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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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PARABRAHMAN

These wanderings of the suns, these stars at play
In the due measure that they chose of old,
Nor only these, but all the immense array
Of objects that long Time, far Space can hold,

Are divine moments. They are thoughts that form,
They are vision in the Self of things august
And therefore grandly real. Rule and norm
Are processes that they themselves adjust.

The Self of things is not their outward view,
A Force within decides. That Force is He;
His movement is the shape of things we knew,
Movement of Thought is Space and Time. A free

And sovereign master of His world within,
He is not bound by what He does or makes,
He is not bound by virtue or by sin,
Awake who sleeps and when He sleeps awakes.

He is not bound by waking or by sleep;
He is not bound by anything at all.
Laws are that He may conquer them. To creep
Or soar is at His will, to rise or fall.

One from of old possessed Himself above
Who was not anyone nor had a form,
Nor yet was formless. Neither hate nor love
Could limit His perfection, peace nor storm.

He is, we cannot say; for Nothing too
Is His conception of Himself unguessed.
He dawns upon us and we would pursue,
But who has found Him or what arms possessed?

He is not anything, yet all is He;
He is not all but far exceeds that scope.
Both Time and Timelessness sink in that sea:
   Time is a wave and Space a wandering drop.

Within Himself He shadowed Being forth,
   Which is a younger birth, a veil He chose
To half-conceal Him, Knowledge, nothing worth
   Save to have glimpses of its mighty cause,

And high Delight, a spirit infinite,
   That is the fountain of this glorious world,
Delight that labours in its opposite,
   Faints in the rose and on the rack is curled.

This was the triune playground that He made
   And One there sports awhile. He plucks His flowers
And by His bees is stung; He is dismayed,
   Flees from Himself or has His sullen hours.

The Almighty One knew labour, failure, strife;
   Knowledge forgot divined itself again:
He made an eager death and called it life,
   He stung Himself with bliss and called it pain.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, pp. 216-18)
SPIRITUALITY —
THE MASTER-KEY OF THE INDIAN MIND

Spirituality is indeed the master-key of the Indian mind; the sense of the infinite is native to it. India saw from the beginning, — and, even in her ages of reason and her age of increasing ignorance, she never lost hold of the insight, — that life cannot be rightly seen in the sole light, cannot be perfectly lived in the sole power of its externalities. She was alive to the greatness of material laws and forces; she had a keen eye for the importance of the physical sciences; she knew how to organise the arts of ordinary life. But she saw that the physical does not get its full sense until it stands in right relation to the supra-physical; she saw that the complexity of the universe could not be explained in the present terms of man or seen by his superficial sight, that there were other powers behind, other powers within man himself of which he is normally unaware, that he is conscious only of a small part of himself, that the invisible always surrounds the visible, the suprasensible the sensible, even as infinity always surrounds the finite. She saw too that man has the power of exceeding himself, of becoming himself more entirely and profoundly than he is, — truths which have only recently begun to be seen in Europe and seem even now too great for its common intelligence. She saw the myriad gods beyond man, God beyond the gods, and beyond God his own ineffable eternity; she saw that there were ranges of life beyond our life, ranges of mind beyond our present mind and above these she saw the splendours of the spirit. Then with that calm audacity of her intuition which knew no fear or littleness and shrank from no act whether of spiritual or intellectual, ethical or vital courage, she declared that there was none of these things which man could not attain if he trained his will and knowledge; he could conquer these ranges of mind, become the spirit, become a god, become one with God, become the ineffable Brahman. And with the logical practicality and sense of science and organised method which distinguished her mentality, she set forth immediately to find out the way. Hence from long ages of this insight and practice there was ingrained in her her spirituality, her powerful psychic tendency, her great yearning to grapple with the infinite and possess it, her ineradicable religious sense, her idealism, her Yoga, the constant turn of her art and her philosophy.

But this was not and could not be her whole mentality, her entire spirit; spirituality itself does not flourish on earth in the void, even as our mountaintops do not rise like those of an enchantment of dream out of the clouds without a base. When we look at the past of India, what strikes us next is her stupendous vitality, her inexhaustible power of life and joy of life, her almost unimaginably prolific creativeness. For three thousand years at least, — it is indeed much longer, — she has been creating abundantly and incessantly, lavishly, with an inexhaustible many-sidedness,
republics and kingdoms and empires, philosophies and cosmogonies and sciences and creeds and arts and poems and all kinds of monuments, palaces and temples and public works, communities and societies and religious orders, laws and codes and rituals, physical sciences, psychic sciences, systems of Yoga, systems of politics and administration, arts spiritual, arts worldly, trades, industries, fine crafts, — the list is endless and in each item there is almost a plethora of activity. She creates and creates and is not satisfied and is not tired; she will not have an end of it, seems hardly to need a space for rest, a time for inertia and lying fallow. She expands too outside her borders; her ships cross the ocean and the fine superfluity of her wealth brims over to Judaea and Egypt and Rome; her colonies spread her arts and epics and creeds in the Archipelago; her religions conquer China and Japan and spread westward as far as Palestine and Alexandria, and the figures of the Upanishads and the sayings of the Buddhists are re-echoed on the lips of Christ. Everywhere, as on her soil, so in her works there is the teeming of a superabundant energy of life. European critics complain that in her ancient architecture, sculpture and art there is no reticence, no holding back of riches, no blank spaces, that she labours to fill every rift with ore, occupy every inch with plenty. Well, but defect or no, that is the necessity of her superabundance of life, of the teeming of the infinite within her. She lavishes her riches because she must, as the Infinite fills every inch of space with the stirring of life and energy because it is the Infinite.

But this supreme spirituality and this prolific abundance of the energy and joy of life and creation do not make all that the spirit of India has been in its past. It is not a confused splendour of tropical vegetation under heavens of a pure sapphire infinity. It is only to eyes unaccustomed to such wealth that there seems to be a confusion in this crowding of space with rich forms of life, a luxurious disorder of excess or a wanton lack of measure, clear balance and design. For the third power of the ancient Indian spirit was a strong intellectuality, at once austere and rich, robust and minute, powerful and delicate, massive in principle and curious in detail. Its chief impulse was that of order and arrangement, but an order founded upon a seeking for the inner law and truth of things and having in view always the possibility of conscientious practice. India has been pre-eminently the land of the Dharma and the Shastra. She searched for the inner truth and law of each human or cosmic activity, its dharma; that found, she laboured to cast into elaborate form and detailed law of arrangement its application in fact and rule of life. Her first period was luminous with the discovery of the Spirit; her second completed the discovery of the Dharma; her third elaborated into detail the first simpler formulation of the Shastra; but none was exclusive, the three elements are always present.

In this third period the curious elaboration of all life into a science and an art assumes extraordinary proportions. The mere mass of the intellectual production during the period from Asoka well into the Mahomedan epoch is something truly
prodigious, as can be seen at once if one studies the account which recent scholarship gives of it, and we must remember that that scholarship as yet only deals with a fraction of what is still lying extant and what is extant is only a small percentage of what was once written and known. There is no historical parallel for such an intellectual labour and activity before the invention of printing and the facilities of modern science; yet all that mass of research and production and curiosity of detail was accomplished without these facilities and with no better record than the memory and for an aid the perishable palm-leaf. Nor was all this colossal literature confined to philosophy and theology, religion and Yoga, logic and rhetoric and grammar and linguistics, poetry and drama, medicine and astronomy and the sciences; it embraced all life, politics and society, all the arts from painting to dancing, all the sixty-four accomplishments, everything then known that could be useful to life or interesting to the mind, even, for instance, to such practical side minuitae as the breeding and training of horses and elephants, each of which had its Shastra and its art, its apparatus of technical terms, its copious literature. In each subject from the largest and most momentous to the smallest and most trivial there was expended the same all-embracing, opulent, minute and thorough intellectuality. On one side there is an insatiable curiosity, the desire of life to know itself in every detail, on the other a spirit of organisation and scrupulous order, the desire of the mind to tread through life with a harmonised knowledge and in the right rhythm and measure. Thus an ingrained and dominant spirituality, an inexhaustible vital creativeness and gust of life and, mediating between them, a powerful, penetrating and scrupulous intelligence combined of the rational, ethical and aesthetic mind each at a high intensity of action, created the harmony of the ancient Indian culture.

Indeed without this opulent vitality and opulent intellectuality India could never have done so much as she did with her spiritual tendencies. It is a great error to suppose that spirituality flourishes best in an impoverished soil with the life half-killed and the intellect discouraged and intimidated. The spirituality that so flourishes is something morbid, hectic and exposed to perilous reactions. It is when the race has lived most richly and thought most profoundly that spirituality finds its heights and its depths and its constant and many-sided fruition. In modern Europe it is after a long explosion of vital force and a stupendous activity of the intellect that spirituality has begun really to emerge and with some promise of being not, as it once was, the sorrowful physician of the malady of life, but the beginning of a large and profound clarity. The European eye is struck in Indian spiritual thought by the Buddhistic and illusionist denial of life. But it must be remembered that this is only one side of its philosophic tendency which assumed exaggerated proportions only in the period of decline. In itself too that was simply one result, in one direction, of a tendency of the Indian mind which is common to all its activities, the impulse to follow each motive, each specialisation of motive even, spiritual, intellectual, ethical, vital, to its extreme point and to sound its utmost possibility. Part of its innate direction was to
seek in each not only for its fullness of detail, but for its infinite, its absolute, its profoundest depth or its highest pinnacle. It knew that without a “fine excess” we cannot break down the limits which the dull temper of the normal mind opposes to knowledge and thought and experience; and it had in seeking this point a boundless courage and yet a sure tread. Thus it carried each tangent of philosophic thought, each line of spiritual experience to its farthest point, and chose to look from that farthest point at all existence, so as to see what truth or power such a view could give it. It tried to know the whole of divine nature and to see too as high as it could beyond nature and into whatever there might be of supra-divine. When it formulated a spiritual atheism, it followed that to its acme of possible vision. When, too, it indulged in materialistic atheism, — though it did that only with a side glance, as the freak of an insatiable intellectual curiosity, — yet it formulated it straight out, boldly and nakedly, without the least concession to idealism or ethicism.

Everywhere we find this tendency. The ideals of the Indian mind have included the height of self-assertion of the human spirit and its thirst of independence and mastery and possession and the height also of its self-abnegation, dependence and submission and self-giving. In life the ideal of opulent living and the ideal of poverty were carried to the extreme of regal splendour and the extreme of satisfied nudity. Its intuitions were sufficiently clear and courageous not to be blinded by its own most cherished ideas and fixed habits of life. If it was obliged to stereotype caste as the symbol of its social order, it never quite forgot, as the caste-spirit is apt to forget, that the human soul and the human mind are beyond caste. For it had seen in the lowest human being the Godhead, Narayana. It emphasised distinctions only to turn upon them and deny all distinctions. If all its political needs and circumstances compelled it at last to exaggerate the monarchical principle and declare the divinity of the king and to abolish its earlier republican city states and independent federations as too favourable to the centrifugal tendency, if therefore it could not develop democracy, yet it had the democratic idea, applied it in the village, in council and municipality, within the caste, was the first to assert a divinity in the people and could cry to the monarch at the height of his power, “O king, what art thou but the head servant of the demos?” Its idea of the golden age was a free spiritual anarchism. Its spiritual extremism could not prevent it from fathoming through a long era the life of the senses and its enjoyments, and there too it sought the utmost richness of sensuous detail and the depths and intensities of sensuous experience. Yet it is notable that this pursuit of the most opposite extremes never resulted in disorder; and its most hedonistic period offers nothing that at all resembles the unbridled corruption which a similar tendency has more than once produced in Europe. For the Indian mind is not only spiritual and ethical, but intellectual and artistic, and both the rule of the intellect and the rhythm of beauty are hostile to the spirit of chaos. In every extreme the Indian spirit seeks for a law in that extreme and a rule, measure and structure in its application. Besides, this sounding of extremes is
balanced by a still more ingrained characteristic, the synthetical tendency, so that having pushed each motive to its farthest possibility the Indian mind returns always towards some fusion of the knowledge it has gained and to a resulting harmony and balance in action and institution. Balance and rhythm which the Greeks arrived at by self-limitation, India arrived at by its sense of intellectual, ethical and aesthetic order and the synthetic impulse of its mind and life.

SRI AUROBINDO

(The Renaissance in India, CWSA, Vol. 20, pp. 6-12)
NATURAL AND SUPERNATURAL MAN

THE FULLNESS OF YOGA — IN CONDITION

We are to exceed our human stature and become divine; but if we are to do this, we must first get God; for the human ego is the lower imperfect term of our being, God is the higher perfect term. He is the possessor of our supernature and without His permission there can be no effectual rising. The finite cannot become infinite unless it perceives its own secret infinity and is drawn by it or towards it; nor can the symbol-being, unless it glimpses, loves and pursues the Real-being in itself, overcome by its own strength the limits of its apparent nature. It is a particular becoming & is fixed in the nature of the symbol that it has become; only the touch of that which is all becomings and exceeds all becomings, can liberate it from the bondage to its own limited Nature. God is That which is the All and which exceeds the All. It is therefore only the knowledge, love and possession of God that can make us free. He who is transcendent, can alone enable us to transcend ourselves; He who is universal can alone enlarge us from our limited particular existence.

In this necessity is the justification of that great & imperishable force of Nature, which Rationalism has unjustly & irrationally despised, Religion. I speak of religion, — not of a creed, church or theology, for all these things are rather forms of religiosity than essence or even always action of religion, — but of that personal and intimate religion, a thing of temper and spirit and life, not of views & formal actions, which draws a man passionately and absorbingly to his own vision of the Supreme or his own idea of something higher than himself which he must follow or become. Without a fervent worship of the Supreme in the heart, a strong aspiration upwards to It in the will or a vehement thirst for it in the temperament, we cannot have the impulse to be other than ourselves or the force to do anything so difficult as the transcending of our own ingrained and possessing human nature. The prophets have spoken & the Avatars have descended always for the one purpose, to call us to God, to inspire us to this great call on our upward straining energies or else to prepare something in the world which will help to bring humanity nearer to the goal of its difficult ascending journey.

It may seem at first sight that there is no need for these religious terms or this religious spirit. If the aim is to become something superior to man, to evolve a superman out of ourselves, as man has been evolved out of the ape, — if that statement of the progression be indeed the truth, — the ape out of inferior animal forms, they again out of mollusc & protoplasm, jellyfish or vegetable animals, & so to the end of the series, then what need is there of anything but the training, preferably the most intelligent & scientific training of our mental, moral and physical energies.
till they reach a point when they are transmuted by the psychical chemistry of Nature into the coming superior type? But the problem is not so simple, in reality. There are three errors hidden at the basis of this sceptical question. We mistake the nature of the operation to be effected, we mistake the nature of the power & process that works it out, we mistake the nature of the thing that uses the power & works out the process.

Nature does not propose to man to work out a higher mental, moral and physical variation-type in the mould of the present human being, — the symbol we are; it proposes to break that general type altogether in order to advance to a new symbol being which shall be supernatural to present man as present man is to the animal below him. It is doubtful whether in the pure human mould Nature can go much farther than she has gone at present; that she can for instance produce a higher mental type than Newton, Shakespeare, Caesar or Napoleon, a higher moral type than Buddha, Christ or St Francis, a higher physical type than the Greek athlete or to give modern examples, a Sandow or a Ramamurti. She may seek to bring about a better combination of mental & moral, or of moral, mental & physical energies; but is she likely to produce anything much above the level of Confucius or Socrates? It is more probable & seems to be true that Nature seeks in this field to generalise a higher level and a better combination. Neither need we believe that, even here, her object is to bring all men to the same level; for that can only be done by levelling downwards. Nothing in Nature is free from inequalities except the forms that are the lowest and least developed. The higher the effort accomplished, the more richly endowed the organism of the species, the greater the chances of inequality. In so high and developed a natural movement as Man, equality of individual opportunity is conceivable, equality of natural powers and accomplishment is a chimera. Nor will the generalisation of powers or the increase of material make any difference to the level of natural attainment. All the accumulated discoveries & varied information of the modern scientist will not make him mentally the superior of Aristotle or Socrates; he is neither an acuter mind nor a greater mental force. All the varied activities of modern philanthropy will not produce a greater moral type than Buddha or St Francis. The invention of the motor car will not make up for the lost swiftness & endurance nor gymnastics restore the physical capacity of the Negro or the American Indian. We see therefore the limits of Nature’s possibilities in the human symbol, fixed by the character of the symbol itself and recognised by her in her strivings.

