THE SUN
AND
THE RAINBOW

Amal Kiran
(K.D. Sethna)

Clear Ray Trust
Pondicherry - India
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APPROACHES TO LIFE THROUGH SRI AUROBINDO'S LIGHT
Essays, Letters, Poems, Short Stories

AMAL KIRAN
(K.D. SETHNA)

Clear Ray Trust
Puducherry - 605 012, India
To
beloved SEHRA
(9.9.1909 — 24.4.1980)
ever-attentive wife for 36 years,
devoted disciple of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother
at their Ashram from 1954
FOREWORD TO THE FIRST EDITION

Most of the writings collected in this book come from the pages of the monthly review of culture, published from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry: Mother India, whose editor the author has been for the last thirty-two years.

They draw, directly or obliquely, the inspiration of their various life-stances from the spiritual truth set shining amongst us by the Master of the Integral Yoga. Each of them aims to transmit, however partially, a touch of that illumination. And it is this touch that shades off their diverse moods into one another and unifies their multiple tones into a single whole.

The rainbow, which they form by issuing from a sense of the Aurobindonian sun, has been brought into public sight with the generous help of two friends — S.T. Pawar, who wanted to remain "an anonymous admirer" until requested to be otherwise, and V. Manmohan Reddy through whom the Institute of Human Study at Hyderabad headed by V. Madhusudan Reddy offered its co-operation.

The Ashram Trust is to be thanked for permission to quote from the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

1st August 1981

AMAL KIRAN (K.D. SETHNA)

PUBLISHER’S NOTE TO THE SECOND EDITION

The Clear Ray Trust is happy to bring out this long-overdue second edition of The Sun and the Rainbow.
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SPIRITUAL INDIA AND SRI AUROBINDO

The old picture of 'spiritual India with the dreamy unpractical look has been stripped off the wall. Not that the picture was false in every detail; but unhappily it overlaid the true with the fictitious. India does "dream" a great deal of what is behind the veil of earth's appearances and she definitely is not concerned with only the dust and heat of an outward-going life. Even in the tumultuous twentieth century, she is tremendously "inward": political slogans and economic formulas do not wholly absorb her, but her "inwardness" is not unpractical, her otherworldly dreaming does not end in an emotional haze, a mental mist.

CONCRETE REALISATION

Ever since the hymns of the oldest scripture in history, the Rigveda, began to be sung, it has been dinned into Indian ears that the way of the inner life is not blind belief or vague speculation. We have to pierce the veil of earth's appearances and seize the hidden Beauty as no less real than the universe to which we are accustomed. To rest content with faith in God and in the Hereafter is far from enough from the Indian standpoint; it is equally insufficient to chop logic about the Absolute and the soul's immortality.

The Gospel of Mark has the famous query: "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" The Indian mystic, from the Rigveda down to our day may be taken to have asked more pungently: "What does it profit a man if he possesses a soul but never realises it?"
Realisation: that is the keyword in India. A man realises what love is by actually falling in love with a woman and taking her to himself — not by emotionally reading Shelley or intellectually studying Havelock Ellis. So too by a psychological process within him, which brings him into actual touch with a divine reality, and not by mere religious belief or philosophical speculation does he grow aware of his true soul and become a mystic.

SEEING GOD

When the young Narendra, who later made a name on three continents as Swami Vivekananda, met the God-intoxicated Ramakrishna, the first question he shot at him was: “Sir, have you seen God?” A crude question for the awed religionist and a naive one for the abstract thinker, but typically Indian in its approach to the Unknown. And typically Indian was the answer it evoked: “I see God more concretely than I see you.” Indian mysticism begins to be understood as we start grasping its concreteness.

When the sacred books of this land spoke, for instance, of God’s light, they did not use a poetic figure. They meant light just as concretely as Raman meant it when he won the Nobel Prize in Physics. In India the concrete was not synonymous with the material, even as consciousness did not stop with the level of the élan vital and the mind. Beyond apparently unconscious Matter and the grades of organic evolution there was for the Indian a Power which was the Spirit.

And this basic stuff of being, this divine substance of consciousness, could be perceived by the subtle senses lying latent behind our imperfect physical instruments. A faint and faltering image of it entered our perception in the cosmos around us. Listen to a stanza from those chants of mystical seerhood, the Upanishads, describing the supreme spiritual Existence: “There the sun shines not and the moon has no splendour and the stars are blind; there these lightnings flash
not nor any earthly fire. For all that is bright is but the shadow of His brightness and by His shining all this shineth." Super­Science is here, a statement of some concrete fact. Even while denying the ultimate reality of the things we know, it denied by means of a greater affirmation of the Real. Our lustres faded in the high trance of the mystic because a mightier one which was more substantial took their place.

**PRACTICE OF YOGA, STATIC OR DYNAMIC**

A wishy-washy play with the Unknown is not Indian mysticism. India has established a sustained systematic process leading to it from many starting-points, and that is what is meant by Yoga. Yoga is "yoking", a union of the human with the Divine: its results are concrete and verifiable. Long and arduous is the path, but there can be no mistake about its practicality: thousands in India even today take it up and pursue it to one end or another.

Various ends have been put before the Yogi, all realisable by a steady endeavour, but they fall mainly into two classes of realisation: the static and the dynamic.

The masters of the static path regard the world as a thing to be thrown aside, a temporary bagatelle. They aim at an absorption in the vast Divine. Their experience of a mysterious Eternal, compared to which the world is like an empty hallucination, is overwhelmingly concrete, but it diverts the consciousness from the earth's normal activities and gives no final raison d'être to them.

Why did the Eternal bring about or permit the pageant of Time and Space if its aim was merely to renounce it? Such a renunciation is indeed not unpractical escapism towards a sort of day-dream — it is escapism without being unpractical, for what its escape leads to is felt as a greater reality behind Nature rather than as an imaginary or theoretical "thin air". All the same, there is a certain one-sidedness which is not in tune with the modern trend of life no less than with the
secret instinct of mankind that the earth too has importance
and is no flimsy foil to heaven. India today is awake to that
deep instinct and its penchant is for synthesis, for many-sided
unity. And the Dynamic Yoga which is the other side of spir­
ital realisation in India’s past falls in with such a penchant.

THE DOUBLE PRACTICALITY OF THE GITA

This dynamic Yoga regards the world as a field of God’s
manifestation, not as a trap from which the soul must break
out. The finest expression of it in our history is the “Song
Celestial”, the Bhagawad Gita. The Gita is not an ascetic cry;
it does not seek to pluck one away from the throbbing heart
of things. It is a gospel delivered on a battlefield with war­
riors brandishing their spears and holding drawn bows of
destruction. In fact the scene is remarkably like the modern
world with the holocaust of a terrible conflict not long past
and the heart-numbing threat of the Cold War all about us.
And the word of Sri Krishna is not a pious advice to stand
aside from the grim actuality but “Go forth and fight: conquer
a mighty kingdom” because on the one side stood in burning
indignation the defenders of civilised values and on the other
a titanic tyranny. Sri Krishna, however, did not look forward
to just an outward triumph. The warrior was asked to rise
above the ordinary human consciousness and live in the light
of the Eternal and be by Yoga the instrument of a Will wider
than his own.

The Gita is not a gospel of action in the common mean­
ing of the term: it teaches a new way of action which absorbs
human push and power into an inspired and illumined ini­
tiative that is divine. It combines two species of practicality
— the practicality of Yoga and the practicality of life. The
former is present even in the static realisation and its presence
everywhere gives the lie to those who think that mystics live
in a “glorified gas”. But the static path lays an overstress on
the Beyond: Sri Krishna makes the Beyond dynamic here and
now, he links up with it the concrete human.

THE GREATEST YOGI OF OUR AGE

An attitude similar to the Gita's is to be found in the greatest Yogi of our age, Sri Aurobindo. That is why in these times of tense body and alert mind, with upheavals in our midst and upheavals around us, he stands as a modern among the moderns. The eyes of renascent India turn to Pondicherry, the little town on our east coast, capital of the one-time French India, where a school of spirituality, an Ashram with hundreds of disciples, sprang up with him as its centre.

A magnificent leonine personality — a writer educated from boyhood in England and using the English language like a mother-tongue in splendid poetry as well as prose — a scholar in Greek and Latin — at home in French, German and Italian, not to mention Sanskrit and other Indian languages — once a politician of profound constructive power — a gigantic philosophical intellect whose chief work, The Life Divine, has been hailed as epoch-making — a still more towering Master of Yoga, whom Tagore in the East and Rolland in the West called the custodian of the future — Sri Aurobindo was a figure to dominate the world’s gaze.

For six years he led his country’s fight for political freedom. Then suddenly he left politics to concentrate more completely on the Yoga he had already been practising for some years. He felt his withdrawal into the background a most necessary step, because the true genius of India was itself a background — the deep Spirit waiting secretly behind the clamour and conflict raging in the outer being of man. India's greatness in the past arose, according to Sri Aurobindo, from her possession of the hidden Spirit by Yogic experience.

The Spiritual Background, however, was not his whole objective. In India's finest hours the contact with the outer being was never lost. Sri Aurobindo sought for something more than a contact which, after a brief flash of illumination,
The Sun and the Rainbow

lets the outer being remain the half-lit and stumbling creature it normally is. As in the background, so too in the forefront there must always be the Spirit. His Yoga is integral, an all-round fulfilment of the Divine on this very earth and not in a remote paradise or a transcendental Nirvana. That is why Pondicherry, with its Ashram, can be regarded as the gateway to a wonderful future.

DIVINISATION OF LIFE

Sri Aurobindo holds that man's hopes and dreams can be crowned only if, with the help of the highest consciousness developed up to now, we rise beyond ourselves to a new level of being, a level above mind as mind is above animal life and animal life above mere matter in which everything lay latent and unevolved.

This new level has to be a step forward in evolution and not just Science, Philosophy Art, Ethics or Religion achieving combinations and permutations of the various aspects of man at his cleverest and noblest. Sri Aurobindo takes up the whole beautiful heritage of past progress but does not rest with giving it a novel shape: he seeks to divinise the entire self by a special experience and ultimately permeate with a spiritual power of consciousness every means of manifestation and the entire outer form so that even the poor body which lives a victim to disease and decay and the sudden stroke of death may become king of Nature.

Our mind boggles at the colossal scheme. But surely one for whose constructive insight men of practical force like Tilak and Das bore the deepest esteem cannot be dismissed as the chaser of a magnificent mirage. The fact that his Ashram is not an abode of complacent "navel-gazers" but a scene of varied enterprise, astir with architects, engineers, scientists and manual workers as well as artists, poets, musicians and thinkers — this fact is enough to testify that the source from which such a complex fountain sprang must have still been a manifold creative vitality. The
Ashram is an experiment to form by a profound psychophysical transformation the nucleus of a super-mankind to be.

THE INTEGRAL YOGA

Patiently and without lust for fame the Master kept moulding his vision of super-mankind. The method of his Integral Yoga is a very plastic one. There are no mechanical breath-exercises or painful physical postures; it is our consciousness that the Yoga starts with, a constant remembrance of the Divine and an offering of all our movements, inward and outward, to Him by a consecrated attitude, a self-surrender that brings about a series of extraordinary yet concrete and convincing experiences affecting every side of us, down to our physical substance.

"A quixotic hope!" cries the man in the street in the face of a Yoga so far-reaching and revolutionary. The claims of the Rigveda, the Upanishads and the Bhagawad Gita are difficult enough to accept, but here in our midst we have something that exceeds them all. Can that intractable old stumbling-block of every spiritual effort in the past, the physical body, be illumined and transformed together with the mind and heart? The signs of such a change would not be the ability merely to stay in a sealed trance, insensitive to outward attacks of pain, or a vague and intermittent exaltation in the nerves, or a few spectacular capacities as developed by "naked fakirs".

An immense wakeful consciousness that is unfettered by human limitations and uses a body that has taken on itself the divine immunity of the Spirit — this is the Aurobindonian ideal. There is nothing fantastic here, once it is admitted that the Spirit is the supreme underlying reality. For, if everything has come from the Spirit, Matter too must be a diminished aspect of some divine truth and can by awakening to that truth get divinised. The trouble is that life does not always bear out logic. Doubt, disbelief, denial are bound to dog the path of Sri Aurobindo's experiment, but we must
not forget that we are living in a country where the Spirit has trafficked with the earth for ages and the Divine and Superhuman are no strangers. Above all we must remember what Sri Aurobindo wrote in a letter to a disciple apropos of an inveterately sceptical intellectuality like Bertrand Russell’s as contrasted with the temperament which easily and eagerly believes or rests happy with lofty notions. Referring to himself and to his associate and co-worker in the Integral Yoga, the Mother, he begins the letter:

“I must remind you that I have been an intellectual myself and no stranger to doubt — both the Mother and myself have had one side of the mind as positive and as insistent on practical results and more so than any Russell can be. We could never have been contented with the shining ideas and phrases which a Rolland or another takes for the gold coin of Truth. We know well what is the difference between a subjective experience and a dynamic outward-going and realising Force. So although we have faith, (and who ever did anything great in the world without having faith in his mission or the Truth at work behind him?) we do not found ourselves on faith alone, but on a great ground of knowledge which we have been developing and testing all our lives. I think I can say that I have been testing day and night for years upon years more scrupulously than any scientist his theory or his method on the physical plane. That is why I am not alarmed by the aspect of the world around me or disconcerted by the often successful fury of the adverse Forces who increase in their rage as the Light comes nearer and nearer to the field of earth and Matter.”

THE BACKGROUND OF AUROVILLE

It is, on the one hand, the process of an unheard-of spiritual transformation and, on the other, the presence of a super-scientific this-worldly genius, that are the background of the larger field of work into which the Aurobindonian inspiration
has broken forth in the project of Auroville, a growing city on the borders of Pondicherry. “Auroville” is a name derived from the French word “Aurore” meaning “dawn”. So it stands for “City of Dawn”, with an appropriate undertone of the Master’s name because of the common component “Auro”. Extending to a greater range of human material than the intensive life of the Ashram could allow, this project has sent out a call to the four corners of our disillusioned earth. The call is to find at last a centre of manifold yet unified existence, marking the first flush of a new era of peace and harmony in the secure working of the new principle of divine dynamism which Sri Aurobindo terms “Supermind” or “Truth-Consciousness”. Not that all who give their services to Auroville have to be full-fledged Yogis; but all must be aware that the City of Dawn is a dream meant to come true under the shaping hand of the guide and guru of Sri Aurobindo’s Ashram: the Mother.
I was at college when I first heard of Sri Aurobindo. I read somewhere that he was a master of English as well as familiar with several other languages both ancient and modern. I also learnt that he was a great Yogi who had the power to appear in many places at the same time! What impressed my young mind was not so much this alleged power as his multi-linguism. I took it for granted that a great Yogi should be able to flout the common laws of space and time. But I was struck by the fact that this spiritual figure should be at home in such a number of languages and therefore of literatures. Here was somebody who possessed a Light from beyond our earth and yet saw meaning in earthly endeavour and expression. Such a seer could not but have some meaning for me.

However, I was engrossed in my own pursuits and they were not always such as might lead one to the spiritual path. The analytic intellect had grown rather strong in me and I came to carry like a challenging flame the modern temper of doubt and denial. During a short period I professed downright materialism and atheism. There was for me no Soul, there was for me no God. An idealistic vein in my nature loved great poetry and kindled up to great art: their "immortal longings" struck a responsive chord in my heart, but the modern temper held sway on the whole and the name of Sri Aurobindo receded into the background.

A series of unexpected events jolted my intellectual self-sufficiency and sent my emotional part looking for a perma-

nence behind transient things, a support of some love which would be eternal and all-understanding. The all-understanding-ness was an important desideratum. For I was quite a bit of a complexity, my mind and character having a great many sides which sometimes drew me in different directions. I now started searching for a Guru. A number of Sadhus and Yogis I caught hold of, asking them for some satisfying revelation. It was in this period of a vague Godward turn that I came across a Theosophist who was also an art-critic. When he saw that I was on a spiritual quest he said: “Nobody except Sri Aurobindo will satisfy you.” This was strange, coming from a Theosophist whose world is chockful of occult Masters forming a coterie among themselves and leaving no room for any outsider like Sri Aurobindo. My friend added: “Sri Aurobindo has the Cosmic Consciousness.”

The Theosophist’s testimony in general and this phrase in particular joined up with the memorable impression made by the statement that Sri Aurobindo was a multi-linguist. But I still did not realise the exact nature of the spiritual life which he represented. The basic meaning of his Yoga had not yet gone home to me. Then a most amazing coincidence happened. I went to Bombay’s well-known Crawford Market to buy a pair of shoes. I took my purchase away in a box wrapped by the shopkeeper in a sheet of newspaper. On uncovering the box the news-sheet fell back disclosing a big headline: “A Visit to the Ashram of Sri Aurobindo.” Immediately I devoured the article. It gave a broad idea of the earth-accepting and life-transforming Yoga practised in the Pondicherry Ashram. All kinds of work, all activities of thought, all movements of literature and art were sought to be taken up into the spiritual life and given their fullest value. I felt nothing in me would be suppressed and discarded, everything would be fulfilled in the light of the Eternal and the Infinite. I wrote to the Ashram, seeking permission to come and live there. The reply was encouraging. So I made my pilgrimage to Pondicherry in the shoes that had brought me that eye-opener of an article.
I was twenty-three at the time. Yoga is not easy on any account — and for a young man it was bound to be pretty difficult at first. For, however life-accepting, no Yoga would be worth its name if the old turns of life were not rectified and dedicated to the Divine. Asceticism was never imposed in the Ashram, but to take everything with an inner detachment and equanimity was the constant call — and every minute was meant to be a gesture of remembering the Divine and offering oneself to Him. A subtle discipline in the midst of a wide freedom lay at the basis of this “Integral Yoga”. Yes, it was not a smooth canter all the way. But the returns were great. There were intense inner experiences. The discovery of an inmost self whose very nature is bliss, the sense of being free from the shackles of the body, the enlightening influx of a force from above the brain-mind — these were no small rewards. And the rewards were all the more rich because of the source from which they flowed: the grand personality of Sri Aurobindo, the beautiful presence of his co-worker, the Mother.

And the Master and the Mother came close to us with their gracious abundance of love and light in a thousand ways. The Mother met us again and again each day, a guide and helper in every problem. The Master, who a year before I joined the Ashram had withdrawn from public contacts in order to concentrate on the momentous work in hand and bring about its consummation sooner, was very far indeed from being a world-shunning recluse. He kept in touch with us all the time by writing profusely to us in answer to our questions on every imaginable topic. His interest in our literary activities was immense. He carried on his own literary creation too. Up to the end of his life he kept up his correspondence with me.

Not only did he want my self-critical faculty to be on the alert, but also asked me to comment on the epic he had been writing for years, Savitri, whose 23,803 lines of superb blank verse are at once a legend and a symbol and a philosophy, charged everywhere with what the ancient Rishis called the Mantra and what Savitri itself sums up in a Mantric utterance:
Sight's sound-waves breaking from the soul's great deeps.

Patiently he considered all that my well-meaning impiumence felt to be occasional shortcomings or oversights in the colossal poem. Mostly he demonstrated to me my errors of judgment but now and again he gladly acted on my suggestion. Here was a Guru who never sat on a deliberate pedestal but built for himself a throne of thrones in our hearts and minds by his intimacy and naturalness and that rare humility which stands always in front of the inexhaustible Infinite whose touch lends "a Yonder to all ends".

The most divine being that I could ever hope to meet, Sri Aurobindo was also the most human person I have ever met. Nor was his humanness definable only in terms of his affectionate fatherly attitude which led us onward and upward by the very splendour of spirit he brought so close to us. Its definition has also a deep evolutionary meaning. Sri Aurobindo represented at the same time descending Godhead and ascending Manhood. The whole passion of man's history, the whole arduousness of man's aeonic adventure lived in him. He was no sudden isolated wonder, not merely a haloed visitor from another and brighter world come down on earth to set our air ablaze for a while and make us eager to go soaring into his empyrean. He stood as a gatherer-up of all our problems and difficulties into himself, making them part of his own flesh and blood so as to know them from the inside and find their final solution. Repeatedly has he said that unless he had passed through every difficulty to which his disciples were subject and unless he had discovered and exemplified on his own pulses the conquest of them he could never assure us that they could be overcome by us.

All through his own ordeals — the trials of a spiritual pioneer, the first invoker and realiser of the hitherto unmanifest "Supermind" which holds the original truth, the perfect model of every term of the cosmic evolutionary travail — all
through the challenges of his Yoga he had the liveliest sense of humour. The transcendental Bliss of the mystic in him he humanised into a laughter ready for any occasion. He has even joked unreservedly about himself. And his divine levity has often shot with sunshine the clouds in which so many of his disciples got wrapped time and again. When my friend Nirodbaran, whom he had dubbed “Man of Sorrows”, wrote to him after a Darshan: “Your Himalayan austerity and grandeur take my breath away, making my heart palpitate”, he replied: “O rubbish! I am austere and grand, grim and stern! every blasted thing I never was! I groan in an un-Aurobindian despair when I hear such things. What has happened to the common sense of all you people?”

Our age is one in which old pomp and ceremony are laughed to scorn. Sri Aurobindo’s laughter has never been derisive, but he has made light of conventions and creeds that have outlived their use. The period in which he was educated in England — from his seventh to his twenty-first year — was, as he put it, “the heyday of materialism”. The mind of materialism has been simultaneously a liberator from age-long superstitions that curb the scientific drive of rationality, and a confiner within a new dogmatism of physical experiment and mathematical formula. Sri Aurobindo, the evolutionary Avatar, could not but allow the representative currents of modern thought to run through his being and come forth transfigured. In his early life he passed through a genuine phase of agnosticism. So he knew intimately how to deal with a mentality such as mine had once been. He has spoken of gigantic doubts through which he had to cut his way to spiritual certitude. He has even said, incredible as it may seem from the lips of the greatest contemporary Yogi: “I had no urge towards spirituality in me, I developed spirituality.”

And he has followed up with the words: “I was incapable of understanding metaphysics, I developed into a philosopher. I had no eye for painting — I developed it by Yoga. I transformed my nature from what it was to what it was not.
I did it by a special manner, not by a miracle and I did it to show what could be done and how it could be done. I did not do it out of any personal necessity of my own or by a miracle without any process. I say that if it is not so, then my Yoga is useless and my life was a mistake, — a mere absurd freak of Nature without meaning or consequence."

Here, in the universal significance, the lesson of aspiring will-power for the whole world, with which he, who bore within himself the supreme status that has need of nothing, filled the labour of his incarnate days — here is what Sri Aurobindo pre-eminently means to me.
According to Sri Aurobindo, every nation, every large and distinguishable human collectivity, is a super-organism, with a common or communal body, mind and soul. This super-organism, like the individual, passes through a cycle of birth, growth, youth, ripeness and decline. If the decline lasts long, it generally ends in death.

But there resides, in the vast subtleties of the collective being of a people, a power of self-renewal with the help of its inner life-idea. The inner life-idea is the key to a nation’s psychology and is more tenacious than the outer form. If it is great and intense and the body is strong enough and the surface mind plastic and adaptive without being loose or unstable, then the collective being can keep unimpaired through vicissitudes, even rise phoenix-like out of an apparent perishing and one cycle will evolve into another and many cycles run their courses before the final collapse.

