

Twelve Years  
with  
Sri Aurobindo

Nirodbaran

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SRI AUROBINDO

NIRODBARAN

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM  
PONDICHERRY

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## FOREWORD

This book is written mainly for the disciples and devotees of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. They have been very eager to know something about the outer life of the Master, which, because of his seclusion for many years, remained behind a veil. The Mother was not so far willing to let us lift that veil. But either because of Sri Aurobindo's Centenary Year or for other reasons, when I proposed to write an account of our historic personal association with the Master during the last twelve years of his life, the Mother warmly approved of it. Not only so, she very graciously listened to the whole story.

An "outsider" may find the book filled in places with devotional outpourings, miraculous phenomena and mystical overtones. But I have tried to the best of my power to give a faithful account of what I have seen and heard and what part we played in the great drama with the Master as the principal actor. Naturally, subjective impressions could not be quite left out, for it was not my purpose to draw an entirely detached description of my experience. Yet those who are interested in having an objective picture of the most sublimely enigmatic Person of the modern age, one whom thousands have felt to be a veritable God-Man, will have, I believe, sufficient food to satisfy their seeking.

For the rest, his own works are there in which to dive and gather the treasures of his supreme vision and unparalleled realisation.

Nirodbaran

Grâce à Nirod

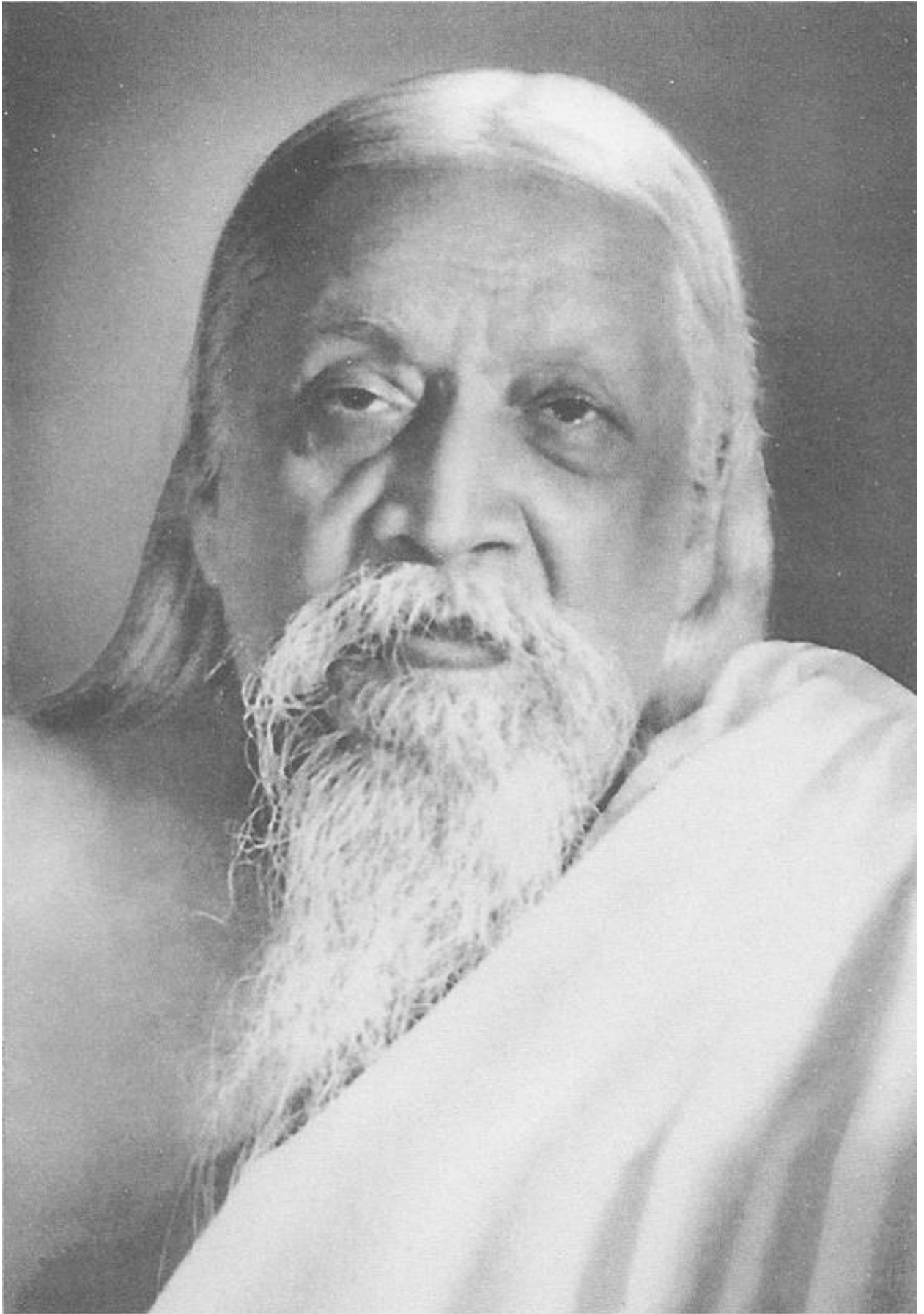
nous avons la révélation

de tout un côté  
inconnu de ce qui était  
Sri Aurobindo

SA is extremely in trusting  
and very instructive



Thanks to Nirod, we have a revelation of an altogether unknown side of what Sri Aurobindo was.



Sri Aurobindo, 1950

## THE UNEXPECTED

*It was the hour before the Gods awake*

The calendar stood at November 1938, the month of the Darshan. A few weeks more and we would meet the Master after a long wait of three months. After every Darshan we start counting the days for the next one, for each occasion brings the Eternal and his Shakti closer to us and is therefore a significant landmark in our lives. As the date comes nearer, our days too take on a brighter hue and the day before the Darshan, all faces glow with sweet smiles. Friends meeting on the road greet each other with one word, "Tomorrow!" or with a silent look of happy expectation. The Dining Room hums with the same theme. Wherever you go, whomsoever you meet, no other talk except the Guru's Darshan for one or two minutes, — an eternal moment.

As for myself, my feelings are more complex. I have broken verbal lances with him, challenged his views, poked fun at his Yoga. I know all these will be forgotten at the moment when I shall meet his august Presence. He will be as affable as in his letters and bestow his gracious smile from his transcendental height while my heart will beat in joy and wonder. Still, the mind cannot be entirely free from a conventional fear.

In this mood of expectation we arrived at the eve of the Darshan, November 24th. The Mother gave her blessings to all in the morning. Embodiment of the Mahalakshmi Grace and Beauty, she poured her smile and filled our hearts with love and adoration, an ideal condition in which to present ourselves to the Lord. Each Darshan is an occasion for him to survey the progress we have made after the last one and to give us a fresh push towards a further advance.

Visitors had swollen the even flow of our life; among them, Miss Wilson, daughter of President Wilson, had come from far-off America for the Master's Darshan. His book *Essays on the Gita* had cast an unearthly spell upon her. That there could be someone who could write such a wonderful book in this materialistic age was beyond her imagination. She could hear the Voice of the Lord saying to man, "Abandon all dharmas. Take refuge in me

alone. I shall deliver thee from all Sin.” The book was her Bible. She decided she must have the Darshan of such a unique person.

The day passed in a happy rhythm. Most of the sadhaks had gone to bed early to prepare inwardly for the great event. Over the Ashram reigned an atmosphere of deep peace and silence. Only one light was burning in Sri Aurobindo’s corner room towards the street and keeping a vigil over the pervasive darkness. The Mother too had retired early, leaving Sri Aurobindo at his work. He was perhaps busy with *Savitri* now that the “avalanche of correspondence” had been arrested due to Darshan work. Thus the small hours were reached. Then in Purani’s room the light was switched on; it was 2 a.m. He had to prepare hot water for the Mother’s bath. At 7.30 a.m. the Darshan would start. But nobody suspected that

Across the path of the divine Event  
The huge foreboding mind of Night, alone  
In her unlit temple of eternity,  
Lay stretched immobile upon Silence’ marge.

Breaking the profound silence the emergency bell rang from the Mother’s room. Purani rushed up and found the Mother at the top of the staircase. She said, “Sri Aurobindo has fallen down. Go and fetch Dr. Manilal.” Fortunately, he had come for the Darshan from Gujarat. Soon he arrived and saw that Sri Aurobindo was lying on the floor in his bedroom. On his way to the bathroom he had stumbled over a tiger skin. The doctor made a preliminary examination and suspected a fracture of the right thigh bone; he asked the Mother to send for assistants. It appears that Sri Aurobindo while passing from his sitting-room to the bathroom (probably revolving some lines of *Savitri*) fell with his right knee striking the head of a tiger. Perhaps there was jubilation among the adverse forces crying, “Our enemy has fallen!” Sri Aurobindo, however, remained unperturbed and tried to get up. Failing to do so he lay down quietly expecting that the Mother would come in soon. As was natural, the Mother in her turn received a strong vibration in her sleep which made her feel that something had gone wrong with Sri Aurobindo. She came in immediately and



found him lying on the floor. Her intuition and good general knowledge of medical science made her suspect a fracture. She rang the emergency bell.

When we other doctors came up, we saw Dr. Manilal examining Sri Aurobindo's injured leg. The Mother was sitting by Sri Aurobindo's side, fanning him gently. I could not believe what I saw: on the one hand Sri Aurobindo lying helplessly, on the other, a deep divine sorrow on the Mother's face. But I soon regained my composure and helped the doctor in the examination. My medical eye could not help taking in at a glance Sri Aurobindo's entire body and appreciating the robust manly frame. His right knee was flexed, his face bore a perplexed smile as if he did not know what was wrong with him; the chest was bare, well-developed and the finely pressed snow-white *dhoti* drawn up contrasted with the shining golden thighs, round and marble-smooth, reminiscent of Yeats's line, "World-famous golden-thighed Pythagoras". A sudden fugitive vision of the Golden Purusha of the Vedas!

Each gentle movement of the leg by the doctor made Sri Aurobindo let out a short "Ah!" which prompted the Mother to ask, "Is it hurting you?" Throughout the investigation he uttered very few words, only to answer the doctor's questions. Finally the doctor pronounced that there was a fracture of the thigh bone. Sri Aurobindo simply heard the verdict and made no comment.

A team of attendants was formed consisting of Dr. Manilal, three other medical men, Champaklal (Sri Aurobindo's personal attendant) and Purani, who had acquired the right by his past association with Sri Aurobindo to be included. One more hand was still needed. The Mother simply looked through the window shutters of Sri Aurobindo's room and seeing Dr. Satyendra below chatting in front of his Dental Clinic said, "Take Satyendra." A happy choice! A strong man with a genial bearing.

The next step was to plaster the leg. Dr. Rao, a friend of the sadhak Duraiswamy and Superintendent of Cuddalore hospital, was sent for, since the local hospital might not have been able to give us the necessary equipment. Purani brought the plaster of Paris from the Government Pharmacy. At last the injured leg was put in a cast as a first aid. The next move was to take the Lord to his bed. We found it quite a job to carry him in

spite of our having three muscular figures amongst us, Purani, Champaklal and Satyendra. His physical frame had considerable weight like the spiritual substance it enshrined.

Already two hours had passed and the news had flown all over the Ashram — a real bolt from the blue. All hopes and aspirations of hundreds of people were set at naught by this single blow. They gathered in the courtyard of the Ashram to know the truth and went back sullen-hearted with a fervent prayer addressed to the Mother and the Lord for his speedy recovery. Miss Wilson accepted Fate's decree with a calm submission. The Mother, out of compassion for the disappointed devotees, gave darshan to all in the evening. Thus she wiped away their gloom with the sunshine of her smile and the power of her touch.

As we had no work now except to keep a watch, I could not but contemplate upon what had happened. I remembered Sri Aurobindo writing to me that though he had acquired sufficient control over disease and death, accidents were possible. Still, living in entire seclusion, secure from all outward contingencies, and inwardly master of cosmic forces, and yet to meet with such an accident in so unexpected a way, was inconceivable. {Sri Aurobindo explained to us later on in the "Talks" the why and wherefore of the catastrophe.) The forces must have been very sly — clever indeed to have chosen the time when the Mother had retired, the Gods were asleep. But the Powers of the Inconscience were awake to strike their infernal blow. It was really the hour of the unexpected!

In the clear morning light I could have a good view of Sri Aurobindo as he was lying on his bed, almost motionless and straight. I asked myself; "Is he enjoying a bit of sweet sleep since he had none the whole night? Or is he simply keeping quiet and bearing the severe pain with equanimity?" It was the latter, as he told us afterwards. Only the Mother's visit, to make some enquiries or to offer some drink, showed flickers of life in his otherwise trance-like mood. I could now observe him from close at hand and the room he had been living in for the last twelve years! Since then, it has undergone such a tremendous change that just a faint memory of its original state is all that remains today. The wooden bed (on which Sri Aurobindo was lying) was rather large, the upper part being slightly raised, and he filled almost the

entire breadth — the broad chest and the head large and round, the fine silken hair parted in the middle. As for the rest of the room, it was very plain, almost austere furnished, except for the carpet, one small box-wood table at either end of the room, a semicircular table in the middle; notebooks, and odds and ends of papers lying scattered on one of the tables; a big almirah containing a small number of books: on the top shelf, the bound volumes of the *Arya*. On the next one, the Collected Works of Shakespeare and Shelley and books presented by writers such as Radhakrishnan, James Cousins, etc. There were two paintings, one Chinese and the other of Amitabha Buddha with the lotus in his hand; a few wood carvings; a couch for the Mother opposite Sri Aurobindo's bed. The only furniture of luxury was a long cane chair in the adjacent room, in which he could recline and have some repose,

When Dr. Manilal arrived after his breakfast, he asked Sri Aurobindo how he felt. There was no complaint and the answer was brief. Soon after, Dr. Rao arrived. On hearing the story of the fall he proposed that an orthopaedic surgeon from Madras be called for consultation. He had a friend Dr. Narasimha Ayer, well known for his efficiency. The Mother approved and he left for Madras.

We now had nothing else to do except wait. The day rolled on. We were counting hours and minutes for Dr. Rao's return. Any sound of a car horn would make us run to the window. Pondicherry in 1938 was, by the way, far from what it is today. The number of cars could almost be counted and they drove by at long intervals, So we could easily be deceived by the sound of a horn, particularly in our anxious anticipation. Dr. Manilal would give us fatherly admonition not to be so restless, both his age and experience must have taught him some *samatā* and an objective outlook on things. Meanwhile, Sri Aurobindo, the divine patient, was lying quietly in his spacious bed, apparently quite at ease. To Dr. Manilal's occasional enquiries he gave monosyllabic answers, and the rest of us were perhaps nothing more than shadowy forms moving about, having no names and awaking no interest. Only when the Mother came from time to time and asked with a sweet smile, "Is it paining you?" we saw some difference on an otherwise impassive face! At last after many deceptions, we were informed that the doctors had arrived. It was evening. They explained that they were delayed because they wanted an

expert radiologist friend to accompany them, and when he was hunted down in the labyrinthine Madras metropolis, the radiologist agreed to follow soon.

The room was now astir. The plaster cast was removed and the specialist examined the limb. He confirmed the diagnosis of fracture but would wait for X-ray pictures before he started any manipulation. The Mother put many intricate questions to him on various possibilities, the prognosis, lines of treatment, etc., etc., and the specialist wondered with admiration at her possession of so much technical knowledge. Sri Aurobindo, on the other hand, sitting up in bed, listened witness-like, yet intently, to all the talk, looking from one face to another, but uttered not a single word! The Mother was explaining to him the surgeon's opinion as if he could not grasp all that was happening. He left the bargaining to the Mother, and accepted whatever she decided for him. She was certainly the better judge. I was very much intrigued by this passive role. One who had been sending me sound medical advice about patients had not a word to say about himself on such a crucial matter. Spectator-like and amused, he simply sat, a big child, his face and eyes beaming with a smile, and the body glowing with an angelic radiance.

The radiologist arrived with his X-ray machine at about 11 p.m. and stirred us into action. He was quite a smart young man carrying a confident air and went about his business in a formal manner. He took a few films and developed them at once which was a great relief to us. But the diagnosis came like a stunning blow. The Mother was shown the pictures revealing an impacted fracture of the right femur above the knee, two fragments firmly locked together. Both the specialist and the radiologist took a serious view of it, and remarked that if the fragments had projected backwards, the main blood vessels and nerves running behind the bone would have ruptured and caused a big disaster! It would have been most unwise in this situation to reduce the fracture by any forceful traction or other drastic mechanical contrivance. "I would leave it alone, put the limb in plaster, and by means of the splints exert a steady traction," was the final verdict of the specialist. The advice was accepted and the limb put into traction from the end of the bed. Particular attention was to be paid to the daily passive movements of the patella in order to avoid adhesion. The patient was to stay in bed for a number

of weeks and the specialist would pay a second visit later on to consider the future course.

The other doctors now took their leave and Dr. Manilal resumed the charge of the patient.

The X-ray plates were kept in Sri Aurobindo's room for a number of years. One day the Mother said, "Remove them from here." I kept them in my personal custody, but could not trace them afterwards.

One thing I could not fail to notice was that from the moment of the fall to the doctor's departure, Sri Aurobindo remained most unusually calm and unperturbed as if nothing had happened to him. No questions about his condition, no anxiety, no complaint of any sort, quiet acceptance of the doctor's direction. It is this submission that made Dr. Rao remark afterwards that Sri Aurobindo was an ideal patient. With the same submission he had accepted Lele's instruction to reject all thoughts. We know however that he was not always submissive in other fields of life.

The following day, Dr. Manilal had to face from the Mother such an unexpected thundering assault that we felt our hearts would stop with fear and consternation. It was Mahakali's wrath. I have never since seen her in such a fiery mood. Sri Aurobindo was lying quietly; the Mother came into the room and, standing by his bed, asked Dr. Manilal what he thought of the fracture. The doctor either purposely gave an evasive reply with some hesitation or did not consider the case serious. The Mother exploded, "Don't hide it! we know the truth," Then I saw something rare that I shall never forget. The Mother prostrated herself on the floor before Sri Aurobindo and, I believe, began to pray to him. From this supplication I could realise the gravity of the situation. Yet, she had shown no trace of it until then. Calm and solemn, Sri Aurobindo heard the silent prayer.

Our working hours as attendants were divided according to individual preference. Purani chose the oddest hour of 12 midnight, but most convenient for the rest of us. As for the work, there was, to begin with, very little to do since Sri Aurobindo was to remain flat on his back in bed, without making any movement. Only someone had always to be near at hand in case he needed anything. The attendance by the entire team was required only at particular

times, if, for instance, the body needed some adjustment after a long stay in one position. He who had had the Mother as the sole companion, and Champaklal as the only attendant, now had to admit others into his sanctum. Circumstances broke down the barriers of solitude and forced upon him a new pattern of life.

Little by little the air of unfamiliarity gave way as Sri Aurobindo began to take cognizance of the new situation and the new conditions that were around him. Our awe also diminished gradually; Dr. Manilal was helpful in this matter because he had attended the Maharaja and knew the ways of great men. Here too he combined very well his unobtrusive medical personality and simple devotional fervour. None felt like leaving the Presence even for meals, though there was hardly anything to do. There must have been pain and discomfort owing to the unaccustomed posture but Sri Aurobindo would scarcely disturb anybody and would not call for any assistance. Only once I remember the doctor had to be called at night for some gnawing pain. The days began to take on a more and more rosy tint as the Master became more and more communicative.

The Mother had a wheeled dinner table made for Sri Aurobindo, so he could take his meals sitting up in bed. She would lay the table herself, push it to the bed and serve the meals with her own hands. One day, not knowing the Mother's ways, we rushed forward to help her push the table. With a sweet smile she complained to Sri Aurobindo, "Oh, they are taking away my work!" Much abashed, quickly we drew back and learnt the lesson that one must not be too forward! At first Sri Aurobindo took three meals a day, the morning one being quite light. Champaklal and I used to be present at this time. One day wishing to give me something, the Mother asked me, "Do you like bananas?" I answered promptly, "I don't dislike them, Mother." The Mother and Sri Aurobindo smiled but she refrained from giving them to me. That was my first joke with the Mother!

The morning meal however was stopped very soon, since it was too early for his appetite. Here I must mention a minor but interesting episode about tea. It was a well-known fact that Sri Aurobindo was fond of a daily cup of tea. The accident had upset that long standing habit. Now the question was taken up. Dr. Manilal proposed that Sri Aurobindo should take a cup of

marmite during the day as well as tea. Sri Aurobindo would not take both. I do not remember whether he took marmite at all, but I distinctly remember that he was taking tea. I also had a personal reason for this recollection, for I was, and even now am, a lover of tea, if not a mild addict. But Sri Aurobindo's way of drinking tea was rather odd; he had to drink it from a feeding cup! Could anyone relish a fine beverage taken out of a feeding cup, I wondered! Before the accident whenever we heard the tinkling sound of his spoon at midnight from his corner room, we used to say, "Sri Aurobindo is having tea!" One day he suddenly declared, "I won't take tea any more!" Thus a life-long habit was given up in an instant! This incident recalls another which took place many years earlier. It concerns his early habit of smoking cigars. A cigar was almost always between his lips. Once Devdas Gandhi, son of Mahatma Gandhi, visited him and saw the inevitable cigar. He shot the question, "Why are you attached to smoking?" At once came the retort, "Why are you so attached to nonsmoking?" This gives us a hint that Sri Aurobindo smoked, but without any real attachment and the proof came a few years later when the Mother began to take charge of household affairs and smoking was indulged in by all the inmates. She favoured non-smoking. Without the slightest hesitation Sri Aurobindo put aside his cigar. There was an end to an inveterate habit without the least fuss.

To resume our story. When everything had settled down and our work had fallen into a regular pattern, the "famous" talks started, in the evening. At the beginning Sri Aurobindo, lying on his back, used to speak in a low voice to the group crowded near the bed. Naturally on that occasion all of us, except Purani who stood at a distance, would rally round to listen to his finely cadenced voice and his utterances on various topics made in an intimate tone. He would rarely look at anybody while talking.

The food question easily solved, next came the problem of the bath. We were left no other choice but to give a daily sponge bath so long as Sri Aurobindo was confined to bed. But even long afterwards, it continued for lack of a proper bathroom. Whatever the arrangement was, Sri Aurobindo was not affected in the least. It was Dr. Manilal's unique privilege to touch the divine body and give it a human cleansing with soap, powder, etc.

Another thing that required medical attention was the proper functioning of the bowels. Their habit was deranged, and a constant flat position added to the difficulty. Various medical remedies were proposed, all of which were vetoed. Here Sri Aurobindo was more positive. He explained that he had not been accustomed to taking any medical accessories for years and years, all his ailments he had cured by the application of spiritual Force. We argued that *trifalā*, for instance, could hardly be called a medicine, it was a compound made of three fruits. Since the argument did not work, we asked, “Why not apply the Force then?” “Well,” he replied, “not that I am not doing it, but the body is not accustomed to receive the Force in this position.” He added with a smile, “It is a tamasic position, and I feel too lazy to apply the Force.” We all laughed to hear this candid admission. Soon however the body did learn to respond, and there was no further trouble on that score. Of course, there were fluctuations and he used to remark, “It is like the story of helping too much or too little.” When we failed to grasp the allusion, he explained it at length. The story goes like this: During the Boer War two soldiers were running away on horseback. One of them was somewhat short and plump. He fell down from the horse. Finding it difficult to mount up, and the enemies hotly pursuing, he made a prayer: “Oh God, help me to my saddle!” and gave a big jump. He fell not on the saddle, but on the other side, and was caught. He exclaimed: “Thou hast helped me too much!” Since then the joke has become proverbial among us.

One minor trouble that worried us was the early appearance of bedsores. They took some time to heal and it needed rubber cushions to protect the back from further damage. Sri Aurobindo enquired daily about the condition. From then on, he started taking an active interest in his health in every detail.

It will be seen from the above account that a personal relation had now grown between the Guru and the disciples; the sense of awe and distance had vanished. In this respect, Dr. Manilal must be considered our vanguard. His age, profession, charming childlike nature melted the apparently frosty reserve of the Master. The Divine has a soft corner for the healers of the body. The much abused human representative of the Divine Healer has still a place in the economy of things! Nevertheless, even in his personal relations, Sri Aurobindo never lost his impersonality.



Now, as far as I was concerned, I was face to face with a disquieting situation. Dr. Manilal was to depart. He had come on a short leave for the Darshan and had made quite a long stay. He could not further extend his holidays, nor was it necessary, he said. For everything was running well, “according to schedule”; the critical period had been tided over. We had only to follow the present regime almost blindfold, and there would be no trouble that he could foresee. Besides, Sri Aurobindo’s force was there constantly at our call. The doctor assured us that he would come again when the limb was released from the plaster. But I could not be so easily persuaded. I was most reluctant to take the divine burden on my shoulders, frail as they were, and poor as I was in knowledge, strength and experience. True, things appear simple enough in the presence of a superior authority, but troubles gather as soon as he turns his back, for the adverse forces try to test, as it were, the novice, the uninitiated. So I clung to him like a child and entreated him not to leave me in mid-stream. The Mother also pleaded on my behalf with the result that he stayed for a few days more. Sri Aurobindo was witnessing the scene silently. Then, after cheering me up, Dr. Manilal left to resume his post and to look after his family who felt helpless without him and were pressing him to come back. My dark forebodings were however set at rest by the Grace that always helps one who relies upon its power, and there was no cause for anxiety. The Divine took good care of himself. Only once as I was taking an afternoon nap did a call come down. When I ran up, Sri Aurobindo said with an almost apologetic smile, “Oh, it is nothing much! the knee has been paining for some time, perhaps the position has got disturbed.” I tried to set it right, it wouldn’t work. But fortunately some readjustment of the slings put the matter right and I heaved a sigh of relief when he said, “It is all right now.” But the pain could not have been “nothing much”, for he would not have “troubled” me for a trivial discomfort.

Things were moving quite well. No more shadows to overcast our days. We were as merry and buoyant as the spring, our faces shining and hearts singing in the bliss of the divine company and laughing with the delightful humour of the evening talks. We were now looking forward to the day when the splints would be removed. People started asking if there was any chance of a Darshan in February. They would sorely miss it. The specialist had

advised, because of the seriousness of the case and the advanced age of the patient, to keep the plaster on for ten weeks. Dr. Rao, on the other hand wanted for the same reasons, to cut the period to six weeks, for, he said, firm bony union must have already taken place and the very age of the patient should militate against a long static condition in bed, as bed-sores and congestion of the lungs might set in. In fact, these had appeared and cleared up. So a comedy ensued on the proverbial difference between doctors. Dr. Rao visited us frequently and insisted every time that these splints be removed. It pained him, he said, to see the Master being confined unnecessarily for such a long wearisome period, and he said he had raised the matter with the specialist but they agreed to differ! He quoted his own hospital experiences in his favour. Though ten weeks was too long a period, none of us were willing to take the risk. "What risk is there?" he argued. "Besides, Sri Aurobindo is an extraordinary patient; we can expect him to take good care of himself." As a result of his repeated insistence, the Mother at last asked Sri Aurobindo to adjudicate. He replied, "If I am an extraordinary patient, I must take extraordinary precaution too. The forces are quite active. I can't trust that I won't make some awkward movement in sleep. Between ten weeks and six, let us come to a compromise and put it to eight weeks." Dr. Rao was apparently satisfied. "Doctors differ" became henceforth a savoury gibe! In view of the complications that followed later on I am inclined to believe that Dr. Rao, was right in his opinion, but his rather ebullient personality failed to carry weight.

There was another unexpected visitor. Dr. Savor, Principal of a College in the South, and an amateur homeopath. I do not know how he gained entry into the sanctuary. Since homeopathy claimed to have some good remedies for hastening bony union, he was perhaps given a chance with the Mother's consent. But there was no way of ascertaining the effect of the treatment. It did no harm, I suppose. Satyendra reminded me that at Dr. Savor's suggestion, a homeopathic drug *Nux Vomica X* had been tried for Sri Aurobindo's constipation at the beginning. That having failed a higher potency 200 of the same drug was given and it produced a good effect.

Dr. Manilal wanted me to keep him informed of Sri Aurobindo's condition and, as if to be quite assured, got even the Mother's seal upon it. The seal

however could not affect my habitual indolence, and this was further encouraged, because everything was proceeding in a I smooth manner. The Mother inquired once, perhaps on Dr. Manilal's complaint about my silence, then she referred my dilatoriness to Sri Aurobindo and I had to write without delay.

In addition to my medical work, I had to do some intellectual work as well. Reading aloud the daily newspapers to Sri Aurobindo was one. *The Hindu* naturally was the paper of choice. His way of reading which I had to follow at first amused me, but I realised that most of us also read in a similar way. His remarks were quite enjoyable. He would say, "Read out the prominent headlines." As I read them aloud successively, he would ask, "Yes, what does it say? Let us hear." Or, "That doesn't matter. Anything else?" Thus in 10 or 15 minutes all the news was served out. The Editorial had an occasional interest. One other paper that caught his fancy was *The Daily Mail* for its Curly Wee cartoon. He kept his interest in it till the end though he found it getting stale and dry. In the evening, the *Weekly New Statesman and Nation*, sometimes the *Manchester Guardian*, used to be read by Purani; later on it came to be my job, but it stopped after a while. It was probably through these media that he maintained his contact with the details of the fast-changing movements in the political and cultural world, whose general aspects he could be inwardly aware of by his universalised yogic consciousness.

## THE RECOVERY

December and January had rolled on smoothly. We were now looking forward to the removal of the splints. Dr. Rao on his weekly visits was pressing his case for the removal and was laughed at by all of us till he promised not to raise the issue again, only to break his word the next time. About the first week of February, some disquieting symptoms appeared. There was pain in the knee-joint and a mild swelling of the leg. We were very much perturbed by this unexpected intrusion. The specialist, informed about it, replied that such minor complications were not rare in fracture cases and would soon clear up. Now Rao got his chance: he argued that the unduly long immobilisation had caused the symptoms and urged the removal of the splints. Poor doctor! Nobody listened to his lonely voice. We all clung to the authority of the specialist and waited for his second visit. But Pondicherry to Madras was then no flying motor-drive! We had no cars, buses still belonged to the dreamland and the train service was as slow as it is today. I do not remember exactly when the specialist came and removed the splints, probably in the third or fourth week of February. As soon as it was done, the entire limb from the thigh downwards swelled up, to our deep consternation. The thigh looked frightful, almost double its size. The Mother kept an ominous silence, but Sri Aurobindo was as unconcerned as ever. The specialist repeated his view that such complications do set in in some cases, so we need not worry. The oedema was of no consequence and would gradually subside. He was satisfied that a firm union of the bone had taken place. With proper and careful treatment, massage, compress, gradual walking, etc., the leg would return to its normal size. The Mother was not however so easily satisfied. She questioned him very closely on the cause of the oedema, its pathology, complications and danger, or other possible sequels. When the specialist stated that sometimes movements might dislodge a venous clot and bring about serious complications, the Mother caught him at once and asked how then could he recommend massage and passive movements. The doctor was not prepared for such an astute question from a “woman” and said that the Mother was a very intelligent person! We reported this remark to Sri Aurobindo; he simply smiled.

All of us were very much depressed by this adverse manifestation, since it would delay his recovery. I was particularly disturbed and worried, for I had not met with such a situation before and had to face it all alone — as a doctor. I needed much strength and faith. So far it was Sri Aurobindo who had been giving me his constant spiritual support in my medical work. Now the Divine Physician himself was the patient. Whom should I approach for help? Though I did not openly ask him to cure himself using my poor self as the physical instrument, as I did in my other medical cases, still with the conviction that his and the Mother's force would be there, I proceeded with the instructions left by the specialist. But I was not free from anxiety. Meanwhile, I wrote to Dr. Manilal about the complication, asking him to come down and bring with him two or three pairs of crutches from Bombay.

Then there was the right foot that drew our attention. It had shrunk and shrivelled up, due to impeded circulation and inactivity, to almost half its size. The skin of the sole had become dry like parchment. The Mother brought some fine white cream and asked me to apply it, Sri Aurobindo sat up, his right leg extended and the Mother stood by, watching the application. Her presence affected my self-confidence and I began the work rather clumsily. “No, no, not that way!” she cried out. Her protest put me at once on to the correct method. Then she smiled and said, “Yes, that's right!” Sri Aurobindo, as usual, was enjoying the scene. The whole layer of skin of the sole, thin, candle-white, peeled off like a cast. How small and tender looked the foot! He has written of his inner fight saying, “My gaping wounds are a thousand and one”, in his poem *A God's Labour*. Here was an outer wound added to his physical being. Still, no complaint! War is war!

His hair also caused some trouble, for it was in a terribly tangled “intrinsicate” mess due to its prolonged fixed position — a network as complicated as its definition by Dr. Johnson. How to untangle it? I do not know what made us bold enough to tackle that feminine problem instead of placing it in the Mother's proper care. We had no idea then that she would be only too glad to do the job; neither did she offer to do it. And Sri Aurobindo, of course, kept quiet. It is we who must ask, must “open”! It took us about an hour's desperate and delicate handling to disentangle that conglomerate skein like Lord Shiva's matted locks and bring all into a decent order. Sri

Aurobindo accepted this torture with his usual submission. At the end of the perpetration, he simply asked, “Have you left some hair?” We laughed. True, this was meant as a joke, but he was not indifferent to physical grace and beauty. Later on when the Mother took up his toilet and attended to his hair, after each combing, tufts of the precious glossy hair, were loosened off, and enriched Champaklal’s treasury. Sri Aurobindo on being informed of this loss, did something to stop the falling, and till the end the hair retained its glistening abundance.

When Dr. Manilal arrived, I breathed a sigh of relief! He was not very happy to see the new development, but hoped that everything would be all right. He was confronted with three problems: the swelling, educating the patient to walk and the bending of the knee, all of which he dealt with in his characteristic efficient manner. The swelling according to him would subside in due course. Gentle massage and hot and cold compress continued, followed later by hot douche. We used to note its diminution week by week. But it took some months to disappear completely. The bending of the knee would also take some time in view of the adhesion of the patella to the underlying tissues, in spite of passive movements. The re-education in walking seemed to be rather a straightforward job, though it was the most awkward and difficult one, for Sri Aurobindo had to walk with crutches! All that was needed was a patient and persistent effort. For Sri Aurobindo’s nature, unaccustomed to physical or mechanical contrivances, and the narrow space in the room made the venture somewhat risky. The first day he got up to use the crutches was a memorable one for us. In the presence of the Mother we made him stand up, handed him the crutches and showed him how to use them. He fumbled and remarked, “Yes, it is easy to say.” Two or three different pairs were tried out, but as he could not handle them properly, the Mother proposed that he had better walk leaning on two persons — one on either side; It was certainly a bright suggestion, for Sri Aurobindo walking on crutches would have reminded us of his own phrase about Hephaestus’ “lame omnipotent motion”, — an insult to his shining majestic figure. Purani and Satyendra were selected by Dr. Manilal as his human supports, much less incongruous than the ungainly wooden instruments! That was how the re-education started. The paradox of the Divine seeking frail human aid gave food to my sense of

humour. However, both men proved unequal in stature; the Mother made Champaklal replace Satyendra on the left side. Now the arrangement was just and perfect and Champaklal had his aspiration fulfilled. His was the last support Sri Aurobindo was to give up. For, as his steps gained in strength and firmness, he used a stick in the right hand, and Champaklal on the left. Finally he too was dropped. As soon as it came to be known that the Master was using a walking stick, several were presented to him — and there was one even of tea-wood from Assam! Thus everyday after the noon and night meals the Mother would come to his room and present the stick, and he would walk about for half an hour in her presence.

While waiting for the Mother's arrival, he would practise various bending exercises for the knee which had been improvised by Dr. Manilal. He did them sitting on the edge of the bed. He actively obeyed whatever was demanded of him. One of the exercises was hanging of the leg — which later became a common joke amongst us.

It was not an unreasonable fear that the slightest inattention in walking on his part might upset his balance and cause a fall. He had to walk with his head bent, looking at the ground, and had to be very careful, particularly at turnings, by checking his speed. We were posted at these turnings to prevent any possibility of a mishap. His steps were now not like those of Zeus on Mount Olympus! They had naturally lost that resounding force we were accustomed to hear, when he used to pace up and down above, during our meditation in the hall below. He told us that it was during those walks that he used to bring down the highest Force. As the walking progressed with of his former strength, we expected a return to his God-like steps.

The days were getting hotter and he used to perspire profusely. There was no ceiling fan. We started fanning him as he walked, but what were two small hand-fans — the wing-wafts of tiny birds in the sultry heat of the closed room? Sri Aurobindo did not seem to be concerned at all, though we were. Purani hit upon a brilliant idea. He came up with a huge palm leaf fan festooned with a red cloth border, as used for the temple Deities. The Mother smiled approvingly. Stationed near the door, he began fanning with all the vigour of his bare muscular arms and a miniature storm would sweep by. We enjoyed the grand sight. It was so becoming to his giant's nature! He handled

it very well. Once for some days he could not come up, and the fan lay idle, like the mythical bow in the cave. With much trepidation I took it up, a pigmy to the giant, but seeing no question on the Mother's face, I set to work. The performance was not bad. I felt rather proud, but alas, pride had its quick fall! By same *faux pas*, or should I say *fausse main*, one day I struck Sri Aurobindo's back with the fan, as he was just turning my corner! He immediately looked around with an indulgent smile, and the Mother smiled graciously to lift me up from the crushing shame. But fortunately for the Guru and the disciple, it was not repeated. Afterwards both Champaklal and Mulshankar used the fan with a greater skill.

When at the end of the walk he would stand in the middle of the room with the stick in his right hand, his upright figure with the flowing beard on his broad bare chest, his two plaits of silken hair in front, and a far away look in his calm wide-open eyes, he would kindle a soft glow of love and adoration in our hearts. The Mother would then take the stick from him; after an exchange of sweet smiles between them, she would go away. Champaklal would then step in and wipe away the dripping perspiration.

Then he would sit in the chair and sponging of the divine body would begin. This practice was continued for several years till a bathroom was built nearby. Our complaint about this crude mode of cleansing was received with a disarming serenity. Neither one arrangement nor another made the slightest difference to his composure. He did not seem to be living in the body at all; or he left it completely into the Mother's care.

Along with the sponging the talks would start: Purani from behind, I from the front, Dr. Manilal sitting on one side and Satyendra standing on the other. We all took part in the talk and worked at the same time. And Sri Aurobindo, perhaps melting by the touch of hot water, would release his silence into a many-hued speech. Sometimes Purani hurled a question from behind, Satyendra took it up, then I answered, and so the question went round with Sri Aurobindo sitting at the centre, listening quietly, answering, or to our delight, springing a surprise by a sudden joke! At times he sat still, leaning against the chair with two fingers of his right hand on his lips, as if musing on something. After a while he would relax and the talk would follow. Once in the midst of our engrossed talk, there was a mild tap at the door. Sri



Aurobindo looked at us, and we wondered who could be violating the privacy. Another tap, and the door was opened by one of us; to our surprise it was the Mother who came with a piece of paper in her hand and said, "For Sri Aurobindo." It was some important war news that had just been relayed over the radio. This little incident is a pointer to the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's vital interest in the war.

The last thing to be done was the bending of the knee. As I have mentioned, there was an exercise called hanging the leg. Manilal's approaching visit for the Darshan would make Sri Aurobindo utter, "Oh, Manilal is coming, I must hang my leg!" or when Manilal would enquire from Baroda about it, he would reply with a smile, "It is still hanging!" The bending exercise was apparently an ineffectual one, but Sri Aurobindo persisted and we too encouraged him as if he were a little child. At any rate the result was not proportionate to the effort. Dr. Rao who was very happy to see the Master at last free from the tyrannical shackles of the splints took the opportunity, whenever he came, of massaging his leg. "May I do it, Sir?" he would ask and would never forget to praise Sri Aurobindo as an ideal patient.

Another imposition placed on him by the doctor was that in order to tone up his body he had to do some free-hand exercises. Every morning while still in bed, he would, without fail, practise them vigorously — the flexion and extension of his arms and the raising and lowering of his legs. Sometimes the arms overcome by sleep would sink into feeble, mechanical movements and then would wake up with a start to resume their duty! The summer heat or an uncomfortable position in bed could not persuade him to break the rule. When I entered the room for my morning work, this assiduous application would greet my eyes. His leg would rise and fall like a hammer, and I could not contain my feeling of amusement and admiration at this hard Tapasya to achieve the supramental perfection of the body. Perhaps this semi-blasphemy has come upon me like a boomerang, now making me undergo physical Tapasya even at this age! It cannot be denied, anyway, that Sri Aurobindo was not meant for such hard and rough gymnastics. There are some things which cannot be conceived of, for instance Tagore or Dilip courting jail during the Non-cooperation movement.

Manilal's prescription did some good all the same; for the soft and mellow frame got a firm nervous tone and the muscles developed fine contours, to his great satisfaction. Perfection is the supramental key-word. Any imperfection, however slight, was foreign to Sri Aurobindo's nature. I give a minor example: one day, while talking about snoring, one of us was tactless enough to tell him that he too had the habit. It must have been an awkward side-effect of the accident due to a malposition of the body. But it came to him as a great surprise. And I was astonished to mark that from the very next day the physiological aberration stopped for good! Even while correcting our poems, he would always do it perfectly. If he was pressed for time, he would ask the poem back and make it flawless. Any perfection achieved in any field by him was a cosmic conquest. "One man's perfection still can save the world."

Dr. Manilal advised us to massage Sri Aurobindo's body too, particularly the lower part. Early morning was thought by common consent to be the most suitable time for it. Three of us would massage him part by part; as he lay in bed, and we would go on talking at the same time. To some of our queries he would often answer "perhaps, perhaps". Much amused, we asked him one day, "Why don't you say 'yes or no', instead of this uncertain 'perhaps'?" "Because", he replied, "the Supermind alone has the certainty." We all laughed. Thus we were merrily massaging him and chatting away without ever considering his comfort or discomfort. After quite a few days' torture at our hands he asked me one day most gently, "Is the massage really necessary? You see, this is the only time when I have some sleep." I replied somewhat guiltily, "We shall stop it, it is not necessary." He could have easily dropped it earlier, but the doctor had to be obeyed!

Thanks to all these arduous and assiduous exercises, the limb gained in solid strength, and the body its requisite tone. He began now to read the daily papers himself. One day as I was passing a rapid glance over the morning paper, assuming that he was not yet ready, he enquired, "The paper hasn't come?" I promptly handed it over to him. "Have you digested the news?" he asked. I smiled abashed! Quiet casual humour, characteristic of Sri Aurobindo.

We reached the month of April. Sri Aurobindo's rapid progress became widely known and people began to clamour for a Darshan; they had already missed two of them, and for the next one in August it would be too painfully long to wait. The Mother also began to plead on behalf of the bhaktas, though not much pleading was needed. For we know that when the Mother's heart had melted, the Father's would not take long to do so. Besides, the Mother probably wanted Sri Aurobindo to take up his regular activities as soon as possible. Even for him she would not make any exception. Her dynamic nature cannot brook too long an ease. April 24th was then fixed for the Darshan, as it was the day of the Mother's final arrival in Pondicherry. Thenceforth the April Darshan became a permanent feature. The date well suited the professors and students, since it fell within the span of the summer holidays. But the darshan time had to be changed from the morning to the afternoon and it would be a darshan in the true sense of the word. For the devotees would simply come and stand for a brief while before the Mother and the Master, have their darshan and quietly leave. Sri Aurobindo tersely remarked, "No more of that long seven-hour darshan!" Formerly the Darshan was observed with a great ceremonial pomp. Starting at about 7.30 a.m., it ran with one breathing interval, up to 3 p.m. The devotees offered their garlands and flowers, did two, even three or four pranams to the Mother and the Master who remained glued to one place throughout the ordeal, and endured another martyrdom under this excessive display of bhakti even as Raman Maharshi suffered from the "plague of prasads". Now, all that was cut down at one stroke by the force of external circumstances, and all expression transformed into a quiet inner adoration which is a characteristic of this Yoga. Sri Aurobindo's accident made the ceremonial Darshan a thing of past history.

On the eve of the Darshan, the Mother washed Sri Aurobindo's hair with our help. It was such an elaborate and complicated affair that had it been left in our hands, it would have ended in confusion, particularly because it had to be done in the bedroom. Hot and cold water, basins, soap, powder, etc., etc., had to be kept ready. What a ceremony really, this washing was! No wonder ladies go in for bob or shingle. Formerly, Sri Aurobindo, it seems, used to wash his long hair every night, but I am sure he did without all this

paraphernalia. His secluded life had, of course, simplified the whole complex process. Later on when a bathroom adjoining his living room was built, washing lost its formidable character. Sri Aurobindo bore all this torture as a part of the game, I suppose.

The Darshan day at last! In the morning, the Mother arrived in his room with a flower, probably a red lotus, knelt before the Lord, placed the lotus on his bed and bowed down to receive his blessings and his sweet smile. This was the second time I saw her doing pranam to him. The first time was on her birthday, February 21. It was a revelation to me, for I did not expect her to bow down in the Indian way. On every Darshan day since then I enjoyed the sight. On other days she used to take his hand and lightly kiss it. With her customary drive, she chalked out the Darshan programme, the time for Sri Aurobindo's lunch and of her coming for the Darshan. We had to be ready and keep the Master ready too. From the early morning time began to move fast, the Mother was seen rushing about, she had so many things to attend to! Everything finished, clad in a lovely sari, a crown adorning her shapely head, looking like a veritable Goddess, she entered Sri Aurobindo's room with brisk steps, earlier than the appointed time, as was her wont. She gave a quick glance at us. We were all attention. The entire group was present, it being the first Darshan after the accident. She was pleased to find us ready. Sri Aurobindo was dressed in an immaculate white *dhoti*, its border daintily creased, as is the custom in Bengal; a silk *chaddar* across his chest and his long shining hair flowing down — a picture that reminded us of Shiva and Shakti going out to give darshan to their bhaktas; Sri Aurobindo was in front and the Mother behind. They sat together as on other Darshan days, she on his right, a glorious view, and the ceremony began.

It was, however, a simple Darshan. One by one the sadhaks stood for a brief moment before the One-in-Two, and passed on quietly thrilled and exalted by their silent look and gracious smile. The feelings of the sadhaks can be imagined when they saw their beloved Master restored to his normal health! The Darshan was over within an hour, and when Sri Aurobindo was back in his room Dr. Rao remarked in his childlike manner, "Sir, you looked grand at the Darshan!" Sri Aurobindo smiled and we retorted, just to tease him, "At other times he doesn't?" Rao, nonplussed, replied, "No, no, I did

not mean that.” Truly, Rao had expressed the sentiments of hundreds of devotees who had a glimpse of him during the Darshan. What a grandeur and majesty in his simple silent pose! What a power, as if he held the whole world in the palm of his hand! If ever a human being could attain the stature of a god, he was there for all to see and be blessed by. Many have had a deep change after just one touch of his God-like magnificence. “A touch can alter the fixed front of Fate.” Many had visions and boons they had long been seeking for, and for the sadhaks each Darshan was a step to a further milestone towards the Eternal. Sri Aurobindo had said: “Darshans are periods of great descents!” It was not for nothing that Hitler chose the 15th of August for his royal ascension in Buckingham Palace and got the first heavy blow. Nor was it for nothing that India gained her independence on that immortal day.

Now that Sri Aurobindo was physically all right, the Mother must find some work for him too! Most opportunely came a demand from the Arya Publishing House, Calcutta, for a book from Sri Aurobindo, preferably *The Life Divine*. The work had appeared long ago in the *Arya* and it could now be published in book form. The Mother caught hold of the idea and asked for his approval. Sri Aurobindo wanted to write one or two new chapters. So he set to work. A new writing table was made and placed in front of him across his bed, provided with three pens, two pencils and paper. For me it was a moment of great curiosity to see him at work. We had heard so much about the silent mind through which ideas, leaping down from above, passed directly into the pen, that I thought I could now put it to the test; as if one could see the silent mind as well as the invisible ideas descending one by one from above the ranges of the mind! At least I could see how he wrote. Was it at all like us, human beings, scrapping, stopping, thinking?

There he was, then, sitting on the bed, with his right leg stretched out. I was watching his movements from behind the bed. No sooner had he begun than followed line after line as if everything was chalked out in the mind, or as he used to say, a tap was turned on and a stream poured down. Absorbed in perfect poise, gazing now and then in front, wiping the perspiration off the hands — for he perspired profusely — he would go on for about two hours. The Mother would drop in with a glass of coconut water. Sometimes she had

to wait for quite a while before he was aware of her presence. Then exclaiming “Ah”, he took the glass from the loving hand, drank it slowly, and then plunged back into his work! It was a very sweet vision, indeed, the Mother standing quietly by his side with a smile and watching him, and he forgetful of everything, writing away; then a short exchange of beatific glances. At the end of the writing, the place where he sat would be completely drenched — there was so much perspiration in the summer months. But remarkably free from any odour! We used to wipe his body and change the bed sheets. But what shocked me most was when finishing the first chapter, he asked us to tear it and throw it into the wastepaper basket! It needed rewriting! I was very much tempted to keep it intact, but that would be a violation of his order. Champaklal told me that he kept some of the torn pieces as a souvenir. I noticed what a fine calligraphy it was with hardly a scratch, almost without a scar or wound. Not at all like his “correspondence” handwriting which he himself could not decipher sometimes! We have cut many jokes with him about his handwriting. Once I wrote, “Sir, will you take the trouble to mark those portions of your letter that can be shown to others?” He replied, “Good Lord, sir, I can’t do that. You forget that I will have to try to read my own hieroglyphs. I have no time for such an exercise. I leave it for others.” I do not know if all great men write in this spotless and spontaneous manner. It seems he wrote all his seven volumes of the *Arya* directly on the typewriter. How I wished I could one day write at this “aeroplanic speed”, to use Sri Aurobindo’s own expression. However the writing of *Savitri* was quite a different story. There he had to “labour”, change, chisel, omit, revise; all this, of course, from a silent mind. Only a few poems like *Rose of God* and *A God’s Labour* just came down *en bloc* and not a word was changed! The Mother must have been very pleased to see him resume his activity after the passage through the long dark night.

With the improvement of his health, he began to spend some hours sitting in a chair and devoting his entire time to spiritual, intellectual and creative activities. The accident had released him in a drastic manner from the 8 or 9 hours’ labour of “correspondence”. He could now take up the revision of all his major works, one after another. The first to see the light of day was the first volume of his *magnum opus*, *The Life Divine*. It was the end of 1939, the

year of World War II. The publication of the *Arya* of which the Divine Life was the basic theme, started in 1914, the year of World War I. Can we call these mere coincidences? The two other volumes came out on the heels of the first one and were extensively rewritten. He composed many sonnets also. We used to see his pen indefatigably writing away page after page. We could not know what was being written, because, except for the sonnets, he passed everything to the Mother. She received it as a gift from God and sent it on to Prithwi Singh for typing. Though his eyesight was bad, his typing was so neat and clean, done with such minute care, that Sri Aurobindo was very pleased with his work.

So long as Sri Aurobindo could use his own eyes, we had no direct means of knowing what he was about. Of course, we could sometimes overhear or he would himself tell us about the topics, how far he had come, if something new he had added, etc. Purani and Satyendra were interested in *The Life Divine*, and the former would try to fish for some information regarding it. Sometimes Fate or Chance or even necessity helped us in knowing what the Master was doing.

Srinivasa Iyengar sent his manuscript of Sri Aurobindo's life for his perusal. Sri Aurobindo began to add to it a substantial portion about his political life of which none had any authentic knowledge. He was in the habit of using a small pad called "bloc" manufactured in France and meant for writing short letters or notes. But as he used it for the former purpose, many sheets were needed. He tore them out of the bloc and tried to pin them together, but because of their bulk, he failed to do it. Neither would he call for our assistance; he would go on fumbling. We would enjoy the scene from a distance till Champaklal, unable to restrain himself, would rush up and take the awkward business away from him. Thenceforth, recognising his limitations, perhaps, he waited for Champaklal to do the job. Nolini who knew Sri Aurobindo's ways from his early days, instructed us not to leave all these slight material vexations to him. But how to spare him unless he himself called, was the point! One had to be bold and "open"!