It is still a question whether in these limits the chief preoccupation of Nature is the exhaustion of the possibilities of the human symbol. That is rather man’s preoccupation and therefore the direction she takes when human intellect interferes with her normal progression. Left to herself & even utilising human interferences, she seems bent rather on breaking the mould, than on perfecting it, — only indeed in her more advanced individuals & more daring movements and with due regard
to the safety of the general human type, but this is always her method when she wishes to advance to a fresh symbol without destroying the anterior species. The more civilised man becomes, the more she plagues him with moral abnormalities, excesses of vice & virtue and confusions of the very type of vice & virtue; the more he intellectualises, the more he insists on rationality as his utmost bourne, the more she becomes dissatisfied and clamours to him to develop rather his instincts & his intuitions; the more he strives after health & hygiene, the more she multiplies diseases & insanities of mind and body. He has triumphed over supernaturalism, he has chained her down to the material, human & rational; immediately she breaks out fiercely into unthought-of revivals and gigantic supernaturalisms. Whatever work she is intent on, she will not be baulked in that work by the limited human reason. Through all her vast being she feels the pulsation of a supernatural power, the workings & strivings of a knowledge superior to material reason. She breaks out, therefore, she compels, she insists. Everywhere we see her striving to break the mental, moral & physical type she has created & to get beyond it to some new processes as yet not clearly discerned. She attacks deliberately the sound healthfulness & equilibrium of our normal type of intellectuality, morality & physical being. She is stricken also with a mania of colossalism; colossal structures, colossal combinations, colossal heights & speeds, colossal dreams & ambitions outline themselves everywhere more or less clearly, more or less dimly. Unable as yet to do her will in the individual, she works with masses; unable in the mind, with material forms & inventions; unable in actualities, with hopes & dreams; unable to reproduce or produce Napoleons & super-Napoleons, she generalises a greater reach of human capacity from which they may hereafter emerge more easily, & meanwhile she creates instead Dreadnoughts & Super-dreadnoughts, Trusts & mammoth combines, teems with distance destroying inventions & seems eager & furious to trample to pieces the limitations of space & time she herself has created.

As if to point her finger to the thing she intends, she has accumulated the signs of this process of breaking & rebuilding in the phenomena of genius. It is now common knowledge that genius hardly appears in the human species unattended, unprepared or unaccompanied by abnormalities in the individual body, vitality & mind which contains it, — degeneration, insanity or freak in the heredity which produces it and even disturbance & supranormality in the human environment in which it occurs. The haste of a brilliant generalisation establishes on this basis the paradox that genius itself is a morbid phenomenon of insanity or degeneration. The true explanation is sufficiently clear. In order to establish genius in the human system, Nature is compelled to disturb & partially break the normality of that system, because she is introducing into it an element that is alien as it is superior to the type which it enriches. Genius is not the perfect evolution of that new & divine element; it is only a beginning or at the highest an approximation in certain directions. It works fitfully & uncertainly in the midst of an enormous mass of somewhat disordered human
mentality, vital nervosity, physical animality. The thing itself is divine, it is only the undivine mould in which it works that is to a lesser or greater extent broken & ploughed up by the unassimilated force that works in it. Sometimes there is an element in the divine intruder which lays its hand on the mould & sustains it, so that it does not break at all, nor is flawed; or if there is a disturbance, it is slight and negligible. Such an element there was in Caesar, in Shakespeare, in Goethe. Sometimes also a force appears to which we can no longer apply the description of genius without being hopelessly inadequate in our terminology. Then those who have eyes to see, bow down and confess the Avatar. For it is often the work of the Avatar to typify already, partly or on the whole, what Nature has not yet effected in the mass or even in the individual, so that his passing may stamp it on the material ether in which we live.

But what is this type of which the great Mother is in labour? What birth will emerge from the cries & throes of this prolonged & mighty pregnancy? A greater type of humanity, it may be said. But in order to understand what we are saying, we must first see clearly what the humanity is which she seeks to surpass. This human symbol, this type we now are is a mental being with a mental ego, working in a vital case by mind always, but upon matter, in matter & through matter. It is limited in its higher workings by its lower instruments. Its basis of mind is egoistic, sensational & determined by experience & environment, its knowledge therefore pursues wider or narrower circles in a fixed and meagre range. Its moral temperament & action is similarly egoistic, sensational, experiential and determined by environment; for this reason it is bound equally to sin & virtue and all attempts radically to moralise the race within the limits of its egoistic nature have been & must necessarily, in spite of particular modifications, end in general failure. It is not only a mixed but a confused type, body & vitality interfering with mind & mind both hampered by & hampering body & vitality. Its search for knowledge, founded on sense contact, is a groping like that of a man finding his way in a forest at night; it makes acquaintance with its surroundings by touching, dashing on or stumbling over them; and, although it has an uncertain light of reason given it which partially corrects this disability, yet since reason has also to start from the senses which are consistent falsifiers of values, rational knowledge is not only restricted but pursued by vast dimnesses & uncertainties even in that which it seems to itself to have grasped. It secures a few flowers of truth by rummaging in a thorny hedge of doubts & errors. The actions of the type also are a breaking through thickets, a sanguine yet tormented stumbling forward through eager failures to partial and temporary successes. Immensely superior to all else that Nature had yet effected, this type is yet so burdened with disabilities, that, if it were impossible to break its mould and go forward, there would be much justification for those pessimistic philosophies which despair of Life & see in the Will not to Live humanity’s only door of escape admitting to it no other salvation. But Nature is the will of the all-Wise God and she is not working out a reduction of the world to
absurdity. She knows her goal, she knows that man as he is at present is only a transitional type; and so far as she can consistently with the survival of the type, she presses forward to what she has seen in God’s eternal knowledge as standing beyond. From this ego, she moves towards a universal consciousness, from this limitation to a free movement in infinity, from this twilit & groping mind to the direct sunlit vision of things, from this conflict without issue between vice & virtue to a walking that keeps spontaneously to a God-appointed path, from this broken & grief-besieged action to a joyous & free activity, from this confused strife of our members to a purified, unentangled and harmonious combination, from this materialised mentality to an idealised & illuminated life, body & mind, from the symbol to reality, from man separated from God to man in God & God in man. In brief, as she has aspired successfully from matter to life, from life to mind & mental ego, so she aspires & with a fated success to an element beyond mind, the vijnana of the Hindus, the self-luminous idea or Truth-self now concealed & superconscious in man and the world, as life was always concealed in matter and mind in life. What this vijnana is, we have yet to see, but through it she knows she can lay firm hold on that highest term of all which is the reality of all symbols, in Spirit, in Sachchidananda.

The aim of Nature is also the aim of Yoga. Yoga, like Nature at its summit, seeks to break this mould of ego, this mould of mentalised life body and materialised mind, in order to achieve ideal action, ideal truth and infinite freedom in our spiritual being. To effect so enormous an end great and dangerous processes have to be used. Those who have been eager on this road or have opened up new paths towards the goal, have had to affront as a possibility frequently realised loss of reason, loss of life & health or dissolution of the moral being. They are not to be pitied or scorned even when they succumb; rather are they martyrs for humanity’s progress, far more than the lost navigator or the scientist slain by the dangers of his investigation. They prepare consciently the highest possible achievement towards which the rest of humanity instinctively & unconsciously moves. We may even say that Yoga is the appointed means Nature holds in reserve for the accomplishment of her end, when she has finished her long labour of evolving at least a part of humanity temperamentally equal to the effort and intellectually, morally & physically prepared for success. Nature moves toward supernature, Yoga moves towards God; the world-impulse & the human aspiration are one movement and the same journey.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, pp. 115-21)
ON HIMSELF AS A WRITER AND ON HIS WRITINGS

ON HIMSELF AS A WRITER

Yoga and Intellectual Development

*Can it be that in course of the sadhana, one may have certain intellectual or other training by the direct power of yoga? How did your own wide development come?*

It came not by “training”, but by the spontaneous opening and widening and perfecting of the consciousness in the sadhana.

4 November 1936

Yoga and Literary Expression

*Suppose you had not studied English literature; would it be still possible for you to say something about it by Yogic experience?*

Only by cultivating a special siddhi, which would be much too bothersome to go after. But I suppose if I had got the Yogic knowledge (in your hypothetical case) it should be quite easy to add the outer one.

29 December 1934

*When one hears that you had to plod through a lot, one wonders whether the story of Valmiki’s sudden opening of poetic faculties is true — whether such a miracle is really possible.*

Plod about what? For some things I had to plod — other things came in a moment or in two or three days like Nirvana or the power to appreciate painting. The “latent” philosopher failed to come out at the first shot (when I was in Calcutta) — after some years of incubation (?) it burst out like a volcano as soon as I started writing the *Arya*. There is no damned single rule for these things. Valmiki’s poetic faculty might open suddenly like a champagne bottle, but it does not follow that everybody’s will do like that.

1 April 1935
Avoidance of Certain Subjects

If I write about these questions from the Yogic point of view, even though on a logical basis, there is bound to be much that is in conflict with your own settled and perhaps cherished opinions, e.g. about “miracles”, persons, the limits of judgment by sense data etc. I have avoided as much as possible writing about these subjects because I would have to propound things that cannot be understood except by reference to other data than those of the physical senses or of reason founded on these alone. I might have to speak of laws and forces not recognised by physical reason or science. In my public writings and my writings to sadhaks I have not dwelt on these because they go out of the range of ordinary knowledge and the understanding founded on it. These things are known to some, but they do not usually speak about it, while the public view of such of them as are known is either credulous or incredulous, but in both cases without experience or knowledge. So if the views founded on them are likely to upset, shock or bewilder, the better way is silence.

December 1935

On His Philosophy in General

I do not mind if you find inconsistencies in my statements. What people call consistency is usually a rigid or narrow-minded inability to see more than one side of the truth or more than their own narrow personal view or experience of things. Truth has many aspects and unless you look on all with a calm and equal eye, you will never have the real or the integral knowledge.

22 December 1934

*  

One Kishorlal G. Mashriwala has written a book in which he says that your “language” has been responsible for creating confusion, etc. X seems to have written to him about this and got a reply that Kishorlal has not been satisfied with your philosophy nor with any of your disciples whom he has seen, but that he may change his views if he gets a quarter of an hour’s talk with you.

Well, there seems evidently to be a confusion in his ideas about my philosophy, — though what has been responsible for creating it? — well, it is perhaps the goodness of his thinking! I fear the pleasure and honour of having a quarter of an hour’s talk with the Yogi Kishorlal is too high a thing for me to wish to attain to it in this life. I must try to obtain punya first and strive to be born again in order to deserve it.

13 April 1935

*
I am thinking of writing a book on your teachings in a systematic Western form in three main sections: (1) Metaphysics, (2) Psychology, (3) Ethics. But to make it presentable in the academic fashion would require a large reading of some past and present Western philosophers and psychologists. And where is the time for it?

I am afraid it would be a rather too colossal affair. But why ethics? I don’t think that there is any ethics; because ethics depends upon fixed principles and rules of conduct, whereas here any such thing can only be for sadhana purposes as conditions for getting the spiritual or higher consciousness and afterwards everything is freely determined by that consciousness and its movements and dictates.

26 July 1936

* 

You wrote to X that though people call you a philosopher you have never learnt philosophy.¹ Well, what you have written in the Arya is so philosophical that the greatest philosopher of the world can never expect to write it. I don’t mean here the bringing down of the new Truth, but the power of expression, the art of reasoning and arguing with intellect and logic.

There is very little argument in my philosophy — the elaborate metaphysical reasoning full of abstract words with which the metaphysician tries to establish his conclusions is not there. What is there is a harmonising of the different parts of a many-sided knowledge so that all unites logically together. But it is not by force of logical argument that it is done, but by a clear vision of the relations and sequences of the knowledge.

4 November 1936

WRITING FOR PUBLICATION

Unwillingness to Write for Newspapers and Magazines

If I allow the Orient to publish something yet unpublished by me, I lose my defence against demands from outside which is that I have ceased to contribute to magazines, newspapers et hoc genus omne and have made it indeed a rule not to do so. Therefore —

* 

¹ See the letter of 31 August 1934 on p. 24. — Ed.
I am afraid X is asking from me a thing psychologically impossible. You know that I have forbidden myself to write anything for publication for some time past and some time to come — I am self-debarred from press, platform and public. Even if it were otherwise, it would be impossible under present circumstances to write at a week’s notice. You will present him my excuses in your best and most tactful manner.

27 August 1931

* 

The answer to Woolf was written long ago at the time Woolf’s article appeared in the New Statesman and Nation — a London weekly. It was X who drew my notice to it and asked for an answer. Y this time wanted something of mine for the Onward August 15th number and chose this one.

24 August 1934

* 

I have not begun writing in the papers — what is being published in the magazines is excerpts from the unpublished things in the Arya or translations such as X is making. So I cannot give anything.

As for past writings, I never take the initiative for publication in papers. Y, X or Z sometimes ask for leave to publish this or that somewhere where it is asked for and I consent — that is all.

circa 1936

* 

The initiative is always X and I do not send anything myself or intervene in his action, but he takes the sanction from me.

All that you need to write to Delhi is that Sri Aurobindo is not writing articles for the papers; the things that appear from time to time are old writings of his not yet published in book form and sent to the papers at their request with his sanction. He is not writing any new things nowadays, as his time is entirely occupied with his work. This is simply to prevent demands on me for new contributions which I cannot satisfy.

2 July 1936

* 

As to the Foreword, I had made a strict rule not to publish anything of the kind or anything except the books from the Arya and letters, so as to avoid any call on me.
from anyone. I don’t know if I can break this rule now. In any case I shall have to read and consider, and I have now no time for anything but the correspondence and the work of concentration that is necessary — the pressure is too great for reading anything. So they should not depend on me for this Foreword.

28 September 1936

*

X must not expect the rather portentous article or essay he demands from me. You know I have made it a rule not to make any public pronouncement; the Cripps affair was an exception that remains solitary; for the other things on the war were private letters, not written for publication. I do not propose to change the rule in order to set forth a programme for the Supermind energy to act on if and when it comes down now or fifteen years after.2 Great Powers do not publish beforehand, least of all in a journalistic compilation, their war-plans or even their peace plans; the Supermind is the greatest of all Powers and we can leave it to its own secrecy until the moment of its action.

14 January 1945

*

What has happened to my letter of request for a Message to grace the Special Number of Mother India of August 15? I have heard nothing from you.

I have been trying to get you informed without success about the impossibility of your getting your expected Message from me for the 15th August. I had and have no intention of writing a Message for my birthday this year. It is psychologically impossible for me to manufacture one to command; an inspiration would have to come and it is highly improbable that any will come in this short space of time; I myself have no impulse towards it. But how is it that you have clean forgotten my rule of not writing any article for an outside paper, magazine or journal — I mean other than those conducted from the Asram and by the Asram — and even for these I write nothing new except for the Bulletin at the Mother’s request, — also my reasons for this fixed rule? If I started doing that kind of thing, my freedom would be gone; I would have to write at everybody’s command, not only articles but blessings, replies on public questions and all the rest of that kind of conventional rubbish. I would be like any ordinary politician publishing my views on all and sundry matters, discoursing on all sorts of subjects, a public man at the disposal of

2. Sri Aurobindo was asked to write an article about what the world would be like fifteen years after the supramental descent. — Ed.
the public. That would make myself, my blessings, my views and my Messages exceedingly cheap; in fact, I would be no longer Sri Aurobindo. Already Hindusthan Standard, the Madras Mail and I know not what other journals and societies are demanding at the pistol’s point special messages for the 15th for themselves and I am supposed to stand and deliver. I won’t. I regret that I must disappoint you, but self-preservation is a first law of Nature.

3 August 1949

Writing Philosophy

Look here! Do these people expect me to turn myself again into a machine for producing articles? The times of the Bande Mataram and Arya are over, thank God! I have now only the Asram correspondence and that is “overwhelming” enough in all conscience without starting philosophy for standard books and the rest of it.

And philosophy! Let me tell you in confidence that I never, never, never was a philosopher — although I have written philosophy which is another story altogether. I knew precious little about philosophy before I did the Yoga and came to Pondicherry — I was a poet and a politician, not a philosopher! How I managed to do it? First, because Richard proposed to me to cooperate in a philosophical review — and as my theory was that a Yogi ought to be able to turn his hand to anything, I could not very well refuse: and then he had to go to the War and left me in the lurch with 64 pages a month of philosophy all to write by my lonely self. Secondly, I had only to write down in the terms of the intellect all that I had observed and come to know in practising Yoga daily and the philosophy was there, automatically. But that is not being a philosopher!

I don’t know how to excuse myself to Radhakrishnan — for I can’t say all that to him.³ Perhaps you can find a formula for me? Perhaps — “so occupied not a moment for any other work; can’t undertake because I might not be able to carry out my promise”. What do you say?

31 August 1934

³. Sri Aurobindo’s letter to Dr. Radhakrishnan, turning down his request to contribute an article to a book Radhakrishnan was editing, is published in Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, volume 36 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, pp. 444-45. — Ed. [See next letter]
To Dr. S. Radhakrishnan

2.10.34

My dear Professor Radhakrishnan,

I regret that you should have had to wait for the publication of your book on account of the contribution I could not write. I had intimated to Dilip that it would be practically impossible for me and I could not make a promise I would most likely be unable to fulfil. I think he hoped I would still find time somehow to write.

I am entirely taken up by my present work which is exceedingly heavy and pressing and from which I cannot take my hands for a moment or spare the necessary energy or time for anything else. I have been obliged to put aside all mental or literary work and even to suspend sine die the revision for publication of the unpublished works in the “Arya” which I had undertaken. There is no chance of any alteration in this state of affairs in any near future. It is not a matter of choice but of necessity for me. I hope therefore you will excuse me for not being able to comply with your request. I regret very much that I have to disappoint you, but it is not possible for me to avoid it.

Sri Aurobindo

* 

Anilbaran says that he can compile something out of The Life Divine for Radhakrishnan. Can he do it?

No, I think not.

