said: “He [the sadhak of the integral Yoga] has not only to conquer in himself the forces of egoistic falsehood and disorder, but to conquer them as representatives of . . .”

Listen, my child, I am sorry, but you don’t listen when I am speaking? This was exactly Tara’s question and I have explained everything to her. Then how do you ask a similar question?

You did not understand? I have explained everything.

(Silence)

Mother, you said that each one represents an impossibility. In this case, each one should concentrate on solving this impossibility, shouldn’t he?

Not necessarily concentrate on that. But he has to face it, whether he knows it or not — an aspect of the problem.

I have already said this once. When you represent the possibility of a victory, you always have within you the thing contrary to this victory, which is your perpetual trouble.

Each one has his own difficulty. And I have given the example already once, I think. For instance, a being who must represent fearlessness, courage, you know, a capacity to hold on without giving way before all dangers and all fights, usually somewhere in his being he is a *terrible* coward, and he has to struggle against this almost constantly because this represents the victory he has to win in the world.

It is like a being who ought to be good, full of compassion and generosity; somewhere in his being he is sharp, sour and sometimes even bad; and he has to struggle against this in order to be the other thing. And so on. It goes into *all* the details. It’s like that.

And when you see a very black shadow somewhere, *very* black, something that’s truly painful, you know, you can be sure that you have in you the possibility of the corresponding light.

Why does it increase instead of diminishing?

What does that mean, “it increases”?

(The disciple can’t answer.)

Here it increases? Yes. Because this is the place of the Realisation.

In life you are unconscious, you pass all your life in an absolutely vague semi-consciousness, you know nothing about yourself, except just an appearance, nothing more. And you will always be incapable of fulfilling your mission and therefore you do not meet the obstacle in the heart of the difficulty, only an appearance; you are all in the midst of appearances. It’s simply that. So your faults are small, your virtues are small, your capacities are mediocre and your difficulties are mediocre, you are entirely mediocre, constantly.

It is only when you begin to walk on the path of Realisation that your possibilities become real, and your difficulties become much greater — quite naturally. Things become intensified.

This is why I tell people, “If you can’t find peace and solitude in yourself, can’t isolate yourself sufficiently to enter within yourself, if you can’t do this in the conditions of ordinary life, it is certainly not here that you will be able to do it, because your first difficulty will be that you will feel invaded by everything and everybody, and will be absolutely unable to isolate yourself. If you have learnt to do it before coming here, then it will be good. But if you don’t know how to do it, you will find it very difficult to do so here.”

And for everything it is the same way. People who are ill-natured, those who have no control over their anger, for instance, are much worse here than in the ordinary world, because in the ordinary world they are controlled by all the necessities of life and because, for example, when they go to an office, if they get into a temper against the boss, they are thrown out. While here, we don’t throw them out; they are simply told, “Try to control yourself.”

21 December 1955

THE MOTHER

(Questions and Answers 1955, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 7, pp. 408-416)

All heaven's secrecy lit to one face
Crowning with calm the body's blinded cry —
A soul of upright splendour like the noon!

But only shadowless love can breathe this pure
Sun-blossom fragrant with eternity —
Eagles of rapture lifting, flickerless,
A golden trance wide-winged on golden air.

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

Exceedingly fine. Illumined Mind. All the lines are admirable.

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

AMBU, THE MOTHER'S BABY

Learning the ABCs

Every month Ambu used to receive a complimentary copy of *Mother India*, a cultural journal of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram edited by his friend Amal Kiran, and every month Ambu would share with me his opinion of the authors whose articles filled that journal. Flipping rapidly through the pages, Ambu would furrow his forehead and exclaim, “These educated donkeys! Always talking about the Supermind and the transformation of the body. What do they know about them? They don’t even know the ABCs of Yoga!”

I knew in a general way what Ambu meant by the ABCs of Yoga — he meant the basics — but what exactly did he mean? One day I mustered courage and said, “Ambu, what are the ABCs of Yoga?” He looked at me scornfully — what a dumb question! — but then, seeing that I was earnest, his face softened. Stepping closer, he held out his left hand and spread his fingers wide. With his right thumb and forefinger he gripped the tip of his little left finger, looked at me and said, “Faith.” Gripping the ring finger he said, “Devotion.” The middle finger, “Aspiration.” The forefinger, “Surrender.” And the thumb, “Sincerity.”

There it was, and that was Ambu. Forget the big stuff. Go back to the basics. Practise them. That is sadhana. And beware of teaching others.

Meeting Ambu

In the spring of 1972, a few months after I came to the Ashram, Steve Webman introduced me to the Ashram’s hathayogi, Ambu. We met in his large, high-ceilinged room on the ground floor of ‘Nanteuil’ House. Ambu stood at the door, attired in an ochre loincloth wrapped about his waist — and nothing else! Very fleshy he looked, but what lovely skin, a smooth copper brown without lines or wrinkles. Short, but well built, he stood gracefully, arms akimbo, resting his upper body on one leg, as was his wont. His face was good, with a straight nose, large ears, bright eyes and a big toothy smile. Its beauty was marred only by the glasses he wore, thick glasses with minus 14-power lenses that made his eyes look larger than they were.

Ambu and I hit it off right away. He loved to talk and I loved to listen. He could talk all day. Unabashedly frank, he delighted in cutting big shots down to size, but always without malice — he bore no ill-will towards those he castigated! Ambu disliked sadhaks who suffered from ambition and vanity. He scorned those who pretended to know more than they really did. He abhorred boasters and show-offs. How could these people be like that? What had they learned in all these years?

And his heartfelt tirades were touchingly sincere. Transgressions of the dharma hurt his sensibilities. Again and again, he cautioned me to beware of the danger of money, sex, power, name and fame.

Two lessons

“Never compare yourself with others,” Ambu told me repeatedly. “Each person is different and Mother treats each one in a different way. Never think, ‘Oh, Mother is helping this person so much — why not me?’ Forget how she is treating others! Accept the way she is treating you. She knows best!” Once he gave this example of her inexplicable ways: There was a young man who treated material things roughly, but Mother kept supplying him with the best of pens. Some he lost, some he broke, and whenever he broke a pen, Mother would ask Pavitra to fix it. Now Pavitra loved pens, but Mother rarely gave him anything new. Once, when a pen refused to write, he asked her if he could buy a new nib for it, but Mother said, “Oh, can’t you fix this one? Try to make it work.” Ambu concluded: “Who knows why she treated Pavitra like that? Don’t even try to fathom her ways.”

Another thing he stressed was the value of doing your sadhana quietly instead of “broadcasting your ignorance” by publishing stupid articles. Ambu knew all the top Ashram writers of the day, but their learned ponderings left him cold. Actually, he rarely read them — simply a waste of time. Moreover, he saw in those writings the author’s ego, the puffed-up intellect. Now and then I thought about writing something for *Mother India*, but then I quickly forgot about it, imagining the look on Ambu’s face when he saw my article in print. “Let others write what they want,” he would say; “you do your sadhana.”

Childhood and Youth

Ambu was born Ambalal Devaji Desai on 14 June 1909 in the village of Nadiad, Gujarat. A weak and sickly boy, he regained his health in his teens by joining an Akhara or gymnasium; there he learned traditional body-building exercises, such as *dands* and *baithaks*, as well as *asanas*. Extremely flexible, he excelled in *asanas* and continued to practise them the rest of his life. When he was seventeen, he left home and travelled to Pondicherry to see his friend Krishnalal. There he met the Mother, who accepted him in the Ashram. In his early years the restless young Ambu ran about from dawn to dusk, working for the Mother, and working for others as well. He loved to please people. Early in the morning he would be found plucking flowers off creepers or climbing trees to get them. Some were for the Mother, others were for those who wanted special flowers to paint or to offer to Mother. He also helped out in the Granary and he cleaned the Mother’s kitchen vessels. His life was one of hectic service.

Stories of the Old Days

When I met Ambu he had been in the Ashram for forty-four years. What a stock of stories he had about the old days. Though he rarely spoke of Sri Aurobindo, for whom he had the highest reverence, he could not stop talking about the Mother — he simply adored her. Mother on her part called him her “Baby”. We find her addressing him that way in their correspondence of the 1930’s. With a mother’s eye she watched over him, guiding, protecting, consoling him. Once in a state of depression, Ambu told her that he was tired of taking care of his body. “It’s not your body,” Mother exclaimed, “it is my body!”

Most of Ambu’s yesteryear tales had as their theme the tragedy of lost opportunity. Mother gave the sadhaks a golden chance to progress, but most of them squandered it due to weakness of character, succumbing to desire and ego. Some fell to the charms of sex (about which Ambu had a number of tantalising tales), others to the desire for comfort, which led them to gain advantages by lying and cheating. Many fell to vanity, wounded pride, inflated self-esteem. Over the years many people left — though most stayed because they knew that only Mother could help them; then they sought refuge in her compassion and love. Ambu’s tales of her rescue missions were touching, and they revealed his deep love for her.

Mother’s Treatment of Ambu

In 1928, when Ambu arrived in the Ashram, there were less than fifty people and life was intimate. Mother controlled every aspect of the disciples’ lives. They were expected to obey her, but how hard it was at times — the lower nature resisted. Ambu certainly found it hard and often he violated her rules. Sometimes he took “outside food” without asking her permission and sometimes he went to the cinemas in town — strictly taboo. Whatever he did, Mother forgave his transgressions. She was lenient towards her Baby because she knew his nature, good at heart but weak in will.

Ambu suffered a lot in the early years. Easy to influence, his friends misled him with wrong suggestions. Highly sensitive, he picked up their discontents and depressions. Attracted to women, he ached when the young lovelies played with him. Eager to please, he got wounded when people misused his regard for them. Thus subjected to psychological assaults, Ambu regularly got confused, depressed, depleted, and often he fell ill. His only support, the Mother, helped him up again and again.

Ambu’s Correspondence

When Ambu was in his mid-twenties, he began writing to the Mother and this correspondence continued for several years. Unfortunately he destroyed most of his letters to her, but at least he kept her replies. From them emerges the portrait of

a troubled young man, prone to doubt, depression, weakness, illness and more. Mother's remedy, her repeated advice, was: Be happy. "Happy to hear that my dear Baby is happy," she once wrote. "Happier shall I be if he becomes still happier." She also asked him to have faith in her, to believe in her love and care for him. Again she asked him to be faithful to her, for then she could help him to gain the peace he needed. And finally she asked him to stop running around.

"The doctor says you ought to lead a quieter life," she wrote, "to take more rest and more food. Will you not try to do so?" Mother urged him to slow down because over and over he exhausted himself. One morning he went 'upstairs' for work, as usual. Mother asked him to sit down and tell her in detail what he did all day. Ambu told her that he plucked flowers for this person, fetched food for that one, borrowed library books for a third, and so on. When he finished his narration, Mother took up his activities one by one. For each task she asked, "Who gave you this work? Did I give this work to you?" Repeatedly he replied, "No, Mother. I took up the work on my own." Then she asked, "And what work have I given you?" "Mother," he said, "you have asked me to clean the vessels." "Voilà!" she exclaimed. "That is your work and I expect you to do it. As for those other works, you can stop some of them. I don't want you rushing around and wearing yourself out."

Ambu's Breakfast Club

By the time I met him, Ambu's Breakfast Club was an established institution. Every morning just before eight, up to a dozen men gathered in his room and sat in a circle on mats on the floor, quietly bantering, waiting for a cup of tea. A few had breakfast too: bread, banana, tomato, cucumber and *achar*. All were Gujaratis, except Anurakta, a Brit close to Ambu, and Muthulingam, a loveable Tamilian who was the butt of many jokes. There was talk of national politics and Ashram affairs, and much fun besides.

A few weeks after I met him, Ambu invited me to eat with his breakfast group on Sunday morning. I happily accepted, but was trepidant about how I would be received. As we sat together, everyone was cordial, asking me questions about my background to get a better picture of me. Ambu set out the food and gave tea to each one, adjusting milk and sugar according to taste. Then my test came. Before me was my plate with bread and slices of cucumber and tomato on it. In the centre of the floor, Ambu had set out a dish of green chillies, but I had not taken one. Ashok Patel picked up a sizable chilli, looked at me with a smile, and popped the chilli into his mouth, biting its stem off with his front teeth. Then he crushed it, chewed it and swallowed. Though his face flushed up, it didn't seem to faze him much. "Can you do that?" he asked. "It will really pick you up."

All the club members looked at me expectantly. I tried to think, but nothing came to mind. I reached out, picked up a middle-sized chilli and held it in front of

me, unsure what to do. Would a small bite be enough? A middle-sized bite? Hard to say. Gathering courage, I put the chilli in my mouth, bit off the stem, chomped down on the green fleshy part and started chewing. Fire, fire! Fire in the mouth! Body hot too. Perspiration, tears, can't breathe! Suffocating! I tried to take a breath; my throat went into spasm and I coughed loudly. The guys were dying of laughter, as if they had never seen anything so funny! Albert just couldn't stop laughing. Harikant, not a man given to ostentation, let out a stream of hearty chuckles. Navinchandra, the shy box-maker, smiled sweetly and giggled. And Ashok Patel, leading the way, slapped the floor madly with his palms, absolutely delighted, hugely happy, broken down with laughter. Having regained my breath, I tried to speak, but no words came out. Oh, that was funny! Another round of laughs and chuckles. Then some teasing and at last things settled down. "How do you feel?" Ashok asked. "Good, huh?"

Too good really, but in the end it was worth it. I had been a good sport and survived my initiation. For the next twenty years I was a Breakfast Club regular on Sundays, special days and birthdays. After breakfast the club members wandered off, everybody except Harikant and me. Harikant would recline against the bolster on Ambu's bed while Ambu made him a cup of coffee; after sipping it down, he would say goodbye to Ambu and saunter out the door. I stuck on and took Harikant's place on Ambu's bed. His clean-up chores finished, Ambu would amble over and begin his weekly discourse. Over the next hour he drilled me in the basics of the Yoga, replete with stories of men who had lost their way by veering from the strait and narrow path. Like an elder brother, he kept me safe over the years, never speaking from "on high" but rather from his own experience, talking frankly about his own weaknesses. Often as he spoke, I recognised in him the same feelings of inferiority and insecurity I found in myself. Ambu was the anchor man who held me together. In a similar way, I think he kept the Gujarati gang together. On his birthday, a big occasion for which he prepared coffee, all of them came to wish him well — Dyumanbhai, Krishnalal, Tara, Lila and many others.

The Hathayogi

The late afternoon was foreigner's time. Anurakta, having finished his labours as manager of the Hand Made Paper factory, ensconced himself in a deep canvas chair and plunged into the pile of magazines at his side. "Don't mind me," he would tell newcomers, "I'm just part of the furniture." Most of those who came were Europeans passing through Pondicherry on a tour of India. Ambu greeted them warmly, one and all. As the resident hathayogi, it fell upon him to instruct them in *asanas*. In this effort the best of the man came out. Kind and gentle, he patiently led his pupils — one or two at a time — through a simple course of *asanas*. A hands-on instructor, he adjusted their postures and explained how to hold them safely. He also taught

them how to stand, lie, breathe and relax. Possessed of a quiet vitality, he himself was a good example of the benefit of *asanas*. Even in his seventies he remained supple and alert. Photos on the walls showed him elegantly contorted in near-impossible positions. He was a man who had walked his talk.

A Bit of Elegance

A fascinating character, Ambu was attractive outside the house. When he went out for work in the morning, collyrium lined his eyes and attractive perfumes sometimes wafted from behind his ears. Dressed in a white bush shirt and coloured shorts, he carried four ironed and folded handkerchiefs, one for each pocket of his shorts. A large pastel coloured handkerchief adorned his neck, providing a bit of elegance to his attire. He was a favourite of the ladies, who looked after him well.

The Saturday Night Movies

Although he could not see well, Ambu loved the Saturday night movies at the Playground. He would come early and plant himself in front, a little to the left of centre. Anurakta sat to his left and I sat to the left of Anurakta. This ritual went on for many years. In the 1970's and 1980's the Saturday night cinema was our main form of entertainment for the week. Television came later, not to mention videos, Internet and Youtube. The young school-children would come early to play in front on the sand, happily chasing each other. In their exuberance, they sometimes came too close and kicked sand on our mats. Ambu's response was to throw sand back at them, shouting at them to behave. Vintage Ambu. Occasionally tensions escalated as the kids continued to play. Then Captain Mona would come and save the situation by cajoling the children to sit down and contain themselves. This little drama was enacted many times over the years. Such was life in the Ashram then.

The Later Years

Over the years I watched Ambu grow old gracefully. Though he managed to keep up his regulated life, he had less energy. His room started gathering cobwebs, for he spent less time cleaning his substantial collection of oddities acquired over the years. He had more colds and fevers and digestive upsets. How did he deal with them? He cut down on food and took rest. Then Ambu developed cataract; the operation to remove them succeeded, but recovery took a long time, and even then he complained of seeing a double image. When he poured tea in the morning, part of the fluid landed on the floor. Then he had a hernia operation, but the protracted convalescence sapped his energy. His hands began to shake. He stopped wearing a loincloth and switched to a lungi — easier on and off, I guess, but it restricted his leg movements.

