



THE MOTHER
A SHORT BIOGRAPHY

WILFRIED

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PREFACE

A learned professor once told us in a lecture, “If I do not understand a subject, I write a book about it.” This is certainly a good method in the field of academe, but it has only a limited validity in the spiritual field where many a truth may elude the seeker during his whole life. How much more do we become conscious of our limitations if we write about a cosmic personality such as the Mother! And yet it is not a vain task, for even if we may not comprehend Her being in its totality, we can yet receive here and there, by intuition, a ray of light from Her immense Sun.

In order to give a safe foundation to the book we have made ample use of autobiographical statements of the Mother herself. Further information was drawn from the abundant secondary literature, especially Nilima Das’ compilation *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* in two volumes and K.R.S. Iyengar’s standard biography *On the Mother*.

In concluding, we wish to thank the Sri Aurobindo Society for the suggestion and encouragement to undertake this work, Mr. K.D. Sethna for correcting and editing the text, and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust for its kind permission to bring out the book as an introduction to the Mother’s Life and to use excerpts from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

The Author

INTRODUCTION

“Here is a little story: one of my friends had made a trip to India and was requested to give an account of his travels. An old very credulous lady was there and she asked him, ‘In India, do they count the souls?’ He answered, ‘Yes.’ ‘How many are there?’ asked the old lady. He answered, ‘One only.’”¹

This humorous story which the Mother once told her disciples serves well to form the opening of our book. Even though the Soul may be one everywhere, it is so in a special way in India which has a high spiritual mission on Earth. And thus it happened that a small town in the South-East of this blessed country was chosen to be the place where a formidable evolutionary experiment would be undertaken, aiming at a most explicit One-ness or Unity – not however a uniformity which exists by suppressing variety was to be sought for, but an infinitely wide and comprehensive consciousness which takes up in itself, assimilates and furthers all manifestations of multiplicity without losing itself in the process. Sri Aurobindo, India’s great revolutionary, poet, thinker and yogi of the 20th century, called this new consciousness the supramental consciousness and dedicated his life to its realization and manifestation. The Mother, Mirra Alfassa, was his spiritual collaborator. She had taken charge of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1926 and guided its growth and development in all details. She initiated the disciples into the new consciousness which Sri Aurobindo was bringing down on earth, and she founded the International Centre of Education so that children might literally breathe-in the yoga from the Kindergarten stage and grow, by way of playing as it were, into the new life. And it was she who founded Auroville, the City of Dawn, where Sri Aurobindo’s high ideal was meant to be realized for the first time in the wider scope of a township.

The Mother was a phenomenon without parallel. Great yogis knelt down before her and saints sat at her feet. Politicians became like children in her presence, or ran away, if they could not bear her Truth-Force. To children she was the Mother, to sadhaks a guru as well and to seekers a guide of rare wisdom and vision. To the hostile forces she was an inexorable warrior: we know today, from some of her writings, to what attacks and ordeals she was exposed. And yet she refused to play the role of a martyr. ‘If you can always smile at life,’ she wrote once, ‘life will always smile at you.’

¹ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 1:101

Sri Aurobindo left his body more than three decades ago, and the Mother one decade ago. And yet their living presence is there and inspires many disciples to continue the work that was initiated by them. Every visitor at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram can observe on the Mother's birthday thousands of devotees passing through her room in an endless line from early morning until noon, making pranam before her bed. For all of them the Mother continues to be there and she is felt helping, guiding and protecting.

If in the following pages we give many data on the outer life of the Mother, since they are of interest from the viewpoint of our searching intelligence, it should not divert the mind from the proper purpose of such a writing: to point towards the timeless ever-living Mother of the Universe, her Power and Love, which are felt if we turn towards her.

“I am not eager to be the Guru of anyone. It is more spontaneously natural for me to be the universal Mother and to act in silence through love.”² We believe that nothing could better characterize her being than these few words from her own pen.

² Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother's Life* 2:113

I. BIRTH AND GIRLHOOD (1878-1896)

The Mother was born in Paris on 21 February 1878 at 10.15 a.m. The house of her parents was at the boulevard Haussmann near the Opera. Her father, Maurice Alfassa, was a Turkish banker from Adrianople, whilst her mother, Mathilde Ismaloun, came from Cairo. The Mother was thus of Turkish-Egyptian descent, a fact which is significant in so far as these two countries are on the threshold between Orient and Occident. It became evident later that the Mother, like no one else, knew how to bring together these two worlds in a happy synthesis.

She was given the name Mirra and grew up in Paris where she was to spend the first part of her life. Her parents had moved to France a year before her birth and settled down there.

Even in her early years Mirra became conscious of her special purpose of life, her mission on earth: “I started contemplating or doing my Yoga from the age of 4. There was a small chair for me on which I used to sit still, engrossed in my meditation. A very brilliant light would then descend over my head and produce some turmoil inside my brain. Of course I understood nothing, it was not the age for understanding. But gradually I began to feel, ‘I shall have to do some tremendously great work that nobody yet knows.’”¹* From the age of five she was conscious that she did not belong to this world and did not have a human consciousness. At this age she began her spiritual discipline, her sadhana. But her mother, who was a rationalist, knew little of what was going on in Mirra’s mind. Once she asked her, when she was meditating in her small chair, “Why do you sit thus with a set face, as if the whole world were pressing upon you?” And prompt came the answer, “Yes, indeed, I do feel the weight of the world’s miseries pressing upon me!”*

Mirra soon developed her own interests. Once she told some students in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram how she was trying to find out even at a young age what forces were working on her and moving her, and how she made an effort to achieve inner clarity and freedom. “It is a rather unpleasant sensation to feel yourself pulled by the strings and made to do things whether you want to or not – that is quite irrelevant but to be compelled to act because something pulls you by the strings, something which you do not even see – that is exasperating... I knew nobody who could help me and I

¹ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 1:14

* Utterances of the Mother on herself which have been remembered and recorded by her disciples are marked with an asterisk.

did not have the chance that you have, someone who can tell you: ‘This is what you have to do!’ There was nobody to tell me that. I had to find it out all by myself. And I found it. I started at five.”²

Whilst Mirra was thus developing her inner experiences, she had to fulfill, externally, the demands of society. She learnt to read and write, went to school and wondered at many strange things in the life of grown-up people. Once when she was carefully dressed up in order to pose for a photo, she looked with astonishment at the older people around her and told herself, “But how childish all this is!”^{3*}

At the age of eight she started practising a sport which was to play a daily role at a later stage in her life, that is, tennis. In order to make quick progress she used a special method: instead of playing with her comrades of the same age, she chose older players who were more experienced. It disturbed her little that with this method she always lost: “I never won, but I learnt much.”^{4*}

At the age of about 12 we find her on lonely walks in the forests of Fontainebleau near Paris. “It was a very old forest, where there were trees that were even 2000 years old. I would sit quietly under a tree going deep into meditation. At that time I often felt a close intimacy with those trees that gave me great joy. My consciousness came into communion with those trees, and even the birds and squirrels from them would come down, very close to me and fearlessly run across my body in a playful mood... Once there was talk of cutting down an old tree, and when I went under this tree, I distinctly felt that the tree had become aware of its danger and was soliciting me to somehow stop this cruelty.”⁵

Another time it happened that while climbing up a steep slope she slipped and fell. While falling, it was as if someone was supporting her and bringing her down slowly. Her comrades were happily surprised to see her safely arriving on the street which was covered with sharp black flint stones.

At the same age Mirra also started developing interest in occultism. Her inner experiences assumed new dimensions now: “Between the ages of 11 and 13 a series of psychic and spiritual experiences revealed to me not only the existence of God, but man’s possibility of uniting with Him, of realising Him integrally in consciousness and action, of manifesting Him upon earth in a life divine. This, along with a

² Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 1:14-15

³ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 1:17

⁴ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 1:19

⁵ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 1:22



In France, 1885

practical discipline for its fulfilment, was given to me during my body's sleep by several teachers, some of whom I met afterwards on the physical plane. Later on, as the interior and exterior development proceeded the spiritual and psychic relation with one of these Beings became more and more clear and frequent.”⁶ Although Mirra knew little of Indian philosophy and religion at that time, she called the special Being ‘Krishna’ and was firmly convinced that one day she would meet him on earth.

Another revealing experience has been recorded by her in her *Prayers and Meditations*. “When I was a child of about thirteen, for nearly a year every night as

⁶ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother's Life* 1:24

soon as I had gone to bed it seemed to me that I went out of my body and rose straight up above the house, then above the city, very high above. Then I used to see myself clad in a magnificent golden robe, much longer than myself; and as I rose higher, the robe would stretch, spreading out in a circle around me to form a kind of immense roof over the city. Then I would see men, women, children, old men, the sick, the unfortunate coming out from every side; they would gather under the outspread robe, begging for help, telling of their miseries, their suffering, their hardships. In reply, the robe, supple and alive, would extend towards each one of them individually, and as soon as they had touched it, they were comforted or healed, and went back into their bodies happier and stronger than they had come out of them.”⁷

But life for Mirra was not one-sidedly an inner life only. She could be firm and resolute if it was the question of fighting for the Truth or protecting comrades. Here are two incidents to illustrate the point.

Once at the age of seven she had to face a thirteen-year old bully who used to insult and molest girls. One day she asked him, ‘Will you shut up now?’ When he continued with his insults, she suddenly caught hold of him, lifted him up and threw him to the ground. A supernatural force had descended into her. The Mother later explained that it was Mahakali, the divine warrior force.

At the age of fifteen she joined a big studio to learn drawing and painting. She calmly concentrated on her work and the others called her the Sphinx. It often happened that fellow students came to her to take her advice or make her settle some quarrel. Once Mirra took up the case of a monitress who had got into the bad books of the old lady who was the Head of the Studio and who wanted to send her away. Mirra knew that this would mean for the poor girl the end of her career. So she approached the Head of the Studio and pleaded for the monitress. When her rational arguments fell on deaf ears, Mirra caught the hand of the old lady and held it in such a firm grip that she quickly changed her mind. The monitress was allowed to stay on.

A school essay which Mirra wrote at the age of fifteen has been luckily preserved. It is entitled ‘The Path of Later on’. A young, student gets disenchanted with his homework and decides to postpone it until the next day. He goes to sleep and has a dream in which he finds himself standing at a crossroads. Enticed by sweet fragrances and the warm sun which is shining there he chooses the easy path in spite of warning voices. Then at the end he lands in a kind of ghost-kingdom and faces a

⁷ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 1:24

deep abyss. When he is just about to succumb, he wakes up and his nightmare is finished. He makes a resolve never to follow again the 'Path of Later on' and not to leave until tomorrow what he can do today.

II. PARIS (1897-1904)

The Mother grew up in Paris, the metropolis of the great painters of Impressionism; it was the time when artists like Matisse, Manet or Cézanne rose to world-fame. In this very milieu she lived and moved among the cultural avantgarde of the time. She had finished her studies at the Académie Julian and some of her paintings had been exhibited in the *Salon*. At the age of nineteen, on 13 October 1897, she married Henri Morisset, a disciple of the painter Gustave Moreau. Her son Andre was born on 23 August 1898.

The Mother's talks with young students in the Ashram in Pondicherry reflect her intimate knowledge of the milieu of Parisian artists. Once she related the story of a talented painter who belonged to the circle of Gustave Moreau. We render it in the following because it is rather interesting from the viewpoint of the history of Arts and throws new light on a disputed subject.

“I knew a painter, a disciple of Gustave Moreau; he was truly a very fine artist, he knew his work quite well, and then... he was starving, he did not know how to make both ends meet and he used to lament.”¹ Then one day, the Mother continues, a well-wishing friend sent a picture-dealer to his studio. The latter inspected all his works, without discovering anything of interest: the works of the painter were simply not fashionable and therefore without commercial value. But at last the dealer found a canvas with some palette-scrapings in a dusty corner and was suddenly full of enthusiasm: “Here you are! my friend, you are a genius, this is a miracle, it is this you should show! Look at this richness of tones, this variety of forms, and what an imagination!”² Now the poor man who was starving, objected shyly, “But, sir, these are my palette-scrapings!” The art-dealer caught hold of him: “Silly fool, this is not to be told!” Then he continued: “Give me this, I undertake to sell it. Give me as many of these as you like; ten, twenty, thirty a month, I shall sell them all for you and I shall make you famous.” The artist was not exactly fond of this idea, but since he was in dire need of financial support, he agreed to the proposal and started producing pictures not with palette-scrapings, but with mixed and brilliant colours which did not have very precise forms and gave free play to the imagination of the people. The Mother's conclusion of this episode may shock many an art expert: “He never made a

¹ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother's Life* 1:37

² Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother's Life* 1:38

name for himself with his real painting, which was truly fine (it was really very fine, he was a very good painter), but he won a world reputation with these horrors!”³



In France, about 1897

Another interesting report is about Cézanne who was also residing in Paris at this time. The Mother mentions his peculiarity to do still-lives in which plates were never round and were therefore objected to by many critics. But when friends asked him why he was painting like that, he answered, according to the Mother: “My dear fellow, you are altogether mental, you are not an artist, it is because you think that you make your plates round: if you only see, you will do it like this (*gesture*).” The Mother explained the point: “It is in accordance with the impression that the plate ought to be painted; it gives you an impact, you translate the impact, and it is this

³ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 1:38

which is truly artistic. It is like this that modern art began. And note that he was right. His plates were not round, but he was right in principle.”⁴

Thus the Mother spent ten years of her life in this creative environment of highly gifted artists and became deeply acquainted with their ways. A student in the Ashram once posed the interesting question why artists had so often rather loose morals, and the Mother answered: “They do not feel bound by the customary rules of conduct and have not yet found an inner law that would replace them.”⁵ But she pointed out that not all artists whom she had known had been of this kind. Some were absolutely ‘bourgeois’, married, good fathers and husbands who followed a strict moral code.

Whilst Sri Aurobindo’s main interests in the early stages of his development were literature, poetry, languages and history, for the Mother they were, no doubt, art and music. But these were to her forms of expression which led to something deeper or revealed something hidden within: the search for God and spiritual realization were her sole objective in all things, and she was almost entirely left to herself in this pursuit. Only rarely did it happen that she received some effective help in the form of a book or a person: “Between the age of eighteen and twenty I had attained a conscious and constant union with the divine Presence and... I had done it *all alone*, with *absolutely nobody* to help me, not even books, you understand! When I found one – I had in my hands a little later Vivekananda’s *Raja Yoga* – it seemed to me so wonderful a thing, you see, that someone could explain something to me! This made me gain in a few months what would have perhaps taken me years to do.”⁶

When the Mother was about 21, she met an Indian who gave her a copy of the Bhagavadgita. It was only a very inadequate French translation, but she could perceive, by intuition, the true content of this Indian scripture. The Indian advised her to envisage Krishna as the immanent Godhead, as the Divine within ourselves, and to read the Gita with this knowledge. The Mother followed his advice and “... in one month the whole work was done”⁷: she had got the experience of Krishna as immanent God. The Mother later explained to her students that the Gita was an important scripture which elucidated an important Truth, and yet one thing was missing in it: the idea of the transformation of the outer nature of man, which is one main object of Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga.

⁴ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 1:39

⁵ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 1:41

⁶ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 1:54

⁷ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 1:55

III. PARIS AND TLEMCEN (1905-12)

The Mother's high inner realization and spiritual radiance soon attracted towards her many seekers. In 1906 a small group was formed under her guidance, which was named *Idea*. They met regularly on Wednesday evenings at her house, first in rue Lemerrier, later in rue des Lévis and after 1910 in rue Val de Grâce. Apart from spiritual topics they also discussed occult experiences. The Mother herself had many occult experiences, but she never made them an end in themselves: they were strictly subordinated to her main object, spiritual realization and manifestation. The following quotation clarifies her attitude towards the occult: "Occult knowledge without spiritual discipline is a dangerous instrument, for the one who uses it as for others, if it falls into impure hands. Spiritual knowledge without occult science lacks precision and certainty in its objective results; it is all-powerful only in the subjective world. The two, when combined in inner or outer action, are irresistible and are fit instruments for the manifestation of the supramental power."¹

The Mother once had an experience in Paris which illustrates how powerful the inner protective wall can be if spiritual discipline is combined with occult knowledge. Once when she was walking in the Luxembourg Gardens and crossing a dangerous intersection, while being absorbed in deep inner concentration, she suddenly received a kind of blow and jumped back instinctively. The next moment a tram passed by – "it was the tram that I had felt at a little more than arm's length. It had touched the aura, the aura of protection – it was very strong at that time, I was deeply immersed in occultism and I knew how to keep it – the aura of protection had been hit and that had literally thrown me backwards, as if I had received a physical shock."²

The Mother's natural disposition for occult experiences was at a later stage perfected by systematic training. Some time between 1905 and 1906 she met in Paris Max Théon, a Polish Jew who was highly advanced in occultism. He had a house in Tlemcen in South Algeria, at the border of the Sahara. His wife Alma too was a highly gifted occultist. She was from the Isle of Wight. The Mother spent one or two years in Tlemcen and had a great number of experiences of which only a small fraction have been recorded. Some of them seem rather incredible, and yet they become authentic by the very fact that the Mother herself relates them, because her attitude towards 'miracles' was very conservative and she had no interest in the sensational. Nevertheless, she told her students some amazing incidents in her own

¹ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother's Life* 1:57-58

² Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother's Life* 1:64

life as well as experiences of Madame Théon, perhaps in order to illustrate that there are indeed more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy. Thus we are told (the Mother herself was personally present in the following incident) that once an Arab merchant was repeatedly bothering Madame Théon with inquisitive questions. Then on one occasion she filled the table at which he was sitting with occult force. The table started moving, attacked the merchant and drove him away... Another time Madame Théon demonstrated to the Mother how she was recharging herself with energy: she lay down on her bed and held a large juicy grapefruit on her solar plexus. She asked the Mother to return after an hour. “An hour later I returned... and the grapefruit was as flat as a pancake. That meant that she had such a power to absorb vitality that she had absorbed all the life from the fruit and it had become soft and completely flat. And I saw that myself.”³

Madame Théon also told the Mother an amusing incident which had happened a few years earlier and seems as if taken directly from a book of fairy-tales. The administrator of Tlemcen had ordered pine trees to be planted on the surrounding hills to prevent the river from drying up. But due to some inexplicable mistake fir trees were ordered instead of pine trees and they were planted on the hills. As is well known, fir trees belong to the Nordic countries and hardly fit into the landscape of the Sahara. Then one night Madame Théon had a strange experience. A little gnome appeared in her room, with a pointed cap, dark green shoes and a long white beard. He was all covered with snow. With the snow melting and forming a small lake on the floor, Madame Théon looked at the guest from the book of fairy-tales and asked him: “But what are you doing here?” The gnome answered: “But we were called by the fir trees! Fir trees call the snow. They are trees of the snow countries. I am the Lord of the snow, so I came to announce to you that... we are coming. We have been called, we are coming.”⁴ Madame Théon finally sent him away to avoid further damage to the floor. The next morning, when the sun was rising, she saw the mountains covered with snow. That had never before happened in this country.