The publication of the first volume of *The Life Divine* was a great event and was hailed with delight. From all lips was heard a jubilant chanting, "*The*

*Life Divine* is out, *The Life Divine* is out.” Dara<sup>1</sup> composed some light verses to celebrate the event. Sri Aurobindo, informed about it, asked, “What sort of a poem?”

Life Divine  
Full of wine?”

Purani answered, “Yes, you have caught it. It goes:

Life Divine,  
Mother’s wine.  
The book is out  
Let us shout.”

There was a rush to buy the book and get Sri Aurobindo’s autograph in the bargain! For a divine policy was announced — whose brain-wave it was, I do not know — that all buyers would be favoured with the autograph of the Master. Volume after volume began to pour in with the names of the buyers appended to them. The names were sometimes quite long, such as Purushottamdas Thakurdas Chintamani Patil, and he would ask, “Am I to write all that?” And there were fanciful spellings to boot! Dates as well! At times the names of the husband and his wife together! If sometimes a name struck his fancy he would ask, “Who the devil is he?” or “Who is this Lord Shiva?” or we, would ourselves say that he was so and so. Many were the bhaktas who could not understand a word of the book but bought it for the sake of his blessings. For us sadhaks who could not afford to buy it, the book was given free on our birthday, with the autograph added to it. Later all the books of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo when published, were given to us according to our needs, on our birthdays. The Mother would ask, “Do you want any book? Have you got this book?” One wonders how much money was spent on this; and the custom continues even now, though in a modified form.

When Vol. III came out, it being the bulkiest, Sri Aurobindo remarked, “What a fat elephant!” And when they entered the room in packs and were heaped on the side-couch waiting for the autograph, they made an impressive herd and thrilled us with joy that *The Life Divine* had at last been delivered

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<sup>1</sup> A Mohammedan disciple.



on this woe-begone planet of ours! But with the encroaching dimness of his eye-sight, the Mother stopped the practice of giving autographs altogether.

Another significant event that was shaping itself in 1939 was the political situation in Europe. Hitler's barking for *lebensraum* had been reverberating throughout the continent for some years and the war-clouds seemed to be gathering. Sri Aurobindo was watching the situation closely. In 1938 the war was almost imminent. Sri Aurobindo told us that "for many reasons war was not favoured at that time", and it did get stopped, as Sri Aurobindo wished. We used to hold daily discussions on the fate of the nations, of India and other dark consequences that would follow in the wake of Hitler's mad ambition. Chamberlain's "peace mission" failed and within a year of Sri Aurobindo's accident, the war broke out. We came to learn from him that England had at last declared war on Germany. He had learnt it from the Mother who had got the news from Pavitra. There was then no radio in the Ashram. We shall deal further with the topic of War in a separate chapter.

These are the highlights of the first year following the accident. Sri Aurobindo's leg had now become quite strong, he could walk without any support. When at the end of the year 1939, Dr. Manilal asked Sri Aurobindo if the accident had done any good, he replied, "Yes, I have advanced much further since last November. I have found time to complete some books. Now I get more time to concentrate!"

Owing to the accident, the Mother's programme also had changed a lot. She had had to suspend all Pranams and personal interviews with the sadhaks. But now they were resumed, though in a different form. Old things as they used to be never come back. I remarked before the Mother one day, "Now that Sri Aurobindo is all right we shall soon be packed off!" She heard and gave a broad smile.

The year 1940 found us, on the contrary, firmly established in Sri Aurobindo's service. He could not dispense with his old medical team. Life had now taken a definite pattern and ran, with minor variations, a regular course and our duties were fixed. The years that followed brought him closer and closer to us at first, then took him farther away at the end. The interlude

will have as its theme the divine event that had unrolled during the twelve years of our stay with the supreme Actor. I shall begin with his external life.

## THE HOUSE OF THE LORD

We were thus installed in the House for an indefinite period. This was the house in which Sri Aurobindo and the Mother lived for about a decade before we broke into their seclusion. Sri Aurobindo had not gone one step out of this house, nor seen any visitors or inmates; only Champaklal, his personal attendant, had glimpses of him. He used to find his body shining like gold. Our work too was to serve the Lord as is done in the temple, — not as medical attendants, for henceforth he needed none — but to minister to his physical and other minor needs, to be near him, even to amuse him by our talk and presence. That was our Yoga. What better way could there be than to serve personally the Guru, the Divine? Sri Ramakrishna had said to his nephew Hriday, “Serve me and you will get all you want.” We had no particular want till then and all our heart was offered to him in utter dedication. It is gratifying for us to remember that Sri Aurobindo had said in the beginning that he was happy to have such a team to serve him. Service was our life, and the hours passed “with a moon-imprinted sail”. Sri Aurobindo did not require, in fact, so many hands, since he had almost recovered the use of his own limbs, but it was not Sri Aurobindo’s or the Mother’s way to dispense with someone, even something, as soon as their need of him was over. Their grace Would always be with him.

How did we serve him? The best way to give a clear idea about it would be to present a picture of Sri Aurobindo’s daily life, now that it had fallen into a definite pattern and woven our activities into it. However, I fear that in depicting his external life, some misconception may be created in the minds of the readers about his real Self. Since man is usually led by surface appearance and expressions, we are likely to be taken up by his outward gestures or words and have not the least idea of the vast consciousness from which these movements flowed. For instance, when he talked to us as a friend, could we ever have imagined that he was the Divine talking to us as divine beings? When he saw Dr. Manilal, could Manilal have perceived that “it was no longer Dr. Manilal but the Divine living in the Divine” that he saw? How could we guess that living confined within the body and the small room, he saw “Paris, Tokyo and New York”? He could say, “My soul unhorizoned

widens to measureless sight.” Referring to a certain context I once told him, “I am satisfied with you as Sri Aurobindo pure and simple.” He replied, “No objection, I only suggested that I don’t know who this Sri Aurobindo pure and simple is. If you do, I congratulate you.”

Far be it from me to read his inner consciousness from his outer activities. Once I asked him to tell me the names of those who were enjoying the Brahmic consciousness so that I could have a practical knowledge of it! He replied, “How can you have a practical knowledge of it by knowing who has it? You might just as well expect to have a practical knowledge of high mathematics by knowing that Einstein is a great mathematician.” His written works leave us in no doubt about the heights of consciousness to which he soared, the depths he has explored and his constant status of consciousness. But how they would influence, affect his daily human activities is a question of perennial interest. Did not Arjuna pose that question to Sri Krishna? The activities themselves may not shed any light on his inner divinity, especially to a superficial gaze. Still, the truly great touch everything they do and say with a sense of greatness. Hence, my attempt to make a selective sketch of Sri Aurobindo’s outer life for the world-eye to have a glimpse of the riddle that he was throughout his earthly existence.

Many fantastic tales were abroad about his outer life, gaining ground and credit because of his living in seclusion. Some people believed that he neither ate nor slept, but remained absorbed in Samadhi. Others had heard that he could keep his body suspended in the air. Some there were who, like Arjuna, wanted genuinely to know how he spoke, how he sat and walked. The Mother had, at one time, discouraged us from dwelling upon these external aspects for fear that people’s minds would be deflected from the Reality. After all it is not what a man appears to be which is most important. And we can affirm that all Sri Aurobindo’s actions welled from the Divine Consciousness that he embodied: they were *yukta karma*. But how to demonstrate this? By having a practical knowledge of his day-to-day activity? Well, he who sees, sees!

Let us then begin from the very break of day. The sun’s rays came in by the eastern window; he was awake and the exercises started in bed, prescribed by Manilal. By 6.30 a.m. he sat up to receive the Mother who on her way to the Balcony Darshan visited him to have his darshan. Sri Aurobindo gave us

definite instructions to wake him up before the Mother's arrival. On the other hand, the Mother wanted us not to disturb his sleep. So at times we found ourselves in a quandary. Champaklal's devotional nature would not interrupt his sweet nap after the exercises, while I, when alone, would try by all sorts of devices to wake him up. Sometimes he himself would wake up only to learn that the Mother had come and gone! Then she would come back after the darshan and begin her day with his blessings, just as we did after her darshan. This was followed by his reading *The Hindu*. Between 9.00 a.m. and 10.00 a.m. the Mother came to comb his hair, apply a lotion and plait it. Most often she finished some business during this period. When a sadhak translated the Mother's *Prayers and Meditations* into English and wanted her approval, she had it read out before Sri Aurobindo and both of them made the necessary changes. She sometimes talked of private matters, and when her voice sank low, we took the hint and withdrew discreetly. She believed more in subtle methods than in open expressions. The gesture, the look, the smile, the fugitive glance, the silence, a thousand are her ways of communication to the soul! After the Mother had left, there started the routine of washing the face and mouth. Here a small detail calls for mention by its unusualness. When he had finished using Neem paste for his teeth and the mouth-wash (Vademecum), he massaged his gums with a little bit of Oriental Balm.

After this, till 3 or 4 p.m. Sri Aurobindo was all alone. Then his first meal would come; in between he sometimes took a glass of plain water. Now, what could he be doing at this time wrapped in a most mysterious silence? None except the Mother could throw any precise light on it. We were only told that he had a special work to do and must be left alone unless, of course, some very urgent business needed his attention. All that was visible to our naked eye was that he sat silently in his bed, afterwards in the capacious armchair, with his eyes wide open just as any other person would. Only he passed hours and hours thus, changing his position at times and making himself comfortable; the yes moving a little, and though usually gazing at the wall in front, never fixed *trāṭak*-like at any particular point. Sometimes the face would beam with a bright smile without any apparent reason, much to our amusement, as a child smiles in sleep. Only it was a waking sleep, for as we passed across the room, there was a dim recognition of our shadow-like

movements. Occasionally he would look towards the door. That was when he heard some sound which might indicate the Mother's coming. But his external consciousness would certainly not be obliterated. When he wanted something, his voice seemed to come from a distant cave; rarely did we find him plunged within, with his eyes closed. If at that time, the Mother happened to come for some urgent work or with a glass of water, finding him thus indrawn, she would wait, usually by the bedside till he opened his eyes. Then seeing her waiting, he would exclaim "Oh!" and the Mother's lips would part into an exquisite smile. He had told us that he was in the habit of meditating with open eyes. We kept ourselves ready for the call, sitting behind the bed at our assigned places or someone cleaning the furniture or doing other work in the room. One regular call was for a peppermint lozenge which he took some time before his meal. If the meal was late in coming he would ask for a second one. When our chatting became too animated and made us feel uneasy, one better informed would exclaim, "Do you think he is disturbed by such petty bubbles? He must be soaring in a consciousness where I wonder if even a bomb explosion would make any impression." At other relaxed moments he would take cognizance of incidental noises.

What could he be doing then with so much God-like ease and natural mastery? He once wrote to me that when he had some special work to do he had to concentrate. This, I think, gives the clue. For his cosmic work, this was the only time he had to himself. Whether to bring down the Supramental Light, or to dive deep into the nether Hell, to send his force for some world purpose, the war in Spain, World War II, helping the Allies or to solve some difficulties of the Ashram, even of individuals, must have been the nature of his special work. One day, after his concentration, I remember him saying, apropos of nothing, "I was seeing how Nishikanto was." At that time Nishikanto was not keeping well. I shall not speculate further on this intricate problem, lest I hear his taunting voice, "Nirod is weaving his romantic fancy!" How he was performing all these operations is beyond my grey matter!

There were occasions, though rare, when we had to intrude upon his strict privacy. An urgent call from the Ashram Press about some proof corrections of his book demanded his immediate attention. I cautiously approached from

behind and stood near him. He asked without turning my way, in an impersonal tone, “What is it?” A moment’s ripple in the vast even ocean of silence. The Mother always felt that pervasive silence whenever she entered the room. I informed him of the queries from the Press. There were some proof-readers who had the Johnsonian mind; they could not accept Sri Aurobindo’s flexible use of prepositions or some new turns of phrases. Either they thought these were due to oversight or was it their grammarian pedantry that made them wiser than he? At last he had to remark, “Let them not interfere with my English!” His admonitions were always gentle. When the Mother heard about it, she observed, “How do they dare correct his English? Sri Aurobindo is a gentleman; he won’t say anything that might hurt — I am not a gentleman.” We understood very well what the Mother meant. A few anecdotes to illustrate the point. When Sri Aurobindo was living with his family in Calcutta, Sarojini, his younger sister, made frequent complaints about the rudeness and impertinence of their cook. Sri Aurobindo simply listened and forgot all about it. Sarojini at last lost her patience and urged upon him a drastic step. Sri Aurobindo called the cook in a grave voice and asked, “I hear you have behaved rudely. Don’t do it again!” Everybody was disappointed at this anticlimax and realised that no further strictness could be expected of him. So too when the Mother once brought a complaint to him against a sadhak who, in a fit of temper, had beaten somebody, “This is the third time! What should be done? I want your sanction, Lord,” she said. Sri Aurobindo calmly replied, “Let him be given a final warning.” We knew very well that this “final warning” could not be really final.

The long stretch of silence ceased only with the arrival of his first and principal meal of the day. Still we hardly ever heard him express that his “stomach was getting unsteady”. The day’s second meal, supper, had to be quite light. Let me stress one thing at the very outset: in his whole tenor of life, he followed the rule laid down by the Gita, moderation in everything. This was his teaching as well as his practice. To look at the outward commonplaceness of his life, eating, sleeping, joking, etc., and to make a leaping statement that here was another man like oneself, would be logical, but not true. Similarly in Sri Aurobindo’s Yoga, even a high experience must not disturb the normal rhythm of life. Naturally, I was extremely curious, and

so were the others, I believe, to see what kind of food he took; had he any preference for a particular dish and how much had he in common with our taste? We had to wait a long time before he regained his health, and could sit up and “enjoy” a proper meal. As soon as people learnt about it, dishes from various sadhikas began to pour in as for the Deity in the temple. And just as the Deity does, so did he, or rather the Mother did on his behalf: only a little from a dish was offered to him and all the rest was sent back as *prasād*. For his regular meal, there were a few devotees like Amiya, Nolina and Mridu selected by the Mother for their good cooking, which Sri Aurobindo specially liked. Mridu was a simple Bengali village widow. She, like other ladies here, called Sri Aurobindo her father, and took great pride in cooking for him. Her “father” liked her *luchis* very much, she would boast, and these creations of hers have been immortalised by him in one of his letters to her. She was given to maniacal fits of threatening suicide, and Sri Aurobindo would console her with, “If you commit suicide, who will cook *luchis* for me?” Her cooking got such wide publicity that the house she lived in was named *Prasād*. Food from the devotees, though tasty, was sometimes too greasy or spicy, and once it did not agree with him. So a separate kitchen, known as the Mother’s Kitchen, was started for preparing only the Mother’s and Sri Aurobindo’s food. It was done under the most perfect hygienic conditions following the Mother’s own special instructions. Her insistence is always on cleanliness. (She said in a recent message: Cleanliness is the first indispensable step towards the supramental manifestation...) I questioned Sri Aurobindo about this: “I wonder why the Divine is so particular about contagion, infection, etc. Is he vulnerable to the virus and the microbe?” He replied, “And why on earth should you expect the Divine to feed himself on germs and bacilli and poisons of all kinds? Singular theology, yours!”

At the beginning all of us would make it a point to be present during his meal and watch the function as well as the Mother’s part in it. When the time was announced, water was brought for Sri Aurobindo to wash his hands, then he started eating with a spoon and rarely with knife and fork. He would take off his ring, place it in Champaklal’s hand and wash. Champakal would put it back on his finger afterwards. Sometimes when he forgot to take off the ring, Champaklal caught hold of the hand before it was dipped in the water.



Then the Mother would come, prepare and lay the table, push it herself up to Sri Aurobindo and arrange the various foods in bowls or glass tumblers, — in the order of savouries, sweets and fruit juices — everything having an atmosphere of cleanliness, purity and beauty. Then she would offer, one by one, the dishes to the silent Deity who would take them slowly and silently as if the eating was not for the satisfaction of the palate but an act of self-offering. Steadiness and silence were the characteristic stamps of Sri Aurobindo. *Dhīra*, according to him, was the ideal of Aryan culture. Hurry and hustle were words not found in his dictionary. Be it eating, drinking, walking or talking — he did it always in a slow and measured rhythm, giving the impression that every movement was conscious and consecrated. The Mother would punctuate the silence with queries like, “How do you like that dish?” or such remarks as, “This mushroom is grown here, this is special brinjal sent from Benares, this is butterfruit.” To all, Sri Aurobindo’s reply would be, “Oh, I see! Quite good!” Typically English in manner and tone! His silence or laconic praise made us wonder if he had not lost all distinction in taste! Did *rasagolla*, bread and brinjal have the same taste in the Divine sense-experience? Making this vital point clear, he wrote in a letter: “Distinction is never lost, bread cannot be as tasty as a *luchi*, but a yogi can enjoy bread with as much *rasa* as a *luchi* — which is quite a different thing.” He had a liking for sweets, particularly for *rasagolla*, *sandesh* and *pantua*. We could see that clearly: after the Mother had banned all sweets from his menu for medical reasons, one day some *pantuas* found their way in by chance. The Mother could not send them back from the table. She asked him if he would take some. He replied, “If it is *pantua*, I can try.” Since then this became a spicy joke with all of us. He enjoyed, as a matter of fact, all kinds of good dishes, European or Indian. But whatever was not to his taste, he would just touch and put away. The pungent preparations of the South could not, however, receive his blessings, except the *rasam*<sup>1</sup>. When on his arrival in Pondicherry he was given *rasam*, he enjoyed it very much and said in our talks, “It has a celestial taste!” He was neither a puritan god nor an epicure; only, he had no hankering or attachment for anything. His meal ended with a big tumbler of orange juice which he sipped slowly, looking after each sip to

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<sup>1</sup> A kind of pepper water with tamarind juice.

see how much was left, and keeping a small quantity as *prasād*. Once the entire juice had slightly fermented and after one or two sips he left it at the Mother's prompting. We conspired to make good use of it as *prasād*, but Sri Aurobindo got the scent of our secret design and forewarned us! We had to check our temptation.

One thing that we noticed was that unless the Mother served him in this way, he would lose all distinction between different preparations and would not know which to take first and in which order. Very probably he would have gone half-fed. On one occasion we saw him eating a whole cooked green chilly before we could cry halt! Of course, what was one chilly for him who is said in the old days to have taken a lump of opium with impunity! We have also seen him finishing his meal somehow, if for some reason the Mother could not be present and Champaklal had to serve instead. The story goes that once Mridu's dish went back without being touched by Sri Aurobindo, and she raised a storm. Sri Aurobindo had to quiet her with the plea that the Mother being absent he did not know what he had taken or what he had not. On another occasion Sri Aurobindo's meal being over earlier than usual, Mridu's dish arrived late and was left untouched. As soon as she heard about it she began to wail "like a new-born babe" as if she would bring down the whole Ashram by her lamentations. Dr. Manilal reported the fact to Sri Aurobindo and he asked, "How did she know about it?" I replied apologetically, "I told her." He said softly, "These things should not be said;" then he added with a smile, "but it is I who ought to lament for having missed her fine dish." We all had a good laugh.

One regular interlude during his meal was the arrival of our rampageous *luchi*-maker, Mridu. I do not know how she obtained this exceptional privilege. She would come like an innocent lamb with incense and flowers, kneel down in front of the door and wait with folded hands for her "father's blessings". On our drawing Sri Aurobindo's attention to her presence, he would stop eating and cast a quiet glance at her. Her boisterous, unruly nature, would become humble for a while before Sri Aurobindo! Whenever it was reported that she had manifested her violent temper, which was not infrequent, she was threatened with the loss of this darshan! (I may add here the name of another recipient of Sri Aurobindo's special favour — Bansidhar,

Champaklal's brother. He used to bring, for Sri Aurobindo's sponge-bath, two buckets of hot water at a fixed time. While going, he would do pranam to him from a distance and Sri Aurobindo would stop whatever work he was doing and bless him with a glance.)

We were rather surprised to notice that milk was excluded from his menu; so was it, we gathered, from the Mother's — *à la Japonaise*! There was before the accident, however, a cow popularly called "Sri Aurobindo's cow". It was specially taken care of and brought with its calf during the Balcony Darshan for the Mother's blessings. While Sri Aurobindo was eating in silence the Mother would speak with him about some general matters or give him reports about people's illnesses, visitors for Darshan or even minor problems regarding the Ashram life. Sometimes he would also ask the Mother's opinion concerning medical or other points. If at any time we pressed our own opinion against the Mother's, Sri Aurobindo would pull us up saying, "You think Mother does not know?" or "You know more than the Mother?" Similarly, if Sri Aurobindo passed some remark, the Mother would accept it as the last Word. Very often sadhaks used to hear her remark, "Sri Aurobindo said so." And Sri Aurobindo would quote the Mother's authority. Once a sadhak wanted to do something in a particular way; the Mother almost consented, but on hearing Sri Aurobindo's objection, she said, "Oh, you think so? Then it can't be done!" To both of them, the other's word was the law. One of us observed that only two persons have realised and put into practice Sri Aurobindo's Yoga of surrender: the Mother surrendering to Sri Aurobindo and Sri Aurobindo to the Mother.

About an hour after food, came the bath. I have described the sponge-bath. Now I shall speak of the shower-bath, given with a spraying arrangement. For this kind of bath to be possible we had to wait for over two years. He would take some rest after his meal, then get up and sit on the edge of the bed waiting for the Mother's arrival. In the interval he would do the leg exercises prescribed by Dr. Manilal. Sometimes if she was late in coming, we used to fidget but Sri Aurobindo was an image of patience. Now and then if he felt drowsy, Champaklal would put a few pillows as back-rest and support them from behind till the Mother came. Then he would start walking in her presence for about half an hour. One may be tempted to ask, "Why should he

walk in her presence?” It was certainly not for any physical reason. As Sri Aurobindo’s walking had not yet become steady, the Mother’s presence was necessary to protect him from any harm that could be caused by occult forces — that is how I understand it. Just as Sri Aurobindo used to protect the Mother, she protected him, when needed: it was the role of the Lord and the Shakti. These are occult phenomena beyond our human intelligence. After her departure, he would go to the adjacent room which had been turned into a small bathroom, with walls of glazed tiles, the floor of mosaic and there was constant supply of hot and cold water. After long years of austerity, affluence and luxury indeed! The Divine also passes through hardships, though with a smile! The bath itself was simple enough, not taking more than half an hour. This again was like the bath of the temple Deity in a shrine, except that here the Deity was in a human body — one of the most sensitive. The Deity, entirely passive, submitted himself to the care of the attendants, the *sevaks* who did what they thought best. In this priestly act of ablution, we felt a thrill as we touched and cleansed his body, part by part. As the face was rubbed, he closed his eyes, leaned in front or back when these parts were done respectively, and when one arm was lifted for cleaning, his hand gently pressed the fingers of the operator. Finally came the turn of the two small and dainty feet — all the activities going on silently and in mutual understanding, while the conversation proceeded simultaneously. Another operation that we, following the ancient traditional practice, undertook during the bath for a short time, at the earnest request of some devotees, was what we call “sipping of water touched by the feet of the Deity”. Sri Aurobindo granted the boon and even put forward his feet so that we could wash them and collect the water in a bowl.

After the bath when the word “finished” was uttered, he would rise and walk to his bed for rest. We would Put a sprinkling of talcum powder on his body. Then relaxing himself, he would enjoy a calm repose.

On a few occasions, we crowded round him like children, as he lay there, and began to show him two big volumes of Ajanta paintings, presented to him by Sir Akbar Hydari. The works of modern painters like Abanindranath, Nandalal and others, were also shown. Purani, Champaklal and Satyendra

took interest in them and Sri Aurobindo freely gave his opinion but as I was not art-sensitive, I made no record of them hoping that Purani would do so.

One part of the divine body that could not be entrusted to our rough hands was the head — the majestic crown. Washing it fell within the Mother's domain. Our part was only to help her. We could easily understand why all the complicated operation connected with it could not be safely left in our clumsy, coarse and unpractised hands. If we had set about doing it, I fear Sri Aurobindo would have asked us, "Have you left any hair on my head?" Now the Mother's deft hands and delicate touch made the hair shine with a silken gloss; all the hair that came off in the combing passed into Champaklal's treasury.

Sri Aurobindo, we were told, used to take his bath about midnight with very hot water, all the year round — mixing very little cold water, even for the head. The story is quite believable, for we were asked to pour extremely hot water on the fractured leg to cure the occasional itching he had. "A very drastic, but effective method," he pronounced with a smile, "but not many could bear such heat." Sometimes while returning from the bath, he was seen moving his lips as though murmuring something. It prompted Champaklal to suggest to him that if he wanted to dictate some lines of poetry, I would be willing to take them down. His intuition was correct. For a few days Sri Aurobindo did dictate verses and then stopped. Perhaps he felt that I must be given rest before I resumed my next round of duty.

There was another tiny operation he allowed us to do, the cutting of his nails. Satyendra used to clean them daily, but we cut them only every month or two after they had grown sufficiently long and could be preserved intact. It was a very delicate operation, for the knife or scissors would sometimes graze the skin, specially when the operator's eyesight was affected. When this did happen — which was fortunately very rare — he would give a quick shake to the leg! When a small bit of nail fell on the carpet and got lost, a search would start for the quarry in which Sri Aurobindo himself smilingly participated, asking, "Have you got it?" All these nails, like the hair, were the legitimate property of our custodian Champaklal.

The Mother would come to Sri Aurobindo's room an hour after his bath for their usual work. Then we left the room, wondering what they were talking about. Probably Ashram affairs, world problems and all that the Mother "considered necessary for him to know". Once I was sitting absorbed in meditation in front of Sri Aurobindo when the Mother entered. Perhaps she waited for a while, then he called, "Nirod, Mother has come." I opened my eyes and saw that she was waiting with a gracious smile. I simply rushed out abashed! The Meetings lasted from 15 minutes to an hour, at the most; and when the Mother opened the door we were there waiting outside. Greeting us with an enchanting smile, she would go back to her work and we entered the Presence.

Sometime in 1945 his eyesight got affected; and the Mother suggested that I should now take up all the reading and writing work and this continued till the end. In the evening we revised the old versions of *Savitri*, read letters, poems, literary articles by disciples or devotees outside, and other miscellaneous matters. In course of time these incidental readings increased to such an extent that he remarked that all his time was being spent on these, while his own work was left undone. He only made the remark and continued with them, until in 1949, practically all the correspondence came to an abrupt halt, and only the work on *Savitri* proceeded steadily. I wonder if he had taken the decision to leave the body and was therefore in a hurry to finish his epic in time. Correspondence with Dilip and Amal Kiran was the only exception.

Now, the part of the time that remains unaccounted for was the night. For a number of years, especially during the last ones, it was the most interesting period. For gradually, attending to Sri Aurobindo's meal, his walking and his sleep became very complicated since these activities had to depend on the Mother's round of work. I have said before that, like life, our daily routine was continually changing. The midday meal shifted from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. We had to be guided by her clock. She had thousands of things to attend to in addition to the organisational work of the Ashram. Now she had also to bear additional responsibility for Sri Aurobindo. No wonder her time had to be very flexible. And too subtle, elusive and quick are her movements for our human calculation! Can we imagine her holding collective meditation at 11

p.m., sometimes even at 1 a.m.? Consequently Sri Aurobindo's supper began to shift from normal hours to as late as 11 p.m. after which she would go down for meditation. But if she was late, then the meal had to be served after the meditation. Later on the meditation was followed by a regular Pranam attended by more than three hundred individuals. Then the Mother would come to Sri Aurobindo's room to attend to his walking, normally at 11 p.m., but there were occasions when she came even at 1 a.m.! Then she would come half an hour or one hour later to give him an eye-wash with a blue liquid called "blue water", and to rub lightly his upper body with a perfumed white cream. That was her last service of the day. We naturally had to keep awake till then, awaiting the soft tread of her feet in the corridor, for there was no knowing when she would turn up. Of course whenever possible, we did snatch a cat-nap in between, but it had to be "conscious sleep"! Purani, whose duty began at 2.30 a.m., sometimes found us awake! I am sure that it was Sri Aurobindo's radiant Presence which was the source of all our energy and kept us fit as a fiddle, in spite of many days of scanty sleep. I have read in Kalidasa that during Shiva's deep meditation, a constant stream of energy — Tapas — went out to fill his two attendants to enable them to keep vigil over the world of Nature. Even after the Mother's departure, Sri Aurobindo kept awake and only when he had learnt that she had retired, did our lights go out; that was at about 2 a.m. It was my duty to switch off the last light. The switch was above the foot, of his bed. Putting my hand on it I would look at him: he gave his impersonal sweet smile in return and the light went off. A night lamp was kept burning. Then we too would retire, sleeping in the same room. Once I had a frightful nightmare and screamed. Sri Aurobindo called me, "Nirod! Nirod!" and I woke up. Very often, Purani said, when he came he found me snoring. Champaklal amended, saying, "No, he snores even long before!" "That is perhaps in anticipation of Purani's arrival!" added Sri Aurobindo.

In spite of there being a swarm of mosquitoes, Sri Aurobindo was not in the habit of using a mosquito net. Instead, mosquito-coils imported from China were lighted and placed around the bed. These coils burn slowly, emitting a thin white trail of smoke with a smell of burnt hay or dry leaves. Its somewhat sharp odour is supposed to stave off the invasion of the invincible army of tiny pests. Chinese discovery indeed! But the smoke-line,

I fear, was not impregnable and some of the wily pests would, under the cover of night, plunge their keen short proboscis into Sri Aurobindo's bare tender skin producing angry weals or scarlet buttons. Some Insectol had to be applied to prevent sepsis. During the breeding season when the army division was at its height, the Mother would bring a globe-like thing and burst, as it were, a 'gas bomb' from it, just before she took her leave at night. A huge volley of white smoke with a strong smell would fill the whole room and clear up soon after. With the installation of the ceiling-fan, these crude devices were of course dispensed with. In the daytime, when the mosquitoes were flying and humming around him, or about to sit on his legs, we would rush to kill them with a clap of our hands. Sometimes he would ask, "Got it?" and on our answering "Yes", an approving smile would be our reward.

There was an inroad of another kind of pest that we had to deal with. Throughout the Ashram, in the Dining Room, the Bakery, and the residential houses a large throng of flies, pale white, grey and black, appeared all of a sudden and started licking, defiling, contaminating indiscriminately, everything that came in their way. If not on food-stuff, they would sit on human beings, whoever they might be. Sri Aurobindo and his room were no exception. Flies, silver-fish, cockroaches, were simply taboo and were not to be tolerated. Out of all these, everyone knows, flies are the worst enemies. They don't bite, it is true, like their cousins, the mosquitoes, but they are carriers of all kinds of infection! When they don't bite, they stick like the habits of our physical mind. So a vigorous crusade had to be taken up. 'Fly leaves' began to hang in all houses. Another effective contrivance trapped swarms in its box with continuous rolling wheels. The queen of the flies, it seems, had to beat a retreat. There is an interesting occult sequel to all this. There are subtle beings presiding over animal or insect communities. The being which was the queen of the fly-kingdom came to the Mother and pleaded for mercy. When they perpetrated the sacrilege in Sri Aurobindo's room, however, we had no mercy. Our fly-flaps became busy. Sri Aurobindo, as we know, was not a votary of Ahimsa in all circumstances. We were in no mood to dally with their whirling dance, particularly around Sri Aurobindo whose body was as sensitive as a child's to their pestering hum. However, our constant clapping sounds like the bursting of crackers made no dents in



his massive silence. Once, a bumble bee came droning into the room and took a fancy to swirl round Sri Aurobindo as he sat on the bed. We had to rush to his rescue!

I have mentioned that Sri Aurobindo used to keep his upper body always bare. In this, as in many other habits, he was very much an Indian, though he was brought up in English ways. For instance, he was not accustomed to use slippers in the room. He always went about barefoot. When a pair of slippers was offered to him, he said, "I don't use them. Let them be given to Nolini who likes shoes." During severe cold weather we have seen him use only a *chaddar*. But it intrigued me very much to see that he kept his feet always exposed, projecting out of the wrap. It seems odd, for our feet feel the cold more than other parts. Did it imply that at all moments, even at night, the feet of the Divine must be available as the haven of refuge to the needy and the devoted? It may not be too fantastic to suppose that many beings came in their subtle bodies to offer their pranams at his feet. My hypothesis is not altogether a fiction, for we have now learnt from the Mother that Sri Aurobindo has built a home in the subtle-physical plane and many of us visit him at night in our subtle bodies. She has also told us that we visit her or she visits us during our sleep. In the morning she has often asked, "Do you know anything about it?" Well, as all this is true, surely beings could also come in their subtle forms to do pranam to Sri Aurobindo. "But why bare feet?" one may ask. "That is the Indian custom", would be my, answer.

"Did he sleep at night?" was the question very often asked. To all appearance he did sleep and quite sufficiently. The Mother and he always insist on observing normal rules of health. We must eat well and sleep well, So, if there was a physical need for food, there could be a need for sleep as with us, but with a difference. For our sleep is a heavy plunge into inconscience where we forget everything, whereas a Yogi sleeps awake. There is also a state in which the physical body is apparently asleep, while the subtle body goes out visiting various persons in their sleep. The Mother has said that she does most of the subtle work in this way at night. Sri Aurobindo wrote to me, "In former days when she was spending the night in a trance and out working in the Ashram, she brought back with her the

knowledge of all that was happening to everybody... I often know from her what has happened before it is reported by anyone.”

This is the overall picture of Sri Aurobindo’s outer life as we saw it and lived it together through his last twelve years. The programme remained, on the whole, constant till the end except for some minor variations due to exigencies of circumstances. I have said nothing about his inner life, for I was not given a vision or perception of that vast secret field; nor had I Arjuna’s unique privilege of seeing his *Viśvarūpa*, except some glimpses of his God-like stature. Sri Aurobindo had reminded me again and again in his letters that my physical crust was too thick. All the same, the joy, peace, light and energy that constantly sustained us could come from his silent Presence alone. People used to remark that we seemed to be beings of another world. Unfortunately, that brightness and felicity gave place to a grave seriousness with the rolling of years and a shadow of gloom was over us all, though we could not account for it at the time. Besides, the dark underside of our human nature, — I am talking particularly of myself — also began to show its grisly face. “Mortality bears ill the Eternal’s touch.” Of course, Sri Aurobindo remained *samam brahman*. Our frailties and shortcomings he had already seen from above, and was prepared for them when he accepted us for his service; he had never shown any annoyance. On the contrary, he forgave us all. Though he was impersonal by nature, hardly looked at us while talking, rarely spoke our name while asking for something, there was an ineffable sweetness in his Presence. And during our pranam on our birthdays or Darshan days, he used to make up for all his want of expression by melting into fatherly or friendly love and affection. He would pat us on the head, press it long with his warm velvety hands and look into our eyes with the tenderness of his sweet personality. Satyendra told me that when on his birthday he used to rub some *attar* on Sri Aurobindo’s hand, he would then put forward the other one. His constant silent love and compassion shine ever bright in the depths of our hearts.

## THE DIVINE MOTHER

### “THIS IS SHE”

*The Two who are one are the secret of all power,  
The Two who are one are the might and right in things.*

My purpose in this chapter is not to write about the Mother's life, for her life, like Sri Aurobindo's, has not been on the surface. And their outer life reflects in a very small measure what they are in their transcendental vastness. But I shall restrict myself to a small part of that reflection, as much of it as we have seen in relation with Sri Aurobindo, and incidentally with us. I shall draw primarily on my own observations. They are bound to be fragmentary, may even be wrong at places when we have to deal with a Being who is superhuman, but I have tried to be impartial and accurate.

I have dwelt at length in the previous chapters on the Mother's relation with Sri Aurobindo and her role in his outer life. There used to be considerable speculation in the early days about their mutual relationship. Was it one of Purusha and Prakriti, Master and disciple or Shiva and Shakti? I was therefore very curious from the start to observe and discern the relationship. I came to the conclusion that it was that of Shiva and Shakti. The Mother has said, “Without him, I exist not; without me he is unmanifest.” And we were given the unique opportunity of witnessing the dual personality of the One enacting on our earth-plane an immortal drama, rare in the spiritual history of man. I could perfectly realise that without the Mother, Sri Aurobindo's stupendous realisations could not have taken such a concrete shape on this terrestrial base. In fact, he was waiting for the Mother's coming. He said that with the Mother's help he covered ten years of sadhana in one year. The very building up of the Ashram testifies to this irrefutable truth: “He wills, I execute.” After Sri Aurobindo's passing, it was feared in some quarters that the Ashram would collapse, at least decline. On the contrary, the manifestation of the Supramental Truth took place after his withdrawal, and since then the Ashram has expanded beyond all belief.

Sri Aurobindo wrote to me, “...The Mother's pressure for change is always strong — even when she does not put it as force, it is there by the very nature

of the Divine Energy in her.” That is the indubitable, puissant impression of all those who have had anything to do with her from near or far. While one felt in Sri Aurobindo’s atmosphere a wide and large freedom of nature, the Mother’s contact always brought us to the hard reality of things. Whenever she came to Sri Aurobindo’s room, a powerful vibration was set within the calm, passive silence of the Self and we had to be *qui vive*. We were no longer left to our easy movements. If chattering was going on, it would stop; a newspaper would remain unread; if anyone was leaning against the wall, he would sit upright. In a word, everyone was like a taut bow-string, certainly not out of fear but to rise to her expectations. Even Sri Aurobindo, if in the course of the evening talk, happened to see her coming, would say in a hushed voice, “The Mother is coming!” and would stop talking, while the Mother would encourage us with a smile, “Go on, go on!” Such was her dynamism, *cit tapas*! This does not imply that she was a stern school-mistress.

Though all of us knew the Mother had taken charge of the Ashram and that hers was the guiding Hand, the truth and bearing of it came fully home to me after the accident when we met her face to face and saw some of her manifold activities close at hand. Then I realised to what an extent her wisdom, power and influence worked in the material field. The greatest wonder to me was the thoroughness and precision with which she had provided for all the daily physical requirements of Sri Aurobindo. He had to ask for nothing, look for nothing; everything would be in its place at the right time. Her activities were a thousand and one; yet she always found time to think of his needs, even as Sri Aurobindo always kept in mind hers. The two consciousnesses were one so that when Sri Aurobindo met with the accident, the Mother felt at once the vibration in her sleep. All things required for him were kept in stock in sufficient quantity: his writing materials, his toilet things, mosquito-coils, mosquito cream and other necessities. Several clocks were kept at various places, for Sri Aurobindo had the habit of seeing the time.<sup>1</sup> Hot water for his bath at midnight was prepared by one particular person, his *dhotis* were washed and pressed daily by another, his bed made by a third, his meals

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<sup>1</sup> Once, it was told, all the clocks had stopped simultaneously. Sri Aurobindo was very much intrigued by this odd coincidence; no sooner did he utter, “All the clocks have stopped!” than all of them began to move! It seemed to be the work of some mischievous goblins!

cooked by a special group. And not only would she serve him, but what dish to be prepared, in what way, what vegetables were to be grown in the field, what fruits to be ordered — all came under her direct supervision. To serve and please him was her sole concern, for he was her Lord. That was how she addressed him. Dry fruits were ordered from Peshawar, and special ripe seasonal fruits from different places. When, owing to the war emergency, good vegetables were not available in the local market, the Mother had them brought from Bangalore and had a cold storage room built in order to keep them fresh. Also a refrigerator was bought separately to store other food stuff. All these details illustrate how the Mother was also an ideal home economist, if I may use that expression in this context. Once Sri Aurobindo asked for some exercise books to copy out *Savitri*. Instantly I went to the market and fetched two and offered them. When the Mother came to know about it, she said, “Why? I have any number of them stored for his use.” Of course, being a new-comer, I was ignorant of this; besides, I had a grand occasion, I thought, to offer something.



The Mother

Her organisation worked so well because of her intuitive choice of the right persons. To give one example, Champaklal was selected from the beginning for Sri Aurobindo's personal service and no choice could have been better. I have already spoken of her solicitude for Sri Aurobindo's health. From the time she came here, this was her special concern. We know how sparingly Sri Aurobindo had lived along with his few companions. His body was consequently, if not fragile, very thin. The Mother brought comparative affluence and often personally attended on him. She herself used to prepare soup for him. We have seen how with her own hands she arranged the dishes, sometimes even mixed and served them, always keeping in view his taste. We have heard that it was at the Mother's instance that Sri Aurobindo gave up smoking in order to set an example to the inmates who had taken up that habit.

She also saw to the proper atmosphere of the room. I shall give an instance: many newspapers were sent to us for Sri Aurobindo's perusal, out of which he read only *The Hindu*, and the *Daily Mail* for its comic "Curly Wee" feature. Since we had plenty of time we rummaged through all the papers, one after another, particularly with a view to make interesting news items the subject of our talk with him. *The Indian Express* used to supply a lot of war news. Whenever the Mother entered the room her first glance was cast at our corner and often in the morning she found a heap of these newspapers, and ourselves making a jolly good feast of them. Suddenly one day to our surprise all the papers stopped coming except *The Hindu* and the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*. Sri Aurobindo looked as usual for the *Daily Mail*. We had to tell him that the Mother had banned all these papers, for they seemed to spoil the atmosphere of the room. The Mother did not know that Sri Aurobindo was interested in the *Mail*. He simply smiled. This one small incident is indicative of her ever-wakeful Intelligence operating over all affairs, mundane as well as spiritual and Sri Aurobindo's quiet acceptance of her decision. The room in the "Library" in which newspapers were kept for general reading was named by her "Falsehood", and yet she did not interfere with the sadhaks' liberty of reading them.

She was always out of sympathy with certain mechanical contrivances like the radio, gramophone and ceiling-fan. The radio was allowed in Sri

Aurobindo's room only after the war had taken a full-blooded turn. His bedroom had no fan, in spite of considerable heat. The sitting-room had a table-fan. Only after the accident a table-fan was installed near Sri Aurobindo's bed which was not very effective in reducing the stuffiness of the room, closed as it was on the east, west and south. Hence the need of small hand-fans during his walk. It was only after the room had undergone thorough repairs and the old beams were replaced by new solid ones that a ceiling-fan came into operation. Till then the Mother feared that a ceiling-fan would be a risk to the old ceiling. This shows how the Mother guarded against all eventualities, inner as well as outer, and gave as little handle as possible to so-called accidents. She knew very well that shrewd and subtle occult forces were actively engaged in causing them grievous harm. Who could have imagined that Sri Aurobindo would meet with a serious accident in his own room at an unwary moment? He had asserted very firmly that their life was a battlefield in a very real sense and that the Mother and himself were actively waging a continuous war against the adverse forces. "The fact that it was being waged from a closed room made it no less real and serious." She said once that illnesses in their case are much more difficult to cure than in the case of sadhaks because of the concentrated attack of the adverse forces. I may mention in passing that the Mother was not only vigilant regarding Sri Aurobindo against all possible outer attacks and accidents, she is also cognizant of the welfare of the sadhaks. During an epidemic in the town, sadhaks are warned not to take any food from outside. All our raw vegetables and fruits are washed in an antiseptic solution before being cooked or eaten and many other precautions are taken to avoid any outbreak in the Ashram. The inspiration behind the origin of the sadhak Ganpatram's Cottage Restaurant came from the Mother, I was told. She did not want the Ashram children to take food from outside and fall ill; so she called him one day and asked him to open a restaurant only for the Ashram children and prepare food under strict hygienic conditions.

If the Mother was thus equipped with all necessities for Sri Aurobindo's comfort, Sri Aurobindo on his part was as solicitous about the Mother's well-being. He followed closely all her outer activities and enveloped her with an aura of protection against the dark forces. His accident was due, he said, to

his being busy protecting the Mother and unmindful about himself, under the assumption that the adverse forces would not dare to attack him. "That was my mistake," he said. The Mother herself could take any risk, launch upon any adventure, for she had entire faith and reliance upon Sri Aurobindo's mighty force and protection. Anybody who has come in contact with the Mother knows that her dynamic nature makes light of all difficulties and dangers and she is the least concerned about herself 'when some special work has to be done. At one time her health suffered from a chronic trouble, indicated by a swelling of the feet. I observed that every time the Mother entered or left the room, Sri Aurobindo's eyes were fixed on her feet till after a number of years the limbs regained their normalcy. Not about her health alone, about all her movements and activities the Mother always used to keep him informed: before going to the meditation and after it, before going for a drive and after it, or before seeing any visitor, she would come and see him. Sri Aurobindo also would inquire about her from Champaklal, whether she had finished her food and gone to bed or not, and as I have said, until she had retired, he kept awake. If by chance she was late in returning from a drive Sri Aurobindo would inquire again and again. As the Mother's routine was crammed with activities, quite often she used to be late for her meal. Sometimes she would report the fact. But he would never interfere with her activities, only mildly suggest some change if necessary. Imposition of rules, compulsion of any sort was against his nature, either on the Mother or on sadhaks. So is it with the Mother. Sri Aurobindo did not want us to detain her in any way. He would cut short his walk, or hurry his meal to suit her convenience.

There was a period when the Mother was in a state of almost continuous trance. It was a very trying phase, indeed. She would enter Sri Aurobindo's room with a somnolent walk and go back swaying from side to side leaving us in fear and wonder about the delicate balancing. Sri Aurobindo would watch her intently till she was out of sight, but it was a matter of surprise how she maintained her precarious balance. Sometimes in the midst of doing his hair, her hand would stop moving at any stage; either the comb remained still, or the ribbon tied to his plaits got loose. While serving meals too, the spoon would stand still or the knife would not cut and Sri Aurobindo had to,



by fictitious coughs or sounds, draw her out. Fifteen minutes' work thus took double the time and then she would hasten in order to make up for it. Such trance moods were more particularly manifest at night during the collective meditation below, and in that condition she would come to Sri Aurobindo's room with a heap of letters, reports, account-books, etc., to read, sign or answer during Sri Aurobindo's walking time. But her pious intention would come to nothing, for no sooner did she begin than the trance overtook her. Sri Aurobindo took a few extra rounds and sat in his chair watching the Mother while she with the book open, pen in hand, had travelled into another world from whose bourne it was perhaps difficult to return. He would watch her with an indulgent smile and try all devices to bring her down to earth. We would stand by, favoured spectators of the delectable scene. When at last the Mother did wake up, Sri Aurobindo would say with a smile, "We haven't made much progress!" She would then take a firm resolve, and finish all work in a dash or go back if the trance was too heavy. Once Sri Aurobindo saw that she was writing on the book with her fountain pen unopened. He kept on watching. Suddenly she realised her mistake and Sri Aurobindo broke into a gracious smile. During the time of meditation too, her condition was most extraordinary. Someone coming for pranam would remain standing before her trance-mood for fifteen to thirty minutes, another had her hand on his bowed head for a pretty long time; all was unpredictable. There was an exceptional circumstance when Sri Aurobindo intervened in the Mother's work. On her way from Sri Aurobindo's room to the collective meditation below, she went for a while to her room to take some rest, as it was probably too early to go down. But once she sat down, time and space vanished and she was deep in trance, while below the crowd was waiting till it was about 1 a.m. Sri Aurobindo, on being informed, sent word that all should disperse and go home. The Mother, on waking up, prepared herself to go to the meditation when she was told what had happened.

After the meditation, the last lap of her service to Sri Aurobindo was to be done. Here too when the trance was upon her we were kept waiting till the early hours of the morning. Purani whose duty started at 2 a.m. often found us awake and relished our anomalous situation!

Then going back to her room, she would start the “flower work” in this state of trance. We know that she is very fond of flowers, particularly roses, both for their own sake and for their power to transmit her force. Hundreds of roses daily came to her as an offering from our gardens. She would spread all of them on trays, pick and choose them according to size, colour, etc., trim and arrange them in different vases, aided by a sadhika. This would continue till the early hours of the morning when she would retire for a short nap. Once I had a long talk with her concerning the affairs of the Dispensary during this time. I wondered how in such a trance-condition her hands moved correctly, used the scissors, cut and trimmed the flowers and at the same time she went on answering the various problems I put before her. Much later I found the solution and that also in an embarrassing manner. She had come to do Sri Aurobindo’s hair and as usual was overtaken by trance. The eyes were half closed, the body swayed but the hands were doing their work. Two of us who were then on duty began to joke and play with each other silently, assuming that she could not notice our innocent pranks. But as she was leaving the room, she said to us, “I can see everything. I have eyes at the back of my head.” Imagine our discomfiture! We had heard that she was the greatest occultist known to Theon, her teacher in occultism. We had no small amount of personal experience in support of it. Still, this small incident from its manner and occasion left us flabbergasted. She must have had her inner senses functioning when the outer ones were in suspension or had ceased their work. She said on one occasion that she is extremely sensitive to the atmosphere. She can at once feel the vibrations of a place or of persons.

In the previous chapters I have given some indications about her power of organisation, her foresight, her practical wisdom in the limited field concerning Sri Aurobindo’s personal needs. Now let me cite some instances to illustrate her method of working in the larger context of the Ashram, those which I came to know in Sri Aurobindo’s presence. Her mind, when she had decided upon a project, would concentrate on it and not relax until it was accomplished or stood on a sound basis. In the same manner she would deal with several projects in the course of the day. She could be single-pointed and many-faceted at the same time. It is the way with all great men of action, I believe.

Take, for instance, the construction of Golconde. I am not going to enter into an elaborate description of its development. Considering that our resources in men and money were then limited, how such a magnificent building was erected is a wonder. An American architect with his Japanese and Czechoslovakian assistants foregathered. Old buildings were demolished, our sadhaks along with the paid workers laboured night and day and as if from a void, the spectacular mansion rose silently and slowly like a giant in the air. It is a story hardly believable for Pondicherry of those days. But my wonder was at the part the Mother played in it, not inwardly which is beyond my depth but in the daylight itself. She was in constant touch with the work through her chosen instruments. As many sadhaks as possible were pressed into service there; to anyone young or old asking for work, part time, whole time, her one cry: "Go to Golconde, go to Golconde." It was one of her daily topics with Sri Aurobindo who was kept informed of the difficulties, troubles innumerable, and at the same time, of the need of his force to surmount "them. Particularly when rain threatened to impede or spoil some important part of the work, she would invoke his special help: for instance, when the roof was to be built. How often we heard her praying to Sri Aurobindo, "Lord, there should be no rain now." Menacing clouds had mustered strong, stormy west winds blowing ominously, rain imminent, and torrential Pondicherry rain! We would look at the sky and speculate on the result of the fight between the Divine Force and the natural force. The Divine Force would of course win: slowly the Fury would leash her forces and withdraw into the cave. But as soon as the intended object was achieved, a deluge swept down as if in revenge. Sri Aurobindo observed that that was often the rule. During the harvesting season too, S.O.S. signals would come to Sri Aurobindo through the Mother to stop the rain. He would smile and do his work silently. If I have not seen any other miracle, I can vouch for this one repeated more than once. During the roof-construction, work had to go on all night long and the Mother would mobilise and marshal all the available Ashram hands and put them there. With what cheer and ardour our youth jumped into the fray at the call of the Mother, using often Sri Aurobindo's name to put more love and zeal into the strenuous enterprise! We felt the vibration of a tremendous energy driving, supporting, inspiring the entire collective body. This was how Golconde, an Ashram guest house, was built, one of the wonders of modern

architecture lavishly praised by many visitors. Let me quote the relevant portion of a letter from Sri Aurobindo, written in 1945 with regard to Golconde:

“...It is on this basis that she (Mother) planned the Golconde. First, she wanted a high architectural beauty, and in this she succeeded — architects and people with architectural knowledge have admired it with enthusiasm as a remarkable achievement; one spoke of it as the finest building of its kind he had seen, with no equal in all Europe or America; and a French architect, pupil of a great master, said it executed superbly the idea which his master had been seeking for but failed to realise...”<sup>1</sup>

Next in magnitude comes the Press. Today the Ashram Printing Press holds a premier place in India. That is because the Mother set from the very start the ideal of perfection before her and exacted from the workers that ideal. Kinds of business run on a commercial basis there are many outside, but here the ideal is quite different, as I have stated. This is what the Mother recently told the manager of the Press, “If any part of the world makes a demand for perfection in printing, it should be able to say to itself, — The Pondicherry Ashram Press fulfils the ideal.” Yet this Press began as some big establishments have done, in a very humble way; I don’t know how the proposal was mooted that we must have a Press of our own to publish mainly Sri Aurobindo’s books. The Mother caught the idea at once. But how to start, was the question. It was not so much the money that was wanting, as men of knowledge and experience in this field. She would not engage workers from outside; it must be run by the Ashram inmates. We had at that time made some connection with the Hyderabad Government through Sir Akbar Hydari who was instrumental in, procuring a donation from the Nizam’s Government for Golconde, hence the name<sup>2</sup>. This connection opened the channel for an experienced officer of the Government to come and give a start to our Press. As soon as things began moving, the Mother put all her available force into it and bundled off sadhaks and sadhikas — old and young, philosopher, scholar, professor, whoever was at hand, to the Press. Naturally, many difficulties cropped up; quarrels, disharmony, complaints — human conflicts

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<sup>1</sup> *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother.*

<sup>2</sup> Golconda, a place in Hyderabad which was under the Nizam. It is famous for diamond mines.

instead of natural calamities. The Mother was certainly prepared for them, for she knows our human nature, also that it is through work that it has to be changed, not through the escape-gate of inaction. We heard from time to time the Mother reporting about these troubles to Sri Aurobindo. With his silent Purusha-like support, and her regular visits to the Press, the initial difficulties were gradually overcome and a modicum of harmony established. One after another, Sri Aurobindo's books began to come out. Thus with our raw but energetic young band and a handful of trained paid workers, this institution was built up piecemeal, illustrating the Mother's method of working, the ideal to be achieved, and Sri Aurobindo's dictum that things must grow out of life itself, not according to a set mental pattern. In our case, of course, the process was sustained by a directly acting Divine Force. "All can be done if the God-touch is there." In fact all our institutions, the Ashram itself, have grown up in this way, from scratch, and Auroville is the latest example. We must remember, however, that activity by itself, of whatever kind, is of secondary importance, but "taken as part of the sadhana offered to the Divine or done with the consciousness or faith that it is done by the Divine Power" — that is the important point.