All these things he took in stride; though he grumbled now and then, his debilities didn't seem to affect him much. He suffered quietly and without fuss.

The End

The end came quickly one morning. I showed up early for breakfast to find Ambu lying on his bed, reclining on his bolster. "I feel a little weak and giddy," he told me. I sat down to peel the cucumbers and cut the tomatoes. "I will sit with you," he said, but I told him to lie where he was till the others came. A minute later he got up off the bed and clumsily lay down on the floor on his right side; his body started twitching and he breathed heavily. Alarmed, I went behind him and helped prop him up as he struggled to remove his dentures; when they finally came out, he sighed and said, "Leave me." I let him down on the floor. He stopped shaking and was quiet. Dazed, I didn't know what to do. Then Harikant came and called Manoj who lived across the hall. Manoj phoned Dr. Datta who showed up with Vishwa-bandhu ten minutes later. They tried to revive Ambu through artificial respiration, but it didn't work. After a lot of effort Dr. Datta looked up and shook his head. Ambu was gone, the victim of a massive stroke.

That day we sat around, somewhat numbed and pensive. Our beloved anchor man was gone; he had left us simply and quietly, without fanfare, as was his way. Hundreds came to the room to see his body as it lay in state. The next morning he was cremated and the morning after that we met for tea and talked about him, but really there wasn't much talk: one could not help but feel sad. The man who held us together had departed. The Breakfast Club was over.

The Lesson of Life

In April 1933 Sri Aurobindo penned some lines to Ambu. In neat handwriting the Master wrote:

It is the lesson of life that always in the world everything fails a man — only the Divine does not fail him, if he turns entirely to the Divine. It is not because there is something bad in you that blows fall on you, — blows fall on all human beings because they are full of desire for things that cannot last and they lose them or, even if they get, it brings disappointment and cannot satisfy them. To turn to the Divine is the only truth of life.

If there is one lesson Ambu wanted me to learn, it is this: turn to the Divine and nowhere else. Do not run after money, power, sex, name and fame. Live for the Divine, live for the Mother, and all else will be given to you.

BOB ZWICKER

AN INTERVIEW

With Dr. M. S. Adiseshiah, Deputy Director General of UNESCO
Interview conducted by Melville de Mello
for All India Radio

Q. Dr. Adiseshiah, we are very happy to welcome you once again to our studios. As you know, it is always a pleasure to be able to bring your voice, your views and your ideas to listeners in India. Now, at the AUROVILLE-UNESCO Symposium in Pondicherry, you spoke of Auroville as a hope for humanity to come out of its present chaos. Would you like to elaborate on that statement of yours?

DR. ADISESHIAH: Yes, but first I want to reciprocate your kind words by greeting you and the people of India and thanking you all for the kindness I have received on this my annual official visit to my own homeland as the Deputy Director General of UNESCO and to give the Government, the President, the Cabinet and the leaders and people of this country UNESCO's very good wishes for 1969.

You have referred to what I said in Pondicherry at a symposium organised by AIR on Auroville, where I characterised Auroville, the plan and programme for an International City to be established on the outskirts of Pondicherry, as the hope for humanity, as a means of deliverance from the present chaos. The political chaos, I think, is evident. One has only to refer to Vietnam, to Biafra, to West Asia and no more, to see that. In spite of the hopes of humanity embodied in the United Nations Charter and the UNESCO Constitution, I don't think that since the end of the last War we have had one single day when the world has been free from war. The confusions in the economic and social realms are also obvious. This great country was host to UNCTAD, and I believe that UNCTAD was a demonstration of the economic confusion and the economic chaos in the world, where the curious spectacle of the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer daily was demonstrated, and UNCTAD could do little about it. And so one could go on. And even education, which is the special domain of UNESCO, which deals with men's minds, with men's spirits — even education, as it has so far been practised, has not led to peace, has not led to harmony and understanding. The people who start wars are not the illiterate farmers, are not the ignorant workers in Europe or America, the people who burn buses and trams in our country are not the illiterates, and since the torch-bearer of this confusion is the educated elite, UNESCO's responsibility for seeing what kind of education should be developed is, therefore, an urgent one. And when I spoke of Auroville as being a hope, I had this very much in mind.

Q. You also said that by unanimously adopting the resolution on Auroville, the General Conference of UNESCO made the Auroville project the concern and responsibility of every man, woman and child in every one of its member-states. Now how do you think this responsibility can be best fulfilled, and what steps will UNESCO take to stimulate the awareness of this concern in order to fulfil this responsibility?

DR. ADISESHIAH: Well, the first task here is for every member-state, and every man, woman, and child in the member-state, to understand Auroville as the international city where the ideals that we have been so long seeking for, of peace and harmony, of human unity, will be realised — realised very concretely, not simply as resolutions, as declarations, as flag-waving, but through the schools, through the colleges, through the workshops, through the factories, through the farms and through the international airport which will bring men and women from all over the world. So the first thing that UNESCO will help member-states to do — and is already doing — is to understand the Auroville programme, and then see what of this programme would be the responsibility of a government, or an organisation, or a university, or an individual.

Q. In the light of your experience of the present-day educational system all over the world what strikes you as unique in the proposed free-progress Auroville system of education?

DR. ADISESHIAH: The Auroville system of education, by the way, is not a paper plan; it is already being worked out in the International Centre of Education which is run by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry. If I am not mistaken, I think it has been run for the last 20 years. There, in that institution, the dream has become a reality, the dream of the pedagogue, the dream of the philosopher for the free development of the human mind, for the absence of compulsion on the child, for a system of learning not ridden by the fear and the terror of the examination, for seeking and searching for what a person, a child or an adult wants to know and not what he is forced to learn by a curriculum and syllabus which is outdated, has no relation to the world we are living in. And the world we are living in is a world which is frighteningly progressive, frighteningly fast-moving. We had last month the splash-down of the three astronauts who have visited the moon; we had last week Zond-6 being sped on its way to Venus, and we had last night the docking of Soyuz-4 and Soyuz-5. Well, that is the kind of world we are living in, and the educational system that Auroville will have, which is now being already developed and perfected, is the system in which every man, woman and child will learn to live, and live to learn, freely and harmoniously.

Q. Sir, in view of the fact that UNESCO is intensifying its efforts in educational research and programmes, how do you think UNESCO should, could or would help in the Auroville project of a World University?

DR. ADISESHIAH: I must tell you frankly we have not come to that stage yet in UNESCO. We have not yet thought of a way through, of what we will do in the individual projects that constitute Auroville. But I can say that just as the basic pedagogy, the psychology and the spiritual foundation of the educational system of Auroville, which I have just referred to, is that of UNESCO, embodied in UNESCO's Charter which we are striving after, which we have not been able to realise elsewhere, so too is the programme for a World University where men and women at the highest level, the intellectual elite of the world, could be banded together, not to split the atom and produce new bombs, not simply to explore space in complete secrecy, but to explore the heart of man and the minds of men in order to promote knowledge, to build development in our under-developed countries in the third world, and to assure peace.

Q. It is said that Auroville, by its very ideology, architecture and aims, would present a spontaneous design of integrated living, the kind that is sought after in the UNESCO resolutions on the Design for Living. How far do you think this will be realised in Auroville?

DR. ADISESHIAH: Now you touch on another programme of UNESCO for which we are grateful to this country. It was at the international symposium held here in 1966 in New Delhi, to commemorate the life and contribution of Jawaharlal Nehru, that this great programme called the Design for Living was initiated. It is a programme, an inter-disciplinary, an international programme for restoring man's lost equilibrium with nature. Well, we are making a start on this programme and it is our hope that Auroville will be one demonstration of this large programme which will once more restore to man his primacy over the world which he inhabits, and bring him into equilibrium with nature and with his environment, whether it be the rural countryside or the urban living conditions which characterise so many of our countries.

Q. What gives you the hope that Auroville will be a site for material and spiritual researches and of endless progress as its Charter declares?

DR. ADISESHIAH: Well, I think it is the Aurovilians whom I met, that are the basis of my hope. They remind me of the astronauts and the cosmonauts, who, as you know, spend years training themselves for the tremendous task that they have to undertake. The Aurovilians are the cosmonauts and astronauts of this new international city of hope, of development, of prosperity and of charity. And it is their spirit which I

have seen for myself, the training which they are undergoing, and the concrete pilot-work which they are doing now in actually digging the foundations of this great city, that are for me the basis of what you call my hope for Auroville.

Q. If I can project that question a little further, Sir, would you assess the importance of Auroville for India and the world?

DR. ADISESHIAH: For India, I believe that we need, as a country, everything that can help us to live together as a people with many different cultural backgrounds, religious backgrounds and social backgrounds. Our programme for national integration is one expression of this, and I believe that in Auroville we shall have yet another start, a start based on the fundamental unity of the human mind and of human consciousness for the flowering of the kind of unity which our country needs so desperately today.

And I have no doubt that we will find it. I am not one who is discouraged or is pessimistic about our future in spite of the daily riots and strikes and difficulties — social, economic and political — that we face. I think this is a transitional phase. And in that phase I believe Auroville is one of the pilots that can lead us on to that land of unity where we can all join together in working for the development of our country which is our only and major task.

As far as the world is concerned, in addition to development, the need for peace does not require any repeating on my part. I believe it is the peace passing beyond the economic and political arrangements on which the present uneasy truce relies, it is the peace based on the consciousness of men as men, the certainties in our hearts and spirits, on which Auroville and its programme are founded, that will assure the peace we are looking for in the world.

Q. Sir, in view of the vast programmes and importance of Auroville as a universal, cultural township, aiming to synthesise the cultures of all nations and paving a way for human unity, don't you think that UNESCO should give Auroville a corresponding importance and emphasis in its budgetary programme, especially when it is destined to play such an important part in the fate of humanity, showing a model way of living together in peace and progressive harmony?

DR. ADISESHIAH: Yes. I think what you are getting at is that UNESCO should take the kind of action we have taken in the last 5 years in restoring the famous temples of Abu Simbel in Nubia in the United Arab Republic where we brought together over 60 countries which contributed 40 million dollars for saving these precious monuments which belong to all mankind. Yes, I believe it will come, but it will come only when the member-states of UNESCO, and the men and women and

children behind the member-states and the organisations in the member-states, begin to be conscious of the reality of Auroville. I would not rush an international campaign now for Auroville through UNESCO. It might, in the wrong way, at the wrong moment, provoke difficulties rather than help in the realisation of the ideals; for do not forget that when mankind came to save the Nubian monuments, the famous temples of Abu Simbel, it was at the last moment when they were going to be submerged. When, therefore, we shall reach such a stage, the world will turn towards Auroville — or rather the Aurovilles, because Auroville will have to spread, Auroville will not be confined simply to Pondicherry. If it is, it will fail. It will be a world movement, and when the critical moment comes, I have no doubt that UNESCO will take the kind of campaign leadership, which is implied by what you are asking me.

Q. Now what steps would you like the Government of India, as the sponsor of the Resolution, to take in order to fulfil its part in the responsibility?

DR. ADISESHIAH: I have been talking to the Minister of Education, to members of the Planning Commission here, and I will mention this also to the President whom I am seeing tomorrow. I have talked to the Chief Minister of Madras and the Governor of Pondicherry. The first thing to do is to assign the land on which this International City is going to be built. This is the task for the Madras Government mainly, and the Pondicherry Government. And, then, I think that the Government of India will have to come forward with a certain amount of financial contribution, as well as the 14 State Governments, for erecting their state pavillions and the institutions which would be in the interest of this country. This is not simply charity, just for charity's sake; it will be in the interest of our country — educationally and economically — to develop Auroville.

Q. Sir, you said that UNESCO has embraced Auroville as one of its major programmes, which fulfils its fundamental aims and purposes. Now what does this imply as far as UNESCO's involvement in the fulfilment of the Auroville project is concerned, and how far is UNESCO willing to finance the project or to raise the finances for its fulfilment?

DR. ADISESHIAH: I have already, I think, answered this, by the way, when I said I do not believe the financing by UNESCO is appropriate at this moment. We are just completing today one year of the foundation of Auroville, and we are proud of the fact that most of the member-states of UNESCO sent part of their soil, exactly a year ago, for the foundation ceremony. That symbolic action in giving a part of their land, land over which man through the ages has fought, fought bloodily, fought at the cost of the lives of many men and women and children — this free giving of a

piece of their own land in the creation of a new city is a hopeful augury of the time when UNESCO and all its member-states would make their contribution — financial, material, and spiritual — for the building of Auroville.

M: Dr. Adiseshiah, thank you very much.

(By courtesy of All India Radio, New Delhi; reprinted from *Mother India*, April 1969)

RECOLLECTIONS

Mr. Nanda, a disciple of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, who worked in the television section of Doordarshan, came to see me and said: “Kailas, do you know that Mrs. Nandini Satpathy (then the Minister of Information and Broadcasting) has arranged tomorrow an interview of Dr. Adiseshiah by Dr. Melville de Mello on Auroville?”

I said: “No, but would you do me a favour? I would like to write the questions for this interview. Would you give them to Dr. de Mello?”

He asked, laughing: “Do you know that Dr. de Mello is a very famous interviewer who has done many such interviews of diplomats and dignitaries like Nehru and others? I would be considered a fool to take questions to him, prepared by you or anybody else for that matter.”

I said: “I know all that. But first of all, if anybody would be considered as a fool, it is I who would be so considered and not you. Would you do it for the Mother?”

He said: “I will do it if you insist, but I don’t think it will work.”

I said: “That’s a different matter. I will give you the questions tomorrow morning.” On that note we parted.

You would not believe, but I had an absolutely silent mind and ten questions came pouring down. I got them typed with two copies. When he came, I gave him the paper, and asked him: “If you would kindly do me another favour, I would be very thankful. Could you ask Dr. de Mello if I could be present at the interview?” He laughed again. Naturally, before these two great men I was nothing and nobody. But he agreed. . . .

Dr. de Mello asked every question I had put without a change of a single word except adding the word of address to Dr. Adiseshiah. The Mother’s force was concretely felt as he answered the questions. . . .

At the end of the interview, I asked Dr. de Mello if I could have a copy of the tape of the interview. He was surprised at my request and said: “But, my dear, we do not let anyone have a copy before it is broadcast!”

I said: “I know that, but I would play it only before the Mother, I promise.” He relented, but said: “We have to edit it. When are you leaving?” I said: “The day after tomorrow.” He asked: “Are you coming to Mrs. Satpathy’s party tonight? I will see if I can have it edited and bring it there for you.” I said: “Yes! Thank you!” And we parted.

He brought the tape and gave it to me. My heart was filled with gratitude for the Mother’s concrete help. . . .

Now I wanted to play the tape before the Mother and asked Her for an interview. She significantly called me on Mahasaraswati’s day. . . .

Richard and I went with a tape-recorder and played the tape for Her. She listened to it attentively and even smiled as She heard the tape. She held my hands and said with a pleased look in Her eyes: “Kailas, do you know what I felt when I listened to the interview?” I was anxiously waiting to hear what She had to say.

The Mother said with great force:

“A very powerful being came down and tied Auroville to the ground. It was needed and he did it. Now Auroville will be a reality and the world will see it.”

I could not be happier. I remained there for a few moments. She gave us roses and said: “*Au revoir.*” And we left.

This interview was to be broadcast on 28th February 1969, the first anniversary of Auroville. It appeared later in the April 1969 issue of *Mother India*.

KAILAS JHAVERI

(*I am with you*, Parts I and II, pp. 151-54)

EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW

**From the Interview with Dr. M. S. Adiseshiah by Georges Pitoeff for
French Television, Paris, on 14th December, 1970**

1. In Auroville, I believe, all the different cultures of the world will be able to live harmoniously and fruitfully in unity.

2. Auroville will give us the possibilities of a high level of life which will produce a new civilisation.

3. The foundation of Auroville is a new kind of spirituality, a new consciousness which we lack in our world today. With this new consciousness Auroville will have a sure basis for the development of society in all areas of life — social, economic, cultural, political, etc.

4. The unique importance of Auroville is that it will never cease to evolve. It will always grow towards an ever-greater perfection. This will give us a possibility of infinite growth of the human spirit.

5. We have arrived everywhere — in Europe, as in Asia, North America, Africa — at a stage which drives home to us the faith that for us there is no way forward except a conscious spiritual development.

6. It is difficult for me to explain clearly all the implications of this new consciousness, but Sri Aurobindo has given us in his works a concrete illustration or a crystallisation of the new man with a new consciousness. In our world the great error of our thought has been to divide our life between spiritual life and material life. But the great dream of Auroville, based on Sri Aurobindo's life-work, is to unite the two. With this reunion or marriage between Spirit and Matter we shall have truly the possibility of a new world and a new man, a universal and integral man. Auroville is an attempt to realise Sri Aurobindo's philosophy on the terrestrial plane: the integration of a total man.