Certain of the ancient civilisations had this kind of continuity and resurrection. But even they could not last indefinitely. For, the inner life-idea itself of a super-organism is only a projection of the authentic soul behind, a principle of that soul’s manifestation. This soul in turn is a manifestation and vehicle of the eternal Spirit whose expression in time is the whole universe. The Cosmic Self or “Virat”, as the Rishis called it, acting through its particularised representative, the soul, is the true source and support of the inner life-idea of the collective
being, as it is of the individual. And if the source and support is not sufficiently contacted in consciousness through the soul, the eternal is never brought with dominant effect into the temporal and ultimately a people suffers dissolution or a fusion into other races instead of achieving their assimilation into its own communal consciousness.

This has happened to several great collectivities of old: Egypt, Sumer, Crete, Greece, Persia, the Celtic culture, Rome, the Incas, the Aztecs and the civilisations of ancient America before them. The nations that exist today where these were at one time are no real continuations of them. Some influence does linger and is still fruitful in general amidst some ethnic remnant, but there is no perceptible identity of inner life-idea or even outer nation-body.

When, however, there is a constant look into the inmost, a persistent pressure upon the deepest and widest Self, a people acquires the secret of perpetual life-renewal and never ages, no matter how many millenniums pass, what foreign invasions interfere with the physical expression and what defects and decadences set in as a result of its own folly. Even death may threaten again and again, but every time a renascence occurs and the wrinkles straighten out, the stiff limbs recover healthy resilient tissue, the crust of dull habit and stifling conservative restraint breaks to reveal an enterprising and creative consciousness that was never moribund within. A people living not only with a keen and independent psychological stress rather than with a merely refined and superficially mentalised animal urge, a people living also in the experience of its profound soul and thereby in the presence of "Virat", the infinite Self of the cosmos seeking its own highest manifestation through human history, such a people never dies and is everlastingly young in spite of many phases of apparent decline.

In ways that are different in several respects but have a basic similarity India and China strike the historian as nations that can be said to have lived from remote antiquity onward with a general touch on this infinite Cosmic Self. The sense of
Atman, the sense of Tao meet us throughout. Not that there have been no counter-currents, but, by and large, the inmost universal Reality has been felt by them across the millennia. And that is why they have persisted with a recognisable continuity, as no other nation contemporary with their early careers has done.

Modern China has gone through a revolution which appears to run against such a continuity at last. But can a nation that has kept a Tao-toned identity for so long lose its character under the sweep of Dialectical Materialism? It hardly seems probable. Certain economic changes may come to stay; permanent change of essential genius is unlikely.

Not the least doubt, however, can be entertained about the India of today. Behind a thousand defects, weaknesses and corruptions, there still runs, as an undying potential, the ancient spirituality. This potential also acts secretly against the trend of a superficial modernism. At one period — in the nineteenth century — India passed through the grave danger of getting its true genius obscured. Then arose Ramakrishna in a stark nudity of fundamental Indianess — illiterate, childlike, clear of all Europeanised trappings and modernised refinements. He began a new cycle of the Eternal in time for the old race. Vivekananda, his disciple, gave a strong vital and mental body to the sheer soulfulness of his master and brought the new cycle into some rapport with the temper of the age. But the sannyasi ideal was still a harking back to the past. Now, with the advent of Sri Aurobindo, the power of renewal, the realisation of perpetual youth, is a certainty, for there is the ideal of life-acceptance and life-transformation by means of spirituality, along with the taking up of all that is significantly modern.

But India labours under a host of difficulties, a load of shortcomings. Of course, we must not let them obsess our view or blind us to the greatness growing in the womb of time. Yet we cannot neglect them either. India must wake up more and more at once to these incongruities and to that greatness in order to fulfil with swift strides her deathless destiny.
Q: Please define Sadhana and Integral Yoga. What is their relationship to each other?

What is the Mother’s and Sri Aurobindo's attitude toward work and what part do work and life-activity play in the life of one who undertakes Integral Yoga?

Sadhana is the practice, system, method by which one tries to attain spiritual perfection. It may be called also the process of Yoga — Yoga meaning the union of the human consciousness with the Divine.

The Integral Yoga sets before the sadhak, the doer of sadhana, a full and complete aim. The fullness and completeness may be viewed from several standpoints.

Not only one part of us — the mental intelligence, the emotional being, the vital force, the physical organism — is taken up according to the specific turn of our nature, as in the old Yogas, but our whole self in all its parts is set towards the Divine. Of course, our starting-point can be anywhere, but with its help we have gradually to open all of ourselves.

Every part of us has an inner and an outer aspect. Both have to be taken into account. There should be a movement inward to concentrate on the Divine in a quiet isolation or absorption. But the movement outward must not be
neglected. The world without no less than the world within is the field of our sadhana.

The ultimate goal is not only to rise above the ordinary world to some supreme Existence, Consciousness and Bliss, some infinite and eternal Oneness in which everything gets merged, or else some sovereign Being beyond with whose light and love we unite. The ultimate goal is also to bring all that is above into the world below and to manifest it in our own humanity and put it in relation to the ordinary life around us.

The manifestation in ourselves and the channelling out to the world have to be of a Divine Presence and Power that can utterly transform into perfection all the terms of our being and nature, all the terms of the world’s life, leaving nothing untouched. There is a supreme original, an eternal truth, a perfect model, as it were, of all that is here partial, broken, groping and discordant. That luminous “archetype” has to be evolved here and now.

The evolution of this “archetype” needs the operation of what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother call the Supermind, the creative Truth-Consciousness, which has never been brought into play in its direct form. The Supermind can divinise the mental and vital and physical being of man and bring about a collective spiritual life on the basis of an inner unity and take up all the fields of activity and give them a divine value, direction and fulfilment.

Thus the Integral Yoga sweeps everything into its scope. Its sadhana is not a fixed one-dimensional discipline as in the older Yogas. It is a plastic movement, varying in its turns, suit­ing each individual and depending ultimately on the working of the Supramental Godhead, the Will and the Grace of the transcendent Mother who is also universal and individual.

The central process of this Yoga, therefore, is a constant aspiration to that Godhead and that Mother, a surrender of the whole self and nature into their hands and a consecration of all activity to them so that they may take it up and make
us their perfect instruments. In more concrete terms we may say that our entire self and nature have to flow towards the Avatar of that Godhead — Sri Aurobindo — and the incarnation of that Mother — the radiant personality who has been Sri Aurobindo’s co-worker.

“Co-worker” — the word is apposite in a special sense, for it points to the importance of work in the Integral Yoga. It is by work that our outer being, with its manifold dynamic turns, can be dedicated to the Divine.

Every kind of work, all life-activity, is embraced by the Integral Yoga. But it has to be offered to the Supreme, launched upon for Sri Aurobindo, carried out for the Mother. Thus it cannot be accepted in any crude shape. Not that one has to be finicky and over-choosy. The Integral Yogi should be ready to take up whatever work falls to his lot and feel himself fit to do it. But nothing should be done crudely, all should be made as perfect as possible and the whole effort has to be charged with a new attitude. The new attitude is the indispensable thing. For our aim is not just to be refined and efficient: our aim is to do everything for the Divine and there must be at all moments the sense of self-offering, the calling of the Divine to take up our work and do the Supreme Will through it. We must cultivate a non-attachment to the results: success we must try to achieve but if we do not get it there must be no inner upset. The failure itself has to be offered up to the Divine to make use of for His own purposes. Shakespeare has hit the mark with his phrase:

There’s a divinity that shapes our ends,  
Rough-hew them how we may.

It could even happen that a depth-churning failure is of greater use ultimately to the Divine than a superficial success. So, upset is out of place in any case.

By continued self-offering and inner detachment from the results and by aspiration to be the Supreme’s instruments we
shall grow gradually into the feeling that a Power beyond our own takes up all our works and directly acts through us. When this experience begins, we are on the way to the state Dante attributes to the blessed at every level of Paradise — the state in which there is no ambition, no discontent, no lack of self-completion but a constant acceptance and reception of God's Will that is all-sufficient and leaves nothing more to be desired:

His Will alone is our tranquillity.

Indeed it is natural that this should be so, for the Divine's dynamism comes out of an infinite peace: it is, as Sri Aurobindo says,

Force one with unimaginable rest.

And because it is such, it is not only inexhaustible, not only possessed of a vast and happy patience but also free from rigidity and one-sidedness and capable of meeting every demand, every change of circumstance and leading assuredly to the previsioned goal. That is why Sri Aurobindo has said:

All can be done if the god-touch is there.
It is the message of Sri Aurobindo that the real call on men today in a world going wrong is not so much to reshape their machines, their technologies, their institutions, as to reshape themselves. By that reshaping, the outer face of their complex and confused civilisation will be transfigured.

It is also the message of Sri Aurobindo that nothing can help the reshaping to the full except what he calls the Integral Yoga. But how does the Integral Yoga set about its gigantic task? Perhaps the easiest approach to an answer is through a correct understanding of the common words “inspiration” and “intuition”.

From very early times a number of people have claimed to be “inspired” — that is, to be the instruments of a knowledge, a power, a goodness, a beauty and a happiness greater than the human being is ordinarily capable of. Modern psychology confirms the phenomenon of inspiration. From the several recorded facts we may pick out a few to get the nature of this phenomenon into focus.

A brief account is available of how Keats came to describe Apollo in the third book of his unfinished epic, Hyperion. The passage arrived “by chance or magic — as if it were something given to him”. He did not realise how beautiful the poetic expressions were, until after he had put them down on paper. When he read them he was himself astonished: they appeared to be the production of another person, some more gifted agency.
Mozart says of his musical compositions that they were presented to him as complete wholes. He further reports: "Nor do I have in my imagination the parts successively, but I hear them, as it were, all at once." The difficult job of laying out in sequence the musical elements followed the ecstatic experience of the "inspired" totality.

Science no less than Art has its story of inspiration to tell. Lord Kelvin has testified how the solution of a key problem came to him quite suddenly without any direct process of reasoning. And there is the famous incident in the course of the chemist Kekulé's research. While seated on the top of a bus he visualised in an instant the structure of a molecule of benzene. What he saw in a flash was the ancient symbol of the serpent biting its own tail and immediately he evolved the chemical formula of the "benzene ring".

Inspiration that is not sustained but flashes across the mind in a revelatory moment may be named "intuition". Intuition is, as it were, a sharp edge of light from within oneself cutting through the knot of a problem. It is knowledge by a sort of instant inwardness towards — or identity with — the thing to be known. Scientists may be said to be more intuitive than inspired — though the case of Kekulé is as of a visionary poet or painter.

Possibly Darwin too "saw" the truth in the instance of which Sir Julian Huxley spoke some years ago in a broadcast: "Darwin... in Ch. 4 of the *Origin of Species* explains at some length why natural selection inevitably produces diversification (and in his autobiography records how he arrived at the solution of this 'problem of great importance' in a flash of intuition)."

Perhaps the most intuitive scientist in the past was Clerk Maxwell. His most fruitful intuition is the leap of mind he made in setting forth his equation for electromagnetism. He postulated a term which nothing at the time necessitated and which was found correct by experiment later. His work on the

laws of gases, too, contains a similar leap. It has provoked a modern physicist to exclaim: "Maxwell, by a train of argument which seems to bear no relation at all to molecules, or to the dynamics of their movements, or even to ordinary common sense, reached a formula which, according to all precedents and all the rules of scientific philosophy, ought to have been hopelessly wrong. In actual fact it was subsequently shown to be exactly right and is known as Maxwell's law to this day."

What is most remarkable at present in the field of Science is that Einstein has given "intuition" a legitimate place at the very basis of theoretical physics. The General Theory of Relativity has not only revolutionised our ultimate concepts but also brought about a revolutionary ideal of what these concepts may be and a revolutionary method of reaching them. Although meant to explain the sense-perceived universe, they become, as Einstein says, "steadily more abstract and remote from experience". Of course, they have to be "verified" by experiment, but what is directly verified is only a number of conclusions coming at the end of a long series of deductions from those concepts: the concepts themselves are never asked to submit to experimental tests. They may well mark an extreme of the materially unpicturable, as does indeed Einstein's own theory of a "curved" four-dimensional continuum of fused space and time, in which all events past and present and future are to be plotted as co-existent, as being "all at once" like the musical compositions heard by Mozart's inspired imagination. And in the search for such theories the physicist, writes Einstein, "is compelled in an increasing degree to be guided by purely mathematical, formal considerations... Experience may suggest the appropriate mathematical concepts, but they most certainly cannot be deduced from it". Einstein calls the fundamental axioms of physics "free creations of the mind". For, in his own words, "there is no logical path to these laws; only intuition, resting on sympathetic understanding of experience, can reach them."

Now, the pertinent query arises: "If at the back of Science
there is intuition and at the back of Art there is inspiration, what is the region of psychological being from which these phenomena appear?"

2

We are all familiar today with terms like "subliminal self" and "unconscious mind". Psycho-analysis has had to posit a complex working of mental process behind and beyond our known thoughts, feelings, desires and volitions. This process is usually called "subconscious" or "unconscious", but what is meant is that our surface being is not conscious of it. Nor is the hidden region of the mind merely individual: Jung has noted a common pool of memories and symbols, a depth of racial responses, motives and mythological attitudes preserved through the ages. And he has invented for it the expression: "Collective Unconscious." An immense range of psychological being, unhindered by space or time and full of strange possibilities, brilliant or mysterious creativities, surprising supra-personal effectivities, is supposed to exist. And Jung has attempted to show some affinity between his hypotheses and the assumptions of Indian Yoga.

He is right, broadly speaking. For, Yoga is the systematised endeavour to establish contact with unknown profundities of our self by special methods. But it is not limited to what Freud and Jung and their colleagues have got hold of for their field of study. The field of Yoga is much wider, yet it is continuous with the "subliminal" of the psychologists and with their "Collective Unconscious". Modern research has, in a very practical manner, provided a jumping-board to the greater claims of this very ancient research.

Yoga chooses as a starting-point the part of one's being which is most natural to one from day to day according to one's individual constitution. Thus there are different Yogas for those who are intellectual or emotional or bent upon action — for those who have an introspective turn or such as are physically oriented. This division, pragmatically convenient
and effective, has, however, its limitations.

So long as the predominant aim is to pass from the ordinary consciousness to a vaster Beyond and stay more and more absorbed there, believing that life’s destiny is not on the earth but in that mysterious immensity, it does not matter how or where one starts. The moment life here is emphasised, the moment the stress on earth which modern science has given is accepted and the ideal is not only of individual development and salvation but also of collective and social fulfilment, the need arises of taking up the entirety of our being and making our Yoga integral. To cope adequately with this need is the way of Sri Aurobindo.

According to him, all the parts of our being have to combine under the awakened leadership of that in us which he considers the true soul. Our true soul is not guided by pet ideas, selfish demands, pragmatic facilities. It is the pure push in us towards what we sense as the supreme Good, what we may regard as the divinely human. Unified by this push, all our parts have to make accessible and normal the powers which are now remote and supernormal and known only in brief occurrences labelled as “inspiration” and “intuition”. The Integral Yoga, elaborated by Sri Aurobindo and set on a manifold practical basis, promises the emergence of a new state of consciousness by which every one of our persisting problems, individual and collective, will be radically solved.

The reasonableness of such a promise must strike us as soon as we look at the panorama modern biology opens up with its theory of evolution. From insensitive matter we see the emergence of active vitality. From vitality, with its instincts and desires, we see the thinking mind of man emerge, haunted vaguely by the presence of the entity he feels as his “soul”. Breaking through the routine of human rationality — helped by the aspiration of that vague presence — there is the sporadic play of inspiration and intuition. A more recurrent play of them is seen in the phenomenon of “genius”. Variously we are led to mark the evidence of a supramental faculty waiting
to emerge and take up the whole of our existence for a new evolutionary embodiment.

"Embodiment" is an important term. For, Sri Aurobindo is all for a more dynamic earth-life in the light of a more-than-human consciousness. As his collaborator in the Integral Yoga — the Mother — puts it: "Yoga is not a contempt for matter but a means to divinise it — not a rejection of the body but a means to transform it."

This definition of Yoga and the assumption behind it — that a more-than-human consciousness is already there, awaiting manifestation — can be judged as nothing alien to the direction of scientific thinking. Science not only stresses the value of material existence: it also swears by the principle of continuity. Even a scientist imbued with Marxism, like J.B.S. Haldane, affirms: "We do not find obvious evidence of life or mind in inert matter, and we naturally study them most easily where they are most completely manifested; but if the scientific point of view is correct, we shall ultimately find them, at least in rudimentary forms, all through the universe." Again, Science, unless it wishes to emulate the dogmatic materialism of the nineteenth century, cannot be pledged to a mere reduction of life and mind to matter. The biologist Julian Huxley tells us: "materialism, according to which mind is 'a function of the body (matter) and depends upon it completely' ... is an easy thesis to demolish." And Haldane himself admits: "the biologist must take cognizance of facts (such as the unity of the organism) which have not yet been fully explained on materialistic lines, and perhaps never will be." Hence scientifically we are not bound to believe — though many scientists may choose to do so — that life and mind exist as "rudimentary" accompaniments of material particles: they may be plenary universal powers in their own right, hidden on earth within the physical matrix for a gradual and laboured emergence. Nor need scientific thought stop with life and mind: if man is still evolving, why not a hidden supermind?

Indeed, recently the palaeontologist-cum-priest Teilhard
de Chardin has scientifically argued, from man’s biological “uniqueness” and from the “convergence” of mankind (two facts which Huxley even has stressed), for a collective super-consciousness not solely as an evolutionary terminus leading to a union with God on earth — “Omega Point” — but also as evolution’s original impetus derived from God’s omnipresence in matter — “Alpha Point”.

However, Teilhard misses the all-round goal of the Integral Yoga which a science grown spiritual must envisage: the divinisation of the bodily being itself to crown the divinisation of mind and life. His “Alpha” and “Omega”, also interpreted in terms of a “Cosmic Christ”, is in the end given an old-fashioned Christian turn: it leads, for all the “ultra-human” growth it allows on the terrestrial scene, to a final breakaway from that scene into a “trans-human”. Teilhard does not always speak with one voice here and the “modern” in him often runs counter to the “traditional” but his anxiety to stay within the Roman Catholic Church in spite of grave disagreements prevents him from being a thorough evolutionist. The supermind of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother has a greater potency for earth’s fulfilment in the this-worldly manner which the scientific temper calls for.

The Integral Yoga, demanded by the supermind, has not only a super-science orientation: it has, too, a super-Yoga direction. No doubt, by its very integrality, it would make use of past spiritual techniques wherever necessary. But it cannot be equated simply to a combination of the old Yogic disciplines classified as Jnana, Bhakti, Karma, Raja and Hatha. Least of all does it lean towards the set of difficult exercises that is Hatha Yoga. Actually it favours physical training more along modern lines, since the psychological benefits together with extraordinary vital powers which Hatha Yoga seeks through its complex postures aided by special methods of breathing are sought to be compassed directly by more subtle processes. For, the Integral Yoga is essentially a dynamism of the consciousness, a mode of many-sided psychological deve-
development which yet by the agency of the supermind evokes hidden potentialities of physical development through the secret consciousness dwelling even in material substance and energy.

3

Free at the same time of an other-worldly outlook and a limited yogic practice, the Integral Yoga cuts loose still more from all fixed dogmas, rites and observances inherited from the past: it is not a revival of any religion or a synthesis of existing religions or a new religion sprouting from the same old root to replace them. Although it assimilates and does not negate the essence of the religious phenomenon, the essence that has taken a wrongly limiting root-form, it is a broad-based, constantly growing, diversely modulated way of life, which is more correctly designable as a spiritual science than a religious path. In fact, while not being anti-religious, it is still a perfectly secular activity inasmuch as the religion to which one may have belonged is dropped in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. And even those who have belonged to no religion are welcome here. An open mind, an aspiration for a deeper and finer living than hitherto accomplished, a flexibility of nature ready to meet the future's challenge, a wholehearted willingness to be made anew in the large lines of what may be called the spiritually scientific superman — these are the sole qualifications required.

Since a systematic and organised move is here towards this goal, there is a palpable curve of progress in the Integral Yoga. Concrete inner and outer results are obtained. And a general assessment is possible of the individual's research in Yoga at different stages, as well as of the level reached by the entire group of people dedicated to realising Sri Aurobindo's vision. In a broad sense, we may measure progress by four standards:

(1) With what degree of effortless efficiency is the work in hand done, as if some inner knowledge and power were
automatically active?

(2) How far is the work of one person complementary to that of other persons so that an interrelated totality results as if there acted a single knowledge and power superior to the individual units and making all of them its instruments?

(3) To what extent does the participant in a work pass through it and out of it with not only a detachment from egoistic desire and anxiety but also an increase in happy awareness of the inner and superior agency?

(4) How much oneness even in the outer life does the work produce among the individuals concerned, expressing itself in a purer and profounder relationship, an efflorescence of harmonious living, an advance towards achieving the ideal of human unity?

Thus the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, in which the Integral Yoga is practised, is different from other Ashrams in India. Unquestionably, they have their merits but theirs is ultimately a refinement of past religion and this refinement is turned basically towards individual salvation in some other-world. What they do for this world is not organic to the Yoga and springs from conventional ethico-social motives — good and helpful motives, surely, yet not the direct issue of a super-science of the Spirit such as Sri Aurobindo has developed. The Sri Aurobindo Ashram is a research in a new order of existence, with a supramental fount of activity in every department. This research has a particularised aspect in the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, with an eye to assimilating special academic qualification into the general inner education that is the Integral Yoga. The Sri Aurobindo Ashram, researching in what may be termed a novel multi-dimensional education, strives by inner conscious self-expansion to form the nucleus of a renovated humanity.

This nucleus would stimulate the whole country and then the entire world to the highest intensity and continuity possible of a divinised life to which the phenomena of inspiration and intuition are scattered pointers in a world not yet awake
to that Yoga of Nature which, through the evolution of matter, vitality and mind, drives integrally towards an earthly unfoldment as of a godhead in the soul of man.

In India, of all places, the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, with its International Centre of Education, should rouse the greatest interest and win the utmost encouragement. For, its work can be seen in intimate relation to the typical genius of the Indian people. Every country has its own basic psychological character and it can truly develop if it acts in consonance with that national personality. Historical India has been two things pre­eminently. On the outer and visible level, she has been a vast concourse of communities. India is one not by an apparent uniformity of race or by a single strain of culture. She is one by a fusion of a large variety of ethnological elements and by a synthesis of diverse lines of intellectual experiment, social combination, practical pursuit. And she has been able to blend so many outwardly differing components because her true being is attuned to that which is other than the visible forms of life and yet is the common origin of them all, that which is capable of differentiating into a myriad forms without losing its essential identity. This origin is what she has called, by inner observation and experience, the Supreme Self or Spirit, a deepmost Reality directly known as an Infinite that is One­in-Many and Many-in-One.

No doubt, India has not always or, rather, invariably been "spiritual" in the obvious connotation of the word. She has also thought and lived along lines which may be considered sceptic, agnostic, atheistic. In fact, if she did not do so, she would not be the cultural synthesis that she is: she would be single­tracked — and when spirituality is single­tracked it becomes necessarily limitative and intolerant on the one hand, ascetic and unworldly on the other. A tendency towards that attitude which is, in Sri Aurobindo's phrase, "the refusal of the ascetic" has indeed increased from India's medieval
age onwards and contributed to her decline. But the original Indian genius was very far from such a negative spirituality — and when spirituality is not only positive but also many-tracked, as in the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Gita and the Puranas, a strong impetus is given to the searching mind and the adventurous life-force to try out every kind of speculation and practice, be it ever so non-spiritual in its surface-shape. With her firm hold on what we may describe as a divine dynamism in the inner being, India could allow without any fear a complete liberty to the seeker in man. All roads, she felt, would eventually lead to that spiritual centre, and the expression of this centre would in the end be all the richer for the apparent temporary deviations.