Now we come to a different field of activity altogether, one whose place in Yoga will be strongly challenged, especially when the Mother herself used it as a means of sadhana: her playing tennis. I won't discuss the issue, for the quotation cited above gives the answer. Before she started playing tennis the Mother joined our young group in playing table-tennis. When a young boy asked her if he could install a table in his house for the game, the Mother replied, "Why not at Nanteuil?<sup>1</sup> then I can come and play too." He was much surprised and delighted at the divine proposal! She must have found it a good light exercise as well as an admirable means of contact with the young set which was gradually increasing; it was perhaps also her yogic means of action upon them. After a year or so the Mother decided to have a tennis court. She might have felt that she needed some more brisk exercise in the open air. She often talked of her project to Sri Aurobindo. One day we heard that the entire wasteland along the north-eastern seaside was taken on a long lease from the Government and a part of it would be made into tennis courts and the rest

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<sup>1</sup> A building opposite the Ashram Playground.

into a playground. One cannot imagine now what this place was like before. It was one of the filthiest spots of Pondicherry, full of thistles and wild undergrowth, an open place for committing nuisance as well as a pasture for pigs! The stink and the loathsome sight made the place a Stygian sore and a black spot on the colonial Government. The Mother changed this savage wasteland into a heavenly playground, almost a supramental transformation of Matter. The sea-front was clothed in a vision of beauty and delight. If for nothing else, for this transformation at least, Pondicherry should be eternally grateful to the Mother. But who remembers the past? Gratitude is a rare human virtue. I was particularly very happy, first, because I was fond of tennis; secondly, I fancied that Yoga would be now made easy. Who could ever think of tennis in Yoga! But woe to me, how it completely upset my balance!

All this, however, is by the way. My point was to demonstrate the Mother's method of working. As soon as the plot was acquired, she went about the work in her usual one-pointed manner. And what a job it was! To build a long rampart against the surges of the sea was itself a gigantic enterprise for a private institution like our Ashram without any income of its own. But I shall confine myself to the construction of the tennis courts only. She did not count the expense; men and money were freely employed, for the courts had to be made ready within a minimum period of time. We have observed that when the Mother feels the need for a work to be done, she goes ahead, confident that the required resources will come. In the present case, there was also the question of the right worker to see the project through. The Mother said to Sri Aurobindo, "I know there is one man who can do it." It was Monoranjan Ganguli, a sadhak. I saw him at this work and was really amazed at his wonderful devotion to the Mother, his determination to fulfil the trust she had placed in him. He supervised the operation with unflinching love and duty and cool temper, making the tennis ground his home and passing many sleepless nights sitting on a stool. When I asked him why he should be in such a hurry, he replied, "Mother wants it so. I must finish it within the appointed time." "Is it possible? Only a few days are left!" I voiced my doubt. "Oh, I must!" and he did. A singular feat indeed, and again the Mother's right choice.

When the courts were ready, there followed a change in our programme. Henceforth Sri Aurobindo's noon meal was served earlier so that the Mother could go out by 5.00 p.m. She would come to Sri Aurobindo's room dressed in her specially designed tennis costume. She played for about an hour with a number of young people in turn, even took part in tournaments. From there she came to the Playground and, after another bout of crowded activities, returned to the Ashram at about 8.00 or 9.00 p.m.

She played very well for her age, and her claim that she had become a champion in her youth was amply borne out by her steady, sharp forehand strokes which were above all a marvel of precision. Naturally she could not run a great deal, but her agility was remarkable. In her vision tennis is the best game spiritually and physically. She used it not only for her physical fitness, but as in everything else, as a medium for her spiritual action on the players. It was this inner movement that interested her as much as the outer one. For, playing with the Divine meant an aspiration, opening, right attitude, reception of her force through the game, as through other means like physical and mental activity. Here, of course, the manner is more direct and more joyful. In other words, it was used more as a means of sadhana. When someone had some inner difficulties, she would invite him for a game with her and the effect was almost miraculous. On the other hand, she would suddenly stop calling for many days or altogether, a person with whom she had played almost regularly. These are nothing but vagaries, one would be inclined to observe. But they were not; the person involved often knew very well the inner reason. Someone asked the Mother in another context which involved certain hardships, if she put people to test. She replied, "Never! people have already enough difficulties, why should we add more? But there are inner tests." Too subtle, swift and mysterious are her ways to be grasped by our human mind; so I will refrain from going into the matter. On our birthdays she used to invite us specially to play a set with her. The joy that she imparted to us by this means can be compared to the joy that we had in our talks with Sri Aurobindo, different in kind, of course.

I shall relate an interesting account of the Mother's diplomacy in this field of tennis. There used to be friendly tournaments under the Mother's supervision. Once my partner and I had reached the finals and were to face a

younger pair who were known to be the Mother's favourites. Gods, goddesses especially, have their chosen ones, if the Puranas are to be believed, and they always win. Of course we are to assume that there are larger purposes which we cannot guess, behind the seeming partialities. The Mother broached the topic of the game to Sri Aurobindo and asked me naively how we were going to fare, what would be our tactics, etc., etc. I would not be caught so easily. Then she employed a familiar strategy, "You know they are a very good pair; you have no chance against them." Thus she went on battering me. Sri Aurobindo listened to it with an amused smile. When, finishing my duty, I was going for the game, I asked Champaklal to plead to Sri Aurobindo on our behalf. The play started, there was quite a crowd. The Mother was watching with keen interest. The upshot was that we lost sadly and badly. Curiously enough, we missed even simple shots. On my return in the evening, I told Champaklal of our ignoble defeat. Later on, Sri Aurobindo himself enquired and learning from Champaklal about the result, he enjoyed the joke and laughed aloud. I did not know what gave him so much amusement. Failure of his own force? Did he give force at all? Success of the Mother's favourites? The Mother, however, in her turn, gave a long report of the game. She said, "Oh, they became so nervous! I tried all the while to make them steady, but of no use. They missed even simple shots!" I made no outer comment but was inwardly muttering, "What chance could we have if you had already decided our doom as Krishna that of the Kauravas?" Doom is the word, in a deeper sense too, for as I have hinted, I became inordinately attached to tennis and neglected even my duty. It was like an old love that had revived with all its insensate passion and I had to receive persistent psychological beating from the Mother before I could get rid of this folly. Sri Aurobindo once wrote to me, "Never! [forsake you] But beat — a lot." The beating came mostly from the Mother.

Let me illustrate. I shall restrict myself to the field of tennis. After Sri Aurobindo's passing I thought of giving up tennis for good. The Mother said, "Why? You will play with me." Every day I went to the tennis ground and she called me for a game. This led to the revival of my old passion which had been arrested due to Sri Aurobindo's illness. I was not satisfied with merely playing a few games with the Mother. Besides, as I had no regular duty to



bind me, I began to indulge in it with abandon. Suddenly the Mother stopped playing with me and for many days at a stretch, I was mystified. Every day I waited, hoping to be called; she would call many others, but ignore me. The contrast was too flagrant. I felt rather humiliated. Curiously enough, whenever I had stopped playing at other times, she gave me a chance. The apparent connection between the two made me suspect that she wanted me to give up playing with others except with herself. As to how she knew which day I had played or abstained from playing, that was no riddle to anyone who knew her well. But I could not give up the game so easily. Also, I thought, "Why should I give it up? What's wrong with it? It is a good pleasant exercise!" Moreover, I wanted to be quite sure of my suspicion and continued playing till I found that there was a clear connection. She called me only when I had not played with others. This "cutting" became so painful to me and palpable to others that I thought of not going to the courts while she played, but some force dragged me there, not exactly in expectation of a game but so as not to give in to my sense of pride and prestige. I observed that she took note of my presence and I was one of the referees during her play. I also thought, "If she had some accident while playing (an accident did happen later) and I was not there? What account should I give to Sri Aurobindo in my inner communion with him? I must swallow my *amour-propre*."

During the sports season, she went to the sports ground after her tennis. Instead of following her, I stayed to enjoy a game. But when I had followed her, she took note of my presence by a fugitive glance for no apparent reason. This happened so often that even a dull person would not fail to perceive the meaning. Thus the battle raged on: sense of humiliation, struggle to keep the right attitude, doggedness to stick to my self-will and a host of other psychological complexes. At last the relentless silent pressure won and I gave up tennis. This is our human nature. When it is evident that the Divine wants to do something for my good, I refuse either out of attachment, self-justification or sheer disobedience. Change of nature is such an uphill job. It is not for nothing that the Guru said in 1936, that changing the nature of 150 inmates of the Ashram was a job! The interesting point was that the Mother never voiced her wish in words. Her way is usually subtle. She has said that unless she could control a movement by a silent gesture or look, she had not

gained a complete mastery. Neither did I ask her what should have been my attitude towards the play. If I did, she would probably have answered. When she said, “You will play with me”, I could not grasp the inner meaning that I should play with her alone. This is one of the methods she employs to open us to higher perceptions than those of reason.

Now, I shall give some instances of my medical contact with her. We have noticed that she possessed medical knowledge far above an average doctor’s. In fact, during my medical practice in the Ashram, it was she who guided me at every step. I was doing the double duty of attending to the patients as well as the Divine. I could not spare much time for the patients, A heavy work was imposed upon me, of course at my own suggestion, that a medical history of all the Ashram people should be recorded and preserved for reference, and it should be incumbent on the new candidates for taking up Yoga to appear for and pass a medical examination. I was to read these reports every day when the Mother attended on Sri Aurobindo. Both of them would ask questions and give suggestions. It became more a test for the doctor than for the patients. Any negligence, mistake or slip in my case-taking was at once detected, but never was I reprimanded for any short-coming. If to some of her questions I remained silent, the Mother would comment, “Oh, he doesn’t know. If he knew, he would at once speak out.” A humorous instance comes to mind. Once I prescribed a mixture to our bumptious Mridu, Sri Aurobindo’s *luchi*-maker, but forgot to write precise directions on the label. She caught hold of this slip, came in a flurry to the Mother and burst out, “Mother, Nirodbabu is a poem, he is no doctor. He has given me medicine without any directions.” The Mother appearing grave, the bottle in her hand, came and reported the joke to Sri Aurobindo. He listened in silence. If it had happened during the correspondence period, I am sure he would have had fun at my cost.

I shall now give an example of the Mother’s considerable courage in taking up the charge of a patient suffering from throat cancer. This man, a devotee, arrived from outside. He had refused all medical aid and turned down all entreaties of his relatives for the accepted treatment. He wanted only to be cured by the Mother or to die here. He was very thin, of a nervous type and his general health was poor. I was asked to supervise the case and give daily reports to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. We shall see in the chapter

‘God Departs’ another devotee seeking entire refuge in them and being cured of a mysterious illness that endangered her life. I must admit frankly that I was stunned by the Mother’s boldness and could not have an unreserved faith. Either in this context or another, I had asked the Mother and Sri Aurobindo if they had cured cancer by their Force. The Mother replied firmly, “Not only cancer, other diseases too, pronounced incurable by the doctors. Isn’t it so?” She asked Sri Aurobindo, as if looking for confirmation; he nodded. The Mother once said that there is hardly a disease that Yoga cannot cure. Sri Aurobindo also wrote, “Of course it [Yoga] can, but on condition of faith or openness or both. Even a mental suggestion can cure cancer — with luck of course, as is shown by the case of the woman operated on unsuccessfully for cancer, but the doctors lied and told her it had succeeded. Result, cancer symptoms all ceased and she died many years afterwards of another illness altogether,” Here was a patient, then, who came with faith in the Mother. I began to do my duty regularly. At first the patient came for Pranam to the Mother. I witnessed her intense concentration and preoccupation with the case. While listening to the report, she would suddenly go into a trance and Sri Aurobindo would intently watch over her. Once she was on the point of falling down. Sri Aurobindo stretched both his arms, exclaiming “Ah!” The Mother regained her control. Things seemed to be moving at a slow pace. If some symptoms improved, new ones appeared; the condition fluctuated from day to day. Some days passed in a comparative restfulness. Our help was mostly psychological: to give courage and instil faith. If some progress was noticed, I would with a cheerful face report it to the Mother. She would just listen quietly. Meanwhile letters from the relatives urged the patient to return. When the Mother heard about it, she replied, “If I can’t cure it, there is none who can.” The fight continued, it was a grim encounter, indeed. As a result of the Mother’s steady Force, things looked bright and I felt we had turned the corner. The Mother kept her vigil and wasted no words. After the February Darshan, however, the picture changed for no apparent reason. The patient went gradually down-hill and in a month or two, life petered out. The patient was brought before the Mother to have her last blessings. She came down and with her soothing touch and the balm of her divine smile wiped away all his distress and made his passage peaceful. Later when I asked Sri Aurobindo the reason for this unaccountable reversal, he replied, “After the Darshan his

faith got shaken and he could not get it back.” Cancer of the throat is a scourge; one cannot eat, drink or speak; breathing becomes difficult. Let us remember Sri Ramakrishna’s classical example. To keep a steady faith needs a heroic will which how many can have? Besides, the family surroundings also were not very congenial.

I remember Nishikanto, a sadhak-poet, who fell seriously ill after being cured of an equally serious illness. The Mother giving the occult reason told me that when he came to her on his birthday, she saw a definite crack in his faith. But a man of quite a different temperament, he pulled himself up, while the cancer-patient could not. “Why take up such a case at all?” one may ask. Well, it was the patient who made the choice; he had no faith in the usual medico-surgical treatment whose efficacy is at best doubtful. Here, he had at least the unique opportunity to live under the Mother’s and Sri Aurobindo’s direct care and supervision. For a bhakta, there cannot be a greater boon. If he lives, it will be glorious; if he dies, he will have a better life in the next birth.

Some years ago the Mother said in connection with another cancer case that was referred to her from outside, that cancer has been conquered in the subtle world and the conquest will soon materialise here.

Another complicated illness I was confronted with during this period was that of a sadhak. A typical Englishman, stiff but polite, a cultured, sensitive poet; the poor man had never enjoyed good health since his childhood and in later years was also mentally shaken. I had been treating him for chronic liver trouble, indigestion, etc., for some years before he had this illness. Either because of this, or by nature, he was none too optimistic. Besides, he had suffered from rheumatism and infantile paralysis too. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo knew his temperament very well and instructed me to look after him with a large consideration as they themselves had always done. He was turned into a fine poet by Sri Aurobindo’s Force. I wonder how with such a poor health he managed to do Yoga. That, however, is none of my business. Failing to diagnose his illness, I called in other doctors, and as is often the case, opinions differed. Neither were there proper facilities for making specific tests in the hospital. He began to suffer from fever, jaundice, abscesses, joint pains, and a host of diverse complaints which made him

extremely irritable. He pestered me like Socrates with all sorts of questions, the why and the how of his ailments, their remedy, and the last question, when would he be all right? I reported faithfully all this to the Mother and to Sri Aurobindo who would often side with him, appreciating his inquisitiveness and his refusal to gulp down docilely all that was given to him. When I told Sri Aurobindo that he would not allow his old dusty heaps of the journal, *Manchester Guardian* to be removed, Sri Aurobindo approved of his feelings. One day the Mother said, “Once when you were fanning Sri Aurobindo, I had a vision of the patient crying to you, ‘Why don’t you cure me?’ “On the other hand, Sri Aurobindo had told me that the patient was disgusted with his ailing body and would like to leave it. We are made of many conflicting parts! My inner comment was: the Mother’s occult sight could read all our movements. Only if she could always prescribe remedies! To that question Sri Aurobindo gave, in our correspondence, a rather evasive answer. He said, “Why do you want us to do your work?” Of course, I understood what he meant. There is a humorous episode connected with this patient’s ailment, which will be interesting to note here. The Mother had advised me in my medical practice to develop the power of intuition. One of the methods I followed was to go into meditation and see, hear or feel something relating to a particular case. Now, in the present quandary, I tried the method; after a couple of failures, what I saw in the meditation was a brinjal! When I blurted it out to Sri Aurobindo and to my colleagues, they all roared with laughter. Thenceforth they would taunt me with “Nirod’s brinjal intuition”!

To end the sad story: the case was not showing any improvement; one after another complications began to develop. Above all, his outer consciousness failed to respond actively to the Force. The Mother saw that the only way that could save the patient was to send him to Bangalore where he could be treated by an efficient German doctor well-known to us, Sri Aurobindo asked me to prepare a clear and complete history of the patient’s malady, let the Mother hear it and then send it to the doctor. When it was ready, I read it out to both of them. Sri Aurobindo commented, “Excellent!” I felt gratified. On receiving the report the doctor came down to take the patient. He concurred with our view that it must be a case of septicaemia. When the patient was being sent

off, the Mother came and stood on her terrace waiting a long time for him. At last the car came before her and she and the patient looked at each other for quite a while. He had a premonition that he would not come back.

We felt very sad, indeed, but there was no other choice. Next day, a telegram arrived carrying the news that the patient had suddenly collapsed and died in the train. As soon as I heard it, my head began to reel and I had to sit down before Sri Aurobindo. It was a most treacherous blow! The post-mortem revealed that there was an inflammation of the heart's envelope with a little collection of fluid behind the heart, and yet clinically there was no sign of it.

Now to finish the medical story with one or two positive examples. A striking case of cure by the yogic force was that of Champaklal's. He had corneal ulcer and iritis. I took him to the local eye-specialist who advised him complete rest. He was obliged to stop his service of the Master, a blow much more painful to him than the illness. Awfully dejected, he passed his days in an inert resignation in bed showing no sign of improvement. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo would listen quietly to my report till one day the Mother paid him a visit. On her return, she told Sri Aurobindo, "The case is serious; he must not remain in bed one moment longer; he should resume work." I was speechless. I could not make out on what ground she made that observation. Subjective or objective? I knew of course from my previous medical experience that she sees beyond our sight. The bandage was removed and he rejoined work. Curiously enough, he became all right in two or three days without any treatment whatsoever. Apart from the Divine Force, the psychological factor, the sense of active physical nearness to Sri Aurobindo, must have counted a lot.

It will not be out of place to mention a minor instance of yogic cure in my own case. While in actual attendance on Sri Aurobindo, I was gripped by a sudden violent colic pain. I had to leave the work and lie down. Sri Aurobindo was informed about it. I was simply tossing on the floor when suddenly I heard a voice within me, "Keep absolutely quiet." Straining all my will, I lay stiff on my back in a board-like rigidity. Insusceptibly sleep came, as if I had been given a morphia injection and I woke up in a normal state.

We have seen cases in which the lack of proper psychological conditions prevented the effective intervention by the Divine Force. Now I shall cite a serious case where, Sri Aurobindo himself declared, the divine intervention had its full effect.

The patient, S, a thin, wiry man of about 40, used to suffer from acidity and came to me for treatment. But being extremely greedy, he could never observe the essential part of the cure, the diet. In 1934, before I had taken up the Dispensary work, he invited me for a cup of tea. I asked the Mother's permission, for at that time we were supposed to obtain her approval for any external movement not concerned with sadhana, and Sri Aurobindo replied, "It would be better not to take S's things. This cooking has reawakened his greed of food and made him ill again after I had completely cured him."

Then a year later — I believe it was in 1935, he came to me for treatment for the first time. I wrote to Sri Aurobindo in my medical report, "S's story is out. In addition to green mangoes, he had some *rasagollas* too. This food business is almost a possession with him." Sri Aurobindo wrote back, "So I heard. Why almost?" "We have decided to remove his stove for good. Rather childish, but what else can be done?" I continued, and he replied, "Quite right. The Doctor said that he was surprised by the relapses of S's health until he found that when he was not there, S used to get up and secretly cook food for himself on the stove! Palate satisfaction seems to be more precious to him than his life." After about five months I received a note from Sri Aurobindo, "Is the condition of S dangerous or critical? If it is so or if it becomes so, it will be better to send for a French doctor who will take the responsibility of the case.... The Mother was knocked up in the small hours and informed that S was very bad and hiccoughing. I presume the French Doctor has been sent for by this time. If it is serious, let us have news 2 or 3 times a day." I replied to him, "S's condition is neither dangerous nor critical. It is a case of hyperacidity. He has vomited a lot and has found some relief now. But I hear that he wants to be treated by our renowned homeopath R. I have no objection, subject to your approval." And this is what Sri Aurobindo wrote to me, "I expect you to put your medical feelings under a glass case in a corner for the time and help the... Homeopath so far as nursing and other care for S goes." I handed over the patient to R and did the nursing part as asked by Sri

Aurobindo. He also wanted me to send him a regular report of the case. The patient started copious vomiting of blood and passing blood in the stool. When I asked the Guru how far the exact reporting was essential for the action of the Force, he replied, “It is absolutely essential. Wrong information or concealment of important facts may have disastrous consequences.” I reported, “His condition will be critical at night. Two things must be done: hiccough has to stop, and he must have sleep. He is extremely weak. Are you sure about him?” His answer came, “No. From the beginning of the case I have not been at all sure of it.... The circumstances have been very contrary and there has not been the usual response to the Force which makes recovery only a matter of time. It seems to me that it is an old illness which has Suddenly taken an acute and perilous form. If tomorrow morning there is no improvement, we can call Philaire<sup>1</sup> (I hope it will be in time).”

The next day, there was a sudden good turn putting the patient beyond the danger zone. Synchronous with the Mother’s coming down to give general blessings, he went into a sound sleep with the temporary cessation of the hiccough. It was at this time that I felt that he had crossed the danger line. Sri Aurobindo, confirming my feelings, wrote, “There was something — a sense of a danger passed and a Force put out.... There is a change in so far as S’s physical has begun to respond while before it was not responsive at all. There is no longer the predominance of the dark forces that there was before. But the response has to increase before one can be absolutely sure of the result. The obstinacy of the hiccough is a dark point that ought to disappear.”

After a long and strenuous vigil, the Mother’s and Sri Aurobindo’s unflinching concentration, daily reports of the progress, the homeopath’s blunders and effective medicines, the patient recovered. I did not know really to whom the credit went — to the Force or the homeopath. There was a supposition also that the patient’s complete surrender to the Mother had made this miracle possible. I had given up all hope of recovery when I saw him vomiting such a lot of blood. Surgical intervention was out of the question, for the local hospital surgeon was not very competent. Sri Aurobindo suggested it by way of keeping ourselves on the safe side of the law, since

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<sup>1</sup> A French surgeon.



we had no legal authority to practise. Neither had I much faith in the homeopath when the case was handed over to him, though he had made a big name in the town. One thing I must say in favour of the patient, that he never lost hope and was throughout conscious. If I was in an anxiety he would give me hope saying, “Doctor, don’t think that I am going to die.” Sri Aurobindo wrote to me, “The man has a belief in yoga-force and that helps.” In this predicament I wanted a straight answer from Sri Aurobindo as to which factor played the dominant part in the cure — the Force or the doctor. I was doubtful about the latter because he had committed many blunders which were recognised by Sri Aurobindo and they had to be counter acted by the Force. The illuminating answer I received from him is as follows, “It was only when the heart began to misbehave seriously, that, as often happens, in response to the danger a big Force began to come down and S’s body also responded — it was that response that saved him, not any surrender... I think the Force can take more credit than R’s medicines, although the latter were very useful, one might say an indispensable assistance. Yet it was whenever a big Force came in that S made a bound forward and each time on the lines indicated by the Force, first the heart’s recovery, next the deliverance of the liver, third the overcoming of the hyperacid excesses. R was an obstacle as well as a help, — twice. First, in his confounded decision to encourage ‘yellow fever’ — the bile had to be cleared out of course, but not in that dangerous way; next in his “lime juice” excesses, the orange-juice was useful, but frantically overdone. As soon as he dropped his first mistake, the bile set itself right — as soon as he dropped his second to some extent and administered orange juice + medicine reasonably, the rest ameliorated.... If so, it was because the Force got a chance to work straight — helped and not impeded.”

This then is one case among many others which I have followed step by step, and have Sri Aurobindo’s own words to vouch for the cure of the case by his Force.

To say a few words about the success of a case by the Divine Force or its failure — Sri Aurobindo has never maintained that the Force is infallible. Only the Supramental Force is a “dead cert”. But it is extremely difficult to bring it down. Short of that, everything is a play of possibility where many factors count: the doctor, the patient, the environment. The Force is not a

magician, as we understand the word. It takes into account all these factors, particularly the faith and openness of the patient as in this case. If the patient's soul wants to leave the body, the Force cannot compel it to remain. In short, it is a complex tangle of forces that has to be dealt with, each case different from another and there is no universal rule that can be applied to all. Nevertheless, if two cases have failed, we have seen other serious ones where the cause of success was beyond all doubt.

There were two small occasions when I attended on the Mother. Usually, she was not in the habit of consulting doctors. Her doctor was Sri Aurobindo. But once when her hand had swollen for no apparent reason, Sri Aurobindo asked me to have a look at it. I examined it in his presence with a certain amount of shy hesitation. Here lay the difference between myself and Dr. Manilal. He would have done the job in quite a business-like manner. The case was simple, however, and got cured with hot fomentation. The next occasion was when she was having much pain in the ear, perhaps from an insect bite. Sri Aurobindo asked if I could do something. I examined the ear and found a tiny spot of haemorrhage inside. The Mother inquired if the insect was still there. I said no, but when I suggested some ear-drops for the pain, she replied, "No, no medicine for me!" Medicines were an anathema to both the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Throughout their long yogic life they cured all their own ailments by applying the Force. Medicines were accepted only during the later stage of Sri Aurobindo's last illness and in the recent illness of the Mother. There were special reasons for this. I have given some of them in Sri Aurobindo's case in the chapter 'God Departs'.

Sri Aurobindo wrote to me about the action of medicine on the Mother's body: "Medicines have quite a different action on the Mother's body than they would have on yours or X's or anybody else's and the reaction is not usually favourable. Her physical consciousness is not the same as that of ordinary people — though even in ordinary people it is not so identical in all cases as 'science' would have us believe."

Now I shall pass on to another field of the Mother's activity which can be called yogic, though it would not be quite the right term to use. For, according to the Mother there is no yogic or unyogic activity, all life is Yoga. This does not mean, as is frequently misinterpreted, that everything can pass as yogic.

It refers to the fact that the whole of Nature's evolution is secretly a slow and gradual preparation for the spiritual life. Thus every earthly activity has a divine purpose behind it. So the Mother and Sri Aurobindo accept the whole field of Nature as the field of Yoga, but they aim at transforming life's common movement, rejecting the ignorant turn it mostly takes and bringing out the divine truth which is secret within it. To achieve this, they want us always to be in the spiritual consciousness so that whatever life-activity is accepted becomes a part of Yoga and undergoes transformation. I have said that Sri Aurobindo's accident had upset all her previous programme: Pranam, interviews and meditation had to be given up or suspended for a time. It was almost a break with the past. And with the arrival of the children and their parents, our way of life also had to undergo a considerable change. The old things came back, but in a new form. No more seven-or-eight-hour Darshans, two or three hour Pranams, evening meditations, etc. Now, for instance, for Pranam, the Mother used to come and stand at the top of the main staircase at about 10.00 a.m. and a whole crowd would go up to her, the ceremony lasting for nearly two or three hours, the Mother remaining on her feet all the time! From Sri Aurobindo's room we used to hear people holding long talks with her on personal or departmental matters. The Mother would be quite oblivious of time and space or of persons. She would go on hearing the various complaints, reports and sometimes discussing some points, no matter for how long, while the queue behind would wait and wait jammed on the narrow and packed staircase. This was, as I have pointed out, her method of working, one-pointed concentration. The business in hand must be first attended to. We have seen this characteristic of hers in many instances. During Christmas, it was her custom to send 'baskets' to the European and American inmates, out of consideration for their national sentiments, I suppose. On its eve she would sit down in a chair or on a low stool and with the help of some sadhikas arrange each basket, consider each individual's taste, necessity, fancy, giving cheese, chocolate, fruits, etc., etc. while time would stop flowing for her. We were waiting in Sri Aurobindo's room for his meal, but we knew and would joke with one another that the Mother was in her element, for though Divine, her human motherly instinct could not be forgotten.

After the Pranam was over — actually there was no pranam, for people would receive only a flower and could talk to her of their need, — then at about 1.00 p.m. she would hold a class in the Darshan hall, in the form of questions and answers, somewhat on the lines of Sri Aurobindo's talks with us, very probably inspired by them. But only those who knew French were allowed to attend it, questions and answers being conducted in French. Here again exceptions were made afterwards. Some people who did not know French attended and asked questions in English. I too was very keen on attending it, partly because we had no work at that time. It was Sri Aurobindo's silent period, to be broken only when the Mother brought his food after the talks. I managed to write a few lines in French asking her permission. She read the note before Sri Aurobindo and said smiling, "He wants to show his knowledge of French!"

However, the class began, if I remember rightly, with the reading of the *Prayers and Meditations* and questions were asked in relation to the text. Only questions on spiritual matters were allowed, but when they gradually grew fewer in number, it was made an open class, I believe. There were not many at that time who knew French very well. And the Mother talked so fast that I wonder how many could follow her. Here is one difference between Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The Mother being by her very nature Shakti, the Divine Energy; could not be slow and leisurely in manner, action or speech like the Purusha, though as I have shown, she could be extraordinarily patient and continue a work for a long stretch of time.

It was a new experience indeed, for till then our approach to her was individual and restricted mostly to practical guidance; there was no intellectual communication and the Mother would always discourage intellectual questions. This was the first time she became collectively expansive and was ready to respond to intellectual seekings, but mainly on spiritual matters. These talks naturally reminded me of Sri Aurobindo's talks for their vivid contrast and I could not but make a mental comparison between them; they sharply bring out the characteristics of two different personalities though their consciousness is one. Here the Mother's personality dominated the whole atmosphere; her tone, mood and manner were stamped with a seriousness, energy and force that demanded close attention. Humour did not

play a conspicuous role, but there were flashes of wit. Her eyes were on everybody, her answers, though meant for the questioner, were directed towards all so that there was no room for being inattentive or indifferent. When a play by the Mother was staged by our students, she strictly enjoined on the young children to keep complete silence. The striking difference with Sri Aurobindo, as I have pointed out, was his impersonality. He asked questions or answered them without looking at the questioner. He spoke slowly in a subdued voice with no stress in it. There was no constraint upon you, you were having a talk with a friend, and in friendship, levity, gravity, all were in order. Still, Sri Aurobindo remained Sri Aurobindo to us; there was no loss of reverence. Some of us had hotly discussed topics even to the point of losing our temper before his Witness-Purusha consciousness. That would be very unusual before the Mother. To put a homely simile, they were like a father and mother, both loving but one indulgent, liberal, large, the other a firm though not inconsiderate disciplinarian. Both are aspects of the one Divine — Impersonal and Personal, Purusha and Prakriti and both have their ineffable charm. Though all were free to ask her questions, it was not always easy to ask them, as the answers instead of having a direct bearing on the questions were sometimes directed against the consciousness of the person involved; for to her, it was that which was more important, and our consciousness was an open book to her inner sight. These talks continued for quite a long time; the hall used to be packed. Unfortunately no regular record has been kept, first because they flowed very fast and secondly, there were only a few who understood French well. In later days, some talks were held in English out of a special consideration for a few people. I shall quote one or two of them from my scanty records.

Q: What is the origin of anger and how to get rid of it?

A: Is there anybody here who is angry? (Laughter) Apart from its origin, when you are angry, it means you have lost control of yourself. As to getting rid of it, you must have a strong will to do so (laughter); no, I don't say it as a joke though it may seem like one. It is because people don't take a firm decision, use strongly their will that things do not become effective. There are contradictory parts in the being; one part may decide, while others pit themselves against the decision; they lie hidden behind. As soon as one part

has said, “I won’t get angry again,” they say, ‘Ah, my friend, just wait, let the occasion come.’ And when it comes, the man forgets his decision and throws himself into anger. But if you really know how to take the decision, then nothing can undo it. I will give you an instance. My brother, older than I by about 18 months, was extremely excitable in his boyhood. I was an expert in knowing how to make him angry. Both of us were fond of each other, but when he was angry he lost all control of himself. One day we were playing croquet; either because he got beaten or for some other reason, he flew into a rage and struck me hard with the mallet. Fortunately I escaped with a slight injury. Next time when we were sitting in a room, he threw a big chair headlong towards me, I bent down just in time and the chair passed over my head. Lastly, as we were coming down from a carriage, he pushed me down under it; luckily the horse did not move. Then my mother told him, ‘One day you will kill your own sister.’ That suddenly brought him to his senses and made him realise the consequence of his own folly. On that very day he took a firm decision not to be angry ever in life again and he never was. He has performed high government duties and people have told me they have not seen him angry even once.

Q: Why is it necessary to have the experience again and again?

A: What I have meant is that one must not repeat dogmas and creeds without having himself realised them first. People have a very common habit of saying, for example, ‘God is everywhere, everything is good since God exists in everything.’ You have no right to say such things before you have realised them. For then they lose all force and become nothing but a dogma. If you simply repeat what others have said and experienced, it can have no benefit for others. You must yourself go through it, see it from different aspects and live it, find something new in it. Then only it becomes interesting and effective.

We owe, by the way, a debt of gratitude to the Mother’s brother, for it was his indirect intervention in the Colonial Office of the French Government at Paris that went a long way towards removing a very great threat to the Ashram’s existence, brought about by the manipulation of the British India Government.

I come now to the last of her day's activities that I have witnessed as well as heard about from others. It was one of the strangest I could think of and could be taken up by her alone, for her inspiration comes from — to quote Nishikanto's phrase — a "God-white source" riot from human reason. I mean her evening meditation and Pranam. I have already made a reference to them. The meditation started in a very reasonable manner at about 8.00 p.m. She would go down and, standing in the middle of the lower part of the staircase, give a silent meditation to all sitting below for about half an hour; then she would come up, look in on Sri Aurobindo, and come back after a while with his supper. Once she said to him, "After a long time, the gods have come to the meditation." This recalls Sri Aurobindo's verses:

Calm faces of the gods on backgrounds vast,  
Bringing the marvel of the infinitudes.

As usual, the time began to shift gradually till it reached 11 p.m., then twelve, then one and meditation was substituted by Pranam. What an unearthly hour for Pranam! This happened particularly when she was passing through a period of trance. Many people would go to sleep in the courtyard, especially young boys and girls. Then Haradhan, an old sadhak, would announce, "Mother has come, Mother has come!" All would wake up and in a flurry stand in the queue to see the Mother who was often in a state of trance — her eyes closed, head bent, flower in hand. Suddenly the trance would break and a few would pass in quick succession, again a lapse into trance. We would watch from our terrace above, while Sri Aurobindo was taking rest, the queue moving on and suddenly a halt for a long time, then moving fast, again a halt! The Mother used to look like a veritable goddess, superb in all her majesty and glory, in the deep hush of the midnight. Some would sit in front of her and meditate, or feast their eyes on that marvellous scene!

At this time a nephew of mine was staying with me. He was of a very independent nature; he used to come home late at night, get up late, was very untidy in his habits due probably to his artistic temperament. I tried to mend his ways but failed. I complained to the Mother; her answer baffled me. She said, "Why, he comes to me!" I did not see how it answered the problem which continued all the same with the result that one day I gave him a very

mild slap, and reported the fact to the Mother. She said, "That is why he doesn't listen to you." The reply surprised me, as she put the cause as the effect. I could not, however, argue with her. Then looking steadily into my eyes, she said, "Look here! I will tell you a story. You know I had a brother. Both of us were very fond of each other. He used to come home late for which my father would beat him. One day I told my father, 'Beat him once more and I will leave the house immediately.' That stern threat stopped his beating. I was very young then." Since then, I left the boy to his own fate. Even today the Mother holds this attitude and has standing instructions that guardians, teachers, captains must not inflict punishment of any kind on children.

There are several other major activities the Mother started during this time and even participated in. A few of them have taken a premier place in our life and gained world-wide recognition. Though I did not hear the Mother talking about them to Sri Aurobindo as much as the foregoing activities, I saw them growing up under her aegis slowly, and by her power. I might just as well give a short description of some of them by way of illustration of her multitudinous activities, her intensity, drive, boldness and creative genius. We shall see how some institutions have developed from a nascent stage into banyan trees spreading their branches far and wide, and are inspiring countries with a new vision.

The two major activities that she took up during this period were the Ashram School and Physical Education which together form the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. Both of them, like the others, were born from tiny chromosomes and out of a compelling necessity, for the Japanese aggression had driven the children of the disciples in affected areas to seek shelter in the protecting arms of the Mother. She had now to devote much of her crowded time to the children who needed a special treatment, since they had not come for Yoga.

It was a challenging problem suddenly thrown upon her by Nature. Our Ashram life also took a different turn; the old barriers completely broke down under this influx. No longer a hermitage of peace, silence and inner expansion and acquisition, it had to be tested in the crucible of outer life. We soon became one spiritual family. The Mother had to look after the mental, vital and physical health of the green ones, both boys and girls. Along with the



necessity, means also came forward to meet the demand. Sisirkumar Mitra from Vishwabharati, with a long teaching experience, and Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya from Calcutta, an expert in physical culture, came and were given charge of the two wings of education, mental and physical. Particularly in young Pranab, the Mother found an excellent instrument for physical culture and with his help she quickly built up the centre of physical education. I don't need to discuss the place and *raison d'être* of physical education in our Ashram life when Sri Aurobindo has done it so well in his essay on *The Divine Body*.<sup>1</sup> My vision being more earthly, I can see that it has served the most important purpose of keeping the inflammable material of young boys, girls and children under a strict supervision through compulsory activities from 4.30 p.m. to 7.00 p.m. or so. One can very well imagine what would have been the moral effect on them, had there not been this central control, especially when the children here are given a great freedom of movement. Those young people who have cut themselves off from these collective activities suffer much from psychological troubles. Most of the ills of the youth outside have their origin in having no occupation after college and school hours. After Sri Aurobindo's passing, the Mother gave me one sound counsel, "Be in the atmosphere," by which she meant that I should not isolate myself from the collective activities. When there was a demand for more holidays, the Mother remarked, "I have started the School so that the children may not knock about in the streets." Since then, Sisirkumar has resisted the pressure of the students for more holidays.

The Mother now began to identify herself more and more with this new generation. In the evening when Sri Aurobindo was enjoying his solitude, the Mother, after her tennis, busied herself in the Playground meeting the children, watching their games and exercises, taking classes, etc. and through all these means, establishing an intimate contact with them. The exercises were done in cumbersome pyjamas which consequently checked free movement. One evening when I went to visit the Playground, I found the gate closed. The gate-keeper told me that the Mother did not want anyone except the group-members to enter the Playground. When it was thrown open we found, to our surprise, that the girls were doing exercises in shorts! How did

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<sup>1</sup> *The Supramental Manifestation*: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication.

this revolutionary change come about? Here, in brief, is the story from one who played an active part in it. One day, one of the girls, doing her exercises in pyjamas in the Playground, fell down and got hurt owing to the impractical dress. When the Mother was told about it, she listened quietly. After a couple of days, she called Bratati, one of the sadhikas of her intimate circle (she had such small intimate groups of young boys, girls and adults) and said, "I have solved the problem of the uniform. The girls will put on white shorts, a white shirt and a kitty-cap on the head for their hair. Prepare them and try them on yourself. Pyjamas are unwieldy. When you are ready, let me know about it." When everything was ready, she informed the Mother and a day was fixed for the rehearsal in strict privacy. The Mother was pleased with the design. Calling the girls together she gave a short impressive talk on the new experiment and the necessity for trying it. They at once fell in with the proposal and adopted the new uniform. But what was the reaction to this drastic step? Some, particularly old people, were shocked to see their daughters scantily dressed and doing exercises jointly with boys; a few conservative guardians were planning to take their wards away from such a modernised Ashram. I, personally, admired, on the one hand, the revolutionary step taken by the Mother far in advance of the time in Eastern countries, in anticipation of the modern movement in dress; on the other hand, my cautious mind, or as Sri Aurobindo would say, my coward-mind, could not but feel the risk involved in this forward venture. At the same time I knew that the Mother's very nature is to face danger, if necessary. And whenever we had tried to argue with her that we were doing 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." Besides, whatever measures she adopts are not done for the sake of novelty or from mental reasons. "Mother is guided by her intuition," Sri Aurobindo reminded us very often. Also, I believe, she prepares the ground in the occult planes and manipulates the forces to her advantage before she takes any hazardous step. That is why we hear her say, "Wait, wait!" for the opportune moment, I suppose. We can realise now the wisdom of her vision in taking that revolutionary step. Further, I think it was one of the most effective means to eliminate sex-consciousness between the male

and the female. We are in this respect much better than before now that shorts have become almost our normal dress.

To cut short the story, thanks to her long and sustained labour, these two institutions have gained today their well-deserved recognition abroad; particularly the physical culture. On the occasion of the April Darshan in 1949, the members of this organisation called J.S.A.S.A.<sup>1</sup> were given the privilege of a march past in their group uniforms before the Master and the Mother. Sri Aurobindo seemed to have been much impressed by the smartness of the young boys' group.

The Mother became so preoccupied with the various activities in the Playground that she would return at about 8 or 9 p.m. with a garland around her neck (put by Pranab) and she would offer it at Sri Aurobindo's feet. Her intensive concentration at the Playground made people remark that the Supermind would descend there first. When Sri Aurobindo was told about it, he commented, "I won't get the Supermind, then?" It is of interest to note that the Supramental Manifestation did take place during a meditation in the Playground on February 29, 1956.

I shall now take up a minor but important activity of which the world has not heard much. I mean the Mother's coaching in dramatics. After her return from tennis and finishing all other activities she would attend the dramatic rehearsals of our children who were being trained for the School Anniversary on the 1st of December. She herself would select the play or theme, choose the roles for different participants and coach them individually night after night till they were ready. I have been told what minute care she took to correct the movements, articulations of each actor, and how she would not spare anyone. A young participant told me laughingly that once he ran away for fear of being scolded before the others! Sometimes the Mother would give descriptions of the display to Sri Aurobindo. Once when a suitable theme was hard to find, for Sri Aurobindo's dramas had not yet come out, I suggested to the Mother in the presence of Sri Aurobindo, to stage *Savitri*. She accepted the idea. Thanks to her assiduous personal training and attention, our novices learnt the art of acting with beauty and refinement. Though she herself cannot

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<sup>1</sup> La Jeunesse Sportive de l'Ashram de Sri Aurobindo.

attend these functions nowadays, the tradition she established is respectfully maintained by the artistes she prepared. A foreign visitor seeing the Mother in her colourful tennis dress observed that she looked like Sarah Bernhardt, the famous French actress. Curiously enough, I had the same impression when I first saw her in that costume without knowing much of the actress except her great name. The Mother's Dramatic faculty and wonderful gift of elocution gave substance to my impression.

The picture that now emerges of the Mother's daily life is one of intense dynamism expressing itself in various ways: creative, organisational, artistic, physical, etc., etc., leaving out of account numberless small individual touches interspersed between the big activities. Except for a few hours for meals and bath and some rest at night, the wheel went round and round with hardly a stop. Even in the midst of such whirling activity she found time for teaching arithmetic to a boy and reading *Prayers and Meditations* in French, at midnight to some youngsters. Once a young boy was found in the streets at about 2 a.m. The French officer who was on patrol challenged him. When he saw that the boy had a flower in his hand, he asked, "This flower is from the Mother?" "Yes!" he replied, "I am coming from the Mother." "So late at night?" exclaimed the officer, utterly baffled, and let him go. The officer knew the Mother. I have seen her bestowing special attention on some young people and sending them to bed past midnight. Mysterious are her ways! I shall cite an instance of her eye for minor details. A sadhika recounted to me how the Mother remembers even the smallest details in the midst of her most busy hours. Once during the Pranam and sari distribution,<sup>1</sup> when all the inmates, numbering about 500, passed in a line before the Mother and a sadhak standing by her side handed the saris to her one by one, the Mother gave the sadhika a sari with a black border. Next day when she came up to see the Mother on some business, she said, "I don't know why X handed that black-bordered sari for you. There is a heap over there, go and choose whichever you like." The sadhika replied, "It doesn't matter, Mother. Give me whichever you like." The Mother gave her a green-bordered one. She was simply staggered at her extraordinary observation and recollection of even an apparently insignificant detail in the midst of a crowded programme and was

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<sup>1</sup> The Mother herself used to distribute saris or frocks to ladies and girls four times a year.

quite overwhelmed by the unexpected touch of her Divine Grace. And this is not the only instance. In those old days when our number was limited and the Mother could establish a personal contact with all of us, big or small, we all had such unexpected touches to treasure in our memory. This faculty, whatever else it might be, is certainly not human, it is a Power beyond and above the human that is all the time at work.

Here is another small instance, gathered from the private diary of a young sadhika, to show how the Mother in the midst of her crammed activities found time to push individuals or groups on the path of their soul's aspiration. She used to see ten or twelve young girls in the evening at about 8 p.m. before she came down for meditation. But many a day they had to wait for hours, even up to 10 p.m. They would feel hungry or sleepy and had to go without their dinner, for the meditation followed immediately after their meeting. One day one of them lost patience and went away, leaving her flowers in a dish for the Mother. Just then, the Mother came. The girls were very much struck by this coincidence. What a test, they thought! As soon as one girl approached the Mother, the Mother asked, "Who has left this dish of flowers here? Oh, is it X? You really surprise me! You can't wait even a little while for me, you get so impatient? Do you know how the gods and goddesses yearn to have my darshan, and the saints and sages consider themselves most blessed when they see me in their meditation even for a minute?"

"But, Mother," replied the girl, "we look upon you as our friend. When we stand under the shelter of a tree, do we think of it giving us a cool shade?" That sweet answer disarmed the Mother completely and she immediately took her into her arms.

We have seen her coming drenched in perspiration from her game of tennis and taking French translation classes soon after, or going to the sports ground to watch our tournaments, herself taking down the names and scores of each participant, her spiritual force acting simultaneously, protecting, sustaining and inspiring all, her very Presence electrifying the atmosphere with a divine energy and quietude. She would hold one end of the tape at the terminus in the running competitions. She had even gone out to watch our team playing friendly matches with outside clubs. Twice she witnessed the Calcutta Mohan Bagan football team's display and was so impressed by it that she changed

her opinion of the game. She had considered it a rough, vital play where one was bound to get some injury; in fact, that was what happened with our young players. But the spectacular display by the Calcutta team playing such a clean game made her remark, “I didn’t know that football could be played in such a clean manner!” All the players came for the Mother’s blessings and presented to her the new football they had won. Then returning from all these functions to the Playground, she continued her daily round of interviews, watching the marching, taking classes or distributing sweets to all the Ashramites, till about 9.00 p.m.! This was her programme throughout the year; one activity or another filled up every moment and, mind you, this continued till her 80th year!

Where did she get all this energy from? Her body was frail, food and sleep were medically quite inadequate to cope with her super-abundant vitality. “Do you think I live on these frugal meals alone? One can draw any amount of energy from universal Nature,” she once said. Here we are face to face with the Divine Energy, the Shakti incarnate. Like Sri Aurobindo with regard to his massive correspondence, she could say, “If for nothing else, at least for my interminable activity, I should be called an Avatar!”

My aim in drawing this picture of the Mother is not merely to demonstrate her dynamism. There have been quite a number of people in the world, Napoleon for example, who had a magnificent vital energy, but they are of a different category. Here all her actions are symbolic, they are the expressions of the Divine Force, *chit shakti*, she embodies, and that force she has given freely to the young ones as she had done to the older generation. It infiltrates everything that it comes in contact with; she leaves a part of her Divine Presence wherever she goes. She has said also she never forgets any person who has come in contact with her even for a moment! The person finds a place in her Divine Consciousness. Sri Aurobindo said to me that with each one of us here she has her emanation. I believe that would be in some sense true for all those who have come in contact with her, and it would help them through life’s strenuous and perilous journey.

I shall now finish this chapter with an account of my utter discomfiture in trying to argue with the Mother over a subject about which I had very little knowledge. The Mother was describing to Sri Aurobindo the physical features

of the brothers of a particular family. At some point, I don't remember exactly when, I was foolish enough to contradict her. She replied, "Better keep quiet! You know nothing." The episode was over and I had forgotten all about it. But the surprise of surprises, later on the Mother called me out of Sri Aurobindo's room and putting her hand on my shoulder explained almost in an apologetic tone how I was wrong. I expressed my sincere regret for my interruption and said that I certainly did not mind her rebuke. I was indeed very much moved by her divine considerateness. If she would be rude or severe on occasions — she once said that Sri Aurobindo was a gentleman, she was not — we have seen her Mahakali aspect, freezing silence, ironical smile, cold look, — her Mahalakshmi graciousness too was showered upon us often. For example, she used to give me, on my birthdays, a pair of fine dhotis from the stock meant for Sri Aurobindo. However hard she might appear outside, and it was unfortunately for us very necessary — she is our true Mother and her only concern is to lead us to the Light.

# WAR AND POLITICS

## INDIA'S INDEPENDENCE

World War II, in which India also was involved, began in 1939, a year after Sri Aurobindo's accident and ended in 1945 with the victory of the Allies. India's long struggle for liberty came to an end in 1947 when she became independent. This was one of the most exciting phases in our twelve years' stay with Sri Aurobindo. We had the unique opportunity of watching with him, from his room and, following step by step, the long course and rapid development of these two historic events: on the one hand, the great danger to Europe and the whole world; on the other, opportunity given to India to gain her freedom by her cooperation with the Allies. We shared with Sri Aurobindo his hopes and fears, his anticipations, prognostications and prophecies. He allowed us some glimpses into his action and gave a calm assurance of the victory of the divine cause. For the Mother had declared that it was her war. Hitler's star was in the ascendant for a time. His Panzer divisions racing through France making Paris' fate hang in the balance, his Luftwaffe over London, Rommel's overrunning of North Africa, the Allied invasion of Europe, the Battle of Stalingrad — all these and many other episodes kept us in breathless suspense.

But in the midst of all these dramatic upheavals, Sri Aurobindo never lost his calm equanimity though he knew very well indeed what was at stake. He said that Hitler was the greatest menace the world had to face and that he would stop at nothing to achieve his sinister object, even destroy the whole civilisation; for "An idiot hour destroys what centuries made", as we find in a verse in *Savitri*.