7. In our great universities — Oxford, Cambridge, Sorbonne — and also in the monasteries of Roman Catholics as well as the temples of Islam, of Buddhism, etc. — we have tried to develop simultaneously the inner and the outer life but in its application the ideal has not gone deep enough, nor become integral. However, the genius of Auroville, based on Sri Aurobindo's vision, is the concept of a new man with a new consciousness who will unite Spirit and Matter.

8. I believe that in Auroville we shall have a true democracy which does not exist anywhere in the world, which has never existed before, even in the ancient cities of Greece from where we learned the democratic way of life in the Occident — because theirs was a life based on slavery. In the great democratic countries also, we have many social problems which constitute a negation of the democratic life. In one-third of the world, we have economic problems. Well, I think the true democracy does not yet exist anywhere. In Auroville, however, all the institutes, economic, social, cultural, based on the concept of the Integral Man with a new consciousness, will assure a true democracy, where each person will have a special role in the decisions and actions of the township. And thus we shall also have a new form of political life. No person will be excluded from Auroville because of his sex, age, colour, race, religion or nationality, or any other social or cultural accidents. Auroville is open to all and there will be no danger of exclusiveness.

9. As regards tax — the word which always evokes in me a feeling of compulsion and imposition — I believe, that in Auroville, with this new consciousness, there will be no necessity of imposing any taxation. For everyone will naturally and voluntarily contribute to the welfare of all.

10. Our General Conference of UNESCO has three times successively declared that the great project of Auroville is a profound expression of the spirit of UNESCO. On the basis freely and unanimously adopted by the member-states of UNESCO, I believe that the moment has come for all the member-states of all the five continents, for all the voluntary organisations and most particularly for all individuals to help in the fulfilment of Auroville. UNESCO, on its part, will certainly continue all its assistance, of which this great project has need. I urge all — the member-states, the governments, the private societies, foundations, non-governmental organisations, specialised agencies, all — to observe the Sri Aurobindo Centenary Year which commences on August 15, 1972 and help the Sri Aurobindo Society in the development of Auroville in every way possible.

Translated by Kailas Jhaveri

(Mother India, March 1971)

THREE PIECES

I

AUROVILLE AS A FIELD OF WORLD PARTICIPATION IN THE SPIRITUAL ADVENTURE

The Mother called the world for participating in the spiritual adventure of Auroville and the world did indeed respond beautifully. The inauguration of the township in 1968, on February 28, is entirely vivid to us. Over a hundred countries of the world joined it. Their delegates came with handfuls of earth of their respective dear countries, their motherlands, and in a vast amphitheatre, in the presence of a vast gathering, in a quiet inspiring ceremony, deposited their sacred handfuls, one after the other, in a beautiful urn. The amphitheatre and the urn in the middle of it are close to the Matrimandir and they remind us ever and again of that occasion, whenever we go to the Matrimandir to spend a little time there in adoration of that Temple of Truth and to live for a while concretely under the large and high impact of that wonderful form and figure and its great spiritual Presence.

Since the inauguration, many years have passed, quite a few hundred people from different parts of the world have lived and worked, experienced a lot, inwardly grown a lot and concretised an identity for themselves and for the township of many settlements with individual lines of growth and development. In all this, one sees a firm will to live and pursue the spiritual adventure of Auroville.

The quality and character of this life and pursuit is extremely interesting. It has an originality of its own. It is obviously marked by a striking sense of freedom and unconventionality-conventionality, whether Indian or Western, of the ordinary life or of the spiritual life has, on the whole, no force there. But 'work' is an eminent priority and the people have created beautiful conditions of living and present a picture of a busy, contented simple life. They also have a general openness to the spiritual truths and aspirations of life; over the years a clearer and a more conscious and well-directed aspiration for spiritual life seems to have grown.

The world invited to a participation in a spiritual adventure was the intention of Auroville. And this participation has now become a settled fact. Such participation, wide-based as it is, must be seen in its own perspective and not under any preconceived ideas and ordinary desires. Human nature in its wideness and numerous strands and backgrounds and the truth of the infinite approaches to the Infinite must be duly appreciated, so that this world participation in the spiritual pursuit may be correctly felt and duly valued.

We have at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, a wide participation and

an intensive one. But Auroville was clearly intended for world participation and it had a base of its own. And obviously its promise too is all its own. The progress of Auroville will have its own quality and tempo, but its impact on the world will be very wide and very profound.

It is a great joy to look at Auroville and contemplate its original intention, its progress since inauguration and its prospects. One can easily miss this joy if one fails to see the thing as a whole and its positive essential trends.

II

A PROGRESSIVE FORM

Mother was ever so keen in conveying Sri Aurobindo's spirituality to the West and Auroville is doing it. It has evolved a form of its own. . . .

Auroville is surely in a progressive form. The feel of the township gives that impression . . . It is building up new strength. More people are joining the adventure.

Auroville is becoming increasingly more productive and self-supporting. The Matrimandir, the soul of the township, has steadily grown and will surely complete itself. The attraction of Mother's Vision of Auroville is palpably operative on the people in general.

Mother's Vision of Auroville is now becoming a reality. . . .

III

THE ACHIEVEMENT AT AUROVILLE

The Auroville Personality and the Auroville Atmosphere

The adventure of Auroville is a high and noble attempt. It is the necessity of evolving life and it will have to be pursued, with interruptions, short or long, until it succeeds clearly and gloriously. Man is, evidently, yet spiritually not ready to succeed in such an adventure easily, yet he is ready enough to feel impelled towards it.

The present attempt has rather too soon got badly stuck, it would appear. Certain rigidities have become a little too hard and we have lost the mobility of life. But once we get into a moving form again, we will feel amazed at what had immobilised us and kept us so for a length of time.

However, even as it is, we see clearly a new personality in the making and we indescribably feel in the areas of Auroville an atmosphere of surprising attraction. The personality in the making is a personality of freedom, of simplicity, of great adaptability, of wide sympathies, of deep aspiration and feeling of oneness of man.

And these qualities have, it appears, already acquired a degree of spontaneity, which is a great deal.

However, the limitations of the older conventional personality persist . . . the narrower loyalties, the partialities and prejudices and habits of past traditions are more or less there. But the new positive qualities are unmistakably there too and it is surprising that they could take form so soon. Evidently those who responded to the Auroville ideal and joined the Auroville adventure had in them some previous preparation.

Such a growth in personality is a high achievement and the best assurance that a township of human unity at the present juncture of human history is a promising possibility. The cohesion and adhesion of individuals drawn from diverse traditions, enduring in their resolution, in the face of persistent difficulties and discouragements, to create a new life and a new world is a most interesting phenomenon. They surely have felt something deeply within them and are moved by a vision of things to come. One would then only wish and aspire for an increasing clarity and vividness in the feeling and the vision and hope that the adventure of Auroville will move on and show ever more clearly its charm and beauty and effective reality.

The atmosphere of the place has an inexplicable charm, widely felt by visitors and residents from the very beginning. How to express this feeling? You just feel, "Oh it is so nice. I feel so happy. I would like to live here." And when you thus exclaim, you do not calculate the conveniences available or possible or consider the inconveniences life will be subjected to there. Is this not really the greatest asset of the township of Auroville? And, given this inherent attractiveness, is it not bound to build up its power and strength?

The spiritual working has a technique of its own. A thing, a purpose, an objective through concentration, is endowed with the Force and the Presence of the Divine and it acquires a charm. People then get irresistibly drawn towards it, they get thus recreated into a new form and, in consequence, create a new world. This charm of the place comes from the Mother and possibly her most powerful means of promoting its growth. Of course, human nature and its normal attitudes always offer resistances. But spiritual Force and charm at work are persistent influences and a great power.

It is extremely interesting, when externally things are discouraging, yet the charm and attractiveness of the place are clearly the prevailing factor.

Apart from the achievement in the quality of personality and the fact of the atmosphere, the attention, the thinking and spiritual contemplation that have been devoted to the problem of town-planning in Indian conditions of life in the present juncture of the world history and human evolution, and the results achieved, in consequence, are of inestimable value. Most original designs of different types of structures have been created and they are engaging the interests of experts in India and abroad. Lots of young people have been drawn to this creative work and it is a joy to see them at work.

Matrimandir is a special creation of this department and the structure will possibly be a unique thing in the world. It has clearly emerged into a large inspiring form and begun to draw visitors from far and near. Many more interesting structures have been realised and it is such a pleasure to see them. However, buildings and houses will take time to come up, particularly in this era of increasing shortages of all sorts.

Very much more important has been the work of the revitalisation of the land of Auroville. The land must become agriculturally strong and capable of supporting the life of a township. This is, in fact, a most difficult scientific job. Attempts have been made to prevent the erosion of soil through afforestation. A large nursery of an international kind has been developed to see what fruit trees and floral plants can thrive here. Many cottage industries like hand-weaving, wood-work, candle-making, incense sticks and some others too are developed and have begun to command an international market. And in all this work, a wide collaboration with the rural population of the place has been continuously sought. All this has meant an interesting awakening and development in the rural area, which is of great importance to India's national advancement. Many approaches regarding rural development are in progress — agricultural, horticultural, educational, social, industrial — and they are likely to yield results of wide usefulness.

The achievements at Auroville in the way of town planning, of land reclamation, of self-subsistence and rural development are indeed important. But the most interesting thing is the Auroville personality, the personality with a will and a faith that men are all essentially one, they can live together, work together and feel a basic unity among them and that differences are really all superficial and secondary. What a wonderful possibility it involves for the future of man!

Auroville is, truly speaking, an adventure of the Spirit, in the way of self-finding, self-realisation and self-manifestation. One might say, it is the Divine's pioneering attempt at self-manifestation in overt form through responsive human individuals. It is evidently a privilege to be called to participate in this work of the Divine. By doing so we attain to our divine fulfilment. But very, very long is the road to such a consummation and we must necessarily endure much and cross many hurdles on the way. In the essential nature of things, such an emergence and manifestation of the Divine is severely opposed by the dark forces, which in the present state of ignorance hold sway over the world and keep it in division, disorder and confusion. The emergence of unity, harmony, collaboration and love are high divine qualities and they must needs prevail over the contrary qualities to establish themselves in this world of ours. But it seems quite an inconceivable task. However, to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother not so inconceivable. If man sincerely and persistently aspires and the Divine in response chooses to descend into the scheme of human life, the inconceivable can unexpectedly become a reality. The spiritual and yogic working of things has a technique of its own and what is miraculous to

the mind can be quite normal to the Spirit.

The opposition to this working basically stems from the arch adversary Force and all its subordinate dark forces, which control this world of division, disorder and confusion, and oppose the emergence of divine peace, unity and harmony. The Divine in His progressive Self-manifestation has to transform and overcome the powers born of the basic unconsciousness of the world.

Human beings and circumstances become tools, knowingly or unknowingly, of the Divine or the anti-divine. Lucky are they who choose the Divine and are chosen by the Divine. And unlucky are they who become tools of the anti-divine under any circumstances. In our superficial consideration of things, we normally get into a quarrelling relation with appearances and blame one another. But really, we have to take a deeper poise, liberate ourselves from the appearances, and, in all inner calmness, persistently reject the hostile interference. In a quarrelling situation, we get involved and lose our purity and calmness. In consequence, the confusion persists unnecessarily too long.

The adventure of Auroville is the realisation and manifestation of the Divine in life. Opposition of the Adversary Force is found to be a normal affair to it. And if we can recognise the strategy and tactics of the Adversary, we can acquire immense confidence in dealing with the fellow.

Those who have felt the stirrings of the Spirit within them and have responded to the adventure of the Divine's call for a higher manifestation, will surely not find it difficult to recognise their adversary within and without and deal with him adequately.

Thus will the adventure of Auroville ever go forward affording wonderful joy to the participants and many others and, in due course, prepare for the high change in human affairs that it aims at.

(Written around 1980)

INDRA SEN

(Culled from the author's old papers)

‘The brilliant Summoner’s chant’

(Savitri, p. 6)

*. . . a holier influence comes,
A tide of mightier surgings bears our lives
And a diviner Presence moves the soul;*

(Savitri, p. 40)

This third selection on Auroville deals with the experiences of those who came quite soon after the inauguration in February 1968.

They came from different countries, different backgrounds, some aware of what they sought, some led as by an invisible hand.

The passages are extracts from the book

“Turning Points — An inner story of the beginnings of Auroville”

General Editor: Christine Devin; Published by Auroville Press Publishers. Published in 2008, the 40th anniversary of Auroville.

Readers will be able to read the more complete accounts of these and other unique testaments in *Turning Points*.

We are grateful to the Editors and Publishers of *Turning Points* for their permission to reproduce extracts from the book.

INTRODUCTION

This collection of stories is not about the past.

It is about a hidden source of water which has irrigated this land for more than forty years and without which Auroville, for all the wells dug and the trees planted, would have remained a desert.

We need to acknowledge this fact.

We like to take pride in our achievements, in how creative our crafts are, green our landscape and innovative our architecture, but we forget that there is but one achievement — and it is not ours: forty years ago a Lady Diviner struck a rock and out of this rock, water sprang. It gave life to this place, it gave life to the people and sustained them.

It is still here and flowing. Its name is faith.

We have given space here mostly to “old-timers”, Aurovilians who arrived at the very beginning of the adventure. Yet we readily admit that the same exercise could have been done, and should be done, including many more stories and not only of those who had the privilege to sit at Mother’s feet. But it was our wish to first go back and trace and explore the sources of the Nile.

After all, it is the same water that flows downstream.

For forty years we have been asked the embarrassing question, “But where is the city?”

Don’t look anywhere else. The city is here, enshrined in the hearts of these men and women, and it is shining softly in the pink light of dawn.

Their faces may have been burnt by the sun, their minds might be a little burdened, they may appear cynical at times, but like Hanuman tearing open his chest to uncover the image of Rama and Sita, if they unlock a certain door deep within themselves, there it lies: the wonderful city of delight, its outline glowing, untouched by human dust.

Beyond individual idiosyncrasies and personal circumstances, these stories are nothing if not a direct and tangible link with that tremendous big-bang of Auroville. You move close to that point, and everything starts vibrating and shaking. Hearing them, transcribing or translating them, I did not cease to be amazed, because each time I was made to look at an Auroville *that we all fell in love with* — a revolutionary, spontaneous, totally unexpected and unpredictable Auroville, immense and extra-terrestrial in its design, humoristic and delightful in its details.

An Auroville that makes all our ideas, theories and expectations fly to pieces.

I asked the interviewees only one question: How did She catch you and bring you here? Each time I was astonished to see how the answer to that simple question could connect me inwardly to a vibration of a tremendous force. The same thing

happened to people around me when I asked them to read the transcripts. That's when I realised that these stories should be available for anyone in Auroville.

*Thou art kindled, O Fire, by the fire,
thou who art the illumined seer art kindled
by one who is illumined,
as a comrade thou art kindled by thy comrade.*

CHRISTINE

A DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this special book to Serge, our brother and friend of many years who recently left us.

Serge loved the project of this publication: a manifold evocation of the one who is at the origin of Auroville, the one who called us all in a thousand ways. Like all those who have worked for this project, he found it wonderful to discover, between the lines and under the fumbling words trying to express the inexpressible, the transcendent face of the Mother.

After discovering his illness, Serge too had started to record some conversations with close friends — one of these is reproduced here — in order to try and define the essence of Auroville.

He had come to understand better and better that this essence was primarily linked to the unique phenomenon that Mother was. And this is what one feels, it seems to me, when one reads the very diverse stories that are gathered in this document. She is the alpha and omega of Auroville.

Today Auroville has become a complex reality, compared to the simplicity of the early times when there was nothing, or almost nothing on the land, except for a handful of Aurovilians — a bunch of crazy, mostly young people who persisted, against all reason, to revive an exhausted land in response to a call from a very old lady who never left her room.

Some of them have accepted to tell us their story — among them a few have never left Auroville, others have come back after long gaps outside.

Sometimes they don't know what to think or what to say about the present Auroville with its obvious and painful shortcomings. But most of them do seem to partake in one crucial faith, that Auroville was created by a force so much greater than whatever we Aurovilians may represent. This is why they continue to believe in its future, in spite of everything.

. . . No thought preceded the birth of Auroville; it was simply, as always, a Force, a kind of absolute manifesting, and it was so strong that I was able to say to people, "Even if you don't believe it, even if all the circumstances seem quite unfavourable, I know that Auroville will be. It may take a hundred years, it may take a thousand years, I don't know, but Auroville will be because it is decreed." And it has been decreed, done, very simply like that in obedience to a Command, without thought.

(Mother's Agenda, September 21, 1966)

So Serge, my brother, I believe it is right that this brochure, published by Auroville Press Publishers, a publishing house you created, is dedicated to you, who always were so concerned with the concrete manifestation of the Spirit of Auroville. Another Auroville has to manifest — the one which is already there above or behind us, and which probably waits till we are ready to receive it.

ALAIN BERNARD

PROBLEMS? WHERE ARE THEY?