The Mother devoted herself intensively to her occult studies and had no difficulty to bear the enormous heat at the border of the Sahara. Once when around noon she was meditating under an olive tree, she suddenly felt uneasy and opened her eyes. Just a few cubits in front of her a hissing cobra was standing with expanded hood. It was a *naga* whose poison kills instantly. The Mother realized that she was probably blocking the cobra’s retreat in the tree. She concentrated with all her will-power and

³ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 1:71

⁴ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 1:75

looked at the snake, without moving. Then she slowly drew away her legs, even while keeping her look fixed on the *naga*. At last the snake yielded, turned round and jumped into a pond. Later in her life the Mother had many such encounters with snakes and she always urged them through mere will-power to leave.

When the Mother left Tlemcen after the completion of her training, Max Théon accompanied her on the journey, since he wanted to travel through Europe. On the Mediterranean their ship got into a heavy storm and there was the apprehension of a catastrophe. Then Théon asked the Mother to go and stop it. She withdrew into her cabin, concentrated for a while and went out of her body. On the open sea she found some small vital entities which had caused the havoc. She talked to them for half an hour and finally managed to persuade them to stop their mischief and leave the scene. When she returned on deck, she saw that the storm had subsided.

One of the members of the Mother's study group in Paris was a well-known Tibetologist, Madame Alexandra David-Neel. She once spoke in an interview about those early days with the Mother:

“We spent marvellous evenings together with friends, believing in a great future... I remember her elegance, her accomplishments, her intellect endowed with mystical tendencies.

“In spite of her great love and sweetness, in spite even of her inherent ease of making herself forgotten after achieving some noble deed, she couldn't manage to hide very well the tremendous force she bore within herself.”⁵

In 1912 the Mother was conducting a study group with twelve members, which was named ‘Cosmique’. She distributed among them translations of Indian scriptures such as the Gita, Upanishads or Yoga-Sutras, and she introduced her European friends to Eastern spirituality. One of her stories which were read out in the group was the following instructive parable: The Virtues, who are usually dispersed throughout the worlds, meet in the Hall of Intelligence within the precincts of the palace of Truth. There is Sincerity with a “cube of the purest crystal through which things could be seen as they were”, and many other guests who have already gathered, among them Humility, Courage, Prudence, Charity, Justice, Kindness and Patience. Last comes a guest who seems to be a stranger to the assembled Virtues: “She was, indeed, very young and frail, dressed in a white robe, very simple, almost poor. She came forward a few steps with a timid, embarrassed air. Then, obviously at

⁵ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother's Life* 1:50-51

a loss on finding herself in the midst of such a crowded and brilliant company, she stopped, not knowing towards whom to go.” At last Prudence turns towards the shy guest and asks her for her credentials. The unrecognized Virtue answers with a sigh: “Alas! I am not astonished that I seem a foreigner in this palace. I am so seldom invited anywhere. My name is Gratitude.”⁶

The subject for the first meeting of the members of ‘Cosmique’ had been: “What is the aim to be achieved, the work to be done, the means of achievement?” And the Mother had answered in a short paper: “The general aim to be achieved is the advent of a progressive universal harmony.” She further refers to “states of being which have so far never been conscious in man” and mentions in connection with the earth, “several sources of universal force which are yet sealed to it.”⁷ These are her first pointers to the new Truth-Consciousness which Sri Aurobindo called ‘Supermind’. And she says, at the end of her paper, that it was the aim “collectively, to found the ideal society in a place suited to the flowering of the new race, that of the ‘Sons of God’.”⁸

Two years before her first meeting with Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry, the Mother had already summarized in this paper the program of her subsequent collaboration with him.

⁶ K. R. S. Iyengar’s *On the Mother* 1:36

⁷ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 1:111

⁸ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 1:112

IV. DIARY NOTES AND MEETING WITH SRI AUROBINDO

Sri Aurobindo's complete works (Centenary Edition) comprise 29 volumes (plus an index volume). The major part of these works are texts which were *written* by him, even though there are also the transcripts of a few speeches. Furthermore, a few disciples like Nirodbaran or A.B. Purani have recorded some talks with him on the basis of notes. But he was mainly communicating himself through the pen (or the typewriter), and his voice has not been recorded. Just the reverse is the case with the Mother. Out of the 15 volumes of her Collected Works most contain transcripts of her speeches and talks with students, the greatest part of which were recorded on tape. The Mother's only written work of some length is *Prayers and Meditations*, a selection from her comprehensive diary notes. Their origin goes back to the year 1912, when she was regularly meditating in the early morning in her room at rue Val de Grâce in Paris. Sitting near the window with a Kashmiri shawl around her shoulders, she entered into communion with the Divine and noted her experiences in a diary. Extracts from this diary were published in 1932 under the title *Prières et Méditations*, and Sri Aurobindo himself translated many of the entries into English.

In the preface the Mother explains the purpose of this publication. The texts are meant to help those "who have undertaken to achieve self-mastery, those who want to find the path that leads to the Divine, and those who aspire to consecrate themselves more and more completely to the Divine Work."¹ A great number of quotations in this chapter will be taken from this diary.

*

After a few years the Mother had dissolved her marriage with Henri Morisset and she married Paul Richard, a well-known and well-read philosopher who was keenly interested in Eastern and Western spirituality as well as Vedantic Yoga. He had also political plans and so in 1910, in connection with an election campaign, he came to Pondicherry, which was at that time part of French India. He also wanted to consult an advanced Yogi about the symbolic meaning of the star of David and therefore went to see Sri Aurobindo who was in exile outside British India. In what follows we shall first give a short survey of Sri Aurobindo's life, which was later to merge more and more with that of the Mother.

¹ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother's Life* 1:113

Sri Aurobindo was born in Calcutta on 15 August 1872. His father was an anglophile and sent him with his two brothers to England for education when he was seven. Sri Aurobindo spent fourteen years in that country. He first stayed with an English family at Manchester, then he joined St. Paul's School in London and later studied at King's College in Cambridge. He passed the open competition for the Indian Civil Service, but got himself disqualified by not presenting himself at the riding examination.

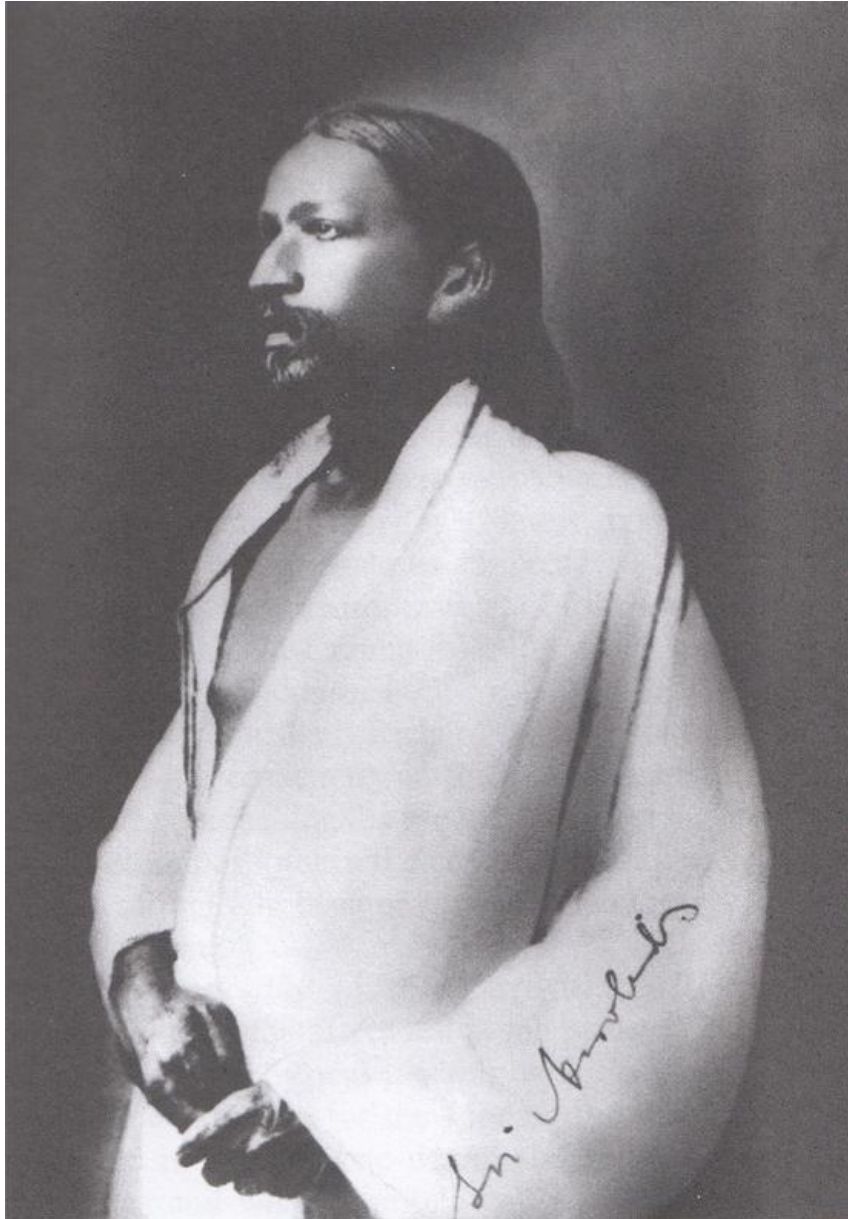
In 1893 Sri Aurobindo returned to India, and the next thirteen years he worked in Baroda in the Revenue Department and the Secretariat, then as a Professor at the Baroda College and, finally, as Vice-Principal there. During this period he studied keenly the basics of Indian culture, learnt Sanskrit as well as some modern Indian languages and wrote many poems. In 1905 he joined the political arena and the next year became editor of the journal *Bande Mataram*. In numberless inspired articles he sought to stir up the Indian national consciousness and to further the independence movement. At Baroda in early 1908 he had the experience of Nirvana or silent Brahman. Later in the year at Calcutta he was arrested in a conspiracy case and detained for one year as an undertrial prisoner in the Alipur Jail. There he had his second decisive spiritual experience and saw God (Krishna) present in all things and beings, moving in them and expressing Himself through them. After his acquittal in 1909 he continued for a while in politics. The next year he withdrew from the political field. Following an inner command, he sailed first to Chandernagore and later to Pondicherry where he completely devoted himself to developing a new path of spirituality, the Integral Yoga.

Richard had several meetings with Sri Aurobindo and one of his questions related to the symbolic character of the lotus. Sri Aurobindo explained that the lotus represents the opening of the consciousness to the Divine.

When Richard had returned to France, he told the Mother about Sri Aurobindo and they started some correspondence. In April 1914 Sri Aurobindo wrote to a friend that the Richards were rare examples of European yogins who had not been misled by aberrations on the spiritual path.

The Mother felt now irresistibly drawn towards India, the one country which she had always felt to be her true mother country. In 1914 her longing was at last fulfilled and she could embark on a journey to Pondicherry with Paul Richard. They left Paris on 5 March, 1914 and the next day they boarded the 'Kaga Maru', a Japanese steamer. In a diary note of March 8 the Mother describes an inner experience, an

inner movement which is characteristic of her being and points towards her future role: she takes all fellow-travellers on the boat into her consciousness and envelopes them in love, tries to awaken them to the Divine. In her inner experience the boat is “a marvellous abode of peace, a temple sailing in Thy honour over the waves of the subconscious passivity which we have to conquer and awaken to the consciousness of Thy divine Presence.”²



Sri Aurobindo, 1915

On Sunday a service was arranged in the saloon of the boat, but the Mother did not take part in it. When the priest asked her, why she had not come, she answered: “... I don’t feel that you are sincere, neither you nor your flock. You all went there to

² K. R. S. Iyengar’s *On the Mother* 1:79

fulfil a social duty and social custom, but not at all because you really wanted to enter into communion with God.”³ When the priest told her that he was on the way to China as a missionary, the Mother did not mince words in giving him her opinion on his mission: “Listen, even before your religion was born – not even two thousand years ago – the Chinese had a very high philosophy and knew a path leading them to the Divine; and when they think of Westerners, they think of them as barbarians. And you are going there to convert those who know more about it than you? What are you going to teach them? To be insincere, to perform hollow ceremonies instead of following a profound philosophy and a detachment from life which lead them to a more spiritual consciousness?”⁴

The Mother and Paul Richard left the boat at Colombo and arrived in Pondicherry in the early hours of March 29. Even while approaching the town, the Mother had a vision of a huge column of light in the centre of Pondicherry, and the intensity of the light became greater when they got down at the railway station.

On the very day of their arrival the Richards met Sri Aurobindo in the afternoon at his place in rue François Martin. The first physical meeting with Sri Aurobindo was a decisive experience for the Mother and she immediately recognized in him the one whom she had so often met in her dreams and whom she had called ‘Krishna’. She was now deeply convinced that her place was at his side, that her work was here in India. After the meeting she noted in her diary:

“It matters little that there are thousands of beings plunged in the densest ignorance; He whom we saw yesterday is on earth; his presence is enough to prove that a day will come when darkness shall be transformed into light, and Thy reign shall actually be established upon earth.”⁵

The Mother had sat down at Sri Aurobindo’s feet and made her mind completely empty, giving up all her ideas and concepts, in order to be completely open only to him. After some time an infinite silence had descended into her and settled in her mind. This experience brought about a deep inner change in her: “It seems to me that I am being born into a new life and that all the methods and habits of the past can no longer be of any use. It seems to me that what was once a result is now only a preparation... It is as if I was stripped of all my past, of my errors as well as my conquests, as if all that had disappeared to give place to one new-born whose whole

³ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 1:128

⁴ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 1:129

⁵ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 1:131

existence has yet to take shape... An immense gratitude rises from my heart. I seem to have at last arrived at the threshold which I have long sought.”⁶

The Richards now met Sri Aurobindo every afternoon, whilst he came to the Richards on Sundays and his companions joined him for dinner with the Richards after their daily football game. The talks often continued until late in the night.

The Richards now started publishing a philosophical journal, the *Arya*, in collaboration with Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo contributed many articles in which he propounded his own interpretation of important Indian Scriptures such as the Vedas and Upanishads, and he wrote about Indian Philosophy as well as world history and world evolution. Here he laid the foundation for some of his major works like *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Secret of the Veda*, *The Human Cycle*, etc. Richard made his contribution with a collection of aphorisms of famous thinkers, poets, saints and sages, whilst the Mother – the actual collector of them in the past – maintained the accounts and was the chief executive. They also prepared a French edition (*Revue de la Grande Synthèse*). The first edition of the *Arya* appeared on Sri Aurobindo’s birthday, 15 August 1914, and it was like a message of Light for the world which had just been precipitated into the chaos of the First World War. The aims of this monthly journal were given as follows on the cover page:

- 1.The systematic study of the highest problems of existence.
- 2.The formation of a vast synthesis of knowledge, harmonising the diverse religious traditions of humanity, occidental as well as oriental. Its method will be that of realism, at once rational and transcendental, a realism consisting in the unification of intellectual and scientific disciplines with those of intuitive experience.⁷

While the first copies of the *Arya* were going out into the world, Paul Richard was called home to join the French Reserve Army and had to leave Pondicherry. The Mother went with him, certainly against her will. But obviously Sri Aurobindo felt that the time for their direct collaboration had not yet come. So they started the return journey on 22 February 1915, one day after the Mother’s birthday. She later stated in one of her talks, with obvious pain: “He (Sri Aurobindo) did not keep me, what could I do? I had to go. But I left my psychic being with him, and in France I was once on the point of death: the doctors had given me up.”⁸ The separation from Sri

⁶ K. R. S. Iyengar’s *On the Mother* 1:88

⁷ K. R. S. Iyengar’s *On the Mother* 1:106

⁸ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 1:160

Aurobindo, from India was a powerful shock for the Mother. She was drawn, as it were, into the whirlpool of the World War to become its silent witness. In Paris she saw trains with wounded soldiers arriving and was deeply moved on seeing the noble manner in which they bore their sufferings. She tried to help them in her own way, by inwardly enveloping them in love, and she discovered that the soldiers had a great receptivity for her invisible gift.

There are a great number of diary entries of this time which reflect the tumultuous developments in the world as well as her own trials.

“O Lord, this earth groans and suffers; chaos has made this world its abode.

