"On one side, he [the seeker] becomes aware of a witness recipient observing experiencing Consciousness which does not appear to act but for which all these activities inside and outside us seem to be undertaken and continue. On the other side he is aware at the same time of an executive Force or an energy of Process which is seen to constitute, drive and guide all conceivable activities and to create a myriad forms visible to us and invisible and use them as stable supports for its incessant flux of action and creation. Entering exclusively into the witness consciousness he becomes silent, untouched, immobile; he sees that he has till now passively reflected and appropriated to himself the movements of Nature and it is by this reflection that they acquired from the witness soul within him what seemed a spiritual value and significance. But now he has withdrawn that ascription or mirroring identification; he is conscious only of his silent self and aloof from all that is in motion around it; all activities are outside him and at once they cease to be intimately real; they appear now mechanical, detachable, endable."

Sri Aurobindo, The Synthesis of Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 20, p. 113

What is the witness soul?

It is the soul entering into a state in which it observes without acting. A witness is one who looks at what is done, but does not act himself. So when the soul is in a state in which it does not participate in the action, does not act through Nature, simply draws back and observes, it becomes the witness soul.

If one wants to stop the outer activities, this is the best method. One withdraws into one’s soul, to the extreme limit of
one’s existence, in a kind of immobility — an immobility which observes but does not participate, does not even give orders. That’s all.

You don’t understand?

When one wants to detach oneself from something, from a certain movement or activity or state of consciousness, this is the most effective method; one steps back a little, watches the thing like that, as one would watch a scene in a play, and one doesn’t intervene. And a moment later, the thing doesn’t concern you any longer, it is something which takes place outside you. Then you become very calm.

Only, when you do this, you never remedy anything in the outer movement, it remains what it is, but it no longer affects you. We have said this already I don’t know how many times: it is only a first step, it helps you not to feel much troubled by things. But things remain as they are — indefinitely. It is a negative state.

Is this what Sri Aurobindo speaks about when he says: “the separative aspect is liberative”?

Yes. It liberates, precisely. It’s just that. One practises it for that, don’t you see, for liberation, in order to be free from attachments, free from reactions, free from consequences. Those who understand the Gita in this way, tell you that — they don’t understand much further than that — they tell you, “Why do you want to try and change the world? The world will always be what it is and remain what it is, you have only to step back, to detach yourself, to watch it as a witness watches something which doesn’t concern him — and leave it alone.” That was my first contact with the Gita in Paris. I met an Indian who was a great Gita enthusiast and a very great lover of silence. He used to say, “When I go to my disciples, if they are in the right state I don’t need to speak. So we observe silence together, and in the
silence something is realised. But when they are not in a good enough state for this, I speak a little, just a little, to try to put them in the right state. And when they are in a worse state still, they ask questions!” (Laughter)

But he was the one who didn’t want to change the world, wasn’t he? the one who said we were revolutionaries?

Oh, that’s to excuse your questions! (Laughter)

No, that was one way of understanding the Gita; these people always quote — I believe in a truncated form the sentence about there being no fire without smoke.1 Perhaps this was true a thousand years ago or even five hundred years ago, but now it is a stupidity. So you can’t use this sentence to explain things: “Why do you worry about the state the world is in? — There is no fire without smoke.”

It is not true.

But still, it is one point of view. I think every point of view is necessary — if each one keeps to his own place and doesn’t try to impede the others. If he had just added: “My experience is like that”, it would have been all right; but he used this to criticise what others were doing. And there he was wrong.

That means he was not truly sincere?

Why? Perhaps he was sincere in his own conviction.... You mean when one makes propaganda, one is not sincere?

He believes he is sincere.

No, excuse me, he is convinced. He had neglected — perhaps

1 Perhaps Mother was referring to the following two verses of the Gita: “All existences follow their nature and what shall coercing it avail? Even the man of knowledge acts according to his own nature.... As a fire is covered over by smoke and a mirror by dust, as an embryo is wrapped by the amnion, so knowledge is enveloped by desire.” (Gita, Ill. 33, 38)
out of politeness — to tell me about the fourth state, which was still worse: that in which after having asked the question, one begins to discuss the answer. That is really the limit!

If you arrive at the conception of the world as the expression of the Divine in all His complexity, then the necessity for complexity and diversity has to be recognised, and it becomes impossible for you to want to make others think and feel as you do.

Each one should have his own way of thinking, feeling and reaction; why do you want others to do as you do and be like you? And even granting that your truth is greater than theirs — though this word means nothing at all, for, from a certain point of view all truths are true; they are all partial, but they are true because they are truths but the minute you want your truth to be greater than your neighbour’s, you begin to wander away from the truth.

This habit of wanting to compel others to think as you do, has always seemed very strange to me; this is what I call “the propagandist spirit”, and it goes very far. You can go one step further and want people to do what you do, feel as you feel, and then it becomes a frightful uniformity.

In Japan I met Tolstoy’s son who was going round the world for “the good of mankind’s great unity”. And his solution was very simple: everybody ought to speak the same language, lead the same life, dress in the same way, eat the same things.... And I am not joking, those were his very words. I met him in Tokyo; he said: “But everybody would be happy, all would understand one another, nobody would quarrel if everyone did the same thing.” There was no way of making him understand that it was not very reasonable! He had set out to travel all over the world for that, and when people asked him his name he would say “Tolstoy” — now, Tolstoy, you know... People said, “Oh!” — some people didn’t know that Tolstoy was dead — and they thought: “Oh! what luck, we are going to hear something remarkable” — and then he came out with that!
Questions and Answers

Well, this is only an exaggeration of the same attitude.
Anyway, I can assure you that there comes a time when one
no longer feels any necessity at all, at all, of convincing others
of the truth of what one thinks.

*When someone criticises what I am, the truth I am
realising, when others criticise...*

You may politely tell him, “Mind your own business.” But you
must leave it at that. You want to convince someone who criti-
cises that he is wrong to criticise? — The more you tell him, the
more will he be convinced that he is right!

*Not him, but others who follow...?*

Oh! you are afraid they will make adverse propaganda....
It doesn’t matter at all. We had an instance like that, which
was very amusing. Someone whom I won’t name, came here and
wrote in one of the leading French newspapers an absolutely
stupid article which was... well, which showed the stupidity of
the man and was extremely violent against the Ashram — that’s
not the reason I call him a fool, but still... Well, the result — one
of the results — of this article was that we received a letter from
someone: “I have read the article, I want to come to the Ashram
immediately.”

This can have just the opposite effect.