We wanted to return to Finland where we had lived for two years. In Italy, there was too much corruption, too much dishonesty, we could not accept it. We were in the process of preparing to leave, finishing whatever we had to do, when by chance at our neighbour's apartment we met an actor who had been to Pondicherry. He started to speak to us about the Ashram and Mother. That was in 1966-67. He gave us the titles of some books by Sri Aurobindo. So we started to read *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Life Divine*. Politically we belonged to the left, since in the milieu of architects people were very aware of social problems. We were also anti-Catholic. So to discover that there was an inner world, so different, so deep, was very exciting.

We exchanged letters with Nata¹ (who did the liaison between the Ashram and Italy), and through him we learnt that there was the project of building a city which would be based on new ideas. It was very interesting for us! For we conceived architecture as something that had to reflect an inner search: something simple that could combine structure, solidity, economy, these material aspects, with all that a space can give a human being. A space can have a great influence on human beings. So we were enthusiastic about this new possibility: doing new things, building new things on a spiritual basis. It was the union of matter and spirit. We read Sri Aurobindo and we liked it a lot. We also read the conversations of Mother with the school children — which we found a bit simple.

Finally we decided to leave for Pondicherry: why not have this experience in India for a year before returning to Finland? We thought: let us go there for one year. We wrote to Mother and she replied “Come at once”.

We arrived in Pondicherry on March 12, 1968.

Nata brought us to see Mother on the 3rd of April (it was Piero's birthday), and we took with us our daughter Martha who was almost 5. Mother did not look at us much, she mainly concentrated on Martha (*laughs*). But what was coming from her was so strong — like another world — that afterwards I wanted very often to go back and see her. Until it was not possible any more (in 1972, I believe), I went to see her once a month with Nata. I didn't want to talk during those occasions. At the beginning I tried to speak about work, etc., but for technical things it was much easier to write. I did not want to waste these moments with her, when just the experience of looking into her eyes could take me into a totally different state!

One year passed, and we had too many things to learn and do here to think of leaving. Our second daughter Grazi was born here, and it was such a joy to bring her up in Mother's atmosphere filled with hope.

1. Nata, an Italian disciple in the Ashram.

Piero had the privilege of reading Mother's conversations on Matrimandir with Paolo and Satprem (recorded by Satprem). Nata had let him read them. Piero was very much touched by Mother's vision. When the work started, he offered to look after the construction. As for me, it was the contact with Mother that did it. We then decided to stay one more year.

And then, two years, three years, and now . . . it has been forty years! It is funny, no?

. . .

Even now, if you compare Auroville with the outside world, even considering all the mistakes, the difficulties, at least here there is an aspiration, a search, something so different, so much deeper. It is interesting to travel outside Auroville; one can see beautiful things, but where does one find a family like Auroville which has all these ideals in common?

. . .

Are we together enough, in view of all the problems?

Look. At that time very often I had problems concerning work or concerning my children. And I would go to the Mother thinking, "Ah, today I am going to talk about this!" Then she would look at me . . . she would look at me — almost sternly — intense, very intense. She penetrated deep inside, and then it would become . . . so sweet! Such sweetness, such love: large, vast! And I would wonder, "But where are the problems?" (*laugh*) One would feel the solution of the problems inwardly, just looking at her, and without her saying one word. "Ah, how simple! It is like this! No need to ask her!" This is something that never happened to me with anybody else.

And for me this is the way of Auroville. I can see the problems, yes, but it is not so important. We give a huge importance to our own truth, our own opinion. I don't believe anymore that there is only one Truth comprehensible by all. I don't believe it anymore. Where is the truth? The truth is made of a million truths together. Our mind cannot see the full picture.

For the problems of Auroville this is the same. We look for solutions and we don't find them. But if we do some inner work and go beyond, we can accept that difficulties are part of a complex evolutionary work.

. . .

Mother gave Auroville its basis, which is karma yoga. One does the work as best one can, but one is not attached to the result. The result is not in our hands . . . This thought gives me a certain peace, and also the desire to work for Auroville till the end. Too bad if it does not develop, but what we do, I hope, still has some value . . .

GLORIA

BUILDING THE RIGHT THING

In 1962 Gloria and I, we came back to Italy after two years in Finland on a wave of optimism that was connected with . . . many things! Kennedy was elected President; it was an opening; for everybody it was inspiring, like today with Obama, it was a big change! There was this new Pope, John XXIII, almost a revolutionary! The economy of Italy was florid, with a real boom of new constructions. Then, in a few years, everything became foggy: Kennedy and his brother were killed, the Pope died. No real change. The hope was hollow. In 1966 we were seriously thinking to go back to Finland, even if in my feeling it was a phase which we had closed. The idea to go back was naturally tempting, because we had experienced beautiful things there; but in the end I never believed that we could really go.

It was in this situation that we decided to take a step and to come here. It was almost like a liberation from all convention! I was confident, I was not afraid. I was sure that we were doing the right thing; I had no doubts. Actually, I am the one who proposed that we go. As far as I can remember, in Italy at that time there were no printed translations of Sri Aurobindo or Mother. Nata was sending us from the Ashram a few things, some extracts, a bulletin that he had started to print with a stencil machine, called "Domani". As Gloria has said, in this way we read some pages from *The Life Divine*. But that was all.

We had planned to be here for the 1968 inauguration, but the processing of our visas in Rome took time, so we arrived only one week later, beginning of March.

We arrived in Pondy, and the Ashramites we met were amazingly sympathetic and kind. After four days we moved to Promesse, where Nata had prepared a place for us. Immediately we got involved in a few small works. My time was filled up, constructions here and there.

Everybody has his own story. My story has maybe ramifications in childhood. I was a child during World War II, and my mother was German. German, but not Nazi, and not in favour of war. She was pulled by the situation, by the people that surrounded us in Florence during the war. An example: there was a dramatic night when we were in a cellar with many other people. Outside were explosions. The German soldiers knocked loudly on the entrance door at ground floor; they were searching. People started to panic, and they wanted my mother to open up and speak to them. She refused; she was afraid to be taken; this was a dramatic moment that lasted some hours which I can't forget. More difficulties came after the war, when as a timid child with blond hair I was going to school, and on the road some gang-boys were teasing me, "German! German!" The term German had become a bad and risky word. Before the war I had been to school for three years in a German school, under German teachers, learning to speak German, so I was having some

flavour of the good side of Germany: all this for me was so new and scary!

When we were in Finland I read a book on Auschwitz. It gave me a real deep shock. How, how was it possible? Musicians and writers and poets — How could they become like this? A wave of deep emotion. I was painting, and suddenly I started to see the faces of people in a different way, and I started to draw that. I have a whole collection of drawings made during that period. Without knowing anything about the philosophy, I called that “the Eye of the Buddha”, as for me it was like discovering the way that Buddha looked at the people: with compassion, understanding and sharpness.

And now, after more years, this vague connection with eastern philosophy suddenly was becoming a reason for coming to India — the inner force that was guiding me to come to India.

When we came, India was quite different from what it is today, but it clicked; there was a correspondence at an inner level, something very personal.

We started to work on some projects. At the end of 1969, not even two years after our coming, we got news about this till-then mysterious building called the Matrimandir. On this occasion we established a strong bond with Paolo Tommasi, who had been from the beginning involved with the project.

At that time had you already seen Mother?

Yes, yes, but apart from the personal contact, very strong, that one experiences, there was a strange scene around her: don't do this, don't do that, one felt almost jealousy between the people around her.

Anyhow, the strange experience at the time was that a few days after Mother spoke with Satprem about the Matrimandir, he typed up the conversations, and sent the typed copies to both Paolo and Roger. This text was actually slightly shorter than the text later published in the Agenda, but basically for what concerns Matrimandir, it is all there. I don't know if Satprem had sent a personal copy to Nata — I don't think so — but anyway for some reason Nata may have received the copy that was meant for Roger. And Nata passed this copy to me and said, “Look, this is something important, you have to read that, but don't show to anybody and bring it back to me tomorrow.” I read it. I spoke to Paolo, who gave me some more information, and I was immediately very deeply impressed.

In the middle of the year 1971, Aurovilians started to ask questions about the ongoing project. By that time Roger had presented his model. Already a bunch of people had started to dig casually in the area. People asked me technical details, how we could start in a proper way. I saw some plans, and Chamanlal Gupta took me to Madras to meet a young engineer, Santhanam, who was ready to prepare the structural design for the pillars and the foundations. On this basis, having got more information, I prepared some general design for the excavation and the construction

of the pillars. That went to Mother, and Mother said, “Yes, this is the right thing to do, start!” — a very nice letter from her. It was only for the excavation, the foundations and the pillars. In the Auroville of 1972 all this represented anyhow a gigantic effort, but I was happy and very confident.

We were doing these concretings at night, and people were coming from Pondy, all enthusiastic. Ladies in white sarees bringing stones and sand to the mixer machine, or making long chains to move the concrete in the old way, with pans; (*laughs*) anything was possible! It was nice, and completely unexpected, because the idea was that we wanted the Aurovilians to build the Matrimandir; and then suddenly these Ashramites were coming and asking when was the next concreting, “I want to come, please, tell me before!”

When we finished the pillars — Shyamsunder was mainly involved in the financing, he wanted to keep the Matrimandir neatly separated from the Society, this is what I perceived — I told Shyamsunder that now that we had finished the pillars, either we buy a lot of material, scaffolding, etc., and we proceed, or we take a contractor, as earlier planned. He may have considered two aspects: firstly the big amount of money involved in taking a contractor, and secondly, I think, he considered the enthusiasm of the Aurovilians and Ashramites. I believe that Shyamsunder was himself on the crest of this wave of enthusiasm, so to say. So he was in favour of continuing like that. He told me, “You have to write to the Mother and ask her.” So I wrote to the Mother with the question, “Should we employ a contractor or should we continue as now?” She replied that it should continue like that: meaning with Aurovilians and Ashramites, voluntary workers plus employees like carpenters, etc.

I regret that I have not written on a more personal basis, and I never got a more personal message from Mother. It would have been a big push for me to have received a sort of personal message, one of those short lines that she used to write. I felt that it was a long commitment, it was no more a one-year thing, it was a life commitment. But then . . . the moment passed. Maybe already at that time (in 1972) it was no longer possible to get a direct communication from Mother. Maybe she was not well. Still, I would have liked to know: is that my real destiny? For whom am I doing that? Am I working for Roger? Am I working for you, Mother? For the Divine? Give me some light. Probably Roger understood that I was working for him. I understood that I was working for Auroville.

. . .

On the 3rd of April 1973, it was my birthday, I was having the appointment with Mother and in spite of the difficulties of communication I wanted strongly to get some clarity on Matrimandir!

I went there, and waited at length on the terrace, but she didn't receive anybody. She was not well, and from the day before she had stopped receiving people. So I never spoke to her directly about the Matrimandir. There were letters from her about

the concretings, blessing packets for various occasions; she would send messages and flowers for big concretings. Of course in those years the energy was very strong, very intense. What I am telling you here is the background, the miserable background of human beings suspecting each other.

. . .

What is it for you, the Inner Chamber?

I found absolutely astonishing the extraordinary invention of the ray of sun. How could Mother see something like that? Where does it come from? In a way, it is a stroke of genius. A symbol which is not only a physical thing, but made out of light. I don't know if you realise that. Go to temples, go to churches, you always find an altar, but it is dead, it is only a material symbolic thing made of gold or marble. The ray is alive. She said: I don't know exactly on what the ray is striking, and then: I have seen, I have seen, it is a globe. She formulated that in fifteen days! That has always given me an immense curiosity and a lot of energy: how to do this ray, what are the means to do that? It is something which is not of this world, which does not belong here! Still today I find it so mysterious — even today. This symbol is not defined, it is a ray, the globe is transparent. The symbol exists *only if the ray is there*.

Is the Inner Chamber doing its transformation work?

I don't know, maybe it is not for me to tell why people go to the Matrimandir. Maybe I am not ready. . . The thing is, I still have difficulty in going to Matrimandir, because everything is so connected with the engineering, and people keep asking me, "Look here, do you remember why we have put that here? etc." So I cannot go like any other Aurovilian. And then, when I go, I am thinking, "But the ray is not at the centre!" or things like that . . . Maybe slowly, slowly now I have to forget. But I like to go in the garden, sit under the banyan or nearby, in the fresh wind and the vastness, I like that.

I don't know, I don't even dislike the discs, the famous discs . . . it was a good end, I would say, a good end of the whole thing. You see, according to me, Roger had changed quite a lot in the last years. I was not doing anything with him at Matrimandir. On the contrary, I was quite suspicious of the whole thing when the skin that was made in ferro-cement started to show cracks, and was looking so bad, so weak and improvised, and the rain was everywhere leaking in! Only when Michael Bonke, that controversial figure from the time of the Society, came into the picture, and somehow reinvented the golden tiles and the discs in stainless steel, finally things started looking up. And Roger himself started to come more often there, and was taking care of the details, the ramps, the marble, etc. He found the right people to help him, so it was interesting to see the change. Finally he came to realise that if

he was not there nothing could go the right way. I appreciated that very much. And I appreciated also what was happening outside and below the Chamber, it is a fantastic job! I appreciate also very much that the inner skin was done according to the design of the beams, the triangulation, which naturally outside remains below the skin and the discs, but inside is visible, and has become a quite perfect design (with the help of Joel, the French guy staying in Bangalore who builds small airplanes). All this came in the last few years, fantastic. I appreciate very much and I go there with much pleasure, seeing this inner space. Actually, it brought me back even to the first times: when I took in hand the design of Matrimandir for execution, there were four ramps, and it was very difficult, and I proposed to Roger to make only two, not knowing what he would say. And then he said, “Yes, why not, two, yes.” Also the walls of the Chamber were continuing down to the first level, hiding somehow the space. And I proposed to Roger to cut off the walls, so as to be able to see the curve of the sphere gently going up, and he agreed also. It was quite amazing how things developed so fast at the time, and I think he never regretted those changes. It is much more interesting from inside to see the sphere than to see some concrete walls. Well, that is the thing with Matrimandir, a long story . . .

What gave you the stamina to continue against all odds?

The Matrimandir created a very strange situation, because I felt that somehow — please, don’t laugh! — I felt that I was protecting the vision of the Mother —, as if she was a poor lady sitting there who didn’t have the means of going and seeing by herself! I was helping to realise her vision the way she had seen, against worldly forces of other people. Strange, no? *I should have asked her for protection*, and there was this feeling that *I was protecting her!* As if it was my duty: this ray is something extraordinary, it is a unique thing, we should do that. In effect, the physical experience to go and see the Mother was not the strongest element, for me. Once I tried to show her my drawings; I put them on her lap, but then I realised she could not see. Once Roger told me, “When you have done a project, ask Mother for her blessings, and once you have the blessings nobody will tell you anything, it is like the official seal.” (*laughs*) So when we made the plans for the Health Centre, I went with my drawings, and I asked for her blessings for the project. I gave her the paper and she said, “Where is the North?” She turned the plan so that the North was on top. Then she said, “You want my blessings?” (*with a twinkle in the eyes and an air of complicity*) (*laughter*)

I would have liked a closer relationship with Mother, but it never happened. And after all, she had that only with a few selected people. But this feeling of protecting her was much stronger than the rest, much stronger . . .

PIERO

“A TRIBAL MUSIC SCENE”

To be perfectly frank, I came here looking for Jan, my wife at that time, and our first child. Our life in Sydney had been pretty turbulent. Although I had been to university and studied architecture, I dropped out of university. I was driving a taxi and we were leading a hand to mouth existence, sometimes without food. It was the sixties, a very turbulent society, but in the end Jan decided that I was hopeless and she took Jonas and went to Pondicherry.

She had known about Pondicherry through the Theosophical Society. There was a Hungarian woman, Georgette, from the Ashram, who would come to Sydney for three months every year and work there for the Theosophical Society. She told us about the Ashram.

The Theosophical Society was the only place in Sydney where you could find the writings of Mother and Sri Aurobindo. They weren't even in the public library then. It was at the same time as the French New Wave cinema, Truffaut and Godard, and you had a small cinema that showed only these films. Everything else showed only American movies. That small cinema showed the New Wave, and underneath was the Theosophical library. There you could get a sniff of incense, and inside there were all the works of Sri Aurobindo. And it was a place where you could take a cushion and sit on the floor and read books. People at the counter would suggest, “You could read this and that.” It was not like a normal bookshop.

When Jan gave up and came to India, she lived in the Ashram, at Parc à Charbon [Guest-House]. Our eldest boy Jonas was in class 3 and he went to the Ashram school. Eventually he went to what they called Equals-1, with Medhananda and Yvonne Artaud.

So Jan was there and I was in Australia. I was reading in those days spiritual books and I did know who Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were, but when Jan wrote to me she described Auroville as “a tribal music scene”; I think because she thought this would sound attractive to me.