“The darkness is so great that Thou alone canst dispel it. Come, manifest Thyself, that Thy work may be accomplished.”⁹

“Solitude, a harsh, intense solitude, and always this strong impression of having been flung headlong into an inferno of darkness! ... Sometimes... I cannot prevent my total submission from taking a hue of melancholy, and the calm and mute converse with the Master within is transformed for a moment into an invocation almost suppliant, ‘O Lord, what have I done that Thou throwest me thus into the sombre night?’”¹⁰

Meanwhile Sri Aurobindo continued his correspondence with the Mother and helped her in her serious crisis. After the departure of the Richards he shouldered all alone the responsibility of publishing the *Arya*. He wrote 64 pages every month. After it had been proposed to him to seek a safer place for his stay than Pondicherry, he wrote the Mother in a letter of 6 May 1915: “The whole earth is now under one law and answers to the same vibrations and I am skeptical of finding any place where the clash of struggle will not pursue us. In any case, an effective retirement does not seem to be my destiny. I must remain in touch with the world until I have either mastered adverse circumstances or succumbed or carried on the struggle between the spiritual and physical so far as I am destined to carry it on.”¹¹

During her serious illness the Mother was staying in Lunel and she noted in her diary on 19 April 1915 how all external circumstances were just then representing the very opposite of her ideal of a harmonious world. “The hour has not yet come for joyful realisations in outer physical things,” she writes with a view of the gloomy situation. But she silently submits to her suffering and accepts it to be the will of the

⁹ K. R. S. Iyengar’s *On the Mother* 1:113

¹⁰ K. R. S. Iyengar’s *On the Mother* 1:133

¹¹ K. R. S. Iyengar’s *On the Mother* 1:138

Lord that she has to share this experience of the complete darkness of the world, which takes her physically to the verge of death. And yet she remains unshaken in her resolve, in her deep aspiration for a truer life on earth, and keeps the flame of her faith burning amidst the hopeless chaos of the holocaust. Whilst her body has been put out of action by an inflammation of the nerves, she carries her work on in the inner planes which are out of reach for the clutches of Death. In the following quotation we learn something about the multi-dimensional workings of the Mother and come to know how she could further and hasten the evolution and individual development of seekers of the Truth, independent of her body:

“I was lying in an easy-chair, in front of a garden. I saw that the spiritual power was still active in me: I could go on with occult experiments in spite of the illness. I used to concentrate on things and persons and circumstances and wanted to see if the power worked. It worked very well on the mental and vital planes. Then I broadened the field of activity. I could go on doing my work in various parts of France and America and other places. I could clearly see the faces of the persons worked upon. They could be made to do what they by themselves could not. These were controlled experiments.

“I could see that nothing could stop the work: even without my body the work could go on.

“Wherever the call was, I could attend.”¹²

On the strength of this quotation we may surely assume and affirm that now after her physical departure, the Mother is in a similar way influencing earth events from the subtle physical plane and giving individual guidance to disciples and devotees all over the world. “Even without my body the work could go on.” this is certainly a most significant revelation.

¹² Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother's Life* 1:162

V. JAPAN (1916-20)

Even though the Richards had specially returned to France because Paul had been drafted as a reservist, they only stayed there for a year. Paul was freed from military service and moved to Marsillargues with the Mother, where Andre, the Mother's son, visited them during the summer vacations and heard for the first time about Sri Aurobindo. In October it was his turn to join the Army, and from then he always felt the protection of his exceptional Mother, piloting him through those difficult times. Meanwhile, Paul Richard got some work in Japan and thus we find the Richards in London on 13 March 1916, embarking on the long journey to the Far East. They reached Japan in June 1916 and stayed for four years in the land of the rising sun, the first year mostly in Tokyo, the last three years in Kyoto. In between they also visited other places, especially places of pilgrimage. They briefly touched China too.

For the Mother this change certainly came as a great relief. Here was a country which could offer, if not India's deep spirituality, yet high traditions and exquisite beauty. "For four years, from an artistic point of view, I lived from wonder to wonder,"¹ she said later in a talk. She has given elaborate descriptions of the beauty of Japanese landscapes and the perfect arrangement of houses which merge into a harmonious whole with their surroundings, being one with Nature, as it were. She also points out that even simple people had a highly developed aesthetic sense and would rather spend their spare time outside in Nature in order to admire a beautiful landscape, than seek other distractions. And yet she has some reservations and adds that all this was no more than "a marvellously organised mental-physical domain"² and that there was an entire dearth of spirituality.

Once there was a characteristic and amusing incident in connection with a Japanese friend of hers, which she told her students in the Ashram. She had brought the young man into contact with his soul and as a result he had extraordinary experiences. But the next morning he suddenly disappeared. Later, the Mother met him in the city and asked him why he had run away. "Oh! you understand, I discovered my soul and saw that my soul was more powerful than my faith in the country and the Mikado; I would have had to obey my soul and I would no longer have been a faithful subject of my emperor. I had to go away."³

¹ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother's Life* 1:181

² Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother's Life* 1:182

³ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother's Life* 1:183

On the other hand, the Mother was appreciating the enormous vitality and energy of the people. There seems to be prophetic foresight when she writes in 1917 that Japan “possesses the vitality and concentrated energies of a nation which has not yet reached its zenith. That energy is one of the most striking features of Japan. It is visible everywhere, in everyone; the old and the young, the workmen, the women, the children, the students, all... display in their daily life the most wonderful storage of concentrated energy.”⁴ We know today the potential of a Japan that has climbed to its zenith...

Another characteristic feature of the nation, “the secret of her power”, has been explained by the Mother in connection with the ancient tradition of Samurai: “They know how to remain silent; and though they are possessed of the most acute sensitiveness, they are, among the people I have met, those who express it least. A friend here can give his life with the greatest simplicity to save yours, though he never told you before that he loved you in such a profound and unselfish way.”⁵

The Richards stayed in Tokyo with Dr. Okhawa, a university professor. A long friendship formed between the two families. The Mother soon adopted the Japanese style of living and wore the kimono with natural grace. She also learnt the highly developed Japanese art of flower arrangements. She grew her own vegetables in a garden and reports, in this context, an astonishing experience which illustrates her close communication with Nature: when she went into the garden to collect vegetables for the meals, some said to her, “No, no,” whilst others called, “Take us, take us”. “So it was very simple, I looked for those which wanted to be taken and never did I touch those which did not. I used to think it was something exceptional.”⁶

In July 1917 the Richards went to Akakura Spa, a hill-station 800 m above sea level. The Mother felt deep peace in the beautiful landscape of this remote resort. Next they travelled to Kyoto, the ancient capital of Japan, and made contacts with Dr. Okhata, the founder of the still-sitting movement, which had some affinities with Indian Yoga and therapeutical values. They also met Dr. Kobayashi and his wife, two close collaborators of Dr. Okhata. An intimate friendship was formed between the Mother and Mrs. Kobayashi, and they often meditated together.

⁴ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 1:184

⁵ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 1:184

⁶ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 1:186



In Tokyo, 1917, in a studio

In January 1919 a frightful epidemic swept over Japan. In Tokyo alone hundreds of new cases of infection were registered every day, and the victims died, as a rule, after three days. If they could survive the third day, they were cured after seven days. The Mother shielded herself from infection with the help of her occult knowledge and avoided every thought of the disease. But this inner discipline was made difficult by someone who stayed with her and kept asking her what was behind this epidemic. One day the Mother had to drive to the other end of the town and in the tram she saw all those people with protective masks before their faces. The whole atmosphere was filled with unbearable fear. Finally, the Mother herself started asking herself involuntarily, "Truly, what is this illness? What is there behind this illness?" When

she returned home, she had caught it. The symptoms used to appear at once, immediately after the infection. The Mother lay down with a high fever. A doctor was called (without her knowledge), but she dismissed him and refused to take medicine. She wanted to fight it out all from within. She kept asking herself what was behind the illness. Then, “at the end of the second day as I was lying all alone, I saw clearly a being, with a part of the head cut off, in a military uniform (or the remains of a military uniform) approaching me and suddenly flinging himself upon my chest, with that half a head to suck my force. I took a good look, then realised that I was about to die. He was drawing all my life out... I was completely nailed to the bed, without movement, in a deep trance. I could no longer stir and he was pulling. I thought: now it is the end. Then I called on my occult power, I gave a big fight and I succeeded in turning him back so that he could not stay there any longer. And I woke up.”⁷

A little later a Japanese friend came to see her and he understood at once what had happened. He told the Mother that the disease was suddenly under control and there were hardly any more death cases. The Mother disclosed to him her experience and her friend talked about it to others. Some newspapers even published articles about the incident.

The Mother explained the occult background of the epidemic as follows: during the First World War many young healthy soldiers were suddenly thrown out of their bodies, without knowing that they had died, physically. They were now desperately trying to regain their lost lives in other bodies and thus became vampires. Whosoever got into the atmosphere of these forces fell ill and was cured only if he was not personally attacked by one such being. All others died invariably. “I know how much knowledge and force were necessary for me to resist,” said the Mother. “It was irresistible.”⁸

“Consciousness, to be sure, is more effective than packets of medicine,” was the Mother’s final comment on this incident. She always avoided medicine, as far as possible. Once she told an Ashram sadhak that she used to cure all the illnesses herself of her son André in his young days, without calling a doctor. Of course, not everybody can imitate her methods and we also find in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram a number of doctors of all medical systems who help to take care of the health and well-being of children and sadhaks.

⁷ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 1:202

⁸ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 1:202

During her stay in Japan the Mother met Tolstoy's son who was touring the world and preaching to everybody that all people should speak the same language, take the same food and wear the same clothes, then there would be peace on earth and everybody would be happy. The Mother seems to have talked to him, but he stuck to his naive ideas.

In 1919 she met Rabindranath Tagore and they stayed in the same hotel for some time. He requested her to take charge of Shantiniketan, his educational institute, but the Mother did not accept his request since she knew that her destiny was elsewhere.

In April 1920 she could at last and for good return to Pondicherry. She was accompanied by an English lady, Miss Dorothy Hodgeson, whom she had already known in France. When their boat was approaching Pondicherry, the Mother had a remarkable experience: "I was on the boat, at sea, not expecting anything (I was of course busy with the inner life, but I was living physically on the boat), when all of a sudden, abruptly, about two nautical miles from Pondicherry, the quality, I may even say physical quality, of the atmosphere of the air, changed so much that I knew we were entering the aura of Sri Aurobindo. It was a *physical* experience..."⁹

⁹ K. R. S. Iyengar's *On the Mother* 1:201

VI. PONDICHERRY (1920-26)

The Mother was back in India, back in Pondicherry, that small town in the South-East where Sri Aurobindo had been pursuing his integral yoga-path since 1910. Her return was now final and she was never again to leave India, the country of her choice. Her relationship with Paul Richard was at this stage coming to a breaking-point since she could follow her destiny now and establish an ever closer collaboration with Sri Aurobindo. It was probably clear to Paul that the Mother was now completely giving herself to Sri Aurobindo and that there was a kind of collaboration and development in their relationship which he could not follow any more. He could recognize Sri Aurobindo as a great yogi and sage, but he did not want to become his disciple and may have tried also to draw the Mother away from him. But this effort was bound to fail and so he left Pondicherry. He kept travelling for some time in India, but later he went to America where he founded a Centre of Asian Studies.

The Mother had foreseen this development in a significant vision which Sri Aurobindo once related to a disciple: “The Mother (Mirra), Richard and I were going somewhere. We saw Richard going down to a place from which rising was impossible. Then we found ourselves sitting in a carriage the driver of which was taking it up and down a hill a number of times. At last he stopped on the highest peak. Its significance was quite clear to us.”¹

The Mother and Miss Hodgeson were at first staying in some Guest Houses, before moving into the Bayoud House at rue St. Martin. On 24 November 1920 there was a heavy tempest in the town and a flood-like rainfall. The roof of a godown opposite the Vinayak temple had collapsed owing to the heavy rain. When Sri Aurobindo was informed that the roof of the house in which the Mother was staying was not safe either, he asked her and her English friend to move into his own house at rue Francois Martin. Since then the Mother has always been staying in the same house as Sri Aurobindo, wherever it might be. She was now doing intensive Yoga with him and the sadhana was brought down from the mental to the vital plane. As a result the Mother experienced a visible physical change: “...after a month’s yoga I looked exactly eighteen. And someone who had seen me before, who had lived with me in Japan and came here, found it difficult to recognize me. He asked me, ‘But really, is it you?’ I said, ‘Of course!’ ”²

¹ K. R. S. Iyengar’s *On the Mother* 1:205

² Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 1:212

A similar surprise was experienced once by Ambubhai Purani who had seen Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry in 1918. When he came back in 1921, he noticed a clear change in Sri Aurobindo's complexion. "What has happened to you?" he exclaimed in astonishment. Sri Aurobindo explained to him that a great transformation took place in the nervous system and even the physical system when the higher consciousness came down to the vital plane. Purani also saw the Mother now, 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 20 whereas she was more than 43 years old."³

Later on, when the yoga was brought down to the physical plane, this extraordinary manifestation of youth in the Mother came to an end, since considerable obstacles had to be worked out and dealt with in the physical being which resisted transformation. But this was the proper work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to prepare even the physical plane, which had been hitherto neglected by the yogis, for the descent of the supreme Light. It was an extremely difficult undertaking, a struggle with the element 'Earth', a fight with the forces of the world.

They got a little foretaste of the upcoming difficulties during the episode of the 'stone-throwing', which took place by the middle of December 1921. Datta (Miss Hodgson) had scolded a cook named Vatel for bad behaviour. Vatel wanted to take revenge for this reproof and made contact with a black-magician in the town. After some time stones suddenly started falling into the courtyard, even though no one was seen. The police were called, but they could not be of any help in the matter. Finally, when the hail of stones became too dangerous, the Mother went into deep meditation to find out the cause. She discovered three vital entities which were held under a magical charm. She sent them away and they never came back. After the magic had been broken, the black-magical force rebounded on the originator with a kind of boomerang effect. Vatel became very ill and had to be taken to hospital. When Sri Aurobindo was informed that the cook was dying, he said, "Oh! just for a few stones!"⁴ and Vatel was cured the same evening.

The Mother's arrival in Sri Aurobindo's house entailed several changes in the household. His disciples had so far been living rather freely and without constraints. Sri Aurobindo did not interfere much with what they were doing, since he was immersed in his own sadhana. Properly speaking, he was not yet playing the role of a

³ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother's Life* 1:212

⁴ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother's Life* 1:217

guru and therefore at this stage we can only speak with reservation of ‘disciples’. The Mother became part of this community now and the whole household was newly arranged by her. Books were nicely stacked in cupboards and everything found its right place. At the same time collective meditations were begun in which Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, the members of his group as well as visitors took part. All these changes and the new discipline made some disciples revolt and grumble, but the Mother was, in course of time, more and more accepted and recognized. Sri Aurobindo left to her increasingly the charge of the household and he also told seekers who turned to him for guidance that he would help them ‘through Mirra’. Her devotion and respect for him gradually brought about a change in the relations between Sri Aurobindo and his disciples. Nolini Kanta Gupta, who had known Sri Aurobindo even from the time of his political activities and was later to become the Secretary of the Ashram, writes with reference to these early times, “the Mother taught by her manner and speech, and showed us in actual practice what was the meaning of disciple and master... It was the Mother who opened our eyes...”⁵

It was at this moment that the foundation of the Ashram was laid, even though it was not consciously planned or discussed. Things took their own course and there was an organic development. It is characteristic of the Mother that even at this stage she already included in these developments members of the animal and plant world. A well-kept garden took shape in the courtyard, and some cats which received the Mother’s special attention found their way into the small community. She had special food prepared for them and gave them special names. These were not ordinary cats which came here to the Mother. There was one cat which used to bring all its kittens to the Mother, as soon as they could use their eyes, and drop them at the Mother’s feet, as if to seek her blessings for them. Another cat took part in the collective meditation and its body used to shake and tremble, whilst its eyes remained closed, as if it had some visions.

One day a cat named Kiki happened to play with a scorpion and got stung. It quickly ran to the Mother and showed her the paw which was already dangerously swollen. “I took my little cat – it was really sweet – and put it on a table and called Sri Aurobindo. I told him, ‘Kiki has been stung by a scorpion, it must be cured.’ The cat stretched its neck and looked at Sri Aurobindo, its eyes already a little glassy. Sri Aurobindo sat before it and looked at it also. Then we saw this little cat gradually

⁵ Nolini & Amrita Reminiscences, pp. 63-64

beginning to recover, to come round, and an hour later it jumped to its feet and went away completely healed.”⁶

We can see from a report of Champaklal how far the Mother went in her care for these representatives of the animal world. “During those early days, she herself used to prepare a pudding. Of that pudding she would put aside a small quantity in a small dish; she would add a little milk to it and stir it with a spoon till it became liquid and consistent. She showed me how to do it and was particular that no grains should be left unmashed... And do you know for whom this part of the pudding was meant? For cats. Later on I learnt that they were not really cats but something more.”⁷

Meanwhile, Sri Aurobindo was forging ahead with his sadhana. His object was the attainment of Supermind, a new global Truth-Consciousness which alone could solve the problems of the world. In the spiritual history of mankind this consciousness had so far been experienced only individually by a few Vedic rishis, but it had not been established as a cosmic principle in the earth-consciousness. And this was exactly what Sri Aurobindo wanted to do. He said more than once that his life would only be fulfilled if he could achieve a new realisation for the world: he had not come in order to merely repeat the realisations of the past. In April 1920 he wrote in a letter to his brother Barin:

“Without reaching the Supramental it is impossible to know the ultimate secret of the world. The riddle of the world cannot be solved without it.

