4. 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; any book we were reading 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.¹ 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 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.

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 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.

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¹ 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 appeared to be the work of some mischievous goblins!
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-faced 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 achieve-
ment; 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...

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. 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 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? 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

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2 The Mother with Letters on the Mother, p.580
3 Golconda, a place in Hyderabad which was under the Nizam. It is famous for diamond mines.
4 A building opposite the Ashram Playground.
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 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 unfailing 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 poet, 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. Henceforth 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 hiccupping. 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: hiccup 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 Philaire5 (I hope it will be in time)."

5 A French surgeon.
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 unflagging 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 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 scantly 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. Fortu-
nately 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 manip-
ulation 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”, not
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 some 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.

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6 Collected Poems, p.562, “The Other Earths”
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. 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 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

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7 Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, p.515, “The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth”
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.8 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 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

8 La Jeunesse Sportive de l' Ashram de Sri Aurobindo.
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, 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 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 cramped 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

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9 The Mother herself used to distribute saris or frocks to ladies and girls four times a year.
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, *cit śakti*, 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.