How pervasive was the influence of this potent centre we mark by a look at the form which the non-theistic or even atheistic trends mostly assumed in India. Materialism, in the modern sense, was never characteristic of such trends. They showed themselves typically in movements like Sankhya, Buddhism and Jainism. Judged from the ordinary point of view, these movements were non-theistic or even atheistic; and yet they were paths leading to a liberation of the consciousness from mere mind: they worked towards an inner illumination which can only be regarded as profoundly spiritual. And the very epochs most coloured by the sensuous approach, like the epoch of the poet Kalidasa, has still a deep instinct of Dharma and an intellectual assent to it. Dharma is not simply religion; it is the inherent law of things, making naturally for collective harmony and stability as much as for individual initiative and activity, while its direction through all moods and modes of life, all formulations of thought, is towards a spiritual Truth diversely symbolised by the play of the senses.

Yes, India has been great by her essentially spiritual character. Although competent enough in other fields, the quest for the inmost Spirit as the radiating source of all existence has been her forte. And she can be great again by being true to her own self. She can be even greater than before. Actually,
that is the demand on her by the logic of events in the modern age. For the key to a divine fulfilment of matter was missed by her and, for all the life-affirmation in her most luminous time, she had to fix her ultimate in a Beyond. That brought about — in the long run, particularly under the impact of foreign invasions — a religious instead of a secular turn. More and more an inward withdrawal took place with a hurry to find a number of separate short-cuts to Nirvana, the Formless Brahman, the peaceful Shiva, the blissful Vishnu. In the outer realm a defensive shell was set up of rigid rites, observances and functions. The Gita was the last explicit testament of a comprehensive and conquering spirituality. Time and again the old urge of the Vedic Rishis and Upanishadic Seers that had reached its largest voice in the Gita broke through the religious turn; but the zest for a divine fulfilment on earth could not quite subdue the growing discontent and weariness to which Tagore has given tongue so memorably in his poem on the migrating cranes: "Not here, not here, somewhere afar is our home!"

To effect a switch-over to the Here and Now, an age of Science, emphasising matter and asserting evolution, had to come. And, along with it, as its inner rationale, as the total Light of which Science was just a one-sided disclosure, there had to dawn the age of an Integral Yoga such as Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have discovered and developed on the basis of all that has been positive and synthesis-minded in the past. With the advent of the Integral Yoga India stands on the threshold of a most glorious future.

If she is not loyal to her own genius she will either degenerate in spite of all technological props or else be a second-rate success on the Western model, always an inferior, however hard she may try to juggle with foreign "isms" and "know-hows". The Integral Yoga is there not only to save her but also to complete the curve of her destiny.

Hence the Sri Aurobindo Ashram should immediately commend itself to those who love this country of ours and
are eager to help it achieve full greatness. The intensity and continuity of the inspired and intuitive super-life which the Ashram aims at will make India, as the Mother has hoped, "the spiritual leader of the world". Then, by her sovereign answer to an inner need which the whole world, bewildered by its own uncontrollable complexity, is coming to feel more and more, India will draw to herself an abundance of material aid to lift to the highest peak her own rightly guided prosperity.

Modern to the most efficient degree but dominating her modernism rather than dominated by it. India living illuminatedly from within outwards by means of the Integral Yoga will lead the earth towards an era of universal concord, a self-consummation of Man at once spiritual and scientific. To elevate our country to play that happy role is a vital part of the dynamic ideal of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in the Ashram of all-round Educational Research they have founded. Their call to men of good will everywhere is to co-operate with them and hasten the completion of the mighty work which is proceeding here in rhythm with Nature's own secret urge and with India's supreme mission.
I wonder why you write: "Nobody mentions the Mother." Either my letters haven’t reached you or else you don’t read them rightly. I think they mention hardly anything except the Mother. Surely one need not speak of her directly in order to mention her. My letters are one long spiritual autobiography. And what is a spiritual autobiography from here except a various presentation of Mother-moodedness?

What shall I say to your question about Sehra and me and the psychic being? Both of us live, each in an individual way, in something of its glow at least frequently if not all the time. But that is different from the outburst of the psychic. That outburst is different also from a soft steady light. I may say that something like an outburst happens now and then, for a brief while. But for it to be constant a firm poise is to be found inside, and that poise is not always easy to come by when one has made a choice of the spiritual life. This will strike you as a paradox. But really there is a difference between short trips to God’s land and a permanent stay there. The trips are enthusiastic and the very shortness of them feeds the fire. The permanent stay means “business” and when one gives notice to one’s defects to quit they protest persistently and even violently and one has calmly and smilingly to bow them out and lay a firm foundation of purity and peace. The whole movement is somewhat dissimilar. In the short trips the defects can be completely forgotten and ignored. Now they have to be faced as long-standing parts of one’s self. And one has to go
deep, break through many barriers, suffer occasional blowings-up in order to emerge into an air of freedom in which one may turn to the Mother and be her child in every detail and on every layer of one's being.

A more complicated process is this and one does not remain in a fixed felicity or a constant flame. But the sense is there, all the same, that a far greater thing is being done than during any flying visit, however resplendent. And the light that gets kindled in one is more effective, for all its slowness and interruptedness, because it comes from the utmost profundities and seeks to spread to the utmost widenesses. Here is the process not only of changing your central consciousness but also of changing the whole of your life.

Considering all this and considering various other circumstances I think that matters are moving at a not unsatisfying rate, though, of course, there is ever a better beyond one's best. An inner freedom, an inner readiness to change in all directions and to become anything the Mother wants, even if that goes against one's cherished beliefs or inclinations, a smiling turn towards the Mother as if one were not bound at all to anything, a slow but unmistakable feeling that, with a growing warmth in the heart and an increasing glow in the mind, one is mysteriously proceeding towards some kind of sweet security in a background region midway between the heart and the mind, until one shall be quite out of the problem of the lower nature — all this seems to be the sadhana at present.

I said: "Out of the problem of the lower nature." This does not mean that the problem ceases. No, it remains there — but oneself is no longer in it. One deals with it as if from outside it like a sculptor chiselling the rough stone to a perfect Hermes or a flawless Aphrodite, the hardest blows and dints and scrapings hurting not himself at all — himself playing the part of only an instrument of the inspiring Spirit, within whose freedom and farness he is caught up!
AUGUST 24, 1954

I suppose you want spiritual news from me. On the whole it is definitely good. And it is as a whole that we must see sadhana if we are to measure it correctly — especially sadhana like that of Sri Aurobindo’s Yoga where a single-track move to the Divine is not permitted and all the turns and twists of one’s nature have to be negotiated patiently and persistently. But this Integral Yoga can have two kinds of progress. In one we have, time and again, sidetracks leading off from the main progressive line and these have to be led back by a counter-force because otherwise they would point quite away into the all-too-human morass on either side of the Godward course. In the other type there are driftings too, but they are like curves which of themselves after a little side-swerve turn back to the luminous line. Here the deviations occur because of our complex unregenerate constitution but they are a natural part of the journey and held together in the general scheme by an inner spontaneity of soul and do not require, as in the first type, a deliberate act of the will. Of course, the will’s co-operation is called for on occasion but mostly to cut short the deviation, to let the curve be as small as possible. The point is that even if the will did not come to add its own helpful quota the Godward course would be rejoined by the drifting slide-offs. And it would be rejoined because the final choice has been made — the mighty Purusha above the head has thrown in the lower being’s lot with the Eternal, and the Purusha behind the heart, “no bigger than a man’s thumb” as the Upanishad describes the evolving soul, has tuned in to the God-affirmative broadcast of that lordly dweller in the Infinite’s ether and his whole being vibrates in unison with that music of the spheres. Difficulties, tensions, perplexities occur, yet the very discords are woven into the multi-toned echo the deep soul with its fire-tongue makes to the Sun-cry above.

We may consider the deep soul’s echo as a composition in the modern style, a lot of counterpointed movements in which
everything is not smooth and there are oppositions and yet a harmony is achieved.

The two types of sadhana may be called the forcefully willed and the spontaneously controlled. Mine at present is of the second type. It was of the first type when I came to the Ashram twenty-seven years ago. Perhaps the more accurate way of putting it would be that my sadhana was always of the second type but long ago the deviating curves were so large that they looked like straight shootings away and had to be met by the forceful will — until in a large view over years and years one saw that the joining back to the spiritual course was in the very nature of the phenomenon. Somewhere inside of me I always knew that there was no possibility of ultimate deviation, but the outer self did not share the inner knowledge. Now it does and that is why, in spite of all disturbances, there is the sense of security and together with all puckeringings of the brow, a smile of certainty. This, however, does not make everything a process from light to light — the way is long and uneven yet there is no fear, no doubt, no hesitation. All shall be well: that is the mantra heard hour after hour and right through the darkest spells.

Coming to the most external life, I may say that I feel sometimes unspeakably happy in this little wide-verandaed flat which seems poised in Sri Aurobindo’s vast peace and caressed by the Mother’s million winds of love. My work goes on with a sweet efficient rhythm, and the presence of Sehra is no bar at all but a natural portion of God’s magnificent day and mysterious night. She is as much a child of the Mother as I am and, although there are several differences in our temperaments, they are as nought in the sweep of the one love towards the All-Beautiful. This is a grace I had dreamt of and hoped for and striven after: it has come sooner than expected and better than visioned.
A DREAM AND AN ATTEMPT
AT ITS READING

"I had a dream some days back. I am in a shop to buy an umbrella. I ask for the colours. I pick up an emerald-green umbrella from those set before me. It is very fine but somehow has marks of birds' droppings on it! Still, I decide to take it. Then suddenly I am by the Pondicherry sea. Many Ashramites are there. Some are sitting on rocks in the water. All of them are children — except Lalubhai. I ask why all are there and am told that the Mother is coming and it is best to be in or near the water. I wonder why then people are not in the water. That is the end of the dream. I wake up feeling full of expectancy."

I don't know what Freud or Jung would say, but here is a poet's interpretation. Your dream is an interesting mixture of several consciousness-levels and symbol-layers. The emerald-green of the umbrella in a shop seems at the same time to represent the vital plane characteristic of the life in the West, amidst which you outwardly are, and the Universal Consciousness of the Divine that is a Super-Life all about your inner being and that can extend anywhere, even to the farthest West and its vitalistic existence. I put together the pretty triviality of that umbrella and the Divine Universality because of the way the dream develops.

The first connecting point is the marks of birds' droppings on the umbrella. They are at once a bit of scorn from on high and a touch of Divine Grace: the droppings suggest the former
and the birds the latter. But as the droppings come from birds, the scorn and the Grace play into each other, and Mahakali the falsehood-smiter and Mahalakshmi the love-showerer are two simultaneous and identical gestures from a single source that is Maheshwari, the all-comprehending all-enveloping "Wisdom supernal". And the double gesture I would imagine as ultimately issuing into the worldward creative dynamism of Mahasaraswati, the Mother-Power of harmony and order, missioned to change turbulent Sansara (World-existence) into blissful Brahman.

Here your "Pondicherry sea" comes in as the next link. Indian spiritual symbology discerns in the sea-vision both the emerald-green vitalism of world-existence and the emerald-green vastitude of Brahmic Bliss in its manifested conscious universality living deep within that world-existence itself. So the Pondicherry sea is our Mother's Cosmic Presence as an earth-transformative love and force, with the centre of her all-circling light in a little town on the eastern coast of South India. Your mind and heart have floated to this Presence and wait with the others who are on the rocks lapped by the sea — rocks that are emblems of a firm soul-stand within the "innumerable laughter" (à la Aeschylus though in a super-Aeschylean sense) of the waves of Infinity. The rock-supported Ashramites are all in the form of children because the psychic being that turns towards the Divine Mother is always a seer-child. But Lalubhai, who is found among them, does not need to have a child-form since very much of him is an unpretentious though wisdom-seeking child. Perhaps the name I gave him, following his own queer "creative" reading of words, caught a hint of this side of him: you know that I have dubbed him "Lullaby".

Now for the problem: If the Universal Consciousness of the Mother is already there in the Bliss-sea, what are all of you waiting for? Your dream is definitely charged with an expectancy. The Mother has still to appear. I believe the waiting is for the personal, the individual aspect of her. And perhaps it will
be poetically in tune with the vibration of the dream to say: "The Mother-Power of harmony and order, the Mahasaraswati-aspect, the infinite transformative force turned personal and individual for the Divine's delight in perfection of detail in earth-life, is the object of the waiting." I have referred to Mahasaraswati as descending from above: now to meet this descent I would imagine an emergence of the same Goddess-presence from the sea, as if in answer to the reflection of the descending divinity in the vast waters. And what, from the viewpoint of India's spiritual visionary tradition, could be more apt? Does not this tradition speak always of Saraswati rising on a lotus-throne, with her various instruments of inspired concord, from the depths of the ocean?

You write: "I...am told that the Mother is coming and that it is best to be in or near the water." I should like to comment on the last part of your phrase. Now that the Mother has left her body a certain emphasis falls upon her universal aspect: to stress this aspect is one of the lessons we have to learn from her departure. And the more we feel as if we were in wide water the more we are likely to come into rapture-rhythmic touch with the Mother's divinity. At least to be near such a vastness is necessary. Most vividly and rapidly we shall approach the individual Mother whom we knew and loved if we put ourselves in contact with the inner universality and move towards being — to quote Sri Aurobindo —

A heart that has grown one with every heart

An unwalled mind dissolved in the infinite.

Out of the inner universality will the intimate intense communion arise with the truth of the Incarnation by whose daily nearness we were so long blessed.

I may add that this truth is indispensable for the transformation of the individual and the person that we are in our psyche and in our embodied nature. That is why in your
A Dream and an Attempt at its Reading

dream there is the expectation of the Mother we were familiar with. Yes, what was shown in the Incarnation is ultimately needed, but we used to be too occupied with the “form” and “name” and these even engendered in us a competition and a grasping and a jealousy, a forgetting of what was within and around and above: we tended even to forget that the “form” and “name” before us had a within and around and above of its own being. We have to develop a detachment from the small self, we have to expand inwardly into a universal and transcendent tranquillity. Then alone can we reach most profoundly, most abundantly, the soul-power to unite with the Supreme Person in a blaze of devotion and delight and thus transmute all our outer being into God-gold.

Your dream ends with the question: “I wonder why then we are not in the water.” It is a question that faces us acutely at present. Our progress in Yoga towards the Mother depends on how we reply to it.

P.S. I have mentioned Lalubhai and my calling him “Lullaby” because of his own “creative” reading of words. Let me give you some instances. When reading with me Sri Aurobindo's comments on the Mahabharata, Lalubhai stopped and asked me: “Why does the poet say that King Yudhishthir’s crown was full of germs?” I said, “Lullaby, look again at the text.” He looked and exclaimed: “Oh, it is ‘gems’, not ‘germs’!” Later he read out as Arjuna’s apostrophe to Krishna: “O thou beast among men!” When I burst out laughing, he looked again and said: “I’m sorry. It was ‘best’.” Somewhere else he turned the poetic phrase “Starry eyes that falter not, set in an exalted visage” into the champion distortion: “Star­ing eyes that flatter not, set in an exhausted village.” Once he asked me: “Isn’t the hero of Homer’s epic Odious?” I said: “Lullaby, many people have thought that, but nobody before you uttered such an apt thing about Odysseus.” On another occasion he informed me in Nirod’s office-room upstairs: “The latest number of the New Testament is waiting for you
on Nirod's table." It proved to be the recent issue of the London Weekly, *The New Statesman!*
MONEY AND THE SPIRITUAL ASPIRANT

SOME QUESTIONS AND REPLIES

(This correspondence between two sadhaks dates back to 1952 but the fundamentals of it hold for the present time also.)

The Questions

1. How is a sadhak to earn money divinely? What should be the attitude of the sadhak living outside the Ashram when he goes into the field of business to earn his livelihood? If one labours to earn money with the sole aim of offering all his earnings at the feet of the Mother when he goes to Pondicherry, the matter is quite different, but the difficulty comes in the case when money is required to be earned for the maintenance of our life on earth (and money is indispensable for this). This earning, I think, is not for the Mother. Till the time arrives when one can live in the higher consciousness and constantly feel the Mother within, I believe the earning is for the ego. One may say at any time that the earning is for the Mother within, but without the constant feeling of unity with the Mother, it would be false and dangerous to say so. And yet the incontrovertible fact remains that one has got to earn money for one’s existence. So, with what aim, motive and attitude should one work to earn money?

2. When the days are hard — no earning, no income, useless efforts — what should the sadhak do? Could he pray to the Mother for removal of the monetary hardships and the
consequent suffering and humiliation which one has to face in dire poverty?

3. Is it a fact that when a person takes to sadhana the Asuric forces who hold the money-power (do they yet?) withhold their favours and deprive the sadhak of money and material prosperity?

Shyam Raj Sharma

The Replies

I don't think your problem is so very difficult to solve. Money, of course, has to be earned — whether one earns it for offering it to the Mother or for one's own maintenance. What I don't agree with are the sharply divided alternatives you pose: the Mother or one's own ego. No doubt, they can fall apart, but they need not. As long as there is no constant feeling of unity with the Mother, the ego is bound to be at play — but certainly not at unchecked and absolute play. Here I may mention that even when one is settled in the Ashram the feeling of unity with the Mother is not always present: the ego is in some evidence even if one has mentally given up ordinary relationships and psychically turned towards the spiritual life. So, essentially, the problem can boil down to more or less the same thing whether one is in or out of the Ashram and whether one is occupied with earning money or with doing some other work. The problem in its ultimate terms is: How is one to act in order that the ego may not fall quite out of tune with the spiritual orientation in one's activity? The problem, therefore, is just that of Karma Yoga — at least to begin with.

The movement of Karma Yoga is in three steps. First, while one feels that one is the doer, one yet makes an inner offering of one's actions to the Divine, and gets inwardly detached from the fruits of one's labour so that failure does not depress and success does not elate one but one preserves a poise and peace *vis-à-vis* every result. Second, one tries to get detached from one's actions themselves and feel oneself
to be merely watching what goes on by force of Prakriti or Nature. This deepens into one's becoming the witness Purusha, the individual Being who initiates nothing and only gives or withholds sanction to Nature's doings — and ultimately one realises the infinite impersonal Atman, the one World-Self standing aloof in divine tranquillity and disinterestedness while supporting or not supporting Prakriti's play. Third, through this attainment and through ever-increasing dedication of all one's works and energies to the Ishwara or Supreme Lord a divine dynamism comes down into one's nature-parts and the lower Prakriti is gripped and guided by the Ishwara's illumined Shakti, the higher Prakriti.

I have used traditional terms. We as Aurobindonians have to substitute our own appropriate ones of a Yoga in which the Mother is felt by us as the Divine embodied.

To practise Karma Yoga while engaged in earning money for the maintenance of oneself and one's family is the general solution of your problem. To this I would add a specially psychic bent — the inmost heart-and-soul's attitude of prayer to the Mother to be always with you and somehow so to guide you that the money you earn may go to the growth of her divinity in your life. The psychic bent should become stronger and stronger, mingling its drive of intense aspiration and deep devotion and passionate self-surrender with the urge of consecrated will that, along with the movement of dissociation, is usual to Karma Yoga.

Thus the whole business of money-getting outside the Ashram will be nothing entirely apart from spirituality. And, as a concrete physical gesture symbolising the interrelation, one should set aside a certain percentage as a direct offering to the Mother.

When the days are hard and there is no income, one may certainly pray to the Mother for removal of monetary problems. There is nothing unspiritual in connecting her in the right manner with questions of money; it would be unspiritual to leave any questions unconnected in the right
manner with her. But one should keep off nervous and mental disturbance on account of lack of money: one should not be upset if one gets poor. One should pray for the Mother’s help and do everything possible to avert poverty, but in an atmosphere of inner calm. Then the help too comes most, by way both of directive inner inspiration and of changed outer circumstance.

Your suspicion that when a person takes to sadhana the Asuric forces which in general hold the money-power withhold their favours and deprive the sadhak of money and of material prosperity is not well founded in all respects. Of course the Asuric forces won’t like the Divine’s disciple to be rich, but they don’t have the last word in the matter. If one proves a good medium of the Divine, one can earn more money than an ordinary man — especially when one is the practitioner of a Yoga which accepts the world and seeks to divinise life’s activities instead of renouncing them and abandoning the world. It is not always the Asuras who have deprived spiritual men of money: spiritual men have themselves given up earthly goods under the mistaken idea that all such goods are evil. Perhaps the Asuras had a hand in suggesting that idea. In this way their grip on the money-power has been strengthened. Possibly in the past the true means of dealing with worldly powers was mostly missing and the general shying away from them was not altogether reprehensible. But the fact remains that the money-power, like all the others in this would, is originally the Divine’s and has to be won back for the Divine’s manifestation and it certainly can be won back.

Sometimes, however, financial difficulties come as a test and in order to increase one’s spiritual intensity; they are not really punishments by Asuric forces but part of the working out of a Yogic development in one. God’s workings are plastic and not single-tracked: they can use the absence of money no less than its presence as a step in their progression. If one meets the test in the correct fashion, the results wanted by the
Divine take place — and the results may very well be more money. The chances of more money are at least as many as the opposite. There is no such fixed law as that the God-lover and God-follower invariably gets impoverished in worldly things.

But, of course, the mere fact of one's being a God-lover and God-follower does not automatically safeguard one against financial difficulties and mishaps. Foolishness and incompetence in financial matters may accompany the Godward turn, and ordinary nature brings a toll for them: to turn towards God does not immediately remove whatever foolish and incompetent traits one may have — traits which put one in relation to the common round of the Cosmic Ignorance and its retributive rules. God's grace, nevertheless, is ever about us, and a subtle "tact" of the soul can often get one out of the mess in which one may land oneself, even if one is not able wholly to avoid the mess.
THE FIRST AMERICANS IN THE SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

RECOLLECTIONS OF THEM AND NOTES ON SOME PERSONAL TOPICS RELATED TO AMERICA

The first American name to fly about in the Ashram’s air was one that significantly had a plural ring: McPheeters. It was two Americans who jointly started the flow of the New World to the Newer World which Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had begun to build in the Old. They were husband and wife: Vaun and Janet McPheeters.

They were here already before I stepped into Pondicherry on December 16, 1927. The Mother had given them the upper floor of a two-storey house, a comfortable apartment with a good open veranda and a big terrace above. Both of them must have been past fifty. Vaun was a huge hulk of a man with practically no hair on his big impressive head. Janet was a smallish person and fairly thin. I came to know them very well and they were always kind to me, especially as I was comparatively a very young man—just turned twenty-three. We used to meet often on their veranda and have long talks. A.B. Purani was another of their intimate friends.

They had undergone the discipline of meditation in the States with a spiritual teacher named Debbitt. I was told he had quite a following. I remember seeing not only a photograph of him in the McPheeters’ album but also a book of his lessons or instructions in typescript. He had a strong handsome clean-
shaven face with powerful eyes. The McPheeters thought very highly of him, believing he had a cosmic consciousness in which he must have contacted Sri Aurobindo. I was not very much struck by what I had heard about his philosophy, and even made to Purani a rather irreverent joke comparing this teacher to Sri Aurobindo as “Debit” to “Credit”.

Janet at some point of her stay here, got from Sri Aurobindo an Ashram name: “Shantimayi” (“one who is full of peace”). She never went out of Pondicherry after her arrival. Vaun, after a year’s stay, travelled in India and was absent from the Ashram for a fairly long period. When he returned he was not quite the same person, either psychologically or physically. His health had suffered a good deal and he lacked the old concentration on Yoga.