“But its attainment is not easy. After fifteen years, I am just now rising to the lowest of the three layers of the Supermind and trying to draw up all my movements into it. But when the siddhi is complete, then there is no doubt that the Divine will give the Siddhi of the Supermind to others through me with very little effort. Then my *real work* will begin. I am not in a hurry to accomplish my work.”⁸

In 1926 already three or four women belonged to the group and they meditated regularly with the Mother. There was now an increasing number of disciples who approached her to seek her guidance. It was obvious that Sri Aurobindo was more and more withdrawing, leaving to the Mother not only the outer organisation, but also the responsibility for the inner sadhana of the disciples. Some time in these months it also happened that he did not call her any more ‘Mirra’, but ‘Mother’. Even earlier the disciples had noticed that he often uttered the name ‘Mirra’ with a slight

⁶ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 1:223

⁷ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 1:224-25

⁸ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 1:230

hesitation and was stopping, as it were, with the *M*. Then finally the great moment arrived when the predestined name came over his lips, but we do not know the exact date.

During his evening talks in 1926 Sri Aurobindo emphasized occasionally the importance of a link between supermind and mind proper. He called this link ‘overmind’ which, in an image that the Mother once used, stands as far above mind as the moon above the earth, whilst supermind in this image corresponds to the sun.

At the beginning of November the possibility of the descent of such a higher consciousness was hinted at in the talks. There was some kind of expectation in the air and the pressure of the higher Force became more and more strong and almost unbearable. Finally came the day of the great event, 24 November 1926. It was in the late afternoon that the Mother had all the disciples called for a special gathering. Some were busy with their work and others were walking at the beach. At about 6 o’clock all had gathered on the verandah in front of Sri Aurobindo’s room. On the wall behind Sri Aurobindo’s chair there was a black silk curtain showing three Chinese dragons.

The tail of each dragon reached up to the mouth of the other. There was an old prophecy in China that Truth would manifest on earth when the three dragons would meet: they symbolise the regions of earth, mind and sky.

Whilst there was a deep silence, the disciples felt the pressure in the atmosphere. Some saw a flood of Light rushing down from above. Then Sri Aurobindo and the Mother came and a meditation was held. Thereafter the two avatars blessed their disciples, and again there was a short meditation. They all felt distinctly that something special had happened, the atmosphere was so much charged with vibrations of Light. When Sri Aurobindo and the Mother withdrew, Datta spoke in a moment of inspiration, “The Lord has descended into the physical today.”⁹

Later on, Sri Aurobindo explained the significance of this descent: “The 24th November 1926 was the descent of Krishna into the physical. Krishna is not the supramental Light. The descent of Krishna would mean the descent of the Overmind Godhead preparing, though not itself actually, the descent of Supermind and Ananda. Krishna is the Anandamaya; he supports the evolution through the Overmind leading it towards his Ananda.”¹⁰

⁹ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 1:233

¹⁰ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 1:233

The next nine or ten months were marked by spectacular events. Almost every day there were ‘miracles’ and time passed like a divine dream. Meanwhile, Sri Aurobindo had completely withdrawn in order to prepare the manifestation of supermind through his inner concentration. Exactly 24 disciples had been present on November 24, and Sri Aurobindo gave them explicit instructions to take guidance from the Mother, since he would now do all the work through her. In the following quotation the Mother reports about developments after the descent of overmind into the physical:

“Suddenly, immediately, things took a certain shape: a very brilliant creation was worked out in extraordinary detail, with marvellous experiences, contact with divine beings, and all kinds of manifestations which are considered miraculous... One day, I went as usual to relate to Sri Aurobindo what had been happening – we had come to something really very interesting, and perhaps I showed a little enthusiasm in my account of what had taken place – then Sri Aurobindo looked at me... and said: ‘Yes, this is an Overmind creation. It is very interesting, very well done. You will perform miracles which will make you famous throughout the world, you will be able to turn events on earth topsy-turvy, indeed,...’ and then he smiled and said: ‘It will be a *great* success. But it is an Overmind creation. And it is not success that we want; we want to establish the Supermind on earth. One must know how to renounce immediate success in order to create the new world, the supramental world in its integrality.’

“With my inner consciousness I understood immediately; a few hours later the creation was gone... and from that moment we started anew on other bases.”¹¹

¹¹ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 1:235-36

VII. THE FORMATION OF THE ASHRAM

There are some utterances of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother which indicate that they were not really eager to become gurus. And yet they adopted this role when it fell on them in the natural course of events. Something similar was the case with the Ashram which was not consciously planned or necessarily intended from the beginning. This can be seen from Sri Aurobindo's statement:

“There was no Ashram at first, only a few people came to live near Sri Aurobindo and practise Yoga. It was only some time after the Mother came from Japan that it took the form of the Ashram, more from the wish of the Sadhaks who desired to entrust their whole inner and outer life to the Mother than from any intention or plan of hers or of Sri Aurobindo.”¹

What the Mother and Sri Aurobindo had in mind was not an Ashram in the traditional Indian meaning, but a kind of spiritual laboratory in which a new integral, Divine Life was to be tried on a much larger scale than had ever been attempted before. Even though Guru and disciples were gathered here for God-Realization, which justifies the name ‘Ashram’ (Sri Aurobindo accepted the term after some hesitation), the model was basically different. When Surendranath Jauhar, an Indian businessman, came to South India on a tour and visited the Ashram, he at once noted this difference. There were no monks and ascetics here, no idols, recitations, devotional chanting and other forms of traditional Indian Ashram life: “When we got into the building, we saw a number of people, all in simple and neat dresses, and some even in pants and coats, but no sants or sannyasis, no monks or mahants, no shaven heads..., no preaching or prayers, no siksha or sermons...”² Then he saw the Mother: “In her gait there was majesty, in her face a glowing grace and her eyes flashed gleams that pierced the darkness below and around. My gaze was fixed at the fairy-like figure whose calm and beautiful face was radiating light and making the whole atmosphere so supernatural that she looked every inch an angel descending from Heaven...”³ Surendranath Jauhar joined the Ashram with his whole family and later founded, on the Mother's suggestion, the Delhi Branch of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, with ‘The Mother's International School’ attached to it.

It would be wrong to assume that the new life style in the Ashram and the turning away from Indian tradition implied the complete rejection of the latter. In fact, what

¹ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother's Life* 1:236

² S. Jauhar, *My Fateful Journey*, pp. 5-7

³ *Ibid.*, p. 7

was being done here was the overcoming of the *ascetic phase* of Indian tradition, which in a one-sided way equated spirituality with renunciation. Through this approach, values such as prosperity, health and work had often not only been neglected, but despised outright. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were consciously working against this trend, even though they were proceeding slowly, since they had at first to create a new basis for the larger life which was not to be merely an improved imitation of ordinary life. We have also to note that some elements of Indian spirituality did find their place in the Ashram life, *e.g.* Pranam, or prostration before the Guru; Darshan, the seeing of the Guru and receiving his blessings; the distribution of food as Prasad, offered to the Divine; meditations; use of incense sticks, etc. If we wanted to find a link with Indian tradition, we would have to go back to Vedic times, when integral life, fullness and prosperity, equality of the sexes and a life-affirming attitude were similarly cultivated by spiritual seekers. This integral approach was lost in later epochs when Mayavada (Illusionism) and one-sided asceticism prevailed.

In a letter of 10 February 1933 the Mother explained the life style in the Ashram to her son André: “The life we lead here is as far from ascetic abstinence as from an enervating comfort; simplicity is the rule here, but a simplicity full of variety, a variety of occupations, of activities, tastes, tendencies, natures; each one is free to organise his life as he pleases, the discipline is reduced to a minimum that is indispensable to organize the existence of 110 to 120 people and to avoid the movements which would be detrimental to the achievement of our yogic aim.”⁴

What was tried here was a spiritual life with variety and relative fullness, which should yet not deviate into the enjoyment of luxury and comfort. The sadhaks were required to learn to use all things with a right attitude and not to misinterpret the fullness as a fulfillment of the ego. Sri Aurobindo clarified this point in a letter: “The Mother does not provide the Sadhaks with comforts because she thinks that the desires, fancies, likings, preferences should be satisfied – in Yoga people have to overcome these things. In any other Ashram they would not get one-tenth of what they get here... The first rule of Yoga is that the Sadhak must be content with what comes to him, much or little; if things are there, he must be able to use them without attachment or desire; if they are not he must be indifferent to their absence.”⁵

⁴ CWM 16:7-8

⁵ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother's Life* 2:45

The number of sadhaks was rapidly growing now. 24 disciples had been present during the descent of overmind on 24 November 1926. By the middle of 1927 there were about 30 disciples staying in five houses. In August 1929 more than 85 stayed in 17 houses, a year later their number was almost one hundred in 21 houses. In a letter to André, dated 23 August 1930, the Mother takes stock: The Ashram has now, among other things, 5 cars, 12 bicycles, garages, workshops, a library and a reading room, general stores, a dairy and a bakery. “You can see,” she writes, “that it is no small affair. And as I am taking care of all this, I can truly say that I am busy.”⁶

The Mother started her day early in the morning at about 4 o’clock and at about 6 o’clock she came to the terrace of her house with some members of the Ashram. Then a sadhak blew a conch to announce her arrival in the Meditation Room. The pranam took one or two hours. Thereafter there were interviews with her which lasted until noon. After this the Mother personally distributed the dishes to the sadhaks in the Dining Hall. Then she went to Sri Aurobindo’s room and finally sat in the Prosperity Hall with some sadhaks. At times she held a meditation. Otherwise there was general conversation and she gave some special talks. There were also ‘flower games’: the Mother had given spiritual meanings to numberless flowers, such as ‘Realization’, ‘Purity’, ‘Faith’, ‘Surrender’, ‘Perfection’ etc. and at these sessions she arranged some flowers in a particular way. The sadhaks were then asked to put together the meanings in such a way that they formed a significant sentence. In the following we give two examples:

Only to those who have a true *humility* will *power* be given.

(10.10.1929)

Approach the Divine with *loving gratitude* and you will meet the *Divine’s Love*.

(14.10.1929)

The sadhak who found the sentence intended by the Mother or who came closest to it got some prize like sweets. The Mother also arranged for other games like balancing a big lemon on the head and other skill games. There was no fixed programme, the group followed the inspiration of the moment. The sadhaks experienced the Mother here as a Mother among her children, giving them relief from the strict concentration of Yoga, which is not to say that Yoga was not being continued here. But it happened more invisibly, just ‘like playing’.

⁶ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 2:60

A regular item after 1927 was the ‘soup distribution’, which however was less a ceremony than a deep spiritual exchange between the Mother and the sadhaks. It took place in the late evening, at 7 or 8 o’clock. The Mother sat in an armchair, with her feet resting on a small stool. She meditated for a while, holding her hands over the container of the soup with the palms pointing downwards, as if she was pouring her force into the liquid. Then the container was moved to her right and she distributed the food with a big spoon to the sadhaks who kneeled down before her one after another and offered her their cup. Sometimes she fell into a trance during the distribution and the respective sadhak waited for a while, until his cup was filled by her. As Sri Aurobindo explained, the soup was “a means by which the sadhak might receive something from the Mother by an interchange in the material consciousness.”⁷ In his report about it, K. D. Sethna has captured something of the mystical atmosphere which prevailed during the soup distribution: “It was a very important function every evening. It impressed me like a snatch of the Ancient Mysteries. The atmosphere was as in some secret temple of Egyptian or Greek times...”⁸

Since 1927 the first day of the month had been the ‘Prosperity-Day’. On this day the Mother gave to the sadhaks their monthly needs and requirements, such as clothes, stationery and other things. The disciples could make their requests in advance on a chit. Some of them often asked only for the Mother’s blessings, whilst others made a long list of their requirements. In both cases the requests were fulfilled.

In 1930 there was pranam on five days in the week and on the other two days flowers were distributed at soup time. Many sadhaks gathered now in the morning on the pavement facing the Mother’s balcony in order to catch a glimpse of her. As a rule, she was expected at 6.15 a.m., but often her coming was delayed. Even then a few sadhaks kept waiting until she appeared. This developed into a regular balcony darshan which was continued for 30 years to come. In the following quotation the Mother explains what she was doing for the disciples during darshan: “Every morning, at the balcony, after establishing a conscious contact with each of those who are present, I identify myself with the Supreme Lord and merge myself completely in Him. Then my body, completely passive, is nothing but a channel

⁷ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 2:57

⁸ K. R. S. Iyengar’s *On the Mother* 1:289

through which the Lord passes freely His forces and pours on all His Light, His Consciousness and His Joy, according to each one's receptivity."⁹

Moreover, there were three special darshan days: the birthdays of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo (21 February, 15 August), and 24 November, the day of the descent of overmind. 24 April (day of the final arrival of the Mother in Pondicherry) was added in 1939. The darshan began at 6.30 a.m. and lasted until about 2 p. m. It took place in a small room to the south east of Sri Aurobindo's room and every sadhak or visitor was given about 1½. minutes to spend in the presence of the two avatars. This arrangement remained unchanged until 1938 when Sri Aurobindo suffered a fracture of the right thigh-bone and could not come for the November darshan. Afterwards the number of sadhaks and visitors increased so much that this kind of individual darshan was not possible any more and so they passed before Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in a long line to shorten the procedure.

Darshan should not be considered as a mere ceremony of reverence towards the guru. The proper purpose was to enable the disciples to share the respective inner advance and achievement of the master and to transfer something of it on them. The Mother stated in this context: "In the days when Sri Aurobindo used to give Darshan, before he gave it there was always a concentration of certain forces or of a certain realisation which he wanted to give people. And so each Darshan marked a stage forward; each time something was added. But that was at a time when the number of visitors was very limited."¹⁰ We may assume that this purpose of a transfer of spiritual force remained the same even in later times, but it did not take place any more in the same intensive and concrete form.

⁹ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother's Life* 2:68

¹⁰ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother's Life* 2:71

VIII. SADHANA

The Ashram was formed with the object of providing a suitable background for the sadhana, the spiritual discipline, of the seekers. Even at young age the Mother had conceived the idea that there should be a place where seekers of God could completely dedicate themselves to spiritual life without any material worries and problems. Such a place was taking shape now and the Mother supervised its development in all details, whilst Sri Aurobindo was opening a path towards Supermind which should eventually be within reach for all sadhaks. The aim which he had set himself went far beyond the traditional aim of moksha, spiritual liberation of the aspirant. The Mother explains, in the following statement, the rationale of integral sadhana:

“...Sri Aurobindo’s Sadhana starts where the others end. Once the union with the Supreme is realised, one must bring down that realisation to the external world and change the conditions of life upon the earth until a total transformation is accomplished. In accordance with this aim, the Sadhaks of the integral Yoga do not retire from the world to lead a life of contemplation and meditation. Each one must devote at least one-third of his time to a useful work. All activities are represented in the Ashram and each one chooses the work most congenial to his nature, but must do it in a spirit of service and unselfishness, keeping always in view the aim of integral transformation.”¹

The sadhaks were called upon to open entirely to the divine Force and to participate as far as possible in the inner advance of the two avatars. In the early years there was a rather strict discipline. Family and vital relations between sadhaks were largely excluded. Everyone was left to himself and stood alone before the Divine. The Mother herself conducted the sadhana of the disciples, as long as their number was limited: “...We began with thirty-five, thirty-six; but even till a hundred and fifty, even till a hundred and fifty it was so like... they were as though held in an egg-shell in my consciousness, so close, you know, that I could direct all movements, both inner and outer, all the time, everything was under complete control, at every moment, night and day. And naturally, I believe, in those days they made some progress. It was altogether true that I did the sadhana for them, *all the time!*”²

¹ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 2:46-47

² Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 2:49

Later on, when the number of disciples had grown considerably and when children were brought into the Ashram in the course of the Second World War, many changes took place and there was a wider framework. The Mother explained that this widening of the radius of life was necessary since life as such was to be transformed in all its fullness and with all its manifestations. But even then a minimum of discipline had to be observed: smoking, alcohol, sex and political activities were prohibited, since they would pull down the Ashram atmosphere and thus form an obstacle to the supramental manifestation.

Meanwhile, the Mother's work was made difficult through numberless problems and obstructions. The sadhaks were a representative selection of mankind. As such they did not only embody the highest possibilities in mankind, but also its deepest resistances against the descent of the divine Light. Every single obstacle had to be tackled and worked out and every small victory meant a gain for all humanity. We may imagine that behind every sadhak there was an endless line of men of a similar type, who would profit from his victory or share the consequences of his defeat. A mighty work was being undertaken.

Some sadhaks wished to get direct guidance from Sri Aurobindo, but he wrote them that they had to receive his help through the Mother and that this was the most effective path for doing his yoga. The same arrangement had been made for all sadhaks, and he was not prepared to make any exceptions. Some sadhaks were suffering, because not they themselves, but others were constantly in the Mother's close company. Here too Sri Aurobindo had to write many letters and remove misunderstandings by clarifying that it was the inner opening which was of decisive importance. Envy, jealousy, pride and selfishness – all variants of the human ego – had their play and had to be eliminated by the Mother with endless patience. Swami Vivekananda has used the image of the curled dog's tail which always curls back howsoever often you may straighten it: this is the very characteristic of human nature whose transformation is a veritable Sisyphus labour. The manifestation of Supermind required a safe foundation in the form of a nucleus of sadhaks who gave themselves completely to the Divine. Sri Aurobindo once said that he needed one hundred such sadhaks who lived exclusively for the Divine, in order to be able to do his work. The admission to the Ashram was not a guarantee for spiritual success – it was the confirmation of a possibility of realisation.

Basically, the sadhana of Integral Yoga proceeds in three steps: psychic, spiritual and supramental transformation. The principal means are surrender to the Divine and

intense aspiration. If these two conditions are fulfilled by the sadhak, the Divine answers with the descent of a supreme Force and Grace from above, which alone can effect the transformation.