10 September 1934

* 

As to Radhakrishnan, I don’t care whether he is right or wrong in his eagerness to get the blessed contribution from me. But the first fact is that it is quite impossible for me to write philosophy to order. If something comes to me of itself, I can write, if I have time. But I have not time. I had some thought of writing to Adhar Das pointing out that he was mistaken in his criticism of my ideas about consciousness and intuition and developing briefly what were my real views about these things. But I have never been able to do it — I might as well think of putting the moon under my arm, Hanuman-like, — though in his case it was the sun — and going for a walk! The moon is not available and the walk is not possible. It would be the same if I promised anything to Radhakrishnan — it would not get done, and that would be much worse than a refusal.
And the second fact is that I do not care a button about my having my name in any blessed place. I was never ardent about fame even in my political days; I preferred to remain behind the curtain, push people without their knowing it and get things done. It was the confounded British Government that spoiled my game by prosecuting me and forcing me to be publicly known and a “leader”. Then again I don’t believe in advertisement except for books etc., and in propaganda except for politics and patent medicines. But for serious work it is a poison. It means either a stunt or a boom — and stunts and booms exhaust the thing they carry on their crest and leave it lifeless and broken high and dry on the shores of nowhere — or it means a movement. A movement in the case of a work like mine means the founding of a school or a sect or some other damned nonsense. It means that hundreds or thousands of useless people join in and corrupt the work or reduce it to a pompous farce from which the Truth that was coming down recedes into secrecy and silence. It is what has happened to the “religions” and is the reason of their failure. If I tolerate a little writing about myself, it is only to have a sufficient counterweight in that amorphous chaos, the public mind, to balance the hostility that is always aroused by the presence of a new dynamic Truth in this world of ignorance. But the utility ends there and too much advertisement would defeat that object. I am perfectly “rational”, I assure you, in my methods and I do not proceed merely on any personal dislike of fame. If and so far as publicity serves the Truth, I am quite ready to tolerate it; but I do not find publicity for its own sake desirable.

This “Contemporary Philosophy”, British or Indian, looks to me very much like bookmaking and, though the “vulgarisation” of knowledge — to use the French term — by bookmaking may have its use, I prefer to do solid work and leave that to others. You may say that I can write a solid thing in philosophy and let it be bookmade. But even the solid tends to look shoddy in such surroundings. And besides my solid work at present is not philosophy but something less wordy and more to the point. If that work gets done, then it will propagate itself so far as propagation is necessary — if it were not to get done, propagation would be useless.

These are my reasons. However let us wait till the book is there and see what kind of stuff it is.

2 October 1934

Philosophical Theft

Radhakrishnan, in his lecture published in The Hindu,\(^4\) has stolen not only most of your ideas but has actually lifted several sentences en masse. I wonder how such piracy in philosophical literature passes unchastised. I am thinking either of writing to him deploring the theft or informing The Hindu.

I don’t think it is worth while doing anything. The thefts are obvious, but if he wants to add some peacock plumes to his dun colours!

24 July 1936

* 

Professor Mahendranath Sircar and others would like to write to Radhakrishnan, asking him why he used passages from your works without acknowledgement.

No. I have said no public notice should be taken of the matter. I consider it inadvisable, so the letters should not be sent.

* 

From the Yogic point of view one ought to be indifferent and without sense of ownership or desire of fame or praise. But for that one must have arrived at the Yogic poise — such a detachment is not possible without it. I do not mind Radhakrishnan’s lifting whole sentences and paragraphs from my writings at the World Conference as his own and getting credit for a new and quite original point of view.

But if I were eager to figure before the world as a philosopher, I would resent it. But even if one does not mind, one can see the impropriety of the action or take measures against its repetition, if one thinks it worth while.

5 August 1936

The Sale of His Books

The question of the royalty can be deferred till X has seen the translation. If it is not approved, the question of royalty does not arise. You can tell him that the Asram is not supported by public subscriptions but by what is given by disciples and private sympathisers. Therefore Sri Aurobindo’s publications cannot be given free, they are sold and the proceeds counted among the available resources just as is the case with the publications of the Ramakrishna Mission.

19 September 1936

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Himself and the Ashram, CWSA, Vol. 35, pp. 63-73)
TO BE A PERFECTLY PURE MIRROR

June 21, 1914

To be at once a passive and perfectly pure mirror, turned simultaneously without and within, to the results of the manifestation and the sources of this manifestation, so that the consequences may be placed before the guiding will, and to be also the realising activity of that will, this, more or less, is what a human being ought to be. . . . To combine these two attitudes of passive receptivity and realising activity is precisely the most difficult of all things. And that is what Thou expectest of us, O Lord, and as Thou dost expect it of us, there is no doubt that Thou wilt give us the means of realising it.

For what must be will be, more splendidly yet than we can imagine.

Oh, may Thy love grow wider and wider in the manifestation, ever more sublime, ever deeper, ever vaster. . . .

THE MOTHER

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 180)*
Will you say something to us about Yoga?

What do you want the Yoga for? To get power? To attain to peace and calm? To serve humanity?

None of these motives is sufficient to show that you are meant for the Path.

The question you are to answer is this: Do you want the Yoga for the sake of the Divine? Is the Divine the supreme fact of your life, so much so that it is simply impossible for you to do without it? Do you feel that your very raison d’être is the Divine and without it there is no meaning in your existence? If so, then only can it be said that you have a call for the Path.

This is the first thing necessary — aspiration for the Divine.

The next thing you have to do is to tend it, to keep it always alert and awake and living. And for that what is required is concentration — concentration upon the Divine with a view to an integral and absolute consecration to its Will and Purpose.

Concentrate in the heart. Enter into it; go within and deep and far, as far as you can. Gather all the strings of your consciousness that are spread abroad, roll them up and take a plunge and sink down.

A fire is burning there, in the deep quietude of the heart. It is the divinity in you — your true being. Hear its voice, follow its dictates.

There are other centres of concentration, for example, one above the crown and another between the eye-brows. Each has its own efficacy and will give you a particular result. But the central being lies in the heart and from the heart proceed all central movements — all dynamism and urge for transformation and power of realisation.

What is one to do to prepare oneself for the Yoga?

To be conscious, first of all. We are conscious of only an insignificant portion of our being; for the most part we are unconscious. It is this unconsciousness that keeps us down to our unregenerate nature and prevents change and transformation in it. It is through unconsciousness that the undivine forces enter into us and make us their slaves. You are to be conscious of yourself, you must awake to your nature and movements, you must know why and how you do things or feel or think them; you must understand your motives and impulses, the forces, hidden and apparent, that move you; in fact, you must, as it were, take to pieces the entire machinery of your being. Once you are conscious, it means that you can distinguish and sift things, you can see which are the forces that pull you down and which help you on.
And when you know the right from the wrong, the true from the false, the divine from the undivine, you are to act strictly up to your knowledge; that is to say, resolutely reject one and accept the other. The duality will present itself at every step and at every step you will have to make your choice. You will have to be patient and persistent and vigilant — “sleepless”, as the adepts say; you must always refuse to give any chance whatever to the undivine against the divine.

Is the Yoga for the sake of humanity?

No, it is for the sake of Divinity. It is not the welfare of humanity that we seek but the manifestation of the Divine. We are here to work out the Divine Will, more truly, to be worked upon by the Divine Will so that we may be its instruments for the progressive incorporation of the Supreme and the establishment of His reign upon earth. Only that portion of humanity which will respond to the Divine Call shall receive its Grace.

Whether humanity as a whole will be benefited, if not directly, at least, in an indirect way, will depend upon the condition of humanity itself. If one is to judge from the present conditions, there is not much hope. What is the attitude today of the average man — the representative humanity? Does he not rise in anger and revolt directly he meets something that partakes of the genuinely divine? Does he not feel that the Divine means the destruction of his cherished possessions? Is he not continually yelling out the most categorical negative to everything that the Divine intends and wills? Humanity will have to change much before it can hope to gain anything by the advent of the Divine.

How is that we have met?

We have all met in previous lives. Otherwise we would not have come together in this life. We are of one family and have worked through ages for the victory of the Divine and its manifestation upon earth.

The Mother

(Questions and Answers 1929-31, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 3, pp. 1-3)
A CONVERSATION OF 3 FEBRUARY 1951

“What do you want the Yoga for? To get power? To attain to peace and calm? To serve humanity?

“None of these motives is sufficient to show that you are meant for the Path.” Questions and Answers 1929 (7 April)

The main trouble is that you think with words, but these words are empty of meaning; most of the time they are mere words — you talk of the Divine, you talk of the Supreme, you talk of Yoga, you say many things, but does all that correspond in your head to something concrete, to a thought, a feeling, a clear idea, an experience? Or are they simply words?

It is said that Yoga is the “final goal of life”, but what do you expect from this final goal? Some say it means to know oneself; that is the personal and individual aspect. If it is pushed a little farther it means to be conscious of the truth of one’s being: why are you born and what should you do? And if it is pushed still farther, you may become conscious of your relations with other human beings; and a little farther yet, you may ask what is the role, the aim of humanity in the world? And yet again, what is the condition of the earth from the psychological standpoint? What is the universe, what is its goal, its role? In this way, you move from stage to stage and finally you see the problem in its totality. You must see the thing, the experience behind the words. Here we speak of Yoga but elsewhere one would speak differently; some would say, “I am seeking my raison d’être”, and so on. Those who have a religious bent will say, “I want to find the divine Presence.” There are fifty ways of saying the thing but it is the thing which is important; you must feel it in your head, in your heart, everywhere. It must be concrete, living, otherwise you cannot advance. You must come out of words and get into action — get into the experience, get into life. (Mother turns to a child) Do you intend to do Yoga?

Yes, Mother.

Why do you want to do Yoga?

To feel the Presence of the Divine.

And you?

To realise the Divine, and for that one must perfect oneself.
And you, why does Yoga interest you?

Because I am able to know myself.

And you?

To do what one feels as the inner truth.

And you, are you doing Yoga?

At times.

You are honest, but why at times? . . .

(Addressing another child ) Do you have any idea as to what Yoga is?

I think it is a way by which . . .

What is there at the end of the way?

The constant Presence of the Divine.

(Turning to another child) In Yoga what is it that interests you most?

I do not understand what Yoga is. Is it in concentrating on you?

It is a good symbol.

Anyway, happily nobody has said that he desired Yoga to obtain power. There are countries and people who know vaguely that there is something called yoga, and they begin it with the idea that they will become superior to others, will get a greater power than others and consequently will be able to dominate others — this is the worst reason, the most selfish, that which brings the most harmful consequences. Others who are greatly troubled, who have a very difficult life, who have worries, sorrows, many cares, say, “Oh, I shall find something that will give me peace, tranquillity, and I shall be able to get a little rest.” And they rush into Yoga thinking they are going to be quite happy and satisfied. Unfortunately, it is not altogether like that. When you begin the Yoga for reasons of this kind, you are sure to meet great difficulties on the way. And then there is this great virtue in men’s eyes: “philanthropy”, “love of humanity”; so many people say, “I am going to do Yoga to be able to serve humanity, make the unhappy happy, organise the world in the happiest way for everybody.” I say this is not sufficient — I do not say that this is bad in itself, although I have heard an old occultist say wittily: “It won’t be so very soon that there will be no more misery in the world, because there are too many people who are happy to live on this misery.” It was a witticism but it is not altogether
wrong. If there were no misery to soothe, the philanthropist would no longer have any reason for his existence — he is so satisfied with himself, he has so strong an impression that he is not selfish! I knew such people who would be very unhappy if there were no more misery upon earth! What would they do if there were no longer any misery to relieve, what would be their activity and what their glorification? How would they be able to show people “I am not selfish!”, and that they are generous, full of kindness?

“Do you want the Yoga for the sake of the Divine? . . . If so, then only can it be said that you have a call for the Path.

“This is the first thing necessary — aspiration for the Divine.”

*Questions and Answers* 1929 (7 April)

The first movement of aspiration is this: you have a kind of vague sensation that behind the universe there is something which is worth knowing, which is probably (for you do not yet know it) the only thing worth living for, which can connect you with the Truth; something on which the universe depends but which does not depend upon the universe, something which still escapes your comprehension but which seems to you to be behind all things. . . . I have said here much more than the majority of people feel about the thing, but this is the beginning of the first aspiration — to know that, not to live in this perpetual falsehood where things are so perverted and artificial, this would be something pleasant; to find something that is worth living for.

“The next thing you have to do is to tend this aspiration, to keep it always alert and awake and living.” *Ibid.*

Instead of telling yourself once in a while, “Oh, yes! I am thinking of finding the Divine”, just when there is something unpleasant, when you are a little disgusted because you feel tired — indeed, there are very many flimsy reasons — all of a sudden you remember that there is such a thing as yoga, something like the Divine to know who can get you out of this flatness of life.

“And for that what is required is concentration — concentration upon the Divine with a view to an integral and absolute consecration to its Will and Purpose.” *Questions and Answers* 1929 (7 April)

This is the second step. That is to say, you begin wanting to find and know the Divine and live it. You must feel at the same time that the thing is so precious, so important that your entire life is not sufficient for acquiring it. Then, the first movement is a self-giving; you tell yourself, “I do not want any longer to belong to myself, for the sake of my little personal satisfaction, I wish to belong to this marvellous thing
which one must find, must know, must live and for which I aspire.”

“This Concentrate in the heart. Enter into it; go within and deep and far, as far as you can. Gather all the strings of your consciousness that are spread abroad, roll them up and take a plunge and sink down.” Ibid.

Naturally, when I speak of the heart, I do not mean the physical organ, the viscera, but the psychological or psychic centre of the being.

[Mother then reads a question asked during her talk in 1929:]

“What is one to do to prepare oneself for the Yoga?” Ibid.

I replied to the person who put this question to me: “Become conscious first of all.” So the person tried to become conscious and a few months later came and told me, “Oh, what a nasty present you gave me! Formerly, in my relations with people, they all used to seem so nice; I had goodwill, they were so nice towards me, and now, since becoming conscious, I see all kinds of things in myself that are not quite pretty, and at the same time I see in others things that are not at all beautiful!” I answered her, “Quite possible! If you do not want trouble, it is better not to come out of your ignorance.”

The first step therefore is to find out whether one wants to see and know the truth or wants to remain comfortably in one’s ignorance.

“What is the attitude today of the average man? . . . Does he not rise in anger and revolt directly he meets something that partakes of the genuinely divine? Does he not feel that the Divine means the destruction of his cherished possessions?” Ibid.

This means very clearly that so long as you remain in your small individual egoism, you will never be ready to make the gesture, to take the plunge, which will enable you to identify yourself with the Divine.

In this connection I could tell you something: long ago there were people who came here because they thought that joining the Ashram was sufficient to make one immortal. And they aspired much for immortality. Naturally, they were old people who did not see a very long road before them and desired to extend it indefinitely — for that is what men understand by “immortality”, an indefinite prolongation of what they are. So, to the first person who made this remark, I replied, “I do not know if everyone can become immortal — probably not — but even among those who have the capacity of becoming immortal, how many are ready to pay the price for it?” Because the number of things which have to be left behind is so considerable
that perhaps half-way they would say, “Ah, no, the price is too much.” I remember a painter with whom I had a talk about the possibility of immortality and who asked me what a new world would be like. I told him things would be, for instance, luminous in themselves and there would no longer be this kind of reflected light which comes here upon earth from the sun. And as I was speaking I saw his face becoming longer, more and more grave; finally he said, “But then how can one do painting without the shadow which brings out the light of things? . . .” I told him, “You have given exactly the key to the problem.”

There were many people, a very large number, who asked me what the new life would be like and to whom I said, “There will be an interchange of forces, a circulating energy; the structure of the body will be quite different, all these ungainly organs will disappear and be replaced by psychological functions; and the necessity of eating, always eating, will disappear.” Once again I saw faces getting longer and longer! People said, “Oh! And all the good things we eat, all that will go?”

These are small instances, there are many others, things more important. The most important, the most difficult thing is to renounce one’s ego, for to somebody who is not ready, to renounce his ego is like dying and dying much more than a physical death, for to him the death of the ego is like a dissolution of the being — this is not correct but it begins by giving this sort of impression. To be immortal one must renounce all limitations and the ego is the greatest of limitations; hence if “I” am not immortal, what is the good of that?

[In the same talk someone had asked Mother how all those then present had happened to meet, and Mother had answered:]

“We have all met in previous lives. Otherwise we would not have come together in this life.” Questions and Answers 1929 (7 April)

It can be said that it is chance or that it is because we have always been together, and both are equally true. As this lady liked occultism I told her also, “We have met in a previous life” and that is true, isn’t it? But it is a way of seeing things. Also, “We all belong to the same family”, this too is true but not in the way in which human beings look at it.

I also said, “We have worked together through the ages for the victory of the Divine and His manifestation upon earth.” This is quite evident, for the universe has been created for that and therefore every part of the universe, whatever it be, works for it, knowingly or unknowingly, but works for it all the same.

The Mother

(Questions and Answers 1950-51, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 4, pp. 64-71)
Sri Aurobindo —

I have written a peculiar poem. Is it any good, and what sort of vision and atmosphere does it bring?