An account of what was said and done in Sri Aurobindo's room during this period will be revelatory in many respects. First of all, it will dispel the prevailing universal misconception that Sri Aurobindo was a world-shunning Yogi immersed in his own sadhana. It will show, on the contrary, how much he was concerned with the "good of humanity". Far from taking only a passive interest in the vast conflict, the modern Kurukshetra, where the fate of the entire world was being decided, he actively participated in it with his spiritual



Force and directed that very fate to a victorious consummation. The account will also bring to light Sri Aurobindo's acute political insight and wide knowledge of military affairs. Although he had left public life in 1910 and lived thereafter in seclusion for nearly half a century, he always kept in touch with all world-movements through outer and inner means. Perhaps people will find it difficult to believe and many will flatly deny that such a spiritual force exists; and it will be hard for them to swallow that, if at all it exists, a man acquiring and possessing it can apply it to an individual or cosmic purpose. But fortunately we have Sri Aurobindo's own word for it and our personal experience in its support. In fact his integral Yoga aims at nothing less than bringing down the supramental consciousness and changing the present terrestrial consciousness by its dynamic power and light. We shall also witness Sri Aurobindo's vital interest in India's struggle for freedom, for which he had himself launched the first movement, awakening the country to her birthright and aiding her later by his decisive spiritual force towards its achievement.

Though we in the Ashram are not supposed to take part in politics, we are not at all indifferent to world affairs. In fact, Sri Aurobindo has said that we are immensely interested in them. The journal *Mother India* which was a semi-political fortnightly, and came out two years after India's Independence, was edited by one of the sadhaks who was living in Bombay and the editorials were sent to Sri Aurobindo for approval before publication. Sri Aurobindo gave many long and regular interviews to a political leader of Bengal and gave him advice and directions regarding the contemporary situation. The Mother too has said that the Supermind cannot but include in its ultimate work for world-change the political administration, since all secular well-being rests in the hands of the governing power of the country. Besides, the War was not a simple political issue among the big nations. The Nazi aggression meant "the peril of black servitude and a revived barbarism threatening India and the world". It was a life-and-death question for the spiritual evolution of the new man, for the emergence of a new race which the Mother and Sri Aurobindo had come to initiate and establish on the earth. And the victory of Hitler's Germany would mean not only the end of

civilisation, but also the death of that great possibility. It is in this sense I have called this War a modern Kurukshetra.

Let us then go back to the crucial year 1938 when dark war-clouds were gathering and rumblings were heard all over Europe. There was a strong possibility that fighting would break out in December, just a week or two after the night of November 23, when Sri Aurobindo had his accident. But, as he indicated in our talks, his Force pushed it back to a later date, for war at that time would have been a great hindrance to his work. It is possible to surmise that the irresistible forces which no human power could check turned their fury on one who had checked them. Long before Hitler's actual invasion of Poland, long before any other person, Sri Aurobindo had seen this dark Asuric Power rising in Germany and striding over Europe, making Hitler its demoniac instrument, a pseudo-colossus, a self-acclaimed Napoleon. Therefore he supported the Allies and warned India of the forthcoming peril, much to the chagrin and indignation of our blind countrymen. Future events proved his forecast right to the letter.

We used to have discussions on the international political situation from the very start. Hitler's insane lust for power, England's political bankruptcy, America's suicidal policy of non-intervention, Russia's shrewd Machiavellian diplomacy: all were subjects of the verbal to-and-fro in Sri Aurobindo's room. Chamberlain's ill-famed peace mission, Colonel Beck's militant interview with Hitler, France's betrayal of Czechoslovakia evoked vigorous protests or praises from us. Sri Aurobindo observed how one nation after another was hypnotised by Hitler's asuric *māyā* and submitted to his diabolical charm, how the intellectuals did not raise any voice against the Hitlerian menace. On seeing a photograph of Chamberlain and Hitler taken during their meeting at Munich, Sri Aurobindo said that Chamberlain looked like a fly before a spider, on the point of being caught — and he actually was caught! Of course, the German dictator had already put Mussolini in his pocket. Only Colonel Beck seemed to have kept some manly individuality. Many other issues Sri Aurobindo discussed with us, as will be evident from the book *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, as though we were all keen-sighted statesmen and generals; and the talks were usually enlivened by Sri Aurobindo's genial humour. In these talks he imparted to us a clear vision of the issues at

stake, but never imposed his views. When we dared to differ or failed to follow him, he patiently explained to us where we were wrong. His physical nearness made us realise, with an extraordinary lucidity, what terrible inhuman forces were trying to overcast the world with an abysmal darkness from which a supreme Divine Power alone could save it.

For all the war-news we had to depend on the daily newspapers, since members of the Ashram were not supposed to have radios. Somebody in the town began to supply us with short bulletins; when the War had taken a full-fledged turn, the radio news was transmitted to Sri Aurobindo's room so he might follow the war-movements from hour to hour. Here we find a notable instance of the spiritual flexibility of his rules and principles. What had been laid down for a particular time and condition, would not be inviolable under altered circumstances. Sri Aurobindo, who was once a mortal opponent of British rule in India, came to support the Allies against the threat of world-domination by Hitler. "Not merely a non-cooperator but an enemy of British Imperialism", he now listened carefully to the health bulletins about Churchill when he had pneumonia, and, we believe, even helped him with his Force to recover. It is the rigid mind that cries for consistency under all circumstances. I still remember Sri Aurobindo breaking the news of Hitler's march and England's declaration of war. For a time the world hung in suspense wondering whether Hitler would flout Holland's neutrality and then penetrate into Belgium. We had very little doubt of his intention. It was evening; Sri Aurobindo was alone in his room. As soon as I entered, he looked at me and said, "Hitler has invaded Holland. Well, we shall see." That was all. Two or three such laconic but pregnant remarks regarding the War still ring in my ears. At another crucial period when Stalin held a threatening pistol at England and was almost joining hands with Hitler, we were dismayed and felt that there would be no chance for the Divine, were such a formidable alliance to take place. Sri Aurobindo at once retorted, "Is the Divine going to be cowed by Stalin?" When, seeing Hitler sweeping like a meteor over Europe, a sadhak cried in despair to the Guru, "Where is the Divine? Where is your word of hope?" Sri Aurobindo replied calmly, "Hitler is not immortal." Then the famous battle of Dunkirk and the perilous retreat, the whole Allied army exposed to enemy attack from land and air and the bright

summer sun shining above. All of a sudden a fog gathered from nowhere and gave unexpected protection to the retreating army. We said, "It seems the fog helped the evacuation." To which Sri Aurobindo remarked, "Yes, the fog is rather unusual at this time." We, of course, understood what he meant. It was after the fall of Dunkirk and the capitulation of France that Sri Aurobindo began to apply his Force more vigorously in favour of the Allies, and he had "the satisfaction of seeing the rush of German victory almost immediately arrested and the tide of war begin to turn in the opposite direction".

Thus, we see, Sri Aurobindo was not simply a passive witness, a mere verbal critic of the Allied war policy. When India was asked to participate in the war effort, and the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, much to the surprised indignation of our countrymen, contributed to the War Fund, he, for the first time, made clear to the nation what issues were involved in the War. I remember the Mother darting into Sri Aurobindo's room quite early in the morning with a sheet of paper in her hand. I guessed that something private was going to be discussed and discreetly withdrew. Then Purani came most unexpectedly. "Ah! here is something afoot," I said to myself. A couple of days later the secret was revealed in all the newspapers: Sri Aurobindo had made a donation to the War Fund! Of course, he explained why he had done so. He stated that the War was being waged "in defence of civilisation and its highest attained social, cultural and spiritual values and the whole future of humanity...." Giving the lead, he acted as an example for others to follow. But, all over the country, protests, calumnies and insinuations were his lot. Even his disciples were nonplussed in spite of his explanation why he had made that singular gesture. A disciple wrote to the Mother, "The Congress is asking us not to contribute to the War Fund. What shall we do?" The answer given was: "Sri Aurobindo has contributed for a divine cause. If you help, you will be helping yourselves." Some were wishing for the victory of the Nazis because of their hatred for the British. The Mother had to give a stern admonition. She wrote: "It has become necessary to state emphatically and clearly that all who by their thoughts and wishes are supporting and calling for the victory of the Nazis are by that very fact collaborating with the Asura against the Divine and helping to bring about the victory of the Asura."

Here I may quote a fellow-sadhak's report on the Mother's pro-Allies attitude:

"P reported to the Mother my reactions to Sri Aurobindo's recent contribution to the War Fund. I did not know about it. Suddenly I saw the Mother quite unmindful of me, I thought it might be because She was very busy in those days. But I observed Her for three days, and was convinced that something was amiss. I approached Her and asked, 'Why are you ignoring me?' She said, 'You know it very well.' But I was puzzled. I guessed every other reason than the true one, which according to Her was serious. I did not think that P would report to Her my talks with him. So I begged her to tell me what I had done, because I was sure to rectify my grave error. To this She said, with severity, 'There are things that were settled long before you were even born. We have been working on them for a long time. Now you with your infinitesimally small mind believe that all that is nothing, that Sri Aurobindo and I are wrong, and that you are right in your judgment!' I was taken aback; it flashed before me, 'What could be the reason?' Being nonplussed, I expressed my surprise, 'Is it something about the War that I spoke to P?' The Mother made the sign of Yes. I felt relieved and said, 'Oh, it was nothing. I just spoke to him casually; it was not at all serious.' But the Mother's face was stern and She said, 'Not serious? It was almost unbelievable that you of all persons could speak like that about Sri Aurobindo! Haven't you read all that He has given out to the Press?' I said, 'Yes, Mother, I have. But have not the British done anything wrong to India?' The Mother replied, 'We never said that they had not, nor do we say that in the future they will not do so any more. But today the question is not that; don't you understand it? When you see your neighbour's house on fire, and yet you do not go to help to put it out because he has done wrong to you, you risk the burning of your own house and the loss of your own life. Do you not see the difference between the forces that are fighting for the Divine and those for the Asuras?' I said, 'Yes, Mother, I do see; only what baffles me is that Churchill, whom you and Sri Aurobindo have chosen as your direct instrument, wants today India's help for his own country's existence; and yet says that His Majesty's government has no intention of liquidating its Empire!' The Mother said, 'But leave all that to the Divine. Churchill is a

human being. He is not a yogi aspiring to transform his nature, Today he represents the Soul of the Nation that is fighting against the Asuras. He is being guided by the Divine directly and his soul is responding magnificently. All concentration must be now to help the Allies for the victory that is ultimately assured, but there must be no looseness, not the slightest opening to the Asuras. After the battle is won, if Churchill's soul can remain still in front and he continues to be guided by the Divine, he will go very fast in the line of evolution. But generally on earth it doesn't happen like that. His human mind and vital will take the lead after the crisis is over, and then he will come down to the level of the ordinary human being, though of a higher order.'”

When Dr. Rao, one of the consultant physicians attending on Sri Aurobindo, said that a lot of people in Madras were wondering how Sri Aurobindo, who had been so anti-British, could contribute to the War Fund, the Master explained to him at great length why he had taken that step. His intention was that Dr. Rao should speak about it to others when the occasion arose. Among the points already known, Sri Aurobindo disclosed his own occult action in the War. He said, “Do you know that Hitler is trying to get a foothold in South America and doing extensive propaganda there? It can lead to an attack against the U.S.A. He is now practically master of Europe. If he had invaded England after the collapse of France, he could have been in Asia by this time.... Now another force has been set up against his. Still the danger has not passed. He has a 50% chance of success. Up to the time when France collapsed, he was remarkably successful because he had behind him an Asuric Power which guided him; from that Power he received remarkably correct messages.”

Rao: The trouble about India is that the British have not kept a single promise so far. Nobody trusts them.

Sri Aurobindo: The fact is they don't believe that India will help them if she is given Dominion Status. Otherwise they would have given it.

Rao: I don't think India will refuse to help.

Sri Aurobindo: Don't you? What about the Left Wing, the Communists, Bose, for instance? And it is not true that they have given nothing. It is the

character of the British to go by stages. Whenever their self-interest is at stake they come to a compromise. They gave Provincial Autonomy and didn't exercise any veto power. It is the Congress which spoiled everything by resigning. If without resigning it had put pressure on the Centre, it would have got by now what it had wanted. It is for two reasons that I support the British, for India's own interest and for humanity; and the reasons I have given are external ones, there are spiritual reasons too.

Sri Aurobindo was not only fighting Hitler, he had also the onerous task of conquering the extreme antipathy of his own disciples towards the British. The Ashram ran the danger of being disbanded for our anti-British and pro-Hitler feelings. How many letters had Sri Aurobindo to write to his disciples to show their grave error and the danger of the Nazi victory! I quote only one such letter he wrote to a disciple, in 1942, "...You should not think of it as a fight for certain nations against others or even for India; it is a struggle for an ideal that has to establish itself on earth in the life of humanity, for a Truth that has yet to realise itself fully and against a darkness and falsehood that are trying to overwhelm the earth and mankind in the immediate future. It is the forces behind the battle that have to be seen and not this or that superficial circumstance.... There cannot be the slightest doubt that if one wins; there will be an end of all such freedom and hope of light and truth and the work that has to be done will be subjected to conditions which would make it humanly impossible; there will be a reign of falsehood and darkness, a cruel oppression and degradation for most of the human race such as people in this country do not dream of and cannot yet at all realise. If the other side that has declared itself for the free future of humanity triumphs, this terrible danger will have been averted and conditions will have been created in which there will be a chance for the Ideal to grow, for the Divine Work to be done, for the spiritual Truth for which we stand to establish itself on the earth. Those who fight for this cause are fighting for the Divine and against the threatened reign of the Asura."

In a talk in 1940, Sri Aurobindo said: "There are forces which are trying to destroy the British and their empire — forces above and here in this world, I mean inner forces. I myself had wished for its destruction; but at that time I did not know such forces would arise. These forces are working for the

evolution of a new world-order which would come following upon the liquidation of the Empire. But, for the advent of this new arrangement, the Empire needn't be destroyed. The new arrangement can be achieved more quietly by a change in the balance of forces, without much destruction. Had it not been for Hitler, I wouldn't have cared what power remained or went down. Now the question is whether the new world-order is to come after much suffering and destruction or with as little of it as possible. Destruction of England would mean victory for Hitler and in that case, perhaps after a great deal of suffering and oppression, and reaction to them, that world-order may come or may not, or it may come only after pralaya! Of course the issue has been decided by the Divine Vision and there can be no change. But nobody knows what the decision is."

These two long extracts are enough to show clearly Sri Aurobindo's vision of the play of forces, how they try through the use of human instruments to fulfil their purpose and also what Sri Aurobindo's part was in this mysterious play. I shall now give some extracts from our talks to demonstrate Sri Aurobindo's close watch on the trend of the War, his comments on the military movements of the contending parties, sometimes his anticipation of their strategic moves and the consequences that would ensue, or his own suggestions about the courses that could be followed. And all this came enlivened with a sense of quiet humour that made the grimness of the War itself appear light, even an enjoyable game of forces.

On 29.12.40 Savarkar gave a speech in which he said that the British could not be defeated. Sri Aurobindo commented: "Nonsense. They were saved by Divine Intervention. They would have been smashed if Hitler had invaded England at the right time after the fall of France."

"Why didn't the Divine intervene in France?" one of us asked.

"Because the French were corrupt and had no power of resistance. The English had still some of their old virtues left, to which support could be given. The Mother says, 'The French have betrayed Czechoslovakia and thereby stand condemned.'"

Similarly, when France, after the fall of Dunkirk, rejected Churchill's proposal of a common citizenship for Britain and France so that they might



carry on the fight as one country, the Mother seems to have considered it a rejection of the Divine Grace itself that had come to the help of France at the most opportune moment. The entire speech of Churchill was dictated in the occult way by the Mother, we were told.

To resume our talk:

Q: They say that Hitler will occupy Italy if Italy meets with reverses.

Sri Aurobindo: That is one of the possibilities. But it will be hard for Germany to keep so many people together.

Q: There is news that Hitler is trying to influence Bulgaria to allow him a passage or get it into the Axis orbit.

Sri Aurobindo: That is the danger now. I don't think the invasion of England is likely; if Britain cannot help with sufficient anti-tank guns, aeroplanes, etc., it will be difficult for the Balkan Powers to resist Germany.

Q: Turkey may come in to help Bulgaria if it is attacked.

Sri Aurobindo: Don't know. If Turkey waits till it is attacked, it will be too late. In that case, Hitler may turn towards Palestine and help Italy there, then move to Africa. Then he will ask Spain to join him so that the English army in Africa may be placed between the two forces.

Q: Hitler's entry into Rumania seems the first step towards the Balkans.

Sri Aurobindo: It is like all his moves a slow penetration, after which he may press towards Turkey, Egypt and Asia. What is wonderful is Stalin's attitude. He is quite silent.

Q: Any secret pact?

Sri Aurobindo: Even if there is one, how long will Hitler respect it if he wins? Then Russia will have either to resist or be effaced. Stalin counted on the exhaustion of the Axis as well as of England and France. Now if Hitler takes Turkey, Africa and Egypt, that will mean practically England's defeat. After that, what can Russia do? Hitler has a sufficiently big army to fight on two fronts while England can hardly spare her troops.

When Norway and Sweden had been threatened by Germany, Sri Aurobindo commented in another talk, "It is a frightened self-interest that

has overtaken these countries. Each of them thinks that it will be safe, whereas actually each will be swallowed up in turn. It seems the Allies will have to fight single-handed, if there is a World War, against Russia and Germany — a formidable combination.... There is no chance for the world unless something happens in Germany or else Hitler and Stalin quarrel. But there is no such likelihood at present.”

April 14, 1940

About Chamberlain’s inactivity when the Germans were preparing to attack Norway. Sri Aurobindo remarked, “So long as he is at the helm, nothing will happen. He applies only business intelligence to politics.... I can’t understand the moves of the British. As soon as they heard of the German occupation, they could have occupied Bergen. Bergen would have been far away from Oslo and within their striking distance. If Germany had six destroyers, they could have brought twenty.... They seem to be enamoured of the idea of blockade by the Navy resulting in the starvation of Germany. They are daunted by the presence of the Siegfried Line on their east. They don’t want to risk anything. They are tied up by their organisation while Hitler fixes himself to nothing.”

April 15, 1940

About Hitler’s entering the Baltic, somebody commented that Hitler had blundered by extending the war front. Sri Aurobindo remarked, “It was a rash thing to do. These things depend in the end on sea-power. Without sea-power you can’t transport supplies, mechanised troops, etc.... Aeroplanes are only a powerful aid. You can’t conquer a country with them.”

May 20, 1940

Q: Hitler’s declaration that before August 15 the War is to be finished and peace agreed upon seems significant.

Sri Aurobindo: That is the sign that he is the enemy of our work. And from the values involved in the conflict, it should be quite clear that what is behind him is the Asuric, the Titanic power....

Q: It is strange how he takes his decisions.

Sri Aurobindo: It is not he who takes the decisions. The Being behind him decided.... This Being comes here from time to time and sees what kind of work is going on.

Q: It knows that the work here is against its own interests?

Sri Aurobindo (laughing): Of course!... It is a very powerful Being. Paul Richard was in communion with this Being and the plans and methods he has written of in his book *Lord of the Nations*, are the same as carried out now. He has said there that the present civilisation is to be destroyed but really it is the destruction of the human values of civilisation that is aimed at and already in Germany Hitler had done it.... And he has destroyed these values wherever he has gone. Human beings by themselves are no match for the Asuras.... In Hitler's case it is not an influence but a possession, even perhaps an incarnation. The case of Stalin is similar. The vital world has descended upon the physical. That is why the intellectuals are getting perplexed at the destruction of their civilisation, of all the values they had cherished and stood for. They deny the existence of the world beyond the physical and so they are bound to be perplexed.

In another context, Sri Aurobindo observed, "It is a very simple thing to see that Hitler wants world-domination and his next move will be towards India."

On 29.5.40 the Mother gave us a message that the Asuras can't be victorious eternally against the Divine. The end of Hitler must come. Sri Aurobindo remarked: "That doesn't mean by the Allies.... If England goes down, there won't be any country left independent except Russia, Germany, Japan and Italy. I am talking of the old world. I think the next conflict will be between Russia and Germany. If Russia finds that England is in a difficult position, then Stalin will put pressure on Turkey and Rumania for the control

of the Black Sea as he has done with the Baltic States. Hitler is not likely to keep quiet about the trouble in the Balkans. With Italy's help he may settle the Asia Minor and Balkan problem or he may allow Stalin a free hand now, knowing that he can settle with him afterwards."

We can see here that Sri Aurobindo envisaged a war between Russia and Germany, when there was hardly any possibility of it.

August 15, 1940

On this day — Sri Aurobindo's birthday — the radio news at noon said that 144 German planes had been brought down over England in half a day, the biggest number so far. We commented that it was the result of the Darshan. Sri Aurobindo laughed and said; "The day of Hitler's triumphal entry into England!"

A month later, on the same date, 15.9.40, Sri Aurobindo said smiling, "England has destroyed 175 German planes, a very big number. Now invasion would be difficult. Hitler lost his chance after the fall of France. He had really missed the bus! If after the French collapse he had invaded England, by now he would have been in Asia. Now another force has been set up against him. Still the danger has not passed."

Apropos of this battle and its date, the editor of *Mother India* wrote, "...Hitler fixed in 1940 the 15th of August as the day on which he would complete his conquest of Western Europe by broadcasting from Buckingham Palace the collapse of Britain... and on that day the largest toll so far was taken of the Luftwaffe... we will designate it as the turning point in the Battle of Britain."

October 7, 1940

Some military correspondent wrote that Britain could take the offensive and invade Germany through the Adriatic. Sri Aurobindo remarked: "They are looking far ahead. But where will they land their troops? In Yugoslavia? That means violating Balkan independence. In that case with their troops in Palestine they can take Syria and then with Turkey siding with them they can

proceed towards Germany. That would be much easier than through the Adriatic which is guarded by the Italians.”

October 20, 1940

Yugoslavia, according to the radio, had signed a protocol with Germany regarding political and economic questions. Sri Aurobindo said, “Yugoslavia is now dependent on Germany economically and politically which means everything. If the news is true, that is the beginning of the end of the Balkans, because Bulgaria won’t resist. Greece will be at her wits’ end without the help of Turkey and what can Turkey do alone? So Hitler comes to Asia Minor and that means India. That was what I thought long before Hitler’s intention about the Balkans was known. Now his move is quite clear. He will try to move towards the Mediterranean, take possession of the Suez and then Egypt, a simultaneous movement in Spain for Gibraltar with the help of France or without. After Egypt, he will try to take North Africa with Pétain’s consent. If Pétain refuses, he may be replaced by Laval. If both refuse, he will occupy the whole of France and the Mediterranean ports. All this will be most dangerous to England, and the English blockade won’t be effective any more. In fact, I felt this danger from the very beginning of the War.”

Well, these long extracts sum up Sri Aurobindo’s vision of the War. They embody his active interest and participation by his spiritual Force in it. One wonders what would have been the fate of the world without Sri Aurobindo’s actual intervention. I often marvelled at the grasp he showed of military affairs. Once I asked him in my letter whether he had any latent military capacity in him, his reply was, “Not in this life.” When somebody asked the Mother why England was meeting reverses in spite of Sri Aurobindo’s support, she replied, “If he had not helped Britain, she would have been swallowed up by Hitler long ago.” Unfortunately I haven’t kept further record of the talks on the War. When America joined the Allies and Hitler attacked Russia there was no doubt that behind both these movements, Sri Aurobindo’s divine diplomacy played a great part just as his intervention or what he called the Divine Intervention saved England from invasion by Hitler. In October

1939, Sri Aurobindo wrote a poem on Hitler in which what he predicted came so literally true!

The closing lines are:

Thus driven he must stride on conquering all,  
Threatening and clamouring, brutal, invincible,  
Until he meets upon his storm-swept road  
A greater devil — or thunderstroke of God.

How did Hitler come to meet a greater devil? What made him commit this colossal blunder? We human beings are no match for an Asura. Only an Asura can “tear the guts out of another Asura”. In one of her talks, the Mother was asked, “If Russia had been on Hitler’s side, would things have been better?” She replied, “Oh, no! Then there would have been no hope for the world. It is by our *coup de maître* that they were on opposite sides. This is divine diplomacy. It is very successful.” (Laughter) But the world does not know that a Supreme Force had worked for its deliverance.

“A Power worked, but none knew whence it came.”

(*Savitri*)

It will be interesting to note here how the Mother helped people even individually in her occult manner during the War. I have learnt it from the sadhika whom I have quoted elsewhere. She said, “Once we were having a talk on the Mother’s trance in her presence, She was listening to it with an amused smile. Her personal attendant said, ‘You don’t know what embarrassing situations I had to face sometimes. Holding in her hand a glass of water I had given her to drink, she would go into trance and her body would sway from side to side, while I was waiting and waiting. In this way at any time she would go away somewhere in her trance.’ Then the Mother explained, ‘During these years of the war, people used to call me in their great distress and I appeared to them at once, leaving everything behind.’

“‘But, Mother,’ I said, ‘people don’t know you.’

“Looking at me she replied, ‘That doesn’t matter. Wherever people call the Divine in any form, I answer to their call. I shall tell you what happened

one day. The Germans were bombing France heavily. Two children, sister and brother, had gone to school. When they returned, they could not find their house nor their parents: they were destroyed. The elder sister clasping the brother began to call her parents and the brother was trembling in fear like a leaf. Suddenly a cry to God reached me surging from the depth of the heart. I had to go immediately. Making some provision for them I returned.’”

Let us now sum up Sri Aurobindo’s vision of Hitler. Long before anyone knew much about Hitler and his aim and purpose, the Mother and Sri Aurobindo were under no illusions about him. Of course, he had spoken openly about his aim in his *Mein Kampf*, but no one perhaps took it seriously. Sri Aurobindo not only understood it but saw the dark occult force behind that made Hitler its effective instrument. He gave us occasional hints in our letters about Hitler and his being possessed by that force. In a letter in 1935 I wrote to him, “Since the descent of the Supermind will quicken the process, why not retrench the whole staff? We shall all flock back after the descent!”

Sri Aurobindo: How? I am not Hitler. Things cannot be done like that....

Again in 1936, I wrote to him, “Perhaps you send Force to Germany between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m.?”

Sri Aurobindo: Who except the devil is going to give force to Germany? Do you think I am in league with Hitler and his howling tribe of Nazis?

How was it possible that an ordinary man could rise to such a height of power, exercise a command and influence over the whole German race, and receive admiration from Europe, even from the whole world? Sri Aurobindo calls it his asuric *māyā* that cast a spell upon the nations to such an extent that he was considered superior even to Alexander and Napoleon! Sri Aurobindo tore the veil from the face of that deception and showed us the dire truth. History has no parallel of a maniac using all kinds of falsehood, hypocrisy, perversity to capture the imagination of a cultured race like the Germans. Sri Aurobindo found his *Mein Kampf* — the Bible of the Nazis — a tissue of lies and would not touch it. Looking at a photograph in *L’Illustration*, he described Hitler, Goebbels and Goering, the trio, in unmistakable terms: “Hitler gives the impression of the face of a street-criminal. In his case it is successful ruffianism with a diabolical cunning and

behind it the psychic of a London cabman, — crude and undeveloped. That is to say, the psychic character in the man consists of some futile and silly sentimentalism which finds expression in his paintings and weeps at his mother's grave. He is possessed by some supernatural Power and it is from this Power that the voice, as he calls it, comes. Have you noted that people who at one time were inimical to him come into contact with him and leave as his admirers? It is a sign of that Power. It is from this Power that he has constantly received suggestions and the constant repetition of the suggestions has taken hold of the German people. You will also mark that in his speeches he goes on stressing the same ideas — this is evidently a sign of that vital possession.”

We heard something from the Mother to this effect in one of her talks. She said, “Hitler was an idiot. In his normal moments he was no better than a *concierge* or a *cordonnier* and behaved and spoke of things in a most idiotic and stupid manner. He was possessed and made an instrument of by some other power and only when that happened he did extraordinary things. People who have seen him at that time said how he thumped, cried and screamed. The Japanese ambassador said, ‘This man is mad. It is dangerous to have any alliance with him.’ It is strange how the whole German race was stupid enough to follow this man. Such a thing would not have been possible in France or other countries.”

Still there were others who dreamt of melting the heart of Hitler by non-violence. Sri Aurobindo remarked that his heart could be melted in only one way, — by bombing it out of existence! Speaking about non-violence Sri Aurobindo told us in a talk on 28th October, 1940: “Gandhi has been forestalled in non-violence in Poland. The Polish (the Jews?) adopted non-violence against the Nazis and do you know the result? The Polish lady who is Ravindra's<sup>1</sup> friend wrote to Gandhi the account of the German oppression against the non-violent people. She cites 3 or 4 instances: 1) About 300 school-boys refused to salute Hitler. The result was that they were taken before their parents and shot down in their presence, 2) Some school-girls were taken to the soldiers' barracks and molested by them till they all died....

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<sup>1</sup> A disciple.



Such is the outcome of non-violence towards Nazism. I hope Gandhi does not want all that to happen in India. Perhaps he will say that the Poles have no love in their heart for the Germans.”

When half the world was dazzled by the glamour of Hitler’s victory and considered him greater than Alexander and Napoleon, when others were groaning under the iron wheels of his war-machine, and still others hoped to change his heart by non-violence, Sri Aurobindo’s vision of Hitler never wavered for a moment — he, a dwarf Napoleon with a rudimentary psychic being whose heart was beyond any possibility of change, became the vessel of an Asuric Power which ultimately led him to his nemesis.

Along with the European war, India’s political problem naturally played a prominent part in our discussion, Mahatma Gandhi’s attitude, the Congress policy, the Hindu-Muslim problem, Jinnah’s intransigence and the Viceroy’s role as the peace-maker, all this complicated politics and our Himalayan blunders leading to the rejection of the famous Cripps’ Proposals, were within our constant purview.... The upshot of the whole discussion till the arrival of the Cripps’ Mission can be put in a few words; the Congress made a big mistake by resigning from the Ministry. The Government was ready to offer us Dominion Status which we should have accepted, for it was virtually a step towards independence. We should have joined the war-effort. That would have created an opportunity to enter into all military departments and operations in air, on sea and land; hold positions, become efficient and thus enforce our natural right for freedom.

When Gandhi complained that the Viceroy did not say anything in reply to all his questions, Sri Aurobindo said to us in one of our talks on October 7th, 1940: “What will he say? It is very plain why he did not. First of all, the Government doesn’t want to concede the demand for independence. What it is willing to give is Dominion Status after the War, expecting that India will settle down into a common relationship with the Empire. But just now a national government will virtually mean Dominion Status with the Viceroy only as a constitutional head. Nobody knows what the Congress will do after it gets power. It may be occupied only with India’s defence and give such help as it can spare to England. And if things go wrong with the British, it may even make a separate peace leaving them in the lurch. There are Left

Wingers, Socialists, Communists whom the Congress won't be able to bring to its side, neither will it dare to offend them and if their influence is sufficiently strong, the Congress may stand against the British. Thus it is quite natural for them not to part with power just now as it is also natural for us to make our claims. But since we haven't got enough strength to back us, we have to see if we have any common meeting ground with the Government. If there is, a compromise is the only practical step. There was such an opportunity, but the Congress spoiled it. Now you have to accept what you get or I don't know what is going to happen. Of course, if we had the strength and power to make a revolution and get what we want, it would be a different matter. Amery and others did offer Dominion Status at one time. Now they have changed their position because they have come to know the spirit of our people. Our politicians have some fixed ideas and they always go by them. Politicians and statesmen have to take account of situations and act as demanded by them. They must have insight."

"But it is because of the British divide-and-rule policy that we can't unite," we parried.

"Nonsense!"<sup>1</sup> Sri Aurobindo rebuffed. "Was there unity in India before the British rule?... Does Jinnah want unity? His very character shows what he wants — independence for the Muslims and rule over India if possible. The old spirit."

In the impasse created partially by the bankruptcy of the Congress policy, Providence came to the rescue in the form of the Cripps' Proposals which, if accepted, would have changed the fate of India. But the forces of distrust, discontent and wanting everything at once, led to a failure to see the substance of Swaraj, as Sri Aurobindo has said, in the offer. There was a pother about small points and overlooking of the central important objective to be attained. Sri Aurobindo found in the proposal a fine opportunity for the solution of India's intricate problems and her ultimate liberation. We may note that the proposals envisaged a single, free, undivided India setting up a united front against the enemy. He promptly sent a message to Sir Stafford

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<sup>1</sup> Sri Aurobindo meant not that the British never followed the policy of divide-and-rule, but that divisions were already there for them to take advantage of and increase.

Cripps welcoming the Proposals and recommended their acceptance to the Indian leaders. The message was as follows: “I have heard your broadcast. As one who has been a nationalist leader and worker for India’s Independence, though now my activity is no longer in the political but in the spiritual field, I wish to express my appreciation of all you have done to bring about this offer. I welcome it as an opportunity given to India to determine for herself, and organise in all liberty of choice, her freedom and unity and take an effective place among the world’s free nations. I hope that it will be accepted, and right use made of it, putting aside all discords and divisions. I hope too that friendly relations between Britain and India replacing the past struggles, will be a step towards a greater world union in which, as a free nation, her spiritual force will contribute to build for mankind a better and happier life. In this light, I offer public adhesion, in case it can be of any help to your work.”

Sir Stafford Cripps replied, “I am most touched and gratified by your kind message allowing me to inform India that you, who occupy a unique position in the imagination of Indian youth, were convinced that the declaration of His Majesty’s Government substantially confers that freedom for which Indian Nationalism has so long struggled.”

Sri Aurobindo also sent messages through Mr. Shiva Rao to Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru that Cripps’ offer should be accepted unconditionally. Lastly, he sent his envoy to Delhi to appeal to the Congress leaders for its acceptance, for sanity and wisdom to prevail. At this crucial moment Sri Aurobindo could not remain a passive witness to the folly that was about to be committed. His seer-vision saw that the Proposals had come on a wave of divine inspiration. The scene is still fresh in our memory. It was the evening hour. Sri Aurobindo was sitting on the edge of his bed just before his daily walking exercise. All of us were present; Duraiswamy, the distinguished Madras lawyer and disciple, was selected as the envoy, perhaps because he was a friend of Rajagopalachari, one of the prominent Congress leaders. He was to start for Delhi that very night. He came for Sri Aurobindo’s blessings, lay prostrate before him, got up and stood looking at the Master with folded hands and then departed.

He was carrying with him an urgent appeal by Sri Aurobindo to the Congress Working Committee. Sisir Kumar Mitra reports in *The Liberator*, “the viewpoints which Sri Aurobindo instructed his envoy to place before the Congress leaders... (1) Japan’s imperialism being young and based on industrial and military power and moving westward, was a greater menace to India than the British imperialism which was old, which the country had learnt to deal with and which was on the way to elimination. (2) It would be better to get into the saddle and not be particular about the legal basis of the power. Once the power came into our hands and we occupied seats of power, we could establish our positions and assert ourselves. (3) The proposed Cabinet would provide opportunities for the Congress and the Muslims to understand each other and pull together for the country’s good, especially at that time of the crisis. (4) The Hindu Mahasabha also being represented, the Hindus, as such would have a chance of proving their capacity to govern India not only for the benefit of the Hindus but for the whole country. (5) The main problem was to organise the strength of India in order to repel the threatened aggression.”

We may remind ourselves of Talthybius’s mission to Troy in Sri Aurobindo’s epic poem *Ilion*: Achilles made an offer by which Troy would be saved and the honour of the Greeks would be preserved, a harmonising offer, but it was rejected. Similarly, Duraiswamy went with India’s soul in his “frail” hands and brought it back, downhearted, rewarded with ungracious remarks for the gratuitous advice. Sri Aurobindo even sent a telegram to Rajagopalachari and Dr. Munje urging them to accept the Proposals. Dr. Indra Sen writes, “We met the members individually and the sense of the reactions were more or less to this effect: Sri Aurobindo has created difficulties for us by his message to Cripps. He doesn’t know the actual situation, we are in it, we know’ better... and so on.” Cripps flew back a disappointed man but with the consolation and gratified recognition that at least one great man had welcomed the idea. When the rejection was announced, Sri Aurobindo said in a quiet tone, “I knew it would fail.” We at once pounced on it and asked him, “Why did you then send Duraiswamy at all?” “For a bit of *niskama*

*karma*,”<sup>1</sup> was his calm reply, without any bitterness or resentment. The full spirit of the kind of “disinterested work” he meant comes out in an early letter of his — (December 1933), which refers to his spiritual work: “I am sure of the results of my work. But even if I still saw the chance that it might come to nothing (which is impossible), I would go on unperturbed, because I would still have done to the best of my power the work that I had to do, and what is so done always counts in the economy of the universe.”

After the War, the Labour Government of U.K. sent a Cabinet Mission to India in 1946 for fresh talks. Asked to give his views on the mission by *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, a leading daily in the country, Sri Aurobindo said:

“Sri Aurobindo thinks it unnecessary to volunteer a personal pronouncement... His position is known. He has always stood for India’s complete independence which he was the first to advocate publicly and without compromise as the only ideal worthy of a self-respecting nation. In 1910 he authorised the publication of his prediction that after a long period of wars, world-wide upheavals and revolutions beginning after four years, India would achieve her freedom. Lately he has said that freedom was coming soon and nothing could prevent it. He has always foreseen that eventually Britain would approach India for an amicable agreement, conceding her freedom. What he had foreseen is now coming to pass and the British Cabinet Mission is the sign. It remains for the nation’s leaders to make a right and full use of the opportunity. In any case, whatever the immediate outcome, the Power that has been working out this event will not be denied, the final result, India’s liberation, is sure.”

We know the aftermath of the rejection of the Cripps’ Proposals as well as the failure of the Cabinet Mission: confusion, calamity, partition, blood-bath, etc., and the belated recognition of the colossal blunder. Then when the partition had been accepted as a settled fact, Sri Aurobindo’s “bardic” voice was heard once again, “But by whatever means, in whatever way, the division must go; unity must and will be achieved, for it is necessary for the greatness

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<sup>1</sup> Disinterested work the essence of which is that the work is inwardly dedicated to the Divine with no attachment to the result.

of India's future." Past events have justified Sri Aurobindo's solemn warning and recent events point to the way to liquidation of that division.<sup>1</sup>

Let me again draw upon the fellow-sadhak from whom I have already quoted. He brings out the Mother's stand on the Cripps-question:

"Then came the famous Cripps' Proposals. In the evening Sir Stafford Cripps broadcast his Proposals to the Indian people, from Delhi; they were discussed everywhere. In P's room the radio was installed and a connection made to Sri Aurobindo's room so that he might listen to the war-news and reports from all quarters of the globe, except from the Axis zones.

"The next day at about 2 p.m., after the All India Radio news at 1.30, there was a hot discussion among three sadhaks, including P, in his room. P took the standpoint of the purely spiritual man, who judges by looking at what is behind appearances. It seemed that he had already spoken with the Mother and thus was arguing forcefully for the acceptance of the Proposals. The second person was an experienced politician of the Gandhian Congress days and took the negative position. He argued the pros and cons of the Proposals and was of the opinion that the Indian leaders would reject them. The third a novice, with no political experience, was more for its acceptance. The discussion became hotter and hotter, so much so that the Mother, while going from Her bathroom to Her dressing room, was attracted by the unusual volume of sound. She did not enter Her dressing room, but turned Her steps towards P's room. Before entering there, She heard part of the argument. Then She stepped in and asked, 'What is it all about?' P said that one person argued that Cripps' offer would not be accepted by the Indian leaders. The Mother felt amused and inquired, 'Why?' By then She had sat on the chair that was in front of Her. It was a very unusual and interesting scene; the Mother, still in Her beautiful Japanese kimono just out of the bath, didn't seem to care to change Her dress, and was more interested in the arguments against the acceptance. Then She began to talk with a very calm and distinct

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<sup>1</sup> We are happy to see that Sri Aurobindo's prediction has been half-fulfilled, for Bangladesh (East Pakistan) is now entirely independent.

voice. One could see that She who had entered a few minutes ago had been transported somewhere else and the voice was coming from that plane....

“She said something to this effect: ‘One should leave the matter of the Cripps’ offer entirely in the hands of the Divine, with full confidence that the Divine will work everything out. Certainly there were flaws in the offer. Nothing on earth created by man is flawless, because the human mind has a limited capacity. Yet behind this offer there is the Divine Grace directly present. The Grace is now at the door of India, ready to give its help. In the history of a nation such opportunities do not come often. The Grace presents itself at rare moments, after centuries of preparation of that nation. If it is accepted, the nation will survive and get a new birth in the Divine’s consciousness. But if it is rejected the Grace will withdraw and then the nation will suffer terribly, calamity will overtake it.

““Only some months ago, the same Grace presented itself at the door of France, immediately after the fall of Dunkirk, in the form of Churchill’s offer to her to have joint nationality with England and fight the enemy. Sri Aurobindo said that it was the right idea, and it would also have helped His work immensely. But France could not raise herself above the ordinary mind, and rejected it. So the Grace withdrew and the Soul of France has gone down. One doesn’t know when the real France will be up again.

““But India with her background of intense spiritual development through the ages, must realise the Grace that is behind this offer. It is not simply a human offering. Of course its form has been given by the human mind, and it has elements of imperfection in it. But that does not matter at all. Have faith in the Grace and leave everything to the Divine who will surely work it out.

““My ardent request to India is that she should not reject it. She must not make the same mistake that France has done recently and that has plunged her into the abyss.’

“As soon as She had finished speaking She hurried back to Her dressing room, without a word or a look at anybody. Later, on the same day, the first of April, 1942, when She returned from the Prosperity after the distribution, She disclosed that, Sri Aurobindo had already sent a telegram to Sir Stafford, and the latter had reciprocated very heartily, and both the telegrams were

being put on the notice board by Nolini. We then read the messages and were very much encouraged.

“But the next day or the day after it, the Congress announced that it had rejected the offer. The Mother was quite unperturbed; She only said, ‘Now calamity will befall India.’

“The events that followed in India right up to now need no mention. We have been paying all along for our mistake.”

The next issue, if not so great in magnitude, was the Japanese aggression. Japan, like a minor Hitler, had established its supremacy in the East. But Sri Aurobindo had never taken Japan’s aggression very seriously. On the contrary, he once remarked that should Hitler become supreme in the West and turn his forces towards the East, Japan’s power might be useful in confronting Hitler and checking his advance. This remark supporting as it were Japan’s blaze of imperial conquest baffled me at the time. Did he want Japan’s rise to serve as a counterblast to Hitler’s problematic thrust towards the East? Or could it be read as a move to force America into the War? At any rate it was quite evident from our talks that Japan’s dramatic conquests did not disturb him, as did Hitler’s. But it was only when Japan’s design on India, aided by some of our misguided patriots, was palpably clear, that Sri Aurobindo, as he himself avowed, used his spiritual Force against Japan and “had the satisfaction of seeing the tide of Japanese victory which had till then swept everything before it, change immediately into a tide of rapid, crushing and finally immense and overwhelming defeat”.

We heard of the Japanese bombing of Calcutta and Vishakhapatnam, we also heard that Japanese warships had come to the Indian Ocean at Trincomali and the next information that reached us almost immediately was that they had exploded and sunk before they had time to invade India! In the North-East the I.N.A.<sup>1</sup> with the Japanese army at its back was triumphantly marching into Assam. The Indian army seemed to be in a panicky retreat, and the British Government, counting its imperial glory to be almost at an end, was preparing to leave India. The then Governor of Bengal seemed to have said at a cabinet meeting, “This time the game is up.” When the words were reported to Sri

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<sup>1</sup> The Indian National Army of Subhash Bose.



Aurobindo he remarked, “Now the wheel will turn.” For the Allies the situation at that moment was desperate everywhere, in Africa, in India, in Europe.

At this jubilant moment of the enemy, India’s destiny intervened. A heavy downpour from heaven inundated the dense Assam jungles for days together, so that, bogged in the flood and mud, the invading army with its liberation force had to liberate itself from the wrath of Nature and beat an ignominious retreat. Yet rain during that season had never been heard of before.

In this context let us quote what the Mother said to a sadhak in 1927, when he asked how India was likely to get freedom. The Mother’s prophetic reply was, “When a Japanese warship will come to the Indian Ocean.” In fact, the Mother had visioned India’s Independence In 1920. It was when she and Sri Aurobindo were in meditation, and she reached a state of consciousness from which she told Sri Aurobindo: “India is free.”

Sri Aurobindo: How?

The Mother: Without any fight, without a battle, without a revolution. The English themselves will leave, for the condition of the world will be such that they won’t be able to do anything else except go away.

It took twenty-seven years for that vision of the truth-plane to actualise itself on the material plane. In those early days the Mother used to pay special visits to the rooms of the sadhaks. One day A asked her, “How is India likely to get freedom?” She replied, “Listen! The British did not conquer India. You yourselves handed over the country to the British. In the same manner the British will themselves hand over the country to you. And they will do it in a hurry as if a ship were waiting to take them away.”<sup>1</sup> How true was the prophecy!

Today the achievement of India’s freedom is attributed to various factors: the August movement, Non-cooperation, the Terrorist movement, the I. N. A. and others; the factor that played the decisive part is either not admitted or ignored altogether. From Sri Aurobindo’s pronouncements we can assert that his Force was principally responsible for the success of the Allies and the

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<sup>1</sup> Narayan Prasad: Life in Sri Aurobindo Ashram (Pondicherry, 1965).

defeat of the Japanese, thereby helping India to gain her freedom. In fact, India's freedom had been his constant dream from his very boyhood. Even during his intense sadhana in Pondicherry, it was always in his mind and he indefatigably worked for it in the yogic way till he became convinced that freedom was inevitable. As far back as 1935, when I asked him if he was working for India's freedom, he replied, "That is all settled, it is a question of working out only.... It is what she will do with her independence that is not arranged for — and so it is that about which I have to bother."

The other causes then could be considered no more than contributory, even if indispensable factors. Out of all these, I may make some comment on the claims of the I. N. A. Whatever significance there may be in its claims, the role it played was fraught with most dangerous consequences. I wonder how our countrymen had no apprehension of them. It was a fatal game the I.N.A. played, thinking that the Japanese, after the conquest of India, would peacefully leave the country letting the I.N.A. enjoy the fruit of its victory, or that India would be able to fight and drive them out. Sri Aurobindo pointing out what would have been our condition, had Japan entered India, said, "Japan's imperialism being young and based on industrial and military power and moving westward, was a greater menace to India than the British imperialism which was old, which the country had learnt to deal with and which was on the way to elimination."

Our Ashram came in for a good deal of suffering and inconvenience in the wake of the War: the wrath and abuse of our countrymen, the resentment of a number of our own inmates for our support of the War and the loss of some other valiant sons in the great holocaust. It had to open its doors to the children of all disciples who were in the danger zone, so we were all of a sudden changed into a large community without sufficient means to maintain ourselves. And due to the general embargoes and restrictions imposed by the Government the most necessary food supply was either cut off or reduced to a minimum. Last of all, and the greatest irony of fate, the Ashram in spite of all our help was suspected of being a nest of spies or enemy agents. Police search was apprehended and even the question of disbanding the Ashram was in the air. Perhaps the British Government had never entirely believed that Sri Aurobindo, once the most dangerous enemy of the British Empire, could

really become their ally. Was he not still engaged in secret revolutionary activities, his war-contribution serving just as a smoke-screen? Unfortunately, in the Ashram itself there were some who wished for Hitler's victory, not for love of Hitler but because of their hatred of British domination. Sri Aurobindo conveyed through us a stern message to them: "If these people want that the Ashram should be dissolved, they can come and tell me and I will dissolve it instead of the police doing it.... Hitlerism is the greatest menace that the world has ever met."

Another inconvenience, but of short duration, that we had to pass through was the threat of bombing by the Japanese Air Force. As soon as the alert for a blackout was given, all lights in the Ashram had to go off. Sri Aurobindo sat up in bed, the Mother on a chair in Sri Aurobindo's room; the two of us who were on duty at the time also sat there, Champaklal very near the Mother.... After a short while when the all-clear signal was given, we would revert to our duty. One day, putting a dark shade over Sri Aurobindo's table lamp, the Mother said with a smile, "Your lamp lights up three streets, Lord." "So I should be darkened?" he asked smiling. In truth, I do not think that any Japanese aeroplane flew over Pondicherry. I was very much amused at the sight of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo taking this human precaution against any possible threat. But that is their way. Because they are Divine and possess a great occult power, one would suppose that all the human measures were otiose or a mere show as I thought in my callow days. But I saw in this case — and in many others — that the Mother was in grim earnest. Even if Sri Aurobindo and she were sure of an eventual success, they would keep applying the pressure of their Force till the issue was decided beyond any question.

A little later, there was a lot of preparation against possible bombing and bombardment. Sandbags were piled up and trenches dug. It is reported that when the Mother was apprised of the preparations, she remarked in private, "There is such a strong Presence of Divine Force and Peace in the atmosphere that an attack is most improbable."

I cannot end this chapter without noting how the whole Ashram was vitally interested in India's fight for freedom, though we are supposed erroneously to be absorbed only in our own spiritual liberation. When the news of the

final victory came, we celebrated it as much as the people outside, particularly because it coincided with Sri Aurobindo's birthday. He was requested to give a message on this great occasion. I am reproducing at the end of this chapter the whole message called "Five Dreams".

"It was on this occasion that for the first time the Mother hoisted her flag over the terrace of Sri Aurobindo's room. The Mother called it the spiritual flag of India.

In the afternoon she appeared on her terrace when the members of the Ashram greeted her by singing *Bande Mataram* after which she called out, 'Jai Hind!' with such a look and gesture that we still remember the moment. The evening programme included the electric illumination of the courtyard inside the Ashram compound."<sup>1</sup>

It will be very pertinent indeed to ask oneself how this identification took place, how and why this date was selected, what the reason behind it was. Surely, there must have been a process or occasion which led to the selection of this date. It may not have been very important to the general public, but it was of great importance to us, the disciples of Sri Aurobindo. Most accidentally I found the answer though the fact was well-known, perhaps, to the historians of India's freedom movement. The occasion has been mentioned in the book *Freedom at Midnight*.<sup>2</sup> "Partition of India had been decided upon by Lord Mountbatten — the Viceroy of India — and the Indian leaders had agreed to it. Now the question that remained to be decided was the Transfer of Power: on which date should it be done? A Press Conference was called by the Viceroy. Three hundred journalists from various countries had gathered. When he had concluded his talk, it was followed by a burst of applause....

"Suddenly... the anonymous voice of an Indian newsman cut across the chamber. His was the last question awaiting an answer.

"'Sir,' the voice said, 'if all agree that there is a most urgent need for speed between today and the Transfer of Power, surely you should have a date in mind?'

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<sup>1</sup> Narayan Prasad: *Life in Sri Aurobindo Ashram*.

<sup>2</sup> Pp. 164-65, by Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre.

“‘Yes, indeed,’ replied Mountbatten.

“‘And if you have chosen a date, Sir, what then is that date?’ pressed the questioner.

“A number of rapid calculations went whirring through the Viceroy’s mind as he listened to those questions. He had not, in fact, picked a date. But he was convinced it had to be very soon....

“He stared at the packed assembly hall. Every face in the room was turned to his....

“‘Yes,’ he said, ‘I have selected a date for the Transfer of Power.’

“As he was uttering those words, the possible dates were still whizzing through his mind like the numbers of a spinning roulette wheel.... Suddenly the wheel stopped with a jar... Mountbatten’s decision was instantaneous. It was a date linked in his memory to the most triumphant hours of his own existence, the day in which his long crusade through the jungles of Burma had ended with the unconditional surrender of the Japanese Empire....

“His voice constricted with sudden emotion, the victor of the jungles of Burma about to become the liberator of India announced:

“‘The final Transfer of Power to Indian hands will take place on August 15, 1947.’

“Louis Mountbatten’s spontaneous decision... on his own initiative was a bombshell. In the corridors of the House of Commons, Downing Street, Buckingham Palace, no one had suspected Mountbatten was ready to ring the curtain down so precipitously on Britain’s Indian adventure. In Delhi, the Viceroy’s most intimate collaborators had no inkling of what Mountbatten was going to do. Not even the Indian leaders with whom he had spent so many hours had received a hint that he would act with such decisive haste.”

Now, people may argue, “There is no mystery here. Mountbatten selected it because, as he says, that date marked a glorious achievement in his life.” “But why with such decisive haste?” one may ask. “Because he did not want to face any opposition. If he had disclosed it in advance, there was every possibility of its being rejected on one ground or another.” Whatever may be the urge to commemorate his own victory, he was instrumental in linking it

with an occasion whose light will grow into a sun with the rolling of the years, while his own victory will pale into a shade. Left to our countrymen, none would have even dreamt of this date, but One who sees and decides everything gave this date the importance it deserved. Those who have some insight can perceive His inscrutable hand behind this memorable identification.