I often think that many of the first Aurovilians that came had a common experience: somewhere in their lives they had a common contact with Mother somehow. I had one interesting experience. I was right up in the north of Australia where you have the deep rain forests, and it was on my birthday, the 2nd of February 1970. I was walking through a forest where there was no path. I got really badly lost. I was so lost that I took the compass and threw it away, so wrong I thought it was. I was climbing a hill to try and see where I was. And really I got to a point where I was in such despair that I sat down with my head in my hands, like this, “What is going on?” And then I got up and when I turned round, there was a gate. A gate. I opened the gate and there was a path. And the path led into a road, which

led me down to a river, where I found some Aborigines who picked me up. But this was around 2 o'clock in the afternoon, and that was the time when Jan said she took my photo to the Mother. For me that was a powerful connecting experience. I later saw a painting of the Mother's called "Ascent to the Truth" that reminded me of that hill.

...

Then I turned up. I actually had come for a week, just to say hello, and if I am not wanted I go. But I came and everybody seemed glad to see me, so I stayed. Then because I had had some experiences in Australia with building houses like this (and Vijay was building in Udavi) I worked with a small group of villagers, in particular Ramu from Bommayarpalayam. They would come by my house in the morning — I must say that the minute I got to India I felt I had come home. For me right from the start, when I travelled by train, India looked to me much more like home, like a country I knew, than Australia.

...

At that time my daughter Jina was born. So Jan took a house in Pondicherry for about three months while Jina got a bit older, because there was nothing here at all really. People find it difficult to remember but you could sit here and you could look straight out there and there was nothing, absolutely complete sand all the way to the horizon. These fishing women used to come up the hill on the hot sand and they had bits of stuff tied to their feet, they didn't even have chappals. With fish on their head, they came running across the land, and sit down under this banyan tree here, drink water, and then the next tree was a kilometre away.

There was a huge firewood shortage in the village in those days. So the first trees we planted, the villagers cut and took home for firewood. It was a huge battle in the beginning: once a thing went beyond a minimum size, you had to protect it. We spent a lot of time actually physically fighting with villagers. This land here had been purchased five or ten years before we came, and so there was a guy who used to keep his cows here every day for what little grass there was, and when we came we had all the time to chase his cows and he would come at you with a stick, "You have no right, you aren't even a Tamil, what right have you to come here?" Once there was a guy with a bullock whip who whacked me across the back with his whip because he had cut a small neem tree here and I was pulling the neem tree and . . . we had really to fight for the land in the beginning.

The first time I saw the Mother was on my birthday in 1972. You had that incredible scene around the Mother: she was in that little chamber and there was always a queue of people going to see her, all these people sitting on all the steps all the way down to the ground. You were supposed to take a flower in your hand to her.

...

When your turn comes, you go in and Mother is sitting on a big chair, and standing beside her is Champaklal, her lion, a small but broad man with a huge white beard. Champaklal had the same birthday as me. I had this geometric idea at the time that Sri Aurobindo's symbol was three-dimensional. I had carved one of these things from wood and I took it to her. You sit there and you slowly raise your eyes and these incredible kohl-black eyes staring down at you and . . . “Yes, Mother,” and immediately I think, “Oh! I am a bad boy”. I offered her this symbol and she picks it up and she chuckles to herself and then gives it to Champaklal for his birthday, “Bonne fête to Champaklal”. And then she smiles at me . . .

After we first began here, actually she called us on a Sunday afternoon, Boris, Namas, Aruna and myself. It was a Sunday afternoon. No procedure, nobody, we went straight in, it was like going to see your grandmother. She only spoke to us in French, which limits me a bit. She gave us the sign “Fertile”, but she also gave us a seedling to plant. It was a “New World”, a little pod with orange seeds.

I personally saw her twice on two birthdays. And then there were the Darshans. These were incredible, because they attracted people from all over the world, very big crowds. People flew in for the Darshan. The whole thing was dead silent. Mother could barely get above the parapet. She would appear only for five minutes. A powerful silence. It was very moving. With Mother I always felt right from the start that she knew me, that she recognised me. I had a very powerful grandmother; she looked a little like Mother and I thought that of all the grandchildren in the family she loved me. I had a very powerful connection to her. And it was the same with the Mother (by then my grandmother was already dead). I had the same feeling that she knew me, she supported me.

I remember the day she died. I thought I was dying actually. I had a fever for about a day. I was lying up here in this house. I was pouring with sweat. Bernard Borg came riding here on a horse and told me.

I have never felt like leaving Auroville. There was a point in 1989 when a friend in Australia died and gave to us a small cabin in a forest. Then I decided to go and try to live like a hermit. I always imagined that the ideal life is a hermit's life. You live alone and you can decide all the time what you are going to do. But in fact I found that the hermit life is most difficult for me. But I experienced at the time a very powerful connection with Sri Aurobindo. It was the first time in my life there that I suffered what I would call spiritual anguish. I felt I was going crazy and I needed spiritual help, and the only thing I read was *The Life Divine*. I used to get up in the morning and just one single paragraph was enough for the whole day. And now I look back at those paragraphs, those notebooks, and I don't know what I was thinking then. That's how I understand spiritual writings. It speaks always to a need. If the need is not there, then. . . . It doesn't respond to a curiosity.

. . .

Each of these little things is a story in its own right. The history of reforestation in Auroville actually makes quite an interesting story. In the beginning we knew nothing, we just wanted shade. Then there were the days when they were planting maps, for all the trees in Auroville had to be in a spiral. When we first planted, we were supposed to plant all the trees as part of the spiral, the galaxy. And on Sundays we used to have bus loads of Ashramites who would come up here to help us plant trees. But for us to get the holes dug, and the compost and the seedlings and the water, and the whole thing and then. . . . Forget about the spiral! (*laughs*) We slowly gained expertise. Now you have within the community maybe five or six really professional botanists. The knowledge of the trees, and how they grow, and what grows with them, and indigenous forests and medicinal plants: it is such a powerful bank of knowledge! And one which has only grown through enthusiasm. It never had anything to do with money. It is always people working from the love of what they are doing. And that is why the forest project works. The people that work in the forest love the forest. But that is a separate book.

Auroville is a wonderful place for an anthropologist. Here is a finite community like an island. It has gone through very rudimentary laws of trying to govern itself.

. . .

I still believe in the magic of Auroville. I believe that it has a destiny in which we don't have much say.

. . .

JOHNNY

SO, WHAT ABOUT MENTAL SILENCE?

I must have been nine or ten years old. It was during a lunch break, and I was getting ready to go back to school. My father was watching television. One could see a crowd and somebody standing on a balcony. I asked my father, “Who is it? Who is it? Is it the Pope?” — “No, no, it’s not the Pope,” as if he too did not understand very well what he was seeing. “But who is it?” I stood there staring at the screen. I can still see the scene, with my father seated in his armchair and me standing by his side. I kept asking, “Who is it, who is it?” He didn’t know what to tell me. It must have been a darshan of Mother. The memory of that moment has always been with me. Why and how I kept it intact surprises me. “Who is it? Is it the Pope?”

From the age of 14 I felt I had to leave. But my father always insisted that he would not let me go before I reached the age of 21. So I was waiting.

I had never heard of Mother or of Sri Aurobindo. One day in the beginning of 1968 (I wasn’t yet 21) I was sitting in a café in the Place St Michel in Paris, drinking a beer, smoking a cigarette and waiting for a friend. Suddenly I heard a voice saying, “You will be gone in a year.” I thought: I am going mad, hearing voices like Joan of Arc! It was very clear and very precise, “You will be gone in a year.” Then my friend arrived; I forgot all about it. . . .

From that point onwards, everything fell into place very quickly. I had a friend who lived in our neighbourhood, and his parents were working in theatre. I was working in small movies at that time, doing extras in films for the Red Cross, things like that. The parents of that friend had heard about Mother and Sri Aurobindo. They had a brochure on Auroville: a city without army, without police. . . . I said to myself: That’s it! I immediately felt that that was it.

The brochure led me to the Association for Auroville. I was told that a caravan was leaving for India. I thought: I am going. My family was totally against it, but in spite of this everything sorted itself out. I sold my cameras in order to get some money. It was magic; I felt pulled by a thread, and I found myself Place des Invalides in Paris on the 15th of August 1969. I got on the bus and we left.

I didn’t know then what was at the end of the road.

We arrived on the 4th of October. On the 14th of October it was my birthday; I met Mother. I was just 22. I had been told: you can see Mother because it is your birthday. I said, “But I don’t know her.” I felt a bit shy: “What is she going to tell me? What am I going to tell her? She is an elderly person . . .”

“Doesn’t matter, go and see her!”

So I went. I waited, then I went up the stairs and saw an old woman, with a hunched back. I was intimidated. I came close to her. Entering that room was like

entering another space, so vast, so vast . . . and I found myself sitting in front of Mother. You look at her and everything is shattered. I was shattered. It happened in a flash. I understood why I had come. I had arrived in front of what I was searching for, it was a recognition. What struck me immediately was the power. An extraordinary impression of force emanated from her, like I had never experienced before. I was astonished, because she was an old woman and yet from her came that extraordinary force. Not an aggressive one, a sort of calm force. And also a presence. It was the first time I could see somebody really present, somebody who was “there”. I became aware of what the presence of somebody meant. You are completely astonished; this is so powerful. Mother looks at you, she is serious, she goes through you, you are totally overwhelmed, there is no word for that . . . (*silence*) And then she smiles, and this smile. . . . You enter into a space of love, something so vast, so vast. . . . And what came to me spontaneously, inwardly, was: “I want to go wherever you are.” That’s it. You come out, you are pulverised.

Yes, it is still with me. . . Twice or thrice I went with the Aspiration group to meet Mother. One day we were sitting around her and she asked, “So, what about mental silence? What have you achieved? Have you succeeded?” We were stunned (*laughs*). She laughed. But even then already she wanted us to be able to go far. In front of her I was on another planet, there was no . . . It was very difficult to ask questions, it was so powerful. It was as if time stood still. I would emerge knocked out.

I stayed thirteen years without a break. I tried to run away. It was too much. Too much of what, one doesn’t know, but I came back. I went to Kathmandu and then I came back running.

A friend named Jean-Christophe was set to leave for Canada. I was supposed to go with him, and first we had agreed we would meet in Kathmandu. I travelled with very little money. Reaching there I had the feeling to be back on the streets of Quartier Latin in Paris. Same hippies, same joints, etc. I thought: I am not going to go to Canada. I sat on the stairs of the Consulate waiting for my friend.

“So Gérard, are you coming? I have got your plane ticket for Canada.”

“No, I am not going.”

My friend got reimbursed and he gave me a plane ticket for Calcutta. I left without money and without a visa. In Calcutta I was asked: “Where is your visa for India?” For me, Kathmandu, Calcutta, it was all the same thing (*laugh*). They took away my passport. That was a catastrophe: I found myself wandering in Calcutta completely lost. On top of it, I must say that I have no sense of orientation at all. I had to go to the External Affairs Ministry to get a visa. I took a bus and didn’t know where to get off. I was so bewildered that I had to open my hands: this is finished, this is over, I am not going to make it. Then I had a beautiful experience. I entered another state and everything fell into place. Somebody told me: you have to get off here. I got off the bus. I found that Ministry. I was in dhoti with a backpack. I was

told, “You have to see so and so.” That person was in a meeting. I was told that I couldn’t see him, and that anyway dressed as I was I would not be allowed inside. I still went inside, I went in another direction, passed all the guards, all the secretaries, and landed in a big office where a man with a Nehru cap was sitting behind a desk. I walked across the five metres of the office to him and told him my story in my broken English.

“Sit down, where are you going?”

“Pondicherry — you know, Auroville, Mother’s Ashram . . .”

“I am a disciple of Mother.”

Incredible! He rang a bell. They brought me my visa. I went back to Auroville.

...

In Aspiration I worked in the school.

...

After a while I asked Mother if I could go to Matrimandir, and she gave me her blessings. One must say that at that time in Aspiration we were going round in a circle. We didn’t have much to do. Planting trees, cooking breakfast, cooking lunch, cooking dinner . . . We didn’t know what to do. There was no money, there was nothing. We were just tinkering about. At a certain point the need to do something was felt. I think it was Rod who expressed this [to the Mother]: what can we do in order to be together (because we were disseminated a little everywhere)? So that there would be some unity? She said: Matrimandir has to be built. She was preparing.

...

So there was this energy for building the Matrimandir. I left Aspiration and in 1970, I went to work on the Matrimandir. When Mother was present, there was such an energy, such a force, one felt that nothing could resist that force. It was like a ship sailing forward, with all her cables, her rigging. There was nothing on the land, it was the Wild West, but we needed nothing. We lived in our dream, we had no money, it was hot, but it didn’t matter, we didn’t feel anything, we were the kings! That was Mother’s force. At the same time we did not feel so much the need to meet her. We knew she had so much work, and anyway we felt very close to her at the Matrimandir. We were working with her, we were working together, she was there. There was no need to trouble her by telling her our petty stories.

When Mother left her body, it was a shock. That was the night when we had finished the concreting of the four pillars. True, for us Mother was immortal. But what helped me a lot was the Matrimandir. There was continuity. Even after she left, one could feel the same energy, there was no break.

...

To come back to Auroville is almost like a renaissance. One is reborn, this is a new life, physically. And one feels the same attraction under a different form.

Yet it was far from being easy, because Auroville had changed so much. At the same time we again found here that presence, that force of Mother, that consciousness, in spite of everything. This is why we could stay. Of course that presence is everywhere on earth, but in Auroville it is particularly intense, since Mother had put it here. When you come back you recognise it; again you are caught by it. All the time I was away, I kept the connection with Mother, I had not forgotten her, but in Auroville you can recognise that [presence], and that is much more powerful than all the heartbreaks you can experience here.

It is still the same force, the same need, the same aspiration: the creation of Auroville. But it takes other forms. We have increasingly to pull it out from inside. We are through with many things — which obviously still have meaning for some people — but as far as we are concerned we have reached the end of a certain road and we are obliged to draw from inside if we want to participate. And the more you let go, the less ambitious, the more incompetent you become, because there are some ways of functioning which don't correspond anymore [to your inner need]. The Aurovilians have to find another way of functioning to deal with the reality. Otherwise one only improves a system. But there comes a moment when you don't feel like improving things; you know that it doesn't change anything. In order to exist, one has to switch to something else.

Two days ago I felt as if I was rediscovering Auroville — rediscovering all the things that made us love Auroville, all the things that drew us towards Auroville. I felt that everything is possible, possible. It only depends on how we look at things. When I speak of a change in the way we look at things, it is not literature, it is real, and at times one is lucky enough to be able to see this Auroville for a few seconds — that Auroville which is here and which will take the time it needs. I feel that there are some Aurovilians over here who are moving towards that.

Forty years of Auroville bring me to this point. I believe that Mother and Sri Aurobindo have made it easier for us to be with them.

It's true, at times the problems of Auroville seem unsolvable, past recall. — But there is nothing past recall, She said. Nothing. It depends more and more on the manner in which you look at things, in which you call for things. There is a certain reality to Auroville, yes, but this is not the only reality. Another one is quietly finding its place, just as the new consciousness gradually does its work and quietly penetrates everywhere. One cannot see this new world, but it is here. At times one can perceive it a little.

You look back on your life and you see how magical it has been: how She has arranged everything, how your failures were blessings (because if you had been successful at university perhaps you wouldn't have left). As if everything was preparing you to come to Her. I was stuck [in France]; I was imprisoned by the

family, by so many things. And I was not conscious, so I was kind of pulled by a thread. I had something inside but I didn't know what that was. I needed something else, I wanted something else, and in 1968 this need was felt by many young people. But the way she pulled you, the way she brought you here! Yet you didn't understand anything, you were not conscious, and this is where you realise that Mother and Sri Aurobindo are at work in you even when you are not aware of it. It was a grace to find myself in front of her. And it continues . . .

I was so stupid with Mother! Unconscious. Even when I was in front of her, you could not talk, you could not ask questions. She was so huge and you were thinking: my questions are so stupid! How many years of preparation, purification you have to go through, how many blows you have to receive, before you reach a kind of surrender! It has been forty years . . . How many years are needed!

And yet: She did catch us and bring us here. When she goes and catches you, you are very young, you don't understand anything, there is just something inside yourself that trembles, and then years later . . .

GÉRARD MARÉCHAL

INEVITABILITY OF THE LIGHT

I was two things when I was young, one I was very conventional (*laugh*), but at the same time I was always feeling I did not fit in anywhere. I was very social, but I was never really feeling that I was in the right place doing the right things at the right time. When I had finally done all the things that were expected of me, passed the exams, gone to university, graduated, taken my teacher training, I went to London. At that time, my sister, who had been rebelling from the day she went to university, was living with her husband in really outrageous conditions, in a 3-room basement apartment. There were 17 people living in that apartment and I went to live with them. It was not a squat, rent was being paid, but it was really a hippy head scene, lots of cannabis, hash, LSD. There were really no hard drugs but there were all these things going on and the belief that it was the new world, the new age. It was very idealistic but I went there just because I had nowhere to stay at that point and I had just got a job in a comprehensive school. So I was this very conventional person who came into this scene, and I started teaching in this comprehensive school and realised that I had just left school and here I was right back in . . . I hated every minute of it . . . and after three months I just walked out. I walked out from being a teacher and started to live on little jobs, house cleaning, hotel work, things like that.