Psychic transformation is the first preparatory and indispensable step. It brings with it a decisive turning of the entire being towards the Divine, an elimination of all elements in nature which are crude and obscure, and an organisation of all parts of the being – the physical, vital and mental – around the psychic being. The psychic being is the soul in evolution, which is ever again taking birth in new bodies and assimilating the essence of all experiences. It grows slowly in the course of its human incarnations until it finally emerges and directs the nature of man towards his divine origin. It is like a silver thread running through all births, the one constant factor, but not to be confused with the Atman, the Self which is ever-the-same and unchanging and of which the psychic being is a delegate in the world of evolution. It exists only in living beings on *earth* which is, as it were, a focus point of evolution in the universe. Sri Aurobindo has given elaborate explanations on the psychic being in his writings and the Mother frequently refers to it in her talks. It is one of the specific discoveries of the two avatars and their great merit to have brought, at last, clarity into the terms of self and soul.

Along with the psychic transformation, but generally when it has reached an advanced stage, the spiritual transformation begins, which brings a descent of Light, Joy, Force and Truth into the whole being of man, which gets now irrevocably established in the Divine and the Infinite. Only after this transformation has been completed or nearly completed, can the supramental transformation take over, in the course of which the entire nature of man gets transformed and divinised up to the very cells of the body. A new being is formed which Sri Aurobindo called superman, a term which has nothing in common with the popular idea of the super-hero of the comics or the aristocratic master-man of Nietzsche's imagination. Sri Aurobindo had, by the way, a thorough knowledge of the writings of the German poet-philosopher and he refers to him more than two dozen times in his own writings. He points out that Nietzsche had some correct intuitions regarding the future man, but that he mostly spoiled and disfigured them, by bringing in his personal thinking mind. One of his correct intuitions was the idea that evolution will not stop with man and that a new being will evolve who will be as different from man as man is from the ape. There are other thoughts too – especially in *Thus spoke Zarathustra* – which come close to Sri Aurobindo's concept. But all in all Nietzsche was misled by his idea of the master-man (Herrenmensch), which is, in Indian terms, an asuric figure with anti-

divine characteristics, and he has thus missed his aim, a failure which possibly had more than philosophical consequences.

Sri Aurobindo's superman is a cosmic being, in close touch with all life in the Universe and conscious of the oneness of all existence. He is a dynamic centre of the Divine on earth; he acts, free from ego, in harmony with the universal laws. He is a channel for the divine Love, for Light and Truth on Earth. In a higher stage of development even his body is included in the process of transformation, starting with a change of the physical functions and then the very cells of the body. Occasionally a distinction is made between superman and the supramental being. Whilst the former represents, so to say, the utmost that can be made out of man in the process of transformation, the supramental being is already a member of a higher species originating from a more elevated plane than human beings. It already has a higher, more plastic body which is not subject to the laws of ordinary mortality, formed, as it were, from materialized spirit-stuff. To speak in a lighter vein, such a being could – to use an amusing image of K. D. Sethna – sit smilingly under the equator sun without perspiration, by using some kind of inner air-conditioning, and he could feel at ease as well at the North Pole without shivering, by producing inner heat.

This is the ideal, the distant aim. Generally speaking, we may say that for most seekers only the first two stages of transformation are immediately relevant, even though Supermind, like a distant sun, may have some indirect impact on our being and prepare it for a future realisation. To organise all parts of the being around the Psyche and keep it always in the forefront is in itself a considerable task to whose necessity the Mother refers again and again in her talks. She often helped sadhaks or devotees through her intervention to re-establish the lost contact with the inner centre and to make it prevail against depression, doubt and desire. Sri Aurobindo has pointed out that the psychic opening is truly the real key for a successful sadhana in this yoga:

“By remaining psychically open to the Mother, all that is necessary for work or Sadhana develops progressively, that is one of the chief secrets, the central secret of the Sadhana.”³

“It is only those who are capable by aspiration and meditation on the Mother to open and receive her action and working within that can succeed in this Yoga.”⁴

³ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother's Life* 2:85

⁴ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother's Life* 2:85

IX. THE INNER WORK

The outer activity of the Mother, her role as head and organiser of the Ashram, as a guru of the sadhaks, was only one aspect of her life, the visible side of her work. She had another wider existence in the inner planes too. The inner experiences which according to her own statement took place uninterruptedly, could certainly fill a whole library if they had been registered second by second. But only a fraction of it has been recorded, partly in her talks, partly in Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*. This main work of Sri Aurobindo in poetry, which takes its motive from a story in the Mahabharata, an ancient Indian epic, is a spiritual epic in nearly 24.000 blank verses. Sri Aurobindo was expressing here his own experiences, his spiritual odyssey, in mantric lines and sought all throughout to receive inspiration from the highest planes that are accessible to a poet. *Savitri* reflects, in coded language, not only his own yoga path, but also experiences of the Mother. She has said that at almost the beginning of the century she had occult experiences which she had never told Sri Aurobindo about, but when at one period of the Ashram he used to read out to her in the morning what he had written at night in *Savitri*, she found the passages reflecting these early experiences of hers.

In the following we give a short sample of Sri Aurobindo's mantric poetry. It is a profound portrait of Savitri or, we may say, the Mother herself:

Near to earth's wideness, intimate with heaven,
Exalted and swift her young large-visioned spirit
Voyaging through worlds of splendour and of calm
Overflew the ways of Thought to unborn things.
Ardent was her self-poised unstumbling will;
Her mind, a sea of white sincerity,
Passionate in flow, had not one turbid wave...
Her look, her smile, awoke celestial sense
Even in earth-stuff, and their intense delight
Poured a supernal beauty on men's lives.¹

It happened quite naturally now that an ever growing number of sadhaks and devotees were concentrating on the Mother and requiring her attention. Unending cascades of prayers were directed towards her, requests for help in sadhana, help in

¹ *Savitri* (Cent. Ed.), pp. 14-15

life, support in illness and calamity. And as once she said, it was part of her mission (and may even be so today, since the inner work is being continued) that she *had to* consider every sincere prayer, as part of her cosmic work. Disciples, who requested her help and wrote to her or Sri Aurobindo, often received the answer inwardly, after completing the letter or dispatching it, or as soon as it reached the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. In the following letter to a disciple Sri Aurobindo gives us an idea of the volume of the inner work to which the Mother had to attend:

“Certainly X’s call for help did reach the Mother, even though all the details she relates in her letter might not have been present to the Mother’s physical mind. Always calls of this kind are coming to the Mother, sometimes a hundred close upon each other, and always the answer is given. The occasions are of all kinds, but whatever the need that occasions the call, the Force is there to answer it. That is the principle of this action on the occult plane. It is not of the same kind as an ordinary human action and does not need a written or oral communication of the one who calls; an interchange of psychic communication is quite sufficient to set the Force at work.”²

Even at night this work was being continued by the Mother, as Sri Aurobindo pointed out in another letter:

“The Mother’s sleep is not sleep but an inner consciousness in which she is in connection with people or working everywhere. At the time she is aware, but she does not carry all that always into her waking consciousness or in her memory. A call would come in the occupied waking mind as the thought of the person coming – in a more free or in a concentrated state as a communication from the person in question; in a deeper concentration or in sleep or trance she would see the person coming and speaking to her or she herself going there. Besides that, wherever the Force is working, the Presence is there.”³

Yet another important aspect of her inner working was her Yoga of physical transformation which was also basically an invisible process. We shall discuss this in Chapter XV.

² Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 2:86-87

³ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 2:87

X. FOUR ASPECTS OF THE MOTHER

A sadhak once asked Sri Aurobindo why the Mother had such a different appearance at different times, even on the same day. Even physical changes could be observed. Sri Aurobindo answered that it depended on the personality which she was manifesting at that time, “she has many personalities and the body is plastic enough to express something of each when it comes forward.”¹ In a short writing, entitled *The Mother*, Sri Aurobindo has described the personalities of the Mother and their respective functions. The centre-piece of this classical writing is the description of her four main aspects:

“Four great Aspects of the Mother, four of her leading Powers and Personalities have stood in front in her guidance of this Universe and in her dealings with the terrestrial play. One is her personality of calm wideness and comprehending wisdom and tranquil benignity and inexhaustible compassion and sovereign and surpassing majesty and all-ruling greatness. Another embodies her power of splendid strength and irresistible passion, her warrior mood, her overwhelming will, her impetuous swiftness and world-shaking force. A third is vivid and sweet and wonderful with her deep secret of beauty and harmony and fine rhythm, her intricate and subtle opulence, her compelling attraction and captivating grace. The fourth is equipped with her close and profound capacity of intimate knowledge and careful flawless work and quiet and exact perfection in all things. Wisdom, Strength, Harmony, Perfection are their several attributes and it is these powers that they bring with them into the world... To the four we give the four great names, Maheshwari, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi, Mahasaraswati...”²

One of these Forces, Mahakali, we came across already in an early stage of the Mother’s life, when she protected a schoolmate from the insults of a bully and threw him vehemently to the ground, obviously with a supernatural force. Among all personalities of the Mother Mahakali is the one which is most difficult to bear for the seeker. On the other hand, it is also the most effective. Like a sword-stroke it hits at the falsehood in the being of the seeker and tries to expel the wrong element through a swift, but at first painful operation. This may happen in the form of a sudden shock, some unbearable rebuke, or a strict rejection. Even while the ego is hit in the process and is ‘losing’, the soul is given an opportunity to come forward, since a little of the surrounding crust has been sheared off. But this presupposes that the seeker does not

¹ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 2:24

² Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 2:27-28

identify himself too strongly with his ego, thereby preventing the working of the Grace or reducing its effectivity.



The Mother, 'Realisation'

Mahalakshmi is the one personality which is most accessible to human beings; “there is no aspect of the Divine Shakti more attractive to the heart of embodied beings,”³ writes Sri Aurobindo. Animals too turn towards her in love and even the most ferocious ones become gentle in her presence, said the Mother in a commentary.

Maheshwari is the Force which lays down and works out the large lines of creation. She has the vision of the whole and determines how the universe shall be. She is less interested in details, which are worked out by Mahasaraswati. The latter is the goddess of Perfection and insists that all work is to be executed most carefully.

There are other personalities of the Mother which however stand more in the background and are more difficult to receive. Among them, we may specially name her personality of Ananda, divine joy. This power alone “can heal the gulf between

³ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother's Life* 2:28

the highest heights of the supramental spirit and the lowest abysses of Matter”.⁴ This Ananda personality came down in 1946, but no sadhak was ready to receive it. “... If she is to stay here and carry on her action,” the Mother explained to her disciples, “she must find at least one human being who has the required qualities in the vital and physical, a kind of super-Parsifal gifted with a spontaneous and integral purity but at the same time possessing a body solid and balanced enough to sustain unbendingly the intensity of the Ananda which she brings.”⁵

⁴ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 2:30

⁵ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 2:31-32

XI. SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM AND THE WORLD (1938-50)

The ancient Indian Scriptures abound with reports on the struggle between the asuric (undivine, hostile) and divine forces. This subject is already dealt with in the Veda, but some Western scholars have imagined that it refers to a conflict between invading Aryans and native Dravidians, even though there is no evidence at all in the ancient literature for such an invasion. Sri Aurobindo has given an elaborate commentary on this curious misunderstanding which had even political consequences in the form of an unnatural antagonism between the speakers of the so-called Dravidian languages who live in South India and those who speak the so-called Aryan tongues living in the North. He has also provided the key to the true meaning of the symbolical language of the Veda in his work *The Secret of the Veda*.

The Mahabharata and the Puranas too give an account of the struggle between the Gods and the Asuras. The Mahabharata is in itself the story of a conflict between two parties which respectively represent dharma (righteousness) and adharma (lawlessness). Sri Krishna, the avatar of that time, who is to be seen in close connection with Sri Aurobindo (Sri Aurobindo once stated that there was oneness in consciousness between himself and Sri Krishna), enters the battle by becoming the charioteer of the main hero of the progressive forces in the war. The Bhagavadgita tells us how he gives powerful psychological support to Arjuna and pulls him out of a deep inner crisis just on the eve of the battle. Even though in these ancient scriptures the divine side is always victorious at the end, the Asuras sometimes achieve terrible triumphs over the divine forces and bring them to the verge of crushing defeat, which gives them temporary victory and domination.

A similar drama has been enacted now in the world of the 20th century. Whilst Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were trying to lay the foundation for a new golden Age, mighty demons like Hitler and Stalin were turning the time backwards, frightening the world with their atrocities. Among these two, Hitler was the immediate danger since he had an insatiable thirst for world domination and was systematically expanding his empire. Sri Aurobindo was well-informed about all important developments in the world in spite of his withdrawal from public life and he was using his Force here and there to give a positive direction to various critical situations. In contrast to other Indian systems, his Yoga was not independent of developments in the world; the descent of supermind was linked with the necessity of a certain progress, a certain receptivity of earth-nature as such, and an atavistic power like Hitler formed a major obstacle for his work. Sri Aurobindo was therefore getting

ready for the battle, but at first he suffered a heavy blow by way of an accident in the night of 23 to 24 November when he stumbled over a tiger skin and suffered a fracture of his right thigh. The complicated fracture required long treatment over a period of several months. A team of five doctors and helpers was formed who constantly attended to Sri Aurobindo. The Mother too was concentrating with all her power on his recovery, and pranams to her and her meetings with sadhaks were therefore restricted. Paradoxically, this accident also meant the end of his seclusion, since he was depending on the help of his attendants with whom he allowed himself to be drawn into long talks. The disciples also had an opportunity now to watch Sri Aurobindo and the Mother together and they got a glimpse of their close relationship. "The Mother and I are one and equal," wrote Sri Aurobindo; "Without him I exist not; without me he is unmanifest,"¹ declared the Mother, and this unique spiritual relationship between two avatars was the foundation for the work of supramental manifestation.

After Sri Aurobindo's accident the Mother had given darshan alone to the shocked sadhaks and visitors. When it became known in April next year that Sri Aurobindo had largely recovered from the consequences of the accident, the sadhaks asked for a special darshan, since August 15 seemed too distant. Sri Aurobindo consented and since then April 24, the day of the Mother's final arrival in Pondicherry, has been the fourth darshan day.

The years to come were entirely dominated by the events of the Second World War. Sri Aurobindo put all his Force behind the Allies and especially Churchill. One particular event in which he had a hand was the successful evacuation from Dunkirk. As some history-books note, the German forces refrained 'for inexplicable reasons' from a quick advance which would have been fatal for the Allies. Another significant date was 15 August 1940, Sri Aurobindo's birthday. Hitler had hoped to broadcast from Buckingham Palace in a defeated England on this day. But his Luftwaffe could not subdue it and actually on that day the German Forces suffered a loss of 75 planes in the air battle over England. The invasion project was finally abandoned after the British Air Force had inflicted further heavy losses on the Luftwaffe on 15 September.

Due to her occult faculties the Mother was able to look deep into Hitler's being and she saw that he was in contact with an asura who is at the origin of wars and makes every possible effort to prevent the advent of world unity.

¹ Mother India, June 83, p. 333

“Hitler... was in contact with a being whom he considered to be the Supreme: this being came and gave him advice, told him all he had to do. Hitler used to retire into solitude and remain there as long as it was necessary to come into contact with his ‘guide’ and receive from him inspirations which he carried out later very faithfully. This being which Hitler took for the Supreme was plainly an Asura, one who is called ‘the Lord of Falsehood’ in occultism, but who proclaimed himself ‘the Lord of the Nations’ Generally he used to appear to Hitler wearing a silver cuirass and helmet; a kind of flame came out of his head and there was an atmosphere of dazzling light around him, so dazzling that Hitler could hardly look at him. He used to tell Hitler everything that had to be done – he played with him as with a monkey or a mouse. He had decided clearly to make Hitler commit all possible extravagances till the day he would break his neck.”²

When Hitler was going from success to success in Europe and when his advance seemed irresistible, the Mother used her occult power to check the ‘Lord of Falsehood’ and worked so that Hitler might take the decision to attack his erstwhile ally Stalin. Whilst the two titans got locked in battle, the Allies got some reprieve.

Meanwhile, another problem was coming up in the Ashram itself. Like most of their countrymen, many Indian sadhaks were wishing not for Hitler’s defeat, but rather for the quick destruction of the British Empire, which would bring the long expected liberation from foreign rule. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had to work against this idea of the sadhaks through many letters and statements, asking them not to help Hitler’s cause by their wrong thoughts, for his victory would mean a powerful setback in evolution and entail the subjection not only of all Europe, but ultimately of Asia itself, whilst a victory of the Allies would keep all possibilities open for further evolution. Sri Aurobindo wrote in a letter: “Even if I knew that the Allies would misuse their victory or bungle the peace... I would still put my force behind them. At any rate things could not be one-hundredth part as bad as they would be under Hitler. The ways of the Lord would still be open – to keep them open is what matters.”³

There were further difficulties coming up in the wake of the Second World War. The food supply became rather critical and this at a time when many sadhaks from the North-East of India, which was now in the danger zone because of the advance of Hitler’s oriental ally, the Japanese army, brought their children and families to Pondicherry. Because of these special circumstances the Mother for the first time admitted children to the Ashram life and opened a school on 2 December 1943. It

² CWM 4:185-86

³ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 2:162

was started with 20 children, but the number grew steadily. The Mother herself held classes too. When she was later asked why children had not been admitted before the war, she said:

“...my children, it is very simple. Because where there are children, you have to be busy most of the time with them only! Children are very absorbing creatures. Everything must be organised for them, everything must be arranged in view of their welfare, and the whole aspect of life changes. Children are most important personages. When they are there, everything turns around them. And the entire organisation of the Ashram has completely changed.” The Mother further explained that to grown-up people one could give a strict discipline which was to be followed if they wanted to stay in the Ashram, but this could not be done in the case of children who had not yet attained maturity and were unable to make a conscious choice. “One cannot tell them: ‘You have chosen, therefore you have to take it or leave it, either you do this or you go away.’ They have been brought here, hence it is one’s duty to give them what they need; and the needs of children are not at all the same as those of big people. It is much more complicated.”⁴

Whilst the Mother was trying to shield the Ashram life from the impact of the war and to sow the seed for a brighter future by educating the children, the great holocaust continued in the war theatres of Europe and Asia. It was now in the interest of Britain to grant Independence to India, and therefore Sir Stafford Cripps was sent to India as a special envoy to offer India a status as a dominion in the British Empire, which would not yet be complete independence, but a decisive step towards the long-expected freedom. Sri Aurobindo supported this proposal and sent a message to the political leaders of the country that they should accept it. However, they were not prepared to listen to him and rejected the offer of the British Government and thereby the divine Grace, which – according to the Mother – stood behind Cripps’ mission. The consequences of this rejection have been aptly described in the *Oxford History of India*: “So the golden moment passed and with it the last real chance of establishing a united independent India. The rejection of the offer was the prelude to the partition.”⁵

The final victory of the Allies in the Second World War was also Sri Aurobindo’s victory, a victory for the Ashram which could now continue its spiritual work without immediate menace. Another great event came on 15 August 1947 when India was granted Independence on Sri Aurobindo’s birthday. But it was for him a gift with a bitter aftertaste, because the partition of India and the creation of Pakistan was in his

⁴ CWM 5:287-88

⁵ The Oxford History of India, p. 828

vision a grave human error and not divinely intended. In the occult vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother the true India includes Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and even Burma. A sketch of this complete India in bas relief has been prominently displayed on a huge wall facing the Ashram Playground, and it also appears on the front page of the monthly journal *Mother India* to contrast, as it were, the present 'reality' with the spiritual Truth. As has been said, it is not the question here of historical or political rights, but of occult vision.