When one reads Sri Aurobindo's message one will not fail to note how much importance he has given to the role India alone can play in bringing about the unity of the whole of mankind. I do not know of any other great leader of India and worker for her future destiny who spoke in such glowing terms as we find in these "Dreams".

The Mother has emphasised the fact that this message should be distributed all over India, read and re-read by the people, for it contains the solution of all the problems the world is facing today.

## FIVE DREAMS

August 15th, 1947 is the birthday of free India. It marks for her the end of an old era, the beginning of a new age. But we can also make it by our life and acts as a free nation an important date in a new age opening for the whole world, for the political, social, cultural and spiritual future of humanity.

August 15th is my own birthday and it is naturally gratifying to me that it should have assumed this vast significance. I take this coincidence, not as a fortuitous accident, but as the sanction and seal of the Divine Force that guides my steps on the work with which I began life, the beginning of its full fruition. Indeed, on this day I can watch almost all the world-movements which I hoped to see fulfilled in my lifetime, though then they looked like impracticable dreams, arriving at fruition or on their way to achievement. In all these movements free India may well play a large part and take a leading position.

The first of these dreams was a revolutionary movement which would create a free and united India. India today is free but she has not achieved unity. At one moment it almost seemed as if in the very act of liberation she would fall back into the chaos of separate States which preceded the British conquest. But fortunately it now seems probable that this danger will be averted and a large and powerful, though not yet a complete union will be established. Also, the wisely drastic policy of the Constituent Assembly has made it probable that the problem of the depressed classes will be solved without schism or fissure. But the old communal division into Hindus and Muslims seems now to have hardened into a permanent political division of the country. It is to be hoped that this settled fact will not be accepted as settled for ever or as anything more than a temporary expedient. For if it lasts, India may be seriously weakened, even crippled: civil strife may remain always possible, possible even a new invasion and foreign conquest. India's internal development and prosperity may be impeded, her position among the nations weakened, her destiny impaired or even frustrated. This must not be; the partition must go. Let us hope that that may come about naturally, by an increasing recognition of the necessity not only of peace and concord but of

common action, by the practice of common action and the creation of means for that purpose. In this way unity may finally come about under whatever form — the exact form may have a pragmatic but not a fundamental importance. But by whatever means, in whatever way, the division must go; unity must and will be achieved, for it is necessary for the greatness of India's future.

Another dream was for the resurgence and liberation of the peoples of Asia and her return to her great role in the progress of human civilisation. Asia has arisen; large parts are now quite free or are at this moment being liberated: its other still subject or partly subject parts are moving through whatever struggles towards freedom. Only a little has to be done and that will be done today or tomorrow. There India has her part to play and has begun to play it with an energy and ability which already indicate the measure of her possibilities and the place she can take in the council of the nations.

The third dream was a world-union forming the outer basis of a fairer, brighter and nobler life for all mankind. That unification of the human world is under way; there is an imperfect initiation organised but struggling against tremendous difficulties. But the momentum is there and it must inevitably increase and conquer. Here too India has begun to play a prominent part and, if she can develop that larger statesmanship which is not limited by the present facts and immediate possibilities but looks into the future and brings it nearer, her presence may make all the difference between a slow and timid and a bold and swift development. A catastrophe may intervene and interrupt or destroy what is being done, but even then the final result is sure. For unification is a necessity of Nature, an inevitable movement. Its necessity for the nations is also clear, for without it the freedom of the small nations may be at any moment in peril and the life even of the large and powerful nations insecure. The unification is therefore to the interests of all, and only human imbecility and stupid selfishness can prevent it; but these cannot stand for ever against the necessity of Nature and the Divine Will. But an outward basis is not enough; there must grow up an international spirit and outlook, international forms and institutions must appear, perhaps such developments as dual or multilateral citizenship, willed interchange or voluntary fusion of cultures. Nationalism will have fulfilled itself and lost its militancy and



would no longer find these things incompatible with self-preservation and the integrality of its outlook. A new spirit of oneness will take hold of the human race.

Another dream, the spiritual gift of India to the world has already begun. India's spirituality is entering Europe and America in an ever increasing measure. That movement will grow; amid the disasters of the time more and more eyes are turning towards her with hope and there is even an increasing resort not only to her teachings, but to her psychic and spiritual practice.

The final dream was a step in evolution which would raise man to a higher and larger consciousness and begin the solution of the problems which have perplexed and vexed him since he first began to think and to dream of individual perfection and a perfect society. This is still a personal hope and an idea, an ideal which has begun to take hold both in India and in the West on forward-looking minds. The difficulties in the way are more formidable than in any other field of endeavour, but difficulties were made to be overcome and if the Supreme Will is there, they will be overcome. Here too, if this evolution is to take place, since it must proceed through a growth of the spirit and the inner consciousness, the initiative can come from India and, although the scope must be universal, the central movement may be hers.

Such is the content which I put into this date of India's liberation; whether or how far this hope will be justified depends upon the new and free India.

# SAVITRI

*Savitri is the supreme revelation of Sri Aurobindo's vision.*

THE MOTHER

It is my task in this chapter to give a factual account of the long process that led to *Savitri* in its final form. As the grand epic has captured many hearts all over the world by its supernal beauty I thought that they would be much interested in the history of its growth, development and final emergence — the birth of the Golden Child. But I own that it is a formidable task. Though I had the unique good fortune to see Sri Aurobindo working on the epic in its entire revised version, and had some small share in being its scribe, to try in retrospect to reconstruct the imposing edifice from such a distance in memory is indeed difficult, for there are many versions, plenty of revisions, additions, subtractions, emendations from which the final version was made. To give an accurate report of all this process is beyond my capacity. For I am not a scholar, and have no aptitude for research into old (or new) archives, neither did I ever dream that I should one day be called upon to render an account of what the Master had done, or left undone, through this poor mortal as his instrument. Had I not been helped by my esteemed and multi-capable friend Amal Kiran — indefatigable researcher no less than a poet — and by a young friend as assistant, my readers would have had to remain content with just a bare outline.

The apology submitted, let the rash venture begin. *Savitri*, according to Dinen Roy,<sup>1</sup> was started by Sri Aurobindo in Baroda. From all the extant versions, for there are quite a number, it appears that originally the scheme of the poem consisted of two parts: I Earth, II Beyond. The first part had four Books and the second had three Books and an epilogue.

Afterwards there came to be three parts but without names. Each part had a series of Books. The first Book was called Love. Then it was named Quest,

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<sup>1</sup> Dinendra Kumar Roy, a Bengali literary man who was brought to Baroda to live with Sri Aurobindo and assist him in Bengali conversation.

and Love became the second Book. In some early versions we have instead of Books, Cantos. Later the Books came to contain the Cantos.

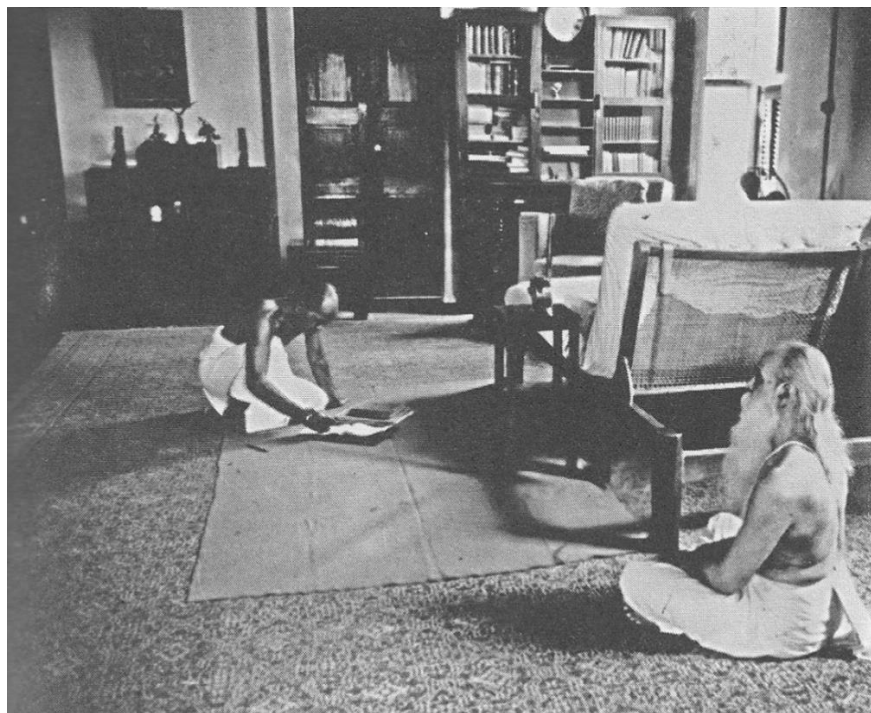
Sri Aurobindo made a good number of recasts before the final form was reached. The first form was begun and completed in Baroda. Other recasts were made in Pondicherry. One of the early ones is subtitled A Tale and a Vision. Later the subtitle was A Legend and a Symbol. It was after several recasts that the present opening line was struck upon: “It was the hour before the Gods awake.”

The version before the very last one had practically the same scheme as the latter, but the Cantos were much shorter, and many themes which were treated at some length received briefer treatment. Particularly the Book now called The Traveller of the Worlds was greatly expanded. He began adding lines in considerable amount in 1938. Sri Aurobindo wrote in the ‘Letters on *Savitri*’ to Amal in 1931: “There is a previous draft, the result of many retouchings, of which somebody told you; but in that form it would not have been a *magnum opus* at all. Besides it would have been a legend, and not a symbol. I therefore started recasting the whole thing; only the best passages and lines of the old draft will remain, altered so as to fit into the new frame.”

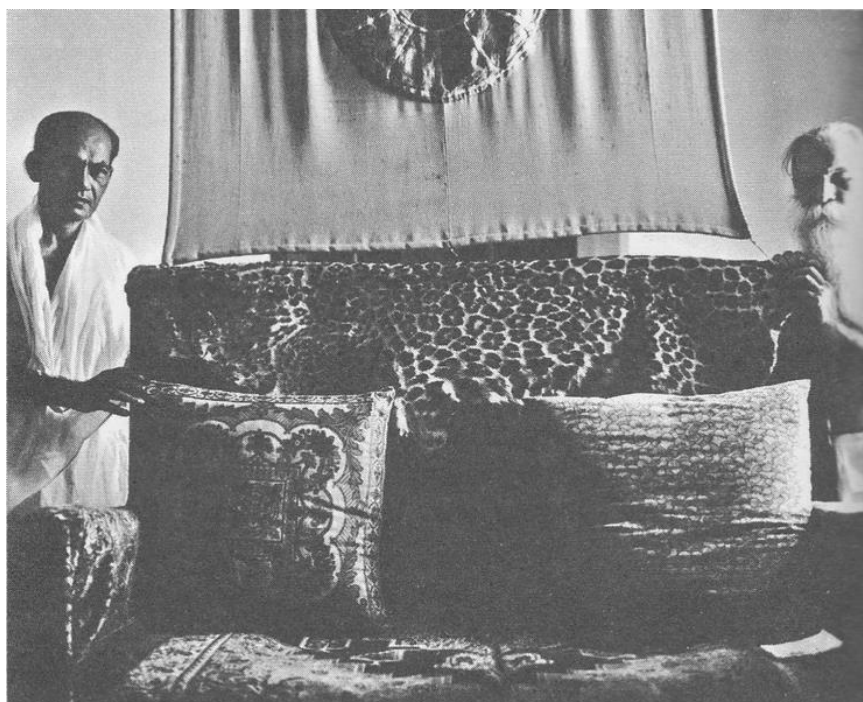
In 1936 he writes: “*Savitri* was originally written many years before the Mother came, as a narrative poem in two parts, Part I Earth, and Part II Beyond.... The first Book has been lengthening and lengthening out.... As for the second Part, I have not touched it yet. There was no climbing of planes there in the first version — rather, *Savitri* moved through the Worlds of Night, of Twilight, of Day — all of course in a spiritual sense — and ended by calling down the power of the Highest Worlds of Sachchidananda. I had no idea of what the supramental World could be like at that time, so it could not enter into the scheme.”

In another letter of the same year: “The poem was originally written from a lower level, a mixture perhaps of the inner mind, psychic, poetic intelligence, sublimised vital, afterwards with the Higher Mind, often illumined and intuitivised, intervening. Most of the stuff of the first Book is new or else the old so altered as to be no more what it was; the best of the old has sometimes been kept almost intact because it had already the higher inspiration. Moreover, there have been made several successive revisions,

each trying to lift the general level higher and higher towards a possible Overmind poetry. As it now stands there is a general Overmind influence, I believe, sometimes coming fully through, sometimes colouring the poetry of the other higher planes fused together, sometimes lifting any one of these higher planes to its highest or the psychic, poetic intelligence or vital towards them.”



Sri Aurobindo, sitting on the bed, used to dictate *Savitri* to Nirod.



Nirod and Champaklal as used to stand during Darshan

The position arrived at in 1946 can be apprehended from a letter written in that year. Sri Aurobindo says: “You will see when you get the full typescript [of the first three Books] that *Savitri* has grown to an enormous length so that it is no longer quite the same thing as the poem you saw then. There are now three Books in the first part. The first, The Book of Beginnings, comprises five Cantos which cover the same ground as what you typed but contains also much more that is new. The small passage about Aswapathy and the other worlds has been replaced by a new Book, The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds, in fourteen Cantos with many thousand lines. There is also a third sufficiently long Book, The Book of the Divine Mother. In the new plan of the poem there is a second part consisting of five Books: two of these, The Book of Birth and Quest and The Book of Love, have been completed and another, The Book of Fate, is almost complete. Two others, The Book of Yoga and The Book of Death, have still to be written, though a part needs only a thorough recasting. Finally, there is the third part consisting of four Books, The Book of Eternal Night, The Book of the Dual Twilight, The Book of Everlasting Day and The Return to Earth, which have to be entirely recast and the third of them largely rewritten. So it will be a long time before *Savitri* is complete....” Again, on July 20, 1948 he writes to Amal: “I am afraid I am much preoccupied with constant clashes with the world and the devil... even *Savitri* has very much slowed down and I am only making the last revisions of the first Part already completed; the other two parts are just now in cold storage.”

Here then we get a brief survey of the work accomplished and what still remained to be done. During the last four years, from 1946 to 1950, he laboured constantly on the unfinished parts and gave them an almost new birth, with the exception of The Book of Death and The Epilogue, which, for some inscrutable reason, he left practically unrevised.

Let us now go into details.

The earliest extant draft of *Savitri* is in an exercise book that came from Madras to Pondicherry evidently in the early years of Sri Aurobindo’s stay in Pondicherry, years in which his habit of writing the English e like the Greek persisted. This copy appears to have been made from some version already with him, which is lost to us. The draft exists in two sections. The

first comprising Book I and a few pages of Book II are in ink which has become brown now. The second is in light greenish-blue ink. Some corrections in this ink occur in the first section. Both the sections have been revised in places in darker blue ink with a thicker nib. The revisions are clear in some places, but unclear and inconclusive in others. Book I is complete. Book II unfinished. The spelling of the three chief characters is: Savithri, Uswapathy, Suthyavan. In the first Book, after a short description of Night and Dawn, there is a very brief account of the Yoga done by Uswapathy, then Savithri is born, grows up and goes out, at Uswapathy's prompting, to find her mate. She finds Suthyavan. In the meantime Narad comes down to earth and visits Uswapathy's palace. There is a talk between the two; Savithri returns from her quest and discovery, and a talk takes place among the three. The opening lines of this earliest draft run:

In a huge forest where the listening Night  
Heard lonely voices, and in the large hush  
Was conscious of the sigh and tread of things  
That have no sound for the rich heart of day.

Book II commences:

So she was left alone in the huge wood  
By Death the god confronted...

The poem is, simply called *Savithri*.

The second version is called *Savithri, A Tale and a Vision*. Apparently it was meant to be in more than one part, because before Book I we have the general title: Earth. Book I is called Quest. It begins:

The boundless spirit of Night dreamless, alone  
In the unlit temple of immensity  
Waiting upon the marge of silence sat  
Mute with the expectation of her change.

The<sup>1</sup> hour was near of the transfiguring gods.

Uswapathy's yoga in this version is a little longer.

The third version is also called by the same general name and its first part is Earth, and Book I is Quest. It starts:

It was an hour of the transfiguring Gods.  
The huge unbound spirit of Night, alone  
In her<sup>2</sup> unlit temple of immensity  
Waited immobile upon Silence' marge...  
Mute with the expectation of her change.

In the fourth version we get for the first time the spelling Savitri though Uswapathy persists. There is no indication of a division into Part I and Part II. Book I is there, called Quest. The poem starts:

It was the hour of the transfiguring Gods  
The large and vacant spirit of Night, alone  
In the unlit temple of immensity  
Immobile lay on slumber's waiting marge  
Mute with the expectation of her change.

In the fifth version we have a mention of Part I, but it is not called by any name. We also have Book I, unnamed. The opening line runs:

An hour was near of the transfiguring Gods.

The spelling Uswapathy persists. Book II is entitled Love.

In the sixth version there are no parts again, but Book I is called Quest. The first line is:

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<sup>1</sup> An

<sup>2</sup> the

It was the hush of a transfiguring hour.

The seventh version has: I Quest.

Now for the first time we have, after two corrections., the opening line as in the final version:

It was the hour before the Gods awake.

In the eighth version we have everything as in the seventh except that the spelling Aswapathy comes in. Book II is there entitled Love.

The ninth version has the same opening arrangement.

The tenth version stands: Savitri Part I, Earth. Book I, The Book of Birth. Aswapathy continues, but there is now Sathyavan.

In each succeeding version after the first, there is a growing expansion in which old lines are taken up into a new framework. The development into separate Books from what was originally all contained within Book I and Book II takes place after the second or third version of the opening matter. This matter now becomes The Book of Quest, followed by The Book of Love, The Book of Fate, The Book of Death. Thus Part I, Earth, is completed. Then starts Part II, Beyond, with The Books of Night, Twilight, Day and The Epilogue.

Each version of Book I runs approximately to one exercise book of 40-80 pages, though the stage of the story differs from exercise book to exercise book when their end is reached.

The tenth version of Book I, made sometime before 1936, is the one on which the later *Savitri* is based. Even here there is no climbing of planes by Aswapathy. It is Only in the version of 1936, sent in instalments privately to Amal, that we find for the first time, brief descriptions of the planes, starting with the plane of subtle matter.



Later these brief descriptions are amplified and each plane gets a fairly long Canto to itself. In the 1936 version there are no Cantos yet — there are only sections with sub-headings.

Such is the story of *Savitri* as we found it in November 1938, the time of Sri Aurobindo's accident. The work on it had to be stopped as a result of this unfortunate event and could not be taken up before the middle of 1940. For though he recovered from the accident sufficiently to take up intellectual work, his first preoccupation was with *The Life Divine*. After its publication in 1940, he resumed his work on *Savitri*. By that time he had started sitting in a chair in the morning hours, but in the afternoon he continued for sometime doing the work seated on the bed.

I had no access to the work or to any of his other writings till that year. Though all the works must have been lying on the table or in the drawers, I had to curb my strong impulse to have a peep into the legend of *Savitri*. For we were in his room for a different purpose and it would have been a breach of trust on our part to lay hands on his sacred private property. The chance came in 1940, first only to place the requisite manuscripts before him, then gradually to work as a scribe. I still distinctly remember the day when, sitting on the bed with the table in front of him, he remarked: "You will find in the drawers long exercise books with coloured covers. Bring them." I think I went wrong in the first attempt, the second one met with his smiling approval. What he actually did with them, I cannot say, for he was working all alone, and we were sitting behind. I guess that he must have been giving a first reading to all the versions, for there were quite a number. He had already written to us before his accident that he had recast the first Book about ten times. Perhaps he was going through these and making a selection of the lines and passages for the final version. Then a few months after — and at this time he was sitting in the morning in a chair — he told me that he needed some exercise books. Without informing the Mother about it, I at once ran to the market and bought two or three exercise books from Manikachetty. He accepted them with a smile and I was happy to find that he used them for copying *Savitri*. At the end of one of the books he has written: "Last draft of *Savitri*, Sep.6, 1942." In another exercise book, containing matter up to the end of The Book of the Divine Mother, only at the end of Canto V of Book I,

the date written is: April 24, 1944. (This, as you see, was the morning of the Darshan day). From these two dates we can surmise that from 1940, the year in which we presume he took up the work on *Savitri*, to 1944, he continued working on the first three Books. Now, how much new material did he add to them? We know from his letter to Amal that Book II at any rate, The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds, was just a small passage. Here now we find the fully lengthened and developed Book running into 15 Cantos. The third Book, The Book of the Divine Mother, was also written probably for the first time, for he wrote to Amal in 1946: "...there is also a third sufficiently long Book, The Book of the Divine Mother."

The next step in the development was his re-copying the entire three Books on big white sheets of paper, in two columns in fine handwriting. There is one date at the end of The Book of the Divine Mother: May 7, 1944, which suggests that the copying of the entire three Books had taken about a year. When this was completed I was called in. Perhaps because his eye-sight was getting dim, I was asked to read to him this final copy. Now began alterations and additions in my hand on the manuscript itself. I regret to say that they marred the clean beauty of the original, and I realise now that it was a brutal act of sacrilege on my part, tantamount to desecration of the carved images on the temple wall. But I cannot imagine either how else I could have inserted so many corrections and additions, one line, one word here, two there, more elsewhere, throughout the entire length. We know how prodigious were the corrections and revisions in so far as *Savitri* was concerned. One is simply amazed at the enormous pains he has taken to raise *Savitri* to his ideal of perfection. I wonder if any other poet can be compared with him in this respect. He gave me the example of Virgil who, it seems, wrote six lines in the morning, and went on correcting them during the rest of the day. Even so, his *Aeneid* runs not even half the length of the first three Books of *Savitri*. Along with all these revisions, Sri Aurobindo added, on separate small sheets of paper, long passages written in his own hand up to the Canto, The Kingdom of the Greater Mind, Book II. All this work was completed, I believe, by the end of 1944.

The next step was to make a fair copy of the entire revised work. I don't know why it was not given straightaway for typing. There was a talk between

the Mother and Sri Aurobindo about it; Sri Aurobindo might have said that because of copious additions, typing by another person would not be possible. He himself could not make a fair copy. Then the Mother suggested my name and brought a thick blue ledgerlike book for the purpose. I needed two or three reminders from the Mother before I took up the work in right earnest. Every morning I used to sit on the floor behind the head of the bed, and leaning against the wall, start copying like a student of our old Sanskrit *tols*. Sri Aurobindo's footstool would serve as my table. The Mother would not fail to cast a glance at my good studentship. Though much of the poetry passed over my head, quite often the solar plexus would thrill at the sheer beauty of the images and expressions. The very first line made me gape with wonder. I don't remember if the copying and revision with Sri Aurobindo proceeded at the same time, or revision followed the entire copying. The Mother would make inquiries from time to time either, I thought, to make me abandon my jog-trot manner or because the newly started Press was clamouring for some publication from Sri Aurobindo. Especially now that people had come to know that after *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo was busy with *Savitri*, they were eagerly waiting for it. But they had to wait quite a long time, for after the revision, when the whole book was handed to the Mother, it was passed on to Nolini for being typed out. Then another revision of the typescript before it was ready for the Press! Again, I cannot swear if the typing was completed first before its revision or both went on at the same time. At any rate, the whole process went very slowly, since Sri Aurobindo would not be satisfied with *Savitri* done less than perfectly. Neither could we give much time to it, not, I think, more than an hour a day, sometimes even less. The Press began to bring it out in fascicules by Cantos from 1946. At all stages of revision, even on Press proofs, alterations, additions never stopped. It may be mentioned that the very first appearance of anything from *Savitri* in public was in the form of passages quoted in the essay "Sri Aurobindo: A New Age of Mystical Poetry" by Amal, published in the *Bombay Circle* and later included as Part III in Amal's book: *The Poetic Genius of Sri Aurobindo*.

So far the account of the procedure which was followed for working on the three Books seems approximately correct. We have been considerably

helped by some dates mentioned before in the account. But in what follows about the rest of the epic, I am afraid that the report cannot claim as much exactness owing to my lapse of memory. I can sum up the position obtained at this stage by quoting Sri Aurobindo's letter to Amal in 1946. After investigating all the documents available, we have come to the following conclusions about the rest of the Books. Book IV, The Book of Birth and Quest, is fairly revised by Sri Aurobindo. Several versions before the end of 1938 have been worked upon — these versions are expansions of much older drafts, one of them possibly dating back to Baroda. The revised version was later corrected and amplified with my help as scribe and has been divided into four Cantos. In re-doing Book V, The Book of Love, Sri Aurobindo took up, at a certain point, an earlier version than that of 1936. There are quite a number of versions with various titles before 1936. Here too, originally there were no different Cantos. There are three old versions of The Book of Fate of equal length. They were called Canto II, and fairly short. One of these versions was expanded into enormous length and developed into two Cantos, the very last touches given almost during the final month of Sri Aurobindo's life. An instance of the expansion is the passage "O singer of the ultimate ecstasy... will is Fate." There was no Book of Yoga in the original scheme of the poem. One old version called Book III, Death, has been changed into The Book of Yoga. It was enormously expanded and named Canto I. All the rest of the six Cantos were totally new and dictated. They were all at first divided into Cantos with different titles. Apparently all these Cantos except the first one are entirely new. I could get no trace of any old versions from which they could have been developed. I am now amazed to see that so many lines could have been dictated day after day, like The Book of Everlasting Day. The Book of Death contains three old versions — all called Canto III; the final version is constructed from one of these and from another version some lines are taken to be inserted into The Book of Eternal Night, Canto IV, Night, of the early version served as the basis of The Book of Eternal Night. It was revised, lines were added and split into two Cantos. Then in the typescript further revisions took place. Canto I, first called The Passage into the Void of Night, was changed into Towards the Black Void. Book X, The Book of the Double Twilight, called only Twilight, Canto V in the earlier versions of which there are four or five, had no division into Cantos. From these early versions a fair

number of lines have been taken and woven into a larger version. The old lines are now not always in their original form. Book XI had three old drafts. One which was larger than the other two has been used for the final version and was enormously expanded; even whole passages running into hundreds of lines have been added, as I have mentioned before. About The Epilogue, except for a few additions, it almost reproduces the single old version.

Now we can go into the detailed working procedure of all these later Books. I had to take now a more and more prominent part as scribe, for after the completion of the fourth Book, The Book of Birth and Quest, from 1944 or so, Sri Aurobindo's eyesight began to grow dim and he didn't want to strain his eyes by going through all the old manuscripts with their faint, small handwriting. So I was asked to bring out these old versions from the drawer; I now had access to all the manuscripts. Most of them were in loose sheets of notebook size written on one side. Unfortunately no dates were given to suggest when they were written. I was asked to read aloud Book by Book before him, but I don't remember by what method we proceeded. Did we give a general reading to all the Books before we started with the actual working on them individually? Or did we go about systematically finishing one Book after another? Perhaps the latter. Taking this procedure to be probable, I was asked when there were more than one version of a Book, to read them, sometimes all, sometimes one or two and selecting out of them the best one, he indicated the lines to be marked in the margin for inclusion; sometimes lines or passages were taken from other versions too. As I have shown, and as Sri Aurobindo's dictated letter has already hinted, all these Books were either thoroughly revised or almost entirely rewritten.

As far as I remember, we worked on these drafts in the evening for an hour or so after all the correspondence work was over. He would sit in a small straight-backed armchair where the big armchair now stands, and listen to my reading. The work proceeded very slowly to start with, and for a long time, either because he didn't seem to be in a hurry or because there was not much time left after attending to the miscellaneous correspondence I have mentioned elsewhere. Later on, the time was changed to the morning. After the selections had been made from one or two versions of a Book, let us say The Book of Fate, we were occupied with it. Never was any Book, except The

Book of Death and The Epilogue, taken intact. He would dictate line after line, and ask me to add selected lines and passages in their proper places, but which were not always kept in their old order. I wonder how he could go on dictating lines of poetry in this way, as if a tap had been turned on and the water flowed, not in a jet, of course, but slowly, very slowly indeed. Passages sometimes had to be reread in order to get the link or sequence, but when the turn came of The Book of Yoga and The Book of Everlasting Day, line after line began to flow from his lips like a smooth and gentle stream and it was on the next day that a revision was done to get the link for further continuation. In the morning he himself would write out new lines on small notebooks called 'bloc' notes which were incorporated in the text. This was more true as regards The Book of Fate. Sometimes there were two or even three versions of a passage. As his sight began to fail, the letters also became gradually indistinct, and I had to decipher and read them all before him. I had a good sight and, more than that, the gift of deciphering his "hieroglyphics", thanks to the preparatory training I had received during my voluminous correspondence with him before the accident. At times when I got stuck he would help me out, but there were occasions when both of us failed. Then he would say, "Give it to me, let me try." Taking a big magnifying glass, he would focus his eyes but only to exclaim, "No, can't make out!"

When a Book was completed and copied out, it went to Nolini for typing. On the typescript again, fresh lines were added or the order changed. In this respect The Book of Fate gave us a great deal of trouble. Though Sri Aurobindo says in his letter to Amal in 1946 that the Book was almost finished, it was again taken up at the end, and many changes were introduced which contained prophetic hints of his leaving the body very probably after he had taken his decision to do so.

As I have already recorded, one day after his bath Champaklal observed that Sri Aurobindo was moving his lips. Suspecting that he was probably murmuring lines of poetry, he told him that if he wanted to dictate them, I could take them down. He caught up the suggestion and started dictating. Had there been no suggestion he would have retained them in his memory and dictated them next day.

But our routine changed after the Mother started going out in the afternoon. Though the hour of work appointed for *Savitri* and correspondence was shifted to the morning, we could get very little time for *Savitri*. Many interruptions came in the way. The preliminary work of reading old versions, selections etc., took up much time before we could actually start writing. We find from the letters to Amal even at the end of 1946 the second part of the Book had not begun. After that too, the work rolled on in a jog-trot fashion till one day in 1950 he exclaimed: "My main work is being delayed." From about the middle of that year the time was fixed from 11 a.m. to 1.30 p.m. without any break or interruption. Only once in between he would ask for a peppermint pastille and Champaklal was always at hand to serve it. As soon as the clock struck 11 a.m. I was ready with the usual small heap of manuscripts and notebooks; would sit on the floor by his left side, and he would sit on the bed in an expectant attitude, give a glance of welcome and we would start from where we had stopped. Sometimes sitting upright, sometimes leaning on the left side cushion, keeping his gaze in front, he would dictate in a quiet, subdued voice slowly and distinctly, with an English accent. There was no rise or fall or any other dramatic quality in the intonation; it was in the manner of simple prose dictation with end stops, of course.

My initiation by him into English poetry rendered the scribe's work congenial as well as convenient. If I missed some words, I would ask again, but sometimes I put down what I thought I heard correct. Later on, after his passing away, experts found the meaning of some words to be dubious, ambiguous, or even wrong. There was faulty punctuation in abundance. Sometimes Sri Aurobindo did not dictate the punctuation and I didn't ask. One couldn't always remind the poet while he was dictating, of the necessity of punctuation, and thus put a curb on his flow. People asked whether I used shorthand for transcribing. There was no need for it at all, for the dictation was very slow and at times halted, waiting for inspiration, I suppose. I don't know what the nature was of Milton's dictation, but one thing was certain: Sri Aurobindo had not Milton's temper, and I didn't suffer his daughter's fate!

The tempo of the work was subsequently speeded up and it proceeded smoothly without break till the seal of incomplete completion was put about two weeks before the November Darshan of 1950. Very probably he had taken the decision to withdraw from this world of the sad music of humanity and leave in compensation his divine music of *Savitri*. A curious incident has stuck in my memory. One day he continued working even beyond 1.30 p.m. — a rare occurrence — and that was the day I was invited for lunch at a friend's place. I thought I would certainly be free by 2 p.m. but no, he seemed to be unusually inspired! I believe I was showing some signs of restlessness at which he remarked, "What's the matter?" I don't remember whether I kept quiet or told him the truth. He, however, shut shop soon after. This incident reminds me strongly of Champaklal's valuable admonition that those who want to serve the Divine must have no personal ties or strings.

During this period a long communication that had passed between Amal and a critical friend of his on *Savitri* as well as on some shorter mystical poems of Sri Aurobindo, was sent to Sri Aurobindo for his opinion or reaction. Amal had also put some questions on beauty and greatness in poetry and whether spiritual poetry could be considered greater than any other. His long illuminating commentary on his own poetry and the detailed answers on the various other topics raised, which were dictated at this time, consumed much of our time, but we could see from the replies how Sri Aurobindo welcomed such discussion from Amal whom he had prepared in the art of poetry. No one except Amal, or perhaps Arjava had he been alive, could have discussed with Sri Aurobindo almost as equals on English poetry and drawn out many intricate expositions on rhythm, overhead poetry, etc., which are now a permanent treasure in English literature.

Sri Aurobindo's quotations from memory from Homer, Shakespeare, Milton and others which he said should be verified were, in most cases, correct. When I read Homer's lines trying to imitate Sri Aurobindo's intonation, but forgetting the quantitative length, he corrected me. That reminds me also of how he encouraged me indirectly to learn the Sanskrit alphabet. I didn't know it, as I learnt Pali in my school. So whenever I met with a Sanskrit word while reading correspondences to Sri Aurobindo, I had either to show it to him or get somebody's help. I thought this wouldn't do,



I must learn at least the alphabet. I put my mind to it and, getting some smattering of it, began to show my learning before him. He started taking interest. When I tried to articulate a word in part, he helped me with the rest as one does with a child. Fortunately I managed, after getting the Mother's approval, to learn French also during the break from my work. She said it would be very useful, and so it was, for when some French communications came, I could read them to him.

This is roughly the story of the grand epic *Savitri* traced from the earliest conception to its final consummation. Undoubtedly the first three Books were of a much higher level of inspiration and nearer perfection than the rest, for with ample leisure, and working by himself he could devote more time and care to that end, which unfortunately could not be said about the rest of the Books. Apart from the different versions I have mentioned, there is a huge mass of manuscripts which we have left unclassified since they are in fragments<sup>1</sup> — all of which testifies to the immense labour of a god that has gone into the building of the magnificent epic. For a future research scholar, when *Savitri* earns as wide a recognition as, for instance, Dante's or Homer's epic, if not more, a very interesting work remains to be done; going into the minutest detail, he would show where new lines or passages have been added, or where one line slightly changed becomes an overhead line, or how another line after various changes comes back to its original version, etc., etc. I was chosen as a scribe probably because I didn't have all these gifts, so that I could, like a passive instrument, jot down faithfully whatever was dictated while Amal would have raised doubts, argued with him or been lost in sheer admiration of the beauty and the grandeur! Dilip would have started quoting line after line in rapturous ecstasy before the poem had come out! I submit no apology, nor am I conscience-stricken for my failures, for he knew what was the worth of his instrument. I am only grateful to him for being able to serve him with the very faculty which he had evolved and developed in me.

We can at last see how from among scattered seeds a single huge banyan tree has grown and spread itself to the transcendent and the cosmic infinite

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<sup>1</sup> Since then the Ashram's department of Archives and Research has done the needed classification.

and excites our perpetual wonder. I wish I could provide a more faithful and vivid picture of its daily growth, a branch here, an offshoot there, trimming the old twigs, reviving the dying ones, discarding the outworn crowding branches till there soared up into the sky a majestic vision under whose perennial shade the world can repose awhile, in its long journey to the Eternal. To show how he expanded the poem I may quote one long new passage which he appended to the end of Book II, Canto VI, The Kingdoms and the Godheads of the Greater Life:

“In a high state where ignorance is no more,  
Each movement is a wave of peace and bliss,  
Repose God’s motionless creative force,  
Action a ripple in the Infinite  
And birth a gesture of Eternity.  
A sun of transfiguration still can shine  
And Night can bare its core of mystic light;  
The self-cancelling, self-afflicting paradox  
Into a self-luminous mystery might change,  
The imbroglio into a joyful miracle.  
Then God could be visible here, here take a shape;  
Disclosed would be the spirit’s identity;  
Life would reveal her true immortal face.  
But now a termless labour is her fate:  
In its recurrent decimal of events  
Birth, death appear as its vibrating points;  
The old question-mark margins each finished page,  
Each volume of her effort’s history.  
A limping Yes through the aeons journeys still  
Accompanied by an eternal No.  
All seems in vain, yet endless is the game.  
Impassive turns the ever-circling wheel,  
Life has no issue, death brings no release.  
A prisoner of itself the being lives  
And keeps its futile immortality;

Extinction is denied, its sole escape.  
An error of the gods has made the world.  
Or indifferent the Eternal watches Time.”

I desist from giving my own impression of the incomparable epic. I have no such competence and though I have been made a poet by the Master I leave it to more efficient authorities. One fact alone makes me dumb with a reverent awe and exalted admiration: the colossal labour Sri Aurobindo put forth to build this unique structure. It reminds me of one of those majestic ancient temples like Konarak or of a Gothic cathedral like Notre Dame before which you stand and stare in speechless ecstasy, your soul takes a flight beyond time and space. Before I knew much about Sri Aurobindo, I asked him in my foolish way, why, himself being the master of inspiration and having all higher planes at his command, sending inspiration to others, should he still have to work so hard? With his consciousness entirely silent, he had only to hitch to the right source and words, images, ideas would tumble down in a Brahmaputra of inspiration! To which he answered in his habitual indulgent tone, perhaps a bit piqued by my facile observation: “The highest planes are not so accommodating as all that. If they were so, why should it be so difficult to bring down and organise the supermind in the physical consciousness? What happy-go-lucky fancy-web-spinning ignoramuses you all are. You speak of silence, consciousness, overmental, supramental, etc. as if they were so many electric buttons you have only to press and there you are. It may be one day, but meanwhile I have to discover everything about the working of all possible modes of electricity, all the laws, possibilities, perils, etc., construct roads of connection and communication, make the whole far-wiring system, try to find out how it can be made foolproof and all that in the course of a single lifetime. And I have to do it while my blessed disciples are firing off their gay or gloomy a priori reasonings at me from a position of entire irresponsibility and expecting me to divulge everything to them not in hints but at length. Lord God in omnibus!”

Then, with regard to hard labour on *Savitri*, he wrote: “That is very simple. I used *Savitri* as a means of ascension. I began with it on a certain mental level, each time I could reach a higher level I rewrote from that level.

Moreover I was particular — if part seemed to me to come from any lower levels I was not satisfied to leave it because it was good poetry. All had to be as far as possible of the same mint. In fact, *Savitri* has not been regarded by me as a poem to be written and finished; but as a field of experimentation to see how far poetry could be written from one's own Yogic consciousness and how that could be made creative. I did not rewrite *Rose of God* or the sonnets except for two or three verbal alterations made at the moment."

All this was written to me in 1936. Since then the work proceeded slowly and gradually until between 1939 and 1950 he succeeded to a great extent in achieving what he aimed at, as stated in the letter above. I am sure if he had more time at his disposal and could work by himself, he would have raised it to his ideal of perfect perfection. As it is, *Savitri* is, I suppose, the example *par excellence* of the Future Poetry he speaks of in his book *The Future Poetry*. Founder of the New Age, pioneer in the field of poetry, as in many others, he has left us an inexhaustible heritage of words, images, ideas, suggestions and hints about which we can only say — here is God's plenty. Rameshwar Gupta very aptly calls it *Eternity in Words*.<sup>1</sup> Generation after generation will drink in its soul's nectar from this perennial source. The life span of the English language itself has increased a thousandfold. Shakespeare, it is said, increased the life span of the English language by centuries. Sri Aurobindo said about Shakespeare, "That kind of spear does not shake everywhere." Now we find another far greater that will shake the world to its very roots. If for no other reason, the English speaking races ought to be eternally grateful to the supreme poet of the grand epic for this miracle.

Sri Aurobindo quoting in *The Future Poetry* these lines of an Elizabethan poet,

Or who can tell for what great work in hand  
The greatness of our style is now ordained?  
What powers it shall bring in, what spirits command?

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<sup>1</sup> *Eternity in Words* (Chetna Prakashan, Bombay).

writes: “It has since brought in many powers, commanded many spirits; but it may be that the richest powers, the highest and greatest spirit yet remain to be found and commanded.” I believe that Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri* fulfils the sovereign potentiality he has foreseen.

Dr. Piper of Syracuse University says about *Savitri* that it already has inaugurated the New Age of Illumination and is probably the greatest epic in the English language... the most comprehensive, integrated, beautiful and perfect cosmic poem ever composed.... It ranges symbolically from primordial cosmic void, through earth’s darkness and struggles, to the highest realms of supramental spiritual existence and illumines every important concern of man, through verse of unparalleled massiveness, magnificence and metaphorical brilliance. *Savitri* is perhaps the most powerful artistic work in the world for expanding man’s mind towards the Absolute.

The Mother has pronounced the last word on *Savitri*. I quote some extracts from a long talk on it to a young aspirant:

“He has crammed the whole universe in a single book. It is a marvellous work, magnificent and of an incomparable perfection.

“You know, before writing *Savitri* Sri Aurobindo said to me, ‘I am impelled to launch on a new adventure; I was hesitant in the beginning, but now I am decided.’... And the day He actually began it, He told me, ‘I have launched myself in a rudderless boat upon the vastness of the Infinite.’ And once having started, He wrote page after page without intermission, as though it were a thing already complete, up there and He had only to transcribe it in ink down here on these pages....

“It may then be said that *Savitri* is a revelation, it is a meditation, it is a quest of the Infinite, the Eternal.... Each verse of *Savitri* is like a revealed Mantra which surpasses all that man possessed by way of knowledge and, I repeat this, the words are expressed and arranged in such a way that the sonority of the rhythm leads you to the origin of sound, which is *OM*.

“...yes, everything is there: mysticism, occultism, philosophy, the history of evolution, the history of man, of the gods, of creation, of Nature....

“These are experiences lived by Him, realities, supracosmic truths. He experienced all these as one experiences joy or sorrow, physically. He walked in the darkness of inconscience, even in the neighbourhood of death, endured the sufferings of perdition, and emerged from the mud, the world-misery to breathe the sovereign plenitude and enter the supreme Ananda. He crossed all these realms, went through the consequences, suffered and endured physically what one cannot imagine. Nobody till today has suffered like Him; He accepted suffering to transform suffering into the joy of union with the Supreme....

“It is the spiritual path, it is Yoga, Tapasya, Sadhana, everything, in its single body....

“It is incomparable; it is truth in its plenitude, the Truth Sri Aurobindo brought down on the earth.”

## ATTENDANTS

We were six regular attendants: Purani, Dr. Becharlal, Dr. Satyendra, Champaklal, Mulshankar and myself. Dr. Manilal was an occasional visitor; he used to come, twice or thrice a year and after some weeks' stay he would go back to Baroda. About Dr. Rao and Dr. Savor I need not mention more than I have done in their proper context. Three of us had the opportunity to serve the Master in our medical capacity. Champaklal had been in the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's personal service since his arrival in 1923, and about Purani and Satyendra, I will state later what relates to them. Though collected from different fields, we made a harmonious bouquet tied together by the thread of Divine Grace. Four of our number have passed away, one in a most tragic manner during the Master's lifetime, and the other three at a fairly advanced age. As for the rest of us, we are engaged in our individual activities, each serving the Divine Mother in his own way. There is no longer the common centre of union, and each being busy with his sadhana, we meet rarely, but, the memory kindles up of our old, far off days whenever we join for a talk, and even when we exchange looks or smiles, the Master seems to be still with us holding us as before by the magnet of his gracious personality. Some of us were not able to give of our best, human as we are; even our worst surged up now and then, for to be constantly in the physical nearness of the Divine Sun with the unregenerated human body is to feel the heat that burns as well as purifies. Nevertheless, each offered, as far as he could, his mite and received the royal blessings.

Purani was already known to Sri Aurobindo from the twenties and had enjoyed his closeness during those years. It was thus with him a resumption or the old relation after a lapse of many years. Compared with him, we were youngsters and had the passport of entry by virtue of our medical profession, but some individual contact was established with the Master through correspondence so that he knew each one of us by name at least. In my own case, perhaps, I can go a little further. Had our written contact not been so intimate and various, I do not know if I could have been so free with him and of use to him in diverse ways. I have always wondered at and failed to probe the mystery of that intimacy. I have even imagined that Sri Aurobindo must

have seen in his timeless vision that one day this humble self might be physically of some service to him. He prepared me for that eventual day, initiated me into love for poetry that I might at least transcribe his epic *Savitri* from his dictation, gave some intellectual training that I might be useful to him in his literary work. He even made me familiar with his often baffling handwriting so that I could read his manuscripts and decipher them. These may be all weavings of fancy, but if I have been of any help in his intellectual pursuits, most of it was undoubtedly due to his previous coaching through voluminous letters, literary training and above all, his patient and persuasive manner. This long preparation had put out all fear of his awe-inspiring personality and made my approach to him free and almost unconventional, sometimes leading to an unpardonable abuse of that unstinted freedom. Things went on like a song and life would have made itself a transformed vision of the Supreme, but alas, after the novelty of the soul-contact had worn off, the other face of our nature, the subconscious, came to light and the pressure of the physical nearness began to tell. Work was no longer a joyous offering, but a duty; service alone was not a sufficient reward, it needed more concrete spiritual touches, failing which other lesser joys and satisfactions were regarded as legitimate recompense. My old maladies doubt and depression renewed their hold and transfused into the act of service their bitter stuff. The Master could at once feel the vibration, even though no word was uttered by the lips. Quite often by a look, by a quiet pressure of hands, he would communicate his understanding sympathy and the affliction would withdraw for a time. Never have I seen any displeasure or loss of temper at my delinquency, no harsh word of disapproval though he was quite aware of all inner and outer movements. A largeness, compassionate forgiveness and divine consideration have made life's stream flow through an apparently trackless solitary journey towards the ultimate vastness.

I do not know if I have the right to speak of my other colleagues, but of Champaklal particularly I must write a few heart-felt words, for his spirit of service has left an indelible impression on my soul and taught me what true service is. Let me prelude it with the Mother's opinion about him when she introduced him to Andre, her son, in 1949. She said with great warmth: "He came here when he was very young. I taught him many kinds of work. He has



himself taken up Sri Aurobindo's personal service. He looks into practically everything with regard to Sri Aurobindo. He is extremely careful, meticulous and very particular about details. He has no regular time for food; he takes it when he can. So it is with his sleep. That is why he cannot join the sports activities. He works with joy and devotion. He collects all our little things and keeps them with great care — our clothes, nails, hair, etc.”

By the very mould of his nature a bhakta, he came into our midst by his innate right, as I have said. Not a bhakta of the traditional type, but one who has chosen service as the means of self-expression and fundamental realisation. Even the word realisation may not be correct, for self-giving alone is what counts with him. Service is his very food. If any of us did his part of the job, he would get annoyed and exclaim, “You are depriving me of my food; I can remain without food but not without work.” That sums up Champaklal and that is exactly the spirit he maintained unflinchingly throughout the long decade that we lived and worked together. The Mother had entire trust in him and putting him in Sri Aurobindo's service along with us, felt quite at ease. Sri Aurobindo also relied on him for all necessary information regarding the Mother and other particulars. Once the Mother came to Sri Aurobindo's room and sat as usual on the couch opposite. We were just watching. Sri Aurobindo signed to Champaklal turning his glance towards the Mother. Champaklal understood and jumped up and put some cushions at the Mother's back. That is their way!

I am firmly convinced that through the ages he has been closely connected with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, otherwise how could he have been selected as Sri Aurobindo's personal attendant, even as a young man, as soon as he arrived? When he came to see Sri Aurobindo for the first time, he lay prostrate at his feet for an hour, all bathed in happy tears! And when he was leaving, Sri Aurobindo asked one of his older companions to bring him back with him! It is he who first accepted Sri Aurobindo as the Divine Father and called him Father, accepted the Mother as the Divine Mother and began to call her Mother. When he offered to wash the ‘Father's’ clothes, Sri Aurobindo warned him that he would be mocked at, but that did not deter him. He had gone without food and sleep, had not moved from his place lest the Master should need something or should even have to wait a minute more.

To serve Sri Aurobindo was in one way quite easy, for he would never make any demands on us, was content with the main necessities being met and would never express any displeasure if we failed him. This very easiness kept us alert, for one who didn't ask for more than the bare minimum, needed a careful, vigilant watch so that he could be given a little more comfort and ease. Champaklal kept that vigilant eye always. He was more familiar with Sri Aurobindo's nature and temperament by love and long experience and felt his needs on his very pulse. If he saw that Sri Aurobindo needed some side pillows, he got them made; if his footstool was a bit high or low, he adjusted it to the required height. He put a time-piece by his side, for he knew that Sri Aurobindo was in the habit of frequently seeing the time. Such small things that would pass unnoticed because our imaginative perception was perhaps dull, were caught by his sensitive insight and he tried to make "happy and comfortable" the life of the impersonal Brahman. Sri Aurobindo, when he sat on the edge of the bed and had to wait long for the Mother's arrival, seemed to feel drowsy; his body would lean backwards and would then right itself. Still, he would not ask for any assistance — but this, not from any sense of egoism. He would put up with any inconvenience but if we offered him some help, he did not refuse it. We simply looked on without knowing how to meet the situation, but Champaklal rose to the occasion: he made a pile of pillows to serve as his back-rest and to prevent them from tumbling down, supported them from behind. To observe economy due to the War, the Mother advised us not to change Sri Aurobindo's bed-sheets too often, but if there was a tiny stain on an otherwise clean white sheet, Champaklal would hesitate to use it, saying, "How can we use anything unclean for the Lord?" His making the bed was a sight worth seeing. I wonder if even an expert housewife would do it so perfectly! The bed-sheet had not the slightest crease anywhere, it shone with a marble smoothness. In everything his aim was to be flawless. Thus it put others who had to work with him into a very difficult corner. He claimed to have acquired this thoroughness under the apprenticeship of the Mother. I sometimes got my share of rebuke from him if I was not tidy or clean enough: "You are a doctor and you still don't wash your hands?" he would say. The fact in his case was that over and above his own training he belonged to a very orthodox Brahmin family and had meticulously observed all the practices ordained by the Shastras and enjoined upon the children by his

orthodox priest-father. We were quite modern people having our own ideas of things, so sometimes clash and conflict would arise. Besides, he was in some parts sensitive like a child. We had to be very careful not to upset him and to spare his feelings as much as we could. He could not understand jokes or any round-about manner. He told me that Sri Aurobindo had once spoken about this to the Mother. It was just after he had settled here. His father wrote a letter to Sri Aurobindo saying that Champaklal's marriage had been fixed; he had only to go, undergo the marriage ceremony and then come back. Sri Aurobindo gravely said, "I suppose we have to send back Champaklal." He was much perturbed to hear it. Then Sri Aurobindo added, "He doesn't understand jokes." He knew, however, how to get things done by the Divine, — blessings written on a book, for instance, an autograph on a photo. If asked by Champaklal, Sri Aurobindo would not refuse. The Mother too has to accede to the wishes of her bhakta, her "most faithful child".

One day he conceived the idea of getting Sri Aurobindo's footprints; but how was he to do it without troubling him in any way or without informing him in advance? He had a brain-wave. He kept a white sheet of paper and pencil ready. As soon as Sri Aurobindo sat on the chair, he pushed the sheet of paper under his feet and asked, "May I draw your footprint?" Sri Aurobindo not only consented but later wrote "Love and Blessings" on the drawing. Let us not forget, by the way, that Champaklal is an artist. Whenever he saw Sri Aurobindo in what seemed to him statuesque poses his heart would go into rapture and he would call us to share his joy. He would exclaim, "Ah, if a photograph could be taken of this marvellous pose!" The Mother has said that he has "a natural talent already developed to an unusual degree". On one of his birthdays he painted two lotuses, white and red, and offered the pictures to the Mother. She was very pleased and said she would take them to Sri Aurobindo and ask him to write something. He wrote under the painting of the white lotus: Aditi, The Divine Mother. And the Mother wrote on the other: The Avatar. But she forbade Champaklal to show them to anyone, for people would not understand what they meant.