At that time, my sister had met, in a pub called The World's End (*laugh*), a German guy called Jobst who had been to the Ashram in Pondicherry. He was also a very unconventional fellow, but he was very caught by Sri Aurobindo and he was writing a book about Sri Aurobindo's vision of philosophy. He lived round the corner, it turned out, so he came in some evenings, would sit down and start reading to our kind of crazy group from his book about the vision of Sri Aurobindo. Of course we were all very stoned (*laugh*), we were very . . . it went straight to the heart, you know, even though this guy was completely the most weird ambassador you can imagine; he was not at all the spiritual guy, not at all! Then he told us about Auroville and Auroville starting. Then, for the whole group, that was what we were going to do: we were going to go to Auroville, that was obviously our place! But somehow everything in that set was bound to disintegrate and of course the group did disintegrate, the whole set up completely disintegrated and degenerated. Then this more conventional side of myself reasserted itself again and I pulled myself together and got myself a proper job — but with the objective that I at least would go to Auroville, because I knew I had to have enough money for travel and enough money to keep myself for a year. So I got myself a job as a statistician in a big company and I worked there. And I got myself into a flat with some other girls in a very conventional set-up.

I suppose I should mention that our father was a Congregational minister, so

we did come from a religious, I would even say spiritual, [background]. My father was a fairly spiritual person, not just religious.

...

Somehow in the lowest times I have had always Mother in my sights and I had sort of a real experience vis-à-vis Sri Aurobindo and the Mother before the set-up in the London flat collapsed. I was getting very frustrated when I first got there, because I was a person who liked things clean, neat, tidy, and this place was total chaos and I was the one trying to keep it all together. One day something in me just said something like, “If you cannot beat them, just join them.” Somebody offered me some LSD and I took it. And then my brother-in-law handed me that Cartier-Bresson photo of Sri Aurobindo and told me, “This is the face of God.” So I spent my whole trip with this photo of Sri Aurobindo. I got lost for so many hours in this face which was the face of God. (*laugh*) And somehow I think it sealed something in my psyche for life. There was no going back from this experience actually. But somehow, in a funny way, I always felt more drawn to the Mother. In those times, when I was doing all this work, I had Her picture in my room, on the wall opposite my bed. I could never really understand this picture, because if you have never met the Mother, in the photos of that time she looks totally androgynous. You could not really tell whether she was a man or a woman (*laugh*), it was a very strange face and it had me utterly captivated. So I always had it at the foot of my bed in all these circumstances — which were pretty untogether — and when I had still this feeling of being out of character and not myself.

I had gone to work and was saving money. But the company [where I was working] was ordered by the government out of central London to a place near Heathrow, alongside other industries moving out of central London, they were obliged to offer their staff the opportunity to go redundant or go with them. But if you went redundant, you got a nice big payout. (*laugh*) So that was an act of grace. I got a big payout, and with this I was able to buy a ticket on, I think, the cheapest bus from London to Delhi.

So somewhere in the middle of June 1971 I got on a very dilapidated bus — it was like a very cheap version of the famous Magic Bus, for me the cheapest way available to go to India — and drove from London to Delhi. They put us first in a very fancy bus out of central London, and then drove us to Croydon, where we changed into a very battered-up bus, looking like these village buses plying here. We drove through Central Europe, Istanbul, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, through the Khyber pass into Pakistan and then to Delhi. It took us exactly a month. Then from Delhi I got the train and I arrived in Madras on August 15. I took a bus and I arrived in Pondicherry on the same afternoon and the rickshaw driver took me to the Ashram without even asking me where I was going. (*laughter*) Of course it was Darshan, and there was Mother on her balcony.

In the meantime, my sister, who had been in England when I left, had been given a plane ticket so she was there! I met her with a few of the other people from our flat in London — but none of whom have stayed here, she and I are the only two who have stayed. They had a place to stay at Colas Nagar so after the Darshan I had a place to go. On that day I met Jocelyn, Rod Hemsell, I met so many people on that day, even big Piete because they had all come to the Darshan. (*laughter*) Somehow I met them all on that first moment under the Mother's balcony.

Did you recognise the person?

Mother, yes. Actually, truthfully, Mother's atmosphere was so powerful that when I was coming from Madras on that bus, it was getting so strong, so strong. All the time I had this feeling of getting into this light. In Jipmer I even wanted to get down as I was sure I had arrived. The bus driver had to tell me, "Not yet, not yet!" I could not believe it could get any stronger. So it was like going towards this light. When I got there I was just totally blown away, absolutely, I had never been so spaced out. After the Darshan was over, we all went back to that little house they had in Colas Nagar (behind the railway station in Pondicherry). But of course when we went back into the house, the first thing that happened was the joints came out and we all started smoking, and I had the most awful experience of just coming down from this most incredible high to this spiralling down into a totally other space. Sitting in a corner I wished I was not stoned. So except for a little experience, a few years later, which was like checking, I was finished with that. So "No drugs" has never been a problem for me, it was just self-evident. I did not have to work on it like some other people had to do. What Mother is putting out here is so much more wonderful than any drug.

Then of course I had to do my applications to join Auroville.

...

I remember myself sitting and praying, "Please Mother, let me stay, please let me stay, please let me stay . . ." And then I had to send her a photograph, and somehow this photograph I had to give to Michael Zelnick who had to give it to Maggi. So I gave this photograph to Maggi to take to her. And then Mother said "Yes". Oh, bliss, bliss, bliss . . .

Then I went to stay with my sister in Aspiration (she was living there at that time). Then came my birthday very quickly, and I went to see Mother. I did not understand anything about this Ashram, how it was working, these old very stern Indian people, bossing you around. It was all very difficult. I was feeling more like a little child. But it was my birthday, somehow I got bullied and directed upstairs to this verandah where we had to sit quite a long time before we went in. And then of course Mother's physical appearance as she really was in a room was very startling

to me, as she was really very small, she was so bent, and actually had a bun in her hair . . . but then we came around, each one of us gave her a few flowers and we kneeled down — I did not have any problem with this kneeling thing, for me it was obvious, from this connection I had, that I could kneel before this person. And (oh my God!) She looked me in the eye . . . I don't know, she just blew me away completely, she gave me this look that went so far down into my being that when I came out I didn't know who I was anymore. I was lost totally, completely, completely. I was dismantled, I would say. It was quite difficult afterwards because suddenly . . . You see, I had a quite active mind, thinking and having a lot of theories about things, after all I studied economics and politics, these kind of things, sociology, so I was very strongly mental in that sense, and it was like she just took a board duster and pffft! there was nothing there and my mind went a complete blank. But unfortunately I had not done all that work you have to do, so that just left my vital only going completely crazy. It was a very spaced-out state so one had to confront the vital, see what it was, experience it somehow because there was no clamping down; the mental thing was no longer there so much.

I was staying with my sister at Aspiration, but I was feeling very uncomfortable there. . . .

My sister suggested that I try to go and see if there was some place I could live at the Centre because then I could do some manual work, like work at the Matrimandir or work at the Nursery.

So I found a place with Vera and Jurgen whom I had known in London. They had a little place at Sincerity and I went to stay with them. I finally persuaded Shyamsunder that when the Matrimandir Workers Camp was open, I could move there. When I moved into the Workers Camp, I sort of walked into a sort of dream I had had. It was all gold from all the bamboos and there were mosquito nets, like things the princesses had in fairy stories; I just had this amazing connection with this little room I had in the camp. I felt so good there. And of course I started working with everybody else, digging the hole [for the foundations]. We women would put the stuff dug by the guys with crowbars in the wheelbarrows, then the men would take them up the ramps. It would be getting too hot, so during the day we would go down to the Nursery and help Narad in the morning with the plants and spend all afternoon watering by hand, big buckets, heavy. But we lived in this space with each other, and the relationship with all these people staying at the Centre was like we had known each other for a thousand lifetimes. It was like coming back and meeting all your friends again or your family. We were all, despite being confused human beings, living in that incredible atmosphere and just completely caught up in this dream that we were creating and it was just . . . I never lived anything even vaguely equivalent. Living conditions were pretty horrific, there was like nothing, there were no proper facilities, proper toilets but it did not matter. All this lack of comfort for normal everyday things added to the charm. It was part of the thing,

somehow. We lived very communally, even though at that time we had to go down to Pondicherry once a month to pick up our hundred rupees and sign for it. But we all put it in the kitty, we never saw it. We made do with it, but with the gravest difficulties. I think that was the most difficult thing for me. . . . Because when I came to Auroville, I had been a big girl but after one year of nearly no food and working all these hours, I was very skinny. I didn't appreciate it then as much as maybe I should have (*big laugh*). In retrospect I realise all the work was done for me, but at the time I struggled with this feeling, "My god, there is not enough to eat, I am getting thin, I am getting weak," but I never thought of leaving, it never occurred to me, it was nothing like that.

. . .

In the beginning of 1973, I remember it so well, I was sitting in front of my little table, with a picture of the Mother, doing my meditation, and I looked at the Mother and said, "Do I really, really, really, have to do this?" Then the most amazing cyclone came roaring through and blew the Pump House down completely. Everything collapsed. In the middle of the night I crawled on hands and knees to Roy's house, which was the first one in the Nursery, and somehow we huddled together as we were not sure his roof would not go off too. Pump House was destroyed, and in the morning we all had to get to work to save all the plants in the Nursery — so I never even went back home. The whole day I just stayed on, pulling trees, staking plants and everything, trying to save what we could in the Nursery. When I went back finally exhausted, the village had come and taken everything. There was nothing left, except my little table with the picture of the Mother, and I walked up to her and said, "Well, you don't have to shout!" (*laugh*)

. . .

Actually, to go back a little bit, at the end of 1973, in October, my father died. So my sister and I suddenly had to go back to Europe. It doesn't look that much, 1971 to 1973, but it was like a million years, we didn't have any shoes (*laugh*), anything to wear, we had no money, we had to wait in London airport for my mother to send money to the bank before we could take even one step further. We were barefoot in October! I had a long skirt and a long blouse and my sister was in a nice white pajama suit, in October, at Heathrow, completely crazy (*laugh*). It was like going into a world where we had no idea what we were doing. Somehow, we managed. We had to face the fact that my mother was very distressed on her own, and a lot had to be done. But towards the end of the month we realised that we had to go back to India. It didn't make sense for us to stay, so we booked our return tickets for November 18. We went down to London and stayed with Margaret Fletcher, who was then one of the mainstays of the Auroville/Sri Aurobindo group in London, a very wonderful lady, living in Queensgate in central London. She had invited Edith

and Joy [from Boytons, in Cambridgeshire] for the evening, and we were all sitting around, feeling much better, as we were all Auroville people; the phone went and it was the message that Mother had left her body. Everybody became very silent and deeply meditative and I had this amazing experience of this golden light just flooding everything where I was and could be, it was like a total reassurance was being given, absolutely amazing.

When we came onto the plane, it was amazing how many people had managed to get on that plane to go to Pondicherry. My sister wanted to go straight to the Ashram, but somehow I knew I had to go straight to Auroville, it was very, very clear to me. I didn't need to go to the Ashram. So I went back to Auroville. I always remember that on the way back from the Centre walking over the fields to Kottakarai, I saw a calf being born. I found that deeply symbolic, the sacred cow giving birth at this moment of apparent loss, right there in the very centre of Auroville. Somehow I was in that kind of space where it had lots of significance.

But it is true that as time went by after Mother had left it became more and more difficult to live in that space in which we had been living. Somehow it receded and we were left much more to our own resources. It became more and more a matter of faith. It had not been a matter of faith up to then, it had just been a kind of living reality. But that faith has never left me, and many things have happened over time and over the years continually reaffirming that it is there, that there is nothing to really be disturbed about, that everything is truly in Her hands. We are all in her hands and there is an inevitability about the light, I don't know how to explain . . . Life is sometimes very very difficult, and then something will come along that shows you that, never mind, even the most difficult situations have the most positive consequences. This is what I keep experiencing, somehow. I had a moment when I was going through a very, very difficult patch, where I went into a kind of very Buddhist state of mind, I did not want to deal with the personal aspect of the divine, but after a few years I realised, I need my Mother, I need my Divine Mother (*laugh*). . . .

JUDITH

I CANNOT WALK ALONE EVEN ONE STEP

That She did something is clear. That She caught me is clear. That I wanted to be caught is also very clear. It was not just meeting her. It started thirty years before. The Mother does not start in Pondicherry. And that I am still here (*laugh*) is due to my daily encounter with her.

In our occidental, cultural and religious upbringing, we are very much aware of the importance of the God-Mother, virgin or not.

In German we know *Stunde null*, the zero hour. Meeting her was the zero hour. What was before, what followed afterwards, is only to be seen in that context. I have to preserve it. You see, I consider you [addressing Hervé and Christine] as fundamentalists. I was also a fundamentalist. I ignored everything that relativised. I needed the Mother. I got the Mother. And I said: “It is the Mother!” There was no doubt about anything.

But the experience of meeting her is one thing. The promise is another thing. And her taking care of you is a third thing.

I am a believer. I try to give myself. I pray to her. It does not matter in the end to whom we pray. It is a name even if not pronounced or spelt correctly.

If you really want to hear from me about the Mother, I have to give the history of how it leads to that moment when I collapsed.

There is my own upbringing, my own thirty years of interesting things, profession and politics and searching, which made me come to her, here.

I was an actor and I had a sort of a career. I knew it was not what I believed I could do. My career was nice, I had money, but it was not fulfilling. It was in the sixties. I got involved in the barricades. Always struggling between my career and the barricades. But one day I was on a Vietnam demonstration on the main boulevard in Berlin, we were shouting slogans Ho ho Ho Chi Minh. My daughter was sitting on my shoulders and we were marching, chanting. I looked into the face of somebody who was looking down from a balcony on this boulevard; he looked completely dumbfounded at what was going on, and I realised that I also didn't know what was going on. I looked at the people around me, and I saw in them all the same humanity, everywhere.

...

I had always this experience of being rejected. It is an all-pervasive element in my life. But in reality, I felt carried by the Mother from the moment she accepted me. This is how it works. There are no false promises — there are promises but answers depend on yourself. The playground, this romantic marvel of the barren nature of Auroville, was to be given.

In America, when I expressed my misgivings, my disappointment, I was told: go to California, but I knew that if I went there, I would never get to India. That was very clear.

Why India?

You should know Germans. You should read Herman Hesse and also Morike and Keller and Heinse (stories of quest and radiant cities, stories of Utopias).

So I came hitchhiking from country to country, meeting holy people. It was my quest. I was looking for the Mother. India would allow me to meet her. In Austria I was with orthodox Christians. In England I was influenced by Buddhism. I also read the Tibetan Book of the Dead. In its appendix was a reference to the Divine Mother.

Being a European I did not have the courage to bow down, but it was an urge, a need, and when I was in Afghanistan I stood in front of those huge statues of the Buddha in Bamiyan (which are not there any more). The moment I decided I would go and kiss his feet, the whole place was empty. Normally there are thousands of people. I was afraid, and I looked left and right, but there was nobody, so I proceeded to go to this Buddha. Naturally my desire was to fall down, to be flat on the ground. But his toes were on this level [one meter high] and even standing on my tip toes I could hardly reach his feet (*laugh*).

I had to go on. I went to Pakistan, to Iran also where I met Sufis, with their mysterious stories, unexplainable to this day.

I had my prejudices against Islam. To a dervish in Mashhad I asked, "Where are your women?" He opened the door to some inner courtyard, and there I saw two Muslim women smoking the hookah. Nothing more.

I was even allowed to enter that mosque as an infidel, and to go to the very inside of the shrine. At that moment I got terrified, knowing that I could not go outside of this choice.

In Sarnath I met two Australians who were coming from Pondicherry. Here for the first time somebody spoke about the Mother — in a derogatory way. I thought: "Let them talk, what, what?" I wanted them to continue because I found out: "She is in Her body!" They could say whatever they wanted, that the place was awful, etc., I only understood: "She is in Her body."

After that I met Jesuits in Calcutta. They wanted me to stay, showing me all the works of Sri Aurobindo in their library.

I had no time to waste anymore. Finally I came to Pondicherry.

When I arrived here (it was 1970), I was told, "You can see the Mother on your birthday." It did not happen. The next day, at 6.30 in the morning, bang-bang on the door. "She wants to see you." (*laugh*)

Then I remembered my good education and put on new clothes and leather chappals.