Apart from the Ashram School, another new development in these years was the Department of Physical Education. Sports and gymnastics were practised under the guidance of 'captains', and all this formed part of the Yoga or was a preparation for it. The Mother herself spent much of her time watching and directing these activities, and she played table tennis and later tennis, which is in her vision the king of sports. She introduced some novelties which seemed revolutionary for the India of that time, e.g. shorts as sports dress for the girls, which shocked many elderly sadhaks and devotees. Some parents even planned now to send their daughters to another school. But only a few followers had such a narrow-minded reaction and the Mother's practical changes were soon accepted. Nirodbaran, a sadhak from the close circle of Sri Aurobindo, reports in his book *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, how he admired, on one hand, the Mother's revolutionary step, but how, on the other hand, he was a little worried about the risks of such new ventures. He makes then an interesting observation: "At the same time I knew that the Mother's very nature is to face danger. And whenever we had tried to argue with her that we were doing new things which were not done outside, she replied sharply, 'Why should we follow the others? They have no ideas, we have ideas. I have come to break down old conventions and superstitions.'"6

The Mother was spending so much time on the Playground now that Sri Aurobindo had to reassure some disciples and tell them that this was only a temporary stage and that "a complete withdrawal from spiritual life and an apotheosis of the Deity of Sport"⁷ was not to be apprehended. Furthermore, he clarified that no one should fear to lose her favour because of non-participation in sports activities and that a number of her closest and most valued workers had never set foot on the Playground. However, we may note that the Mother was encouraging everyone, young and old, who had some inclination or capacity for physical education programs, to participate in them.

⁶ *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, pp. 117-18

⁷ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother's Life* 2:182

Even today these programs take an important place in the Ashram life and are compulsory for all students. Athletics, swimming, gymnastics and games form part of this program as well as (optionally) table tennis, tennis, Judo, Karate, etc. A group of senior sadhaks performs Swedish drill exercises for half an hour every evening, certainly not a small feat for disciples who are fifty, sixty or even eighty years old, considering the hot sultry climate of Pondicherry. It is but natural that the emphasis here is less on records – even though these are also registered – than on regularity, endurance, sportsmanship and overcoming of resistances in the body which is thus made a better vessel for the divine Force.

In this way the whole day was filled with purposeful activities which could be used as means for sadhana. Furthermore, there were occasional meetings with the Mother on the Playground, at work, on Darshan days or on birthdays. The latter were a very special occasion in the life of every sadhak. The Mother once explained the deeper meaning of birthdays in a talk with Mona Sarkar, a captain of the Department of Physical Education. In the following text he quotes the Mother from memory:

“Yes, it is truly a special day in one’s life. It is one of those days in the year when the Supreme descends into us – or when we are face to face with the Eternal – one of those days when our soul comes into contact with the Eternal and, if we remain a little conscious, we can feel His Presence within us. If we make a little effort on this



In the Playground

day, we accomplish the work of many lives as in a lightning flash. That is why I give so much importance to the birthday – because what one gains in one day is truly something incomparable.”⁸

On their birthdays, the sadhaks went to the Mother with a flower offering and spent some time with her. She gave them her blessings, and a small gift or a helpful word for their sadhana, and some were also given a new name on this occasion. At the end she gave a bunch of flowers to the sadhak, which were arranged in such a way that the symbolical meaning of the flowers formed a significant sentence or guide-line for the disciple.

⁸ Sweet Mother – Harmonies of Light, pp. 16-17

XII. SRI AUROBINDO LEAVES HIS BODY

The history of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram until 1950 could be presented in three periods of 12 years: 1914 – first physical meeting of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and the beginning of their collaboration. 1926 – descent of Overmind; the Mother takes charge of the Ashram. 1938 – Sri Aurobindo’s accident which takes him out of his seclusion; beginning of a decisive battle against asuric forces. 1950 – Sri Aurobindo leaves his body in order to continue his work from the subtle-physical plane, whilst the Mother strives on for the fulfillment of his object on earth: the manifestation of Supermind, which, in its turn, took place six years later in the earth’s subtle-physical layer.

By the end of 1950 Sri Aurobindo developed a kidney infection which did not appear serious at first. The sadhaks attending on him, among them some doctors, felt quite confident that he could heal the illness by sheer spiritual will-force as he had done so often in the case of disciples and devotees. But the illness became more and more serious. After the School Anniversary functions on 1 and 2 December were over, his fever rose dangerously in the afternoon of 3 December. December 4 brought some improvement, but when Sri Aurobindo was asked by a disciple, “Are you using your force to get rid of the disease?” his surprising answer was a plain “No”. When questioned “why”, he replied: “Can’t explain. You won’t understand.” Nirodbaran writes: “Here at last was the key to the mystery! That is why the disease had progressed step by step, marked by three clear stages in its downward path: the completion of *Savitri*, Darshan on November 24, and the School Anniversary, each stage followed by a deeper and deeper in-drawn condition. It was about one of the final stages that the Mother remarked, ‘Whenever I was there, I used to see him pulling down the Supramental Light.’ It was clear from this statement what Sri Aurobindo was busy with. He had shifted his gaze and concentration to something else which, to his view, must have been much more important than minding the afflictions of the body.”¹

On 5 December, at 1.26 in the morning Sri Aurobindo left his body. Dr. Sanyal who had been attending on Sri Aurobindo asked to call the Mother. He reports: “Almost immediately the Mother entered the room. She stood there, near the feet of Sri Aurobindo... Her look was so fierce that I could not face those eyes.”² The Mother looked at Sri Aurobindo for half an hour in silent concentration and then she turned

¹ To Thee Our Infinite Gratitude, p. 26

² Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 2:205

towards Dr. Sanyal: “Softly She came to me, touched my head, stilled my thoughts, quietened my mind. No trace of agony was left, I could think normally. I asked Her, ‘What is to be done, we have to arrange for the last offices.’ She quietly said, ‘He will be given Samadhi, under the Service tree, in the place where the giant maidenhair plants are arranged.’ ”³

All the Ashram members and the public were informed and an endless line of sadhaks and devotees passed through Sri Aurobindo’s Room for a last darshan. A supramental Light was enveloping his body and preventing its decomposition. On 6 December the Mother said to Dr. Sanyal: “People do not know what a tremendous sacrifice He has made for the world. About a year ago, while I was discussing things I remarked that I felt like leaving this body of mine. He spoke out in a very firm tone, ‘No, this can never be. If necessary for this transformation I might go, you will have to fulfil our yoga of supramental descent and transformation.’ ”⁴

On the third day too no signs of decomposition were observed. According to the Laws of Pondicherry, a French doctor had to be called to confirm this. On 9 December in the morning the supramental aura started gradually withdrawing from Sri Aurobindo’s body and in the evening the body was placed into a prepared samadhi under the Ashram Service Tree.

Later on, the Mother explained the reason for his departure:

“Sri Aurobindo has given up his body in an act of supreme unselfishness, renouncing the realisation in his body to hasten the hour of the collective realisation. Surely if the earth were more responsive, this would not have been necessary.

“When I asked him to resuscitate he clearly answered: ‘I have left this body purposely. I will not take it back. I shall manifest again in the first supramental body built in the supramental way.’ ”⁵

Many Ashram members were shocked and the Mother had to use all her power and concentration to ward off the depression in the atmosphere. More than ever the sadhaks and devotees were required now to establish the inner contact and she asked them in a number of messages to feel Sri Aurobindo’s living Presence:

“To grieve is an insult to Sri Aurobindo who is here with us, conscious and alive.

³ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 2:206

⁴ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 2:207

⁵ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 2:209

“We must not be bewildered by appearances. Sri Aurobindo has not left us. Sri Aurobindo is here, as living and as present as ever and it is left to us to realise his work with all the sincerity, eagerness and concentration necessary.”⁶

⁶ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 2:212

XIII. THE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE OF EDUCATION

Sri Aurobindo had left his body, but not the work for whose achievement he had come on earth. The Mother stood alone now and shouldered the burden with unbroken determination. The following lines in *Savitri* – they were among the last which Sri Aurobindo dictated – prophetically point towards her new role:

A day may come when she must stand unhelped
On a dangerous brink of the world's doom and hers,
Carrying the world's future on her lonely breast,
Carrying the human hope in a heart left sole
To conquer or fail on a last desperate verge.
Alone with death and close to extinction's edge,
Her single greatness in that last dire scene,
She must cross alone a perilous bridge in Time
And reach an apex of world-destiny...¹

Even though the Mother was 'alone' now in her physical incarnation, the communion with Sri Aurobindo continued on the inner plane: "Sri Aurobindo whom I know and with whom I lived physically for thirty years... has not left me, not for a moment – for He is still with me, day and night, thinking through my brain, writing through my pen, speaking through my mouth and acting through my organising power."² While she was continuing the supramental Yoga on the physical plane, Sri Aurobindo was influencing earth-events from the subtle-physical plane, 'from the other side', as it were, free from the limitations of the physical body.

After a twelve days' break the Mother resumed her activities on 17 December and she increasingly occupied herself with the children now for whom she held special classes on every Tuesday, Friday and Sunday. She gave French lessons, told instructive stories and reported many interesting incidents from her own life. Some children also went to the Mother at other times and were literally enveloped in her love. We may quote from the reminiscences of Tara who belonged to a small group of children that went daily to the Mother: "We used to have a real little ceremony every day. After we had offered our flowers to the Mother, she chose a few of them for each of us, and gave us each a big red tomato. Then we would form a little circle, placing our arms around each other's shoulders. Promesse stood in the centre of the

¹ *Savitri* (Cent. Ed.), p. 461

² Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother's Life* 2:210

circle. The Mother drew us towards her until our heads touched and came into contact with hers. Then she would concentrate for a moment before saying ‘Au revoir’ to us.”³ The youngest member of this group of children was 2½ year old

In June 1951 she started the ‘Wednesday-classes’, at first with no more than seven children. But this group grew quickly and soon there were thirty members. Many Ashram sadhaks also wished now to join the sessions in order to participate in the interesting talks between the Mother and her students. They were allowed to sit behind the circle of the young students. Many joined the group even though they did not understand French. After some time all talks were recorded on tape and published in an Ashram journal. A great part of the Mother’s works is made up of the transcripts of these recordings.

The Ashram School had been started on a small scale on 2 December 1943 and formed a first basis for the educational activities of the Mother. But now the time had come for a far more comprehensive experiment. On 24 April 1951 the Mother announced in a Convention with leading intellectuals and educationalists of the



Story-telling day in the Mother’s class

³ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 2:220-21

country the foundation of an International University Centre, which was inaugurated on 6 January 1952. In 1959 the ‘Sri Aurobindo International University Centre’ was renamed the ‘Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education’.

The idea of such an institution had already been expressed by Sri Aurobindo. At the Convention in April 1951 the Mother declared: “Sri Aurobindo is present in our midst, and with all the power of his creative genius he presides over the formation of the University Centre which for years he considered as one of the best means of preparing the future humanity to receive the supramental light that will transform the *elite* of today into a new race manifesting upon earth the new light and force and life.”⁴

The primary aim of this institution was not to produce brilliant students, but to allow young souls to grow into a higher life through a comprehensive, integral education. It was the teacher’s task to create for every student the necessary conditions for his development and to awaken in him the joy of learning, of discovery. Instead of filling the students with mere book knowledge, they should be encouraged to develop the gift of intuition which every child naturally possesses until it loses it through wrong education and teaching. Moreover, the emphasis was to be on *integral* education: the Mother made it clear that she did not want pale pattern-pupils. Therefore the daily sports program in the evening is compulsory for all students.

The ideal teacher has, in the Mother’s words, the following qualities:

1. Complete self-control not only to the extent of not showing any anger, but remaining absolutely quiet and undisturbed under all circumstances.
2. In the matter of self-confidence, must also have a sense of the relativity of his importance.

Above all, must have the knowledge that the teacher himself must always progress if he wants his students to progress, must not remain satisfied either with what he is or with what he knows.

3. Must not have any sense of essential superiority over his students nor preference or attachment whatsoever for one or another.

4. Must know that all are equal spiritually and instead of mere tolerance must have a global comprehension or understanding.

⁴ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 2:227

5. “The business of both parent and teacher is to enable and to help the child to educate himself, to develop his own intellectual, moral, aesthetic and practical capacities and to grow freely as an organic being, not to be kneaded and pressured into form like an inert plastic material.”⁵

The main emphasis in the lessons should not be on factual knowledge, but on the growth of consciousness and the capacity for autonomous self-development:

“Essentially, the *only thing* you should do assiduously is to teach them to know themselves and choose their own destiny, the path they will follow; to teach them to look at themselves *and* to will what they want to be. That is infinitely more important than teaching them what happened on earth in former times, or even how the earth is built...”⁶

Of course, whatever knowledge is required for daily life, is also imparted. In fact the standard of education at the International Centre is exceptionally high. The mere fact that all students grow up with four languages speaks for itself. While Sciences are taught in French, Humanities are taught in English. Then there is the mother tongue of the student (that is, mostly an Indian language) and Sanskrit which is compulsory now. Already in the Kindergarten a Sanskrit scholar talks with the children in Sanskrit, using simple words and sentences – it is the nature method. The physical education too is excellent and highly diversified. We have already referred to it. As for the vital being, the children are encouraged to develop qualities such as cheerfulness, sincerity, patience, endurance, equality and fairness.

The Mother has emphasized from the beginning that the International Centre should develop its own methods of teaching and pedagogy. A living relationship between teacher and student, who are ultimately both in the process of learning, is the precondition for such a school of the future. There are no marks and diplomas, which removes considerable obstacles from the atmosphere. However, there are ways by which the student can monitor his own progress objectively. The common mentality of learning for success and career, the habit of swotting and cramming (which is widely spread in India no less than elsewhere), was here to be overcome so that the joy of learning and researching could be fully developed. The classes are kept small and the teachers are Ashram sadhaks who perform this activity as part of their yoga without any remuneration. There are about 150 teachers instructing 500 students up to the B. A. level. Those who want to study at a University outside afterwards, get a

⁵ CWM 12:167

⁶ CWM 8:181

statement which has been recognized by some universities in India and in foreign countries. However, several students also decide to stay in Pondicherry as members of the Ashram.

The International Centre is an experiment in the process of growth, a very comprehensive and radical experiment which may still need decades to reach its full potential. The Mother had very high expectations of this institution:

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

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

“And those who collaborate in this divine work today will have the joy and pride of having participated in such an exceptional achievement.”⁷

And here once more is her call to the teachers:

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

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

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

“Anything else is not worth the trouble and not worthy of Sri Aurobindo’s help.”⁸

⁷ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 2:228

⁸ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 2:230

XIV. THE SUPRAMENTAL MANIFESTATION

Sri Aurobindo's *Weltanschauung* is dynamic-evolutionary. In his vision (which is identical with the Mother's vision, but has been specially expressed by him in philosophical terms) the world is not a vain illusion, of which you have to get rid, but the manifest Spirit which embodies itself in manifold forms. Sri Aurobindo thus overcomes the unsatisfactory philosophy of Indian Illusionism which could never properly answer the question why the soul has to incarnate itself in a body which is illusion, in a world which is illusion, in order to escape this deception through a method which is illusion as well. This is basically a negative philosophy which makes our stay on earth a compulsory duty which we have to fulfill until we can at the end happily escape it to merge into a supracosmic Unknown or voluntarily return into the world to free others from the illusion.

Sri Aurobindo, in contrast, speaks of the adventure of the soul which is growing through many births in the world of becoming and gathering experiences. It is the adventure of plunging into the inconscience of matter which is ultimately also divine, but is only in an advanced stage of evolution experienced as such. This embodied soul should joyfully participate in creation and help to lead it to its divine prototype until a virtual paradise on earth is realised, a divine life in harmony, love and truth.