PLEROMA

Nor first nor last, but in a timeless gyre
The globes of Beauty burn — a hush made fire:
Their colours self-secluded one by one,
Yet sisters in a joyful union —
Rhythms of quiet, thrill on gemlike thrill
Necklaced around a Throat\(^1\) invisible . . .

When wearily I string word after word,
I call your flame, O Ecstasies unheard,
To guide my frailty with some touch of you!
Grant me a worship-glow that reaches, through
My dreamful silence ere the musics throng,
Your deathless silence at each close of song.

(Amal’s question written in the right margin:)
1. Should this be changed to some abstract noun like “Love” or “Power”? If so, would it be better to write “souls of beauty” in line 2?

Sri Aurobindo’s comment:
1. But then, would “necklaced” have much meaning? It is much better as it is.

Very fine. It is a vision of things from the Illumined Mind with the atmosphere of lights and colours that reigns there.

29 August 1936

Amal Kiran
(K. D. Sethna)
EVENING TALKS WITH SRI AUROBINDO

INTRODUCTION

I

The question which Arjuna asks Sri Krishna in the Gita (second chapter) occurs pertinently to many about all spiritual personalities: “What is the language of one whose understanding is poised? How does he speak, how sit, how walk?” Men want to know the outer signs of the inner attainment, — the way in which a spiritual person differs outwardly from other men. But all the tests which the Gita enumerates are inner and therefore invisible to the outer view. It is true also that the inner or the spiritual is the essential and the outer derives its value and form from the inner. But the transformation about which Sri Aurobindo writes in his books has to take place in nature, because according to him the divine Reality has to manifest itself in nature. So, all the parts of nature — including the physical and the external — are to be transformed. In his own case the very physical became the transparent mould of the Spirit as a result of his intense Sadhana. This is borne out by the impression created on the minds of sensitive outsiders like Sj. K. M. Munshi who was deeply impressed by his radiating presence when he met him after nearly forty years.

The Evening Talks collected here may afford to the outside world a glimpse of his external personality and give the seeker some idea of its richness, its many-sidedness, its uniqueness. One can also form some notion of Sri Aurobindo’s personality from the books in which the height, the universal sweep and clear vision of his integral ideal and thought can be seen. His writings are, in a sense, the best representative of his mental personality. The versatile nature of his genius, the penetrating power of his intellect, his extraordinary power of expression, his intense sincerity, his utter singleness of purpose — all these can be easily felt by any earnest student of his works. He may discover even in the realm of mind that Sri Aurobindo brings the unlimited into the limited. Another side of his dynamic personality is represented by the Ashram as an institution. But the outer, if one may use the phrase, the human side of his personality, is unknown to the outside world because from 1910 to 1950 — a span of forty years — he led a life of outer retirement. No doubt, many knew about his staying at Pondicherry and practising some kind of very special Yoga to the mystery of which they had no access. To some, perhaps, he was living a life of enviable solitude enjoying the luxury of a spiritual endeavour. Many regretted his retirement as a great loss to the world because they could not see any external activity on his part which could be regarded as ‘public’, ‘altruistic’ or ‘beneficial’. Even some of his admirers thought that he was after some kind of
personal salvation which would have very little significance for mankind in general. His outward non-participation in public life was construed by many as lack of love for humanity.

But those who knew him during the days of the national awakening — from 1900 to 1910 — could not have these doubts. And even these initial misunderstandings and false notions of others began to evaporate with the growth of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram from 1927 onwards. The large number of books published by the Ashram also tended to remove the idea of the other-worldliness of his Yoga and the absence of any good by it to mankind.

This period of outer retirement was one of intense Sadhana and of intellectual activity — it was also one during which he acted on external events, — though he was not dedicated outwardly to a public cause. About his own retirement he writes: “But this did not mean, as most people supposed, that he [Sri Aurobindo] had retired into some height of spiritual experience devoid of any further interest in the world or in the fate of India. It could not mean that, for the very principle of his Yoga was not only to realise the Divine and attain to a complete spiritual consciousness, but also to take all life and all world activity into the scope of this spiritual consciousness and action and to base life on the Spirit and give it a spiritual meaning. In his retirement Sri Aurobindo kept a close watch on all that was happening in the world and in India and actively intervened, whenever necessary, but solely with a spiritual force and silent spiritual action; for it is part of the experience of those who have advanced in yoga that besides the ordinary forces and activities of the mind and life and body in Matter, there are other forces and powers that can and do act from behind and from above; there is also a spiritual dynamic power which can be possessed by those who are advanced in spiritual consciousness, though all do not care to possess or, possessing, to use it and this power is greater than any other and more effective. It was this force which, as soon as he attained to it, he used at first only in a limited field of personal work, but afterwards in a constant action upon the world forces.”¹

Twice he found it necessary to go out of his way to make public pronouncements on important world-issues, which shows distinctly that renunciation of life is not a part of his Yoga. “The first was in relation to the Second World War. At the beginning he did not actively concern himself with it, but when it appeared as if Hitler would crush all the forces opposed to him and Nazism dominate the world, he began to intervene.”²

The second was with regard to Sir Stafford Cripps’ proposal for the transfer of power to India.

¹. Sri Aurobindo and His Ashram, 1985, p. 22.
². Ibid.
Over and above Sadhana, writing work and rendering spiritual help to the world during his apparent retirement there were plenty of other activities of which the outside world has no knowledge. Many prominent as well as less known persons sought and obtained interviews with him during these years. Thus, among well-known persons may be mentioned C. R. Das, Lala Lajpat Rai, Sarala Devi, Dr. Munje, Khasirao Jadhav, Tagore, Sylvain Levy. The great national poet of Tamil Nadu, S. Subramanya Bharati, was in contact with Sri Aurobindo for some years during his stay at Pondicherry; so was V. V. S. Aiyar. The famous V. Ramaswamy Aiyangar — Va Ra of Tamil literature — stayed with Sri Aurobindo for nearly three years and was influenced by him. Some of these facts have been already mentioned in *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*.

Jung has admitted that there is an element of mystery, something that baffles the reason, in human personality. One finds that the greater the personality the greater is the complexity. And this is especially so with regard to spiritual personalities — whom the Gita calls Vibhutis and Avatars.

Sri Aurobindo has explained the mystery of personality in some of his writings. Ordinarily by personality we mean something which can be described as “a pattern of being marked out by a settled combination of fixed qualities, a determined character. . . . In one view personality is regarded as a fixed structure of recognizable qualities expressing a power of being”; another idea regards “personality as a flux of self-expressive or sensitive and responsive being. . . . But flux of nature and fixity of nature” — which some call character — “are two aspects of being neither of which, nor indeed both together, can be a definition of personality. . . . But besides this flux and this fixity there is also a third and occult element, the Person behind of whom the personality is a self-expression; the Person puts forward the personality as his role, character, *persona*, in the present act of his long drama of manifested existence. But the Person is larger than his personality, and it may happen that this inner largeness overflows into the surface formation; the result is a self-expression of being which can no longer be described by fixed qualities, normalities of mood, exact lineaments, or marked out by structural limits.”

The gospel of the Supermind which Sri Aurobindo brought to man envisages a new level of consciousness beyond Mind. When this level is attained it imposes a complete and radical reintegration of the human personality. Sri Aurobindo was not merely the exponent but the embodiment of the new, dynamic truth of the Supermind. While exploring and sounding the tremendous possibilities of human personality in his intense spiritual Sadhana, he has shown us that practically there are no limits to its expansion and ascent. It can reach in its growth what appears to man at present as a ‘divine’ status. It goes without saying that this attainment is not an easy task; there are

3. His initials, in the Tamil manner, by which he was widely known.
conditions to be fulfilled for the transformation from the human to the divine.

The Gita in its chapters on the Vibhuti and the Avatar takes in general the same position. It shows that the present formula of our nature, and therefore the mental personality of man, is not final. A Vibhuti embodies in a human manifestation a certain divine quality and thus demonstrates the possibility of overcoming the limits of ordinary human personality. The Vibhuti — the embodiment of a divine quality or power, and the Avatar — the divine incarnation, are not to be looked upon as supraphysical miracles thrown at humanity without regard to the process of evolution; they are, in fact, indications of human possibility, a sign that points to the goal of evolution.

In his *Essays on the Gita*, Sri Aurobindo says about the Avatar: “He may, on the other hand, descend as an incarnation of divine life, the divine personality and power in its characteristic action, for a mission ostensibly social, ethical and political, as is represented in the story of Rama or Krishna; but always then this descent becomes in the soul of the race a permanent power for the inner living and the spiritual rebirth.”

“He comes as the divine power and love which calls men to itself, so that they may take refuge in that and no longer in the insufficiency of their human wills and the strife of their human fear, wrath and passion, and liberated from all this unquiet and suffering may live in the calm and bliss of the Divine.”

“The Avatar comes to reveal the divine nature in man above this lower nature and to show what are the divine works, free, unegoistic, disinterested, impersonal, universal, full of the divine light, the divine power and the divine love. He comes as the divine personality which shall fill the consciousness of the human being and replace the limited egoistic personality, so that it shall be liberated out of ego into infinity and universality, out of birth into immortality.”

It is clear that Sri Aurobindo interpreted the traditional idea of the Vibhuti and the Avatar in terms of the evolutionary possibilities of man. But more directly he has worked out the idea of the ‘gnostic individual’ in his masterpiece *The Life Divine*. He says: “A supramental gnostic individual will be a spiritual Person, but not a personality in the sense of a pattern of being marked out by a settled combination of fixed qualities, a determined character; he cannot be that since he is a conscious expression of the universal and the transcendent.” Describing the gnostic individual he says: “We feel ourselves in the presence of a light of consciousness, a potency, a sea of energy, can distinguish and describe its free waves of action and quality, but not fix itself; and yet there is an impression of personality, the presence of a powerful being, a strong, high or beautiful recognisable Someone, a Person, not a

limited creature of Nature but a Self or Soul, a Purusha.”

One feels that he was describing the feeling of some of us, his disciples, with regard to him in his inimitable way.

This transformation of the human personality into the Divine — perhaps even the mere connection of the human with the Divine — is probably regarded as a chimera by the modern mind. To the modern mind it would appear as the apotheosis of a human personality which is against its idea of equality of men. Its difficulty is partly due to the notion that the Divine is unlimited and illimitable while a ‘personality’, however high and grand, seems to demand imposition, or assumption, of limitation. In this connection Sri Aurobindo said during an evening talk that no human manifestation can be illimitable and unlimited, but the manifestation in the limited should reflect the unlimited, the Transcendent Beyond.

This possibility of the human touching and manifesting the Divine has been realised during the course of human history whenever a great spiritual Light has appeared on earth. One of the purposes of this book is to show how Sri Aurobindo himself reflected the unlimited Beyond in his own self.

Greatness is magnetic and in a sense contagious. Wherever manifested, greatness is claimed by humanity as something that reveals the possibility of the race. The highest utility of greatness is not merely to attract us but to inspire us to follow it and rise to our own highest spiritual stature. To the majority of men Truth remains abstract, impersonal and far unless it is seen and felt concretely in a human personality. A man never knows a truth actively except through a person and by embodying it in his own personality. Some glimpse of the Truth-Consciousness which Sri Aurobindo embodied may be caught in these Evening Talks.

II

Guru-griha-väsa — staying in the home of the Guru — is a very old Indian ideal maintained by seekers through the ages. The Aranyakas — the ancient teachings in the forest-groves — are perhaps the oldest records of the institution. It was not for ‘education’ in the modern sense of the term that men went to live with the Guru; for the Guru is not a ‘teacher’. The Guru is one who is ‘enlightened’, who is a seer, a Rishi, one who has the vision of and has lived the Truth. He has, thus, the knowledge of the goal of human life and has learnt true values in life by living the Truth. He can impart both these to the willing seeker. In ancient times seekers went to the Guru with many questions, difficulties and doubts but also with earnestness. Their questions were preliminary to the quest.

The Master, the Guru, set at rest the puzzled human mind by his illuminating answers, perhaps even more by his silent consciousness, so that it might be able to

pursue unhampered the path of realisation of the Truth. Those ancient discourses answer the mind of man today even across the ages. They have rightly acquired — as everything of the past does — a certain sanctity. But sometimes that very reverence prevents men from properly evaluating, and living in, the present. This happens when the mind instead of seeking the Spirit looks at the form. For instance, it is not necessary for such discourses that they take place in forest-groves in order to be highly spiritual. Wherever the Master is, there is Light. And guru-griha — the house of the Master — can be his private dwelling place. So much was this feeling a part of Sri Aurobindo’s nature and so particular was he to maintain the personal character of his work that during the first few years — after 1923 — he did not like his house to be called an ‘Ashram’, as the word had acquired the sense of a public institution to the modern mind. But there was no doubt that the flower of Divinity had blossomed in him; and disciples, like bees seeking honey, came to him. It is no exaggeration to say that these Evening Talks were to the small company of disciples what the Aranyakas were to the ancient seekers. Seeking the Light, they came to the dwelling place of their Guru, the greatest seer of the age, and found it their spiritual home — the home of their parents, for the Mother, his companion in the great mission, had come. And these spiritual parents bestowed upon the disciples freely of their Light, their Consciousness, their Power and their Grace. The modern reader may find that the form of these discourses differs from those of the past but it was bound to be so for the simple reason that the times have changed and the problems that puzzle the modern mind are so different. Even though the disciples may be very imperfect representations of what he aimed at in them, still they are his creations. It is in order to repay, in however infinitesimal a degree, the debt which we owe to him that the effort is made to partake of the joy of his company — the Evening Talks — with a larger public.

III

EVENING SITTINGS

Sri Aurobindo was never a social man in the current sense of the term and definitely he was not a man of the crowd. This was due to his grave temperament, not to any feeling of superiority or to repulsion for men. At Baroda there was an Officers’ Club which was patronised by the Maharajah and though Sri Aurobindo enrolled himself as a member he hardly went to the Club even on special occasions. He rather liked a small congenial circle of friends and spent most of his evenings with them whenever he was free and not occupied with his studies or other works. After Baroda when he went to Calcutta there was hardly any time in the storm and stress of revolutionary politics to permit him to lead a ‘social life’. What little time he could spare from his incessant activities was spent in the house of Raja Subodh Mallick or at the Grey Street house. In the Karmayogin office he used to sit after the office hours till late
chatting with a few persons or trying automatic writing. Strange dictations used to be received sometimes: one of them was the following: “Moni [Suresh Chakravarty] will bomb Sir Edward Grey when he will come as the Viceroy of India.” In later years at Pondicherry there used to be a joke that Sir Edward took such a fright at the prospect of Moni’s bombing him that he never came to India! After Sri Aurobindo had come to Pondicherry from Chandernagore, he entered upon an intense period of Sadhana and for a few months he refused to receive anyone. After a time he used to sit down to talk in the evening and on some days tried automatic writing. *Yogic Sadhan*, a small book, was the result. In 1913 Sri Aurobindo moved to Rue François Martin No. 41 where he used to receive visitors at fixed times. This was generally in the morning between 9 and 10.30.

But, over and above newcomers, some local people and the few inmates of the house used to have informal talks with Sri Aurobindo in the evening. In the beginning the inmates used to go out for playing football, and during their absence known local individuals would come in and wait for Sri Aurobindo. Afterwards regular meditations began at about 4 p.m. in which practically all the inmates participated. After the meditation all of the members and those who were permitted shared in the evening sitting. This was a very informal gathering depending entirely upon Sri Aurobindo’s leisure.

When Sri Aurobindo and the Mother moved to No. 9, Rue de la Marine in 1922 the same routine of informal evening sittings after meditation continued. I came to Pondicherry for Sadhana in the beginning of 1923. I kept notes of the important talks I had with the four or five disciples who were already there. Besides, I used to take detailed notes of the Evening Talks which we all had with the Master. They were not intended by him to be noted down. I took them down because of the importance I felt about everything connected with him, no matter how insignificant to the outer view. I also felt that everything he did would acquire for those who would come to know his mission a very great significance.

As years passed the evening sittings went on changing their time and often those disciples who came from outside for a temporary stay for Sadhana were allowed to join them. And, as the number of sadhaks practising the Yoga increased, the evening sittings also became more full, and the small verandah upstairs in the main building was found insufficient. Members of the household would gather every day at the fixed time with some sense of expectancy and start chatting in low tones. Sri Aurobindo used to come last and it was after his coming that the session would really commence.

He came dressed as usual in dhoti, part of which was used by him to cover the upper part of his body. Very rarely he came out with chaddar or shawl and then it was “in deference to the climate” as he sometimes put it. At times for minutes he would be gazing at the sky from a small opening at the top of the grass-curtains that covered the verandah upstairs in No. 9, Rue de la Marine. How much were these
sittings dependent on him may be gathered from the fact that there were days when more than three-fourths of the time passed in complete silence without any outer suggestion from him, or there was only an abrupt “Yes” or “No” to all attempts at drawing him out in conversation. And even when he participated in the talk one always felt that his voice was that of one who does not let his whole being flow into his words; there was a reserve and what was left unsaid was perhaps more than what was spoken. What was spoken was what he felt necessary to speak.

Very often some news-item in the daily newspaper, town-gossip, or some interesting letter received either by him or by a disciple, or a question from one of the gathering, occasionally some remark or query from himself would set the ball rolling for the talk. The whole thing was so informal that one could never predict the turn the conversation would take. The whole house therefore was in a mood to enjoy the freshness and the delight of meeting the unexpected. There were peals of laughter and light talk, jokes and criticism which might be called personal, there was seriousness and earnestness in abundance.