Before standing in front of her, I was so proud, full of myself. But I came in and everything was over, everything was done, there was nothing of me left. I was flat on the ground immediately. What I had wanted all my life finally happened. Before going to her I had watched people at the Samadhi, doing these gestures, fully prostrating. I was always thinking, “Oh, beautiful, I would like to be able to do that!” In front of her I collapsed. I don’t know how long it lasted, I am sure it took only seconds. My whole life passed. I realised I was very small. I stayed in that state for quite some time, at least it appeared to me like that. Then I heard a voice which said, [insisting tone] “She wants your hands.” Later I realised it was Champaklal’s voice. I reached out to her to give them, and then arrives that beautiful smile: “I am there.” So I could get up. Remembering songs we sang at church: “I cannot walk alone, not one step, without you holding my hand.” I was thinking exactly like that: without her I cannot go one step anymore.

The next morning I was still in the Park Guest-House. Before waking up, I had the experience of Mother being physically inside me. It was strange; it was the Mother inside of me turning like a wheel. In my chest or in my heart. I broke down again, cried and cried . . .

After that day I didn’t have other experiences — not one. I am hanging in mid-air ever since. Everything else, She has given to me. I know what she is giving me every day. I take care of this place [Gratitude], I touch the soil every day, knowing that it is sacred soil, Mother’s soil. As much as I can, I will try to be responsible for it. I get all my existence out of it.

I was working in Last School for the children twenty-four hours per day, as Mother had said yoga is twenty-four hours. I was working day and night taking care of Tamil children, washing them, giving them food and paper for them to paint on. This lasted for two or three years. I was exhausted to the point of depression. And I was starving. So I stopped and I went to the Bakery because I could get food there. I could at least eat (*laughs*). I was supporting four Aurovilians and was very proud of it. I was cycling to Pondi with a rucksack and biscuits which I was making, and which Mother had called “Aspiration biscuits”. I was selling them.

Later I left Aspiration for Auroson’s Home. At the beginning of my Auroville experience, I believed in *the words* of the Mother, the *letter* of the texts. This has changed, and now I can love people for what they are, or are not. I have learned to detach myself, to let go. I can feel compassion, I am grateful. I trust my likings. I am free. It is one thing to have a guru and another to get rid of him.

When Mother left her body, it was the day of my birthday. I was at Matrimandir. It was the last concreting of the pillars. I came to know. I ran to Pondi to Sunil. I challenged him, “What is this? She promised us the transformation!” Sunil being Indian said: “I was never interested in transformation; that is *their* yoga.” But he missed her badly.

[After she left] I was still under the routine impression: “Oh, the Mother is

there.” As we say in German: *der liebe Gott*. But then I saw that not one thing was like Mother wanted it to be, *not one*. And we still say *der liebe Gott, der liebe Gott*, “She will do!” That is a tragedy.

To the Mother I don’t have to adjust. To the world, yes. I give you an example: after forty years of being a resident in the international city of the future, I am always a foreigner for India, depending on visa renewal and recommendation.

Another thing: Auroville is and will be a success at least touristically speaking. But did we come for that? It is one thing to dream, another one to wake up. But a lighthouse has been ignited, and it is not in vain.

*Car c’est vraiment, Seigneur, le meilleur témoignage
Que nous puissions donner de notre dignité
Que cet ardent sanglot qui roule d’âge en âge,
Et vient mourir au bord de votre éternité.¹*

[Baudelaire, *Les Phares*]

THOMAS

1. For truly, Lord, the clearest proofs
That we can give of our nobility,
Are these impassioned sobs that through the ages roll,
And die away upon the shore of your Eternity.

(Baudelaire, *The Beacons*; Translated by William Aggeler)

COME TO INDIA NOW!

This was April 1968. I was living in Arizona, I was a hippie, and I was having a wonderful time with all my friends, the desert, the mountains, and so on and so on. One day I went with a friend to the house of another friend, which was called the House on the Hill. There was nobody at home, but we were very good friends with the people in the house, so we felt we could go in and sit there, waiting till someone came home. So I went and I was sitting in a very deep comfortable chair, and my friend was sitting on another chair next to me, and we were just sitting there very quietly.

There was a painting on the wall opposite me; it was a very abstract painting, almost entirely green. I was just sitting there and . . . the painting disappeared. The wall disappeared. The house disappeared. And then I saw two very powerful eyes, and I heard a voice that said to me, “Come to India now!” This [body] had almost disappeared, but I could still feel my heart and my brain. So I replied, “I have no money, I am two days pregnant . . .” This voice came back like . . . as though what I said meant nothing (*ordering*): “Come to India now!” Then someone came to the door and I kind of came back into the room. And the friend who was sitting next to me asked, “What just happened?” — “What do you mean?” She said, “It was so strange!”

I had never heard a word about Mother or Sri Aurobindo.

I was a person a little bit ahead of my time. Now they go on what they call “vision quest”. I didn’t know about vision quest, but on February 20, 1968, I had gone out into the desert alone with a bag of brown rice to a little trailer that a friend of mine had on a piece of land. I had this bag of brown rice with me, and some gomasio. I had nothing else, no drugs, no tobacco or anything. I was going to be quiet. I couldn’t figure out what was going on in my life (I was more confused *after* I found out what was going on in my life!) I spent eight days there alone, not seeing anybody, not talking to anybody. I didn’t know anything about meditation, but basically I was doing nothing but meditating. On the night before February 28, I had a vision. It was incredible. It was one of the most beautiful experiences of my life. I thought it was people from outer space. Completely different kinds of people coming together in a kind of amphitheatre, some kind of circular thing, doing some kind of ceremonial thing, but very different, all different colours, sizes, shapes, different clothes, just something so different, so different from anything I had seen or heard about in America. I thought it had to do with outer space, quite frankly. I had no idea what it was.

Then in April, “Come to India now!”

Of course all hippies were talking about India and gurus. So okay, I am supposed

to go to India. First I go to the East Coast because my sister is getting married. I am in New York, and I am really confused and upset. I am supposed to go back west. So I look for ashrams in the New York telephone directory. And I come out with “Sri Aurobindo Ashram”. So I call the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in New York.

“Hello”, I said, “I need to speak to the guru.”

“Well, we are sorry, it’s not possible.”

“No, no, this is very serious, I really need to talk to the guru!”

“Sorry, we can’t help you.”

That was it.

Then I did all that journey, travelling to Spain, Morocco. Binah was born in Berlin. I travelled to Greece, then to India. I came to India through the India-Pakistan border. Somebody had told me, “Come to India now”, but . . . India is a very big country, there are lots of people there, they didn’t give me any name, they didn’t give me any address, “Come to India now.” I thought I was really stupid and slightly crazy. So I went to Kashmir, I stayed in an ashram where there was a very interesting guru.

I went to Kathmandu.

. . .

As I was leaving that place, Francis N. was sitting downstairs. I said, “I am leaving!”

“Where are you going?” he asked.

“I am going to Ceylon.”

“Well, if you want to break your trip between Kathmandu and Ceylon — it is a very long trip over the land, it takes about ten days — stop in Pondicherry, there is an ashram which is like a country club.”

“Is it on the beach?”

“Yes, it is on the beach.”

“Oh, I like beaches, maybe I will stop there for a couple of days, to break the trip.”

So I travelled from Kathmandu to Madras. In Madras I couldn’t remember the name Pondicherry. The train from Patna had arrived in Madras in the morning, and the train to Colombo was not leaving until the evening. I couldn’t decide if I should buy a ticket on the train or not. There were some French girls in the waiting room, so I said, “Somebody said there is an ashram near Madras, very nice, near the beach?” They said, “Oh, Pondicherry!” I said, “I will get a train.” They said, “No, no, take a bus, it is only a few hours.” I took a bus, got to Pondicherry bus stand and took a rickshaw to the Ashram.

Madhav Pandit had already left for lunch, so I had to go and wait. Then I came back. The whole place was . . . like nothing I had ever seen. I had been travelling at that point off and on for years. I travelled extensively, the Middle East and Mexico and Europe, Nepal, Morocco. I had never come across anything like that, *that had*

the kind of light that the Sri Aurobindo Ashram had in 1969. The place was luminous. There were all these old sadhaks there sitting on chairs, offering you chairs, flowers everywhere. The ashrams I had visited were not at all like that. Then they put me in Castelini Guest-House, which was where John Kelly was staying. And John Kelly¹ told me all his miraculous experiences with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Which I thought were fun stories. I didn't believe a word of it, but they were great stories. And then Ananta came in, he had just escaped from Jipmer madhouse, he was so far out, so crazy. He was an American Boston Brahmin who had lived in the Ashram since 1963. (He is Bjorn in Satprem's book, *The Sannyasi*). He took me to his island, which was so beautiful you can't imagine. Then John took me to meet Maggi Lidchi, who is an impressive person . . .

All the time I am stuck there in Pondy because I am waiting for money.

Then August 15, Darshan Day. I go to the Ashram by 10 o'clock in the morning, with my daughter on my arm, to sit in the meditation, and they stopped me at the gate: "No, no, no children." What! I go back to the guest-house, sit down in front of a photo of Sri Aurobindo, and — you are not going to believe this — he smiled at me. I was . . .

The next day or two I got a message: "Time for you to leave the guest-house, you had permission to stay till Darshan, Darshan is over, go." So I decided to go to Ceylon and back to America. I was still waiting for a cheque. I moved into the Quality Hotel by the park. Now I didn't tell anybody where I was, I had never written to Mother, I had made no approach to her. I left the guest-house in the morning, moved into the Quality Hotel. 4 o'clock in the afternoon, Maggi Lidchi comes to me and says, "I have a message for you from the Mother, '*Don't worry about money, you can use all the facilities of the Ashram and Auroville, love and blessings, Mother.*'" I had made no movement from my side towards her!

I had seen her at Darshan, on August 15, I stayed in the street with I don't know many thousands of people, and she came right down to me and said, "Look after Binah", but I thought maybe it is my own thing. . . And now I got this note from Mother, "You may use all the facilities of the Ashram, don't worry about money, love and blessings", that's pretty weird! So I said, "It's alright, Maggi, I am going to get a cheque in a day or two and I am going off to Ceylon, it has been nice meeting you."

Two or three days later I am at the Ashram post-office, and as I am walking out of the post-office, Maggi comes to me and says, "Mother just told me that she will see you when you come back from Ceylon" . . . I had *no intention of coming back*

1. John Kelly was an American who had been a soldier in the famous Easy Company during the Second World War. During the battles of 1944-45, in the midst of terrifying explosions, he was guided at each step by a voice and by two eyes which later he would recognise as the eyes of Sri Aurobindo. Maggi Lidchi recounted that astonishing and true story in her book *Great Sir and the Heaven Lady*.

from Ceylon! Okay, so instead of going from Ceylon to the US, I'll come back here and go to the US.

So I come back from Ceylon, and somebody had told Mother sees people on their birthday. You know, I am always the greedy one. So I thought (I was coming back towards the beginning of October) well, maybe she will see me *now and one more time* on my birthday. Again I hadn't told her anything about myself.

So I get back and go to Maggie, and I say, "I am back, and when can I see the Mother?" She said to me, "Mother said she will see you on your birthday." (*laugh*)

When I went to see her on my birthday, I am still thinking of leaving. And she looks at me and she says, "Come back with Binah on her birthday." So I decided I wasn't leaving.

Of course it was not possible to stay, because I was in India on a tourist visa, etc. . . I didn't worry about stuff like that. There was no reality in Mother's world, except Mother. Everything else was just circumstances which she would move around.

She was fantastic, she was super-fantastic. When I arrived in her room the first time . . . my mind stopped totally, I was so astonished. But when I came out of there, I couldn't walk down the stairs, I didn't want to go down the stairs, I never wanted to go down the stairs, everything I had ever wanted in my life was right there in that room. It was something totally inexplicable.

. . .

The most wonderful vibration you can imagine! You just cannot imagine the vibration.

. . .

And I tell you, there was one rule in Auroville when Mother was in Pondicherry: Goodwill toward all, goodwill is the basis of peace and harmony. Without peace and harmony, she said, the Divine cannot manifest.

. . .

I went to her once for darshan. I'd had an unhappy love affair. I was feeling very bad, very sorry for myself. Some people are still crying twenty years after they have finished. . . . I went to Mother and I am wearing a dress made out of second-hand silk and covered with ribbons, it was really outrageous. And I walked in and she started laughing, and I started laughing with her, and we laughed and laughed and laughed. It was just . . . And we always had the same about clothes. One time my sister came and she brought me a dress in a new fabric, very soft, very nice. I thought, I will wear this to Mother, this is very different, she will never have seen something like this, I have never seen anything like that ever. I go to Mother and . . . she is wearing something in the same fabric! But very nicely cut. She was always there five steps in front of me. And she knew exactly where I was going and where I needed to go.

...

I had thirteen darshans with Mother, and each one was memorable. In 1972 she would see different people who were in charge of different departments regularly, so I wrote and asked her if . . . At that time Aurocreation was handling all the products of Auroville. I asked her if I could be one of the people from Aurocreation she saw every month, [. . .] And she called me for each of the Aurocreation darshans.

The last time I went to her room, I was on the balcony with Jacqueline, and at that time — this was already in 1973 — there were thousands of people who were up there for darshan every morning, and so Mother would just sit there and hand out blessing packets. Except the last one on the line: to that person she would usually say something. So I was up there with Lisa, Jacqueline and Yann, and everybody wanted to be last. Champaklal said, “Come, come!” I did not want to bother Mother and keep her waiting, so I went in. She was handing out blessing packets, so I went to take my blessing packet, and she grabbed my finger — this is a little old lady, she must have weighed about a third of what I weighed — she took two of my fingers and pushed me down on my knees (*laugh*), she was so STRONG, you cannot imagine, and this was in 1973, when she was 95 years old. It didn’t matter whether you were the last person on the line, it was not like she didn’t know who you were, she knew exactly who you were, and why you were there.

I had gone to America in October 1973 because my father had a heart attack, and he wanted me to come. I was travelling across the United States and I was in New Mexico when my father called me and told me that George Nakashima had called him to tell him that the Mother had left her body. I just turned into ice. For me that was the toughest blow I had in my life. Because I totally believed in the supramental transformation, and I believed she was doing this supramental transformation. Today I really believe that death is a step on the path towards supramental transformation. However at that time. . . . I could not get warm for months, it was such a terrible shock, the most profound shock. So I stayed in America at that time for a couple of years.

...

One time, maybe in January 1972, I had gone to America for Christmas with Binah, and I came back, I had been away for five weeks. I had built the whole community, what is now Sri Ma, which was Far Beach. I had built this community after I had left my house at Bharat Nivas, Silence — I had built the whole community, workshops, houses, kitchen, everything. Myself I lived in a tiny little hut. I come back and there are some French people staying in my hut! I go over to the big community house and I ask . . . They said, “Nothing belongs to anybody in particular.” So I went to Pondicherry and I sent Mother a letter, “What should I do?” She replied, “Find your psychic being! (*roaring with laughter*) Try and I will help you. Love and blessings.”

You know, she was not dealing with bullshit. It was not what was about with her. It was not: Oh (*sad*), if she built another hut here or there, or did this or that . . . No! “Do the work, I will do . . .”

. . .

I go to the Matrimandir. For me that room is like Mother’s room with Mother in it, it is fantastic, it is truly amazing, it is as close to perfection and consciousness as one can hope for among the human race.

. . .

Sri Aurobindo says the only thing that is important is spiritual progress. They make a big thing about death. He says that is not important, the only thing that is important is spiritual progress. These people don’t get that at all. . . .

JOCELYN

WE SHALL DECIDE . . .

She found a unique way to catch us. That was in the midst of a crisis we were going through, while I was in uniform, in the eastern part¹ of India in Calcutta. In East Pakistan (what is now Bangladesh), a clampdown took place by a ruthless military ruler, called General Niazi, as a result of which lots of refugees started coming into India. Literally millions of miserable people, without food, starving, without clothes, were being thrown out of East Pakistan and poured into Assam State and West Bengal, which were already overcrowded. We were told in the army, in my Headquarters (Headquarters Eastern Command), that we had to tackle this problem. That was 1971. It is amazing how we were confronted with this very difficult problem, while in my mind, at least, the 1962 debacle against the Chinese was still rankling. I used to be very very very concerned: Do we have to go through that again?

One day one of my own officers came to me and said, “Sir, you are very pensive these days.” And I said, “Chum (typical army language), you would be more bloody pensive if you had some of the problems I carry in my head. I can’t share them with you because I have been told the top secret plans, but we may have to take military action.” He said, “Sir, you are my old instructor, I shouldn’t be advising you, but whatever your problems, *write to the mother*.” My immediate reaction was, “Who is the mother? My own mother is no more.” And then I discovered she was a French lady. In uniform, getting ready for an operation, writing to a foreigner . . . I never heard of her before, although I had heard of Sri Aurobindo. He told me she was in the Ashram, in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram; but it took me two to three days to decide. And I wrote just two lines: that, “I have been advised that I should seek your blessings; I cannot talk about my problems; I am in the Army, and I would be very happy to get your blessings.”

Across my letter she signed, “Blessings, Mira”. I received it after a few days.