In the early days, whenever I asked him about his sadhana he would mostly say with a broad smile and an expressive movement of his hand at head-level, “Coming and going, going and coming!” Now it appeared there was less “coming” and more “going”.

But during the time he had been in the Ashram, he along with Janet had lived in close touch with the Mother. In his absence, Shantimayi became a part of the group of about twenty people who used to sit with the Mother every evening in the “Prosperity” Store-room for an hour or so before the Soup Distribution downstairs. She entered fully into the spirit of the happy illuminative talks and intuition-developing games held there. She made one of three Westerners who were present in that group — the two others being Pavitra (Philippe Barbier St. Hilaire) and Datta (Dorothy Hodgson).

When Vaun decided to leave the Ashram for good, Janet appeared very unwilling but left out of a sense of duty. She kept corresponding with the Mother for a year or two from the States. Much more than Vaun she may be considered the first American to have become a sadhak of the Integral Yoga — though at the start both of them were equally sincere and ardent in their aspirations.
They had a great fund of humour — and Shantimayi was both amazed and tickled when our diminutive Ashram engineer, Chandulal, who also attended the meetings in the "Prosperity" Store-room perpetrated one of his “howlers” in English by summing up her character. He said: “Shantimayi is frivolous in the eyes but serious in the back.”

In Light and Laughter: Some Talks at Pondicherry I have recounted an amusing incident at the first darshan both these Americans and I had of Sri Aurobindo who had withdrawn from public contacts after November 24, 1926. The darshan was on February 21, 1928, the Mother’s birthday, an occasion on which, as on two others in the year (August 15, Sri Aurobindo’s birthday, and November 24, “the Day of Victory”) both the Master and the Mother received, one by one, all the sadhaks and some visitors to the Ashram. Let me quote from that book:

“I happened to be just behind them in the queue and I couldn’t help overhearing their agitated conversation. It seemed a big problem had arisen at the last minute: to whom to bow first, the Mother or Sri Aurobindo? Vaun told his wife: ‘If we bow to Sri Aurobindo first, the Mother will feel insulted; if we bow to the Mother first, Sri Aurobindo will get offended. So what should we do?’ I too was very much intrigued by this almost insoluble problem. But they had remarkable ingenuity. Their solution was: not to bow to either of them — but to put their heads, one after the other in the empty space between the two! Of course they had the unique privilege of having blessings from both Gurus at once but they missed the feet of either! For the likes of me it was no problem because Sri Aurobindo was quite new and unknown to us, while the Mother had become familiar; and while Sri Aurobindo was sitting very gravely the Mother was all smiles to set us at ease. So we went straight to her, got soothed by her, gained some moral courage, then proceeded to Sri Aurobindo and looked at him.” (pp. 24-25, third edition)

I recall another funny incident. There was to be no smok-
ing in the Ashram, but Vaun had not been able yet to give up his pipe. The Mother used to visit their flat every week. Once, before the hour fixed, Vaun was having his little "pipe-dream". The Mother arrived earlier and Vaun in a hurry put his pipe on a ledge outside one of his windows where the Mother would be unlikely to see it. But it so happened that the Mother, after the usual meditation with them, went straight to that particular window and looked out of it. Naturally she caught sight of the concealed pipe. Vaun was embarrassed but the Mother laughed heartily and he and Janet joined in the laughter. Later they remarked: "It isn't possible to hide anything from the Mother."

The Mother had once told me: "When a person wants to conceal something from me, the thought of the thing to be hidden keeps hovering all about him and I immediately catch it."

Shantirnayi and Vaun were always anxious to get Indianised. Whenever she went out of doors, she dressed in a sari. She looked elegant in this dress — the white sari matching her white bobbed hair and making more graceful her somewhat bony body. Vaun moved about in a dhoti topped by a white shirt, like most of the Ashram-inmates.

Shantimayi once asked Purani how Indians managed to have strong white teeth. Purani attributed the strength and the glitter to the use of "tooth-sticks" — that is, small sticks of the neem or banyan tree, which were to be chewed at one end to make a kind of brush and then moved vigorously over the teeth as well as repeatedly bitten to get the astringent juice out of them on to the teeth and gums. This sort of morning-practice was a much more athletic exercise than ordinary tooth-brushing with a soft paste. Shantimayi religiously took to the Indian way. After a couple of days her teeth looked a little whiter but unfortunately, because of the strenuous stick-chewing she had done, all her gold fillings fell out!
Apropos of the first Americans in the Ashram, I may write of my connection with America as an Ashramite, repeating what I have recounted elsewhere about my return to the Ashram in 1954 after several years’ absence. As if from something above the head, from some uplifted luminous watching Will, the decision appeared to come in early February 1953 that I should make my home again near the Mother. When the decision was conveyed to her during my visit for the darshan of February 21 she confirmed its authenticity. But to make it practicable in terms of rupees was not easy. In an interview I laid all my difficulties before the Mother. At that time I was somewhat hard-up and I said: “Mother, I must have Rs. 500 to settle a few matters and pay for a thorough migration with my wife Sehra and our dog Bingo.” The Mother replied: “So you must have Rs. 500?” I gave a big serious nod and she smiled.

I went back to Bombay and fixed the time of my permanent return a few months ahead. Weeks rolled by but there was no prospect of those Rs. 500 materialising in a lump sum.

In December of the previous year, an American journalist, Harvey Breit, had come to Bombay with a scheme of the Ford Foundation for a special India-Supplement to the Atlantic Monthly. I was introduced to him and he commissioned an article on Sri Aurobindo and his Ashram. I wrote my piece, 2000 words or so. It was approved. I asked hesitatingly whether there would be any payment. “Of course,” was the answer, “we’ll write to you from the States.” But even after months there was no word from the Atlantic Monthly. Now the month I had fixed for my return to Pondicherry was approaching. Within a fortnight of D-Day (Divine Day, naturally) I got a letter from America. It said that a cheque was enclosed on the Ford Foundation’s account in an Indian bank. I unfolded the cheque. There, unbelievably, was an order for Rs. 500. Not a rupee more, not a rupee less! But the story of the Grace does not end here. A week later I received another letter.
It was apologetic, saying that owing to certain unavoidable circumstances the Supplement had to be cut down considerably and that, though my article had been much appreciated, it could not be used. This did not mean the withdrawal of the payment. The payment would be made and I was even told that the compilers claimed no right to the article: it could be sold by me anywhere else.

Thus my article went all the way from India to the U.S.A. and came back to me with a gift of the exact amount I had mentioned to the Mother and she had endorsed. Again, to take me to the Ashram of Sri Aurobindo, it had appropriately to be an article on Sri Aurobindo and his Ashram.

What is of further and final interest is that many years earlier there had been a talk between the Mother and myself about financial aid to the Ashram from America. She had said: “I have a feeling that we may have something to do with Henry Ford.” Years afterwards, Margaret Wilson, the daughter of the one-time President Woodrow Wilson, came to stay in the Ashram and she got in touch with Ford. Ford replied that, as he believed in reincarnation, he would be interested to meet somebody who could throw light on his past births. Miss Wilson spoke with the Mother. The Mother said she could certainly throw some light. It appears that Ford was eager to pay a visit to the Ashram. Unhappily, adverse circumstances delayed his coming. A little later he died. So the only help that has come so far from the side of Ford are those Rs. 500 as a windfall to one to whom the Mother had talked about Ford’s possible help.
February 21, 1974 marks Mother India's "Silver Jubilee". It may be of interest to recall how this periodical was launched and to note some of the vicissitudes through which it passed. Considering the initial difficulties in its way, one may well designate it a child of Divine Grace.

In its origin it was the idea of a young businessman, Kes­havdeo R. Poddar, now known as Navajata but even at that time secretly what the name signifies: "The New-born." For, although not yet a resident of the Ashram, he was devoted to the cause of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Feeling the need to bring into the dust and heat of the common world's arena the breath of the New Life they embodied, he conceived a paper which would busy itself with that world's problems without any narrow business-concern. It was meant to make current the gold of a spiritual light at any material expense, and no calculation was made about the length of time it might take for this celestial coinage to be accepted.

Poddar put his project before the Mother. She, in consultation with Sri Aurobindo, approved it. Then he proposed Amal Kiran (originally K.D. Sethna but known to the Aurobindonians by the name the Master, during Sethna's stay in the Ashram, had given him, meaning "The Clear Ray") as Editor. With the Master's and the Mother's sanction he asked Amal Kiran to assume charge under the name familiar to the city of Bombay where both of them resided at the time. As the two Gurus had said "Yes", Sethna could not say "No". Forthwith, the periodical was fixed to be a fortnightly and the date
of its publication planned to coincide with February 21, 1949, the Mother's seventy-first birthday.

The crucial question of the title was very appropriately settled by a brain-wave of the Editor's wife, Sehra. What she brought up answered at once to the truth behind the publication-date by harmonising with (1) the fact that the base of operations, besides being the motherland of Sri Aurobindo, was the country which the Mother, while hailing from the West, had still made her own by soul's choice, and (2) the vision of the Ashram-Mother as incarnating not only the "Wisdom-Splendour" that is the universe's fount —

Creatrix, the Eternal's artist Bride

but also that particular face and front of the Infinite, the Goddess Bharat-Shakti

Who watches over India till the end —

mothering especially the India of the Rishis, the Yogis, the Saints and, above all, the Avatars.

How would a fortnightly with a spiritual background fare in the commercial capital of India where the word "spirit", if it meant anything at all, might connote simply what Prohibition puts out of the way of celebrating or relaxing commercialists? Bombay was also a centre of furious political activity, with culture and idealism no more than a suggestion of infra-red and ultra-violet beyond the multi-passioned spectrum of contending or co-operating shades of opinion in practical politics. The desperateness of the proposed venture and its need of Grace from the Divine was finely hit off by the message (dated January 29, 1949) received from Aldous Huxley for the first issue:

"I wish you all success in your venture. You will, of course, be a voice crying in the wilderness. But
if a few individuals pay attention, something will have been accomplished."

Some time before the date of publication the Mother gave an interview at Pondicherry to all the Aurobindonians concerned: Poddar, Sethna, Soli Albless who had been appointed the Editor’s associate, and Yogendra Rastogi who was Poddar’s right-hand man for management. The Editor was rather worried over that part of his job which was to consist in writing thousands of words on various political themes in a manner that would be clear, cogent, penetrating, widely informed, easily authoritative, enlightened by a view of national and international situations from the height of Sri Aurobindo’s thought. Although conversant with this thought, the crowded and chequered field, to which he was expected to apply it with full cognisance of what was going on there, was mostly foreign to him. More than a little puzzled, he unburdened his mind to the Mother: “Mother, I have to be an expert political thinker and writer. But I have no turn for politics and no touch with it.” She smiled a cool sweet smile and answered: “Neither have I.” The Editor got a start: “Well, then what shall I do?” Again the imperturbable sweetness and then the reply: “There is Sri Aurobindo. He will guide you in everything.” A sudden flood of power swept over the hearer. “Oh, yes,” he said, “Sri Aurobindo will surely do the impossible.” And Sri Aurobindo did.

Not only did he put from afar his mighty spiritual force to the task of “politicising” the Editor’s grey cells. He also got every editorial, however lengthy, read out to him before publication and sent a telegram of approval or modification. Matter for Mother India received preferential treatment among the sundry calls on the precious time of the Avatar of Supermind. And his interest in it had a directly personal touch. On one occasion, when a sadhak’s sceptical attitude to the opinions expressed in the fortnightly was reported to him, he said: “Doesn’t he know that Mother India is my paper?” Here was
Grace in abundance and without stint — initiating, fostering, shaping, supporting, championing.

When the main articles for the first issue — written by the Editor and Albless — were sent to Pondicherry, not only Sri Aurobindo but also the Mother listened to Nolini’s reading out of them. Both the Gurus sent words of praise and total sanction. However, in the Bombay-office where various practitioners of journalism dropped in for a close look at the experiment, a crisis arose. The office had been set up only six or seven weeks before the projected date for the opening number. There were no materials in reserve except for two or three issues. Several newspapermen raised their eyebrows to convey that this would never do. One day a veteran journalist appeared and clinched the others’ contention. He told the small staff that they were heading for the rocks: unless they had six months’ matter in hand it was foolhardy to start on February 21, 1949. They said their opening number would be a brilliant one and it would be a shame to suppress it. A warning finger was wagged in front of the novice Editor’s nose: “Better to lie quiet for a few months than go up a rocket and come down a stick!” The Editor and his companions swore they would work frenziedly and keep things going. “Impossible! All journalistic experience is against you. Mass your forces sufficiently — six months’ stuff in hand — and then make your entrance.”

Mother India was in a quandary. To commence and then flop was an unbearable prospect. The Editor had at times the apparently irrational feeling that if hard-pressed he could write the whole periodical single-handed. But could one rely on such delusions of grandeur? Not to be published according to the original plan was galling. Poddar, Rastogi and Albless were no chicken-hearts and they were in full sympathy. Yet the Editor could not bring himself to involve everything in a rapturous risk. He thought it best to consult the Mother. So he despatched to her an urgent note: “All journalists advise us to postpone publication for some months. They say we
must be well stocked with articles: otherwise we are doomed. My own instinct is that of Foch at the Battle of the Marne in 1914. When he was asked by his superior at headquarters for a report from the field, he sent the message: ‘Mon centre cède, ma droite recule, situation excellente, j’attaque.’ But what do you say?”

On January 27, 1949, the Editor received the telegram: “Stick to the date. Live on faith. Blessings. — Mother.” With a whoop the office went into action — and faith in the Mother’s Grace has kept Mother India in action up to now.

During Sri Aurobindo’s life-time this Grace, though often directly bestowed in response to questions, was frequently operative from behind the scenes, as it were. For, the Mother was extremely busy on many occasions and left matters entirely to Sri Aurobindo: her support was tacitly present, his actively at work. The decisions about the editorials were sometimes taken when both she and he were together; but generally it was he who gave judgment. This was in the fitness of things in regard to political pieces. He had been a great politician and had still his finger on the nation’s pulse. And sometimes he let his disciple-editor be as audacious as he had himself been in the famous old days of Bande Mataram and Karmayogin. Once, in the period when it was a vital issue whether or not to recognise Red China, an editorial came out in strong criticism of the current national policy. The Mother looked at the opening sentence in the printed copy that had come into her hands. It is reported that she was rather surprised at the way the thoughts had been voiced. She went to Sri Aurobindo’s room and said: “Amal has written very violently. Did you see and pass the expressions before he printed them?” Sri Aurobindo, with his Himalayan calm, just smiled and said: “Yes.” This was enough for her: the Master was in sole charge of politics. She never took his disciple to task over any editorial. And when once he got into a little trouble with

1. ‘My centre is giving way, my right wing is in retreat, situation excellent, I am attacking.’
the authorities for a somewhat slashing article on Kashmir and was called up to be questioned, both she and Sri Aurobindo, on being informed, assured him of their spiritual support. The confrontation with the authorities got happily resolved.

Two days before Sri Aurobindo passed away, the disciple had an interview with the Mother late in the evening. As the Master could not do his usual job, the Mother listened to the new editorial. She let it stand, but asked the writer to be cautious in certain matters. On her own responsibility she would not like to allow extremist expressions on some points. There should be no fear or faltering, but forces of a particular sort were not to be encouraged. After the passing of Sri Aurobindo all editorials were necessarily read out to her. At the end of a year or so, she expressed her boredom with political writing. Then *Mother India* was converted wholly into a cultural review and from a fortnightly it became a monthly, altering its format in the process. This was in February 1952.

Suddenly some time in 1953 the Mother decided to shift the office from Bombay to Pondicherry and to get the monthly printed at the Ashram Press. The Editor was not himself yet ready to settle in the Ashram. So he had to do his work from Bombay, leaving the final arrangements in the hands of his editorial associate who was in Pondicherry. When, on a visit he asked the Mother why she had effected the sudden shift while he was still making preparations for a move to the Ashram, she replied: "I did not want anybody to create obstacles in your way. If your office, your work are here, you have every reason to say that you should be in Pondicherry. I have made your path of Yoga clear."

From February 1954 the Editor was helped to get fixed where his office had been moved. Now the Mother could be consulted directly at all times, and she presided most generously over the month-by-month run of the periodical, giving "Words" each time, and other contributions now and again, attending to diverse problems of cultural policy and practical management. Questioned on the issue of becoming more
"popular", she ruled that wanting to please readers as a means of obtaining a larger circulation was a form of vulgarity: one must write at one's highest and give the readers what, according to one's best lights, one believes they should have. This did not exclude making the field as wide as possible. *Mother India* need not restrict itself to being philosophical or to dealing with spiritual topics. Its appeal could be vast and varied, but there should be consonance, however subtle and implicit, with the great ideal of refining no less than sharpening all of man's faculties. And, of course, topics concerned with the Integral Yoga were to hold the centre of the stage.

At the end of twenty-five years *Mother India* cannot do better than turn in deep gratitude to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and so comport itself as to be able to carry on building the Mother's India within us and without, and, through that loveliness, help the whole earth to aspire for

What most she needs, what most exceeds her scope,
A Mind unvisited by illusion's gleams,
A Will expressive of soul's deity,
A Strength not forced to stumble by its speed,
A Joy that drags not sorrow as its shade.

Yes, one must strive always to write at one's highest and, with the Yoga which the Gita describes as "skill in works", all the workers involved must see that they do not fail the conviction the Mother expressed in the last letter she wrote to the Editor about the periodical at a recent time of difficulty. She fully agreed with him that *Mother India* should continue.
SEX AND SPIRITUALITY

This is the article which has aroused a lot of curiosity ever since the publication of CHAMPAKLAL SPEAKS (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1975). In that book there is on page 58 the entry dated 5-11-1944: “While going back from Sri Aurobindo’s room Mother said: ‘Amal’s article on sex is good, but it cannot be published in the ADVENT.’” The note which came to the author in Bombay from Sri Aurobindo through Nirodbaran was to the same effect: “Sri Aurobindo sends congratulations but finds the article unsuitable for the ADVENT.”

A bit of a riddle faces us in these pronouncements. It is solved when the precise reason for the reservation is explained. In the original draft the article had a few jocular expressions of somewhat “naughty” high spirits. Both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother could enjoy them but not allow them in a periodical of the Ashram, especially one like the ADVENT which had a sustained serious tone. Even elsewhere in India the article needed a little editing. With those expressions partly smoothed down, it appeared in the Bombay Weekly, THE SOCIAL WELFARE, October 4, 1946, pp. 9-10. It is now reproduced with some further touches here and there. It has become fairly “respectable”, but has done so without losing the essential liveliness of the points it had to make. Nor does the respectableness affect the rather unusual thrust of its thesis; for that is independent of the phrases which were deemed peccant. And, in addition to whatever gusto of verbal turn may be at play,
this thrust is surely the reason why the Mother and Sri Aurobindo appreciated the piece.

Nobody in India can permanently find room for sex in spiritual life without violating his own deepest conviction. Not that all have refrained from mixing sex with the spiritual life — there are various cults in which erotic indulgence of the body is practised with a pseudo-mystical ecstasy accompanying its excitement and its orgasm. Yet one may be sure that even the most misguided adherents of these cults go against themselves; for, though sex has a place in the religious symbolism of India, it is never understood as being there to make the mystical path sexual. In the first place, the aim is to throw upon ordinary acts a glow of religious idealism by associating them with super-human personalities. Thus there are injunctions in the Shastras never to perform coitus without a prayer to the divine Creator and Creatrix. A seed of mysticism is cast by such a means into the soil of the common consciousness and helps holy thoughts to sprout more and more. In the second place, the aim is to quicken the hidden soul in us by kindling the poetic imagination and using emblems of concrete love-union and creativity to counter the vacuous abstractness which the common man feels in the spiritual. Those emblems undermine his penchant to identify the mystical with the misty and prepare him to quest for God as the most positive, gripping and substantial of realities. The passionate force of our nature leaping towards an object of attraction is thus aided to divert itself from customary to higher values, from being blind heat to first a searching luminousness and then revelatory light, from retas to ojas and lastly tejas. All this is ingrained in the Indian mind and the pseudo-mystical cults leave always an uneasiness no Indian can wholly escape.

An instinct of purity reigns also in the Roman Catholic world, though there a moral and ascetic revulsion sits in the place of the Indian's sober sense of the sexual storm's incompatibility with the mystical "flame burning straight upward
in a calm and windless region”, as we may put it paraphrasing a text in the Gita. It is among the Protestants that the spiritual instinct is well-nigh lost and attempts are made to render sex a legitimate part of the holy life, at least a harmless thing which scarcely hinders the soul’s growth towards God. Originally these attempts were a reaction to the hypocrisy of the medieval monks. Seeing how contorted became human nature under a celibate regime, the Protestants deemed sex uncontrollable except by the few gifted geniuses of chastity. They made their peace with it and openly established marriage for the clergy. An honest procedure — but it erred in believing that one could truly and wholly be God’s minister in the day while still being an engine of concupiscence at night. Under the Protestant influence, even those Europeans who have absorbed the atmosphere of Indian mysticism by direct contact with it seem often not quite to understand why sex is renounced by all the Yogis. One of the keenest of them whom I know leads himself a brahmachari life: his books, however, express the notion that the nuptial bed, moderately enjoyed, has nothing essentially antagonistic to the bliss of Brahman. What is perhaps responsible for his view is his eagerness to popularise spirituality, to make it accessible and acceptable to the intellectuals of Europe who cannot in a mass give up sex. He is not altogether wrong in thinking that mystical development is possible with sex going on; but this development is only on the plane of the mind and the inner consciousness and that too to a certain extent: the emotional part, the sense-self, the outer consciousness remain gross and the full freedom of the mental and the inner is also never attained or, if attained, is not kept up but always interrupted by the desire-driven, ego-slaking, turbid and narrow frenzy of the genitals.

And yet we must admit there is something in sex that has a basis of incontrovertible necessity in Nature. Earth-life is haunted and obsessed by the fact of the individual’s limitation and death. Sex is an effort by the elemental energy in us to abolish them, an effort that has no direct success, since what
The Sun and the Rainbow

it achieves are fits of feverish blinding pleasure interspersed with much heartburn, disharmony and disappointment, while the perpetuity it compasses is not of our own selves but of imitations and projections of them in our children. Yes, the success is not direct at all; but the mystical paths, the Yogas, have not the power to lift the total make-up of man out of the world of limitation and death which brings the sex-function into play as a delightful balsam for one's fragmentary finitude and a magic rite by which one who is himself doomed to perish wins a vicarious immortality. No doubt, by mysticism the individual becomes aware of his eternal spirit and escapes inwardly the death-obsession no less than the load of limit. Liberated into the immortal bliss of Brahman he exceeds the urge to procreate and to perpetuate himself in his offspring. Nor has he the stinging sense of being just a fragment, a part aching for a complementary physical mate in order to end its pain of incompleteness. The knower of Brahman realises an infinitude of self, an illimitable inner state that has no walls to beat unhappily against, no jagged edges clamouring to fit into a pattern of finite body-satisfaction. But not all mystics can remain in the bliss of Brahman for good. Many have ups and downs to the close of their lives. A small number manage to preserve a general air of *Ananda*. Even they do not cease to be aware of sexuality in themselves. Sometimes it is a wave trying to drown them but they keep above its dark swirl. At other times it is a trouble in their dreams wherein they yield to its temptation but they do not let such involuntary yielding have any grip on their wakeful moments. More rarely still, it is a devitalised demon lying quiescent, a presence felt as a mere passive weight in their earth-being. No more than a sprinkling have cast it out of themselves altogether. Yet even the great Yogis and Saints who have banished lustful desire have felt in the midst of their entire psychological release the limitations of their physical existence, a bounded sense of outer being and the transitoriness of the body. The deep-seated striving of Nature to get over these defects created that
leap in us towards the sex-embrace and the generative act. Sex is the stretching of the hands for a fullness of the embodied finite being in matter and for an endless future on earth. Have the Yogas, the mystical ways, led the stretched hands to their goal? If they have not, the banishing of lustful desire is insufficient. Nature's need for sex is left and with it an irresolvable problem, a lasting ground for some sort of give-and-take between sex and spirituality.