These sittings, in fact, furnished Sri Aurobindo with an occasion to admit and feel the outer atmosphere and that of the group living with him. It brought to him the much-needed direct contact of the mental and vital make-up of the disciples, enabling him to act on the atmosphere in general and on the individual in particular. He could thus help to remould their mental make-up by removing the limitations of their minds and opinions, and correct temperamental tendencies and formations. Thus, these sittings contributed at least partly to the creation of an atmosphere amenable to the working of the Higher Consciousness. Far more important than the actual talk and its content was the personal contact, the influence of the Master, and the divine atmosphere he emanated; for through his outer personality it was the Divine Consciousness that he allowed to act. All along behind the outer manifestation that appeared human, there was the influence and presence of the Divine.

What was talked in the small group informally was not intended by Sri Aurobindo to be the independent expression of his views on the subjects, events or the persons discussed. Very often what he said was in answer to the spiritual need of the individual or of the collective atmosphere. It was like a spiritual remedy meant to produce certain spiritual results, not a philosophical or meta-physical pronouncement on questions, events or movements. The net result of some talks very often was to point out to the disciple the inherent incapacity of the human intellect and its secondary place in the search for the ultimate Reality.

But there were occasions when he did give his independent, personal views on some problems, on events or other subjects. Even then it was never an authoritarian pronouncement. Most often it appeared to be a logically worked out and almost inevitable conclusion expressed quite impersonally though with firm and sincere conviction. This impersonality was such a prominent trait of his personality! Even in such matters as dispatching a letter or a telegram it would not be a command from
him to a disciple to carry out the task. Most often during his usual passage to the
dining room he would stop on the way, drop in on the company of four or five
disciples and, holding out the letter or the telegram, would say in the most amiable
and yet the most impersonal way: “I suppose this has to be sent.” And it would be
for someone in the group instantly to volunteer and take it. The expression he very
often used was “It was done” or “It happened”, not “I did.”

From 1918 to 1922, we gathered at No. 41, Rue François Martin, called the
Guest House, upstairs, on a broad verandah into which four rooms opened and
whose main piece of furniture was a small table 3´ × 1½´, covered with a blue cotton
cloth. That is where Sri Aurobindo used to sit in a hard wooden chair behind the
table with a few chairs in front for the visitors or for the disciples.

From 1922 to 1926, No. 9, Rue de la Marine, where he and the Mother had
shifted, was the place where the sittings were held. There, also upstairs, was a less
broad verandah than at the Guest House, a little bigger table in front of the central
door out of three, and a broad Japanese chair, the table covered with a better cloth
than the one in the Guest House, a small flower vase, an ash-tray, a block calendar
indicating the date and an ordinary time-piece, and a number of chairs in front in a
line. The evening sittings used to be after meditation at 4 or 4.30 p.m. After 24
November 1926, the sittings began to get later and later, till the limit of 1 o’clock at
night was reached. Then the curtain fell. Sri Aurobindo retired completely after
December 1926, and the evening sittings came to a close.

On 8 February 1927, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother moved to No. 28, Rue
François Martin, a house on the north-east of the same block as No. 9, Rue de la
Marine.

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Then, on 23 November 1938, I got up at 2 o’clock to prepare hot water for the
Mother’s early bath because the 24th was Darshan day. Between 2.20 and 2.30 the
Mother rang the bell. I ran up the staircase to be told about an accident that had
happened to Sri Aurobindo’s thigh and to be asked to fetch the doctor. This accident
brought about a change in his complete retirement, and rendered him available to
those who had to attend on him. This opened out a long period of 12 years during
which his retirement was modified owing to circumstances, inner and outer, that
made it possible for him to have direct physical contacts with the world outside.

The long period of the Second World War with all its vicissitudes passed through
these years. It was a priceless experience to see how he devoted his energies to the
task of saving humanity from the threatened reign of Nazism. It was a practical
lesson of solid work done for humanity without any thought of return or reward,
without even letting humanity know what he was doing for it! Thus he lived the
Divine and showed us how the Divine cares for the world, how He comes down and
works for man. I shall never forget how he who was at one time — in his own words — “not merely a non-co-operator but an enemy of British Imperialism” bestowed such anxious care on the health of Churchill, listening carefully to the health-bulletins! It was the work of the Divine, it was the Divine’s work for the world.

There were no formal evening sittings during these years, but what appeared to me important in our informal talks was recorded and has been incorporated in this book.

MEETING THE MASTER

I went out from Pondicherry in 1947 when India was on the eve of securing her partitioned freedom. On my return-journey in the month of July 1947, I became conscious of the fact that it was my return to a place where I had passed nearly twenty-five years at a stretch. The memory of my first visit in 1918 awoke in me all the old impressions vividly. I saw then that even at that early period Sri Aurobindo had been for me the embodiment of the Supreme Consciousness. I began to search mentally for the exact time-moment when I had come to know him. Travelling far into the past I found it was in 1914 when I read a notice in the Bombay Chronicle about the publication of a monthly magazine — the Arya — from Pondicherry by Sri Aurobindo. I hastened to register my name in advance. In those days of political storms, to avoid the suspicion of the college authorities and the police, I had ordered the magazine to be delivered to an address outside the college. Sri Aurobindo then appeared to me to be the personification of the ideal of the life divine which he so ably put before humanity in the Arya.

But the question: “Why did I order the Arya?” remained. On trying to find an answer I found that I had known him before the appearance of the Arya.

The Congress broke up at Surat in 1907. Sri Aurobindo had played a prominent part in that historic session. From Surat he came to Baroda, and at Vankaner Theatre and at Prof. Manik Rao’s old gymnasium in Dandia Bazar he delivered several speeches which not only took the audience by storm but changed entirely the course of many lives. I also heard him without understanding everything that was spoken. But ever since I had seen him I had got the constant feeling that he was one known to me, and so my mind could not fix the exact time-moment when I knew him. It is certain that the connection seemed to begin with the great tidal wave of the national movement in the political life of India; but I think it was only the apparent beginning. The years between 1903 and 1910 were those of unprecedented awakening and revolution. The generations that followed also witnessed two or three powerful floods of the national movement. But the very first onrush of the newly awakened national
consciousness of India was unique. That tidal wave in its initial onrush defined the goal of India’s political ideal — an independent republic. Alternating movements of ebb and flow in the national movement followed till in 1947 the goal was reached. The lives of leaders and workers, who rode, willingly and with delight on the dangerous crest of the tidal wave, underwent great transformations. Our small group in Gujarat got its goal fixed — the winning of undiluted freedom for India.

All the energies of the leaders were taken up by the freedom movement. Only a few among them attempted to see beyond the horizon of political freedom some ideal of human perfection; for, after all, freedom is not the ultimate goal but a condition for the expression of the cultural Spirit of India. In Swami Shraddhananda, Pandit Madanmohan Malavia, Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi — to name some leaders — we see the double aspect of the inspiration. Among all the visions of perfection of the human spirit on earth, I found the synthetic and integral vision of Sri Aurobindo the most rational and the most satisfying. It meets the need of the individual and collective life of man today. It is the international form of the fundamental elements of Indian culture. It is, Dr. S. K. Maitra says, the message which holds out hope in a world of despair.

This aspect of Sri Aurobindo’s vision attracted me as much as the natural affinity which I had felt on seeing him. I found on making a serious study of the *Arya* that it led me to very rational conclusions with regard to the solutions of the deepest problems of life. I opened correspondence with him and in 1916, with his permission, began to translate the *Arya* into Gujarati.

But, though I had seen him from a distance and felt an unaccountable familiarity with him, still I had not yet met him personally. When the question of putting into execution the revolutionary plan which Sri Aurobindo had given to my brother, the late C. B. Purani, at Baroda in 1907, arose, I thought it better to obtain Sri Aurobindo’s consent to it. Barindra, his brother, had given the formula for preparing bombs to my brother, and I was also very impatient to begin the work. But still we thought it necessary to consult the great leader who had given us the inspiration, as the lives of many young men were involved in the plan.

I had an introduction to Sj. V. V. S. Aiyar who was then staying at Pondicherry. It was in December 1918 that I reached Pondicherry. I did not stay long with Mr. Aiyar. I took up my bundle of books — mainly the *Arya* — and went to No. 41, Rue François Martin, the *Arya* office, which was also Sri Aurobindo’s residence. The house looked a little queer, — on the right side, as one entered, were a few plantain trees and by their side a heap of broken tiles. On the left, at the edge of the open courtyard, four doors giving entrance to four rooms were seen. The verandah outside was wide. It was about eight in the morning. The time for meeting Sri Aurobindo was fixed at three o’clock in the afternoon. I waited all the time in the house, occasionally chatting with the two inmates who were there.
Sri Aurobindo was sitting in a wooden chair behind a small table covered with an indigo-blue cloth in the verandah upstairs when I went up to meet him. I felt a spiritual light surrounding his face. His look was penetrating. He had known me by my correspondence. I reminded him about my brother having met him at Baroda; he had not forgotten him. Then I informed him that our group was now ready to start revolutionary activity. It had taken us about eleven years to get organised.

Sri Aurobindo remained silent for some time. Then he put me questions about my sadhana. I described my efforts and added: “Sadhana is all right, but it is difficult to concentrate on it so long as India is not free.”

“Perhaps it may not be necessary to resort to revolutionary activity to free India,” he said.

“But without that how is the British Government to go from India?” I asked him.

“That is another question; but if India can be free without revolutionary activity, why should you execute the plan? It is better to concentrate on Yoga,” he replied.

“But India is a land that has Sadhana in its blood. When India is free, I believe, thousands will devote themselves to Yoga. But in the world of today who will listen to the truth from, or spirituality of, slaves?” I asked him.

He replied: “India has already decided to win freedom and so there will certainly be found leaders and men to work for that goal. But all are not called to Yoga. So, when you have the call, is it not better to concentrate upon it? If you want to carry out the revolutionary programme you are free to do it, but I cannot give my consent to it.”

“But it was you who gave us the inspiration and the start for revolutionary activity. Why do you now refuse to give your consent to its execution?” I asked.

“Because I have done the work and I know its difficulties. Young men come forward to join the movement, driven by idealism and enthusiasm. But these elements do not last long. It becomes very difficult to observe and extract discipline. Small groups begin to form within the organisation, rivalries grow between groups and even between individuals. There is competition for leadership. The agents of the Government generally manage to join these organisations from the very beginning. And so the organisations are unable to act effectively. Sometimes they sink so low as to quarrel even for money,” he said calmly.

“But even supposing that I grant sadhana to be of greater importance, and even intellectually understand that I should concentrate upon it, my difficulty is that I feel intensely that I must do something for the freedom of India. I have been unable to sleep soundly for the last two years and a half. I can remain quiet if I make a very strong effort. But the concentration of my whole being turns towards India’s freedom. It is difficult for me to sleep till that is secured.”

Sri Aurobindo remained silent for two or three minutes. It was a long pause. Then he said: “Suppose an assurance is given to you that India will be free?”
“Who can give such an assurance?” I could feel the echo of doubt and challenge in my own question.

Again he remained silent for three or four minutes. Then he looked at me and added: “Suppose I give you the assurance?”

I paused for a moment, considered the question with myself and said: “If you give the assurance, I can accept it.”

“Then I give you the assurance that India will be free,” he said in a serious tone.

My work was over — the purpose of my visit to Pondicherry was served. My personal question and the problem of our group was solved! I then conveyed to him the message of Sj. K. G. Deshpande from Baroda. I told him that financial help could be arranged from Baroda, if necessary, to which he replied, “At present what is required comes from Bengal, especially from Chandernagore. So there is no need.”

When the talk turned to Prof. D. L. Purohit of Baroda, Sri Aurobindo recounted the incident of his visit to Pondicherry where he had come to inquire into the relation between the Church and the State. He had paid a courtesy call on Sri Aurobindo as he had known him at Baroda. This had resulted in his resignation from Baroda State service on account of the pressure of the British Residency. I conveyed to Sri Aurobindo the good news that after his resignation Mr. Purohit had started practice as a lawyer and was quite successful, earning more than the pay he had been getting as a professor.

It was time for me to leave. The question of Indian freedom again arose in my mind, and at the time of taking leave, after I had got up to depart, I could not repress the question — it was a question of my very life for me: “Are you quite sure that India will be free?”

I did not, at that time, realise the full import of my query. I wanted a guarantee, and though the assurance was given my doubts had not completely disappeared.

Sri Aurobindo became very serious. The Yogi in him came forward, his gaze was fixed at the sky that could be seen beyond the window. Then he looked at me and putting his fist on the table he said:

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

I bowed down to him. That day I was able to sleep soundly in the train after more than two years. And in my mind was fixed ever the picture of that scene: the two of us standing near the small table, my earnest question, that upward gaze, and that quiet and firm voice with power in it to shake the world, that firm fist planted on the table — the symbol of self-confidence of the divine Truth. There may be rank Kaliyuga, the Iron Age, in the whole world but it is the great good fortune of India that she has sons who know the Truth and have the unshakable faith in it, and can risk their lives for its sake. In this significant fact is contained the divine destiny of India and of the world.
After meeting Sri Aurobindo I was quite relieved of the great strain that was upon me. Now that I felt Indian freedom to be a certainty, I could participate in public movements with equanimity and with a truer spiritual attitude. I got some experiences also which confirmed my faith in Sri Aurobindo’s path. I got the confident faith in a divine Power that is beyond time and space and that can and does work in the world. I came to know that any man with a sincere aspiration for it can come in contact with that Power.

There were people who thought that Sri Aurobindo had retired from life, that he did not take any interest in the world and its affairs. These ideas never troubled me. On the contrary, I felt that his work was of tremendous significance for humanity and its future. In fact, the dynamic aspect of his spirituality, his insistence on life as a field for the manifestation of the Spirit, and his great synthesis added to the attraction I had already felt. To me he appeared as the spiritual Sun in modern times shedding his light on mankind from the height of his consciousness, and Pondicherry where he lived was a place of pilgrimage.

II

The second time I met Sri Aurobindo was in March 1921, when there was a greater familiarity. Having come for a short stay, I remained eleven days on Sri Aurobindo’s asking me to prolong my stay. During my journey from Madras to Pondicherry I was enchanted by the natural scenery — the vast stretches of green paddy fields. But Pondicherry as a city was lethargic, with a colonial atmosphere — an exhibition of the worst elements of European and Indian culture. The market was dirty and stinking and the people had no idea of sanitation. The sea-beach was made filthy by them. Smuggling was the main business.

But the greatest surprise of my visit in 1921 was the ‘darshan’ of Sri Aurobindo. During the interval of two years his body had undergone a transformation which could only be described as miraculous. In 1918 the colour of the body was like that of an ordinary Bengali — rather dark — though there was a lustre on the face and the gaze was penetrating. This time on going upstairs to see him (in the same house) I found his cheeks wore an apple-pink colour and the whole body glowed with a soft creamy white light. So great and unexpected was the change that I could not help exclaiming: “What has happened to you?”

Instead of giving a direct reply he parried the question, as I had grown a beard: “And what has happened to you?”

But afterwards in the course of the conversation he explained to me that when the Higher Consciousness, after descending to the mental level, comes down to the vital and even below the vital, then a transformation takes place in the nervous and even in the physical being. He asked me to join the meditation in the afternoon and also the evening sittings.
This time I saw the Mother for the first time. She was standing near the staircase when Sri Aurobindo was going upstairs after lunch. Such unearthly beauty I had never seen — she appeared to be about twenty years old whereas she was more than forty.

I found the atmosphere of the house tense. The Mother and Datta, i.e. Miss Hodgson, had come to stay in No. 41, Rue François Martin. The house had undergone a great change. There was a clean garden in the open courtyard, every room had simple and decent furniture, — a mat, a chair and a small table. There was an air of tidiness and order. This was, no doubt, the effect of the Mother’s presence. But yet the atmosphere was tense because Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were engaged in fighting with forces of the vital plane.

Only a few days before my arrival a dismissed cook had managed to get stones hurled into Sri Aurobindo’s house through the agency of a Mohammedan occultist. This was the topic of excited talk when I was at Pondicherry. Upendranath Banerjee, who hardly believed in the possibility of such occult phenomena, had gone to the terrace with a lantern and a lathi to find the culprit. I heard the whole story from Upen himself. The stone-throwing ended when the Mother took the matter in hand and removed the servant-boy, who was the medium, to another house. (The account of this is already given in my *The Life of Sri Aurobindo.*)

The Prabartak Sangh was started at Chandernagore by Motilal Roy and others under the inspiration of Sri Aurobindo. In the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo life is accepted as the field for the manifestation of the Divine. Its main aim is not liberation merely but the manifestation of divine perfection. In his vision not only the individual but the collectivity also is a term of the Divine. Acceptance of life includes the collective life. There is a deeper reason for accepting life. In his vision of the Reality Sri Aurobindo shows the rationality and the inevitability of an ascent by man to a higher consciousness than Mind. This ascent to the Higher Consciousness must lead to its descent in man. If the new element, the Supermind, is to become a permanent part of the earth-consciousness, then not only should it descend into the lowest plane of physical consciousness — the subconscious — but it must become a part of the collective consciousness on earth.