Champaklal is the custodian of all their relics such as hair, nails and teeth. He has even stored up all the ashes of the burnt mosquito-coils. Here is a humorous incident in connection with the ashes. Once during our evening

talks, the Mother came in with a telegram asking Sri Aurobindo to send “ashes” for someone’s marriage. We were perplexed for we could not make out the meaning. Purani had an intuitive flash and said, “It may be the Indian word *āsīs* for benediction.” “Oh, I see!” exclaimed Sri Aurobindo, “I was wondering how I was supposed to carry ashes with me, perhaps on my head! Of course I can give them some from Champaklal’s mosquito-coils. If I had not given up smoking, I could have given some cigar-ash.”

I may as well narrate how I was made the recipient of a favour. Champaklal and I used to attend on Sri Aurobindo when he washed his face and mouth. Once in the course of doing it, he made a gesture of giving me something as I was holding the bowl for gargling. I immediately stretched out my left hand and he softly deposited something without any look or comment. I felt a sudden thrill and drew back into the light to see if it could be a tooth. Yes, it was indeed a whole side-tooth. I showed it to Champaklal who was busy doing some work. His eyes rolled in astonishment. Then he extracted from me the story of how I received the extraordinary present! Of course I handed it over to him for safe custody. Later several times he commented on my unusual luck! Or perhaps how he had missed it! Truly speaking, these things belonged to his domain, but the Divine sometimes oversteps our human rules and rights. Many such instances come to our notice but since they are more a question of inner perception, no rational proof can be adduced as to their truth. Only the person involved knows that his inner aspiration has found an answer. I will give an illustration. I have stated that when Sri Aurobindo resumed walking, instead of using crutches he leaned on Purani and Champaklal. After a few months Champaklal alone was retained. He stood on the left side while Sri Aurobindo used a stick on the right. Champaklal would of course never miss his chance as well as his duty. He would not be Champaklal if he did! Now, a desire was growing within me to hold, like him, Sri Aurobindo’s arm on my shoulder, at least once. But being by nature a bit shy and fearing that my unsubstantial body would be too weak to bear the divine weight and substance, I stifled my desire before it raised its head. It so happened that one day the Mother came for Sri Aurobindo’s walk long before the appointed time and Champaklal was not present; only I was there. What to do? To my excited surprise the Mother said, “You can give the

support!” Very cautiously and almost palpitatingly I sat by his left side on the couch and put my right hand around his waist; he put his left arm over my shoulder and stood up. We had hardly taken a round or two when Champaklal arrived running. I could guess what must have been his feeling at that momentous sight! Then I withdrew and he took his place and the Master must have felt an immense relief! But a minute’s soft velvety touch is unforgettable. If such was my experience, I don’t know what Purani and Champaklal, who had supported the Lord for months, must have felt! Somebody rightly appreciated the value of the touch when he said that Champaklal’s shoulders should be wrapped in gold! Each one of us had his chance, as we called it; whatever we had inwardly aspired for had its proper response and he who received it could alone testify to the truth of the phenomenon, *ye yatha mam prapadyante*.<sup>1</sup> This is the divine play between the devotee and the Lord!

I shall quote another instance at the risk of being mocked at by the rationalists and being dubbed an apostate, for was I not once a materialist myself? As I have said, Sri Aurobindo used to take a peppermint pastille while he was dictating *Savitri* and Champaklal’s role was to offer it, when wanted. He would wait and wait — even if not called at the due hour, he would sometimes hurry his meal so as not to miss the occasion. I thought, “Why should I not get one chance, at least?” But my friend would hear the call even if it was whispered and would run from wherever he might be in the room. Here again, Sri Aurobindo consciously or unconsciously responded to my silent wish by asking one day for the pastille much earlier than the usual time, when Champaklal was not present. He came up and waited for the call. I put on a very innocent face though now and again a mischievous smile tried to betray it. Then at last, very much piqued, Champaklal asked me, “What’s the matter? He is not asking for the pastille?” I could not help breaking into laughter. He understood but enquired exactly when he had asked, who had given it, etc., etc. All these incidents were our little pranks played among ourselves and between us and the Master. I shall not protest if anyone calls me too credulous and finds these as nothing but sentimental outpourings of

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<sup>1</sup> Gita 4.11: As men approach Me, so I accept them to My love.

bhaktas. These instances do illustrate why I call Champaklal a real bhakta and have looked upon his service as having the true spirit. No wonder that the Lord, during his last hours, amply recompensed him by repeatedly embracing him, to our great bewildered delight.

Some critics might find this a very rosy picture of Champaklal, drawn, as one would expect, by a colleague who would keep the thorns out of their sight. Thorns he has, who has not? In 1935, when I knew very little of him, I wrote to Sri Aurobindo, “Champaklal came to the Dispensary and had an outburst with me. I am sure he will tell the Mother about it.” He replied, “Champaklal does not usually tell Mother about these things — outbursts of that kind are too common with him. And when heat meets heat — It is almost midsummer now.” Champaklal is himself aware of his defects and repents them very much. Sometimes on the verge of despair, he confesses that complete change of nature is impossible except by the Divine Grace. More than once after losing his temper with me, not always without cause, he regretted his explosion and said, “I hope you won’t mind; you know my nature,” and became his old sweet self. He has a streak of Bholanath in him, and says that he must have been an *avadhūt*<sup>1</sup> in his previous life. He has prayed again and again to the Mother for the removal of this weakness in his nature. He is outspoken, very straightforward — the Mother has vouched for it — he cannot bear any kind of insincerity. He cannot make or even see any compromise made with falsehood; his nature is alien to the ways of the world. Much of his apparent rudeness and ill temper stems from this uncompromising spirit. This, of course, does not save him from misjudging people at times, but when shown his fault, he never tries to cover it up. I believe that there should be someone who is upright and unsparing, and as firm as steel when all around there is such a mixture of motives. He serves as the gate-keeper of Heaven. Parodying Sri Aurobindo’s verse, “None can reach Heaven who has not passed through Hell,” I would mutter, “None can go to the Mother who has not passed through Champaklal!”

To make the path easy to Heaven, or at least to get Heaven’s blessings more easily, is also possible by his intervention. If the Mother is at times

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<sup>1</sup> A sannyasi of the Shaiva school.

reluctant for some reason to give a birthday card to someone or write a person's name or "love and blessings" on it, if she refuses to see another on his birthday, Champaklal appeals to her divine compassion and makes her rescind her decision. The Mother sometimes asks him, "What shall I write?" "Why, love and blessings, Mother!" is his reply. He says that he suffered a lot in his childhood because people could not understand his nature. He now wants to distribute the Divine's largesse whenever and wherever he can. Many people are grateful to him for procuring the Mother's blessings for them, especially her physical touch. Only one must be frank and straightforward. Sometimes he has gone out of his way to help even an unknown and unassuming person to get the Mother's touch if he thought that he had been overlooked. To sum up, his soul's mission is to serve the Mother, to look after her and to make her love and compassion available to all, rich or poor, worthy or unworthy, young or old, without any distinction. I shall now conclude my "rosy picture" of Champaklal by quoting Sri Aurobindo's estimate of him: "All have their defects, but Champaklal has great qualities to atone for them."

Mulshankar, youngest of the group, was the brother of Esculape, alias Dayashankar, at one time in charge of the Ashram Dispensary. He also worked as an assistant in the Dispensary after Esculape's retirement and came to serve Sri Aurobindo as a medical aid. An excellent worker, he had the privilege of massaging Sri Aurobindo's body for a certain period. He was no masseur and in fact knew nothing about it, but he picked it up from some casual lessons and was gifted with the natural lightness and suppleness of finger movements. During the short interval that Sri Aurobindo had to wait for the Mother to come, before he started walking, Mulshankar would sit behind and apply a good massage to his back. It was really as if an expert masseur was at work; his hands moved so lightly and fast, up and down the back and spine; sometimes using delicate finger strokes or the edge of the palms and swinging and bending the body as the various movements demanded and then finishing off with very gentle touches of the fingertips. One was tempted to take a photograph of his agile figure and beaming face visibly moved beyond measure by the unique privilege of touching the Lord's body, while Sri Aurobindo kept on sitting like a statue looking downwards as

the massage proceeded, or in front, sometimes smiling by himself, perhaps oblivious of all the hundred kinds of fleeting, fluttering, striking movements being made on his back. Both the figures supplied us food for a good deal of merriment, the Guru sitting on the edge of the bed, the shishya briskly massaging his back. But the poor fellow had to miss his service because of an intractable headache that crippled him often. And every time that happened we would report to Sri Aurobindo; his comment would be: “Again?”, or an exclamatory expression; we could feel at the same time that the inner help was being given.

What could be more heart-rending than that he lost his life at the hands of an assassin during the riot of 1947? When the news was brought to Sri Aurobindo that he had been fatally stabbed, the air was filled with gloom. Sri Aurobindo listened quietly and his face bore a grave and serious expression that we had not seen before. The dark forces seemed to have achieved a perilous victory in snatching away one of the personal attendants of the Divine. Such is the grim occult struggle between the forces of Light and the forces of Darkness. For days we were under a pall of gloom and none of us referred to the incident in our talks.

Such appalling mist could only be dissolved by counterbalancing incidents like the one of our old doctor Becharlal, a true bhakta by nature. Sri Aurobindo remarked that his bhakti was genuine. How many times he was on the point of shedding tears on seeing his “Bhagawan suffer”! Apart from his age, his emotional nature rendered him incapable of doing anything but light work and we gave him only such work. Neither would he ask for more, since he knew himself quite well. If he could just breathe the nearness of the Lord, that was all he wanted. That was his lifelong aspiration, it appeared, and it was fulfilled. He was called Dadaji by us and given his due respect. During the early days of the accident, in the tranquil atmosphere of the room, we would hear some sudden sobbing trying in vain to control itself. It was our doctor who had been moved to sorrow by the “painful condition” of his beloved Lord! Or sometimes there were tears of spiritual fervour.

When after his bath Sri Aurobindo lay down for a little rest, our doctor would squat behind or beside him and gaze on the reclining god who was in serene repose with both hands locked above the head. Becharlal said that at



those moments especially, Sri Aurobindo appeared to him just like Lord Shiva and he felt a great impulse to embrace him. Stretched at full length on the bed, his well-formed body almost filling it without any covering on the upper part, the large full head and the radiant face, caring nothing for earthly vanities, yet the Lord of the world, captured not only Dr. Becharlal's heart but ours as well. Dr. Becharlal would be full of peace and rapture in his presence but could not stay long because of his old-age infirmities. Dr. Manilal remarked to Sri Aurobindo that among all of us Dr. Becharlal profited most from his association with Sri Aurobindo.

Coming as a sharp contrast to Dr. Becharlal, Dr. Manilal was in every way a sound practical man. Since he spent most of his time away in Baroda, his personal service had to be limited. Both the doctors had been connected with the Ashram for a long time and Dr. Becharlal had served under Dr. Manilal in Baroda before he came here. There is no doubt that Manilal's devotion was also genuine, though of a different kind; less emotional and more practical, his approach to Sri Aurobindo was easy and spontaneous and his manner with us was always sweet and affable; it had none of the superior airs that one is accustomed to meet in a senior colleague. He took our playful jokes and banterings with good grace and was ever inquiring when the Supermind was going to descend. I have stated in the chapter on 'Talks' that he had a child-soul in him and in my book *Talks with Sri Aurobindo* there are quite a number of glimpses of that trait. I will quote here one or two examples: apropos of a discussion on sadhana Sri Aurobindo said, "You want an easy path?"

Manilal: More than an easy path; we want to be carried about like babies. Not possible, Sir?

Sri Aurobindo: Why not? But you have to be a genuine baby! (*smiling*)  
Meditating?

Manilal: Trying hard, Sir.... Many undesirable things come to disturb me.

Sri Aurobindo: What are they?

Manilal: Some nonsense.

Sri Aurobindo: Some extraordinary nonsense like thoughts of perpetual attendance on your Maharaja patron or of the likely successor to Mussolini?

Manilal: No, Sir, thoughts of the Maharaja come very rarely....

Another example: Sri Aurobindo asked the doctor, “Do you always have to try to meditate?”

Manilal: Not always. I have told you that sometimes it visits me all of a sudden.... But was I right in saying that I was able to reject thoughts?

Sri Aurobindo (*smiling*): How do I know?... I was only making comments on your statements.

Manilal: You don't know? We consider you omniscient.

Sri Aurobindo: You don't expect me, surely, to know how many fishes the fishermen of Pondicherry have caught....

Dr. Satyendra is an unassuming and nice person, did his part of the job in a quiet and steady way. He was cleaning, for a time, the windows and furniture in Sri Aurobindo's room. Ready to serve but never pushing and not over eager, he kept a closeness and happy relation with all. He used to express very often that he was more of a retiring nature and more intent on personal realisation through Bhakti. Karmayoga did not suit his temperament very well. Whatever might be his particular bent, we saw that he did his own work like a karmayogi, in a genuine spirit of service to the Master whom he always addressed as Sir. His talks with Sri Aurobindo showed his sense of humour, his insight into philosophy, politics and mysticism. Sri Aurobindo seemed to like his company, his quiet devotion, in spite of his constantly grumbling against the integral Yoga and the Supermind. While cleaning the Master's nails as he lay in bed, he would start his old unvarying tale about the necessity of the personal touch, his close contact with his former guru. Sri Aurobindo would listen quietly to his nostalgic monologue. There must be some expression of love, was his constant burden, to which Sri Aurobindo once replied that unity of consciousness is the root and love is its fine flower. A shrewd observer of human and divine nature, it was he who made the pertinent remark that in this Yoga only two persons have achieved complete surrender: the Mother to Sri Aurobindo and Sri Aurobindo to the Mother! As an example he related this story: Sri Aurobindo was lying in bed one day, and the ceiling-fan was revolving at full speed. Satyendra felt that he wanted something, so he approached the Master and asked, “Are you looking for something, Sir?”

“Oh, no.... Is Nirod there?” “No, Sir. But can I do anything?” he asked. “I was wondering if the speed of the fan could be reduced,” he replied. “I can do it, Sir.” “Oh, can you?” he asked. Sri Aurobindo enquired about me because I was given charge of the fan by the Mother, and he would not violate the rule. As for the reduction of the speed, that too was in deference to the wishes of the Mother, for once on entering Sri Aurobindo’s room, she saw the fan turning at full speed and remarked, “Oh, what a storm!” To give another instance: when we wanted to move the table-fan a bit nearer him, he said, “No, Mother has kept it there.” This is how we learnt submission and obedience — not only in big matters, but even in small trivialities.

The Mother told Satyendra recently on his birthday that Sri Aurobindo had come to her on the eve of his interview with her and said that he had taken good care of Sri Aurobindo’s body. What a touching recognition from Sri Aurobindo! Even after leaving the body, the Guru remembers a kind act, some help rendered to him by his disciple! What a Divine Magnanimity! We know also that all those who had served him during his accident period have had their reward in some form or other, in the material and spiritual life.

Purani, the last to be mentioned of our group, was one of the old guards associated with Sri Aurobindo from the twenties. I shall not speak much about him because his own books tell in every line what profound love and adoration he bore for the Master for whose sake he would do anything. Full of life and gusto, he added a liveliness to our company. His choice of the unearthly hours from 2 a.m. to 6.30 a.m. for service was a great relief to us. He would surge up from the bosom of the night and say, “Here I am!” He had the entire period to himself and kept awake while we were contentedly sleeping and snoring by his side. Now and then we used to hear, as if in a dream, Sri Aurobindo’s soft voice asking for something and Purani with military steps advancing and responding to the call of the General. If you happened to wake up by some inadvertent noise, you would find a different figure altogether, moving in the penumbra. No longer that lively, youngish spirit, but a very serious face that does not recognise anything else but the work, and brooks no meddling in his duty when Sri Aurobindo is his sole monopoly. I realised then why he chose that hour for service. He could be concentrated, watchful and all alone with the Master. The midnight surely

affects all of us with its portentous weight. Another distinctive feature in his service was his physical strength without which it would have been difficult to lift or carry Sri Aurobindo during the early days of the accident. We have seen how he served as a solid human crutch on Sri Aurobindo's right side and later on, his giant manipulation of the large hand-fan was no less an achievement.

His tremendous vital energy would take little account of things big or small. It would either dash against the door or kick at a poor matchbox! The noise would make Sri Aurobindo remark, "What's the matter?" "It is Purani!" we would reply in fun and evoke his smile. He knew Purani's nature very well. Once when Purani hurt his big toe Sri Aurobindo remarked, "You are always dropping things or knocking against them!" He even referred our jokes to the Mother at Purani's cost.

But see him again sitting on the floor with big volumes by his side. How serious his whole demeanour is! An erudite Sanskrit scholar at work! Sri Aurobindo sitting on the bed, leaning against the back-rest, asks him to find out the root of some Vedic word and its various derivative meanings. Purani forages through the dictionaries or Sayana's commentaries, reads them aloud and notes them down. The Master dictates the interpretations of a hymn in a low voice, sometimes looks at him or makes some further enquiry, resting his left elbow on the side-cushion which is tending to slide down, and he puts it back in its position. Meanwhile if he needs anything, he casts a glance behind to see if anyone is nearby, and resumes his dictation. The disciple, serious and docile, obeys the Master's bidding.

Apropos of Sayana, Sri Aurobindo said in a talk, "Sayana in spite of his many mistakes, is very useful, though it is like going to Ignorance for Knowledge." I added, "Purani with his shining bald head, some locks of white hair, his glasses resting on the tip of his sharp nose and fat volumes by his side, looks very much like Sayana!" Sri Aurobindo replied, "O Sayana came back to undo his mischief?"

At another time he is like a press reporter: bubbling with news gathered from all quarters, particularly from the town. He arrives and Sri Aurobindo,

looking at him, asks, “Any news?” Then the talks begin. Sometimes Purani is late and the Master enquires, “Where is Purani?”

Often forgetting his gravity, Purani becomes a child and joins us in a plot, when there is nothing to talk about, to draw out Sri Aurobindo who might himself be waiting for the occasion. The ball is set rolling by Purani reporting for instance, “Nirod says that his mind is getting dull and stupid!” On other occasions he starts serious discussions on modern painting, modern poetry, philosophy, politics, history, science and what not. There is hardly any subject on which he cannot say something — a versatile man indeed, and a very interesting personality. Once in the evening the Guru and the shishya had a long talk, for more than an hour, on an old legal case (Bapat case?) that must have taken place during Sri Aurobindo’s stay in Baroda, and must have been famous for Purani to remember it and discuss it with Sri Aurobindo. He was lying on one side and Purani was sitting on the floor leaning against a couch opposite. It had the air of a very homely talk, as between father and son. Anybody who had seen the Master only during the Darshan could never conceive of this Sri Aurobindo who had put off his mantle of majesty and high impersonality. I stood for a while to listen to the discussion, but found it so dull that I began wondering how they could drag on *ad infinitum*! It was Purani’s versatility that enriched much in our talks with the Master. If, however, by any chance you stepped on his toes, the old lion growled and roared! But wherever Sri Aurobindo’s interest was involved, he would not spare himself. The Guru’s name acted on him like a Mantra. The Aurobindonians are ever grateful to him for his yeoman service in bringing out so many valuable documents on Sri Aurobindo’s early life in England and for trying to get his genius recognised by the English intellectual circle.

One other casual attendant whose name I should include was Dr. Sanyal. He was an eminent surgeon in Calcutta and his active service was called for when Sri Aurobindo’s condition became critical in the first week of December, 1950. He was sent an urgent wire to come immediately. Before this he had Sri Aurobindo’s private darshan twice. The first occasion was when I consulted him in the beginning about Sri Aurobindo’s illness. Next year, when again he visited the Ashram, his contact with Sri Aurobindo was renewed for the same reason. Each time he stayed for about a week and every

day he had the Guru's darshan. He would come dressed in simple white dhoti and punjabi with a big bouquet of lotuses or roses and offer his pranam to the Guru in quiet devotion. Then, as Sri Aurobindo sat on the bed, he, kneeling on the floor, massaged his leg and held long talks with him at the same time. Sri Aurobindo's manner was affable and engaging, bearing a smile that egged on the speaker. Once I heard from a distance the Mother talking to Sri Aurobindo about him. From a few words that caught my ear it seemed she was very much impressed by his deportment and physiognomy. I felt that she had already marked him as one of her future instruments. All these paved the way to his last service to his Lord and permanent service to the Mother.

Besides Pavitra and Dyuman who used to come to clean the carpeted floor, the former at the beginning only, I might mention another sadhak, Udar, who came daily to clean the new furniture in Sri Aurobindo's room since 1947. He had also helped us greatly in procuring medicines for Sri Aurobindo during the last days of his illness and he was present at the moment of his departure. Here is his own account regarding his attendance:

"Now, in 1939, after Sri Aurobindo's accident, it was felt that the furniture He was using had to be replaced by something better. It was mostly made of boxwood. So the Mother gave me the great privilege of designing and making the furniture for His room which was done in Rosewood but the bed in Teak wood. It is the furniture that is there today.

"Then, when the furniture, well polished with wax (not French Polish) was installed, the Mother gave me another great privilege — that of cleaning and polishing the new furniture. I was permitted one hour a day for this. This is how I came into personal contact with Sri Aurobindo, except for the Darshans we had before.

"These were happy days for me. I chose the daily hour differently — sometimes when the Mother and others were with Him — sometimes when He would be dictating *Savitri* to Nirod. This was really a great thing for me and I treasure the memory very dearly.

"Sri Aurobindo did not speak much or often but I heard Him on several subjects. He did not speak to me directly except a few times and the memory of this is very precious. I had, however, the great good fortune of being able

to make my private pranams to Him on Darshan days and lay my head in His lap and look closely into His eyes. But otherwise, except for being in His immediate presence for an hour each day, I did not have close contact with Him.

“One day, however, a few days before His passing I found him looking at me very closely and intensely with such a love and compassion that passes all description. I was alone with Him at the time. I did not know why He was looking at me so, but I was so carried away with joy by the love He showered on me in His look that I did not bother about the reason for it. It was only later, when comparing notes with the others who served Him personally, that I discovered that He was bidding me a physical good-bye. He had done the same to others — to each differently and, it seems, each one was puzzled at the time. But when He left us physically soon after, we guessed the reason.”

## TALKS

Those who have read *Talks with Sri Aurobindo* or *Evening Talks* must have realised that Sri Aurobindo was not a world-averse Yogi lost in rapturous silence of the Brahman like the Maharshi, nor talked, when he did, mostly of spiritual matters as did Ramakrishna. In fact our talks covered a vast range of subjects, they had almost a global dimension. We wondered at his enormous knowledge in so many fields. Considering the shortness of the period during which he lived in strenuous contact with the external world, one would be tempted to ask how much of this knowledge was the outcome of his practical worldly experience and how much a result of Yoga? In a letter to me he had said, “Don’t try to throw allopathic dust in my eyes, sir! I have lived a fairly long time and seen something of the world before my retirement and much more after it.” So Yoga must have opened to his vision “thoughts that wander through eternity” and made him the possessor of infinite knowledge, secular as well as spiritual: “World after world bursts on the awakened sight”, he says in one of his sonnets. He has attributed all that he had become to the effect of Yoga. In one of our talks we were staggered to hear him profess that even if he had written ten times more than he had done, his knowledge would have remained unexhausted. And when we murmured in a sad protest that such a vast amount of knowledge would be lost to us, he replied, “Practise first what I have written.” On another occasion when he was asked by a sadhak how he could manage to write on seven subjects at a time in the *Arya*, he replied that he could write seven issues of the *Arya* every month for 70 years and still the knowledge that came from above would hardly be exhausted. The Mother also said that he wrote the *Arya* from a completely silent mind; everything came right down on the typewriter. Otherwise it would not have been possible to write 64 pages every month. Strictly speaking, it was only in the last week of the month that he would get down to writing. Amrita had been asked to remind him about the *Arya*, a week before its time for the Press. When he gave the signal, Sri Aurobindo would start the “Herculean labour” and finish it with utmost ease. Those words from a sonnet of his — “I have drunk the Infinite like a giant’s wine”, are a testimony to this bewildering fact.



Now at this fountainhead of wisdom and yogic illumination we had the rare opportunity to drink day and night for a number of years. If we could not get more it was not because he had closed the channel, but rather that our small vessels could not contain more. One can then understand that next to his silent human-divine Presence, his talks were the most coveted feature of our close association with him.

Yet they came so unexpectedly, for Sri Aurobindo, as we had come to know and see him during the Darshan, had succeeded in building in our minds a picture of him high-poised as his *Life Divine*, far-moving as his *Synthesis of Yoga*, unapproachable, except perhaps by the gods, not at all close and intimate like his *Essays on the Gita* or accessible to our mortal longings. Of course, a few of us had the extraordinary good fortune of knowing his human side through his inestimable correspondence, on the strength of which I wrote to him, “You thrashed me for calling you grave and austere at the Darshan time. But see, when we go to the Mother, how seraphically she smiles, while your noble Self being near, appears still far away at some Olympian height. It is difficult to discern the gravity or the jollity of a face at such a height. I suppose our conception of the gods was formed from the vision of such a figure.” He replied, “Neither gravity nor jollity, but a large, easy, quiet, amiable condition. The gods can’t be amiable?” And it was this amiable aspect that came to the forefront in our talks. We came to know much later that Sri Aurobindo used to hold “table-talks” in the pre-Ashram days, with his few young followers. But I believe ours were an advance on those talks by the ease, the informality, the natural diversity and intimacy of communication due to the exceptional circumstances in which they were held. Sri Aurobindo had no need of vocal self-expression, either in our time or before. It is my conviction that the interchange with us was an act of compassion to entertain us in return for the medical attendance we had been called upon to render him. I may add here that any personal service offered to the Divine, however small, brings an ample reward. When after the first few days of discomfort and submission to medical rigours, he had adjusted himself to the new mode of life, the talks started. At first they were in the form of medical enquiries. Dr. Manilal would come up in the morning (for he was living outside the Ashram compound) and stand

with folded hands before Sri Aurobindo who lay in bed. After pranam he would ask, smiling, “How are you, Sir? Did you sleep well?” to which Sri Aurobindo’s answers were genially brief.

These short preambles were soon followed by the cascade. It was evening, about 7 p.m. Our duty being over, Sri Aurobindo was lying down in bed. A dim electric light was on. I had gone out. When I came up after a while, I saw our group sitting on the left side of Sri Aurobindo’s bed, near his feet and some talk was going on, almost in whispers. Sri Aurobindo was the talker. I joined the group at once but could not get very near. All were listening intently; if they did notice my coming, they had no room to spare for me. This was the first time he talked at length. As we were not accustomed to his subdued voice and intonation, we had to strain our ears in order to catch all the words, and yet many of them were lost to me. Several people have asked us about the quality of his voice. Lacking in expressive power for such delicate matters, I am afraid I can’t define it or give its exact sound-shade. The nearest characterisation I can hazard is that it was masculine, but soft — some have called it musical — low-pitched, quiet and measured, with a clear English accent. This was my impression formed from a gradual closeness. In her *Prayers and Meditations*, the Mother describes the voice of the Lord which can apply very well to Sri Aurobindo’s. On June 27, 1913, she writes, “Thy voice is so modest, so impartial, so sublime in its patience and mercy that it does not make itself heard with any authority, any force of will but comes like a cool breeze, sweet and pure, like a crystalline murmur that brings a note of harmony to a discordant concert. Yet, for him who knows how to listen to the note, to breathe that breeze, it holds such treasures of beauty, such a fragrance of pure serenity and noble grandeur, that all foolish illusions vanish or are transformed into a joyful acceptance of the marvellous truth that has been glimpsed.” It is a great pity that we do not have a tape-recording of his voice. People have charged us with a callous indifference. But then there was no radio, no ceiling-fan and even to take a photograph of the Mother was strictly banned. I am told that when the Mother went out to see our Ashram team playing a volley-ball match with an outside team, someone took a photograph of hers and gave it to the local photographer who was known to us, to have it printed. The Mother managed to stop the printing.

Besides, who could ever dream that Sri Aurobindo would pass away so suddenly? It was by an unseen dispensation that a few photographs were taken in his last year. We often compared his previous photographs with his present appearance and wished for new ones to be taken and distributed to the sadhaks, instead of the old ones. Once somebody had made paintings of Sri Aurobindo from his old photographs and sent them to him. Looking at them he said, "I look like a criminal! Am I so bad to look at?" But our requests for the new photographs were gently turned down with a humorous (or was it solemn?) reply that only after the descent of the Supermind they could be taken. Henri Cartier-Bresson's photographs, impressive though they are, are still a poor apology for Sri Aurobindo's real physical appearance. Can they do Justice to all that God-like majesty, beauty and serenity? Those who had seen him with his bare shining torso different times in different postures, look at these replicas and murmur sadly, "Was this the figure that we loved and worshipped?" The Mother showing a painting of Sri Aurobindo to Champaklal asked him his opinion, he kept quiet. She then repeated, "You don't like it?" Then he burst out, "How can I like it, Mother? This is sheer mockery. I won't look at it!" The Mother smiled. But people would perhaps say that something is better than nothing. It is true that but for these last photographs there would have been a great void left in our recollection of Sri Aurobindo.

After the first day, regular talks continued at the same time in the evening. All of us sat huddled together near his bed, Purani sometimes stood at a distance, and the talks rolled on under the dim light. The listening hush was quite often broken by our outbursts of hilarious laughter. We had ample leisure, since all medical duties were over and what remained before us was only his light supper. In the middle of the talks the Mother would sometimes glide in and ask Sri Aurobindo with a smile, "They are making you talk?" The Mother feared that too much talk would put him under an undue strain. At times we got so absorbed in the talks that Sri Aurobindo had to remind us of the Mother's coming and we then quickly regrouped ourselves ready to receive her. She would then insist saying, "Don't move, don't move." Dr. Manilal's reply was, "No, Mother, we shall now meditate!"

"But if I want to talk?"

“Then we shall talk, Mother.” The ready answer was followed by a burst of laughter. Rarely did she participate in our talks. Once she asked, “What are you laughing about?” Sri Aurobindo replied with a smile, “I am telling them the story of my poet-brother Mono Mohan.” It was one of the most interesting talks we had!

In the beginning, as I said, Dr. Manilal was the spearhead of the attack. What we did not dare to ask because of our youth, our shyness or even our sophistication, he, our elderly doctor, babbled away like a simple child, bluntly and sweetly, and we were greatly rewarded. We were so much charmed by the novelty of the talks that none of us thought of keeping any record. I would make some mental notes and when I visited Dilip’s place for tea pour them out and make everybody roar with laughter. He would regale me with a sumptuous breakfast, in return for the divine ambrosia. After about a fortnight of squandering the precious talks which, had they been noted and published, would have made another volume, I realised my mistake and thought, “Why not keep a record?” But I would debate, “What’s the use since they will never be published?” Thus in two minds, I started noting them down in the middle of the night after the work was over or at other odd hours. Quite often my colleagues would help me in rescuing some of the points I had lost, or correcting and adding others. Still almost one third of the talks were not recorded for want of time or sheer laziness. Meanwhile the news had gone abroad that Sri Aurobindo was having talks with us. So people began to waylay or hunt us out for some nectar and our stock went up. Groups were formed, according to the law of sympathy and attraction for hearing the “Divine news”. Some approached Dr. Manilal, some Purani some Satyendra and others came to me. Many advised us to keep a diary and others must have suspected that we were doing so already. Sri Aurobindo did not know, at least physically, about it and there was even a fear that if he did, he might stop talking altogether. Now I feel that some Hand must have pushed me over my reluctance and turned out a fairly good record, after all.

With Sri Aurobindo’s gradual recovery the time of the talks also changed. They were held mostly during his sponging and later during his bath. As the years passed, the original stream of abundance began to get thinner and thinner till in the last years there was practically a silent attendance on a

silent Presence. Either we had exhausted all topics and a satiation had followed and dried up all our inspiration or Sri Aurobindo had withdrawn his inner gesture of approval. Only when Dr. Manilal arrived from Baroda, the still atmosphere quickened with life for a while but he too would soon lapse into a quiescent mood.

About the range and variety of the talks the readers have now got a fair idea from our books. They show Sri Aurobindo's encyclopaedic knowledge and bear out the truth of his remark that if he wrote all that he knew, it would be ten times more than what he had already written. He had serious or sublime subjects in mind, but I am referring even to ordinary matters of life. Dr. Ramachandra once told me that he had had a racy discussion with the Guru on horse-racing! Much more striking was the ease and freedom in which the talks were held and on either side there was no feeling of constraint or sanctimonious awe putting a check on our impulses. We forgot the sublime Guru-shishya relationship and became long-standing friends. It was quite a different Sri Aurobindo from what he was at other hours of the day. The high, serene and silent snow on the Himalayan peaks had melted down into a quiet and cool gurgling stream. Hold the pure sanctified waters in your hands, sprinkle them over the body, drink them or play with them like a child. How perennially fresh and diversely rich, sparkling always with his ready wit and humour! But the stream flowed, as I said, only at some particular time and not for a long period. Again the grand, serene and silent Presence on the peaks! One could say that the austere "cloak of a reclining God", the robe of silence had slipped down and brought to our view the body of a human godhead. But he would put on the robe of silence again; yet both the visions had their unfailing charm and grandeur.

The talks of Sri Ramakrishna come naturally to our mind in comparison. Their spirit is perhaps the same, the lightness and vivacity too are there, but his talks were restricted in scope, while all life being yoga for us, no subject was too trivial for our discussions. And in Sri Aurobindo's case always *samam brahman*, impersonality marked all his utterances, no matter what the subject of the discourse. Nevertheless, the warm touch of personality could always be felt from behind the usual front of impersonality. For instance, though he would, while talking, hardly look at us or address us by our names,

for his eyes were cast downwards or looking away in front, still the soft tone of his voice, sparks of personal humour reflected the “sweet rays of a temperate sun.”

I have said so much about his voice, I might as well add a few words about his eyes. Opinions about them vary according to the inner quality of the person who saw them. Sir Edward Baker, Governor of Bengal, archenemy of Sri Aurobindo’s fiery nationalism, described them as “the eyes of a madman” when he visited him in Alipore Jail. The English Principal of the Baroda College said, “...There is a mystic fire and light in them. They penetrate into the beyond. If Joan of Arc heard heavenly voices, Aurobindo probably sees heavenly visions.” Upen Banerjee, a close associate of Sri Aurobindo during his revolutionary period, describes his first meeting with him, “That sickly, dark, malaria-afflicted man is Aurobindo? He is our Chief?... My spirit was awfully damped at the sight, but just then he turned to look at me. I don’t know how to describe that look. There was a liquid sparkle of amusement in it, but the pupils gave me a sense of fathomless wonder that baffled all analysis. Even today the mystery has not left me.”

Arjava (J. A. Chadwick) remarked, “How beautifully he writes, how crystal clear! Not a trace of haziness anywhere. No abracadabra, wanting to show off and yet how luminous — shedding light without heat — like his eyes!”

I have said that Sri Aurobindo rarely looked into our eyes except at Darshans when, he said, he gave a piercing look to everybody. Most often, he was gazing in front or looking down, and seldom were the eyes fully open. During our pranams in his room on our birthdays or on Darshan days, he looked deep and steadily into our eyes. At that time I could mark their colour: it was a dark brown. To see anything beyond the softness and compassion in the expression was not given to me. But once, and once only, I saw a different pair of eyes, and that experience is unforgettable. He had finished lunch and I was attending on him. Just for a memorable moment, he half-opened his eyes and I saw two deep pools, intensely black, serene, inscrutable and unfathomable. It was as if on a hushed afternoon you entered a dense wood and suddenly came upon a deep pond and saw its still dark waters.

People who read our *Correspondence* were under the impression that our days bubbled with “jest and jollity, quips and cranks” all the while. In fact, a friend did not believe me when I said that the bubbling lasted only for a short time. Sri Aurobindo was, after all, a Yogi. All who knew him knew that. In one of his letters to Dilip, when Dilip complained that Sri Aurobindo would not laugh or even smile, he replied that since his childhood, he had been estranged from his family and accustomed to live a solitary life. His nature had therefore become reserved, somewhat remote and he felt shy of too much personal emotion. The English racial climate may have, I suppose, added its own large share to it. Moreover, the Yoga he had practised, beginning with the transcendental nirvanic experience, must have crowned the natural disposition. Buddha, I believe, for all his compassion, could not but have been impersonal in his daily communication. This vast impersonality even in personal relations, is it not the basis of his Yoga? I have often wondered what his state of consciousness was, for instance, when he was talking with us or dictating *Savitri*. Now I have learnt that the three states of consciousness: transcendent, cosmic and individual can operate at the same time. I also used to wonder how he could take interest even in the most trivial, “unspiritual” amusing talk or incidents, and joke with us, say on snoring or baldness! He had found the *rasa*, the delight of Brahman in everything. So his jokes were never trivial; they could be playful but always had an intellectual element in them.

I have already given some examples of his humour in the previous chapters; let me now quote something to show his light mood. One day suddenly breaking his silence, he addressed Purani and said, “There is something nice for you, Purani.” (For once he used his name!)

Purani: For me?

Sri Aurobindo: Yes. A letter has come from America addressed to Sri Aurobindo Ashram. The writer says, “I have heard that you are a great yoga. I am also a yoga. I have started to predict sporting events. I can go into trance and know everything. If you agree to work in collaboration with me, we will share the profits. Let me know your terms. If you don’t want to take the money yourself, you can give it to the poor. Our collaboration will be a

service to yourself, to me and to the poor.” What do you say, Purani? You too can go into trance or send Nirod into trance!

He was by no means a conversationalist as we understand and use the term. Tagore, for example, was one. Those who have heard or talked to Tagore, recall their experience as “great”. When we read his talks, we can well imagine how brilliant he must have been with his rich similes and metaphors, his sparkling wit and banter, the twinkling of his eyes, the rise and fall of his voice and all the other concomitant dramatic gestures so that his personality came in front more than his talks. Sri Aurobindo is quite a different study in perfect contrast. Life here is steady; there are no eddies or whirls, the stream flowing unobtrusively in a quiet rhythm, the jokes uttered rather casually, in an even tone in a typically English fashion, which makes you laugh all the more. Here the personality remained behind and the subject-matter became more prominent,

His talks with Dr. Manilal deserve special notice. The doctor had medical and worldly experience. The Mother considered him a master in his own field. But he still had a child-soul in him and it talked freely with Sri Aurobindo. The Guru with an equal paternal or friendly smile would listen to his prattle. His long rigmarole on Jainism that would bore us, would amuse him and after the doctor had departed, Sri Aurobindo would naively ask Purani how far Manilal’s knowledge of Jainism was sound and dependable. It was most entertaining to see how Sri Aurobindo used to dodge, tease, play with him, yet obey his medical injunctions! “Oh! Dr. Manilal is coming! I must hang my leg!” he would exclaim and we in turn utter, “You seem to be afraid of Dr. Manilal!” The tone, one would feel, was that of a comrade chatting with another; the doctor’s age, position and nature evoked from the Guru a response in tune with them. Sri Aurobindo once remarked that he was very simple and frank like a child.

Throughout our talks extending over many years and to many subjects, I don’t remember a single occasion when Sri Aurobindo lost his patience with us. He never refused to answer any question but on the contrary would explain at great length and repeatedly if some points did not enter my head. “Do you understand?” he would ask softly. The tone was always affable. Even when one of us complained that he could not accept his Yoga, he looked into his



difficulties and met his objections in a kind, dispassionate manner. Much of this must have been due to the Guru's innate nature and the rest due to Yoga. We have had hot debates among ourselves before him; he listened quietly to our childish vanity and showed our mistakes only when we approached him for his views. If we have not profited as much as we should have by his talks, at least his patient tolerance and indulgence, wideness of outlook and leaven of humour have cast a radiant influence on our souls. As we look back on those days, we hear a sigh in the breeze murmuring, "Those delightful days that are no more!" The nostalgic memory revives at moments when we meet and start talking of those bygone years. Satyendra recalled an incident I had completely forgotten. Once the Mother came to inform Sri Aurobindo that Bhishmadev, a former disciple and an eminent singer of Bengal, was going to sing on the radio, and he very much wanted Sri Aurobindo to hear him. So the radio was brought near and the sponge-bath and the music went on simultaneously. When at the end of Bhishmadev's programme we asked him how he had liked the music, he answered, "Oh, I completely forgot!" We had a good laugh. A similar instance happened in Dilip's case. He had sent the timing of his radio programme from Calcutta and beseeched Sri Aurobindo to hear him. Sri Aurobindo asked Champaklal to remind him of it. Champaklal, probably, did not. When the music was over, he asked Champaklal, "Where is Dilip's music?" He laughed and said that it was already finished!

Lastly, those who have read *Talks with Sri Aurobindo* and his *Correspondence* with me cannot but notice a striking difference between the two in their tone and manner. Though both of them have an air of intimacy and informality, still the correspondence is certainly more free. There he has let himself go, to quote his phrase, whereas in the talks there is a sense of restraint. Is it because of a different set of circumstances and a different milieu? I believe there is something more. Even if I had met him all alone, I don't think he would have been as free in his speech as with his pen. For, his shy and reserved nature would have put some curb on total abandon. Of course, the correspondence was restricted to one person with his own particular interests; the talks covered a larger and more diverse sphere, and there they have an advantage of their own.

## LAUGHTER OF THE GODS

The old *idée fixe* that Sri Aurobindo was an anchorite who did not know how to smile or laugh is by now dead. A new fixed notion may swing to the other extreme that he smiled or laughed too much for a yogi. But a sensible estimate, after a reading of his letters, talks and creative works, will confirm the view that his Yoga instead of drying up the fountain of laughter made it flow like the Ganges. For his consciousness grew as vast as the universe; it sounded the uttermost depths and heights of existence. He read the “wonder-book of Common things” as well as the supernal mysteries of God and found the very *rasa* which is at the root of things. His love and compassion flowed towards all men and creatures like a life-giving ocean. He said in one of his letters: “It is only divine Love which can bear the burden I have to bear, that all have to bear who have sacrificed everything else to the one aim of uplifting earth out of its darkness towards the Divine. The Gallio-like ‘Je m’en fiche’-ism (I do not care) would not carry me one step; it would certainly not be divine. It is quite another thing that enables me to walk unweeping and unlamenting towards the goal.” In his own Ashram which is composed, on the one hand, of unlettered villagers and, on the other, of the intellectual élite, with what patience and forbearance, love and sympathy he, like a grand patriarch, guided and led us all towards the goal! Humour that springs from a heart of sympathy made him smile at our follies and foibles and the numerous eccentricities of our human nature. The readers of *Talks with Sri Aurobindo* must have observed how Sri Aurobindo threw aside his mantle of gravity and enjoyed with us pure fun and frolic, as if we had been his close playmates. In the preceding chapter we have already touched upon one instance. In the period after the accident to his right leg, when he failed to carry out Dr. Manilal’s instructions about hanging the leg, he would exclaim as if out of fear, “Oh, Manilal is coming, I must hang my leg.” And one of us, piqued by his fear, would remark, “Sir, you seem to be afraid of Dr. Manilal.” When Manilal arrived and enquired about the leg, he replied, “The leg is still hanging.”

Yogis and great men there were, who used to joke with their disciples and friends; but it seems to me that there was always a barrier of awe and

reverence between them. And though Sri Aurobindo allowed us to forget that and we cut jokes with him on equal terms, the sense of his being our Guru was there.

At certain places in this book, I have given some indication of his sense of humour. Here I shall reveal it further by citing instances from several sources and add my little bit to the gaiety of nations. The readers will also notice how any circumstance or situation could trigger off his comic Muse either in the form of sustained volleys or quick sparkling shots.

An example of pure fun:

Sri Aurobindo was lying on the bed. We were talking in whispers among ourselves. Champaklal who had been trying to suppress his laughter let go suddenly and had to run away from the room. Sri Aurobindo, looking at us, said, "What divine descent was it?" I replied, checking my mirth, "Champaklal burst into laughter."

Sri Aurobindo: Oh, so it was Vishnu's Ananda that descended!

Later on, Champaklal said, "My eyes always remain watery."

Sri Aurobindo: Virgil had eyes like that, while Horace used to breathe hard. Once Mycaenas, the great patron of literature in the reign of Augustus Caesar, was sitting between the two poets and remarked, "I am sitting between sighs and tears."

Addressing Dr. Manilal with whom he was very free during the talks, Sri Aurobindo said, "Your mention of bribe and small amount makes me think of X. He said that people simply thrust the money on him and he couldn't but accept it. 'After all, it is a small bribe,' he argued. I was then reminded of the maidservant's story. She got an illegitimate child. The mistress of the house was very angry and rebuked her severely for the fault. She replied, 'But, oh madam, it is such a small one!'"

A sadhak, while meditating, saw a beautiful woman looking at him with plaintive eyes. He asked Sri Aurobindo about the meaning of the vision. Sri Aurobindo wrote back, "This is your weakness presenting itself to you in a concrete form and plaintively asking, 'Will you, won't you, will you?' When it comes, you have to say, 'Get thee behind me, plaintive Satan.'"

I wrote about a patient, “Most of the trouble is in the abduction of the hip joint... I will take him soon to Philaire [a French Surgeon].”

Sri Aurobindo: Abduction of a joint, sir? What’s this flagrant immorality? What happens to the joint when it is abducted? And what about the two colliding bones? Part of the abduction? Right. Abduct him to Philaire.

I wrote again: X had irregularity in her periods caused by physical and mental strain due to poetry.

Sri Aurobindo: Good Lord! If poetry is to be the parent of irregular menses!

I protested: It is not poetry, but physical and mental strain, Sir! Coming here, going there with the poem to send it to you, etc., etc. Not enough to cause strain?

Sri Aurobindo: You relieve me! I was thinking if poetry could be the parent of i.m., what it would do to you and Dilip and Nishikanto.

Moral purists, I am afraid, will burn with a righteous indignation at such uninhibited levity.

Once I asked him: Please give me some precise practical suggestions on the art of healing. How to bring down the Force?

He answered: My God, man! I am not a doctor. How? is there a how? You call, you open, it comes (after a time). Or, You don’t call, you open, it comes. Or, You call, you don’t open, it doesn’t come. Three possibilities. But how — ? Well, God he knows or perhaps he doesn’t.

In my medical report I wrote: No medical cases to report today.

Sri Aurobindo: Hello! Golden Age come or what? No — for R.B.’s pain is kicking cheerfully again. It is telling her, “Your Nirod’s potion and things indeed! I just went because I took the fancy. I go when I like, I come when I like. Doctors — pooh!”

Myself: Yesterday J’s finger was incised prematurely but there was hardly any pus. Today the swelling persists.

Sri Aurobindo: Mother suggests hot water 1 part peroxide, 3 parts water and dipping the finger for 15 minutes. Some of these things are cured by that — it ought really to be done immediately, but even now it may be effective.

Myself: Why, that is almost exactly what we have advised him to do from the very start, only peroxide was not given.

Sri Aurobindo: You are taking daily almost exactly the same thing as Anglo-Indians take in their clubs i.e. a peg. Only brandy and soda are not there — but the water is.

Myself: Couldn't touch the patient without making her shed tears. The ladies are thinking, "What heartless brutes these doctors are!"

Sri Aurobindo: Much safer than if they think, "What dears these doctors are, darlings, angels!"

Myself: I am plunged in a sea of dryness and I am terribly thirsty for something. Along with it waves of old desire. Any handy remedy?

Sri Aurobindo: Eucharistic injection from above, purgative rejection below; liquid diet, psychic fruit juice, milk of the spirit,

Myself: For this yoga one must have the heart of a lion, the mind of a Sri Aurobindo, the vital of a Napoleon.

Sri Aurobindo: Good Lord! Then I am off the list of the candidates — for I have neither the heart of a lion nor the vital of Napoleon."

Myself: What will be the nature of the physical transformation? Change of pigment? Mongolian features into Aryo-Greek? Bald head into luxuriant growth? Old men into Gods of eternal youth?

Sri Aurobindo: Why not seven tails with an eighth on the head — everybody different colours, blue, magenta, indigo, green, scarlet, etc.; hair luxuriant but vermilion and flying erect skywards; other details to match? Amen!

Now you can't surely say that all your points have not been cleared?

Myself: Again a blessed boil inside the left nostril — painful, feverish. A dose of Force, please.

Sri Aurobindo: As the modernist poet says

O blessed blessed boil within the nostril,  
How with pure pleasure dost thou make thy boss thrill!  
He sings of thee with sobbing trill and cross trill,  
O blessed, blessed boil within the nostril.

I hope this *stotra* will propitiate the boil and make it disappear, satisfied.

I complained: Inspiration is very wanton in its nature. I know nothing of its reason of arrival and departure. It has no railway time-table.

Sri Aurobindo: No reason. Only unreason or super-reason. Keep your end up and it will arrive again, and some day perhaps after jack-in-the-boxing like that sufficiently, one day it will sit down and say, “Here I am for good. Send for the priest and let us be married.” With these things that is the law and the rule and the reason and rhyme of it and everything.

Myself: The result of the last Darshan was disturbing in some quarters. Difficulties of individual nature rushing up?

Sri Aurobindo: Individual and general. The subconscious, sir, the subconscious. Brilliant irruptions of the subconscious Brahman into the dullness of the ordinary life. অবচেতনায় ব্রহ্মণে নমো নমঃ<sup>1</sup>

Talking about astrology, Dr. Manilal said, “I met an astrologer who was after money. But he didn’t know I was a hard master to deal with.” Pat came Sri Aurobindo’s answer, “He would have to propitiate Saturn before coming to you.” A gentle hit at Manilal’s parsimony!

“But there was another astrologer,” Manilal added, “a good man who is dead.”

Sri Aurobindo: And this is a bad man who is alive?

Satyendra: The psychic of the Divine is like a dictator.

Sri Aurobindo: It is more like a constitutional monarch who allows you to do whatever you like.

Satyendra: But it doesn’t come out.

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<sup>1</sup> Salute to the subconscious Brahman.

Sri Aurobindo: Because it waits for the consent of all the members of the cabinet.

A spiritual truth rendered in modern analogy.

Last example which can be taken as a piece of humour or as a serious statement.

Kalyan, a sadhak, offered to Sri Aurobindo the skin of the first tiger he shot, remarking to me, “Please tell the Lord that it is without the tiger’s skull. So, there is — no chance of his stumbling over it at all.” The Master replied with a smile, “Very well, it will be placed under my feet at Darshan.” Ever since it was always placed under his feet.

I think I can now close this chapter with the sense of “something done”. Here is what Sri Aurobindo has to say about the sense of humour: “Sense of humour? It is the salt of existence. Without it the world would have got utterly out of balance — it is unbalanced enough already — and rushed to blazes long ago.”

## CORRESPONDENCE AND INTERVIEWS

Correspondence of Sri Aurobindo with the disciples stopped to all intents and purposes as a consequence of his accident and it appeared that there was no chance of its resumption. Just as he would have no revival of the eight or nine hours' Darshan of the old days, so no more of the nine hours of correspondence. Besides, it had outlived its need. But as he began to recover and resumed work, correspondence with him took another form. People began to send verbal enquiries or questions or even letters through any one of us who was in sympathy with them. We also would gladly carry the queries and messages, as much for our own interest as for the sake of the communicants, since they would serve to create an opening for some talk with him on intellectual questions, life-problems, dream-experiences, etc. Sri Aurobindo would very often satisfy them with a generous response or lend spiritual help to their sadhana or worldly difficulties. People who had no connection with us also approached him for guidance. A few instances of this kind have been recorded in *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*. And quite a number of our own people, inmates or visitors, who never hoped to reach Sri Aurobindo through external means, had thus the "divine grace", as they called it, to be heard by the Lord.

The self-imposed seclusion was partially broken by the hand of Fate. There was the case of a visitor-friend who was unjustly involved in a criminal case and detained in jail. It was a serious case, indeed. Sri Aurobindo gave specific instructions on many legal points, backed undoubtedly by his spiritual Force, till it ended with the release of the accused. A Maharani, also involved in some legal suits, prayed to him for help. Then during the Hindu-Moslem riot in Calcutta constant frantic appeals were coming to him seeking advice, guidance, succour. When the Hindus were getting beaten in the first few days, Sri Aurobindo remarked, "Why don't the Hindus strike?" The very next day the scene changed; there was a tremendous counter-move. Lest people should be shocked to hear Sri Aurobindo advising violence, I refer them to *Essays on the Gita* where he discusses this question. Here I shall quote something from my correspondence. He says, "There is a truth in Ahimsa, there is a truth in Destruction also.... Non-violence is better than violence as a rule, and still sometimes violence may be the right thing...."