So far in the world's history the rationale of sex has stayed unchallenged. Indirect though the success achieved by sex is, it cannot be discarded by the race until a finer substitute is found. Because no finer substitute has been struck upon, the force of passion frequently fails to be uplifted, slips again and again from the Godward-turning tapasya of the mystic. And even when it has been set free from its habitual mould and wholly re-orientated, it has not been put to any service of physical nature which might help out the secret behind sex. In consequence, the body has come to be regarded as baulked forever of a divine destiny. This implies that God cannot dwell in man from top to toe and that man must leave a part of himself as incapable of a supreme fulfilment. Pricked by a constant awareness of external imperfection, the mystic strains to a supra-terrestrial fulfilment, his attitude remains otherworldly, taking his embodied life on earth to be a temporary phase which consists of a divine side and an undivine if not actually a devilish side, the two ultimately irreconcilable.

The question arises: Is it wisdom to make a trenchant division in Nature? Surely it is not undivine, much less devilish, of Nature to cry for the finite individual's bodily self-completion and his conquest of death. The cry is at bottom a hunger for materialisation of the plenitude and immortality of the Spirit. It is a cry that cannot be facilely set aside. Out of primeval depths it seems to emerge with a tremendous strength; it is an essential and elemental part of earth-existence and no Yoga or mystical way can permanently ignore its presence or satisfy by an other-worldly nisus the innate sense we have that what
quivers out through sex is a precious secret whose loss would impoverish our general life here. We may admire the great Yogis and Saints, we may recognise and feel their splendid holiness, their vast beatitude, their superhuman virtue. Yet we cannot help also feeling and recognising that they have missed something necessary and fundamental, lacked in their realisations what earth cannot do without except by letting penury fall upon it amidst all mystical riches. A compromise appears to be called for. But oh how watery gets the inner life, the spiritual aspiration, the mystical state, if a compromise is accepted! Can we ever have a lascivious Christ or a lustful Buddha? Can Mirabai sleep with mortals or any earthly kiss echo on the lips of Teresa the name of the Lord? One cannot have the Spirit's height side by side with a mounting fever of the libido. One cannot have the God-intoxicated profundities of the soul together with a frenzied absorption in carnal appetite. The stuff, the vibration and the psychological plane of the sex-thrill are quite different from those of the mystical rapture. They are in comparison so crude and gross and cramping. Still, Eros shouts like a godhead and if his voice is ignored he turns devil, making sudden assaults on the ordinary spiritual aspirant, vaguely burdening the extraordinary one and leaving even in the most exceptional who has positively ejected him a certain barrenness of the body, until an anti-life otherworldly outlook is engendered, an outlook which puts a big gap in man's heart and frightens away the mind of the race from walking in the footsteps of the God-seeker.

Where then lies the solution of the dilemma? No number of Christs, Buddhas, Mirabais and Teresas will establish the kingdom of the Spirit on earth and drive from a world of limitation and death the mighty bewitchment of sex unless they realise that the search of sex, no matter how blind, is along a track of truth, and that this truth can be attained just as little by an inner divinity and immortality of spiritual consciousness concentrating on a Beyond as by self-enlargement through the sex-embrace and self-prolongation into the
future through the offspring of the sex-act. What is needed is not the mere suppression or quiescence or else ejection of sexuality. The need is also for a radical change in the ideal of spirituality. If the individual is to get out of the sex-clutch laid by the death-haunted consciousness of man as he is and escape the body’s barrenness caused by replacing that clutch with no other physical process, not only the inner being but the outer as well must be able to partake of the Divine’s nature: then alone the rush for sexual self-completion and for vicarious immortality through one’s children will be checked — then alone the poverty which seems to spread over bodily existence will be avoided. The body must find the Divine’s immortal bliss filling the very cells and transforming their substance, freeing them from pain and disease and decay, evolving them to manifest perfectly the Spirit’s perfection. As long as the body is not to be divinised and as a result immortalised, sex cannot be made quite superfluous and powerless. No Yoga of the past has envisaged the possibility of a physical God-experience. The finitude and transitoriness that are in our external Nature, the shut-up and small sense there of the individual unit, the incapacity of it to go on forever have been accepted as inevitable and irremediable. Spirituality puts its heart in some heaven or Nirvana beyond. Like sex, it offers but an indirect success to the earth-creature. Both fail, though in different modes, and tear life into extremes or else unite to form various kinds of unsatisfactory compromises.

Only the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo affirms that, if matter has derived from the Spirit, there must be in the Spirit an ideal truth of matter supporting the evolving phenomenon here and pressing for entire manifestation. The Spirit’s substance, according to Sri Aurobindo, must possess a divine materiality as the archetype of our body, and our body must have been evolved in order ultimately to express that materiality. At present it is a palpit image of the archetype, the supporting truth. Our Yoga must be such as would enable the archetype to shine out and transform the flawed image. Intuiting the
real aim of terrestrial evolution, Sri Aurobindo has sought for a power of consciousness which would hold the master-key to all problems. In what he calls the Supermind he has discovered a dynamism for crowning completely the evolutionary labour. The seers of the Upanishads spoke of a spiritual or causal body — kārana sharīra — governing our gross and subtle sheaths from its occult station above in the Spirit’s ether. But no total descent, emergence or organisation of it in both the gross and the subtle was taught or methodised. Evidently the Supermind’s full evolutionary implications were never fathomed. Sri Aurobindo is the first to proclaim that matter can be divinised, he is the first to practise the superb artistry of the divinising Yoga. None but he can illumine and consummate that which is grouping and stumbling through sex for a physical self-fulfilment. None else can meet the crucial question so often asked of those who hold Yoga to be the ideal of life: “If everybody did Yoga and stayed celibate, would not the world come to an end?” If everybody did Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga to the very end, everybody would become physically transformed and capable of perpetuity because of the descent of the Divine and His undying Spirit into the atoms of the body: so the need to perpetuate the race by having children will be no more, even as the need sex tries to answer for a physical sense of union in which the ego-fragment seeks completeness will disappear because of a divine body-experience that is not shut off from the Beatific and the Perfect.
Time and again the question has cropped up: Can Sri Aurobindo’s ideal be realised by means of the past religions and the old Yogas?

An answer in the negative, insisting on the newness of the ideal and the consequent need of a new spiritual praxis, is usually given. But a very positive criticism is couched in the following terms which call for our notice by the striking quotations they incorporate from Sri Aurobindo himself and the sweeping conclusions drawn on the strength of them:

"Many people are of the opinion that for the Supramental Yoga we require exclusively Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The devotion of these people is commendable, but we must see what Sri Aurobindo has said on his Integral Yoga. Otherwise there is every possibility of sectarianism being developed.

"Sri Aurobindo was dead against sectarianism. He wrote in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, in the Chapter ‘The Four Aids’: ‘The sadhaka of the integral Yoga will make use of all these aids, according to his nature; but it is necessary that he should shun their limitations and cast from himself that exclusive tendency of egoistic mind which cries, “My God, my Incarnation, my Prophet, my Guru,” and opposes it to all other realisation in a sectarian or a fanatical spirit. All sectarianism, all fanaticism must be shunned; for it is inconsistent with the integrity of the divine realisation.’

"Then again in *Letters on Yoga* we read these lines: ‘I have
no objection at all to the worship of Krishna or the Vaishnava form of devotion, nor is there an incompatibility between Vaishnava Bhakti and my supramental yoga. There is in fact no special and exclusive form of supramental yoga: all ways can lead to the supermind, just as all ways can lead to the Divine.

"So I think the matter ends here. Sri Aurobindo warned us and gave his final word which we must remember."

'Well, have we truly the “final word” here?

2

The words of a Master of the Integral Yoga are bound to be such that they seem to lend countenance to various standpoints at various times and places. They present many aspects of truth and can be quoted by one side or another to suit particular purposes. Unless taken in the context of the entire Aurobindonian vision they cannot yield their full significance.

But even if the quotations made from The Synthesis of Yoga and from Letters are taken on their own merits, do we really get the impression that Sri Aurobindo considered his ideal to be realisable by means of the past religions and the old Yogas?

To reject the cry "My God, my Incarnation, my Prophet, my Guru" is surely not to say, "Any kind of God, any type of Incarnation, any sort of Prophet, any brand of Guru will straightaway do for the Integral Yoga." And to forbid "all sectarianism, all fanaticism" is surely not to go in for a mighty mixture of the world’s religions in an impartial acceptance of everything in them exactly as it is. A broad-minded view of the function and utility of all spiritual and religious motives, a willingness to let different human beings accept different creeds and guides and paths according to their natures — this is the obvious intention.

Again, look at the declaration that the worship of Krishna and the Vaishnava form of devotion are compatible with the
The Past Religions ... Sri Aurobindo's Ideal

Supramental Yoga and that there is no special and exclusive form of such a Yoga and that all ways can lead to the Supermind. Is it tantamount to asserting that it makes no difference in the least whether one follows Vaishnavism in the manner current so far or whether one takes to it in accordance with a larger and more plastic spirit which we should expect to be proper to a Yoga admittedly many-sided and widely inclusive and openly designated by a non-Vaishnavite term, a term hitherto unheard-of: "Supramental"? Nor must we overlook the small yet important word "can". It is not replaceable by a sweeping "will" or an unconditional "must". This too should be obvious.

A deeper scrutiny of the first quotation would attend to the point markedly suggested in it that the student or practitioner of the Integral Yoga should avoid "all sectarianism, all fanaticism". He should avoid them because he casts from himself the "exclusive tendency" and takes the essence of all spiritual paths and impregnates it with the new Aurobindonian revelation, making that essence yield the secret truth in it that tends towards integrality. But, if we admit this, then we imply integrality to be the distinguishing Aurobindonian feature, so that what is of living value to us is not one particular cult or another as it is in itself but that in it which can blend with the new endeavour. There is always this blendable part, for the work of Sri Aurobindo is not a negation of the past but its fulfilment: if the Supermind is the truth of truths and if it is meant to complete the evolutionary movement everything in that movement must hold something which points — however vaguely, indirectly, even perversely — towards the supramental. But the Supermind fulfils the past not by merely encouraging it: it fulfils by bringing a novel light and power and only by this light and power can the past's pointer be disengaged and employed with fruitful results. So there is no question of reaching the goal set by Sri Aurobindo without appreciating the Aurobindonian work as something which the past in itself cannot give and without which the
past is unacceptable to us for our special ends, however valid its acceptance may be for those who — quite legitimately for their own objectives — do not share our aim to consummate the universal evolutionary drive.

The gods and avatars and teachers who have influenced the world are not to be brushed aside: all of them carry a concealed cry for the Supermind, but mostly for an aspect of it rendered separate and exclusive, and we cannot lose ourselves in such a form of the aspect. Thus Shiva has mostly been invoked to grant a liberation from the cosmic imbroglio — “Hara, Hara! Vyom, Vyom!” (“The Free, the Free! The Void, the Void!”): this has been the Shiva-mantra. The Free and the Void are indispensable to Sri Aurobindo’s Yoga, for they are the base and the milieu for the supramental dynamism in the world. But if we go in for the Shiva-mantra as made effective in the past we shall hardly be Aurobindonians. Vaishnava bhakti has brought the sweetness and intensity and concreteness of the personal Divine into life and, as such, it is indispensable for us, human persons who have been doing the Integral Yoga under gurus whom we have believed to be the Divine embodied. But there has been a lot of emotional and sensational excitement associated with this bhakti, and that certainly is no objective for us: a calm flickerless flaming of the heart is what Sri Aurobindo wants: no loss of true fire is here, but nothing of the dramatic, the uncontrolled, the lopsided, the fitful. Again, Vaishnava bhakti has fixed for its terminus a beyond-life of Goloka-felicity: a wonderful lila, play, here with Krishna’s inner presence and then a happy storm of passage to a heaven on the other side. This transmundane terminus is also not suitable for the direction of our consciousness. No doubt, the worship of Krishna or the Vaishnava form of devotion can go along with the Supramental Yoga, as indeed all ways can lead to the Supermind, but it is poor logic to think Sri Aurobindo is deliberately recommending it. If anybody is so minded or so conditioned psychologically as to want to practise it, Sri Aurobindo would not forbid him, provided the
potentiality it possesses of being compatible with the Yoga of the Supermind is made active and dominant. We should commit the grossest mistake to think that according to Sri Aurobindo any past spiritual way would be helpful for our ultimate purpose without the least qualification, without the slightest reorientation.

Sri Aurobindo has never said: “Go and follow Shankara and you will reach the Supermind. Be a follower of Ramanuja or Chaitanya and you will automatically do the Supramental Yoga.” Nor has he gone out of his way to advise people to take up old cults, as if saying: “Why bother about coming to the Ashram and devoting yourself to the Mother or to me? Stay where you are and as you are and continue in your own religion, carry on your ancient puja of this or that Ishta-devata, chosen deity, for you are sure to be supramentalised and bound to be a brilliant sadhaka of the Integral Yoga if you just do what your ancestors have done or you have been habituated to do. In fact, there was no need for the Mother or me to get born and pass through the ordeals of a path that had never before been trod in its fullness and in its details, no need for us to have discovered new lights and powers for earth’s transformation which has never been rightly attempted or even properly dreamt of. Any old path, any past cult, any god or avatar or teacher will serve for practising a Yoga with which they themselves were never associated.”

Actually, Sri Aurobindo’s central stress is on a new life, a transcendence of the spiritual past as well of the past in any other form, though in that spiritual past there are naturally some helpful hints for the new life. Sri Aurobindo appreciates all true seeking and permits the prolongation of the past when sincere people are somehow too addicted to it: he discerns in it those helpful hints and throws them into relief for the benefit of the aspiring addicts: he is eager to aid every man according to his individual bent. But he nowhere welcomes into his Yoga such addiction on its own merits nor does he offer an unconditional carte blanche to it. Merely because big-
otism and exclusivism are not in his line, merely because he can extract from everything some luminous affinity to his own message, we should not misunderstand his position. To view his wideness, his considerateness, his comprehensiveness as our commentator does is to render pretty meaningless those words of Sri Aurobindo’s in a letter on the process of spiritual transformation he has worked out in terms of the Supermind. Among the reasons why he has called his Yoga “new as compared with the old yogas” he lists the following: “... a method has been preconized for achieving this purpose which is as total and integral as the aim set before it, viz., the total and integral change of the consciousness and nature, taking up old methods but only as a part action and present aid to others that are distinctive. I have not found this method (as a whole) or anything like it professed or realised in the old yogas. If I had, I should not have wasted my time in hewing out a road and in thirty years of search and inner creation when I could have hastened home safely to my goal in an easy canter over paths already blazed out, laid down, perfectly mapped, macadamised, made secure and public. Our yoga is not a retreading of old walks, but a spiritual adventure.”
Your circular is full of goodwill and a sincere desire to bring about harmony. You seem to have come across Aurobindonians who tend to be more religious than spiritual in their attitudes. It is the usual religious mind that sets up one alleged revelation in opposition to the approaches of other religions towards God. But one who claims to do an Integral Yoga cannot be exclusive in this fashion or come out with cudgels against people who are not yet aware of what Sri Aurobindo stands for. No true Aurobindonian tries to bully or browbeat anyone into becoming an Aurobindonian.

However, one must realise what is meant by saying, as you do, that a newcomer from an old Teaching has to be brought to a point where Sri Aurobindo can take over and that the old Teaching should be given its due as the newcomer’s starting-point. If the old Teaching is a “starting-point” and if Sri Aurobindo has to “take over”, surely it is admitted that there is something in Sri Aurobindo which exceeds the old Teaching and effects a consummation not possible with the old Teaching. When this is admitted, one cannot just say: “It has all been said before two thousand years ago and in other ages too.” One cannot remain simply a Christian, a Buddhist, a Judaean, a Zoroastrian, a Mohammedan, a Bahai or even an adherent to the Vedantic Hinduism which served as the base and background to Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga — one cannot just be any of these things and still be an Aurobindonian. One
does not “exclude” the old Teachings, for exclusion would run counter to integrality, but one certainly cannot keep them as they were. You have yourself understood Sri Aurobindo to imply that his Yoga “goes beyond Buddha, Christ, Krishna and other Teachings”. If Sri Aurobindo “includes” all the Teachings of the past and yet goes beyond them, why does one have to keep them at all in their old recognisable forms instead of plunging wholeheartedly into Sri Aurobindo?

If we keep harking back to the great figures from whom the old Teachings emanated and to the terms in which they have chiefly gone home to humanity, we shall merely be using Sri Aurobindo to give a new look to the religious forces of the past. No doubt, we must not disdain these forces, but there must be what I may paradoxically call a sympathetic good-bye to them, a friendly break-away. Those forces have their own counterparts in Sri Aurobindo: so there will be no real loss, but they will now work in a wider context and be infused with new meanings. If that context and those meanings are to yield their full life-value and bring us a pull from the future in addition to a push from the past, the old associations need to disappear, however gently and gradually. Otherwise we shall never get the total benefit of the light which Sri Aurobindo embodied for us. I may specifically make it clear that I do not mean only an adapting of the old Teachings to changed modern conditions. I mean something more than old wine in new bottles or even new wine in old bottles. In a certain important sense there have to be both new wine and new bottles. Two basic instances in point are the Aurobindonian concepts of “Supermind” and “Transformation”.

Sri Aurobindo says that he brought the term “Supermind” into general use and now it is employed in various ways quite far from his intention. Similarly he remarks that people talk of “Transformation” in senses that are very different from what he wants. Sri Aurobindo’s “Supermind” makes a fundamental difference in our vision of God’s activity and purpose in the world, and Sri Aurobindo’s “Transformation” carries us far
beyond all previous ideals of sagehood, seerhood, sainthood. Time and again he has explained the precise content of these two key-terms of his Integral Yoga and how they make this Yoga very new on the whole in spite of old aims, methods, disciplines and experiences forming part of it, especially in the early stages.

Now I come to what you write on love of one’s fellows as a builder of Auroville. There is a fundamental truth in what I may call the essence of your message. For, the love you speak of is a mighty idealism and a forgetfulness of oneself. Your vision answers in its own way to Sri Aurobindo’s in those glorious lines of Savitri:

Love must not cease to live upon the earth;
For Love is the bright link twixt earth and heaven,
Love is the far Transcendent’s angel here;
Love is man’s lien on the Absolute.

But you will observe that Sri Aurobindo’s definition of love is openly charged with a sense of “heaven”, the “Transcendent”, the “Absolute”. Unless these high realities are made an active force in the lover’s consciousness, the unity towards which love drives will never be set on its way to consummation. Unquestionably if one is not capable of loving the human, one will not have the capacity to love the Divine, just as one’s love of the Divine will not be complete if cut off from love of the human. But the converse is even truer and more basic: one cannot fully and freely love the human without rooting oneself in love of the Divine.

What we name love of one another is as much coloured — whether grossly or subtly — by egoism as any other movement of our nature, however high-pitched it may be. The gospel of love of one’s fellows has been preached repeatedly but it has never brought about the hoped-for results. As long as no attempt is made towards an inner wideness and tranquillity which would lead us to an already existent Universal Being,
the single infinite Self in all — as long as no turn is there towards the deep hidden "psyche" in us to whom God the beatific Super-Person is ever real as its Lord and its Origin, as the Master and Source of the whole world — we shall always have in our love a seeking for the satisfaction of our desires, a feeling of disgruntlement at things not going as we might wish, and even a resentment if the sort of response we want is not forthcoming. Our fine dreams and grand hopes will invariably founder on the blind rock of our divided egos.

A conscious Yoga must accompany the movement of love for our fellows, an intense turn both to the Cosmic Presence and to the Personal Divinity beyond all beings as well as within them. Then alone will love bring heaven to earth. Then alone shall Auroville be the City of Dawn built from the Light of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.
PUNCTUATING OUR WORLD-VIEW

AN EXERCISE WITH THE PASSAGE OF TIME

What punctuation-mark could better express our state of mind face to face with the modern world and its enigmatic as well as ominous movement from day to day than the sign of interrogation?

Some might be stirred to use the exclamation-sign because every day an unpleasant surprise is in store for us making us sit up straight and evoking from our hearts a desperate “Oh!”

Others might vote for the colon: they would do so on the following ground: each sunrise reveals more glaringly the import of unpleasantness suggested by the previous sunset.

Still others would select the semi-colon; they would like to symbolise their sense of a continual heaping up of disagreeable developments; each such development would appear to add its own new shade to the significance of the last; the new shade in turn leads on to the next frightful nuance.

A few might plump for the comma, with the plea that the pause between event and event is a mere seeming, and the same old story of misfortune unfolds itself, piece after piece, without any apparent end, any sign of a new turn.

Perhaps a yet smaller group would pick out the full-stop. They would indicate their impression of a cleavage between one day’s evil and another’s. They would discern a jerkiness and discontinuity and illogic. It would be as if the world-spirit were in an interminable state of nightmare on abrupt surreal-ist nightmare.

As an alternative to the full-stop a handful might make a
dash for the dash — the cleavage and discontinuity and jerkiness and illogic of events make a headlong series — they give us no time to arrive at a conclusion about anything — the surrealist nightmares take the bit between their teeth and gallop at breakneck speed everywhere to nowhere.

But am I wrong in saying that the large majority of thinking people would favour the question-mark? How well it combines something of all the implications by its very vagueness! And in addition this is what it represents: the tension of undecidedness we have all the time. The tension comes of our long-drawn-out uncertainty about various problems; it is also born of our anxious straining after solutions that seem to keep ever eluding us. All the empty succession, the pointless continuity, the immeasurable monotony of our life is there, with their answer-defying problems. And there is yet something more. The answer-defiance brings us again and again to a halt. And at last — at long last — we feel our hopes dashed — till we begin doubting the value of every position — and the one who questions what will happen to the world tomorrow asks himself “Will even the questioner live beyond today?”

But all punctuation severs to a greater or lesser degree what is really the single indivisible expression of One Existence and One Consciousness and One Delight thrown into everlasting play by that Unity’s multitudinous vision of its own truth and if we could pass beyond a punctuated view of the world we should know each today as the enigmatic and ominous appearance worn by an evolving mystery of divine Selfhood which carries the fulfilling sense of an eternal answer to every quivering question of time.
A BIRTHDAY LETTER

TO J.A., AGE ONE ON NOVEMBER 17, 1938

I am sure this is the first letter you have ever got. Of course you’ll realise the fact many years later, but what I have to say now will perhaps not have grown old by then.

I need not wish you a happy birthday: such a wish would be superfluous, since you are so drenched in happiness every hour that your birthday can be no exception. I don’t mean that you do not cry: you do that quite lustily, I hope, for it helps you to develop your lungs and throat-muscles. What I mean is that these howlings, even if due to temporary stomach-ache or some such calamity, are really lost in the general flood of joy which is your life-blood at present. You are a baby: your contact with the marvellous secret source of all being is still strong: no hard and dry crust has formed on your simplicity of soul.