I asked him many questions about the organisation of a collective life based on spiritual aspiration.

On the last day of my stay of eleven days I met Sri Aurobindo between three and four in the afternoon. The main topic was Sadhana. When I got up to take leave I
asked him: “What are you waiting for?” I put the question because it was clear to me that he had been constantly living in the Higher Consciousness.

“It is true,” he said, “that the Divine Consciousness has descended but it has not yet descended into the physical being. So long as that is not done the work cannot be said to be accomplished.”

I bowed down to him. When I got up to look at his face, I found he had already gone to the entrance of his room and, through the one door, I saw him turning his face towards me with a smile. I felt a great elation when I boarded the train: for, here was a guide who had already attained the Divine Consciousness, was conscious about it, and yet whose detachment and discrimination were so perfect, whose sincerity so profound, that he knew what had still to be attained and could go on unobtrusively doing his hard work for mankind. External forms had a secondary place in his scale of values. In an effort so great is embodied some divine inspiration; to be called to such an ideal was itself the greatest good fortune.

* * *

The freedom of India, about which he had assured me, came, and I was fortunate to live to see it arrive on his own auspicious birthday, the 15th of August 1947. I had been out and now it was to Pondicherry that I was returning.

I had lived there for nearly a generation but had never felt the Pondicherry Ashram as something fixed and unchanging. I realised this most strongly on the day I was returning to it. Pondicherry has always been to me the symbol of a great experiment, of a divine ideal. It is marching every hour towards the ultimate goal of man’s upward ascent to the Divine. Not a city but a spiritual laboratory, a collective being with a daily changing horizon yet pursuing a fixed distant objective, a place fixed to the outer view but constantly moving — Pondicherry to me is always like the Arab’s tent.

A. B. Purani

(Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo recorded by A. B. Purani, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 2007, pp. 1-22)
MAKING OF DEATHLESS BEING: AN OCCULT AND YOGIC VISION OF SRI AUROBINDO

Introduction:

Although Science has discovered evolution as the secret of life and its process in the material world, it has laid more stress on the growth of form and species rather than on the growth of consciousness. In his explanation of the mystery of creation Sri Aurobindo puts forward ‘the cardinal fact of a spiritual evolution as the meaning of our existence here’. ‘. . . all that evolves already existed involved, passive or otherwise active, but in either case concealed from us in the shell of material Nature.’

It was as though even in this Nought’s profound,
Even in this ultimate dissolution’s core
There lurked an unremembering entity,
Survivor of a slain and buried past . . .

_Savitri_, p. 2

This ‘unremembering entity’ is the concealed godhead involved in Matter, the ultimate dissolution’s core. The aim of Evolution, as Sri Aurobindo sees, is the gradual release of this consciousness in forms of life and mind. Evolution is the method by which the concealed godhead liberates itself and is self-impelled to grow higher and higher, to enlarge and develop towards a greater and greater perfection. As this self-impelled consciousness grows and gets enlarged and more and more perfected, it takes and develops a form suited to itself. But Evolution does not end with the mind, ‘it awaits a release into something greater, a consciousness which is spiritual and supramental.’

It may therefore, be said that Evolution is an ‘adventure of consciousness’:

There is no rest for the embodied soul.
It must live on, describe all Time’s huge curve.
An influx presses from the closed Beyond
Forbidding to him rest and earthly ease,
Till he has found himself he cannot pause.

_Savitri_, p. 339

In other words, ‘There is no end to the world’s stupendous march’ till man reaches the highest consciousness and

Rescue the preamble and the saving clause
Of the dark Agreement by which all is ruled
That rises from material Nature’s sleep
To clothe the Everlasting in new shapes.

_Savitri_, p. 75

But in ‘the slow evolution’s sluggard steps’, the consciousness has to rise to all its grades:

Arise upon a ladder of greater worlds
To the infinity where no world can be.
But not in the wide air where a greater Life
Uplifts its mystery and its miracle,
And not on the luminous peaks of summit Mind,
Or in the hold where subtle Matter’s spirit
Hides in its light of shimmering secrecies,
Can there be heard the Eternal’s firm command
That joins the head of destiny to its base.

_Savitri_, p. 694

In the endless vistas of the unknown and unseen

There is a consciousness mind cannot touch,
Its speech cannot utter nor its thought reveal.

_Savitri_, p. 705

This realm of consciousness is Infinity’s heaven that spills the rain of God; it is the Immense (the Truth, the Right, the Vast)

. . . that calls to man to expand the Spirit, . . .

_Ibid._

The line of human progression and activity is determined by the motive of the forces of consciousness from a particular plane on the will of the being. As one rises more and more on the ladder of determinism, one is gradually absolved from pain and suffering and decay. The ascension of consciousness, according to Integral Yoga, has two stages — one in the ignorant field upto the Overmind realm, and the second, in the superconscient realm from the Supermind and beyond. When the
supreme Supramental determinism has been attained, we have divinised our life.

A divinised life can be attained by the ascension of our consciousness to higher planes of determinism, the consciousness ascends first in the ignorant field upto the Overmind and then in the superconscient realm to the Supermind and beyond. The whole of Savitri describes this ascension:

\[
\text{As if from Matter’s plinth and viewless base} \\
\text{To a top as viewless, a carved sea of worlds} \\
\text{Climbing with foam-maned waves to the Supreme} \\
\text{Ascended towards breadths immeasurable;} \\
\text{It hoped to soar into the Ineffable’s reign:} \\
\text{A hundred levels raised it to the Unknown.}
\]

\textit{Savitri, p. 98}

Thus is formed ‘a summary of the stages of the spirit’; ‘a subtle pattern of the universal is refashioned in our secret air of self’.

But for such a vast spiritual change to be Sri Aurobindo advocates:

\[
\text{Take the psychic attitude; follow the straight sunlit path, with the Divine openly} \\
\text{or secretly upbearing you . . . do not insist on the hard, hampered, roundabout} \\
\text{and difficult journey.}\]

The psychic is the immortal element in man. If all the parts of the being, mind, life, body and its very cells offer themselves to this divine element within, offer all the consciousness, all that happens in it, all their work and action to the true inmost being; if the outer beings of the man are centred round the psychic and are impressed and illumined by the psychic fire, they ‘sustain a bright metamorphosis’:

\[
\text{Out of the mystic cavern in man’s heart} \\
\text{The heavenly Psyche must put off her veil} \\
\text{And step into common nature’s crowded rooms} \\
\text{And stand uncovered in that nature’s front} \\
\text{And rule its thoughts and fill the body and life.}
\]

\textit{Savitri, pp. 486-87}

\textbf{The Method:}

\textit{1. Divinisation of life:}

Then the soul soars high carrying the lower consciousness on its upward march. This, according to Integral Yoga, is the most effective way to shed the discredit of our mortal state, and to make a road in the abysm for Heaven’s descent and then we

'cleave the darkness with the mystic Fire'. This is the way to divinising and supra-mentalising of life.

Such stupendous work is beyond all human effort. Hence some preliminary steps have to be fulfilled. The most important step is widening of the being. Sri Aurobindo says, “The supramental world has to be formed or created in us by the Divine Will as the result of a constant expansion and self-perfecting.”3 The Mother in this regard speaks of the yoga of the cells. The cells of the body ‘must learn to widen, widen, not only the inner consciousness, but even the conglomeration of cells’. This widening enables the cells of the body to hold and house in them the force. In this way, a new mould of the cell is created and a new harmony made possible. But here too is a difficulty — how to hold the supra-ethereal consciousness in the cells? Sri Aurobindo speaks of a ‘holding power’ in the cells, *dharana shakti*. This power of holding grows in the cells by calling down receptivity or aspiration in the cells.

The cellular consciousness and the material cells of the body obey the habits of physical consciousness. But

> All here must learn to obey a higher law,  
> Our body’s cells must hold the Immortal’s flame.  

*Savitri*, p. 35

Under the pressure of physical consciousness, in the cage of the physical and its habits, the cells wilt and are unable to receive divine consciousness. Decoat the cells of all mental, vital and environmental suggestions, denude them of all such teguments, then the cell

> Acts vibrant with a superhuman light  
> And movements pushed by a superconscient force, . . .  

*Savitri*, p. 28

Thus we move towards divinisation of this earthly life:

> A labour to the gods impossible.  

*Savitri*, p. 108

2. Divinisation of material substance:

There is a Supreme Divine Consciousness. We want to manifest this Divine Consciousness in the physical life.4

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But to transplant and manifest a divinised life in the ignorant physical body is not at all possible. Sri Aurobindo’s occult and yogic vision finds a way out of this situation; ‘a divine life in a divine body’ — the formula of the Integral Yoga.

In an earlier section of this article we have seen how a divine life or the divinisation of this earthly life is possible and for which Integral Yoga has laid down a specific method. Making of a deathless being requires, according to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, a two-pronged way; first, attaining a divine consciousness and secondly, attaining a divine body. A divine life in a divine body can alone prepare ‘a deathless being’. A divine life, a divinised life, can be attained by the ascension of our consciousness to higher planes of determinism. The ascension of consciousness has two significant roles to play in the making of a deathless being. First it helps in the formation of a divine consciousness and secondly it helps indirectly in the formation of a divine body.

The occult and yogic process towards the fulfilment of the Integral Yoga is the amazing use of the ‘ascending series of Substance in the scale of Matter’. Sri Aurobindo affirms that ‘within the formula of the physical cosmos there is an ascending series in the scale of Matter’ which takes us from ‘the more to the less dense, from the less to the more subtle’ realm; ‘out of earth-matter’s heavy doze’ rises the ascending series of Substance in the scale of Matter. In this way the principle of Matter and the principle of Spirit, the base and the head are linked, and Matter becomes pure Spirit substance. This discovery of Sri Aurobindo is of great significance, else the supreme adventure in Matter’s field could never have reached its goal. For we cannot leap from the material substance of the inconscient’s make to the pure substance of the Spirit. There must be ‘a series of subtler and subtler formulations of substance’. These gradations of substance can be seen to correspond to the ascension of consciousness as in ‘The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds’ in Savitri.

Towards the discovery of this true Matter or ‘pure Spirit Substance’” Sri Aurobindo’s yogic mission is directed:

To draw the chequered scheme of mortal life
Into some semblance of the Immortal’s plan,
To shape it closer to an image of God,
A little nearer to the Idea divine.

Savitri, p. 720

In the involutionary plunge of the divinity, “Divinity’s lapse from its own splendours” (Savitri: 99), the concealed godhead gets involved in Matter, the ultimate dissolution’s core. The adventure of the consciousness begins at this stage, in this ‘Nought’s profound’.
It plunges lost in our inconscient base.  
Out of its fall our denser Matter came.  

_Savitri_, p. 107

The consciousness involved in material substance becomes most dense and least ethereal of all the higher grades of consciousness:

In the crude beginnings of this mortal world  
Life was not nor mind’s play nor heart’s desire.  
When earth was built in the unconscious Void  
And nothing was save a material scene,  
Identified with sea and sky and stone . . .  

_Savitri_, p. 129

In that desolate grandeur, in the deaf stillness,

Her young gods yearned for the release of souls  
Asleep in objects, vague, inanimate.  

_Ibid._

In the inscrutable darkness stirred an aspiration of the ‘unremembering entity’, a nameless movement, an unthought Idea, ‘at peace in its subconscious moonless cave’ to raise its head and look for absent light, like one who searches for a bygone self. This aspiration of the involved consciousness troubled the far rim of life’s obscure sleep.

To seek for a spirit sole and desolate  
Too fallen to recollect forgotten bliss.  

_Savitri_, p. 2

Thus begins ‘the adventure of consciousness and joy’.

As  
Life cast her seed in the body’s indolent mould;  
It woke from happy torpor a blind Force  
Compelling it to sense and seek and feel.  

_Savitri_, p. 133

But this is a ‘faint and dim subconscious start’, a slow ascension that ‘teased the inconscient to wake ignorance’. This is the kingdom of little life, teeming with
instincts and intimate with Night and ‘far away from Truth and luminous thought’. But ‘all its means come from the Inconscient’s store’ and dim huge world-energies act unseen in the kingdom of the little life.

In this passage from a deaf unknowing Force
To struggling consciousness and transient breath
A mighty supernature waits on Time.

and

Across the cosmic field through narrow lanes
Asking a scanty dole from Fortune’s hands
And garbed in beggar’s robes there walks the One.

_The purpose of this essay is to delve into the yogic vision of Sri Aurobindo — ‘a divine life in a divine body’. The previous section dealt with attainment of a divine life by man. But the fulfilment of this yoga is not possible unless man attains a divine body too. The consciousness of the material substance must be released into a higher life consciousness._

A trepidant and motley multitude,
A strange pell-mell of magic artisans
Was seen moulding the plastic clay of life, . . .
Out of the greyness of a dim background
Their whispers come, an inarticulate force, . . .

_The purpose of this essay is to delve into the yogic vision of Sri Aurobindo — ‘a divine life in a divine body’. The previous section dealt with attainment of a divine life by man. But the fulfilment of this yoga is not possible unless man attains a divine body too. The consciousness of the material substance must be released into a higher life consciousness._

Thus they do their work in that little Nature:

Only the miraculous Inconscient,
A subtle wizard skilled, was at its task.
Inventing ways for magical results,
Managing creation’s marvellous device,
Marking mechanically dumb wisdom’s points,
Using the unthought inevitable Idea,
It did the works of God’s intelligence . . .

_The purpose of this essay is to delve into the yogic vision of Sri Aurobindo — ‘a divine life in a divine body’. The previous section dealt with attainment of a divine life by man. But the fulfilment of this yoga is not possible unless man attains a divine body too. The consciousness of the material substance must be released into a higher life consciousness._

Then a subtler breath quickened dead Matter’s forms:

A serpent Power twinned the insensible Force.
Islands of living dotted lifeless space
And germs of living formed in formless air.
A life was born that followed Matter’s law, . . .

_Savitri_, p. 156

This trepidant and motley multitude ‘inflict their little pigmy law’

And curb the mounting slow uprise of man,
Then his too scanty walk with death they close.

_Savitri_, p. 163

. . . there are a series of subtler and subtler formulations of substance which escape from and go beyond the formula of the material universe. . . . these gradations of substance, in one important aspect of their formulation in series, can be seen to correspond to the ascending series of Matter, Life, Mind, Supermind and that other higher divine triplicity of Sachchidananda. In other words, we find that substance in its ascension bases itself upon each of these principles and makes itself successively a characteristic vehicle for the dominating cosmic self-expression of each in their ascending series.5

Each plane of consciousness has its own gradation of substance, and as one rises to higher planes of consciousness, one enters into subtler and subtler gradations of substance. This is what Sri Aurobindo’s occult and yogic vision discovers. The soul’s expedition passes not only through the many planes of ascending consciousness but also enters into subtler and subtler gradations of substance in these planes. From gross earth matter the adventure of the soul follows a double ascension, one in the field of consciousness to attain a divine life and secondly to rise to a higher gradation of substance to a pure Spirit substance to attain a divine body. Then is made a deathless being.

From the material kingdom of little life ‘inflicting on the heights the abysm’s law’, the material substance in greater Life-plane is no longer form and force; it becomes more subtle, powerful and free from disintegration as the earth matter is. The substance in greater Life is

Immune from the harsh clutch of Death and Time,
Escaping the search of sorrow and desire,
In bright enchanted safe peripheries
For ever wallowing in bliss they lie.

_Savitri_, p. 119

Substance and matter in the greater Life-plane are

Calm heavens of imperishable Light,
Illumined continents of violet peace,
Oceans and rivers of the mirth of God
And griefless countries under purple suns.

_Savitri_, p. 120

And the beings of this kingdom are:

A race and laughter of immortal strengths,
The nude God-children in their play-fields ran
Smiting the winds with splendour and with speed;
Of storm and sun they made companions,
Sported with the white mane of tossing seas,
Slew distance trampled to death under their wheels
And wrestled in the arenas of their force.

_Savitri_, p. 126

This Life-plane is a subtle state of substance —

Unreal-seeming yet more real than life,
Happier than happiness, truer than things true
If dreams these were or captured images,
Dream’s truth made false earth’s vain realities.

_Savitri_, p. 120

At the summit of the gradation of this Life-plane stands the most subtle plane of Life-substance

Intoxicated with the wine of God,
Immersed in light, perpetually divine.

_Savitri_, p. 233

The ‘unfettered Spirit of Delight’ is its Godhead —

It lived in a jewel-rhythm of the laughter of God
And lay on the breast of universal love.

_Ibid._
Looking through ‘the World-Magician’s glass’, substance here becomes ‘a miracled imagery of soul-scapes’,

... plains of brilliant calm,
Mountains and violet valleys of the Blest,
Deep glens of joy and crooning waterfalls
And woods of quivering purple solitude; ...  
*Savitri*, p. 234

and

No lower note could break the endless charm
Of her sweetness ardent and immaculate; ...  
*Savitri*, p. 235

In ‘the shining Edens’ of the Paradise of the Life-Gods one sees

In scenes forbidden to our pallid sense
Amid miraculous scents and wonder-hues
He met the forms that divinise the sight, ...  