It’s amazing how gradually things started clarifying, getting more stabilised, in the sense that we knew what we could do, what the Pakistanis could do, and we knew that the situation would not be absolutely out of control. And it is amazing how the same instrument [that young officer] had gone around to most of the top people in the army, including my commander in chief, General Jagjit Singh Arora. I didn’t know — none of us knew that he had been going around.

One day, myself and another General, Narendra Singh, travelled with the Army Commander in the VIP aircraft. Narendra had got into the aircraft already, and the Commander in Chief was coming, following us, and as he came in there was this elaborate seat for him in the VIP aircraft. He lay down. We used to be working

1. Eastern Command.

about twenty hours a day. Sitting down in front of him, watching him, we greeted each other. I was very fond of him, and he liked me. I said, "You are very pensive this morning." (I used the same words.) He sat up immediately and said, "Krishen, you haven't done your homework this morning!" I said, "Sir, I beg your pardon, thirty years of service in the army, I haven't been caught so far, where have I slipped up?" He opened his pocket, and gave me a message to read which had been given to him by my own staff as he was coming into the aircraft (somebody had rushed out and given him). It was an intercept message from the Russians, warning us that the Chinese had started moving towards the northern border. I am very touchy about the Chinese, and I immediately said, "Oh! no Sir, we can't cope with it now." He said, "Don't worry, whatever the thing, *get the Mother's blessings*." He opened his other pocket to take a little blessing packet.

My reaction was, "You too" like in Shakespeare! It was amazing: *all of us had received the Mother's blessings*. One by one. And it is amazing how things got clarified.

Things got delayed, in order for us to get more ready. While we were getting ready, suddenly the Pakistanis took the initiative on the Western front, so we were at liberty to do what we liked, *we did not have to start the war*. It is amazing how we were preparing mentally for it. With great confidence we took on the Pakistanis, and in two weeks' time it was over. The war started the 3rd of December 1971, and on the 16th of December, the Commander in Chief of East Pakistan, General Niazi, formally asked for release. It was over in two weeks' time.

I didn't meet him on that day of surrender, I went the next day, the 17th, and in his mess we were informally discussing among ourselves what had gone on and so on. After all, we knew each other before Partition, and one of our Divisional Commanders and he were Corps mates in Bangalore before Partition. While discussing with them, we asked him, "What happened to you? What kind of an officer are you? You surrender with 93 regular soldiers fully armed, and we have just been to your depot where you have got all the weaponry given to you by the Americans." He suddenly became very serious. He said, "I don't know, I thought it was hopeless, I thought it was hopeless." I could see from his face that he was sincere, not a coward. He was not a coward. There is no doubt — that's why I call it a divine intervention — that the Mother's action had taken place, and we were given all the support, and the Pakistanis were told not to go on and on and on.

I immediately decided that I must find out more about it. That was 17th of December, and we were still trying to sort things out in East Pakistan, trying to control the situation. In the middle of January 1972, I thought I would request some leave to go to Pondicherry. It was flatly refused. In early February, a second time I asked for leave. Luckily my boss was with his Chief of Staff, General Jack Jacob, who later became the Governor of Punjab. He turned to Jacob, "Jack, what is the problem with Krishen? He is always asking for leave!" So I said, "I will tell you what the problem is, I would like to go to Pondicherry." As soon as I named

Pondicherry, it was amazing — even now I can remember his face — how his face changed immediately.

“Really?”

“I would like to go and find out who this lady is,” I said. “I have heard of Sri Aurobindo, but I have never heard of her before and I believe that [her intervention] did the trick.”

So he said, “Jack, I think he should be allowed.” And,

“When can you go?”

“Sir, as soon as possible.”

But I was allowed to go only after the middle of the month, so that the things could get stable, and I thought we would go as a family. Kamala was looking after the wounded Pakistani prisoners of war in the military hospital in Calcutta. Her leave was another problem, but somehow, using the name of my boss, I got her boss to give her leave. And what strange coincidence, we arrived in Pondicherry with our three daughters (the eldest one was not with us, because she was in her medical college for commissioning into the Army Medical Corps) on the 20th. We had no idea that the Mother’s birthday was on the 21st of February!

On 21st morning, Prem Malik was there, a college friend of mine. We were told that early morning at 4 o’clock, there would be the inauguration of the Matrimandir at Auroville. We never heard of Auroville before. The foundation stone of the first pillar was going to be laid. At 4 o’clock in the morning, the two of us (we left the children behind) found ourselves standing on blank red laterite soil, covered with red dust. A huge pit had been dug out for the foundation. Both of us were given a small stone to lay down, after some music of Sunil was played. Both of us were deeply moved. Later we saw Mother on the balcony in Pondicherry, and went to the Samadhi where there was a very emotionally charged atmosphere.

On the 22nd morning we were told, “You will be given a special audience as a family.” Mother’s secretary, M. P. Pandit, was the one who was to escort us. The five of us were taken to her room, and we were told that we could sit at her feet one by one, look into her eyes, and think of all the things we wanted. These words were used by Roger Anger who met me just outside the Mother’s room. Typical French pronunciation, “Generrâl, think of all the things you want, Mother will grant them.” I didn’t know him at that time.

I must have sat there for I don’t know how long, I thought for eternity. One by one we sat. When I came out, I felt very guilty, looking at the people outside. Mother must have thought, “What a stupid man this is,” because I had gone completely blank; I didn’t think of anything I wanted; I was absolutely dead blank. But when I shared this with Madhav Pandit, he said, “It is very fortunate that you were blank, she will give you what you need.” This is how She brought us in.

This instrument (this young officer), is not even here in the Ashram, but he fulfilled a role for me. He keeps in touch with me, he comes here sometimes.

Kamala

In that war there were very heavy casualties. We were getting trains coming from Assam, and ambulances coming from nearby. In those few war days, there had been heavy casualties, mainly young people. We had four theatres functioning simultaneously: chest surgeon, orthopedic surgeon, neuro-surgeon, and general surgeon. We were on twenty-four hours duty. There was no leave, no time at all.

. . .

I was very busy at the time, so how we got this leave I don't know!

When we reached Pondicherry, we knew nothing about this place. We had some food at *Tout c'qu'il faut* (the children were small, Shubha my youngest was only 6). Then early in the morning when we came to Auroville, we were so impressed by the complete barrenness. . . All you could see was a few palmyra trees on the way, and going to Matrimandir we were all covered with red dust.

The big pit was surrounded by many people. Many people from the Ashram. Sunil's music was played. I thought I had never heard such beautiful music before. And while listening to that music itself, in my heart it came, a voice from within said: "*This is your place.*" I thought to myself, this big barren area is my place? (*laugh*) So I said, leave it; if the Divine says it is my place, I will come here at some time. I made no decisions, he [Krishna] made all the decisions of coming here.

We put the first pebbles in the East pillar, Mahalaksmi, and we came back to Pondicherry. We saw Mother on the balcony for a little while, then we had meditation at the Samadhi. I had often tried to meditate, because I had met a lot of saints (I had been fortunate from childhood to visit many ashrams and meet many saints), but I could never meditate. But here, around the Samadhi, at 10 o'clock the bell rang and . . . I don't know what happened, I was in complete *samadhi*. I woke up, 10.30 . . . I thought, what happened to me? Where was I?

That was one important thing.

The other one was meeting the Mother. To me, all I remember — I don't remember her face at all — all I remember is two deep blue eyes, that's all. And they looked into you, and you went completely blank.

We were asked to give her flowers, and she picks up a rose and returns it to you. I was given a yellow rose, I think. He was given a red rose, and the children were given . . . I don't remember. We came out, I was deeply moved, I felt like crying and crying. I was crying, all the way back to Chennai on the bus. I was crying, something let loose.

All the children were individually affected.

When did you decide to come back?

Krishna

Immediately. When we travelled back to Calcutta, this was discussed between us, and I knew I had to be there. I had to be here for life.

I was coming towards the tail end of my service. So within a few months of our return to Calcutta, after meeting the Mother, I asked for retirement. I asked for premature retirement, which you can seek. After all, we had won the war, and I had got over the feeling of the 1962 debacle. I was laughed at by everybody, because I had been given an award, the second highest award for service. We had a chief at that time, Field Marshall Maneckshaw, who was very good at Punjabi abuses. He had come to visit Calcutta, and then he saw my application.

“What the bloody hell do you think?” he said. “As if you can leave the army when you like!?”

“Sir, this is what I have decided,” I said. In the meantime I had written to Madhav Pandit that I had decided to leave the army. Within a day or two of receiving my letter, he rang me up in Calcutta, and I still remember the loud words of his, “*The Mother has forbidden you to leave the army. She said it four times. Please note: he is not to leave the army, he must not leave the army, he must continue in service. We shall decide when he is to leave the army.*” I had to withdraw my application! And I was laughed at and cursed a second time: I was wasting everybody’s time.

Then I was promoted, and in 1973 I was posted to Kashmir, for another unique experience before my retirement. Then there was a possibility that I might get another extension, a two years extension. I said no. So at the end of 1976, when the term was over, we decided (Kamala too) to leave the army. We came straight from Kashmir to Pondicherry. Permanently. And we have been here since . . .

KRISHNA AND KAMALA TEWARI

OUT OF AFRICA

As an Aurovilian one is often asked, “How did you come to Auroville?” In my case I’m tempted to reply using the title of Isak Dinesen’s famous book . . . “Out of Africa”.

My wife (Susan) and I had decided to take a year’s sabbatical with our two children, Camilla and Marcus, aged 6 and 3^{1/2} respectively when we set out, and travel down through Africa to Johannesburg, where Susan’s father was living; visit Capetown; ship ourselves from Durban across the Indian Ocean to Bombay; and see parts of India and Nepal before returning home overland again to London.

For this we bought a 2-litre petrol Land-Rover fitted with heavy-duty suspension and strengthened rear axle; [etc.]

...

Travelling through Africa was fantastic.

...

We reached Durban, where we took an Italian ship across the Indian Ocean to Bombay. Clearing the Land-Rover in Bombay took a day and a half of nightmarish bureaucracy, but finally we were free to leave.

On board ship we had developed close friendships with several couples who were also globetrotting with vehicles. One of them wanted us to travel with them to the north, but we had other plans. We had an introduction to a Canadian woman at Mundgod Tibetan Refugee Settlement near Goa, married to the Tibetan official in charge of the settlement. And we had been told — emphatically — by a close and perceptive Italian artist friend in London that we must visit a place he called “the new vibrating Auroville”. He had never been there himself, or to India, but his sensitive nature clearly saw something. He was, in hindsight, Mother’s first instrument, because his guidance had spoken directly to something within us with such strength that we readily stuck to our original plans . . .

...

We decided first to visit the Canadian woman at Mundgod and consult with her.

She was undoubtedly Mother’s second instrument. Although she had never been to Auroville, the moment we raised doubts she swept them aside: “I would advise you to go on. You should definitely see the place,” she said, with inspiring enthusiasm.

...

We headed south again via Bangalore, Kancheepuram and Mahabalipuram to reach Pondicherry on 15th March 1973.

From Pondicherry we were directed out via JIPMER Hospital to look for a dirt track near Morattandi, leading into the heart of the countryside. We found it; then came kilometre after kilometre in the heat and dust — through a village (Edayan-chavadi), past a single nice-looking house off to the right (Auroson's Home), and so on. But still there was no sign of a city. Worse, something had begun to make an odd noise in the engine. Finally we felt convinced that we had taken a wrong direction, as ahead lay only what looked like a lone construction site adjacent to a large tree, and nothing else. As we approached it, thinking to get directions, just seventy metres from the site there was a terrible noise from the engine, and we were forced to make an immediate halt in the mid-day sun.

It was *the first time* in 25,000 km of travel from London that we had experienced a breakdown (which says something for the enormous strength and reliability of our vehicle). And now it had happened in a remote area of countryside, miles from anywhere. I couldn't imagine a much worse situation in which to be in, but what happened next was extraordinary. When I went over to the nearby buildings, literally the first man I spoke to was a Westerner who turned out to be a mechanic, and introduced himself as Jack Alexander from the USA. It seemed miraculous, so I explained that we had broken down near the banyan.

"We're looking for Auroville," I said.

"This is Auroville," he replied.

"No," I went on, "I mean *the city of Auroville*."

"You're in the city," he said. "Although it's not yet built, you're at the very heart of the city area at a place called the Matrimandir."

25,000 kilometres of travel, and we had broken down *for the first and only time just seventy metres from the absolute centre of Auroville!*

...

Through an American Aurovilian named Roger Toll (Mother's third instrument) we were introduced to Madhav Pandit (Mother's fourth instrument), a senior sadhak close to Mother, who asked us to write a letter to Her and give it to him next day. This we did, enclosing our photos. The following day we were told by Madhav that Mother had expressed interest in us, and had accepted to see us, adding that we could bring the children with us. He then told us that he had arranged for us to join a group going for birthday darshan on March 25th.

What follows next is an extract from my diary.

Sunday, 25th March 1973

The BIG DAY!

...

We reached the Ashram sharp at 10.00, and after leaving our shoes in the courtyard mounted a flight of green-carpeted stairs in a quiet, anticipatory frame of mind. On the first floor we passed through a room with leopard skins on the chairs, then went on up a second staircase, past some sadhaks, to a man ticking off names at the top of the stairs, and finally out onto a covered roof area in company with others. As we sat down to wait, I looked around and noticed how fresh and beautiful everyone else's flowers were, and felt a bit ashamed of ours.

...

After maybe twenty minutes everyone was summoned, and we lined up to enter Mother's room, with us — as non-birthday people — at the end of the line.

I am not specially sensitive, but I immediately noticed a strong and beautiful atmosphere inside the room. I had a quick look around, then concentrated on Mother. She was sitting in a large armchair, with her head deeply bowed. As people came before her, they knelt, and were then given a "blessing packet" of rose petals charged with her spiritual force.

I suppose it was all the talk we had absorbed about the Mother which affected my impression of her, but I had the distinct feeling of being in the presence of someone extraordinary, someone more than just an ordinary human being. The atmosphere was really powerful, and suddenly the children, who had shown no hesitation beforehand, didn't want to go to Mother, and hung back nervously. We knew there was nothing we could do about it, so Susan went ahead and knelt first, getting her blessing packet. Then it was my turn. I was in a daze, but I knelt with head bowed, resting my forehead on the material of Mother's garments on the left edge of her chair. As I did so, I felt Mother's hand gently touch my head, then, assuming that that was IT, I took the proffered silvery blessing packet from her, stood up, and started towards the door. I had taken maybe two or three paces, when something made me look again at Mother, and I saw that she had turned her head as though to follow me with her eyes as I moved away. That is the moment when I feel my bond with Her was made, because earlier I hadn't looked into her eyes, as everyone else apparently did.

Then it was over, and with my eyes wet with emotion I was at the door and going down the stairs to the courtyard, feeling in a state of utter peace, as though walking on air, conscious of nothing but a surging aspiration to improve myself and be worthy of Mother and what she had just given me. I felt such a beginner, and so low compared to all around me, but there was now a determination to try to rise to a higher level, and be as Sri Aurobindo and The Mother would want me to be. For

this, I felt that Mother had in fact given me the strength and determination to follow the path and reach the goal.

Susan had also been deeply affected. She had expected to come away with a feeling of elation and joy, but instead felt devastated. As she put it, it was as though Mother had revealed to her all the defects within her which needed to be worked on, and she suddenly felt very unworthy, and was in tears at what she had seen within herself, even thinking of running away from Pondicherry.

From the Ashram we went straight up to Centre, and sat first in silence on the brick structures near the banyan tree. We then went down into the Matrimandir pit and walked all round the structure, before going on to the Nursery, where Roger joined us.

After lunch Susan expressed the need to be left alone in complete peace and quiet for some time, and retired to a private room; but no sooner had she settled herself than the first thing she saw in front of her was the following quote from the Bhagavad Gita, set beside a picture of The Mother:

Fix your mind on Me, be devoted to Me, worship Me, and bow to Me; so shall you without doubt reach Me. This I truly promise you; for you are dear to Me. Surrendering all duties to Me seek refuge in Me alone. I shall absolve you of all sins; grieve not.

That finished her off! It took her some hours before she could again compose herself and begin to relate to the outside world. In contrast, I was not in such a state, and felt instead a calmer and more peaceful inner joy, which allowed me to interact with everyone normally.

We later learned that Mother stopped seeing all ‘new’ people from the beginning of April, so it seems possible that we may have been the last ones — almost certainly the last Westerners — to come before her in her room.

We stayed seven weeks in all, to also experience Mother’s Balcony Darshan in April, then, after visiting Nepal, returned overland to Europe via Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey.

...

With Mother’s help I finally did in 1977, but this time “Out of England”.

TIM WREY

*Answering with the flower's answer to the sun
They gave themselves to her and asked no more.*

...

*Their lives replied to hers, moved at her words:
They felt a godhead and obeyed a call,
Answered to her lead and did her work in the world;*

...

They felt a larger future meet their walk;

...

*They were moved by her towards great unknown things,
Faith drew them and the joy to feel themselves hers;*

...

(Savitri, p. 364)



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