It would be wrong to call you, as many students of childhood may do, just a little animal without any care — a tiny lump of smiling thoughtlessness. No doubt, in being free from “the pale cast of thought”, you have an affinity with animal nature. Or, rather, the animal nature that is in all of us is at play in you without our expectations and forebodings, even as it is exempt from our ambitions and rancours. But this nature’s ignorant spontaneity, expressing itself unpervertedly, is mixed with the innocent grace of the divine spark in you. All that hinders the same spark in us is absent from your being. That is why you are not only happy but radiantly so and the happiness you radiate is the very stuff of your
existence, needing no cause, depending on no circumstance. And I hope that, as you grow, you will not forget to grow in your soul side by side with cultivating your vital and mental powers. To help you do this, I should advise your parents to surround your childhood with two miracles which are within the reach of everybody.

They must keep you in the midst of flowers. Always there should be a sense of petals and delicate perfume near your bed. And when you are out of your bed they must move you about between green shadows and among gay blossoms. For flowers are the little smiles of paradise that break out of the sleep of Nature. They have at the same time a depth of gentle peace and the brave sparkle of colour. They never sit in sackcloth and ashes but neither are they carried away by their own pomp. Rich they are without being proud of their wealth, for theirs is a natural poise which is not either vain or over-humble: they do not refuse themselves to plucking fingers nor do they clamour to be plucked. Nothing can add to their perfection and nothing can take away a jot from it. This is the consciousness of the psyche, because its hold is on something infinite hidden behind things. May you, my dear little friend, always feel that your eyes are like flowers, that your face is like a flower, that every part of you, however earthly, bears roots in it of an ever-flowering delicacy of quiet and colourful fragrance.

The other miracle which must mingle with your growth is great music. I wish that every day some master-musician would tune your pulse. You will not know what is happening to you, but, as the strains of the world's wonders of sound float about you and gain soft entry into your being, you will become a citizen of a strange land which waits for all those who are not in love with the dust and heat of the common world. Slowly you will realise that though you may not see fairies dancing under the moon or angels bathed in an ecstasy of sun, you can listen to the melodious throb of dream-translucent wings and the golden laughter that drips
from the motion of limbs unfettered by mortality. Words, articulate words, may mean nothing to you; but these sounds, delightfully linked together as if by magic, will fuse with the rhythms of your own living body and make harmonious all the instincts of your nature. The Greeks grew up in the midst of great sculpture and architecture: ours is not an age of builders of beauty, but we can raise around you palaces not made by chisel and hammer, spacious patterns of music, and we can set you amidst movements of gods and goddesses, a heavenly traffic heard for us and echoed to us by Chopin and Mozart and Cesar Franck, Bach and Beethoven and Wagner. Live, child, in these palaces, and find yourself, when you are no longer a child, one in spirit with those divinities. I can never wish you anything better on your first birthday.
EACH OF US ON EARTH...

Each of us on earth has a short span of dreaming and doing. But the human life which we live, whether individual or collective, is not all that is ours. Through and beyond our dreaming and doing, a larger life is being dreamt and done. Our hearts and minds have a movement which we vision as our own concern. But there is a soul in us which moves to a superhuman issue.

This soul gives us our rare strange spells of agonising self-exceeding and ecstatic self-giving. Sudden flashes are the acts of our soul — they seem to come as if from nowhere and to disappear as if into nothing. Often we see very little concrete result. But actually through these fugitive flashes the luminous body of God is being built, cell after golden cell, a supreme beauty that is eternal in itself but evolutionary in its disclosure through us.

We think we are living our own absorbing lives: we hardly are aware of the Great Life that is growing along with us. Some shadow of it we perceive in those adventures that pull us a little out of our humanly happy grooves — the adventures of art, philosophy, science, social experiment, religion, selfless love. But the true glory of life lies precisely in carrying out more and more these adventures. And the culminating glory is what may be called the quintessence of them all, when the secret soul comes forward in its own proper reality, takes hold of our hearts and minds and with wide-open eyes understands that the building of God’s body on earth is the whole purpose of existence. Then we get the via mystica, the Inner Life, the pursuit by the Hound of Heaven, God-intoxication,
Yoga — but all this with a view to earth's transfiguration and not earth's rejection.

So different in its intensity from our habitual aims is the first flush of the soul's self-recognition that frequently we forget that our souls are here in bodies and that by communing or uniting with the Super-soul we are meant to evolve a tangible palpable Divine Shape, a cosmic structure of expressive visage and active limb.

Inasmuch as we participate in this evolution of a universal divinity through our small humanity, we live beyond our doom of transience. We become enfolded in all Time, persist through all individual catastrophes — caught up in God's light and liberty. And we are thus caught up because even within our brief lives we have tried our utmost to exceed ourselves and give ourselves to the mighty Will and Wisdom that are our origin and that work to make us realise we are their immortal children. To feel at every moment our lives as at once streaming out of, and leaping towards, a Divine Mother-Father is the single task we all have in common. If the dreamings and doings of each of us stand apart from those of others instead of joining together in an harmonious effort, we shall fall short of the demand and the delight of Eternity's Body glowing through our days. Our source and goal are one: one also should all of us endeavour to be.
WHEN NEHRU MET SHAW

The history of our times is full of memorable meetings between the Modern East and the Modern West. Perhaps the meeting that took place in May 1949 was the most imaginatively significant — not only because two outstanding representatives met but also because of what the one gave to the other.

Both the meeting and the gift were eminently in the fitness of things. Immediately after achieving what seemed like “squaring the circle” — the reconciliation of the concept of India the sovereign independent Republic with the concept of the British Commonwealth of Nations — Jawaharlal Nehru could not have acted more appropriately than by meeting that master of surprise and paradox, Bernard Shaw. Nor could he have done anything more appropriate at the meeting than giving Shaw not the usual presents one might anticipate, such as a tiny model of the Taj Mahal or a statuette of Nataraja or a pocket edition of the Bhagavad Gita, but that most unexpected symbol of his country — the mango!

In the world of fruits the mango is as essentially Indian as olives are Greek, grapes French, figs Spanish, oranges Maltese and dates Arabian. Even more so — since it is a stauncher nationalist than any of them inasmuch as it has refused to thrive to any marked degree in a non-Indian soil, although Burma, Ceylon, Egypt, Brazil and the U.S.A. have done their best to plant mango groves. It is also as old as Indian history: the specimens Nehru put into Shaw’s hands are known by botanists to have had at least five thousand years of ancestors behind them, in the land of Arjuna and Tilak, Kapila and Jagadish Chunder Bose, Vyasa and Tagore, Sri Krishna and Sri Aurobindo.
Further, the mango is fraught with the flavour and bouquet of the typical Indian genius. This genius combines in its unity a large diversity of elements so that India is a sort of microcosm of all humanity's numerous cultural and racial types: this fruit, as a recent writer on its many merits pointed out, holds in its own unique taste and smell the presence of the apricot, the melon, the peach, the pineapple and is, to Europeans, suggestive even of turpentine! What is more, we learn from the same writer that in the Hitopadesha and Pancha Tantra it is regarded not only as the medicine par excellence for humans but also as the food of the Gods. It is, therefore, the emblem of the spiritual delight which is said to sustain the celestial realms and we are told that according to ancient records certain varieties of this fruit were actually "named after the Gods themselves for whom they were supposed to be the approved and relished bhoga or offering." India the seeker of the Supreme Spirit can very well consider the mango as suggestively summing up at the same time the high ideal of her inner life and the sacrificial, the dedicative, the detached attitude which is commanded to the idealistic soul by Krishna in the famous phrase of the Gita: "Thou hast a right to the work but not to to the fruit thereof."

A most poetic and profound gesture, then, can be read in Nehru's action, conveying to Shaw the truth and beauty of historical India in the shape of the mango. But an added touch of the sympathetic imagination may be found if we realise that no other figure among the intellectuals in England could be so fitting a recipient of this delicacy as Shaw. Shaw is the most emphatic voice raised there against what he considers the superfluity no less than the barbarity of eating flesh. Throughout his life he has stressed that from the nutritive point of view it is not in the least necessary for man to be a carnivorous animal. All that the body needs, says he, is found in vegetables and fruits. But perhaps even Shaw did not know that in the mango we have the complete food: medical dieticians inform us that here are all the ingredients required to
keep the body vibrant with every conceivable vitamin! Hence the mango is the master confirmation of the Shavian thesis.

An even deeper aspect of Shavianism is hidden in this fruit. But before we touch upon it let us refer to a lighter side of the situation of Nehru’s giving Shaw the mango. The Irish thinker and wit, with his grand beard, reminds us of the story in which an Iranian traveller who had returned to the court of a great Shah saved his life by a brilliant brain-wave. The traveller praised to the Shah the wonderful Indian fruit of the mango. The potentate told him that the praises had no point unless the mango’s taste could be described. “If you cannot tell us,” the traveller was informed, “what the mango tastes like, we shall cut off that head of yours which is so full of vain words.” The poor rhapsodist was in a panic. Then a thought struck him. He called for honey. Dipping both his hands in the jar he smeared his own big beard with the sweet stuff and, holding it towards the astonished Shah, said: “If Your Majesty deigns to taste of the honey on this most humble beard, the taste of the mango will be revealed.” The Shah, we are told, “was so impressed by the novelty of the proposal that he made the traveller his vizier.” What the traveller did to convey the mango’s deliciousness has indeed a strong taste of the mind and personality of the original and impudent yet patriarchal Shaw.

The most profoundly Shavian association, however, of the mango is by way of a pun. And this pun drives home also the most luminous philosophy that has sprung up on Indian soil in our day — the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo — and filled what in Shaw is but visionary aspiration with a concrete substance and practicality beyond his dreams. Often has Shaw declared that the mere change of institutions and of outer social forms is of no avail if man does not change himself, set astir his imagination and dynamise his will and evolve into a better brain for the purpose of fulfilling the immense potentialities of wisdom and harmony lying within that secret Something which is at the back of all being and striving, that
secret Something called the Holy Ghost in the past and named the Life Force by Shaw. No doubt, the Shavian gospel lacks the true mystical sense and impulse; too many intellectual hedgings have taken away from the novel version of the Holy Ghost the dynamics of divinity; but an intense dissatisfaction and disgust with materialism and mechanism animate Shaw and some touch he does bring of

the prophetic Soul
Of the wide world dreaming on things to come.

The cry which Nietzsche raised of “surpassing man” and going beyond to a greater formula of embodied consciousness is ever on Shaw’s lips, although he is not a strict partisan of Nietzsche’s apotheosis of strength and aggression and reckless rapture. It is no use, he says, our playing variations on the theme of Man: we must make this old theme give place to a new one — the Superman. But, while the Modern West has vaguely searched in a Neo-Vitalism for a means to this theme, the Modern East in the figure of Sri Aurobindo the Master of the Integral Yoga has shown the actual inner and outer Way by which it can be worked out. What is to Shaw’s credit, in spite of all his shortcomings, is that he has looked farther than the common “isms” bespelling the usually extravert West: the deep urge within is to him more important than the vast surge without. Our life, in his view, will be genuinely fruitful if we keep always in our mind and heart like an uplifted torch of truth a longing for Man’s departure and Superman’s advent. Of that genuine fruitfulness we can very well conceive Shaw himself ingeniously making the mango expressive. Perhaps the extreme pleasure with which Shaw accepted Nehru’s gift was due to the fact that the word “mango” sounds the first note of his world-message — a world-message which, in a highly transfigured form unrecognised by him and even by Nehru, is also India’s weltanschauung today and which, in brief, is:

“Man, go! Superman, come!”
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU AND MODERN INDIA

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India, passed away on May 27, 1964 in his seventy-fourth year. What India has lost may best be suggested by asking a question he would himself have loved to hear: “Was he seventy-four years old or seventy-four years young?” Nehru never outgrew the happy audacity that was his in the days of his youth. He was at one time the living symbol of young India, and years did not change that aspect of him. This Prime Minister of ours was the country’s sole Minister who was always in his prime. For, he represented India in her modernity. It is because modern India flamed in his being that, even when his hair was sparse and white and his face had a drawn expression, we still felt youth to be incarnate in him. Nehru had a face with the light of the future on it. The great new ideas that have been springing up in our day and whose fulfilment is yet to come glowed in his eyes — and what else ever is it to be young?

But we must emphasise that Nehru, no matter how westernised by his education at Harrow and Cambridge, was an Indian; and his having been seventy-four years young was a realisation, in his own individuality’s terms, of the Indian way of youth. The happy audacity we have spoken of is not essentially an exuberance of the life-force, an overflowing physical energy, but the élan of high ideals, idealism endeavouring to mould and govern physical and vital existence by means of principles sought within some eternal order of things, so that a radiant smile of something imperishable and immortal, something Godlike that never ages, begins to work in the world’s affairs and dynamise the world’s nature: this is how the true Indian is happily audacious and does not grow old.
And it is to be noted that the taste of idealism's *elixir vitæ* is not of a conservative fixity of principles. To oppose the permanent to the changing is similar to setting up the One in antagonism to the Many — facile faults into which thinkers, Indians not excepted, frequently stumble. But genuine Indian culture is free from them. India has not really sat navel-gazing, entranced in a superhuman infinite Unity and Immutability, oblivious of the multicoloured million-mooded play of space and time. She was in her most typical periods never anti-life. And Nehru himself was well aware of this. His own words are there in *The Discovery of India*:

"The basic background of Indian culture was not one of other-worldliness or world-worthlessness. In India we find, during every period when her civilization bloomed an intense joy in life and nature, a pleasure in the act of living, the development of art and music and literature and song and dancing and painting and the theatre, and even a highly sophisticated inquiry into the sex relation. It is inconceivable that a culture or view of life based on other-worldliness or world-worthlessness could have produced all these manifestations of vigorous and varied life. Indeed it should be obvious that any culture that was basically other-worldly could not have carried on for thousands of years... I should have thought that Indian culture, taken as a whole, never emphasized the negation of life, though some of its philosophies did so: it seems to have done so, much less than Christianity."

Yes, the Indian way of being young does not cast a pallor on life's changing face. Although never giving priority to the life-force as such and always taking its stand in the deep awareness of supreme ideals that cannot be corrupted for passing or personal ends, it is keenly conscious of the onward pressure of the world-movement, it is full of the sense of man's adventure through the years, it is ever on the *qui-vive* for the new and the undreamt-of. The future is its passion no less than the past, evolution is its delight no less than the unchangeable Atman, modernism is its inspiration no less than the
"beauty of ancient days". Nehru, more than any other Indian on his own level and within his own sphere, combined the spirit of experiment and discovery and the eager look ahead with the idealistic spirit that cannot be bought or bartered or made subservient to selfish interests: that is why he stood out among his colleagues as the representative of the youth that is Indian, the youth that all should cultivate.

Two points, however, are to be observed when we look back at Nehru with pleasure and pride. They spring from the paradox that he was even more young in his sixties and seventies than he had been in his twenties and thirties: in other words, laterly his idealistic modernity, shedding some early biases, was brighter, wider, deeper, and he was living out more and more the Indian youthfulness afire in him. Nehru grew up side by side with the Soviet Union: his adult life synchronised with the development of Leninism and Stalinism, and it was very much coloured by the Marxist doctrine as embodied in contemporary Russia. He was for years impressed by the Stalinist regime because he identified it with the opposite of things he most condemned: capitalism, racialism, imperialism. Later he was no less an enemy of these things. But it is significant that in 1949, on the eve of his sixtieth birthday, he went on a mission of goodwill to the U.S.A., a country whose whole economy ran counter to the Marxist collectivism of the Soviet Union. The mission could never have come about if he had not realised, as he had scarcely done some years before, that countries which were not unstained by a history of capitalist, racialist and imperialist evils could still be, on account of some radical outbalancing virtue, leaders of progress and contribute immensely to the flowering of all that India has considered the finest in man.

Nehru did not stop keeping in his mind a shining picture of Marxism. Yet he came to feel acutely that a country which called itself Marxist and had, to a surface-view, abolished economic exploitation, established racial equality and denounced all attempts at turning Asia into Europe's colonial empire, need
not be more productive of essential life-values than countries which formed a bloc against it. Seeing the flaws which could not be slurred over in those countries, he refused to let India be hustled into any bloc, and stuck to a neutrality waiting on future events; but his awakened sense of the greater good on the whole in the western bloc was evident. “It is our aim,” he said in America, “to keep friendly contacts with everybody.” He, however, added: “Naturally we are bound to be closer to some nations than others. For example, we consult with the nations of the Commonwealth.” Although this consulting was declared, in the very next clause, to diminish by no jot the independence of India’s foreign policy, the willingness to be bound closer to Commonwealth nations which were quite antagonistic in feeling to Marxist Russia was a fact characteristic of Nehru approaching sixty and unthinkable of Nehru reaching forty. Still more characteristic and so far unthinkable was his pronouncement: “There is the growing tendency to centralization and regimentation which is a danger to individual freedom. Soviet Russia is the extreme example of centralization. I would not like to limit freedom for any nation.” Here we had in the clearest terms the recognition by Nehru that what glittered was not always what he took to be the gold of Marxism and also that far more precious than anything else in a nation’s life was individual freedom and that those countries where individual freedom was not lost were, in spite of all their faults, more worthy of consultation and friendly relation than one which claimed to have got rid of capitalism, racialism and imperialism and yet had reduced the individual human being to a robot.

In brief, while Nehru had not outgrown his rose-spectacled hope for a perfect society through Marxism, he no longer could be tempted to equate the distinction he drew between Marxism and Capitalism with the distinction between Stalin’s Russia and Truman’s America, much less between Stalin’s Russia and Attlee’s Britain. This breaking of an old association and throwing of the value of individual freedom into relief
was of first-rate importance, and made Nehru face the future with an idealistic modernity all the younger from the Indian angle of vision.

We may add that subsequent world-events showed the same increased youthfulness. Terrible for Nehru was the time when Mao Tse-tung took violent possession of Tibet. The act appeared to contradict all that his representatives had erroneously pictured to him of the new mentality abroad in China. Still believing in this picture he found himself sorely taxed with the problem of adopting the correct attitude. It was impossible not to protest. But what he felt — mistakenly, in most eyes — to be more crucial questions of international relationship prevented the full condemnation that was due. All the same, the true Indian in Nehru came to the fore when in spite of Mao’s fury he threw India wide open to the Dalai Lama and his fellow-refugees. The political asylum offered to them was never withdrawn and the principle of it never abjured. Mao did not forgive Nehru this assertion of the right of individuals to maintain their freedom of mind and to keep intact in the hospitable arms of India the vision of their deepest heart.

Significant too is the clear pronouncement on Russia under Khrushchev in comparison with the state of things during Stalin’s rule. Nehru declared that now there was some welcome relaxation of monolithic control. Stalinism was thus criticised once more and condemned in retrospect. Finally, there was the spontaneous turn mainly towards Britain and America for military aid when the Red Chinese struck across India’s Himalayan borders and shattered for good whatever illusions had lingered in Nehru about Communism being inevitably non-imperialist.

The second point to be observed about his increase in youthful Indianism relates to issues beyond the political. It was principally in connection with them that he could hope to deserve fully to be reckoned as what, to his extreme pleasure, he had been widely called by America in one phrase
or another during his 1949 tour: quintessential India of the twentieth century. Idealism, holding that there is a sense of the “ought” in our consciousness, a sense as of some supreme Law which is not born of mere expediency and is more than a mere generalisation from facts of Nature — idealism with its high ethical sense must look for a sanction to right conduct in nothing short of what India has termed the spark of divinity in man. A common tendency of our time is to make ethics a branch of Freudian psychology or Marxist sociology. But these are reachings after empirical science, attempts at description of mental happenings or social relationships. They cannot imply any norm, standard or ideal. As a reviewer of Amber Blanco White’s *Ethics for Unbelievers* has aptly reaffirmed, ethics is rooted in “values”, not in a charting out of the way things occur. To give a description, Freudian or Marxist, of “what is” can never yield those key terms of ethics, right, duty, obligation, good, ought. An empirical study of behaviour and a list of inductions from observed facts are utterly impotent to explain or justify the normative character of idealism. Idealism such as Nehru felt and advocated cannot admit of a purely natural explanation: it must seek both its motive force and its sanction in a Divine Being and can act only by virtue of this Divine’s Being’s representative *scintilla* in the depths of our humanity — a soul that functions with an instinct of divinity and that, even in letting itself be driven by considerations which it knows to be undivine, recognises the “ought” from which it deviates. Not that the human consciousness can always in its idealistic operation claim possession of the infallible divine rule; but the feeling that there is a supreme Reality faultlessly guided by its own Truth-light and that we are ethical inasmuch as we strain to express this Reality, must be present if idealism is to have any meaning. In other words, genuine idealism implies, however inexplicitly, a world-view whose utter consummation would be the mystical experience, the direct God-vision and God-realisation such as, in historical India, have been most powerfully recorded in the Vedas,
the Upanishads and the Gita. It was high time Nehru saw this — not only because he had arrived at an age which historical India had regarded as eminently suitable for filling oneself with the sense of the Divine but also because if there was any Indian with a disposition of the best “sattwic” and Brahmin type, precisely made, as it were, for turning to supreme spiritual truths in the twentieth century it was our Prime Minister for all his lack of concern with what is popularly labelled as religion. In fact, this very lack of concern would distinguish, on the negative side, the spiritual aspiration of our modern age that had come out into the light by discarding the fears and fanaticisms and ascetic refusals of the old religions. And, on the positive side, could any contemporary political figure surpass Nehru in innate refinement and spontaneous nobility, in a humanistic, international and forward-looking attitude profoundly in tune with a secret oneness underlying the divided world?

Even in the early days when the stamp of Marxism was sharp upon his intellect, signs were present that pointed towards the final mark of the idealistic modernity which would be true Indianism today. There could not be a keener contrast in both temperament and habit than between Nehru the complex and free-thinking Marxist and Gandhi the simplistic, the primitivist, the religionist, the extreme Tolstoyan. And yet what drew Nehru to Gandhi was a stupendous unknown quantity, something uncharted by Marx and unanalysed by science and inadequately covered by merely moral principles. He compared Gandhi’s influence to that of Socrates, and thereby confessed his own intuition of the metaphysical and “daemonic” touch. Even apart from his sense of a mighty X behind Gandhi, he has not omitted to report en passant his own unfathomable yearnings. In The Discovery of India, published in 1946, he has written that though much in the Marxist philosophical outlook he would accept without demurring, almost unawares a vague idealist approach would creep in, “something rather akin to the Vedanta approach”. And he has
added significantly: "It was not a difference between mind and matter but rather of something that lay beyond mind."

There was another hint too: his response in the midst of the dust and strife of the world to the image of the Buddha seated on the lotus flower above mortal passion and desire. He asked himself if this tranquillity could be reconciled with action, and said: "Behind those still unmoving features there is passion and an emotion, strange and more powerful than the passions and emotions we have known. His eyes are closed but some power of the spirit looks out of them and a vital energy fills the frame." Some vast and quiet impulsion from beyond the mind was what Nehru seemed to aspire after when the surface of him was not too insistent. And how genuine the aspiration was could be guessed from the photograph which was printed in every newspaper when, not long after India's independence, he went all the way to Calcutta to receive the relics of the Buddha's disciples Moggalana and Sariputta. However opposed to formal religion, he stood with his palms joined and held in front of his bowed head. No Marxist has stood thus even before the embalmed body of Lenin in Moscow's Red Square.