The substance in this plane ‘climbed with fiery feet to heights of unimaginined happiness’ and

Recast his being’s aura in joy-glow,
His body glimmered like a skyey shell; ...  
*Savitri*, p. 236

This plane is perhaps the first transfiguring realm. The substance here keeps harmony with the universal growth of consciousness and faces no disintegration of the form:

Immortal pleasure cleansed him in its waves
And turned his strength into undying power.
Immortality captured Time and carried Life.  
*Savitri*, p. 237

In the kingdoms and godheads of the greater Mind it ‘too falls back from a nameless peak’.

For still the human limits the divine:
Out of our thoughts we must leap up to sight, ...  
Then the Unmanifest reflects his form ...  
*Savitri*, p. 276
There comes a most subtle plane of Matter in its ascending series of Substance. Matter here aspires, leaving ‘known summits for the unknown’. Always the Ideal beckoned from afar. The ‘tireless Thought’ ‘longed for the Light that knows not death and birth’.

At each pace of the journey marvellous
A new degree of wonder and of bliss,
A new rung formed in Being’s mighty stair,
A great wide step trembling with jewelled fire
As if a burning spirit quivered there
Upholding with his flame the immortal hope,
As if a radiant God had given his soul
That he might feel the tread of pilgrim feet
Mounting in haste to the Eternal’s house.

*Savitri*, p. 277

Above ‘the Inconscient’s sullen dim abyss’, above the spirit ‘cased in mortal sense’ can be seen

A body of the cosmic beauty and joy
Unseen, unguessed by the blind suffering world,
Climbing from Nature’s deep surrendered heart
It blooms for ever at the feet of God, . . .

*Savitri*, p. 278

Then

A fiery stillness wakes the slumbering cells,
A passion of the flesh becoming spirit,
And marvellously is fulfilled at last
The miracle for which our life was made.


Thus the consciousness rises towards divinity and simultaneously making material substance more and more ethereal, ‘a passion of the flesh becoming spirit’. Above the Heavens of the Ideal and next in the series is the Substance in the Self of the cosmic Mind:

Substance there must be subtle and flexible enough to assume the shapes directly imposed upon it by Mind, to obey its operations, to subordinate itself to its demand for self-expression and self-fulfilment. The relations of sense and
substance too must have a corresponding subtlety and flexibility and must be
determined, not by the relations of physical organ with physical object, but of
Mind with the subtler substance upon which it works.\textsuperscript{6}

Substance here is kneaded with the ‘vast quietism’ of the Self of Mind, ‘a blank of
wordless peace’. Here Substance subordinates itself to Mind’s demand to obey its
operations:

\begin{quote}
It gave no heed to the paeans of victory,  
It was indifferent to its own defeats,  
It heard the cry of grief and made no sign,  
Impartial fell its gaze on evil and good,  
It saw destruction come and did not move.
\end{quote}

\textit{Savitri}, p. 283

Substance here is shaped and moulded in the nature of the Self of Mind. The Light
to mould this substance ‘comes not by struggle or by thought’;

\begin{quote}
In the mind’s silence the Transcendent acts  
And the hushed heart hears the unuttered Word. . . .  
A Power that lives upon the heights must act,  
Bring into life’s closed room the Immortal’s air  
And fill the finite with the Infinite.  
All that denies must be torn out and slain  
And crushed the many longings for whose sake  
We lose the One for whom our lives were made.
\end{quote}

\textit{Savitri}, pp. 315-16

The principles of consciousness not only manifest from below in a qualified and
restricted emergence, but also from above they must descend in their characteristic
power and full possible efflorescence into the material being. This is the method to
attain to true Matter and a subtler substance and a new creation of a divine body is
possible. Thus shall the material substance become the ‘pure Spirit Substance’ and
the stage is set for the divine life in a divine body. Till the supramental action on the
material comes into force or the human consciousness rises to Truth supreme, material
consciousness and substance can never change to Spirit substance:

\begin{quote}
There substance was a resonant harp of self,  
A net for the constant lightnings of the Spirit, . . .
\end{quote}

Its solidity was a mass of heavenly make;  
Its fixity and sweet permanence of charm  
Made a bright pedestal for felicity.  

_Savitri_, pp. 328-29

A new creation, a deathless being, shall thus rise from the old: ‘The Superconscient conscious grow on earth.’ The ascending adventure of material substance to a state of ‘pure Spirit Substance’ is explained by Sri Aurobindo:

The ascent of man from the physical to the supramental must open out the possibility of a corresponding ascent in the grades of substance to that ideal or causal body which is proper to our supramental being, and the conquest of the lower principles by Supermind and its liberation of them into a divine life and a divine mentality must also render possible a conquest of our physical limitations by the power and principle of supramental substance.7

The ascending series of substance in the ‘divine triplicity of Sachchidananda’, in the unfading Ray of the Superconscient’s Sun only a changed earth-nature and the most subtle substance can dare enter. This is the sweet and delightful, ultimate and deathless destiny of the ascending series of substance in the scale of Matter. Material substance must open itself into that realm and it

... will awake and unite at last its consciousness subliminal no longer to the supramental superconscious Force, feel all her powers permeating from above and below and around it and thrill to a supreme Love and Ananda.8

Listen to the most ethereal expression of the union with the supreme divine Love and Ananda:

Into those heights her spirit went floating up  
Like an upsoaring bird who mounts unseen  
Voicing to the ascent his throbbing heart  
Of melody till a pause of closing wings  
Comes quivering in his last contented cry  
And he is silent with his soul discharged,  
Delivered of his heart’s burden of delight.  

_Savitri_, p. 678

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This is the supreme consummation the ascending material substance and consciousness must attain to become deathless being. A divine life in a divine body is the goal the poet of *Savitri* sets before us. The making of a divine body becomes possible when consciousness of gross Matter of which our living forms are made either ascends to the consciousness of subtler substance in superior grades or the latter descends into gross Matter and raises it to ethereal states.

**Conclusion:**

As so he grew into his larger self,  
Humanity framed his movements less and less,  
A greater being saw a greater world.  

*Savitri*, p. 26

‘Above mind’s twilight and life’s star-led night’ there gleamed the one ‘wearing the glory of a deathless form’.

All can be done if the God-touch is there.  

*Savitri*, p. 3

Then

A magical accord quickened and attuned  
To ethereal symphonies the old earthy strings;  
It raised the servitors of mind and life  
To be happy partners in the soul’s response,  
Tissue and nerve were turned to sensitive chords, . . .  

*Savitri*, p. 27

and

A heavenlier function with a finer mode  
Lit with its grace man’s outward earthliness;  
The soul’s experience of its deeper sheaths  
No more slept drugged by Matter’s dominance. . . .  
A door parted, built in by Matter’s force,  
Releasing things unseized by earthly sense:  
A world unseen, unknown by outward mind  
Appeared in the silent spaces of the soul.  


In the silent spaces of the soul the sadhaka waits for ‘the footsteps of the undreamed Idea in the far avenues of the Beyond’. Then
The inner planes uncovered their crystal doors;  
Strange powers and influences touched his life.  
A vision came of higher realms than ours, . . .  

_Savitri_, p. 28

Thus he could rise towards a subtler divine consciousness of ‘brighter fields and skies, of beings less circumscribed than brief-lived men and subtler bodies than these passing frames’. In _Savitri_ Sri Aurobindo in a very succinct manner expresses how man’s rise in the subtler gradation of his consciousness leads to the formation of a subtler substance of his body of inconscient matter, —

> Of beings less circumscribed than brief-lived men  
> And subtler bodies than these passing frames,  
> Objects too fine for our material grasp,  
> Acts vibrant with a superhuman light  
> And movements pushed by a superconscient force,  
> And joys that never flowed through mortal limbs,  
> And lovelier scenes than earth’s and happier lives.

_Ibid._

Such is the way ‘the deathless being’ can be formed by ‘a divine life in a divine body’ when

Transcended was the human formula; . . .  

_Savitri_, p. 319

ASOKA K GANGULI
SRI AUROBINDO’S EARLY POETRY
ACCORDING TO RASAVĀDA

It is proposed in the following pages to study Sri Aurobindo’s early poetry according to the principles of the ancient Sanskrit poetic theory rasavāda. Since I do not believe in taking the Lord’s name in vain I shall be referring to the poet as just “the poet”, which should be enough. For what is a poet? He is the maker, the seer, and the bard. What is a Bard? Blake says:

Hear the voice of the Bard,
Who present, past and future sees
Whose ears have heard
Thy Holy Word
That walks among the ancient trees.

Only the early work of the poet will be taken up for this study, that is, the poems that come within the first section of Collected Poems, written during 1890-1900. This is because the early works of a great writer are often neglected, specially when the later work is so very rich and complex in every way. Yet these poems were not composed when he was too young. They were written when he was 18 to 20 years of age and the poems show mature handling of versification and other matters. The study will be a rewarding one. For that matter, how old was the writer of Le bateau ivre when he wrote it? Old enough to write an epoch-making poem, though only fourteen.

Before we start, however, a brief introduction to the main rasas is indicated. The theory itself is a vast, rich and entrancing subject and some very brief hints on the subject have to be attempted here. Let me start the exposition by quoting a not entirely irrelevant quotation by Raja Rao:

He who possesses Sanskrit can possess himself.¹

Most of the readers possess enough Sanskrit to know about the basic nine rasas though it is doubtful if everyone knows that the sage Bharata had given only eight, the ninth had been added later. According to him:

Śṛṅgāra-hāsyā-karuṇa-raudra-vīra-bhayānakaḥ
Bibhatsyādbhūta-sangau cetastau nātye rasāḥ smṛtāḥ ²

It was some time later that Udbhata mentioned śānta and added “nava nātye rasāḥ smṛtāḥ” to Bharata’s eight. Abhinavagupta comes later (10th century) and establishes śānta firmly. Indeed, he points it as the main rasa (mūla rasa) but all that deserves a longer discussion.

After this many scholars came and went, most of them accepting these nine rasas, and some of them adding one or two of their own. The most significant of them are being mentioned here. Thus there is Bhoja (11th century) who in his Saraswati Kanthabharana posits preyāṇ, udāṭta and uddhata rasas, Vishwanātha Kavirāja (14th century) in his Sāhitya Darpana posits vatsala rasa in most memorable and charming terms: “sphutan camatkāritayā vatsalan ca rasan viduh”. Bhanudatta is a most important scholar and has analysed and added to the rasas in a significant manner. In his Rasatarangini he establishes, with all particular requirements, two rasas, kārpanya and māyā.

Probably the last attempt in this field, that of adding to the rasas, was made by Rūpa Gosvāmin. In fact he not only added to the rasas, he almost prepared a new poetics out of it (16th century). His two celebrated books in this connection are Ujjvalanīlamanī and Haribhakti-Rasāmṛta-Sindhu, but his theory will not be of much use to us in discussing the early poetry of our poet, since it is based on bhaktirasa or devotion. These are most of the opinions of the ancient scholars.

Panditraja Jagannatha (17th century) in his Rasagangādhara summed it all up by announcing in favour of the nine rasas as given by the sage Bharata — “rasānān navatva-gaṇāṇa ca muni-vacana-nīyantrita bhajyeta”.

After these come the scholars of the Middle Ages, and the modern ones. Bharatendu, Harishchandra, among the moderns has added, after accepting bhakti, vātsalya and sakhyā one of his own, pramoda or ananda rasa. Acarya Ramchandra Shukla has added prakṛti-rasa in some detail. This will be of use to us as in the concerned poems we come across nature many times. Several scholars like Gulab Rai, Paranjape and Prof. Jog have established, in detail, desābhakti-rasa.

Only one aspect of the rasa theory has been touched on here, the number of the rasas. All other aspects have been deliberately neglected, like the nature of the rasas etc. Some of them will come up in the discussion that ensues. The subdivision of the rasas has not been gone into either.

This has been a most dry (nirasa) exposition of only one aspect of the theory. Each rasa will be discussed a bit more in detail as we meet it in the poems. With this criminally brief account we shall bring this discussion to an end.

(To be continued)
AUROVILLE: A CITY FOR THE FUTURE

(Continued from the issue of April 2019)

[This is the concluding instalment of our selection from Anu Majumdar’s book. — Eds.]

21. AN EXPERIMENT IN COLLECTIVE LIVING

Conditions for Living in Auroville . . .

To be convinced of the essential unity of mankind and to have the will to collaborate for the material realisation of that unity;

To have the will to collaborate in all that furthers future realisations.¹

— The Mother

Information on how to join or live in Auroville can easily be found on the Auroville website but the two conditions stated above remain priority and it is uncanny how exact they are. The first echoes the Charter. The second, the City.

Fifty thousand people in the City area and in its farms and forests? There is space enough on hand, but we need to be creative and open to try new ideas, for people keep coming, just as we did, attracted by something indefinable. We have to be prepared to receive them, not turn them away, because there is not enough housing. So the choice before us is either random, thoughtless growth, or a beautiful city, consciously planned, even if in a mix of temporary and permanent projects — for the Residential Zone and other habitat areas in the city were created for both high density and more relaxed concentrations.

At present more than half the world’s population lives in cities. For the majority it has come to mean subhuman standards, a faceless, desensitised environment, struggle, violence, stress and conflict, or else, sprawling suburbia. Building a city in harmony with the environment and a huge variety of individuals is just half the challenge. The other half is to become a city expressive of Auroville, its values and another way of life. Can residential densities bring together multiple strands of culture, across nationalities, languages, genders and age groups, from different financial and social strata? Can they reduce consumption by sharing common gardens and facilities, do away with personal servants, personal washing machines, and above all treat the house or apartment they live in not as a possession?

¹. Mother on Auroville, p. 33.
Auroville is the ideal place for those who want to know the joy and liberation of no longer having any personal possessions.  

One pioneering experiment is Citadines. Situated in the Habitat area of the City Centre, it has tried a number of these things to enhance a sense of collective belonging for those living there as well as a sense of collective responsibility towards the living area and environment. At the same time it contributes a collective facility for the whole of Auroville, the Arts Centre, and of course, no ownership. All properties belong to Auroville. Citadines has also pioneered a sense of shared economy that moves beyond the idea of affordable housing versus expensive housing, where only the haves can have nice places to live in and the have-nots must make do with lesser stuff. Instead, the aim has been to encourage a mix of economic possibilities allowing Citadines to offer over 75 per cent of the apartments free, particularly to those who have lived and worked in Auroville for long, but did not have the possibility of financing a place to live in. 

Citadines is not a terrific architectural statement but it succeeds in providing something simple, rich and beautiful for everyone. The Habitat Zone is a street that will have interconnected buildings like Sunship, Mitra, Inspiration to one end of Citadines and the Maison des Jeunes on the other. It is conceived as a pedestrian zone, not just to keep the area pollution and noise-free, but to create an urban atmosphere and a harmonious life. Here people can meet, have lunch together, attend activities and exhibitions, walk across to Matrimandir or through parks and green corridors, integrate urban farming, have T’ai chi classes, play and dream. All this makes it something more than just a bland apartment block. Citadines also harvests rainwater, manages its gardens with the building’s waste water, avoids air conditioning, recycles sewage and has introduced some solar energy.

On a full day at lunchtime the mix of people at Citadines kitchen has a charm all its own: there are people who hail from the local area, others from Andhra, Gujarat, Punjab or Bengal. About a dozen are French, and people from Bulgaria, Russia, Ukraine, Italy, Germany, Holland, Sri Lanka, the United States, Argentina and Brazil, and of course the children born in Auroville. Just about all the world, from eight to eighty. But across the table, none of this matters: we are just a bunch of Aurovilians talking about the pump, a meeting, or a play that someone saw the night before. Sometimes the talk is about a shift in consciousness.

* * *

Behind this project there is an intrepid man with a happy laugh, Louis C, and a dedicated team. Louis has been routinely criticised for being a Rogerite, a Galaxy-

walla, a developer from France on a greedy personal trip of wanting to build and build, and who will surely destroy the whole planet and make Auroville completely unsustainable. Given such stunning credentials I asked him if that was true.

“Totally different,” he says simply. “You remember there was a housing crisis a few years ago? Long-time Aurovilians and newer people were in urgent need of housing and so we thought of this project in the Habitat Zone. It was also a trial to see what would work for collective urban living. Development is so much more challenging and complicated here, materially or administratively. There were difficulties, but now it is here and I have total gratitude. It is She who did it. She was behind all the details. It is not about being a developer or anything like that but to participate in the Mother’s plan, to make it happen, materially, on earth. Auroville has a spiritual dimension and an urban dimension at the same time. Before being ecological and green, it has to be a spiritual city, where we can learn to live differently and follow the permanent inner quest for transformation. We have to live this research for human unity, especially at this time of crisis in the world, with many people from many different countries and diverse backgrounds. Citadines was always a collective project.” For Louis it has been an experience to create this for people to stay, to be able to offer apartments for free and create a sharing environment and economy. “But, after the conceptual level and details of realisation, it has to become a place of spiritual and fraternal unity. And we wanted the material maintenance to be taken in charge by a team and looked after as a system of services in the city.”

“The Mother said that was indispensable,” I tell him.

“She did?” Louis is taken aback. “Where did you see that?”

I tell him about the first report by Roger that Paulette had just posted on Auronet: *the upkeep to be checked by an Auroville service taking the responsibility.* To which the Mother responded: “This measure is indispensable.”