The soul has voluntarily accepted this adventure, for the joy of a fuller manifestation. However, in the first stages it is very much a journey through Ignorance. At first we have the entirely unconscious Matter which is not as lifeless, though, as was formerly assumed. New experiments of unbiassed scientists seem to indicate phenomena such as 'living reactions' in matter. In the next stage of evolution we have the principle of Life manifest in plants and animals which, as the Mother points out, already have an awakened psychic being (we may especially think of flowers and cats), and finally in the third stage there is the principle of Mind which makes man. Man himself has developed in a long process through various intermediate forms which have been abandoned in the course of evolution, with the exception of the aboriginals who still co-exist here and there with modern man. As the Mother noted in a talk, it may have taken a million years after the manifestation of the mental principle until man reached his present form. But evolution does not stop here, and why should it do so? It stands smilingly above our theology and philosophy. It was Nietzsche's great merit to have overcome the concept of a creation culminating in mankind, even though he made serious mistakes in the process. Sri Aurobindo, who used the same term 'superman', saw in his inner vision that the next

principle to manifest on earth would be Supermind and he made its manifestation the object of his life as evolutionary pioneer.

It is difficult to say something about supermind or to know something about it, but we may state in very general terms that man's aspiration for total knowledge, full joy and all-round perfection, which again and again flames up on earth in spite of all obstructing forces and appearances, points towards this higher Truth-Consciousness and has its origin in it like a memory of the future.

Sri Aurobindo has discussed these questions in ample detail in his main philosophical work *The Life Divine*, the greatest part of which was published in the *Arya* during the First World War. He did not have at that time the direct experience of Supermind, but he could write about it due to his inner vision which, as he has said, had already the Overmind's range. We have already quoted a letter to his brother Barin in which he stated, "I am just now (that is, in April 1920) rising to the lowest of the three layers of the Supermind..."¹ In 1938 the Mother saw Supermind descending even into the very physical substance of Sri Aurobindo, but it could not yet be fixed there, because earth-conditions were not ready. Another hint we get from a statement of the Mother soon after Sri Aurobindo had left his body:

"As soon as Sri Aurobindo withdrew from his body, what he had called the Mind of Light got realised in me.

"The Supermind had descended long ago – very long ago – in the mind and even in the vital: it was working in the physical also but indirectly through these intermediaries. The question now was about the direct action of the Supermind in the physical. Sri Aurobindo said it could be possible only if the physical mind received the supramental light: the physical mind was the instrument for the direct action upon the most material. This physical mind receiving the supramental light Sri Aurobindo called the Mind of Light."²

Here we would have to give long explanations of terms such as 'the physical mind', etc., which is not possible in the limited scope of this book. We may only point out here that the above statements refer to the individual experiences of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother which were to prepare for the still more decisive experience of the systematic transformation of the body as well as the general manifestation of Supermind in the earth-atmosphere and its establishment as an

¹ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother's Life* 1:230

² Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother's Life* 2:209-10

irreversible principle. The latter was the main object of the work of the two avatars. In this context the Mother said in 1933:

“The Supramental descent will be the successful consummation of our work, a descent of which the full glory has not been yet or else the whole face of life would have been different. By slow degrees the supramental is influencing us, now one part of our being and now another feels the distant touch of its divinity; but when it comes down in all its native power a supreme radical change will seize our nature.”³

For 1956 the Mother gave the following New Year message: “The greatest victories are the least noisy. The manifestation of a new world is not proclaimed by beat of drum.”⁴

It was to be one of the most important years in the history of mankind. On 29 February in the evening, during a meditation on the Playground, the great event of the supramental manifestation took place. In the Mother’s words:

“This evening the Divine Presence, concrete and material, was there present amongst you. I had a form of living gold, bigger than the universe, and I was facing a huge and massive golden door which separated the world from the Divine.

“As I looked at the door, I knew and willed, in a single movement of consciousness, that ‘the time has come’, and lifting with both hands a mighty golden hammer I struck one blow, one single blow on the door and the door was shattered to pieces.

“Then the supramental Light and Force and Consciousness rushed down upon earth in an uninterrupted flow.”⁵

The experience of the Light rushing down was so overwhelming for the Mother that she believed all sadhaks and students present on the Playground had also experienced it and would be lying flat on the ground by the sheer force of the outflow. However, this was not the case: nobody had felt anything special. But five sadhaks – two in the Ashram and three outside – had extraordinary experiences in connection with this great event; The Mother officially announced the Supramental Manifestation in two messages of 29 March and 24 April 1956:

“Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,

³ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 2:273

⁴ K. R. S. Iyengar’s *On the Mother* 2:599

⁵ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 2:278

A new world is born,
The things that were promised are fulfilled.”⁶

This text is derived from her prayer of 25 September 1914. In it the Mother has changed the original into the present: instead of ‘shall break upon...’, she wrote ‘breaks upon’, and instead of ‘shall be born’, ‘is born’, and instead of ‘shall be fulfilled’, ‘are fulfilled’.

The second message said:

“The manifestation of the Supramental upon earth is no more a promise but a living fact, a reality.

“It is at work here, and a day will come when the most blind, the most unconscious, even the most unwilling shall be obliged to recognise it.”⁷

But what did this Supramental Manifestation concretely mean? Many sadhaks expected miracles and a quick end to all their difficulties, whilst others were already looking around for the new race. However, the Mother clarified that this was not the meaning of the descent. In the same way as millions of years passed after the manifestation of mind until man reached his present state of development, even now some time would pass before the new race would be visible, at least a few hundred or thousand years. But the process could be done faster now because man, unlike the ape, could consciously collaborate with his evolutionary ascent. As for the difficulties of the sadhaks, no immediate turn-about was to be expected, but some sincere aspirants who had most obstinate obstacles in their sadhana, could get the decisive breakthrough.

The Mother has explained why it would take some time for the results of this great event to become fully manifest:

“The atmosphere of the earth is too contrary to the magnificence of the Supreme Consciousness and veils it almost constantly. From time to time It can show and express Itself, but then again, this Inconscient atmosphere veils It.

“It was like that when in 1956 the Supramental Power came down upon earth. It was coming in torrents of Light, wonderful Light and Force and Power, and from the earth big waves of deep blue Inconscience came and swallowed It up. All the Force

⁶ CWM 15:95

⁷ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother's Life* 2:278

that was coming down was swallowed up and it is again from inside the Inconscient that It has to work itself through. That is why things take so much time here.”⁸

A little less than two years later, in 1957, the Mother had another experience which is of the greatest importance in the history of evolution. For centuries, for millennia the inner search of the yogis, the saints all over the world has been connected with extraordinary difficulties, resistances in nature which made necessary a ‘journey through the night’. Whilst some old traditions such as the Chaldaean, Vedic, Egyptian or Eleusinean accepted Nature with its difficulties and sought to include it – at least individually – in the ascent, there were other branches and traditions which followed the path of askesis and excluded Nature as far as possible, leaving only a necessary minimum which was required to maintain life. The body is put into a cage, as it were, like a rebellious animal, so that it does not trouble the seeker in his advance towards the inner Light. In this way many ascetics and saints have achieved some realisation, but the outer nature remained unchanged, often even rather crude and unrefined. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo wanted to leave this path behind once for all and so they developed the integral path which accepts the challenge to educate this ‘rebellious animal’ within ourselves and to make it collaborate with the divine work. But their object went further than to merely work on themselves and a group of disciples – the whole earth was to be included in the transformation, Earth-Nature Herself was to participate in the Light.

By the end of 1957 the Mother came into ever closer contact with Nature and a new deep relationship was formed which culminated in a decisive experience on 8 November:

“Suddenly Nature understood. She understood that this new Consciousness which has just been born does not seek to reject her but wants to embrace her entirely, she understood that this new spirituality does not turn away from life, does not recoil in fear before the formidable amplitude of her movement, but wants on the contrary to integrate all its facets. She understood that the supramental consciousness is here not to diminish but to complete her.

“Then from the supreme Reality came this order, ‘Awake, O Nature, to the joy of collaboration.’ And the whole of Nature suddenly rushed forward in a great surge of joy, saying, ‘I accept, I shall collaborate.’... She accepted, she saw with all eternity before her that this supramental consciousness was going to fulfill her more perfectly,

⁸ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life* 2:289

give a still greater strength to her movement, a greater amplitude, more possibilities to her play.”⁹

On 3 February 1958 the Mother had another important experience in the wake of the supramental manifestation. She saw, in a clear vision, a boat on which advanced seekers were trained for supramental life. The beings on board the ship had already reached a high stage of transformation and were now ready to disembark. The Mother was standing at the gangway and called the groups one by one. They were at first inspected by some extremely tall beings and then accepted, or sent back to the ship for further training if their physical substance was not yet sufficiently transparent. The Mother was able to identify all persons on board the ship as Ashram sadhaks or seekers outside whom she knew. Most of them were middle-aged, but there were also a few young and old people. The things on the boat were not of the same kind as here on earth, but of a different substance. Clothes, for instance, were not made of cloth, but were a kind of materialized consciousness-tissue which was sufficiently plastic to assume various forms. “Life created its own forms: There was *one single* substance in everything; it changed the quality of its vibration according to need and use.”¹⁰

This vision of the boat that had reached the shores of the supramental world and carried a first group of future inhabitants of this world is certainly one of the most beautiful experiences which the Mother has recorded for posterity. The full text of the experience can be studied in Volume 9 of the Collected Works (pp. 271-8).

⁹ CWM 9:247-48

¹⁰ Nilima – *Glimpses of the Mother's Life* 2:308

XV. THE YOGA OF PHYSICAL TRANSFORMATION

What work remained to be done now for the Mother, after the supramental manifestation and Nature's consent to participate in the divine work? In 1958 her Yoga of physical transformation began in its most material sense, that is, her working on the cells of the body, their purification, their liberation not only from the suggestions of the physical mind, but also from what the Mother termed the body-mind, the basic cellular consciousness as it has been up till now. The former with its seemingly ineluctable mechanisms, keeps telling us, 'if you do this, you will fall ill', 'if there is rain, you will catch a cold', 'today you will have a bad day', 'nothing works any more', etc., repeating such suggestions with obstinate persistence until we ourselves start believing it. Of course, the physical mind can also be given a positive direction, with the help of a mantra, for instance. The Mother herself was using the following mantra to help the process of physical transformation: OM NAMO BHAGAVATE. The functioning of the cellular consciousness, the body-mind, is more difficult to define.

The first stage of the transformation, the complete deprogramming of the cells, took about ten years until 1968. In the remaining five years until 1973 the Mother tried to direct the cells towards a new working and ultimately the formation of a new body which would be physically immortal – an impossible-seeming undertaking, an attempt to achieve the ultimate victory for mankind and to conquer for good Disease and Death.

This work of cell-transformation was like entering a no-man's land, and the Mother had hardly any clues for her work except a few hints in Sri Aurobindo's writings. Her body itself had to find its way, independently of the mind and the vital which, as she said, had been 'sent away' in the process of this I work. It may sound astonishing, but the Mother had reached now a stage in evolution – we may say a stage which is beyond our imagination – where these two principles of human existence were not required any more: "...the mental and vital have been instruments for... grinding Matter – ... the vital by its sensations, the mind by its thoughts... But they seem to me to be passing instruments that will be replaced by other states of consciousness..."¹

The Mother was therefore thrown back on the most material aspect of her being and she was attempting to attune the cells themselves to the Divine in a most

¹ K. R. S. Iyengar's *On the Mother* 2:751

laborious precision-work. No spectacular successes or results were to be expected here and yet the whole process was necessary if Sri Aurobindo's ideal of an irreversible divinisation of the body was to be accomplished. A particular difficulty she was facing was the complete uncertainty as to where she had reached, what distance had been covered and what still remained to be done. It was, as she once remarked, like wandering in a virgin forest. At the same time she had to continue her outer occupations, receive visitors, sign cheques and work out the vibrations of the 'old world'. About the body she said: "... it is still open to all the influences from outside and... is obliged to do things that are not directly the expression of the Supreme Impulse; hence fatigue, friction..."²

As the Mother was more and more getting in touch with the cellular consciousness, she made the amazing discovery that the cells themselves had the aspiration for the Divine, for immortality, or even the feeling of immortality, and they were rejecting illness and falsehood like a foreign body. It was as if here, on the ground of matter, the deeply buried Divine showed a golden seam which the Mother started pulling, as it were, in order to link Spirit and Matter, the two ends of the divine Tissue. But again and again there were new resistances in the physical which could only inadequately receive the supramental vibrations. This total and inescapable identification with the physical matter of her body and, as a result of it, the frequent entry into a complete night, as it were, entailed often unbearable suffering for the Mother. And yet this was part of the work for which she had come: "I am here because my body has been given for the first attempt at transformation... it is not very pleasant, but I do it willingly because... everybody will be able to profit from it."³

What the Mother was doing now, was a race between Life and Death, between the old habit of becoming old and dying and the new goal of remaining young forever with the immortal Divine. In the outside world too there was a similar race – the struggle between constructive and destructive forces was becoming more and more critical: "...it is a kind of race or struggle as to which will reach the goal first. It would seem that all the adverse, anti-divine forces, forces of the vital world, have descended upon the earth... at the same time a new, higher, more powerful spiritual force has also descended upon earth to bring it a new life."⁴

² K. R. S. Iyengar's *On the Mother* 2:730

³ K. R. S. Iyengar's *On the Mother* 2:788

⁴ K. R. S. Iyengar's *On the Mother* 2:657

On 30 August 1945, three weeks after the bursting of the atom bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Mother had told her disciples: “I cannot promise you that the Divine’s will is to preserve the present human civilisation.” On 5 March 1963 a disciple in the Ashram took up the question again and asked her, “Can you *now* say that the Divine has decided to preserve the present human civilisation?” The Mother concentrated for a while and then answered: “It will be *settled* in 1967. Do not change my words: it will be *settled* in 1967.”⁵

Her new year message of 1967 was:

“Men, countries, continents!
The choice is imperative:
Truth or the Abyss.”⁶

Sri Aurobindo had already written long ago in a letter: “The supramental consciousness will enter into a phase of realising power in 1967.” With these and other predictions in view the Mother said on 15 May 1967: “Since a few months ago the children born, among our people mostly, are of a special kind.”⁷

While the Mother was in these years invisibly working on the deprogramming of her cells, the Hippie-movement in the world outside gained more and more momentum and the Hippies in their turn tried the ‘deprogramming’ of life in a society of which they were tired, whose rigid mechanism they wanted to escape, whose falsehood they had seen through. The Mother’s commentary on this movement may surprise many a conservative reader: “In America... the entire youth seems to have been taken up with a sort of curious brain-wave which would be disquieting for reasonable people, but which is certainly an indication that an unusual force is at work. It is the breaking up of all habits and all rules – it is good. For the moment, it is rather ‘strange’, but it is necessary.”⁸ But it then turned out that the movement was not long-lived, and perhaps it died of the grotesque illusion that a chemical formula and its product, LSD, could give its users the new consciousness and life. Thus they were escaping one mechanism, the routine of the ‘old world’, in order to plunge into another, the much more dangerous process of biochemical manipulation. The Mother pointed out that drugs like LSD were only precipitating people into the lower vital and objectifying earlier experiences – good or bad – in the subconscious. In fact, it

⁵ K. R. S. Iyengar’s *On the Mother* 2:696

⁶ K. R. S. Iyengar’s *On the Mother* 2:732

⁷ K. R. S. Iyengar’s *On the Mother* 2:733

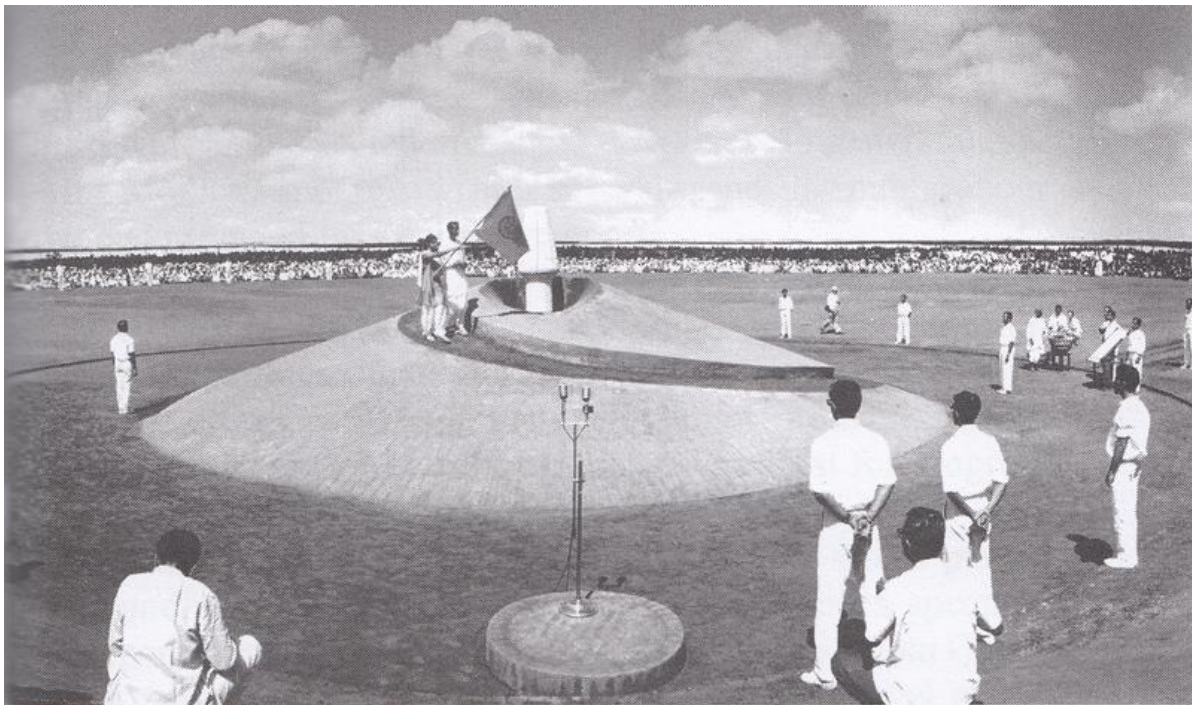
⁸ K. R. S. Iyengar’s *On the Mother* 2:702

was not a true widening of the consciousness but only a risky disturbance of the inner balance. This was not the path into the future. However, the starting-point of the new movement, the search for a new consciousness and a life free from conventions was correct in essence and actually reflected the impact of the New Force on the world. But how could such a life, free from conventions, be realised in a world which is built on fixed principles and which would immediately plunge into chaos if there were no laws, taxes, law-courts, police and identity cards? This was the problem facing seekers in East and West, and the Mother's answer to it was: Auroville.