All the communications were, however, mostly made orally and did not interfere with Sri Aurobindo's personal work. But gradually correspondence of another sort began to demand his attention. I mean writings on various aspects of his work, either by sadhaks, visitors or outsiders, were sent to him for approval, comment or suggestion, such as Prof. Sisir Mitra's series of articles, Prof. Haridas Chowdhury's thesis on his philosophy, Prof. Sisir Mitra's book on history, books by Prof. Langley, Morwenna Donnelly, Prof. Monod-Herzen, Dr. Srinivas Iyengar, and Lizelle Raymond on Sister Nivedita, to mention a few. In the last three books Sri Aurobindo made extensive additions and changes. Even casual articles from young students were read and received encouragement from him. Arabinda Basu was one of these writers. Poems written by sadhaks, for instance, Dilip, Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna), Nishikanto, Pujalal and Tehmi, or a Goan poet, Prof. Menezies, were also read out. Then came the journals, *The Advent* and *Mother India*, the latter particularly, being a semi-political fortnightly, needed his sanction before the matter could be published. Most of the editorial articles of *Mother India* written by Amal Kiran were found impeccable. But on a few occasions small but significant changes were telegraphically made. Sri Aurobindo's famous message on Korea with its prediction of Stalinist communism's designs on South East Asia and India through Tibet, was originally sent in private to Amal Kiran for his guidance. One of the editorials was based on it. Sri Aurobindo declared privately that *Mother India* was his paper. When the *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* was launched, the Mother wanted to initiate it with an article from Sri Aurobindo. Some days passed. She asked him if he had started writing it. He answered with a smile, "No." After a few days, she reminded him of the urgency. Then he began dictating on the value of sports and physical gymnastics. Quite a series commenced and the most memorable of the lot was the article "The Divine Body". It was a long piece and took more than a week, since we daily had just about an hour to spare. As he was dictating, I marvelled at so much knowledge of Ancient Greece and Ancient India stored up somewhere in his superconscious memory and now pouring down at his command in a smooth flow. No notes were consulted, no books were needed, yet after a lapse of so many decades everything was fresh, spontaneous and recalled in vivid detail! This article, like his others, was then read out to the Mother in front of Sri

Aurobindo. She exclaimed, "Magnificent!" Sri Aurobindo simply smiled. All of them have appeared in book-form called *The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth*.

About some of the articles by others which were being read out to him, he asked, "Have you not read them before?" "No!" I replied. He repeated, "Are you sure?" "How could I? I received them only yesterday," I answered. "Very strange!" he added, "They seem so familiar, as if I had heard them already." He appeared much intrigued by this phenomenon and I wonder if he found an explanation of the mystery. Some articles by a former sadhak were filled with so many quotations from Sri Aurobindo's writings that I muttered my protest, "There is hardly anything here except quotations." He smiled and answered, "It doesn't matter." Once he asked me about a long abstruse article, "Probability in Micro-Physics", written by Amal. It was read out to Sri Aurobindo shortly before he passed away. He asked me, "Do you understand anything of it?" I said, "No!" He smiled and said, "Neither do I." Readings and dictated correspondence, as I have stated before, began to swell in volume and absorbed much of his limited time. Consequently the revision of *Savitri* suffered and had to be, shelved again and again till one day he declared, "My main work is being neglected."

Dilip's was a special case. Sri Aurobindo's accident had cut off all connection with him and Dilip suffered a lot. After some time, Sri Aurobindo made an exception and maintained correspondence with him almost until his withdrawal from his body. He even granted him an interview. Amal who was living in Bombay at the time was also an exception. Particularly important were the long answers (sometimes 24 typed sheets) Sri Aurobindo dictated to his questions on topics like "Greatness and Beauty in Poetry" as well as the correspondence centering on *Savitri*. All these constituted the last writings dictated by him. They are a work apart and form a permanent contribution to our appreciation of mystic poetry in general and *Savitri* in particular. It seemed to me that he did this lengthy work with much zest and was glad to have an opportunity to shed some light on his unique poem for its proper understanding in the future. Again, I would gape in wonder at his surprisingly vast knowledge.

And this lengthy communication required very little change. The exchanges between the Master and the disciple went off and on for two years through me and one cannot be too thankful to the disciple for drawing out the Master on his own creation. Another important work that was carried on for some time with Purani was on the Vedas about which I have written in the chapter Attendants.

Work of a different sort that did not interfere with his regular schedule was to correct various factual errors perpetrated by his biographers. Quite a number of people from outside started writing in English and Bengali about his life. One biography that gained some Popularity in Bengal and drew public attention was by a Bengali littérateur Shri Girija Shankar Roy Chowdhury. He was reputed to be a scholar and his articles were coming out in the well-known Bengali journal *Udbodhan*. But many of the facts he had collected and collated from heterogenous sources were entirely baseless and therefore the conclusions he had drawn from them wrong and fanciful. He took them for granted, without caring in the least to refer to Sri Aurobindo for verification. Since he was a man of some consequence, many of his articles were read before Sri Aurobindo who was amazed to find his erudition so muddled, and imagination so fantastic that he asked Purani to compile a sort of factual biography where only the facts of his life would be stated with precise dates and exact descriptions. Both, the Master and the disciple in collaboration, established on a sure and authentic foundation all the main incidents of his life and corrected those that passed into currency on the authority of the biographers. These are given at the end of Purani's book, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*. Sri Aurobindo was very much amused at the fanciful hypothesis drawn from his early love poems that he must have fallen in love more than once while in England! We could hardly control our laughter. Because of such inaccuracies, twisting of facts, colourful and hasty conclusions indulged in quite often by biographers, Sri Aurobindo discouraged the sadhaks from writing about his life since he did not “want to be murdered by his own disciples in cold print”. The greatest drawback of Girija Shankar’s book is that he does not seem to be an impersonal seeker of the truth about Sri Aurobindo’s life. He was already a partisan even when he began his so-called biography.

Among the interviews granted to public figures by Sri Aurobindo the first one was in September 1947, followed by a few others at a later date. It was a great concession on his part to break his self-imposed seclusion. A prominent French politician Maurice Schumann was deputed by the French Government as the leader of a cultural mission to see Sri Aurobindo and pay him homage from the French Government and to propose to set up at Pondicherry an institute for research and study of Indian and European cultures with Sri Aurobindo as its head. I was happily surprised to hear this great news, great in the sense that Sri Aurobindo had at all consented to the proposal, for I hailed it as an indication of his future public appearance. The fact that it came on the heels of India's Independence pointed to her role as a dominant power in the comity of nations, as envisaged by Sri Aurobindo. It seems Sri Aurobindo asked the Mother in what language he should speak to the delegates. The Mother replied, "Why, in French! You know French." Sri Aurobindo protested, "No, no! I can't speak in French." The Mother, Sri Aurobindo and the French delegates were closeted in Sri Aurobindo's room and we don't know what passed among them.

The second interview was with Sir C. R. Reddy, on December 11, 1948, one year after India's liberation, when he came to offer Sri Aurobindo, on behalf of the Andhra University, the National Prize for the humanities. On this occasion Sri Aurobindo gave a message to the Andhra University "re-emphasizing the unique and true role of resurgent India!" I may quote here the last few lines to show how India was always in the forefront of his consciousness: "... It would be a tragic irony of fate if India were to throw away her spiritual heritage at the very moment when in the rest of the world there is more and more a turning towards her for spiritual help and a saving Light. This must not and will not surely happen; but it cannot be said that the danger is not there.... No doubt we will win through, but we must not disguise from ourselves the fact that after these long years of subjection and its cramping and impairing effects, a great inner as well as outer liberation and change, a vast inner and outer progress is needed if we are to fulfil India's true destiny."

The next interview was with K. M. Munshi in April 1950. In previous years Sri Aurobindo had often mentioned Munshi in our talks. After the

interview Munshi said, “A deep light of knowledge and wisdom shone in his eyes. The wide calm of the spirit appeared to have converted the whole personality into the radiant Presence of one who shone with the light of Consciousness. He was the absolute integration of personality, the Central Idea in Aryan Culture materialised in human shape, one of the greatest architects of creative life.”

At another place, Munshi writes:

“When I visited Sri Aurobindo in 1950, after a lapse of more than forty years, I saw before me a being completely transformed, radiant, blissful, enveloped in an atmosphere of godlike calm. He spoke in a low, clear voice, which stirred the depths of my being. I talked to him of my spiritual needs. The sage replied: ‘...I wrote to you that I would help you and in my own way I am helping you.... I will watch over your progress.’

“Then we discussed Indian culture. I said: ‘The younger generation is being fed on theories and beliefs which are undermining the higher life of India.’ The Master replied: ‘You must overcome this lack of faith. Rest assured that our culture cannot be undermined. This is only a passing phase.’ Then the Mahayogi sprang a surprise on me. ‘When do you expect India to be united?’ he asked. I was taken aback. I explained to him how our leaders had agreed to partition. I then said: ‘So far as the present generation of politicians is concerned I cannot think of any time when the two countries — India and Pakistan — can be united.’ Sri Aurobindo smiled and averred: ‘India will be reunited. I see it clearly.’

“Was it an opinion? Was it a clear perception? I shook my head in doubt and asked how India could be reunited. In two short sentences the god-man described what Pakistan stood for and indicated how the two countries could come together.”<sup>1</sup>

Munshi was one of the prominent leaders of India at that time. He was to observe later: “He (Sri Aurobindo) saw into the heart of things. His perception of the political situation in India was always unerring. When the world war came in 1939 it was he of the unerring eye who said that the

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<sup>1</sup> *Bhavan's Journal*, December 26, 1971.

triumph of England and France was the triumph of the divine forces over the demoniac forces. He spoke again when Sir Stafford Cripps came with his first proposal. He said, 'India should accept it.' We rejected the advice... but today we realise that if the first proposal had been accepted, there would have been no partition, no refugees, and no Kashmir problem."

There was another interview in 1950 with the Maharaja of Bhavanagar who was then Governor of Madras. Sri Aurobindo was not well at that time. Still, he did not cancel the interview. I had the impression that he would have been willing to see other people too if they had so desired and would have conferred his blessings on them.

Then there were the long series of regular interviews with Surendra Mohan Ghose extending over some years up to even a few months before Sri Aurobindo's withdrawal. I should not call them interviews, for he was Sri Aurobindo's political follower in the early days, and later his disciple, and a prominent political leader of Bengal. Whenever he visited the Ashram, he had meetings with the Master to get guidance in his political work which he had accepted as his work. Sri Aurobindo used him as his instrument and said to us, "He is my man." In the talks he gave to the students of our Centre of Education, Surendra Mohan partially disclosed the various issues he had discussed with him. They were mostly international, national and provincial situations as well as spiritual matters. They constitute a very illuminating document testifying to Sri Aurobindo's external intervention in politics, besides his occult action. I often used to see Surendra Mohan in advance to get current news and Sri Aurobindo would ask, "What does Surendra Mohan say?"

Let me quote an instance to illustrate how Yogis have more insight into politics than politicians themselves. Surendra Mohan writes, "When I came here in October or November 1949, he asked me, 'Why have you not asked me anything about the communal situation in Bengal?' I said, 'There is nothing to report, it is all very quiet.' 'No, no, be careful. Something may happen.' And something terrible did happen — the communal killings." Yet, not even great leaders paid any heed to it; they thought it impossible even when Surendra Mohan apprised them of Sri Aurobindo's warning. Sri

Aurobindo predicted also “the Russo-Chinese rift and the disintegration of China one day”.

We ridicule the idea of Yogis having any knowledge of affairs outside their own “limited” spiritual field. Sri Aurobindo’s intervention during the Cripps’ Proposals was stigmatised as such an ignorant and illegitimate interference. More than once he demonstrated how false this notion is. Not only are Yogis aware of world-affairs, but those who ordinarily claim cognizance of them are actually ignorant and incompetent. For, according to Sri Aurobindo, unless one knows the domain of the Spirit, one’s knowledge of the world remains incomplete.

The Mother too gives directions to those who seek for them, whether they listen to them or not is their affair. Quite often they come to grief if they do not. Yet, are not Yogis supposed to have *trikāla drsti*?

Apropos of the integration of French India and the other French possessions with India, Surendra Mohan writes: “...All of us had to suffer for not having listened to Sri Aurobindo’s direction or advice. He sent me back saying, ‘Go and tell Gandhi, Nehru, Maulana, Sardar and Rajendra Prasad that it is for the good of India and ultimately for the good of the world that they should act on these lines and here is an opportunity I am giving them, let them accept and work on it.’ I went to Delhi — there was a meeting of the Working Committee of the Congress, everybody said, ‘A very good thing, very good,’ but it was never implemented.... The draft which Sri Aurobindo had made about the integration was on this basis that all the French possessions should immediately merge with India, with a right for Pondicherry to maintain its cultural contact with France. Because we did not implement it, a serious problem arose afterwards. To solve it I was again asked to go to Pondicherry after Sri Aurobindo had passed away in 1950.” And with the Mother’s help and intervention the whole plan of integration with India was finalised here. Yet the Mother was not at all willing at first to meddle in politics; she said she was not interested in it. Political problems were Sri Aurobindo’s field. When Surendra Mohan asked for an interview with her, she enquired, “Is he interested in seeing me?” The interview granted, he pressed upon the Mother to take up Sri Aurobindo’s cause and won his case.

I have purposely given long quotations in order to dispel our ignorant notions that Yogis live in a rarefied atmosphere of the Spirit and are indifferent to what passes on this plane of Matter; we forget that Spirit and Matter are two ends of existence. I shall give another minor, even humorous, instance of Matter's reality to Sri Aurobindo the Yogi, the poet and the philosopher. Sri Aurobindo was taking his meal, the Mother was serving him and we were standing nearby. She said, "X promised to offer us a big sum, but he has given only Rs.100 with a promise that the rest will follow. Shall we accept or refuse, Lord?" Sri Aurobindo quietly replied "Accept it and hope for the best." All of us, including the Mother, burst out laughing.

Another interview with Sri Aurobindo, which Surendra Mohan almost succeeded in bringing about, but which did not materialise, was with Mahatma Gandhi, in spite of both the parties' willingness to meet. Sri Aurobindo said, "He can come now. You may tell him this." Fate stepped in and foiled what could have been a momentous meeting!

Apart from these discussions on politics in which Sri Aurobindo gave a prophetic warning about China's intention and about the Hindu-Moslem situation in Bengal, Surendra Mohan speaks of some astrological reading regarding Sri Aurobindo, which vitally concerned us. According to Bhrigu astrology, he says, Sri Aurobindo after his 78th year, would develop a loathing towards his body and then would leave it; otherwise death was in his control, he was such a great Yogi.... It was also mentioned there that the Mother or he himself could perform a particular *yajña*, a sacrificial ceremony following elaborate instructions and repeating certain mantras. On hearing this Surendra Mohan immediately came here and informed the Mother about it. When Sri Aurobindo heard of it, he consoled him saying, "Don't worry." The Mother asked him to send a copy of those instructions but due to some misunderstanding they arrived too late to be of any possible use. Now, this reading took place probably in October 1950. I remember very well the Mother having a talk with Sri Aurobindo on this point. That the reading was unhappily true has been borne out by later developments. Sri Aurobindo's answer to Surendra Mohan was equivocal; we now know that he had already decided to leave a year before. Had the instructions arrived earlier and the *yajña* been performed, it is still improbable that Sri Aurobindo would have



changed his decision. The whole thing still remains a baffling mystery. We can only quote the Mother's words on the subject, uttered on 28.12.50: "Our Lord has sacrificed himself totally for us.... He was not compelled to leave his body, he chose to do so for reasons so sublime that they are beyond the reach of human mentality.... And when one cannot understand, the only thing is to keep a respectful silence." Another utterance on 18.1.51: "We stand in the Presence of Him who has sacrificed his physical life in order to help more fully his work of transformation.

"He is always with us, aware of what we are doing, of all our thoughts, of all our feelings and all our actions."

Surendra Mohan avers that this is very true in his case. He sees his Presence, and gets his guidance whenever he calls it.

## GOD DEPARTS

It is finished, the dread mysterious sacrifice,  
Offered by God's martyred body for the world.

*Savitri*, Book VI, Canto II

In the chapter on Talks I have indicated that in the late forties we began to notice a change coming over Sri Aurobindo. He was becoming more and more silent, aloof, as if deeply preoccupied with some problem and the talks were less and less frequent till they ceased almost completely. Many were the days when we hardly exchanged a word. We were attending on a god who had suddenly become aware of his true identity and would now escape from his human bondage. The contrast between the past years of abundance and the present years of famine was so striking that our minds were rife with all sorts of speculations as to the reason of this ominous silence. Was it a terrestrial problem or a supraterrrestrial one? Could there have been any possible dereliction of duty on our part? Was it due to the increasing symptoms of the disease that had now lodged in his body? As regards terrestrial affairs, the War had come to a successful completion, India had gained her freedom, for both of which he had worked incessantly. The supraphysical was out of our ken; so we could lay our finger only on the physical world. But that would be a very tenuous ground indeed on which to build our conjecture, for Sri Aurobindo certainly was the last Person to be perturbed by mere physical troubles, however serious they might be. Besides, he had cured this disease when it appeared the first time. Surely he could do it again, if that was the real issue! What ailed him then? Or was the disease more serious?

Let us go back to the origin of his illness and follow the sequence of events that ended with his leaving the physical sheath and were apparently its cause and try to discover the truth behind the appearance. One day we came to notice that Sri Aurobindo's urination had increased in frequency. He wanted to know the reason. The urine was examined and found to have an excessive amount of sugar with a trace of albumin. I reported the result to the Mother in Sri Aurobindo's presence and said, "It looks like diabetes." The Mother sharply retorted, "It is *not* diabetes." "What is it then?" I asked myself. The

Mother, however, reduced considerably the amount of starchy food, particularly rice and sweets for which Sri Aurobindo seemed to have a liking. For his age and his sedentary life, so much carbohydrate was surely bad. He could hardly now walk 6-7 hours a day as he used to. I was asked to examine the urine every week and apprise him of the result. In a few weeks' time it became sugar-free but the frequency did not altogether disappear. Sri Aurobindo too had noticed it. It made me suspect some mild prostatic enlargement. When Dr. P. Sanyal, F. R. C. S., England, paid a visit to the Ashram, I consulted him and at my request Sri Aurobindo saw him. After an enquiry he confirmed my suspicion, but added that it was just at the initial stage. He told Sri Aurobindo of the nature, course and complications of the disease, ultimately operation being the only radical cure. After a few months, on Sanyal's second visit, Sri Aurobindo told him emphatically, "It is no more troubling me. I have cured it." Our faith in the action of the Force was fortified and we felt no anxiety.

We could not say then that this change of mood had any connection with the disease. Not only with us, but with the Mother too, he became very reticent. However, with regard to his work, there was no flagging. Even when a little time was at our disposal and I was reluctant to bring out the numerous files containing the *Savitri* manuscript, just for half an hour, he would say, "We shall work a little." This provoked my other colleagues, particularly Champaklal, to an impish mirth, for they loved work and I did not, at least I did not then. And almost till his withdrawal the miscellaneous literary works and the labour on *Savitri* were carried on in full swing in spite of the discomfort caused by the gradual increase of the symptoms. In addition to these, when at this stage an importunate call came from an outside sadhika in Northern India to save her life from a dreaded and strange illness, he took great pains to cure her, especially as she was an intimate friend of an old sadhak who had made a desperate appeal to Sri Aurobindo's compassion. The story is rather long but intriguing. The doctors, as usual, differed about the diagnosis. Cancer, ulcer, T. B., none was found to be the case. One prominent symptom was profuse bleeding through the mouth but without any definite lesion of any organ. All kinds of tests and treatment failed. At last the patient gave up all treatment and said that she would depend entirely on Sri

Aurobindo, even if she were to die. Sri Aurobindo then took up the responsibility at the supplication of the sadhak-bhakta, I believe, but on one condition that regular news must be supplied to him. The bhakta himself went from Pondicherry to the patient's place with a view to fulfil the condition. News began to stream in by letters, wires about her daily progress. Suddenly it stopped. Sri Aurobindo became anxious and enquired again and again if any news had come. I tried to plead on their behalf and give the usual excuses for the delay. At last he remarked, "How am I to save her if I have no news?" After two or three days, information began to flow in and very soon the patient recovered completely and came to settle in the Ashram. Her illness turned out to be a case of black magic. That is why the symptoms were erratic and there was no definite lesion in spite of their gravity. That was what probably made Sri Aurobindo so anxious about the case. We modern people may scoff at such unscientific superstition, but in this case, there was very solid ground in favour of such a belief. Though Sri Aurobindo took charge of the case, at each fresh arrival of news, he would ask me to keep the Mother informed. "Have you informed the Mother?" he would repeat. I did not understand why he was so insistent on the point; it was not his nature. Did he suspect that I might not, and I really felt no necessity, such was my human stupidity, trying to be wiser than the Guru! The reason for it became clear when he left the body. He had already taken the decision and wanted the Mother to know all about the case in anticipation of possible future developments.

The revision of *Savitri* was going on apace with regular unabated vigour. Book after Book was getting done and fascicules of them released for publication. Some 400-500 lines of The Book of Everlasting Day were dictated on successive days, since we could not spare more than an hour a day for the monumental work and that too had often to be cut short to meet other demands. We were, nevertheless, progressing quite steadily. I marvelled at the smooth spontaneous flow of verse after verse of remarkable beauty. Once I had complained to him in my correspondence why, having all the planes of inspiration at his command, should he still labour like us mortals at his *Savitri*. Why should not the inspiration burst out like the "champagne bottle"? Now I witnessed that miracle and imagined that it also must have

been the way Valmiki composed his Ramayana. At this rate, I thought, *Savitri* would not take long to finish. On everyone's lips was the eager query, "How far are you with *Savitri*?"

But *Savitri*, as I have mentioned, was not his sole preoccupation. Many other adventitious tasks were thrust upon him and he did not say "No" to them out of the magnanimity of his divine nature.

During his last months the symptoms of prostatic enlargement reappeared and began to increase slowly. It was like a tiny dark cloud on the horizon and I fancied it would be blown away by the action of his Force, since he had been made aware of the serious consequence of the disease. Synchronous with this advance, we observed a noticeable change in his mood. Our talks, the only occasion when the Divine would become human and play with us, diminished. He was no longer expansive; humour, wit, sally, fun, all had shrivelled up and we were in front of a temple deity, impassive, aloof and indifferent — *udāsīna*. However much we tried to draw him out from his impregnable sanctum of silence we were answered by a monosyllabic "yes" or "no" or at most a faint smile. Naturally, such a radical change made us uneasy and set us speculating on its probable causes.

One day taking courage in both hands, Dr. Satyendra asked, "Why are you so serious, Sir?" Sri Aurobindo answered gravely, "The time is very serious." The answer left us more mystified; we could not probe further. This would mean that, as we will see later, he had taken the decision to leave his body and that was the first and last verbal indication of the gravity of the situation, not that he could be attached to his own personal existence in the body — no Yogi is — but there were vaster issues connected with the decision and demanded attention.

Meanwhile, urinary symptoms were worsening and now a trace of albumin was detected. He was informed, but made no comment. Then acetone appeared, a grave signal. He heard it in silence and said, "Tell the Mother." The Mother too heard it quietly. It all seemed so terribly mysterious. I was perplexed by their seeming indifference as compared with their former concern. Something must have gone amiss, surely. The mystery was too deep

for my plummet to fathom, but I had faith that everything would turn out all right in the end.

The work on *Savitri* proceeded as usual, but slowed down in pace, especially when we came to a mighty confrontation with the two big Cantos of The Book of Fate. Revision after revision, addition of lines, even punctuations changed so many times! It seemed like a veritable “God’s labour” against a rock of resistance. At this time the Press sent up a demand for a new book from him. *The Future Poetry* was given preference and some passages which were meant to be dovetailed into the text of the chapters were written. But since he wanted to write something on modern poetry and for this works of modern poets were needed, orders were sent to Madras for them while whatever few books were available from our small library were requisitioned. As I read them out, he said, “Mark that passage,” or “These lines have a striking image” — (once the lines referred to were, I think, from C. Day Lewis’ *Magnetic Mountain*). He himself read out a poem of Eliot’s to me — I don’t remember exactly which, and remarked, “This is fine poetry.” In this way we proceeded. Since we had to wait for the arrival of the books, he said, “Let us go back to *Savitri*.” His whole attention seemed

to be focussed on *Savitri*, but again, the work had to be suspended owing to the pressure of various extraneous demands. They swelled up to such an extent that he was obliged to remark, “I find no more time for my real work.” When the path was fairly clear and I was wondering what his next choice would be, he said in a distant voice, “Take up *Savitri*. I want to finish it soon.” This must have been about two months before his departure. The last part of the utterance startled me, though it was said in a subdued tone. I wondered for a moment if I had heard rightly. I looked at him; my bewildered glance met an impassive face. In these twelve years this was the first time I had heard him reckoning with the time factor. An Avatar of poise, patience and equanimity, this was the picture that shone before our eyes whenever we had thought or spoken about him. Hence my wonder. We took up the same two Cantos that had proved so intractable. The work progressed slowly; words, ideas, images seemed to be repeated; the verses themselves appeared to flow with reluctance. Once a punctuation had to be changed four or five times. When the last revision was made and the Cantos were wound up, I said, “It is

finished now.” An impersonal smile of satisfaction greeted me, and he said, “Ah, it is finished?” How well I remember that flicker of a smile which all of us craved for so long! “What is left now?” was his next query. “The Book of Death and The Epilogue.” “Oh, that? We shall see about that later on.” That “later on” never came and was not meant to come. Having taken the decision to leave the body, he must have been waiting for the right moment to go, and for reasons known to himself he left the two last-mentioned Books almost as they were. Thus on *Savitri* was put the seal of incomplete completion about two weeks before the Darshan of November 24th. Other literary works too came to an end.

And significantly The Book of Fate was the last Book to be revised. What I deemed to be minor flaws or unnecessary repetitions, and thought that a further revision would remove them, appeared, after his passing, to be deliberate and prophetic:

A day may come when she must stand unhelped  
On a dangerous brink of the world’s doom and hers  
.....  
In that tremendous silence lone and lost  
.....  
Cry not to heaven, for she alone can save.  
.....  
She only can save herself and save the world.<sup>1</sup>

We know how true these words have proved.

There were now ten days or so for the Darshan. Owing to the onset of winter, the symptoms increased. At this time Dr. Satyabrata Sen F.R.C.S., England, paid a visit to the Ashram.

He was consulted. He confirmed Dr. Sanyal’s previous diagnosis and said that the gland had enlarged. Sri Aurobindo remarked that he too had the same feeling. “But what is the remedy?” he asked. Surgical intervention was the only radical cure, but Dr. Sen knew that the Mother and Sri Aurobindo would

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<sup>1</sup> *Savitri*, The Book of Fate, Canto II.

not approve of it. Not to speak of an operation, the mere use of a catheter was not favoured. One night the urine flow stopped altogether. I ran in a panic to call Sen, as there were signs of some distress. In my absence, the urine had started flowing. He seemed to have asked for me and on learning that I had gone to fetch the doctor, he remarked, "Why? Has he lost his head?" I was so happy to learn of the release of the obstruction that even my "loss of head" did not matter. Then he said to me, "Why have you unnecessarily troubled this poor fellow? You see, I had a dream in which I was freely passing water, but when I woke up, I found this obstruction. Nothing more. Do you understand?" His tone was very sweet. Then I understood that it was his look of surprise and concern that had given me the impression of distress. But obstruction was obstruction and one had to relieve it. Nevertheless all of us were happy. Next day when the Mother learnt the story, she too made a remark to the same effect. She said, "Having passed so many years with Sri Aurobindo, you still get frightened?" "What to do, Mother?" I replied humbly. "We are dealing with no other person than Sri Aurobindo." "That is exactly why you should never be afraid. Don't you know that his mighty Force is always with you and helping you? No, fear has no place at all, especially among you who are serving him." I felt ashamed but uplifted as well.

The Darshan was now upon us. A letter had arrived from an astrologer stating that Sri Aurobindo would be subject to a grave malady which might even threaten his life. We simply pooh-poohed the idea, but Sri Aurobindo did not pass it off so lightly. He asked, "Will you enquire what exactly he has written? I feel that he has caught some truth." Sometime previously Dr. Manilal was also told by an astrologer that Sri Aurobindo was going to leave his body and if Dr. Manilal wanted to see his Guru, he had better rush to Pondicherry. When he reported this prediction to Sri Aurobindo, he simply smiled. There were quite a number of predictions about this time to the same effect. Surendra Mohan Ghose has narrated a similar one published in *Mother India* which I have already described at some length in the previous chapter. Still, I was not a little surprised to find Sri Aurobindo giving credence to such seemingly wild forecasts. For his view with regard to astrology was that its predictions were often uncertain, more especially about the Yogis, since



they can change their own and others' destiny. The predictions of Narayan Jyotishi, a famous astrologer of Calcutta, about him had all come true, except the one about a serious illness at the age of 63. But that too, it was said, would be overcome by his yogic force, and he would live up to a ripe old age. Sri Aurobindo writes in *Savitri*,

Nature and Fate compel his free-will's choice.  
But greater spirits this balance can reverse  
And make the soul the artist of its fate.<sup>1</sup>

The latest prediction was found, on enquiry, to have been misreported. It did not have such an appalling import, but that import proved to be true.

The Darshan was on. A vast crowd had gathered. Unaware that it would be the last Darshan, some people were drawn in by an unknown force and later thought themselves specially blessed. There were others who missed it and nourished a lifelong regret. It was mooted at one time whether the Darshan should not be postponed, since it might cause a considerable strain and exhaustion leading to further aggravation of the disease; But the proposal was brushed aside out of compassion for the devotees. Everybody, even persons quite ill, was given permission. Everything went off well, the atmosphere was charged with a solemn silence. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo were love and compassion incarnate; light, joy, peace, sweetness and strength emanated from them as from the sun and moon. After about two hour's an uneasy stir, a nervous tension was felt in the crowd. A whisper had gone round that the Master would like the Darshan to finish as soon as possible. Then in quick steps the long queue passed and everyone received the last memorable blessings from him.

He came back to his room somewhat tired. It was about 5 p.m. He had eaten practically nothing the whole day. The first utterance he made was, "I am very hungry." We had never heard such a frank personal note from him before. The meal was quickly served by the Mother and taken in grave silence.

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<sup>1</sup> *Savitri*, Book VII, I.

In the week following Darshan, one day when Sri Aurobindo was taking his bath, Purani read out an astrological forecast predicting that Sri Aurobindo would undo himself and that “his manifestation would come about in his 93rd year”. Sri Aurobindo heard it quietly and remarked, “So late as that!” We, of course, took it as, one of the Bickerstaff prophecies. But how true was the first part!

The symptoms grew more serious and a partial obstruction to the flow of urine made us think of mechanical intervention. When it became complete and was causing distress, Dr. Sen and we had no other alternative but to pass a catheter, much against his will. It was followed by immediate relief. We felt light and cheerful. Then a wire was sent to Dr. Sanyal to come down at once. He had been forewarned to be ready for such an emergency call. Our joy was unfortunately short-lived, for in the wake of the intervention crept in the dark shadow of the fever, a not unusual complication, but all the same it brought a cold shiver. At this juncture, Sanyal’s arrival acted like warm sunshine.<sup>1</sup>

We apprised him of the whole clinical picture since his last visit. He approached Sri Aurobindo, did pranam but found him “seemingly unconcerned, with eyes closed, like a statue of massive peace”. Then he opened his eyes, recognised him and gave him a serene smile. The doctor asked him regular professional questions to which he answered, “Trouble? Nothing troubles me, and suffering — one can be above it.” I mentioned the urinary difficulties. “Well, yes; I had some difficulties, but they were relieved and now I don’t feel anything,” he replied reassuringly. Sanyal told the Mother that there was a mild kidney infection, but nothing serious. We were consoled. But he wondered how, after Sri Aurobindo had cured himself, there could be this recrudescence.

Then came the 1st and 2nd December programmes for the School Anniversary. The entire Ashram was busy and bustling. The Mother also had no rest. Nobody suspected that a profound tragedy was being enacted in the closed chambers of Sri Aurobindo. His ailment had been kept a guarded

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<sup>1</sup> Much of the material that follows has been taken from Dr. Sanyal’s pamphlet, *A Call from Pondicherry*.

secret. On 1st December, some improvement was noticed; the temperature was normal. He was in a more cheerful mood and even joked with Sanyal. When the doctor suggested that a detailed blood examination would be advisable, Sri Aurobindo smiled and retorted, "You doctors can think only in terms of disease and medicine, but always there is much more effectual knowledge beyond and above it. I don't need anything." We were very happy with the answer, but missed its ambiguous import and thought that it carried a consoling assurance. Next evening the temperature shot up. It had been a heavy day for the Mother because of the Annual Physical Display in the Playground where more than two hundred people took part. The function went off well. When Sri Aurobindo was informed of it, he remarked with a contented smile, "Ah, it is finished!" As soon as the activities were over, the Mother came to Sri Aurobindo's room, placed the garland from her neck at his feet and stood there quietly. Her countenance was very grave. He was indrawn with his eyes closed. Later Sanyal expressed a desire to use some drugs in order to fight the infection. The Mother warned him against the use of any violent drugs or drastic methods not only because Sri Aurobindo would not like them, but they would be, on the contrary, positively harmful. "He will work out whatever is necessary. Give some simple medicines," was her instruction.

On 3rd December, the temperature again dropped to normal. Thinking that Sri Aurobindo was improving, Sanyal proposed to leave that evening. The Mother heard him gravely, but gave no reply. He took the hint and added quickly, "I would rather stay for a few more days, Mother." A smile lit up her face. In the afternoon the picture rapidly changed. The temperature shot up, respiratory distress showed itself for the first time. Sri Aurobindo refused to take any liquid. At the Mother's persuasion he sipped some fruit juice and immediately lapsed into a trance. Almost the whole day he remained in that condition. The Mother, owing to this set-back, did not go to the Playground.

Then, for the first time, the Mother said, "He is losing interest in himself." To our request for some energetic measure, she now replied, "It all depends on him." The long night passed in distress alternating with an indrawn condition. He would wake up, however, only when we wanted to give him a drink. Sometimes he even expressed a choice in the matter.

On the next day, he emerged from the depth and wanted to sit up. In spite of our objection, he strongly insisted. We noticed after a while that all the distressing breathing symptoms had magically vanished and he looked his normal self. We were so happy at this sudden change and thought that at last our prayer had been heard. Then he moved to the chair. We boldly asked him now, "Are you not using your force to cure yourself?" "No!" came the stunning reply. We could not believe our ears; to be quite sure, we repeated the question. No mistake! Then we asked, "Why not? How is the disease going to be cured otherwise?" "Can't explain; you won't understand," was the curt reply. We were dumbfounded.

At last the clue to a part of the enigma was found, the reason why the disease had come back and progressed. But the big mystery as to his strange attitude and non-intervention still remains. The increasing gravity of the disease was visible in three clear stages concomitant with the completion of *Savitri*, the Darshan and the School Anniversary, each progressive stage followed by a deeper and deeper trance. It was probably at the second stage that the Mother remarked, "Each time I enter his room, I see him pulling down the Supramental Light." Evidently, he had fixed the date of his departure and was pulling down the highest Light before the curtain fell. We misinterpreted the Mother's words to mean that the descending Light was meant to cure him. After an hour in the chair he went back to bed, serene and majestic in poise. Sanyal even held a brief talk about Bengal's pitiable plight. But the Mother knew the truth behind the appearance.

Since midday the symptoms were on the increase, particularly the breathing difficulty; urine output definitely diminished. That was an alarming signal. We decided to make a thorough blood analysis. Sri Aurobindo consented after a great deal of reluctance. Our poor human vision! It was a Sunday; the General Hospital was closed. Dr. Nripendra and I hunted out the laboratory assistant; he took some blood from Sri Aurobindo's imperceptible vein. The punctures were painful to the sensitive body which was getting transformed. The result of the examination staggered us. All the signs of imminent kidney failure and nothing to be done! As a last resort we had to give some drugs. He was now always indrawn, and only woke up whenever he was called for a drink. That confirmed the Mother's observation that he

was fully conscious within and disproved the idea that he was in uraemic coma. Throughout the entire course of the illness he was never unconscious.

By 5 p.m. there was a respite and he called for the commode. In view of the distress, we requested him not to move out of the bed, but he firmly insisted. He knew evidently what he was doing while we always looked through our medical glasses. There was a thorough purposive clearance of the bowels though he had taken very little food for many days. He then walked to the big cushion chair; again a self of calm repose. Alas, but for a brief instant. The respiratory distress returned with redoubled force. He went to his bed and plunged deep within himself. It was during this period that he often came out of the trance, and each time leaned forward, hugged and kissed Champaklal who was sitting by the side of his bed. Champaklal also hugged him in return. A wonderful sight it was, though so strangely unlike Sri Aurobindo who had rarely called us even by our names in these twelve years. We knew that Champaklal particularly longed for some tender outward expression. But Sri Aurobindo's impersonal nature kept at bay all personal touches except during our birthday or Darshan pranams when he would pat and caress our heads. Now Champaklal had his heart's yearning gratified to the full extent. But on what grounds? Was it the repayment of God's debt to his "servant" for his lifelong dedicated service without the expectation of any other meed than perhaps some occasional look or touch or word? For my part too, I can count a few glowing touches that shine like stars on a dark night. First of all, soon after the completion of *Savitri*, as I would enter his room in the morning, he would cast a moment's quiet glance at me leaving me in wonderment but happy. Then, when I did pranam on my birthday, 17th November, and the last Darshan day, he was unusually tender and caressed and pressed my head for a long time. But the climax of the wonder came when I was massaging his right leg. He was quietly lying down in bed; I was within the reach of his right hand. As I bent down, I suddenly felt a quick touch of his palm on my head. At once I looked up; all was as before. His gaze was elsewhere as if he knew nothing about it. I was utterly mystified. That these were indications of his imminent withdrawal became clear only after he had left the body. I am sure my other colleagues also received either vivid or veiled tokens.

Even a non-attendant, Amal Kiran, reported a last act of Grace that was his good fortune: “My turn to go up to the Darshan of November 24, 1950, came. As soon as my wife and I appeared at the door of the long Meditation Room upstairs, at the other end of which was the small room where Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were sitting, the Mother leaned towards Sri Aurobindo and said something. At once he started smiling. All through the Darshan the smile was on his lips, and my wife tells me that until I disappeared into the next room on my way out, he was looking in my direction and smiling. Such a thing had never happened at any other Darshan I had attended. This was just eleven days before he passed away.

“When I had an interview with the Mother after December 5, I asked her what she had whispered to Sri Aurobindo. She replied, ‘I told him, Amal is coming.’ I inquired why she had to give the information. Her answer was, ‘Sri Aurobindo’s eyes had gone very bad. He could not see people clearly. Of course he could contact the consciousness of whoever was before him but could not recognise the outer being and form. The moment he heard me, he began to smile.’

“From these words I realise that the Grace was as much the Mother’s as Sri Aurobindo’s. For it was through the one that the other had come.”

To go back to our account, the Mother returned from the Playground after her usual attendance in the evening. I have said that she did not go there on the previous day. As a result the activities of the Playground were suspended. A deep gloom fell upon the hearts of the young group members. The Playground which used to bustle with energy and noise became ominously still. It was the first time an apprehension had loomed over the people that Sri Aurobindo’s condition was serious. The Mother must have felt the poignant despondency of her children and the next day she had to appear in the Playground. As soon as she stepped in, everything changed: there was sunshine on every face and people were lulled into the belief that all was well. Some of them said, “We could never imagine that things were so bad. For the Mother had such self-composure and a look of detachment that it was only when on the 3rd of December she did not come to the Playground that we fell from the sky. But when on the next day she came into our midst, the nightmare passed and we forgot everything.”

On returning to Sri Aurobindo she laid her garland at his feet and stood and watched him. She again remarked, "He is withdrawing himself." At 11 p.m. she helped him take a drink. At midnight she came again. This time he opened his eyes and the two looked at each other in a steady gaze. We were the silent spectators of that crucial scene. What passed between them was beyond our mortal ken, but Sri Aurobindo's look seemed to bear a touch of unusual softness. At 1 a.m. she came back, her face was calm, there was no trace of emotion. Sri Aurobindo was indrawn. The Mother asked Sanyal in a quiet tone, "What do you think? May I retire for an hour?... Call me when the time comes."

It may appear strange to our human mind that the Mother should leave Sri Aurobindo at this critical moment. We must remember that we are not dealing with human consciousness. The Mother's consciousness always being united with Sri Aurobindo's, the physical nearness is not indispensable at all times. Besides, we know that at this particular hour she had very important occult work to do. Personal motives do not exist, as the Mother has said, for those who are conscious with the Divine Consciousness.

Even after the Mother's broad hint before she left the room and despite clear signs of impending tragedy, I could not really believe that he was going to leave us. We hoped against hope and expected a miracle, knowing very well that such spectacular miracles were not in accordance with the process of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga. If he wanted to save himself, he would not have allowed the disease to run its course and then dramatically reverse the fatal decree. But one fondly clings to one's delusions. That is why we did not inform anyone of the imminent danger. About ten minutes before the grand end, he called me by my name from his indrawn state, inquired about the time and said, "Nirod, give me a drink." This was his deliberate last gesture. The quantity he drank was very small and there was no apparent need of calling me by name. Those last words still ring in my ears and remain inscribed on my soul. Apparently they express nothing more than a physical need. But to us who look upon the Mother and Sri Aurobindo as the incarnations of the Divine, one word, one look, one touch are rare gifts added to the treasures of the soul. And to me, especially, these few words carried an assurance that he

had not forgotten me even in his last moment. They were a reminder of the pledge he had given before that he would never forsake me.

After this utterance, followed the final plunge. At 1.26 a.m., leaving his physical sheath, “the Colonist from Immortality” departed from the earthly habitation, in the presence of the Mother who stood near his feet with an intense penetrating gaze, an incarnation of divine strength, poise and calm. Champaklal broke down completely and began to sob. He could not accept the hard fact. The Mother made him quiet with a stern look. After half an hour, she left us alone.

Immersed in silent, incommunicable grief we sat by his immobile body. From that stupor, Sanyal woke me up and said, “A lot of things to do; get up.” Yes, the body had to be prepared for public view. News had already gone abroad. The Ashram photographers who had no chance to take photos of the Living would now take them of the Maha Samadhi. “In the morning twilight of the gods,” the sadhaks came one by one and saw the Marvel and the Mystery, the body of the Golden Purusha in eternal sleep. And with tears of joy and grief they offered their prayer to the One who had sacrificed all for them.

I also saw, to my utter wonder and delight, that the entire body was suffused with a golden crimson hue, so fresh, so magnificent. It seemed to have lifted my pall of gloom and I felt light and happy without knowing why. When the Mother came, I asked naively, “Mother, won’t he come back?” “No!” she replied, “If he wanted to come back, he would not have left the body.” Pointing to the Light she said, “If this Supramental Light remains we shall keep the body in a glass case.” Alas, it did not remain and on the fifth day, on the 9th of December in the evening, the body was laid in a vault.

Before this, for four days, the disciples, the people of the town, Ashram employees had the unique Darshan and paid their homage. Bhaktas had come from different parts of India for the benediction of the last Darshan of the Guru. Many of them felt the room surcharged with peace, force, light or bliss. Some saw Sri Aurobindo sitting on the bed and saying, “I am here, I am here!” as if to falsify Nature’s decree. Dilip happened to be away. On receiving the



news, he arrived posthaste and utterly broke down. The Mother tenderly consoled and assured him, “How can I not love someone whom Sri Aurobindo loved? What do you think we are here for? Only to please Sri Aurobindo.” He told me, “You don’t know, Nirod, what I have lost.” Amal Kiran too was not there. He had just left on the night of 3rd December for Bombay after meeting the Mother. He flew back as soon as he got the news. He was in the Ashram on the morning of the 6th. He has written in his reminiscences entitled *The Grace of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*:

“I who had depended so much on Sri Aurobindo in all my writing work — when he had woken to inspiration the labouring poet, stirred to literary insight the fumbling critic, shaped out of absolute nothing the political commentator — I who had almost every day despatched to him some piece of writing for consideration felt a void at the thought that he would not be in that room of his, listening so patiently to my poetry or prose and sending me by letter or telegram his precious guidance. A fellow-sadhak, Udar, spoke to the Mother about my plight. On December 12, the inmates of the Ashram met her again and each received from her hands a photograph of Sri Aurobindo taken after his passing. It was dusk, as far as I recollect. She must have seen a certain helplessness on my face. Smiling as she alone can do, she looked me in the eyes and said, ‘Nothing has changed. Call for inspiration and help as you have always done. You will get everything from Sri Aurobindo as before.’”

Champaklal remained sitting at the foot of the bed day and night. The Mother gave him a good quantity of milk to drink at night — that was all for physical sustenance.

The Mother paid her visits to the room twice or thrice a day, clad in a white robe and with a scarf tied over her hair. Her face calm and grave, yet softened with a maternal sweetness, she looked like Maheshwari of transcendent glory. She would stand silently before the body, look at it for some time and quietly retire. Sometimes she was accompanied by Nolini, Pavitra, Amrita and others. She did not want the body to be touched and wished that an utter silence should prevail in the room at all times.

On 9th December, the Light faded and signs of discoloration here and there were visible. Then, according to the Mother's direction, the body was put into a specially prepared rosewood casket lined with silver sheet and satin and the bottom made comfortable with cushions. Sri Aurobindo's body was wrapped in a gold-embroidered cloth. At 5 p.m. the body was carried by the sadhaks to the Ashram courtyard under the Service tree where a cement vault had been under construction from 5th December. Udar climbed down into the vault to receive the casket and put it in its proper position. As the box was lowered a friend of mine said that a prayer sprang spontaneously from his heart: "Now that you have gone physically, assure us that your work will be done." Something made him look up at the Service tree and suddenly he saw against it Sri Aurobindo; his undraped upper body was of a golden colour. He said firmly with great energy and power in Bengali, "Habe, habe, habe" — "It will be done, it will be done, it will be done." Then, as wished by the Mother, Champaklal came first to place a potful of earth upon the slate of the vault, followed by Moni, Nolini and other sadhaks. The ceremony was quiet and solemn. The Mother watched it from the terrace above Dyuman's room. Hundreds of sadhaks stood in the courtyard in silent prayer and consecration. The most blessed Service tree amply fulfils its name by offering the Samadhi day and night, a cool shade and sweet-scented flowers.

Thus came to a close the physical life of the One who, without the world knowing it, worked unceasingly for the world and will continue doing so, careless of human reward of any kind and accepting the success of his mission as the only recompense. Of the latter he was absolutely sure, but were it to end in failure, he said that he would still go on unperturbed, because "I would still have done to the best of my power the work that I had to do, and what is so done counts always in the economy of the universe." Was it the sacrifice that he called, "paying here God's debt to earth and man"? Never has there been recorded in earth-history a phenomenon where a person of Sri Aurobindo's supreme eminence has lived secluded from the world-gaze and quietly and unobtrusively passed away. Such a complete self-effacement can be thought of only of one who is a god or has become a god. It is certain that one day the world will wake up to realise who he was and what it owes to him as it becomes more and more enlightened in its consciousness. Already,

some faint glimmerings of that recognition are visible in the Eastern sky, “a long lone line of hesitating hue”. His Birth Centenary is knocking at our door. Rabindranath’s salutation to him in his political days will turn into a salutation of the whole of humanity as its lover and saviour. The long lone hue will be transformed into a full blaze of the living Sun.

I need not add that the Samadhi of Sri Aurobindo is not just a conventional place of pilgrimage. Every part of it is vibrant with the Consciousness-Force that the Master embodied during his unparalleled lifelong sadhana. From the oldest to the youngest, devotees see his glorious face, hear his ethereal voice, receive his answer to their prayers and become filled with something that cannot be mathematically proved, but subjectively apprehended. Yogis, saints and sadhus through the ages have done miracles; the Samadhi does the same in a different way; it is a Presence that radiates a constant stream of Peace, Light, Force, and responds to all our soul-needs when we approach it with faith and devotion.

## CONCLUSION

### He is here

Again the unexpected! All of a sudden the curtain dropped on the divine drama that had been unrolled for twelve years. Who could have foreseen it? The Supreme Actor who had apparently been quite well and given darshan to the bhaktas on his birthday, August 15, as well as on November 24, most unexpectedly left the stage! When the news was announced on the radio, it came as a heart-rending to the devotees all over the world and just at a time when his name spelt a word of hope to aspiring humanity, as a Yogi, Rishi, poet, philosopher, lover of mankind and bringer of new Light. It was hard to believe and many rushed to Pondicherry by whatever means available to have the last darshan of the Sage.

It is now twenty-two years since he left us; His Birth Centenary in which the Government of India is taking a significant part as a modest recognition of Sri Aurobindo's greatness, is going to be observed all over India and in many parts of the world. Meanwhile the Supramental Manifestation has taken place and the Ashram in consequence has come to be regarded by the world as a spiritual institution from which a new Light is radiating upon earth. Politically, India is gaining a world-status and a serious obstacle to her greatness has been partially removed fulfilling his prophecy. We see then the purpose for which Sri Aurobindo took birth and the dreams he cherished and worked for are on their way to realisation. He did not come for a few individuals only, or for a single nation or race; he came for the transformation of earth-nature which had been abandoned to herself by God and man. God-men came to give some relief to the suffering humanity or to show it a door of escape from suffering, but none before Sri Aurobindo, the Supramental Avatar, accepting Matter as essentially Brahman, came to divinise it. When the work was going apace the curtain dropped, all of a sudden.

The question surges up like an old suppressed ache, "Why did he leave his body? What imperious necessity compelled his withdrawal, self-chosen though it was? Had the accident which had changed his rhythm of life any connection with it, however subtle or remote? What would have been the

course of events had there been no accident?" The Mother told a sadhak in 1935 that in ten years' time she would look as young as a girl of 16. To me also she narrated at length a similar vision of hers, the gist of which is that she and Sri Aurobindo had become young and exquisite so much so that none of the sadhaks could recognise them. From Sri Aurobindo's letters too we had the intuition that the Supramental descent in the physical was imminent. In one of the sonnets written in 1940 we find him speaking of abolishing death and of his physical transformation:

... Under the mask grows clear  
The mould of an imperishable face.

Well, notwithstanding all these bright prospects, what turned the wheel backwards? What inevitable fiat cancelled and ruled supreme over the glorious promise? Vain, otiose are such speculations and questions, for answers also would be speculative unless he or the Mother herself unravelled the mystery.

Along with his mysterious self-immolation another question which is also somewhat mysterious puzzles us: Why did he choose the "natural way" to leave his body when he could have easily left it in the yogic way, as Yogis usually do? The answer that I have found is that Sri Aurobindo's life has respected the rules and laws of Nature, what he has called the conditions of the game. But even these conditions are adapted to a new direction of which Nature, though not pursuing it, is secretly capable. Thus Nature is put to a supernatural use. Whenever any directly miraculous or special intervention has been made either in his own case or in the case of others, then too it is not by utter flouting of those rules and laws, a freakish and ultimately inconsequential movement. A process is still followed. Sri Aurobindo sums up the several sides of the Divine's action thus: "The Divine also acts according to the conditions of the game. He may change them, but he has to change them first, not proceed, while maintaining the conditions, to act by a series of miracles." In following this course of Nature, he probably wanted to have the concrete experience of Death which would help him in the conquest of the Power of Death for the world from across the barrier. Also

this natural way created conditions of crisis which would bring about an urgent and extraordinary response from the spiritual Force so that side by side with the progression towards death there would be the precipitation of the Supramental Light. A sign of what was being done may be seen from the Mother's statement: "As soon as Sri Aurobindo withdrew from his body, what he had called the Mind of Light got realised in me." We can understand also how after death and as a result of it, the Supramental Light suffused his body for several days.