“He was there . . .” Louis shakes his head. “He’s on the other side, but it’s the same thing. He is with us to continue the city.”

Thulasi is a Matrimandir fixture. No matter what time of the day, you’ll find her doing something there: on the phone, with a mop, straightening out something or the other. She is also Citadines’s cake fairy. Thulasi came on a visit from Sri Lanka in 1999. Those were difficult years in her country. At first glance she did not like Auroville. Too many tourists hanging around. But as she was having lunch at the solar kitchen, Joy stopped at her table.

“Are you an Aurovilian?”

She shook her head.

“Newcomer?”

“No!”

“No? But you look like one.”

Thulasi returned three years later as a yoga teacher and Auroville started to make much more sense, but her parents needed her and it was only a year later that
she finally decided to join. “Everything was so easy,” she recalls a little wonderingly, “everything just worked out.” She began working in Matrimandir, initially doing the bookings for visitors coming for concentration. One day when she was in the midst of a difficult personal crisis, someone pointed to John H. and said, “That’s John Harper. He came from Canada and he gives all his life to Matrimandir.” Something clicked inside her at that moment. “I wanted to be that, give all my life to something. Matrimandir became that place.” The day after the massive cyclone Thane, Thulasi was on night duty. Everything was still as she walked around the garden watching the Matrimandir. “That night I understood something. Auroville was there. The soul was there. We had been placed here to see what the world was not able to see. I began to know Sri Aurobindo after that, and what Mother’s Auroville was. Little by little, each day, as though I was here for the first time.”

Thulasi usually walks in late for lunch and goes straight for the fruit salad. Once in a while she walks in with a cake that no one can resist. “Getting the Citadines apartment was such a beautiful experience.” Her face lights up. “I had heard that the Citadines team was making a list for the free apartments. So when I saw Louis at Matrimandir one day I asked if they could think of me.” The same afternoon, Gérard and Fabienne invited her over.

“Do you want an apartment with furniture or without?”
“It was too much! So I said, ‘Anything’.”
“Take the furniture, it will be easier for you.”
And so it was. “Sometimes you just have to ask the Mother first.” Thulasi laughs.

Was Citadines different from where she was before, I ask. Did anything change for her?
“It is more supple. It is also home. I think we got lucky with all the people who came to live here. No one asks you to be like them, the diversity is admired and yet the unity flows in. And everything is taken care of, so you also learn to care for everything. But now I can go off to work without worrying about a leaking tap.” Thulasi looks around the cafeteria and grins. “Look, we have three base camps. There’s the French table, the Russian table, the mixed one where you and Pierre usually sit and the kids have their own table. But we move around tables sometimes, or eat alone when we feel like it, and really there is a beauty of relations. So it’s not just a building where you come to sleep. Difficulties will always be there, but I’m learning that they are not the end of the world.”

* * *

Louis asked Carlos if he would like to join the Citadines project and be part of the team, and it was “Yes,” right away. Carlos recalls the day the construction started. “Aiswarya (his daughter, then five), was our chairman that day, and when she laid
the foundation stone, there was such a Force, and I knew it was the beginning of the town, I hadn’t expected anything at all, but it came as a clear perception in the body. Not something superficial, not some idea or feeling, it was a force. Sometimes the Grace passes through all this and gives us its vision.”

Carlos’s field of work is painting: houses, public buildings, schools, and occasionally taking care of construction sites. He is not interested in philosophy and big ideas. He is interested in paints and colours, about which anti-rust to use. He prefers to trust direct experience and follows that inner thread as much as he can to guide his life and work. Originally from Argentina, Carlos spent some years in Europe where he heard about Sri Aurobindo and Auroville through the books of Satprem.

The very first time Carlos stood before Matrimandir, he realised in a very physical way that he could not enter the building. A preparation was needed so he could contain the experience that lay inside and found himself asking for help. “A hurricane passed through the body and all those conflicts in me were wiped out. It was such a power that I knew that I could now enter.” Matrimandir remains a pivot, guiding Carlos with a variety of experiences and inner understanding. “In Auroville, so many things get attacked: our unity, the city, our education, but nothing can touch this. It lets each one walk the collective path with one’s own difficulties and help change them. Everything in the end relates to Matrimandir. It is our physical centre and inner centre. It is the bridge. If we build a relationship with it, learn to trust it with sincerity and humility and awareness, everything that needs to change in our humanity can change with its power.”

How to make the bridge with the consciousness? All this can become lunchtime discussions around the table with Carlos, Aryamani, Sam, Guduia, Pierre and others, depending on the mood. Carlos recalled an overwhelming experience with Sri Aurobindo: a massive silence, and to understand that for each one, only the body can make a bridge with this Consciousness. That is why the city has to be there, he says, it is the physical body of Auroville. “When things get difficult or disharmonious and the mind starts to struggle, I have to catch myself and get back to this experience because it is the power of a much greater harmony.”

A tall, thin man potters around Citadines every day making sure everything works properly and is maintained. His eyes are very blue and they squint when the sun glowers over Auroville. Yevgeny (Jenya) comes from Belarus where temperatures can dip to -50°C in winter. Every summer we sense him burning in the south Indian heat but he’s out there, working. How did he land in Citadines, Auroville, India?

“I was already in the stream of Yoga,” he tells me. His mother was interested in Eastern mysticism, he had read some books, accompanied her once to a talk where the speaker, an Indian, had power of the heart and radiated a warmth that was so much more than words. By twenty-two he was reading Sri Aurobindo. At the end
of studies in St Petersburg, he stayed on at the youth campus, after everyone had left, reading the lot and just being quiet, when he had the first experience of silence, like a descending force of consciousness. “The starting was quite strong!” he grins, but it was difficult to talk about it to anyone. People could not understand. Yet the experience was so concrete that “you just could not be without it. To go away from it was like betraying the very core of your being.” It was also an understanding that he had to be sincere at all times and be who he really was, beyond all outer definitions. It was a period of intense preparation. “I knew Belarus was not my real home. I had to go where I had to be.” He tried to learn Hindi but in Minsk that was not easy. The Indian embassy gave him a book and a cassette with Hindi music, but no teacher. Eventually, he decided that he needed to learn some English to travel and it was time to go to India, to touch Pondicherry.

Jenya came in 2005, but could not find the right place in the Ashram. He had read about Auroville, Satprem’s *Adventure of Consciousness* and decided to visit. But Auroville seemed a little too relaxed, and he wanted something more focused. Yet, something told him that if he turned away now, it would be the biggest mistake of his life.

At Galina’s guesthouse he met a Russian with whom he could finally talk about the spiritual experience. That was a tremendous gift, but the best thing was to be able to work in Matrimandir. He went to see Victor and was offered work with the disc team and eventually, more technical work inside the structure.

In this period learning to communicate was of utmost importance. He was working with a team of Tamil workers and with them shyness was strictly prohibited! “Everything that blocked me in the past had to disappear and I realised that I actually knew quite a bit of English. It was a wonderful experience! They helped me grow and I made new friends. Soon, it was time to leave, but it was clear that to return was only to close a chapter in Belarus, earn and come back.”

Back in Belarus he was offered a job at once, in the middle of the unemployment crisis. “As though I was being looked after.” But there was a curious discovery: the streets he had left behind four months ago were still the same, as though nothing had moved, while inside of him everything was growing, learning, moving like a rocket, at such a high speed inside.

Jenya started his Newcomer’s period in 2009 and started looking for a job. Someone suggested that he go and see Carlos in Citadines and that was it, everything was taken care of. “It was just amazing!”

Jenya is a relatively young Aurovilian but his wish list for Auroville is firmly rooted in the ‘Dream’. “I understand that at present we are the best we can be, but to exceed ourselves, to go higher is what we are really supposed to do. I wish many more people will come with that need inside them. The ideal we have is to live by the Divine — to live the real existence and I wish people come for that. In big numbers! We are not here to do just a little better, live a little more harmoniously,
but a life that is absolutely different. I hope I can do that, meet all the conditions of the Divine, because Auroville is filled with an energy that supports us. The most important thing is to never give up, even when things look like a failure. We should turn again to the light, to that initial starting enthusiasm, which is the most important point, and to never betray it.”

When Pierre and I decided to move to Citadines on an impulse, everyone said we were crazy. Leave behind a big workshop house and move to an apartment block with those Galaxy-wallas? How unsustainable and politically incorrect. Some people even stopped looking at us. Our shift had been prompted by a need to move to the City area. Little did we know the richness that was in store. The invisible city will have many more surprises to offer as it comes to life.

* * *

25. WISH LISTS FOR SURRENDER

. . . all problems of existence are essentially problems of harmony. — Sri Aurobindo, The Life Divine

After all is said and done, how does one cross over to that other position of harmony from where individual change begins and forges the collective?

Q: If one wants to live in Auroville, what does it imply for oneself?
A: To try to attain the Supreme Perfection.

Is this perfection some kind of peak of faultless excellence? “Perfection is a harmony, an equilibrium . . . But a progressive, dynamic equilibrium . . . The human being as he is at the moment cannot attain [this] perfection” unless he evolves further. It is not a faultless peak nor a maximum limit after which things stagnate, drop or break, but something that ‘cannot be demolished’ but can keep growing, integrating more and more.

It is a choice, this need to evolve, to participate in the adventure, to surrender to the needs of the future.

“Unity cannot be enforced,” Frederick warns however. “It has to come from within. With hindsight, if I had known some of the things the Mother said about Auroville, in the Agenda and elsewhere, which we found out only later, maybe our relationship

3. CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 4.
4. Mother on Auroville, p. 11.
with Roger, the city, even the SAS, would have been different. We need to affirm
that inner centre, really make Auroville the city of Sri Aurobindo. Unity is not some
kind of uniformity but a burning oneness.”

I shall go back once more to those who have been here long years, on this
uncharted path called Auroville and have sometimes come through fire. With
hindsight what has distilled? What is still wished for?

Srimoyi grew up in the Ashram and works at Matrimandir. “See, I don’t have
great experiences or expectations. I just believe in what Sri Aurobindo and the
Mother said about Auroville and it inspires me. I’m just so grateful that I can work
here. Sometimes there is a very full happiness or a surge of love when I am working.
And I see all the people who come, sometimes again and again, from so many
different parts of India and the world, who go through our process, just for those ten
to fifteen minutes, so there must be something. That is why we must make sure
Matrimandir remains as the Mother wanted it to be used and respected. It is not an
exotic tourist spot. I want to see the city of Auroville and I pray for the true Auroville
to happen, not our ideas about what it should be. But,” Srimoyi smiles, “the Divine
has a thousand different ways.”

John glances out of the window of the makeshift Matrimandir office, which
used to be Centre kitchen once: “I watch people come to Matrimandir from all
walks of life, and of course the Aurovilians. They go to the chamber or they just sit
under the banyan. They come here to touch the real fabric of Auroville, the material
and the spiritual are woven together here. So we have to go on. See,” John taps his
chair and grins, “we are sitting on the lake. This building will have to go one day
soon. We still have to think of the lake, the gardens, we are in the final phase of
completion now. So whatever our mental agitations are at present, I trust that
something will pop up with lightness through all our tangles.”

For Chali, the big concern is that the commitment to Auroville is no longer the
same thing as it was in her parents’ generation. “People then gave everything with
no expectation of return. There was such a strong commitment to finding a different
way of living, of being, sometimes sacrificing all material comfort or stability, even
for their families. With new people now it sometimes gets quite business-like: what
are my expectations of Auroville, what do I get in return, do I need this and so on —
a bit like an investment, which is strange, and we’re pandering to that. There has
been a shift in attitudes. There is not that jumping into the adventure, come what
may. I wish Auroville will become what it’s meant to be, to fulfil the Dream at its
highest expression of life. Before that can happen, each of us has to aim for the
highest in us that goes beyond the limitations.”

Certainly there are people who are demanding and complaining and perma-
nently dissatisfied as though they are blind to the gifts of Auroville, or else they
dislike its aims and ideals and find everything faulty and dogmatic or, are simply
reluctant to change. Should they be ‘pandered’ to?
“In 200 years it will be a fine place. The elimination process must go on because there will be no one in Auroville to say, ‘Get out!’ and those who don’t fit will have to leave in disgust. They will leave voluntarily because they don’t like it.”

Alain B., who has seen it all, since the Aspiration days, tells me he has rescinded on thinking about problems. “We have to find a way to come together. Until we achieve a real divine anarchy, there’s no point talking.” For divine anarchy the ego’s authority and influence must disappear. So again, what we seem to be saying to each other is, surrender.

Louis C. echoes a large cross section of people interviewed in this book when he says, “At present we are all suffering from a kind of obscure democracy that seems to have taken hold of the collective. Anyone can object and stop months, sometimes years, of hard work and preparation, as though there is a perverse enjoyment to block things. We need an enlightened democracy, or at least a will to create it. And once we’ve elected a group, let us help them work, give them the support and faith to work. I really hope for an acceleration, and for that we certainly need the young, but even more urgently, we need living souls who really want Auroville.”

Ponnusamy adds, “We can’t go backwards now, or to some other dream. People must know why they are here. That seems to be missing now for some reason. We still have a city to build, to complete it, because there will be new people coming.”

A poem popped up unexpectedly on Auroville’s intranet one morning, the autobiography of a misguided one, who is slowly refashioned by the Grace. Who knew Francis could write?

The boy is created
always in the way
a have not
totally misguided, in the name of love —
misbelief becomes the goal
viciousness the means,
the Grace descends
the perception alters
the heart deepens
God enters —
old habits, hard to extinguish
slowly, ever so slowly
the heart continues
gratitude dominates
continually tripping and falling, up and brushing

7. Mother on Auroville, p. 28.
continually growing in spite of oneself
learning to love —
sweet is the air I breathe

“Perhaps we have to wait for a new generation,” Nathalie says. “We seem to be locking horns all the time now. Yet it’s all there really and seems so simple at times . . .”

“Challenges are getting very difficult,” Jacqueline confirms from TDC. “We have to work with young people, but we also have to find a way together without lowering the ideals or compromising them for the sake of other dreams, like being a tribal village or eco-city. The Mother wanted another kind of city, let us not forget that or throw away the specifics she gave. Sometimes it is pure agony. If we must surrender, it is to her, to Auroville, not to what we want to enforce on it.”

“It is time to move beyond this for-and-against trap,” says Toine, “and find that inclusive third position that helps us go forward.”

“There is a lot of fear. We have to stop acting out of fear,” Deepti agrees, “fear brings all kinds of mental tactics and accusations, and the trust goes. We have to approach it differently. Don’t make general rules because a few make mistakes. Don’t penalise and block the flow for everyone. Keep room for flexible decisions. An experiment implies that sometimes there will be mistakes, even failures. We have to recognise the Grace even where the shadow is.”

In recent months however, something seems to have started pushing us from inside.

“A wish?” Judith wonders aloud. “If I could wave a magic wand and it would all be there: the Matrimandir Lake, the Lines of Force, the Crown . . .”

“It is only when the circle will be completed, when the two extremities will touch, when the highest will manifest the most material that the experience will be truly decisive. It would seem that one never truly understands until one understands with one’s body.”

For an artist like Pierre, Auroville is first and last, an evolutionary field. It has meant a relentless exploration to come to a point of simplicity that is self-creating. His artistic research draws on the cellular level, delving through its unifying networks, codes and points of light that lie inside our physical substance and are, at once, part of the universal field. “There are fleeting moments when you feel your body dilate with a very quiet and infinite joy. It takes you by surprise, undoes your doubts and difficulties. Perhaps, one day, these experiences will undo the catastrophe of the world. For my work it is the only test: Does it convey that frontier of physical joy, its inner lightness and pulsation? The work is just a way to give those unexpected experiences some physical permanence. Of course, a new kind of art needs a new

kind of society, a new kind of city. The Mother has given us Auroville, a city that will hopefully carry the contagion of truth and beauty wherever we go. Art should serve that. The greatest cities of the past that still have an enduring life and beauty are those that were rigorously planned and built by an unquestioned authority. If we can at least respect the wishes of the ‘first authority’ of Auroville, most of the problems will be over.”

*To surrender to the Divine is to renounce your narrow limits . . .
True surrender enlarges you, . . .*\(^9\)

ANU MAJUMDAR

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**Postscript:**

Soon after the book was published, Auroville crossed its fiftieth year, a landmark point and a moment of reflection, as the next fifty years began. The achievements on the outside are for all to see: the Matrimandir, the greening of Auroville, a diverse society and its myriad activities. The inner field still awaits the city to become truly manifest.

*It may take a 100 years but the city will be built,*\(^1\) the Mother remarked even before Auroville had started. In fact, she instructed her architect that *the technical conception of the city should be that of 2060.*\(^2\) She had already seen ahead, past our limitations, past the old patterns and confusions that had to be exhausted. It is time to prepare the second round, hundred years is not so far away. Time then, to deepen our actions with knowledge, anchor the Consciousness through a willingness to serve something that the earth calls for: a city beyond conflict, expressive of a rich supramental life, in every way.

The future wears a smile, the Mother would tell her secretary, look far ahead, far ahead. . . .\(^3\) In about 200 hundred years Auroville would be a very nice place and a harmonious society, but for that it was important to make the experiment.

So, hardly a time to rest on our laurels: there is work to be done, a city to be built and a new beauty of co-existence to be found for the earth.

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