It was also a sense of more than natural presences that was aroused in Nehru by the loveliness and grandeur of Nature as well as the perfection of art and poetry. And most of all the spiritual unknown was at the back of the intense hunger he mentioned in his Autobiography (1936) to visit "Manasarovar, the wonder-lake of Tibet, and snow-covered Kailas nearby" — two of the holiest spots of Hinduism. "I dream of the day," wrote Nehru, "when I shall wander about the Himalayas and cross them to reach that lake and mountain of my desire." The words were as of a Pilgrim of Eternity who had lost himself in Time.

No doubt, prior to 1946 his Marxist penchant made him turn down the experiences of the ancient Indian mystics as probably phantasms of the self-deluded imagination; he chose to admire only the passion connected with them for truth and
for practical endeavour: "What interests me is the approach, which was not authoritarian or dogmatic, but was an attempt to discover for oneself what lay behind the external aspects of life." Nevertheless, a veiled instinct within him kept on saying: "Whether we believe in God or not, it is impossible not to believe in something, whether we call it a creative life-giving force or vital energy inherent in matter which gives it its capacity for self-movement and change and growth, or by some other name, something that is as real, though elusive, as life is real when contrasted with death. Whether we are conscious of it or not, most of us worship at the invisible altar of some unknown god and offer sacrifice to it — some ideal, personal, national or international: some distant objective that draws us on though reason itself may find little substance in it; some vague conception of the perfect man and a better world. Perfection may be impossible of attainment, but the daemon in us, some vital force, urges us on and we tread that path from generation to generation." (The Discovery of India)

Clearly, here is a strong pressure of the spiritual inner on the pragmatic outer. And that it is no passing phase but part of a continuous process is shown by the Will Nehru wrote on June 21, 1954, when holidaying on the hill-station of Simla. The publication of this Will after his death has revealed the real Nehru perhaps more than anything else from his pen. While staunchly refusing to have the ceremonies of conventional religion performed over his body, he has left about the disposal of his ashes instructions which make a most lyrical and visionary document.

There are two blending voices in this poetry of the idealist Nehru and each has again two movements. The major portion of his ashes, he says, should "be carried high up into the air in an aeroplane and scattered from that height over the fields where the peasants of India toil, so that they may mingle with the dust and soil of India and become an indistinguishable part of India". We are faced with a profound humility coupled with a passionate love of the country's masses, a noble self-
effacing gesture towards the wide stretch of earth that is visible Mother India. But along with this patriotic worship there is the upward aspiration symbolised by the aeroplane-flight of the ashes. Ultimately the aim is earth’s own service, but after attainment of the far freedom of the sky. Nehru, we may observe, has the word “high” and makes a specific point of its meaning by following up with “that height” without needing to do so: he could have just said “and then scattered...” The sense of the altitude to be reached above the earthly has distinctly shot through the inspiration of the imagined death-hour.

Even more spiritually significant are the two movements of the second voice in the request about the ashes: “a small handful... should be thrown into the Ganga.” Although a mere handful and not the major portion is now involved, the portion of the Will dealing with this handful is the major one. It is the great burning core of Nehru’s self-disclosure, non-religious on the one hand and undeniably packed with spiritual suggestions on the other:

“My desire to have a handful of my ashes thrown into the Ganga at Allahabad has no religious significance, so far as I am concerned. I have no religious sentiment in the matter. I have been attached to the Ganga and the Jamuna rivers in Allahabad ever since my childhood and, as I have grown older, this attachment has also grown. I have watched their varying moods as the seasons changed, and have often thought of the history and myth and tradition and song and story that have become attached to them through the long ages and become part of their flowing waters. The Ganga especially is the river of India, beloved of her people, round which are intertwined her racial memories, her hopes and fears, her songs of triumph, her victories and her defeats. She has been a symbol of India’s agelong culture and civilization, ever-changing, ever-flowing and yet ever the same Ganga. She reminds me of the snow-covered peaks and the deep valleys of the Himalayas, which I have loved so much, and of the rich and vast plains
below, where my life and work have been cast.

"Smiling and dancing in the morning sunlight, and dark and gloomy and full of mystery as the evening shadows fall: a narrow, slow and graceful stream in winter, and a vast roaring thing during the monsoon, broad-bosomed almost as the sea, and with something of the sea's power to destroy, the Ganga has been to me a symbol and a memory of the past of India running into the present, and flowing on to that great ocean of the future. Though I have discarded much of past tradition and custom, and am anxious that India should rid herself of all shackles that bind and constrain her and divide her people, and suppress vast numbers of them, and prevent the free development of the body, though I seek all this, yet I do not wish to cut myself off from the past completely. I am proud of the great inheritance that has been and is ours, and I am conscious that I too, like all of us, am a link in that unbroken chain which goes back to the dawn of history in the immemorial past of India. That chain I would not break, for I treasure it and seek inspiration from it, and as witness of this desire of mine and as my last homage to India's cultural inheritance, I am making this request that a handful of my ashes be thrown into the Ganga at Allahabad to be carried to the great ocean that washes India's shores."

What have we in this sustained moving eloquence? First, a personal and private attachment to the Ganga and then an attachment of the Nehru who is one link in the age-long uninterrupted chain of Indian history. First, a repudiation of the "religious sentiment" which, to his mind, has caused shackles, constrainments, divisions, suppressions and proved an obstacle in the way of the body's free development — and then a wholehearted affirmation of "India's cultural inheritance" which is well known to be predominantly spiritual. And the personality which has discarded "much of the past tradition and custom" is merged in the self which is "proud of the great inheritance" and, cherishing it, draws motive-force from it. As a vibrant sign of this merging is Nehru's setting of the Ganga
Jawaharlal Nehru and Modern India

at the very centre of his Indianism. Together with Lake Manasarovar and Mount Kailas, Ganga — the river mythologised as the Grace brought down from heaven by the Yogic meditation of Bhagiratha — stands for India's basic God-awareness. And it is worth marking, as an instinctive pointer to the merging, that Nehru uses for his own association with the Ganga the same word as he employs with a slight shift in the nuance, for the association with it of India's history and myth and tradition and song and story through the long ages. Just as he speaks of his own "attachment" he speaks of all these spiritually-charged things of the past having become "attached" to the Ganga and the Jamuna, especially the former. We may also emphasise his statement that this river, "a symbol of India's agelong culture and civilization", is through all her changing and flowing "ever the same Ganga". Are not these words a recognition of the ancient spiritual India that never dies and a recognition too that Nehru is portion and parcel of her? That he should fasten his heart on this sacred symbol and dedicate himself in death to it at such length of poetic enthusiasm is once more indicative of a strong pressure of the spiritual inner on the pragmatic outer.

The pragmatic outer was indeed too firm-moulded in Nehru by early influences to undergo complete alteration; yet the vague approach akin to the Vedanta's which had an appeal for him, appeared to be acquiring a kind of concreteness when during the last decade or so he began to take sympathetic interest in the directly spiritual figures of this ancient land of the Rishis. Although Gandhi, by his intimate relation with Nehru and by his political leadership of the India of Nehru's generation, remained in Nehru's explicit affirmations his "Master", here was a turn exceeding the feel of the "Socratic" which he had known through Gandhi's ethicoreligious make-up. That such a turn had long been preparing may be best inferred from a fact that was disclosed only a fortnight after his death. Nehru, we were told, had read the Gita in the early morning each day from as far back as his daughter
Indira could remember. Whenever he went abroad, the Gita went with him in his pocket, and with the Gita a picture of Buddha. Is it any wonder that the spiritual inner should at last effect a breakthrough of some sort and a sympathetic interest in modern saints and seers kindle up? The most notable instance of this novel orientation was his look of admiration and reverence at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and the International Centre of Education associated with it. Ever since his first visit to these institutions on January 16, 1955, he had come to see there a most original venture which he wished would find its true fulfilment instead of declining into an ordinary cultural movement. The new culture which is at work under the light of an earth-embracing Integral Yoga, full of constructive physical and mental vigour no less than creative spiritual vision, went home to Nehru's ever-young heart. Time and again he expressed in private his sense of the preciousness of the Aurobindonian experiment constantly developed in all directions by the Mother even after the passing of the Master. Deeply happy he seemed each time he was in her presence and in front of the positive progress of the institutions under her both in the outward life and in the inner, so that it is no exaggeration to say that in Nehru these institutions enjoyed the greatest possible goodwill of the Indian Government.

On September 27, 1955, he was in the Ashram a second time. Actually, it was his daughter who was on a visit. But Nehru unexpectedly dropped in, the same evening, by turning aside from his chalked-out itinerary. On the third and last occasion he was in Pondicherry—June 13, 1963,—he broke through the packed official programme and made special time for a Sports display by the Ashram children. Still more fraught with meaning was the meeting he had with the Mother as the very first event of his stay. After a silent session she gave him a white rose which in the Ashram language of flowers signifies Peace. Peace was indeed what his whole being appeared to cry for—peace not only because China's treacherous attack on India in spite of his unceasing attempt at friendship with
her had given a rude shock to his dream of Asian solidarity no less than of a world without war — peace also because "something that lay beyond mind" and its restless dreams was distantly calling to him more and more and here from the Mother’s eyes he could receive its touch. Her blessings went with him, working to bring closer to him the depths of that mighty "Soul of India" with whom his soul had always been in love, depths hinted by the Mother’s phrase that India’s Soul lives for Eternity. To live for Eternity is not only to exist forever but also to exist for the Everlasting. One with this inmost super-life of the nation. Nehru’s soul will march into the future illustrious with the history of his beloved land’s achievement of political freedom as well as with the promise of achieving a greater liberation that has always beckoned the heart of this land and that may most comprehensively be summed up in the words of Sri Aurobindo:

Arms taking to a voiceless supreme delight,
Life that meets the Eternal with close breast,
An unwalled mind dissolved in the Infinite,
Force one with unimaginable rest.
THE TWO SMILES

·A LETTER TO A WESTERN VISITOR TO INDIA

Bombay, May 11, 1952

I think that during those few hours we met I smiled at you sufficiently to make up for all the unsmiling faces you have encountered in Delhi! And I assure you that you will find many smiling ones in various parts of India. The trouble is that mostly they are scattered, because the conditions that make for the Indian smile do not prevail in strength enough all over the country.

I should like to make a few remarks about the Indian smile and the Western smile. Of course, human beings have the same qualities everywhere and authentic happiness beams out from the same source in all places. But there are differences in disposition of qualities and also dissimilarities in stress on one quality or another. As a result it happens that the Westerner can smile with some genuineness even when inwardly sad. He lives with a certain intensity of life-force which shows out in smiles as a reflection of the sheer love of earthly existence: this love, in spite of all wounds and frustrations, retains its pleasure in the very act of breathing. No doubt, the intellect too is very prominent in the West, but it is turned more upon the active material scene than upon the secret supra-physical background of our universe: therefore, even its nihilist moods catch something of that vital pleasure and the blackest intellectual despair still remembers that sunshine and shadow make an exciting composition, that the
moment as it flies is a call to chase nature’s secrets and that the colourful jostle of fellow-creatures gives warmth and wonder to the senses. As long as these familiarities as well as surprises are left, one can smile.

There is nothing intrinsically wrong in drawing satisfaction from the vision of the world dynamically going on. In fact, the capacity thus to smile has in general a positive value inasmuch as the material scene does not get neglected: the material scene is very important as the basic field of the manifestation of man’s potentialities. But there is the danger that too much emphasis on it for its own sake may slow down the mysterious pressure that is in man towards the bringing out in him of the more-than-human.

India’s intellect is not essentially unworldly or otherworldly as people sometimes make out, but it wants to value the material scene mostly in the light of what it can find in the secret background of the physical cosmos — the occult, the mystical, the spiritual. Occasionally, preoccupation with this background takes away its feel of the reality of the material scene and then we have the illusionist attitude wearily regarding the earth as a mere dream. When, however, the Indian intellect’s hunger for that background is not fed, the material scene naturally becomes the dominant reality but it is not capable of satisfying that intellect. The drama of the days, the challenge of passing beauty, the stir of bright bodies are not sufficient to bring smiles. Further, the intellect itself is not for the Indian the acme of consciousness: he lives neither in the life-force nor in the mind so much as in a sense of “soul” to which the occult, the mystical, the spiritual are more or less directly “given” and the intellect is merely the instrument for formulating what the soul-sense perceives or intuits. So, when as has happened with quite a number of people at present, the soul-sense gets covered up and the intellect has only the earth left to hug, the vital-physical movements, though not unpleasurable, lack the sparkle which is necessary to make smiles automatically break out even when no real happiness
glows in the heart. The Indian smile, when it does make its appearance and is genuine and not just a formality or a social habit, is born of a real happiness that has its roots in the more-than-human. This smile you will discover wherever Indians live in tune with their own historic genius — wherever the national consciousness is at its truest.

True India is the life of subtle vision and inner experience to which the Divine is a concrete reality — a reality not only beyond the cosmos but also within it, permeating all things and beings and manifesting itself in a thousand different yet harmonious ways. True India, therefore, consists at present of those who feel the reawakened national soul as a face and front of some universal Goddess-Power making for a many-hued profound national vitality as well as for a grand symphonic world-unity on a basis of actual inner experience of the one Self of selves. All those who intellectually and emotionally respond to this Presence in some mode or other and serve it through art, literature, philosophy, politics, social life or even common labour are also true India, though they are more open to doubts and confusions than those whose touch on this Presence is more direct. Most clearly and intensely true India are the few who make a conscious and consistent attempt to be in touch with hidden spiritual truths — and this, not through rigid rules and stereotyped disciplines, though these too have their limited uses when charged with authentic inspiration, but through a plastic spontaneous multi-aspected movement under the creative and compassionate eye of one who has realised those truths in actual experience. That is why I asked you not to miss paying a visit to the Ashram in Pondicherry and know something about Sri Aurobindo and meet the Mother. Here you have a nucleus in which the historic genius of the country is alive with a new brilliance which is directed more towards the future than towards the past and has all dynamic modernity within the Light that has been through the ages. You will see a lot of the genuine Indian smile in the Ashram — and most radiantly focused on
the lips of the Mother, a smile at once of bliss and love taking you up into a luminous freedom and wideness and strength and world-rapport.

There is no need for you to be disappointed so soon with what you observe of our country. Even Delhi is perhaps not so bad as it may seem. Possibly the heat of the season has slowed down people’s activities and given you the impression that the leaders of the masses are lethargic and evasive, “waiting for miracles without moving a finger”. But I must admit that even where there is a fair amount of doing things, it is often doing without knowing — expenditure of physical and nervous force without proper light from the brain and proper warmth from the heart. A considerable number of people are in a state of confusion. They don’t know what sort of government they want at home, how exactly the country’s life should be directed and organised and what our attitude should be in international politics. But all this ignorance, as well as every other ignorance is part of the general ambiguity in people’s minds owing to a degree of obscuration of India’s true spirit. True India, however, is, as I have said, not completely submerged and is very far from being defunct. In fact, in one place it is burning with a gathered fire as never before and towards that fire all the scattered flames that are difficult at times to discern will finally be drawn and a vast new life take birth, destroying our present confusion, challenging with undeniable authority the anti-soul heresies rampant today over the globe and providing real leadership to the whole world which is so ravaged and baulked and sorrowful behind all its smiles.
TO A PEACE CORPS WORKER IN NEPAL

A LETTER OF SEPTEMBER 27, 1972

I believe that what you have gone through lately in Kathmandu is not something unexpected. Of course, you may not have known it coming, but when one has suddenly burst open to new dimensions of feeling, new depths of being, a return to the old associations and environments is bound to bring a psychological reshuffling, a vision of things and persons as if one either saw them from a great distance that dwarfs their former importance or from very close so that one touches all the grossness and insufficiency and impermanence which one never realised before.

But the reshuffling should not disorientate one completely. And I am glad you have been able to keep the Pondicherry peace glowing within you. It will effect a new adjustment, in which you will find in the very diminution of the old values and old ties an increase of the divine presence that is always there in the world and only waits for our receptivity to show us its calm eternal smile whose message is: "Abhaya — Have no fear."

Your indecision over staying on in Nepal or going back to your own country is quite natural. But I am afraid the time has come in the evolutionary career of the world when many souls are likely to feel that they have no home. The whole Hippie movement is an odd manifestation of this wide-spread homelessness. The true reason for the phenomenon lies in our having reached a critical threshold where one epoch of evolution is dead and another not yet born — or, if born, still not
“alive and kicking”. Man the Mental Being has had his day — the hour of his triumph, the hour of nuclear energy and bio-genetic control, is also the moment when he sees an abyss yawn under his feet, the abyss opened up by his awareness of the huge imbalance between his world-knowledge and his self-knowledge.

Suddenly something from beyond the Mind has touched Man’s glittering kingdom and exposed its inadequacy. Nothing positive has yet come to light in the common world-consciousness, but this touch has disclosed a void in the human set-up and that void creates the sense of homelessness, the vague wandering of the heart away from ancient fixities, a profound discontent with all achievements of society, religion, science, personal relationship.

The turn in the right direction will arrive, I believe, when the void will be seen as God-shaped. The emptiness, the homelessness will then become a positive power and guide one towards one’s true parents, whom I consider to be Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. A real home will then have been found — an America beyond Columbus’s discovery, a country even beyond the India Columbus dreamed of reaching when he stumbled upon America, a land towards which Whitman moved when he cried “Passage to India!” but which is truly seen when we hear his deeper cry: “Passage to more than India!” For, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are leaders, from an Indian starting-point, to a Future where all earth will attain at the same time its consummation and its self-transcendence.

However, it is not unimportant to know where Sri Aurobindo and the Mother start from on their wonderful journey.
SOME MISUNDERSTANDINGS
ABOUT THE ASHRAM

A LETTER

There are several misunderstandings about the Ashram, which I would like to clear up. First of all, take the ideal here and the life we lead. The impression you have received from what you call X’s interpretation of Sri Aurobindo is quite wrong. You have come to believe that a society based on Yoga “is built on self love”. The truth is that it is precisely self love in all its subtle no less than gross ramifications that the life of Yoga is meant to free us from. We distinguish two sides of our self: the so-called normal personality which is distinct from every other person, and the inner being which is an individual expression of the one divine Self in all and so is in spontaneous sympathy with all beings and all things. The first side we call “ego”. We do not mean merely that part of us which is openly egoistic or selfish. We also mean whatever in us does things from the limited personal consciousness that we ordinarily are: even acts, which look as if they were unselfish and social-minded and altruistic, really stem from the same restricted human unit. If a philanthropist finds that the people he wants to help with his money or personal service are ungrateful or misuse his “benevolence”, he is angry and outraged or else despondent and pessimistic. This reaction which you might consider quite natural is from our point of view a sign that behind the philanthropy there is still the small, divided, individualistic self at work.

Unlike the “ego”, the “soul” would be completely serene
and have no personal reactions. All that it does is inwardly dedicated to the Divine and it is itself free from all self-regarding reactions. A certain wide equanimity (which means a lot of difficult self-exceeding as well as self-control) and a certain constant remembering of That which is one in all and also greater than all is sought to be practised at every moment if possible. Always a guidance from beyond ourselves is prayed for and there is a definite endeavour to shift our poise from the outer being to the inmost — what in Christian mystical parlance is known as “the practice of the presence of God”. We make no show of religiosity, we follow no ostentatious ritualism, but we try to live from a non-egoistic depth in ourselves.

We do not look down upon what you have called “brotherly love”. Ideals of fraternity, like those of liberty and equality, are very good, and surely they reflect something of what we may term the Divine Consciousness. But as long as we live in our surface being, however refined and well-intentioned it may be, and as long we do not make a constant methodised effort to go beyond it, we shall see that human society remains full of personal tugs of war, a play of open or concealed self-interests. “Brotherly love” which was preached from thousands of years ago has not made any true difference to man’s life.

You will say it has not been really practised. Do you mean to imply that nobody in the past centuries ever thought of practising it? There have always been well-intentioned people who have thought in terms of it and striven to cultivate it. But whatever small successes it may have had, in a few private circles and for a little while, have been upset and nullified by the activities of unregenerate manhood. The need is to make a lifelong drive towards discovering the psychic self deep within us and then to live from it. This is an arduous task and not something which can be accused of self-indulgence and self-centredness: It is exactly the opposite and therefore there are so few who lead the mystical life and do Yoga. Of course, there is always the possibility of misconstruing what one genuinely sets out to do. That is what seems to have happened
with X, so that you got the impression that he was moving away from "brotherly love". But I can assure you that the real picture of the Yogic life is quite different.

Now I come to some immediate practical problems. When people make an effort to do Yoga, and especially a Yoga like Sri Aurobindo's whose ultimate aim is not to pass into a beatific beyond (whether the Vedantic Liberation, the Buddhist Nirvana, the Vaishnava Bliss-world, the Zoroastrian or Christian Heaven, the Muslim Paradise), there has to be an organised collective life with a certain minimum of rules. An extreme tolerance is attempted because human beings are so various. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have tried to give the utmost liberty to their disciples so that each one's special trend of being may be respected. As the very word "Mother" connotes, there has to be an abundance of understanding and forbearance. People are not dealt with in a strictly legalistic way. Stumblings are expected and there is always an eagerness to help one get back on one's feet and start moving. However, there comes a time when things go beyond the limit and steps have to be taken for the sake both of the stumbling person and the group in which he lives. Everything possible is always done to give a person the chance to carry on here. Only when he shows no capacity to take advantage of the tolerance and freedom allowed, the Ashram has to decide upon the definite course of sending him away. You seem to think that it is only fits of anger and tantrums that are involved. Surely a system of Yoga which tries to change human nature is full of understanding of human failings. The Ashram would never think of sending anyone out for anything short of dangerous violence.

You have yourself said in your letter that you and the society based on "brotherly love" can deal with X in a welcoming way only if it is the "old X" or else a mixture of the old and the new but not at all if you have altogether the "new X" on your hands. You say that if X has chosen definitely a certain line of life he must fend for himself. Of course you would
try to let him have whatever help is possible in making him go his own way. Obviously, you set a limit to tolerance but would also attempt to act as kindly and constructively as you can. Similarly the Ashram, after a good deal of thought and watching, would try to help a person get beyond the inner spiritual pressures of the yogic life and recover his or her balance in a different atmosphere elsewhere, with whatever means, psychiatric or any other, available. Certain kinds of behaviour compel the Ashram to take defensive steps which are at the same time beneficial to the party concerned. Surely, there should be nothing here for you to criticise.
THE MOTHER’S GAYATRI

The most sacred Mantra of the Rigveda (III.62.10), the Gayatri of Rishi Vishwamitra, directs us to the Solar Godhead of Truth — Surya-Savitri:

\[
\text{Tat savitur varenyam} \\
\text{bhargo devasya dhīmahi} \\
\text{dhiyo yo naḥ prachodayat}
\]

Let us meditate 
on that most excellent light 
of the divine Savitri 
that it may impel our minds.

It is hardly possible for the Mother to have come across this great formula of Yogic progress in Paris in 1911. But just at that time, she gave a speech to a Women’s Association. It makes a study of the anatomy of thought and explains how thinking can be controlled and turned into a perfect servant. Her speech ends with the exhortation:

“I would like us to make the resolution to raise ourselves each day, in all sincerity and goodwill, in an ardent aspiration towards the Sun of Truth, towards the Supreme Light, the source and intellectual life of the universe, so that it may pervade us entirely and illumine with its great brilliance our minds and hearts, all our thoughts and our actions.”