The shock and desolation, however, that we felt can be more imagined than described. Though we could see the Master only four times a year, his Presence was vibrant in the very air we breathed, in our sleep, in every moment of our life; particularly after the accident, even physically he seemed to have come nearer. So the sudden absence was felt like a yawning abyss ready to engulf our very existence. I wonder what would have happened to the vast life of the Ashram, if the Mother was not there to envelop all of us, the whole earth, in the embrace of her infinite love and compassion. Yet, have we any measure of knowing what she must have felt, though she is the Divine? Just as he "worked, struggled, suffered", so did she suffer and bear. We witnessed it in the early period of the accident; but the command was upon her from the Lord to carry on his work. And the immense vacuum that was created could be filled by her alone. From these verses in *Savitri* in a different context we get such an indication:

The dubious godhead with his torch of pain  
Lit up the chasm of the unfinished world  
And called her to fill with her vast self the abyss.

That it was a voluntary withdrawal has been rendered sufficiently clear from the foregoing account.

In answer to a query Sri Aurobindo wrote to me in 1935, "...Or perhaps what I said was that I have the power to overcome illness, but accident and poison and the I.M. [Ichcha Mrityu — self-willed death] still remain as possible means of death. Of course, the Mother and myself have hundreds of

times thrown back the forces of illness and death by a slight concentration of force or even a use of will merely.”

Even the date seems to have been envisaged by him, for we have seen that the symptoms took a suddenly grave turn as soon as the School Anniversary functions were over. Evidently he was waiting for the passing of that date and then relaxed all control. The end came swiftly. We know also from the Mother’s revealing account that a year earlier he had taken the decision to leave the body. The Mother had 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.’” He told us he would not explain why he was not curing himself as we would not understand it. He called it “the dread mysterious sacrifice, offered by God’s martyred body”. These significant words which were the last touches to be given to *Savitri* suggest a clue that might disclose the meaning of the event.

There is a message received by the Mother to the same effect. When on December 8, the Mother inwardly asked him to resuscitate himself, 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.” We need not probe further into the mystery, since it is of another dimension. Instead, it would be much more soul-satisfying to know that though physically he has withdrawn, his Presence is always with us. We get that illumination from the Mother’s statement on December 7, 1950 during Sri Aurobindo’s lying in state. It runs, “Lord, this morning Thou hast given me the assurance that Thou wouldst stay with us until Thy work is achieved, not only as a consciousness which guides and illumines but also as a dynamic Presence in action. In unmistakable terms Thou hast promised that all of Thyself would remain here and not leave the earth atmosphere until earth is transformed. Grant that we may be worthy of this marvellous Presence and that henceforth everything in us be concentrated on the one will to be more and more perfectly consecrated to the fulfilment of Thy sublime Work!”

Those of us who grieved over the tremendous loss received a sharp reprimand from the Mother, “To grieve is an insult to Sri Aurobindo who is here with us, conscious and alive.” And “The lack of receptivity of the earth and men is mostly responsible for the decision Sri Aurobindo has taken regarding his body. But one thing is certain: what has happened on the physical plane affects in no way the truth of his teaching. All that he has said is perfectly true and remains so. Time and the course of events will prove it abundantly.” And how much he worked for us, for the world, can be gauged by the inscription in English and French on the Samadhi as an offering of the Mother’s gratitude:

“To Thee who hast been the material envelope of our Master, to Thee our infinite gratitude. Before Thee who hast done so much for us, who hast worked, struggled, suffered, hoped, endured so much, before Thee who hast willed all, attempted all, prepared, achieved all for us, before Thee we bow down and implore that we may never forget, even for a moment, all we owe to Thee.”

Let us see now what have been the effects, direct and indirect, of that withdrawal. First of all, by virtue of this tremendous sacrifice the Supramental Light which had been descending into the most outward physical since 1938 but could not be fixed there, was at last fixed in the earth-consciousness. This massive descent into his own body and extending through it into all Matter was a crowning achievement of his Yoga at the expense of his body’s sacrifice and an act of unparalleled self-effacement for the sake of the earth-transformation. The next step that was to follow was the great Manifestation which took place in 1956. The Mother is reported to have said after it, “Now my work is done.” This means that essentially what she and Sri Aurobindo had been wanting to do was achieved, but the details had to be consciously worked out and a concentrated yoga is required to hasten the evolution. There is no doubt that the Manifestation, so soon in the wake of his departure, was the direct result of Sri Aurobindo’s sacrifice. One might argue that it should have been possible without his leaving the body. Quite true, but it was getting delayed, as Sri Aurobindo complained more than once in his letters. Various internal and external circumstances were always hindering it. We have noted in the chapter on *Savitri* Sri Aurobindo’s



complaint about his real work being hampered by these factors and yet he could not ignore them. They did not leave him sufficient time for concentration which, he said, was his real work. A drastic measure to deal with all obstruction at its very root seemed called for. This measure would also create the right conditions by which the subtle sheath, free from its physical counterparts, gets its full scope and can work more dynamically from above and behind. Sri Aurobindo could now make the path clear for the Manifestation in 1956. The Mother has said in the *Bulletin of Physical Education* that we have no idea of the tremendous work Sri Aurobindo has done in the occult worlds as a result of which all the crucial changes are taking place in her body. It will be, therefore, not an error of perception to call his passing away a strategic retreat, nor an emotional hyperbole to call it a sacrifice, a martyrdom. The phenomenon itself that we witnessed was something stupendous, beyond all canons of Science. Whoever has heard of a dead body changing its colour overnight, becoming charged with a gold-crimson radiance and remaining intact for five days?

The second effect whose purport will not be evident to those who are unfamiliar with Sri Aurobindo's Yoga was, to quote the Mother, "As soon as Sri Aurobindo withdrew from his body, what he had called the Mind of Light got realised here. 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 those 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 direct action upon the most material. This physical mind receiving the supramental light Sri Aurobindo called the Mind of Light."<sup>1</sup> It is because the Mother as his supreme collaborator was there to receive the Light and continue his work that Sri Aurobindo could make that holocaust of himself. The holocaust has also had one effect which cannot but be regarded as being eminently in accord with Sri Aurobindo's own vision. It is clear that the Ashram "instead of dwindling after the Master's self-withdrawal has leaped gloriously forward under the Mother's leadership".

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<sup>1</sup> K. D. Sethna: *The Vision and Work of Sri Aurobindo*.

Earlier Sri Aurobindo's towering personality, though in seclusion, dominated the scene. Now the picture, as I said, is entirely different. We can see that all the world is coming to the Mother and accepting her as the Divine Mother, the Shakti who rules, guides and saves. This is what Sri Aurobindo had wanted and laid down since the Mother took charge of the Ashram, as the prime desideratum of his Supramental Yoga. It has been rendered possible and quickly effective by his unprecedented sacrifice. It is also in keeping with his nature. He had admitted that temperamentally he was always prone to act from behind the veil, — the way of the Supreme to move men and forces without their knowledge. His political life, except for a short period, and life in Pondicherry, bear testimony to its truth. So the final retirement was consistent with that disposition and is its highest culmination. This culmination has carried the Mother even more to the forefront. There she stands now and plays the role of Shakti and, as she has said, is doing Sri Aurobindo's work and giving his final dream, of which he has spoken in his Independence Day message, a concrete shape on this earth. Sri Aurobindo constantly helps her from behind. The Mother has said in the *Bulletin*, as I have stated before, what a vast amount of work Sri Aurobindo has done in the occult field in consequence of which the work of transformation of the physical has become easier. Similarly, can we have any idea of his world-action, particularly in the political field, for example his occult contribution to the liberation of Bangladesh? Let us remember Sri Aurobindo's prophetic voice, "Division must go." His Force has not ceased to act in that direction. On the contrary it is moving powerfully towards the realisation of this prophecy. These are his works on a cosmic scale that we are aware of. In our individual cases too his Presence and his dynamic action have been testified to by devotees and disciples all over India and in the West. We hear his voice, get his touch, protection, active intervention. The Mother told me more than once that she always saw Sri Aurobindo working on me. I had a personal proof of his surprisingly direct intervention, saving me from a critical situation that could have otherwise put my sadhana in peril. I have mentioned another occult phenomenon in the preface of my *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. I to illustrate his subtle help. A third small instance will suffice: when the Ashram was passing through a financial difficulty, the Mother reported

the matter to Sri Aurobindo. He replied, "Ask Prodyot." And it is well known that Prodyot brings a lot of money for the Ashram.

Still, it cannot be denied that we do miss his physical Presence, especially those of us whom he had drawn near by his personal intimacy and those who had the exceptional privilege of living with him and serving him. "Nirod is no doctor to me; he has come to serve me," is one of his few utterances I cannot forget, though I know too well how poorly I served him. Sometimes when we think of the old days that will never come back, when I go over his unparalleled correspondence with me, a void, a sore loss fills my heart. A few days after Sri Aurobindo's departure, the Mother asked a group of sadhaks what was the greatest loss caused by his absence. Different answers were given, but the Mother replied, "No, not these; the biggest loss is that I can no longer approach him for his advice. For instance, if he were there, I could have gone and asked him to stop the rain." (It was raining heavily at that moment.) To this, someone said, "But, Mother, you can look into yourself." She kept quiet. Here I may speculate on this incident. To deal with any serious problem needs a degree of concentration. The Mother has always been a very busy person; She often fell back on Sri Aurobindo to do the concentration needed. The more important point, however, seems to be that certain problems are better dealt with by an embodied spiritual force than a disembodied one, problems concerned perhaps with the most outward material aspect of existence. We see how our difficulties and problems get quickly solved by the Mother's direct intervention. Apropos of the above incident, I may further ask: Did not the Mother hint at something more poignant? The difference between a physical presence and a subtle one? Whenever there was an intricate situation to face, some crucial stage to be crossed, she quietly came and laid the burden at his feet with an utter trust, that he would see it through. The ineffable physical Presence of an Avatar of Sri Aurobindo's stature, one whose work ultimately was transformation and divinisation of the very body, was a heavenly boon to our corporeal earthly life. The incarnation itself would have otherwise lost much of its significance.

Both the external and the internal development towards physical divinisation is going on apace in the Mother so that in a not distant future it

will be seen that the sacrifice, the martyrdom has not gone in vain, but has resulted in the emergence of a glorified body — the consummation of the Supramental victory over Matter.

One can then conclude by saying that in his departure as well as in life the aim of Sri Aurobindo's entire Sadhana was served — namely to make the Mother manifest, without which the divinisation of Matter would be impossible. We hear this truth very beautifully expressed in his poem *A God's Labour*:

I have gathered my dreams in a silver air  
Between the gold and the blue  
And wrapped them softly and left them there,  
My jewelled dreams of you.

And the poem finishes with:

I shall leave my dreams in their argent air,  
For in a raiment of gold and blue  
There shall move on the earth embodied and fair  
The living truth of you.

## POSTSCRIPT

This book published in 1972 ends on a highly expectant note. The lines quoted from Sri Aurobindo's poem, "A God's Labour", written in 1935-36 give us the definite hope that Sri Aurobindo's dream would be realised: the Mother's body would be transformed into a "raiment of gold and blue". Indeed after Sri Aurobindo had left his body, the work went on apace. A number of sadhaks had the experience of participating in the work of transformation by changes felt in their own body. The Mother wrote at length and spoke about it quite often. So we were living in the bright hope that it was just a question of time. The Mother would complete a hundred years or even more and would appear to us in a glorious body.

She carried on her daily activities with the same vigour and keen interest from morning to evening. I was an exceptional recipient of her Grace when she consented gladly to listen to my *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo* in its manuscript form before being sent to the Press. And I went on reading it every evening till the end of 1972. She was so pleased with the book that when I asked for her impression, she wrote immediately a sentence which has been appended at the beginning of this book. Besides the *Twelve Years*, I read out to her my other works: *Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo* and *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*. The former particularly pleased her so much that at the end she remarked, "Sri Aurobindo has given you everything." Once during this period, I don't remember the context, stretching her right hand out to me, she said, "Grip my hand." We pressed each other's hands. Then she asked smiling, "How do you find it?" "Very strong, Mother," I replied. She was happy.

But all of a sudden things took a different turn. She had said that her body was the first ever to be subject to the Supramental Power — here was an experiment Sri Aurobindo had wanted her to undergo. The pressure of this Power to which she had unreservedly opened herself began to tell on the physical instrument and she fell ill. All work and interviews came to an abrupt cessation from the early months of 1973. She went into complete retirement, seeing no one except her personal attendants. Since these are

matters of an occult dimension it will be futile on anyone's part to venture an interpretation. All we can say is that at the end of her tremendous isolated labour through twenty-three years after Sri Aurobindo's passing away in 1950, the Mother also departed. Now that the special support had been withdrawn, we had to fall back considerably upon our own efforts. But that did not mean that her help has been withdrawn. She has given us the assurance, like Sri Aurobindo, that she will always be with us. It is the constant experience of the sadhaks that her Presence is ever active. We have only to carry on with unflagging zeal, faith and surrender, and her aid will be unfailingly with us.

## APPENDIX

Three extracts from Sri Aurobindo's writings have been included in this section to give the readers a glimpse of his vision for India and the world.

## A MESSAGE TO AMERICA

I have been asked to send on this occasion of the fifteenth August a message to the West, but what I have to say might be delivered equally as a message to the East. It has been customary to dwell on the division and difference between these two sections of the human family and even oppose them to each other; but, for myself I would rather be disposed to dwell on oneness and unity than on division and difference. East and West have the same human nature, a common human destiny, the same aspiration after a greater perfection, the same seeking after something higher than itself, something towards which inwardly and even outwardly we move. There has been a tendency in some minds to dwell on the spirituality or mysticism of the East and the materialism of the West; but the West has had no less than the East its spiritual seekings and, though not in such profusion, its saints and sages and mystics, the East has had its materialistic tendencies, its material splendours, its similar or identical dealings with life and Matter and the world in which we live. East and West have always met and mixed more or less closely, they have powerfully influenced each other and at the present day are under an increasing compulsion of Nature and Fate to do so more than ever before.

There is a common hope, a common destiny, both spiritual and material, for which both are needed as co-workers. It is no longer towards division and difference that we should turn our minds, but on unity, union, even oneness necessary for the pursuit and realisation of a common ideal, the destined goal, the fulfilment towards which Nature in her beginning obscurely set out and must in an increasing light of knowledge replacing her first ignorance constantly persevere.

But what shall be that ideal and that goal? That depends on our conception of the realities of life and the supreme Reality.

Here we have to take into account that there has been, not any absolute difference but an increasing divergence between the tendencies of the East and the West. The highest truth is truth of the Spirit; a Spirit supreme above the world and yet immanent in the world and in all that exists, sustaining and



leading all towards whatever is the aim and goal and the fulfilment of Nature since her obscure inconscient beginnings through the growth of consciousness is the one aspect of existence which gives a clue to the secret of our being and a meaning to the world. The East has always and increasingly put the highest emphasis on the supreme truth of the Spirit; it has, even in its extreme philosophies, put the world away as an illusion and regarded the Spirit as the sole reality. The West has concentrated more and more increasingly on the world, on the dealings of mind and life with our material existence, on our mastery over it, on the perfection of mind and life and some fulfilment of the human being here: latterly this has gone so far as the denial of the Spirit and even the enthronement of Matter as the sole reality. Spiritual perfection as the sole ideal on one side, on the other, the perfectibility of the race, the perfect society, a perfect development of the human mind and life and man's material existence have become the largest dream of the future. Yet both are truths and can be regarded as part of the intention of the Spirit in world-nature; they are not incompatible with each other: rather their divergence has to be healed and both have to be included and reconciled in our view of the future.

The Science of the West has discovered evolution as the secret of life and its process in this material world; but it has laid more stress on the growth of form and species than on the growth of consciousness: even, consciousness has been regarded as an incident and not the whole secret of the meaning of the evolution. An evolution has been admitted by certain minds in the East, certain philosophies and Scriptures, but there its sense has been the growth of the soul through developing or successive forms and many lives of the individual to its own highest reality. For if there is a conscious being in the form, that being can hardly be a temporary phenomenon of consciousness; it must be a soul fulfilling itself and this fulfilment can only take place if there is a return of the soul to earth in many successive lives, in many successive bodies.

The process of evolution has been the development from and in inconscient Matter of a subconscious and then a conscious Life, of conscious mind first in animal life and then fully in conscious and thinking man, the highest present achievement of evolutionary Nature. The achievement of

mental being is at present her highest and tends to be regarded as her final work; but it is possible to conceive a still further step of the evolution: Nature may have in view beyond the imperfect mind of man a consciousness that passes out of the mind's ignorance and possesses truth as its inherent right and nature. There is a Truth-Consciousness as it is called in the Veda, a Supermind, as I have termed it, possessing Knowledge, not having to seek after it and constantly miss it. In one of the Upanishads a being of knowledge is stated to be the next step above the mental being; into that the soul has to rise and through it to attain the perfect bliss of spiritual existence. If that could be achieved as the next evolutionary step of Nature here, then she would be fulfilled and we could conceive of the perfection of life even here, its attainment of a full spiritual living even in this body or it may be in a perfected body. We could even speak of a divine life on earth; our human dream of perfectibility would be accomplished and at the same time the aspiration to a heaven on earth common to several religions and spiritual seers and thinkers.

The ascent of the human soul to the supreme Spirit is that soul's highest aim and necessity, for that is the supreme reality; but there can be too the descent of the Spirit and its powers into the world and that would justify the existence of the material world also, give a meaning, a divine purpose to the creation and solve its riddle. East and West could be reconciled in the pursuit of the highest and largest ideal, Spirit embrace Matter and Matter find its own true reality and the hidden Reality in all things in the Spirit.

11.8.1949

## MESSAGE TO THE ANDHRA UNIVERSITY

You have asked me for a message and anything I write, since it is to the Andhra University that I am addressing my message, if it can be called by that name, should be pertinent to your University, its function, its character and the work it has to do. But it is difficult for me at this juncture when momentous decisions are being taken which are likely to determine not only the form and pattern of this country's Government and administration but the pattern of its destiny, the build and make-up of the nation's character, its position in the world with regard to other nations, its choice of what itself shall be, not to turn my eyes in that direction. There is one problem facing the country which concerns us nearly and to this I shall now turn and deal with it, however inadequately, — the demand for the reconstruction of the artificial British-made Presidencies and Provinces into natural divisions forming a new system, new and yet founded on the principle of diversity in unity attempted by ancient India. India, shut into a separate existence by the Himalayas and the ocean, has always been the home of a peculiar people with characteristics of its own recognisably distinct from all others, with its own distinct civilisation, way of life, way of the spirit, a separate culture, arts, building of society. It has absorbed all that has entered into it, put upon all the Indian stamp, welded the most diverse elements into its fundamental unity. But it has also been throughout a congeries of diverse peoples, lands, kingdoms and, in earlier times, republics also, diverse races, sub-nations with a marked character of their own, developing different brands or forms of civilisation and culture, many schools of art and architecture which yet succeeded in fitting into the general Indian type of civilisation and culture. India's history throughout has been marked by a tendency, a constant effort to unite all this diversity of elements into a single political whole under a central imperial rule so that India might be politically as well as culturally one. Even after a rift had been created by the irruption of the Mohammedan peoples with their very different religion and social structure, there continued a constant effort of political unification and there was a tendency towards a mingling of cultures and their mutual influence on each other; even some heroic attempts were made to discover or create a common religion built out

of these two apparently irreconcilable faiths and here too there were mutual influences. But throughout India's history the political unity was never entirely attained and for this there were several causes, — first, vastness of space and insufficiency of communications preventing the drawing close of all these different peoples; secondly, the method used which was the military domination by one people or one imperial dynasty over the rest of the country which led to a succession of empires, none of them permanent; lastly, the absence of any will to crush out of existence all these different kingdoms and fuse together these different peoples and force them into a single substance and a single shape. Then came the British Empire in India which recast the whole country into artificial provinces made for its own convenience, disregarding the principle of division into regional peoples but not abolishing that division. For there had grown up out of the original elements a natural system of sub-nations with different languages, literatures and other traditions of their own, the four Dravidian peoples, Bengal, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Punjab, Sind, Assam, Orissa, Nepal, the Hindi-speaking peoples of the North, Rajputana and Bihar. British rule with its provincial administration did not unite these peoples but it did impose upon them the habit of a common type of administration, a closer intercommunication through the English language and by the education it gave there was created a more diffused and more militant form of patriotism, the desire for liberation and the need of unity in the struggle to achieve that liberation. A sufficient fighting unity was brought about to win freedom, but freedom obtained did not carry with it a complete union of the country. On the contrary, India was deliberately split on the basis of the two-nation theory into Pakistan and Hindustan with the deadly consequences which we know.

In taking over the administration from Britain we had inevitably to follow the line of least resistance and proceed on the basis of the artificial British-made provinces, at least for the time; this provisional arrangement now threatens to become permanent, at least in the main and some see an advantage in this permanence. For they think it will help the unification of the country and save us from the necessity of preserving regional sub-nations which in the past kept a country from an entire and thorough-going unification and uniformity. In a rigorous unification they see the only true

union, a single nation with a standardised and uniform administration, language, literature, culture, art, education, — all carried on through the agency of one national tongue. How far such a conception can be carried out in the future one cannot forecast, but at present it is obviously impracticable, and it is doubtful if it is for India truly desirable. The ancient diversities of the country carried in them great advantages as well as drawbacks. By these differences the country was made the home of many living and pulsating centres of life, art, culture, a richly and brilliantly coloured diversity in unity; all was not drawn up into a few provincial capitals or an imperial metropolis, other towns and regions remaining subordinated and indistinctive or even culturally asleep; the whole nation lived with a full life in its many parts and this increased enormously the creative energy of the whole. There is no possibility any longer that this diversity will endanger or diminish the unity of India. Those vast spaces which kept her people from closeness and a full interplay have been abolished in their separating effect by the march of Science and the swiftness of the means of communication. The idea of federation and a complete machinery for its perfect working have been discovered and will be at full work. Above all, the spirit of patriotic unity has been too firmly established in the people to be easily effaced or diminished, and it would be more endangered by refusing to allow the natural play of life of the sub-nations than by satisfying their legitimate aspirations. The Congress itself in the days before liberation came had pledged itself to the formation of linguistic provinces, and to follow it out, if not immediately, yet as early as may conveniently be, might well be considered the wisest course. India's national life will then be founded on her natural strengths and the principle of unity in diversity which has always been normal to her and its fulfilment the fundamental course of her being and its very nature, the Many in the One, would place her on the sure foundation of her Swabhava and Swadharma.

This development might well be regarded as the inevitable trend of her future. For the Dravidian regional peoples are demanding their separate right to a self-governing existence; Maharashtra expects a similar concession and this would mean a similar development in Gujarat and then the British-made Presidencies of Madras and Bombay would have disappeared. The old Bengal

Presidency had already been split up and Orissa, Bihar and Assam are now, self-governing regional peoples. A merger of the Hindi-speaking part of the Central Provinces and the U.P. would complete the process. An annulment of the partition of India might modify but would not materially alter this result of the general tendency. A union of States and regional peoples would again be the form of a united India.

In this new regime your University will find its function and fulfilment. Its origin has been different from that of other Indian Universities; they were established by the initiative of a foreign Government as a means of introducing their own civilisation into India, situated in the capital towns of the Presidencies and formed as teaching and examining bodies with purely academic aims: Benaras and Aligarh had a different origin but were all-India institutions serving the two chief religious communities of the country. Andhra University has been created by a patriotic Andhra initiative, situated not in a Presidency capital but in an Andhra town and serving consciously the life of a regional people. The home of a robust and virile and energetic race, great by the part it had played in the past in the political life of India, great by its achievements in art, architecture, sculpture, music, Andhra looks back upon imperial memories, a place in the succession of empires and imperial dynasties which reigned over a large part of the country; it looks back on the more recent memory of the glories of the last Hindu Empire of Vijayanagar, — a magnificent record for any people. Your University can take its high position as a centre of light and learning, knowledge and culture which can train the youth of Andhra to be worthy of their forefathers: the great past should lead to a future as great or even greater. Not only Science but Art, not only book-knowledge and information but growth in culture and character are parts of a true education; to help the individual to develop his capacities, to help in the forming of thinkers and creators and men of vision and action of the future, this is a part of its work. Moreover, the life of the regional people must not be shut up in itself; its youths have also to contact the life of the other similar peoples of India interacting with them in industry and commerce and the other practical fields of life but also in the things of the mind and spirit. Also, they have to learn not only to be citizens of Andhra but to be citizens of India; the life of the nation is their life. An *élite* has to

be formed which has an adequate understanding of all great national affairs or problems and be able to represent Andhra in the councils of the nation and in every activity and undertaking of national interest calling for the support and participation of her peoples. There is still a wider field in which India will need the services of men of ability and character from all parts of the country, the international field. For she stands already as a considerable international figure and this will grow as time goes on into vast proportions; she is likely in time to take her place as one of the preponderant States whose voices will be strongest and their lead and their action determinative of the world's future. For all this she needs men whose training as well as their talent, genius and force of character is of the first order. In all these fields your University can be of supreme service and do a work of immeasurable importance.

In this hour, in the second year of its liberation the nation has to awaken to many more very considerable problems, to vast possibilities opening before her but also to dangers and difficulties that may, if not wisely dealt with, become formidable. There is a disordered world-situation left by the war, full of risks and sufferings and shortages and threatening another catastrophe which can only be solved by the united effort of the peoples and can only be truly met by an effort at world-union such as was conceived at San Francisco but has not till now been very successful in the practice; still the effort has to be continued and new devices found which will make easier the difficult transition from the perilous divisions of the past and present to a harmonious world-order; for otherwise there can be no escape from continuous calamity and collapse. There are deeper issues for India herself, since by following certain tempting directions she may conceivably become a nation like many others evolving an opulent industry and commerce, a powerful organisation of social and political life, an immense military strength, practising power-politics with a high degree of success, guarding and extending zealously her gains and her interests, dominating even a large part of the world, but in this apparently magnificent progression forfeiting its Swadharma, losing its soul. Then ancient India and her spirit might disappear altogether and we would have only one more nation like the others and that would be a real gain neither to the world nor to us. There is a question

whether she may prosper more harmlessly in the outward life yet lose altogether her richly massed and firmly held spiritual experience and knowledge. It would be a tragic irony of fate if India were to throw away her spiritual heritage at the very moment when in the rest of the world there is more and more a turning towards her for spiritual help and a saving Light. This must not and will surely not happen; but it cannot be said that the danger is not there. There are indeed other numerous and difficult problems that face this country or will very soon face it. No doubt we will win through, but we must not disguise from ourselves the fact that after these long years of subjection and its cramping and impairing effects a great inner as well as outer liberation and change, a vast inner and outer progress is needed if we are to fulfil India's true destiny.



POSTSCRIPT TO SRI AUROBINDO'S  
REVISED EDITION OF  
*THE IDEAL OF HUMAN UNITY*

At the time when this book was being brought to its close, the first attempt at the foundation of some initial hesitating beginning of the new world-order, which both governments and peoples had begun to envisage as a permanent necessity if there was to be any order in the world at all, was under debate and consideration but had not yet been given a concrete and practical form; but this had to come and eventually a momentous beginning was made. It took the name and appearance of what was called a League of Nations. It was not happy in its conception, well-inspired in its formation or destined to any considerable longevity or a supremely successful career. But that such an organised endeavour should be launched at all and proceed on its way for some time without an early breakdown was in itself an event of capital importance and meant the initiation of a new era in world history; especially, it was an initiative which, even if it failed, could not be allowed to remain without a sequel but had to be taken up again until a successful solution has safeguarded the future of mankind, not only against continued disorder and lethal peril but against destructive possibilities which could easily prepare the collapse of civilisation and perhaps eventually something even that could be described as the suicide of the human race. Accordingly, the League of Nations disappeared but was replaced by the United Nations Organisation which now stands in the forefront of the world and struggles towards some kind of secure permanence and success in the great and far-reaching endeavour on which depends the world's future.

This is the capital event, the crucial and decisive Outcome of the world-wide tendencies which Nature has set in motion for her destined purpose. In spite of the constant shortcomings of human effort and its stumbling mentality, in spite of adverse possibilities that may balk or delay for a time the success of this great adventure, it is in this event that lies the determination of what must be. All the catastrophes that have attended this course of events and seem to arise of purpose in order to prevent the working out of her intention have not prevented, and even further catastrophes will

not prevent, the successful emergence and development of an enterprise which has become a necessity for the progress and perhaps the very existence of the race. Two stupendous and world-devastating wars have swept over the globe and have been accompanied or followed by revolutions with far-reaching consequences which have altered the political map of the earth and the international balance, the once fairly stable equilibrium of five continents, and changed the whole future. A third still more disastrous war with a prospect of the use of weapons and other scientific means of destruction far more fatal and of wider reach than any ever yet invented, weapons whose far-spread use might bring down civilisation with a crash and whose effects might tend toward something like extermination on a large scale, looms in prospect; the constant apprehension of it weighs upon the mind of the nations and stimulates them towards further preparations for war and creates an atmosphere of prolonged antagonism, if not yet of conflict, extending to what is called "cold war" even in times of peace. But the two wars that have come and gone have not prevented the formation of the first and second considerable efforts towards the beginning of an attempt at union and the practical formation of a concrete body, an organised instrument with that object: rather they have caused and hastened this new creation. The League of Nations came into being as a direct consequence of the first war, the U.N.O. similarly as a consequence of the second world-wide conflict. If the third war which is regarded by many if not by most as inevitable does come, it is likely to precipitate as inevitably a further step and perhaps the final outcome of this great world-endeavour. Nature uses such means, apparently opposed and dangerous to her intended purpose, to bring about the fruition of that purpose. As in the practice of the spiritual science and art of Yoga one has to raise up the psychological possibilities which are there in the nature and stand in the way of its spiritual perfection and fulfilment so as to eliminate them, even, it may be, the sleeping possibilities which might arise in future to break the work that has been done, so too Nature acts with the world-forces that meet her on her way, not only calling up those which will assist her but raising too, so as to finish with them, those that she knows to be the normal or even the unavoidable obstacles which cannot but start up to impede her secret will. This one has often seen in the history of mankind; one sees it exemplified today with an enormous force commensurable with the

magnitude of the thing that has to be done. But always these resistances turn out to have assisted by the resistance much more than they have impeded the intention of the great Creatrix and her Mover.

We may then look with a legitimate optimism on what has been hitherto achieved and on the prospects of further achievement in the future. This optimism need not and should not blind us to undesirable features, perilous tendencies and the possibilities of serious interruptions in the work and even disorders in the human world that might possibly subvert the work done. As regards the actual conditions of the moment it may even be admitted that most men nowadays look with dissatisfaction on the defects of the United Nations Organisation and its blunders and the malignancies that endanger its existence and many feel a growing pessimism and regard with doubt the possibility of its final success. This pessimism it is unnecessary and unwise to share; for such a psychology tends to bring about, to make possible the results which it predicts but which need not at all ensue. At the same time, we must not ignore the danger. The leaders of the nations, who have the will to succeed and who will be held responsible by posterity for any avoidable failure, must be on guard against unwise policies or fatal errors; the deficiencies that exist in the organisation or its constitution have to be quickly remedied or slowly and cautiously eliminated; if there are obstinate oppositions to necessary change, they have somehow to be overcome or circumvented without breaking the institution; progress towards its perfection, even if it cannot be easily or swiftly made, must yet be undertaken and the frustration of the world's hope prevented at any cost. There is no other way for mankind than this, unless indeed a greater way is laid open to it by the Power that guides through some delivering turn or change in human will or human nature or some sudden evolutionary progress, a not easily foreseeable leap, *saltus*, which will make another and greater solution of our human destiny feasible.

In the first idea and form of a beginning of world-union which took the shape of the League of Nations, although there were errors in the structure such as the insistence on unanimity which tended to sterilise, to limit or to obstruct the practical action and effectuality of the League, the main defect was inherent in its conception and in its general build, and that again arose

naturally and as a direct consequence from the condition of the world at that time. The League of Nations was in fact an oligarchy of big Powers each drawing behind it a retinue of small States and using the general body so far as possible for the furtherance of its own policy much more than for the general interest and the good of the world at large. The character came out most in the political sphere, and the manoeuvres and discords, accommodations and compromises inevitable in this condition of things did not help to make the action of the League beneficial or effective as it purposed or set out to be. The absence of America and the position of Russia had helped to make the final ill-success of this first venture a natural consequence, if not indeed unavoidable. In the constitution of the U.N.O. an attempt was made, in principle at least, to escape from these errors; but the attempt was not thorough-going and not altogether successful. A strong surviving element of oligarchy remained in the preponderant place assigned to the five great Powers in the Security Council and was clinched by the device of the veto; these were concessions to a sense of realism and the necessity of recognising the actual condition of things and the results of the second great war and could not perhaps have been avoided, but they have done more to create trouble, hamper the action and diminish the success of the new institution than anything else in its make-up or the way of action forced upon it by the world situation or the difficulties of a combined working inherent in its very structure. A too hasty or radical endeavour to get rid of these defects might lead to a crash of the whole edifice; to leave them unmodified prolongs a malaise, an absence of harmony and smooth working and a consequent discredit and a sense of limited and abortive action, cause of the widespread feeling of futility and the regard of doubt the world at large has begun to cast on this great and necessary institution which was founded with such high hopes and without which world conditions would be infinitely worse and more dangerous, even perhaps irremediable. A third attempt, the substitution of a differently constituted body, could only come if this institution collapsed as the result of a new catastrophe: if certain dubious portents fulfil their menace, it might emerge into being and might even this time be more successful because of an increased and a more general determination not to allow such a calamity to occur again; but it would be after a third cataclysmal struggle which might shake to its foundations the

international structure now holding together after two upheavals with so much difficulty and unease. Yet, even in such a contingency, the intention in the workings of Nature is likely to overcome the obstacles she has herself raised up and they may be got rid of once and for all. But for that it will be necessary to build, eventually at least, a true World-State without exclusions and on a principle of equality into which considerations of size and strength will not enter. These may be left to exercise whatever influence is natural to them in a well-ordered harmony of the world's peoples safe-guarded by the law of a new international order. A sure justice, a fundamental equality and combination of rights and interests must be the law of this World-State and the basis of its entire edifice.

The real danger at the present second stage of the progress towards unity lies not in any faults, however serious, in the building of the United Nations Assembly but in the division of the peoples into two camps which tend to be natural opponents and might at any moment become declared enemies irreconcilable and even their common existence incompatible. This is because the so-called Communism of Bolshevist Russia came to birth as the result, not of a rapid evolution, but of an unprecedentedly fierce and prolonged revolution sanguinary in the extreme and created an autocratic and intolerant State system founded upon a war of classes in which all others except the proletariat were crushed out of existence, "liquidated", upon a "dictatorship of the proletariat" or rather of a narrow but all-powerful party system acting in its name, a Police State, and a mortal struggle with the outside world: the fierceness of this struggle generated in the minds of the organisers of the new State a fixed idea of the necessity not only of survival but of continued struggle and the spread of its domination until the new order had destroyed the old or evicted it, if not from the whole earth, yet from the greater part of it and the imposition of a new political and social gospel or its general acceptance by the world's peoples. But this condition of things might change, lose its acrimony and full consequence, as it has done to some degree, with the arrival of security and the cessation of the first ferocity, bitterness and exasperation of the conflict; the most intolerant and oppressive elements of the new order might have been moderated and the sense of incompatibility or inability to live together or side by side would then have disappeared and a

more secure *modus vivendi* been made possible. If much of the unease, the sense of inevitable struggle, the difficulty of mutual toleration and economic accommodation still exists, it is rather because the idea of using the ideological struggle as a means for world domination is there and keeps the nations in a position of mutual apprehension and preparation for armed defence and attack than because the coexistence of the two ideologies is impossible. If this element is eliminated, a world in which these two ideologies could live together, arrive at an economic interchange, draw closer together, need not be at all out of the question; for the world is moving towards a greater development of the principle of State control over the life of the community, and a congeries of socialistic States on the one hand, and on the other, of States coordinating and controlling a modified Capitalism might well come to exist side by side and develop friendly relations with each other. Even a World-State in which both could keep their own institutions and sit in a common assembly might come into being and a single world-union on this foundation would not be impossible. This development is indeed the final outcome which the foundation of the U.N.O. presupposes; for the present organisation cannot be itself final, it is only an imperfect beginning useful and necessary as a primary nucleus of that larger institution in which all the peoples of the earth can meet each other in a single international unity: the creation of a World-State is, in a movement of this kind, the one logical and inevitable ultimate outcome.

This view of the future may under present circumstances be stigmatised as a too facile optimism, but this turn of things is quite as possible as the more disastrous turn expected by the pessimists, since the cataclysm and crash of civilisation sometimes predicted by them need not at all be the result of a new war. Mankind has a habit of surviving the worst catastrophes created by its own errors or by the violent turns of Nature and it must be so if there is any meaning in its existence, if its long history and continuous survival is not the accident of a fortuitously self-organising Chance, which it must be in a purely materialistic view of the nature of the world. If man is intended to survive and carry forward the evolution of which he is at present the head and, to some extent, a half-conscious leader of its march, he must come out of his present chaotic international life and arrive at a beginning of organised

united action; some kind of World-State, unitary or federal, or a confederacy or a coalition he must arrive at in the end; no smaller or looser expedient would adequately serve the purpose. In that case, the general thesis advanced in this book would stand justified and we can foreshadow with some confidence the main line of advance which the course of events is likely to take, at least the main trend of the future history of the human peoples.

The question now put by evolving Nature to mankind is whether its existing international system, if system it can be called, a sort of provisional order maintained with constant evolutionary or revolutionary changes, cannot be replaced by a willed and thought-out fixed arrangement, a true system, eventually a real unity serving all the common interests of the earth's peoples. An original welter and chaos with its jumble of forces forming, wherever it could, larger or smaller masses of civilisation and order which were in danger of crumbling or being shaken to pieces by attacks from the outer chaos was the first attempt at cosmos successfully arrived at by the genius of humanity. This was finally replaced by something like an international system with the elements of what could be called international law of fixed habits of intercommunication and interchange which allowed the nations to live together in spite of antagonisms and conflicts, a security alternating with precariousness and peril and permitting of too many ugly features, however local, of oppression, bloodshed, revolt and disorder, not to speak of wars which sometimes devastated large areas of the globe. The indwelling deity who presides over the destiny of the race has raised in man's mind and heart the idea, the hope of a new order which will replace the old unsatisfactory order, and substitute for it conditions of the world's life which will in the end have a reasonable chance of establishing permanent peace and well-being. This would for the first time turn into an assured fact the ideal of human unity which, cherished by a few, seemed for so long a noble chimera; then might be created a firm ground of peace and harmony and even a free room for the realisation of the highest human dreams, for the perfectibility of the race, a perfect society, a higher upward evolution of the human soul and human nature. It is for the men of our day and, at the most, of tomorrow to give the answer. For, too long a postponement or too continued a failure will open the way to a series of increasing catastrophes which might create a

too prolonged and disastrous confusion and chaos and render a solution too difficult or impossible; it might even end in something like an irremediable crash not only of the present world-civilisation but of all civilisation. A new, a difficult and uncertain beginning might have to be made in the midst of the chaos and ruin after perhaps an extermination on a large scale, and a more successful creation could be predicted only if a way was found to develop a better humanity or perhaps a greater, a superhuman race.

The central question is whether the nation, the largest natural unit which humanity has been able to create and maintain for its collective living, is also its last and ultimate unit or whether a greater aggregate can be formed which will englobe many and even most nations and finally all in its united totality. The impulse to build more largely, the push towards the creation of considerable and even very vast supranational aggregates has not been wanting; it has even been a permanent feature in the life-instincts of the race. But the form it took was the desire of a strong nation for mastery over others, permanent possession of their territories, subjugation of their peoples, exploitation of their resources: there was also an attempt at quasi-assimilation, an imposition of the culture of a dominant race and, in general, a System of absorption wholesale or as complete as possible. The Roman Empire was the classical example of this kind of endeavour and the Graeco-Roman unity of a single way of life and culture in a vast framework of political and administrative unity was the nearest approach within the geographical limits reached by this civilisation to something one might regard as a first figure or an incomplete suggestion of a figure of human unity. Other similar attempts have been made though not on so large a scale and with a less consummate ability throughout the course of history, but nothing has endured for more than a small number of centuries. The method used was fundamentally unsound inasmuch as it contradicted other life-instincts which were necessary to the vitality and healthy evolution of mankind and the denial of which must end in some kind of stagnation and arrested progress. The imperial aggregate could not acquire the unconquerable vitality and power of survival of the nation-unit. The only enduring empire-units have been in reality large nation-units which took that name like Germany and China and these were not forms of the supranational



State and need not be reckoned in the history of the formation of the imperial aggregate. So, although the tendency to the creation of empire testifies to an urge in Nature towards larger unities of human life, — and we can see concealed in it a will to unite the disparate masses of humanity on a larger scale into a single coalescing or combined life-unit, — it must be regarded as an unsuccessful formation without a sequel and unserviceable for any further progress in this direction. In actual fact a new attempt of world-wide domination could succeed only by a new instrumentation or under novel circumstances in englobing all the nations of the earth or persuading or forcing them into some kind of union. An ideology, a successful combination of peoples with one aim and a powerful head like Communist Russia, might have a temporary success in bringing about such an objective. But such an outcome, not very desirable in itself, would not be likely to ensure the creation of an enduring World-State. There would be tendencies, resistances, urges towards other developments which would sooner or later bring about its collapse or some revolutionary change which would mean its disappearance. Finally, any such stage would have to be overpassed; only the formation of a true World-State, either of a unitary but still elastic kind, — for a rigidly unitary State might bring about stagnation and decay of the springs of life, — or a union of free peoples could open the prospect of a sound and lasting world-order.

It is not necessary to repeat or review, except in certain directions, the considerations and conclusions set forward in this book with regard to the means and methods or the lines of divergence or successive development which the actual realisation of human unity may take. But still on some sides possibilities have arisen which call for some modification of what has been written or the conclusions arrived at in these chapters. It had been concluded, for instance, that there was no likelihood of the conquest and unification of the world by a single dominant people or empire. This is no longer altogether so certain, for we have just had to admit the possibility of such an attempt under certain circumstances. A dominant Power may be able to group round itself strong allies subordinated to it but still considerable in strength and resources and throw them into a world struggle with other Powers and peoples. This possibility would be increased if the dominating Power

managed to procure, even if only for the time being, a monopoly of an overwhelming superiority in the use of some of the tremendous means of aggressive military action which Science has set out to discover and effectively utilise. The terror of destruction and even of large-scale extermination created by these ominous discoveries may bring about a will in the governments and peoples to ban and prevent the military use of these inventions, but, so long as the nature of mankind has not changed, this prevention must remain uncertain and precarious and an unscrupulous ambition may even get by it a chance of secrecy and surprise and the utilisation of a decisive moment which might conceivably give it victory and it might risk the tremendous chance. It may be argued that the history of the last war runs counter to this possibility, for in conditions not quite realising but approximating to such a combination of circumstances the aggressive Powers failed in their attempt and underwent the disastrous consequences of a terrible defeat. But after all, they came for a time within a hair's breadth of success and there might not be the same good fortune for the world in some later and more sagaciously conducted and organised adventure. At least, the possibility has to be noted and guarded against by those who have the power of prevention and the welfare of the race in their charge.

One of the possibilities suggested at the time was the growth of continental agglomerates, a united Europe, some kind of a combine of the peoples of the American continent under the leadership of the United States, even possibly in the resurgence of Asia and its drive towards independence from the dominance of the European peoples a drawing together for self-defensive combination of the nations of this continent; such an eventuality of large continental combinations might even be a stage in the final formation of a world-union. This possibility has tended to take shape to a certain extent with a celerity that could not then be anticipated. In the two American continents it has actually assumed a predominating and practical form, though not in its totality. The idea of a United States of Europe has also actually taken shape and is assuming a formal existence, but is not yet able to develop into a completed and fully realised possibility because of the antagonism based on conflicting ideologies which cuts off from each other Russia and her satellites behind their iron curtain and Western Europe. This separation has gone so far

that it is difficult to envisage its cessation at any foreseeable time in a predictable future. Under other circumstances a tendency towards such combinations might have created the apprehension of huge continental clashes such as the collision, at one time imagined as possible, between a resurgent Asia and the Occident. The acceptance by Europe and America of the Asiatic resurgence and the eventual total liberation of the Oriental peoples, as also the downfall of Japan which figured at one time and indeed actually presented itself to the world as the liberator and leader of a free Asia against the domination of the West, have removed this dangerous possibility. Here again, as elsewhere, the actual danger presents itself rather as a clash between two opposing ideologies, one led by Russia and Red China and trying to impose the Communistic extreme partly by military and partly by forceful political means on a reluctant or at least an infected but not altogether willing Asia and Europe, and on the other side a combination of peoples, partly capitalist, partly moderate socialist who still cling with some attachment to the idea of liberty, — to freedom of thought and some remnant of the free life of the individual. In America there seems to be a push, especially in the Latin peoples, towards a rather intolerant completeness of the Americanisation of the whole continent and the adjacent islands, a sort of extended Monroe Doctrine, which might create friction with the European Powers still holding possessions in the northern part of the continent. But this could only generate minor difficulties and disagreements and not the possibility of any serious collision, a case perhaps for arbitration or arrangement by the U.N.O., not any more serious consequence. In Asia a more perilous situation has arisen, standing sharply across the way to any possibility of a continental unity of the peoples of this part of the world, in the emergence of Communist China. This creates a gigantic bloc which could easily englobe the whole of Northern Asia in a combination between two enormous Communist Powers, Russia and China, and would overshadow with a threat of absorption South-Western Asia and Tibet and might be pushed to overrun all up to the whole frontier of India, menacing her security and that of Western Asia with the possibility of an invasion and an overrunning and subjection by penetration or even by overwhelming military force to an unwanted ideology, political and social institutions and dominance of this militant mass of Communism whose push might easily prove irresistible. In

any case, the continent would be divided between two huge blocs which might enter into active mutual opposition and the possibility of a stupendous world-conflict would arise dwarfing anything previously experienced: the possibility of any world-union might even without any actual outbreak of hostilities be indefinitely postponed by the incompatibility of interests and ideologies on a scale which would render their inclusion in a single body hardly realisable. The possibility of a coming into being of three or four continental unions, which might subsequently coalesce into a single unity, would then be very remote and, except after a world-shaking struggle, hardly feasible.

At one time it was possible to regard as an eventual possibility the extension of Socialism to all the nations; an international unity could then have been created by its innate tendencies which turned naturally towards an overcoming of the dividing force of the nation-idea with its separatism and its turn towards competitions and rivalries often culminating in open strife; this could have been regarded as the natural road and could have turned in fact into the eventual way towards world-union. But, in the first place, Socialism has under certain stresses proved to be by no means immune against infection by the dividing national spirit and its international tendency might not survive its coming into power in separate national States and a resulting inheritance of competing national interests and necessities: the old spirit might very well survive in the new socialist bodies. But also there might not be or not for a long time to come an inevitable tide of the spread of Socialism to all the peoples of the earth: other forces might arise which would dispute what seemed at one time and perhaps still seems the most likely outcome of existing world tendencies; the conflict between Communism and the less extreme socialistic idea which still respects the principle of liberty, even though a restricted liberty, and the freedom of conscience, of thought, of personality of the individual, if this difference perpetuated itself, might create a serious difficulty in the formation of a World-State. It would not be easy to build a constitution, a harmonised State-law and practice in which any modicum of genuine freedom for the individual or any continued existence of him except as a cell in the working of a rigidly determined automatism of the body of the collectivist State or a part of a machine would

be possible or conceivable. It is not that the principle of Communism necessitates any such results or that its system must lead to a termite civilisation or the suppression of the individual; it could well be, on the contrary, a means at once of the fulfilment of the individual and the perfect harmony of a collective being. The already developed systems which go by the name are not really Communism but constructions of an inordinately rigid State Socialism. But Socialism itself might well develop away from the Marxist groove and evolve less rigid modes; a co-operative Socialism, for instance, without any bureaucratic rigour of a coercive administration, of a Police State, might one day come into existence, but the generalisation of Socialism throughout the world is not under existing circumstances easily foreseeable, hardly even a predominant possibility: in spite of certain possibilities or tendencies created by recent events in the Far East, a division of the earth between the two systems, capitalistic and socialistic, seems for the present a more likely issue. In America the attachment to individualism and the capitalistic system of society and a strong antagonism not only to Communism but to even a moderate Socialism remains complete and one can foresee little possibility of any abatement in its intensity. The extreme success of Communism creeping over the continents of the Old World, which we have had to envisage as a possibility, is yet, if we consider existing circumstances and the balance of opposing Powers, highly improbable and, even if it occurred, some accommodation would still be necessary, unless one of the two forces gained an overwhelming eventual victory over its opponent. A successful accommodation would demand the creation of a body in which all questions of possible dispute could be solved as they arose without any breaking out of open conflict, and this would be a successor of the League of Nations and the U.N.O. and move in the same direction. As Russia and America, in spite of the constant opposition of policy and ideology, have avoided so far any step that would make the preservation of the U.N.O. too difficult or impossible, this third body would be preserved by the same necessity or imperative utility of its continued existence. The same forces would work in the same direction and a creation of an effective world-union would still be possible; in the end the mass of general needs of the race and its need of self-preservation could well be relied on to make it inevitable.

There is nothing then in the development of events since the establishment of the United Nations Organisation, in the sequel to the great initiation at San Francisco of the decisive step towards the creation of a world-body which might end in the establishment of true world-unity, that need discourage us in the expectation of an ultimate success of this great enterprise. There are dangers and difficulties, there can be an apprehension of conflicts, even of colossal conflicts that might jeopardise the future, but total failure need not be envisaged unless we are disposed to predict the failure of the race. The thesis we have undertaken to establish of the drive of Nature towards larger agglomerations and the final establishment of the largest of all and the ultimate union of the world's peoples still remains unaltered: this is evidently the line which the future of the human race demands and which conflicts and perturbations, however immense, may delay, even as they may modify greatly the forms it now promises to take, but are not likely to prevent; for a general destruction would be the only alternative destiny of mankind. But such a destruction, whatever the catastrophic possibilities balancing the almost certain beneficial results, hardly limitable in their extent, of the recent discoveries and inventions of Science, has every chance of being as chimerical as any early expectation of final peace and felicity or a perfected society of the human peoples. We may rely, if on nothing else, on the evolutionary urge and, if on no other greater hidden Power, on the manifest working and drift or intention in the World-Energy we call Nature to carry mankind at least as far as the necessary next step to be taken, a self-preserving next step: for the necessity is there, at least some general recognition of it has been achieved and of the thing to which it must eventually lead the idea has been born and the body of it is already calling for its creation. We have indicated in this book the conditions, possibilities, forms which this new creation may take and those which seem to be most desirable without dogmatising or giving prominence to personal opinion; an impartial consideration of the forces that work and the results that are likely to ensue was the object of this study. The rest will depend on the intellectual and moral capacity of humanity to carry out what is evidently now the one thing needful.

We conclude then that in the conditions of the world at present, even taking into consideration its most disparaging features and dangerous possibilities, there is nothing that need alter the view we have taken of the necessity and inevitability of some kind of world-union; the drive of Nature, the compulsion of circumstances and the present and future need of mankind make it inevitable. The general conclusions we have arrived at will stand and the consideration of the modalities and possible forms or lines of alternative or successive development it may take. The ultimate result must be the formation of a World-State and the most desirable form of it would be a federation of free nationalities in which all subjection or forced inequality and subordination of one to another would have disappeared and, though some might preserve a greater natural influence, all would have an equal status. A confederacy would give the greatest freedom to the nations constituting the World-State, but this might give too much room for fissiparous or centrifugal tendencies to operate; a federal order would then be the most desirable. All else would be determined by the course of events and by general agreement or the shape given by the ideas and necessities that may grow up in the future. A world-union of this kind would have the greatest chances of long survival or permanent existence. This is a mutable world and uncertainties and dangers might assail or trouble for a time; the formed structure might be subjected to revolutionary tendencies as new ideas and forces emerged and produced their effect on the general mind of humanity, but the essential step would have been taken and the future of the race assured or at least the present era overpassed in which it is threatened and disturbed by unsolved needs and difficulties, precarious conditions, immense upheavals, huge and sanguinary world-wide conflicts and the threat of others to come. The ideal of human unity would be no longer an unfulfilled ideal but an accomplished fact and its preservation given into the charge of the united human peoples. Its future destiny would lie on the knees of the gods and, if the gods have a use for the continued existence of the race, may be left to lie there safe.

*Sri Aurobindo*