XVI. AUROVILLE

The year 1965 had at first started with a drawback for the Mother's cause. In the night of 11 February a powerful attack by rowdy elements of Pondicherry took place on many Ashram buildings and there was considerable damage. The original cause was an anti-Hindi-agitation in Madras state, the protest of South Indian Tamils against the imposition of Hindi (which is mainly spoken in the North) as the national language of India. The agitation then spread to the neighbouring Pondicherry, and the Ashram which is no party to the idea of Hindi being imposed, became quite illogically its victim.

Undaunted by this event, the Mother decided to realise further an old 'dream' of hers to create a place where seekers from all over the world could live a progressive life in the service of Truth on a city level. The Ashram itself had been her first experiment on a limited scale. Now she launched another on a more generalised basis. The name 'Auroville' derives from the French 'Aurore', meaning 'dawn', and 'Auroville' signifies 'City of Dawn'. On 8 September the Mother declared: "Auroville wants to be a universal town where men and women of all countries are able to live in peace and progressive harmony, above all creeds, all politics and all nationalities.



The inauguration of Auroville



The Matrimandir, with the urn in the foreground

“The purpose of Auroville is to realise human unity.”¹

Auroville was to come up in the vicinity of Pondicherry on an area of 15 square miles and it was planned for a population of 50,000. Four zones or sectors – Residential, Industrial, Cultural, International – were to be arranged around the Matrimandir, the ‘Temple of the Mother’.

The physical decision to launch Auroville was taken at the end of 1964 during the World Conference of Sri Aurobindo Society, an international organization which the Mother had started in 1960 and of which she was the president. Roger Anger, a prominent French architect, began designing plans for the city, while Navajata as General Secretary of Sri Aurobindo Society managed the project in general under the Mother’s supervision as well as informed the public about it and arranged for financial support.

The inauguration of Auroville was on 28 February 1968. At 10.30 a.m. the Mother read out a message from her room to those participating in the event:

“Greetings from Auroville to all men of goodwill.

Are invited to Auroville all those who thirst for progress and aspire to a higher and truer life.”²

¹ K. R. S. Iyengar’s *On the Mother* 2:713

² K. R. S. Iyengar’s *On the Mother* 2:745

Children from almost all countries of the world placed a handful of earth from their native lands into a specially prepared urn, which was then sealed by Nolini Kanta Gupta. 124 nations and 23 Indian States were represented at the inauguration.

The Mother said in the first article of the Auroville charter, which was read out in sixteen languages:

“Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. But to live in Auroville one must be the willing servitor of the divine Consciousness.”³

The Mother clarified that the Ashram would keep its role as pioneer and inspiring and guiding force, while Auroville would be the attempt of a collective realisation. What was expected from the Aurovillians was “the simple good will to make a collective experiment for the progress of humanity.”⁴ It was a city for the new man, a model for the future of the world.

By the middle of 1967 a pioneer colony named ‘Promesse’ had already been formed at the border of Auroville, and settlements like ‘Auro-Beach’, ‘Hope’ and ‘Aspiration’ soon followed after the foundation ceremony. In 1971 the foundation was laid for the Matrimandir, ‘the Soul of Auroville’ in the form of a spherical globe (slightly flattened on top and on the bottom), constructed on the scaffold of four pillars which represent the four powers of the Mother. Inside the globe a meditation hall was to be built, a spiritual-dynamic power centre. The Mother had said in November 1970 on the Matrimandir: “Matrimandir will be the soul of Auroville. The sooner the soul is there, the better it will be for everybody, and especially for Aurovillians.”⁵

Soon it became evident that the demands made on the first pioneers of the City of Dawn were considerable. There was the hot humid climate, the absence of water and electricity, the arid earth, limited financial and technical means as well as psychological difficulties which (in the case of Western Aurovillians) resulted from the sudden transition from a highly developed civilization to a kind of rural wilderness where suddenly every bucket full of water, every nail and screw became desired objects which one could never be sure of. Moreover, everybody had imported all his own ideas and concepts, and these were not always identical with those of other pioneers.

³ K. R. S. Iyengar’s *On the Mother* 2:746

⁴ K. R. S. Iyengar’s *On the Mother* 2:753

⁵ K. R. S. Iyengar’s *On the Mother* 2:775

The Mother gave general guide-lines for the development of the City and also regulated many details, but at the same time she expected from the Aurovillians that they should open to the higher consciousness and receive directly the answer for all those never-ending problems.

It was and is a very difficult project which made some considerable progress in the beginning but was overwhelmed by ever-growing difficulties after the Mother's departure. It is at this moment hardly possible to assess more recent developments, but we may say that the true collective Spirit of the City of Dawn is yet to be discovered, even though we have to appreciate the enormous efforts and contributions of some pioneers, especially if we see the difficult conditions of the terrain and know what demands it makes on the residents, physically and psychologically.

The Mother had an experience in May 1969 in which she showed Sri Aurobindo in the subtle-physical how Auroville would be and should be eventually. Even details such as kitchen and food were noted. This means, in other words, that the City is already formed somewhere, completely designed in its ideal shape, and the only question that remains open now is: *when* will it be fully manifest?

XVII. THE SUPERMAN-CONSCIOUSNESS

The Mother continued all her activities in the Ashram and on the Playground up to the end of 1958. She held her classes on Wednesday and Friday with the students of the International Centre of Education, which were also joined by many sadhaks, and they studied extracts from Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine* and later *Thoughts and Aphorisms*. But on 9 December 1958 the Mother fell ill – we have to remember here that 'illness' always meant a crisis of transformation for her – and all these activities were stopped. Instead of that, from January 1960 collective meditations were held twice a week on the Playground, and this practice is still being continued today. The Mother was not physically there, but the sadhaks felt her presence and often at the beginning of the meditation her tape recordings were played or there was meditative music with Sanskrit invocations.

Another serious crisis came in 1962 when she fell ill after the balcony darshan on 18 March and suffered a break-down in the night of 3 April. All these events were connected with her inner development, her body-sadhana, and they did not diminish her powerful radiation. The Ashram work was being continued and a constant stream of new seekers and visitors arrived. The number of members was now 1200. Due to the Mother's crisis there was no darshan for almost a year, but on 21 February 1963 the Mother appeared on the darshan balcony to give her blessings to sadhaks and devotees on her eighty-fifth birthday.

In a letter of 23 July 1964 she explained the difficulty of her work to Huta: "If the transformation you are asking for depended on me alone, it is long since it would have been done. But the whole world is ONE and interdependent and this creates a situation that the Supreme Lord alone can alter."¹

In 1966 the Mother wrote to Huta: "Whoever is sincere in his resolution to serve the Truth will know, or rather be made to know, at each moment, what he or she must do to serve the Truth, for there are many ways of serving It."²

On herself and her own situation she commented in a talk: "I am all the while... all the while (*gesture forward*), on the march. Yes, the work of transformation of the consciousness is so rapid, must be done so quickly that there is no time to enjoy or dwell upon an experience... for any length of time."³ And she made the following

¹ K. R. S. Iyengar's *On the Mother* 2:707-8

² K. R. S. Iyengar's *On the Mother* 2:726

³ K. R. S. Iyengar's *On the Mother* 2:727

statement regarding her sadhana of the body: “If it can be done in one single body, it can be done in all the bodies... I am not made of something else than the others. The difference is in consciousness, that is all...”⁴

Ten months after the inauguration of Auroville, on 1 January 1969, the Mother had another decisive experience of terrestrial or cosmic importance. It was the descent of a new consciousness-force:

“On the first, something truly strange happened... And I was not the only one to feel it, some others also have felt it. It was just after midnight, but I felt it at two o’clock and the others at four o’clock in the morning... It was something very material, I mean it was very external – very external – and it was luminous, with a golden light. It was very strong, very powerful; but even so, its character was a smiling benevolence, a peaceful delight... They all had felt it, like this, a kind of joy, but a joy friendly, powerful and... oh! very, very gentle, very smiling, *very benevolent*... My own impression was that of an immense personality... for it the earth was small, small... like a ball... It gave the impression of a personal divinity... who comes to help, and so strong, so strong and at the same time so gentle, so all-embracing... Since it came, the feeling of the body is a kind of certitude, a certitude as though now it was no longer in anxiety or uncertainty to know: ‘What will it be? What will the Supramental be like? *Physically*, what will it be physically?’ The body used to ask itself. Now it does not think of it any more, it is contented.”⁵

On 8 January 1969 the Mother said that it was the descent of the ‘superman-consciousness’, an intermediary between man and the supramental being. The special characteristic of this particular Force was its material character and its direct impact on the body. On 15 February the Mother said: “During these few hours (three or four), I understood absolutely what it was to have the divine consciousness in the body... But that state, which lasted for several hours, nothing similar to that happiness has this body ever felt during the ninety-one years it has been here upon earth: freedom, absolute power and no limits...”⁶

A mighty Force had descended on earth to help the Mother’s work. She said that all those who had been touched by it, would have a great certainty and precision in their thinking. Her message for 1969 was:

⁴ K. R. S. Iyengar’s *On the Mother* 2:738

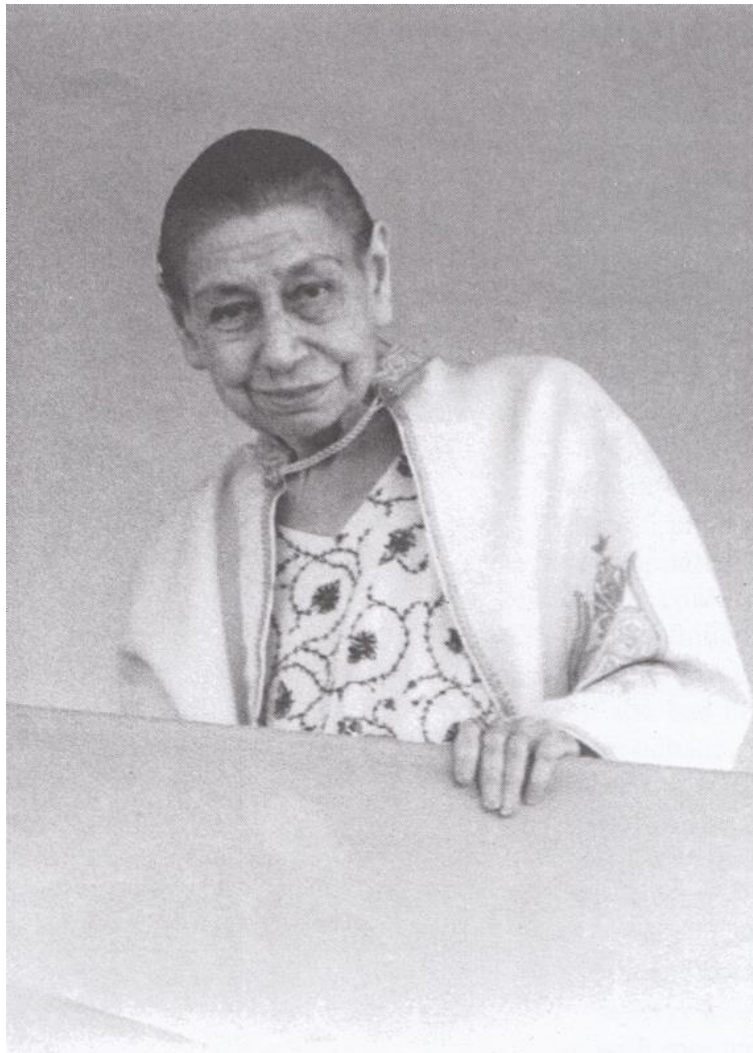
⁵ CWM 11:149-51

⁶ CWM 11:157-59

“No words – acts!”

Three years later, in March 1972, the Mother saw for the first time in an inner experience her supramental body, or a transitional body leading towards it. It was sexless, neither man nor woman. The trunk was very different from the human trunk, the chest only a semblance, even though the shoulders were broad. The figure was very slim and the stomach too was only a semblance.

“The two things very very different: first, procreation, of which there was no possibility there; secondly, the food... And now the question is to find a food which needs no complicated digestion... Evidently, what will change very much, which had become very important, was breathing. It is upon this that this being greatly depended.”⁷



The Mother: Terrace Darshan

⁷ CWM 11:304

XVIII. THE MOTHER LEAVES HER BODY

We have already referred in the Introduction to the suffering which the Mother took upon herself for mankind, since her body was, through its identification with earth-consciousness, like a nucleus of this world and had an ineluctable interrelationship with it. The ‘world’ at the present stage is still dominated by forces of Falsehood which resist transformation, since a new order according to the laws of evolution of consciousness would entail the fall and decline of all those whose outer position in life is entirely disproportionate to their inner qualification.

Perhaps it was these resistances in the world or obstacles deep in the material layer which brought about a paralysis of one of her legs in December 1970 and precipitated her into incredible suffering – a suffering which she could not escape through proven yogic technics such as detaching the consciousness from the body, transforming pain into joy, etc.: there was only sheer uninterrupted pain, as if she had been forced into hell in order to build, not somewhere outside, but there itself a bastion of Light and Truth.

The Mother described her experience in a talk of 16 January 1971: “But it was not an innocent (!) paralysis: for at least – for three weeks, a constant pain, night and day, twenty-four hours out of twenty-four without fluctuation, none: it was as though I was being torn asunder... One might say that it was a cry all the while. It lasted long, lasted several weeks. I did not count. Then gradually, it alternated with moments of calmness when the leg did not feel. And it is only for the last two or three days that it looks like being put back into order...”¹

In 1971 the Mother gave her disciples a mantra with a view to the imminent crisis in East-Pakistan:

“Supreme Lord, Eternal Truth,
let us obey Thee alone and live
according to Truth.”²

1972 was a year of fulfillment: the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary. An endless stream of visitors passed through the Mother’s Room, receiving her blessings, her smile, her Force. But soon after August 15 she suffered a physical set-back and her health became weaker. Whilst she seemed to have recovered at the beginning of

¹ K. R. S. Iyengar’s *On the Mother* 2:773

² K. R. S. Iyengar’s *On the Mother* 2:778

1973, another set-back came at the beginning of April. On 2 April access to the Mother was greatly restricted and only a dozen sadhaks could go and see her very shortly. Her activities were now more and more reduced, but she gave darshan on the terrace on 24 April.

On 20 May she suffered a complete physical break-down. Only four attendants (Pranab, Champaklal, Kumud and Vasudha) were with her now by turns, whilst two doctors kept watch over her health. Her son Andre had arrived from Paris and saw her occasionally, though without speaking with her. In this situation it seemed uncertain whether the Mother would be able to give Darshan on 15 August.

A huge crowd of sadhaks and visitors had gathered in the evening on the street facing the darshan terrace. At six o'clock there was a short; sudden downpour but nobody stirred. At last the Mother appeared on the terrace and gave the last darshan to her waiting children. "With the appearance of the Mother," reported one of those present, "there came an inscrutable peace, and all seemed to be gripped by an unknown power. The silence was so intense that one could never imagine 8000 people were packed together on the road."³

After the darshan the Mother withdrew completely and spent most of her time in trance, as she had done already before 15 August. Nirodbaran had said in a speech on 13 August: "They say now that the Mother is in a continuous trance, but in that trance she is ever awake. She knows everything that is going on in the whole world... Somebody attending on the Mother asked her, 'Mother, why do you always keep your eyes closed?' She replied, 'Because I can see everything with my eyes closed.'"⁴

By the middle of November 1973 the Mother's crisis became more and more serious. She could eat only very little and her heart had become weak. She asked her attendants repeatedly to lift her from the bed, since this gave her some relief. On 17 November in the afternoon she asked again to be lifted up, but her physical condition seemed now extremely critical. There was great respiratory distress and Dr. Sanyal was called. When her pulse failed, he tried a heart massage. But the earthly life of the Mother had come to an end. At 7.25 in the evening she left her body.

On 18 November, in the early morning, the Mother's body was laid in state on a bed in the Meditation Room. Tens of thousands of disciples and devotees arrived in Pondicherry during the next three days to see her physically for the last time.

³ K. R. S. Iyengar's *On the Mother* 2:801

⁴ K. R. S. Iyengar's *On the Mother* 2:800

On 20 November in the morning the Mother's body, after being placed in a casket, was laid in a second chamber of the Samadhi. Nolini Kanta Gupta, the Secretary of the Ashram, issued the following message the next day:

“Mother once told me – ‘If ever I leave my body, my consciousness will remain with you.’

“Mother is present amongst us and Her work continues.

“Let us once more dedicate ourselves for Her work of transformation with utmost sincerity and faithfulness.”⁵

The Mother's physical presence had come to an end, but her disciples were there to continue the work and she herself remains in close contact with the earth-atmosphere, from the ‘other side’, in a supramental body in the subtle-physical world.

The foundation for a new creation has been laid and whosoever is today living on earth, participates in it, whether he knows it or not, whether he wants it or not. In 1958 the Mother had said to her disciples:

“I may tell you that by the very fact of your living on the earth at this time – whether you are conscious of it or not, even whether you want it or not – you are absorbing with the air you breathe this new supramental substance which is spreading out in the earth atmosphere now. And it is preparing in you things which will manifest *very suddenly* as soon as you have taken the decisive step.”⁶

⁵ Mother India, December 1973, p. 1

⁶ K. R. S. Iyengar's *On the Mother* 2:658-59