Here is indeed a spontaneous reflection of the master Mantra — rather a recurrence of it from the same depths that it originally surged up from. But what is even more striking is that the Mother’s version anticipates in living essence the
new Gayatri which Sri Aurobindo has been inspired to give us, crystallising the aspiration for the direct descent of the Supermind into our earthly being:

\[
\text{Tat saviturvaram rūpam } \\
\text{jyotiḥ parasya dhīmahi } \\
\text{yannah satyena dipayet}
\]

Let us meditate
on the most auspicious (best) form of Savitri,
on the Light of the Supreme
which shall illumine us with the Truth.
Q: Sri Aurobindo left British India and came to Pondicherry in French India and the Mother came from France to join Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry. Will you explain the significance of their meeting?

The meeting of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother appears as if predestined. Events and circumstances have been so moulded as to bring them together. Sri Aurobindo, who had been practising Yoga during his 6-years' leadership of the nationalist fight for freedom in British India, received an inner command to leave the political field and go to French India, first to Chandernagore and then Pondicherry, in order to devote himself to a spiritual work that would usher in a new age of the whole world with India as its luminous centre. The Mother, who had been practising spirituality first in France and then in Algeria, got also into touch with Pondicherry — initially through one who came there in connection with French politics. A little before Paul Richard arrived in the capital of French India, Sri Aurobindo had already made his home there. Richard spoke to him of Mirra, as the Mother's name then was. Sri Aurobindo is reported to have said that when the time would be ripe he would get in touch with him and her.

Four years later the Mother came to Pondicherry. This was in 1914. Before coming she repeatedly had the vision of a certain figure whom she accepted as her guide and instinctively called Krishna though she knew very little of Indian mythology or history. Being a gifted painter, she made a coloured sketch of that figure. At the very first meeting with Sri Aurobindo she recognised in him the master of her occult life. We
may observe here that Sri Aurobindo, during his political life in British India, had raised the cry of “The Divine Mother”, the World-Creatrix whose frontal aspect was to him the Soul of India, the presiding Goddess of this country’s career through time, this country whose most characteristic trait has been its seeking for the infinite and eternal Spirit all through her long history. On meeting the Mother, Sri Aurobindo recognised an incarnation of the Divine Mother he had worshipped.

The meeting of the two represents the coming together of the necessary creative powers by whom a new age would be born. And it is to be noted that both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had been pursuing the inner life on essentially identical lines which would unite Spirit and Matter. So their joining of forces was the most natural thing. And it was not only a doubling of strengths but also a linking of complementaries. Sri Aurobindo’s main movement of consciousness may be said to have been an immense Knowledge-Power from above the mind though whatever was necessary for an integral spirituality was also there in one form or another. The Mother’s chief movement may be said to have been an intense Love-Power from behind the heart, even if all else needed for an all-round Yoga was present as a ready accessory. When she and Sri Aurobindo met, they completed each other, brought fully into play the spiritual energies in both and started the work of total earth-transformation from high above and deep within.

Another significance of their meeting may be read on the cultural plane. Sri Aurobindo, hailing from India, was educated in England from his seventh to his twenty-first year — at the start privately in Manchester, later at St. Paul’s School in London and finally at King’s College, Cambridge. He became not only a master of English but also an extraordinary scholar of Greek and Latin. He grew perfectly familiar with French and knew Italian and German sufficiently to read The Divine Comedy and Faust in the original. European history was a special study of his and he steeped himself in Western culture ancient, medieval and modern. It was only after his return to
India that he plunged into a study of India’s history and cultural institutions and awoke in himself the multi-dimensional spiritual consciousness of India. He embodied a fusion of the West and the East and expressed himself and his experiences in poetry and literary criticism, philosophy and socio-political thought. Nor has he been merely a literary and spiritual figure of giant proportions. Practical politics was his daily concern for several years. He gave India’s nationalist aspirations a new dynamism, evoked in a fallen people the vision of its freedom and of its psychological revival, and stood as its leader through a crowded and dangerous period of revolutionary activity. Also all through his life in India he kept in living contact with the West and he has particularly recorded that he was drawn by an intense affinity to France although he was educated in England and never set his foot in the former country.

On the other side, the Mother has declared that as soon as she came to India she felt India to be the true country of her soul. But, of course, she brought too the finest that French culture represented and she bore in herself the whole artistic spirit of Europe. She was in her younger days a student of painting familiar with the great artists and studios of Paris. She practised painting for many years and her inspired output is both abundant and varied. Music too was a part of her being and it has found creative expression time and again. Further, she embodied a practical genius of a rare order, with powers of wide yet precise organisation.

Thus she and Sri Aurobindo complete by their combination the entire circle of the higher human activities and are supremely fitted to bring the East and the West together and, blending them, lead to a common all-consummating goal.

Q: Is it true that every 12 years there has been a change in Sri Aurobindo’s life in connection with his Yoga of what he has called Supermind?
At least four important “changes” we can see at intervals of 12 years.

In 1914 the Mother came into Sri Aurobindo’s life and their direct collaboration for the Yoga of the Supermind started. Also in that year Sri Aurobindo, with the Mother’s assistance, launched the monthly philosophical review, *Arya*, in which most of his works first appeared serially.

In 1926 — that is, 12 years later — there was the descent, into Sri Aurobindo’s body as well as into the Mother’s, of what Sri Aurobindo has termed Overmind. Overmind is the World of the Great Gods, diverse aspects of the one Divinity. It is the Plane of Krishna-Consciousness, the highest unified power of the Divine known in the past. With its descent the preparation was made and the foundation laid for the descent of the hitherto unmanifested power which is the unique goal of Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga, the Supermind. Supermind is the supreme dynamic and creative Consciousness, also designated by Sri Aurobindo Truth-Consciousness, Gnosis, *vijnana*, whose direct entrance into the world can alone transform and divinise not only the mind and the vital being but also the body.

After another 12 years — in 1938 — there was, as certain words of the Mother seem to indicate, a momentous move onward. Before 1938 the Supermind had already been within Sri Aurobindo’s body because it had descended into his mental and vital being and had been functioning in it. But now the Mother could see the Supermind descending into the most physical part of Sri Aurobindo and directly mingling with his outermost centre of consciousness rather than indirectly through his mental and vital being. But the problem was to fix it there, a permanent light in what we may pinpoint as the physical mind, so that an immediate and settled action of the Supramental Consciousness instead of a come-and-go of it might develop in the material being.

Only in 1950 — when 12 years again had elapsed — this kind of action became a part of earth-life — but as a result of
Sri Aurobindo's sacrifice of his own body. The whole resistance of what he had named the Inconscient, the root and support of all incapacity of the physical nature, including death, was, as it were, swallowed up into Sri-Aurobindo's body and nullified and exhausted there. Hence this body, semi-divinised and marked for total transformation, had to be given up and in return the Supramental Consciousness poured forth unresisted. Because of that pouring forth, Sri Aurobindo's body, as it lay in view of a devoted public, was seen not only by the Mother but also by a number of disciples as filled with light. The light remained for 5 days, during which there was no touch of decomposition, not even of discolouration. The Mother has said in private that as soon as Sri Aurobindo left his body what he had called the Mind of Light was realised in her — and she has defined the Mind of Light as the physical mind receiving the Supramental Light. Thus we may say that the "change" which occurred in Sri Aurobindo's life in 1950 established permanently the Supermind, as a starting-point, in the most external being of his companion in Yoga, the Mother.

Q: Sri Aurobindo has called his Yoga the Supramental Yoga. What exactly is it and why precisely is it needed?

All Yogas aim at the union of the human consciousness with the Infinite, the Eternal, the Divine and at the expression of this union in world-activity. But all Yogas have held that this expression cannot be complete because the very stuff of world-existence has an in-built imperfection. Entire spiritual fulfilment can never take place on earth: it can take place only in the Beyond after the body has been given up.

This attitude and position are due, according to Sri Aurobindo, to the fact that the highest spiritual Consciousness directly attained and set working in our nature so far is not the ultimate creative Power. The ultimate creative Power must hold the secret divine truth of all that is in our world, a truth that is meant to unfold itself in the course of earthly evolution
and fulfil here and now all the terms in which this evolution has occurred: the mental, the vital, the physical beings. Otherwise the universe in which we live fails to discover its final justification. Coming as an expression of the Divine it should in the end be able to express the Divine and not serve merely as a grandiose stage on which a soul arrives to develop and pass out, abandoning as ultimately useless the instruments through which it has worked. Some sense of this fulfilling destiny of the universe and its forms was there in very early ages of Indian spirituality; but it faded afterwards. Sri Aurobindo seizes that sense, clarifies it, dynamises it as a result of his Yoga which moves beyond all the splendid achievements of the past and reaches a power of the Infinite and the Eternal, so far unmanifested, which he names Supermind. Hence his Yoga is the Supramental Yoga: it brings into play the divine truth of the mind, the vital being, the body and asks the soul in us, whose instruments these are, to surrender itself wholly to the Supramental. Truth-Consciousness, God in His highest form, so that our whole self may ascend there and the whole Supermind may descend into us.

All through human history, our imperfect nature has longed for perfection. The mind has aspired after plenary knowledge, the life-force after total capacity, the body after health and beauty and perpetuation. Only the Supramental Yoga can answer these basic demands. For they arise from its own hidden presence in Nature. That is one aspect of the need for his Yoga.

Secondly, unless the very body receives the Divine in its cells and tissues and bones, unless the entire outer self and its activity is filled with the Divine, the spiritual light will never make its permanent home on earth. Sages and prophets and Avatars will come and bring their glory, but the glory will thin away after a time and humanity will continue to be ignorant and weak and mortal. To establish God amongst us for good, the Supramental Yoga is needed.

Thirdly, the Supermind will make all life its province: no
function of the human consciousness will be left out: every field will be covered and changed. This means the solution of all our problems — cultural, social, political, economic.

Fourthly, the Supermind brings to completion the evolutionary process which is concerned not only with individuals but also with collectivities. The Supramental Yoga takes all mankind as its material. It is not for just a few extraordinary individuals: its call is to the whole of humanity, declaring to all the divine destiny awaiting them. It is a collective and not a merely individual Yoga and it promises a perfect society, a new world of complex harmony moving from adventure to blissful adventure of Truth-discovery and Truth-dynamism. All modern thought which has a global vision and stresses the ideal of “One World” is in profound need of the Supramental Yoga.

Q: What, according to Sri Aurobindo, would the Supramental Body be like and how long will Yoga take to fulfil his vision?

A very precise description of the Supramental Body cannot be given but some general points may be put forward. This Body will have four main attributes: lightness, adaptability, plasticity and luminosity. It will feel absolutely light — weightless as if walking on air — because all inertia and unconsciousness will be gone. It will also have the power to adapt itself to any condition. Whatever the demands on it, it will prove equal to them — because its full consciousness will drive out all incapacity, all resistance to change. To put the matter a little frivolously: sitting on the North Pole it can say, “How warm and cosy!” and squatting on the Equator it can start an inward air-conditioner. Further its plasticity will make it immune to injury. If a bullet, for instance, is fired at it, it will not dully receive it but pliantly open up and let the bullet pass through and then close up once more. Of course, most probably the bullet will fail to reach it and somehow get deviated; but in case it comes in the right direction it will
find no vulnerable surface. Finally, every cell will be radiant with the supramental glory. All the physical substance will be turned into stuff of living light. And this luminosity will be visible to everyone. Sceptics may at first say that phosphorus has been cunningly applied. But they will soon realise that the glow is permanent — a lasting proof of the supramental transformation.

It should be evident that a body with these four main attributes cannot be composed of gross parts like bones and arteries and organs like heart and stomach, or live on food and water and have a process of blood-circulation and waste-elimination. Quite a different kind of structure no less than a different kind of substance must go to the making of it. Instead of solid fixed organs there will be subtle centres of energy and instead of a definite process of chemical changes there will be a radiation of forces, energy-exchanges — and all the movements as well as all the centres will be materialisations of an illumined consciousness.

As to the general form, it will have a human aspect, but there will be no differentiation of sex and the typical sexual traits, primary or secondary, will be absent. The sexual function itself will be out of place and unnecessary just as the intake and throw-out of food will be. Whatever creative action is needed will be achieved by subtle means, by a pure play of conscious energy.

This is as it should be, for the sexual function comes into existence because the individual body is mortal and the race has to be continued through one's offspring. The Supramental Body, being what it is, cannot degenerate and die or be subject to fatal accident. The necessity of death is due also to an incapacity of the ordinary body to change and keep pace with inner development: it has to break up and set free the evolving soul to get for itself new bodies. The Supramental Body by its infinite adaptability will never lag behind the inner movement and thus require no substitution. Not that it will be bound to immortality: such bondage is again a glorified
shortcoming. The Supramental Body, like the Divine Consciousness which has shaped itself into it, will be free in all respects. It can dissolve at will and re-form at will.

Who can say for sure how long evolution will take to arrive at a wholly divine physical life? Sri Aurobindo once remarked that perhaps 300 years would be wanted. The change has certainly to be gradual if it is not to be a temporary miraculous imposition of Supernature upon Nature but a lasting wonderful growth of Nature into Supernature — a true evolution, however much the final result may look like a revolution. Yet definite signs of the change can come much before 300 years.

In closing we may distinguish between the Supramental Body which will be the transformed human physical life and the Supramental Body which will be the direct material manifestation of beings belonging to the Supermind itself. The latter will not ever have known a past of earthly development and so will possess what we may term a perfect perfection whereas the former will be the best and most perfect job made out of materials that were once human and imperfect.

Q: Will you tell me something about Sri Aurobindo’s poetic masterpiece, Savitri?

Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol is a poem over which Sri Aurobindo worked for almost half his life-time. The first version dates back to his early forties: the last was on the anvil in even his seventy-eighth year when he passed away. There were almost twelve recasts, not exactly to add to the purely poetic merit but essentially to lift the work to the highest and most comprehensive expression possible of spiritual realities within the scheme set up by him of character, incident and plot. The expression sought was from the top range of what he designated “Overhead” planes — ranges of consciousness lying hidden above the human mind and possessing an inherent light of knowledge and a natural experience of the Infinite. He distinguished in general a progression of four levels as expressible at present in poetry (or prose): Higher Mind,
Illumined Mind, Intuition, Overmind. *Savitri* was intended to be on the whole the poetry of Overmind, akin on a massive scale to what the ancient Rishis had called the Mantra — the supreme revelatory expression. The Mantra can open up in the hearer luminous tracts of the inner being and put him in touch with the very heights from which it has descended through the hushed intense receptivity of the poet’s deepmost self. Brief instances of the Mantra in *Savitri* are lines like

The abysm of the unbodied Infinite...

Our minds hush to a bright Omniscient...

The superconscient realms of motionless Peace
Where judgment ceases and the word is mute
And the Unconceived lies pathless and alone...

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

Earth’s winged chimaeras are Truth’s steeds in Heaven,
The impossible God’s sign of things to be...

Sight’s sound-waves breaking from the soul’s great deeps...

Both in quality and bulk, this epic must be counted as remarkable among even the world’s remarkable achievements. With its 23,806 lines, covered by Twelve Books, each mostly of several Cantos, it is the longest poem in the English language, beating *The Ring and the Book* of Browning with its 21,116 lines to the place of runner-up. Among the world’s epics which can in general be compared with it in sustained poetic quality, only the *Shah-Nameh* of Firdausi, the *Ramayana* of Valmiki and the *Mahabharata* of Vyasa exceed it in length — three works which, like it, are products of the East. And indeed
Savitri stands with the masterpieces of Valmiki and Vyasa in more than one respect. It has been conceived with an affinity to the ancient Indian temperament which not only rejoiced in massive structures but took all human life and human thought into the spacious scope of its poetic creations and blended the hidden worlds of Gods and Titans and Demons with the activities of earth. A cosmic sweep is Savitri’s and Sri Aurobindo wanted his poem to be a many-sided multi-coloured carving out, in word-music, of the gigantic secrets of his “Supramental Yoga”.

With the Mahabharata it has a direct link too. For, it is based on a story, in that epic, of a victorious fight by love against death. But the Savitri of the Mahabharata, fighting Yama the God of Death who took away her consort Satyavan, becomes here an Avatar of the eternal Beauty and Love plunging into the trials of terrestrial life and seeking to overcome them not only in herself but also in the world she has embraced as her own: she is sworn to put an end to earth’s ignorant estrangement from God — estrangement whose most physical symbol is Death, the bodily opposite of the luminous inherent immortality of the Divine. Her story grows a poetic structure in which Sri Aurobindo houses his special search and discovery, his uttermost exploration of occult worlds, his ascent into the highest plane of the Spirit, the as-yet unmanifested Supermind, his bringing down of its power to divinise man’s total nature. And the figure of Savitri suggests in general his own companion in the field of Yoga, the Mother, who carried on after the Master’s departure the great task set by him.

The technique of Savitri is attuned to the scriptural conception at work. The iambic five-foot line of blank verse is adopted as the most apt and plastic for harmonies like those of the Vedas and the Upanishads. The blank verse, however, is given certain special characteristics affining it still further to them. It moves in a series of blocks formed by a changing distribution of correctly proportioned sentence-lengths. Scarcely any block breaks off in the middle of a line and each
thus forms, in spite of linkage with the others, a kind of self-
sufficient structure like a stanza, but in general no two such
"stanzas" are equally long. The units also of each block tell
markedly in their own individual mass and force of word
and rhythm, though a concordant continuity is maintained
in the sense. Enjambment (overflow from line to line) which
was used to impetuous effect in Sri Aurobindo’s early narra-
tives — *Urvasie, Love and Death* and *Baji Prabhou* — is not
altogether avoided, yet end-stopping is the rule as serving
better the graver, more contained movement demanded by
the scriptural mood.

A notable feature, in *Savitri*, of this mood and of its expres-
sion is that there is no strict confinement of them to ostensibly
spiritual subjects. A Legend as well as a Symbol, the poem
paints many scenes and levels of human development at the
same time that it is instinct with a mystical light. It includes
and absorbs every life-theme of any import in man’s evolu-
tion towards deity. Again, ancient motifs and motifs of our
own day are equally caught up. Even modern totalitarianism
is seized in its essence, even the new physics that replaces the
classical concepts in which “all was precise, rigid, indubitable”
enters the poetry, and there blows through the epic the breath
of what can only be termed a Democracy of the Divine, whose
aim is to liberate the whole of humanity into Light, as in those
words Sri Aurobindo puts into the mouth of his heroine.

A lonely freedom cannot satisfy
A heart that has grown one with every heart:
I am a deputy of the aspiring world,
My spirit’s liberty I ask for all.
THE FOUNT OF POETRY

The Roman poet Horace has the dictum: "No poems can please long, nor live, that are written by water-drinkers."

Horace touches a sympathetic chord in me with his winy nature, but I cannot echo his thought on poetry-writing. I should rather say: "There can be no long-pleasing or living poems by those who need to be wine-drinkers in order to be drunk." And I would add: "No man can be a poet who, in order to be drunk, needs to give up water-drinking." But a caveat must be entered: "If one is such as to make a fetish of water-drinking, one can't be a poet."

A bit of complexity here. May I explain a little? According to me, a poet is one who is always intoxicated — by the very fact of his over-sensitive aesthetic consciousness. This consciousness puts him in contact with an eternal Bliss endlessly expressing itself in various harmonies of interrelated structures catching in the flux of time something of the splendours and mysteries that are at play in an Ideal World beyond ours, where the Divine is perfectly manifest. To the poet, all that the earthly day brings is shot with those supernal splendours, all that the earthly night holds is charged with those lofty mysteries. Not that he lives in a fool's paradise: he is quite aware of the delusive gleams that mislead one in the day and of the treacherous glooms that make one stumble at night. But even there he can seize an artistic pattern, a dramatic propriety and reflect them in accurate words building a flawless form of significance and sound: beauty, shimmering beauty, is the end-product, no matter what perceptions and experiences have gone into the process.
With a soul and a sensorium born astir with a creative delight, how should a poet require the fillip of any Falernian to impart to his work the flush and fire of immortality? It is not poets but mere versifiers who have to be artificially stimulated to carry them in some lucky moments beyond their own dull hearts and labouring minds. Perhaps we may say that even a true poet has his versifier-spells when the genius in him withdraws for some reason or other. Possibly then the aid of Bacchus would be fruitful — but just to sparkle up the versifying intelligence and quicken it to call out the hiding poetic intuition.

That intuition itself comes with its own bubbling store of the Vedic Soma and borrows no singing strength from the wine-cup. When its power is active in the forefront and has not receded into the background, draughts of water are enough to keep the life of song going. The poet has just to live in order to sing — and *aqua pura* is all he needs to keep existing as a perennially dream-drunk wanderer through this world of God’s evolution with its swift stabs of magic and its slow difficult sorceries.

Now a word explaining my *caveat*. If a man makes it a point always to drink water and avoid wine, thinking that wine would be a distraction and that water alone can keep him in poetic fitness, he commits an error, for the poet is not dependent on water any more than on wine for the wonder-flow of his language. The poetry wells from a self-supplied source — and it calls for a constant alertness and plasticity in the human medium and for a sense in that medium of the utter independence the creative fount possesses. To be caught in any fixity, in any fad, in any narrowing belief would come in the way of the freedom, the many-sidedness, the expectation of the unexpected which go with the creation of worlds and with the creation of words aspiring to reflect cosmic harmonies.
"A POET’S SINCERITY"

A LETTER IN ANSWER TO A CRITICISM

I have kept you hanging for quite a time, I am sorry, but couldn’t help it, for I had a Himalaya of work on my hands.

Having written this, I am visited by a scruple. Could I have justifiably penned a line of poetry like:

A Himalaya of work on my frail hands?

How would such a line fare face to face with the two criteria of AE’s, which you endorse but which I have considered insufficient for “a poet’s sincerity” if not even irrelevant in essence? Is my line prompted by “a passionate desire for truth” and can it pass the test: “Do I really believe this? Is this truly what I feel?”

Neither you nor I really believe that Everest, Kanchanjanga, Gaurishanker and Nanga Parbat were weighing down on my five fingers, nor even that the mass of work my hands had to deal with was anywhere comparable in quantity to India’s northern mountain-range of 800 miles’ length and 5 miles’ height. Here is evidently an exaggeration: literal truth has been sacrificed to significant effect. Again, to think of the Himalaya is to visualise endless snow, perpetual solitude, eternal immobility. What have these things to do with my work? Surely I am letting fantasy run riot. My words cannot possibly answer to my actual feeling. Yet I think some sort of genuine poetry has been struck upon.

And, when I let my mind brood a little on what I have said,
I discover that there are suggestions in it which I did not at all entertain when I framed it. Here is not merely a contrast between a huge labour and a small capacity: here is also a figuration of something that to the Indian mind looms with a superhuman grandeur, something rapt and remote, something ineffably godlike, and this deific presence is brought into relation with striving finitude. Further, a divine infinity of calm is converted into values of force, the immutable Vast has become vibrant with activity and laid its command on a poor mortal’s weak and faltering instruments to dare and do creative work. In addition the very nature of this work is shadowed forth: besides being massive, it has to be snow-white in motive, it has to uplift men’s thought, it has to convey through its power a peace that exceeds conception.

Yes, all this significance can be read into my line — and it is certainly hiding in it and glimmering out of it. But it belongs to the poetry achieved, not to the poet intending to say no more than that he was too busy with his monthly review of culture, Mother India, and with other occupations to reply to his friend’s critical letter in due time. If the poet’s intention was this alone, the achieved poetry is undoubtedly insincere. From its first step it betrayed fact and falsified truth — and in doing so it betrayed even its own betrayal and falsified even its falsehood itself, without knowing what it was up to, for it brought in spiritual nuances unconsciously, it played the poet’s humanly busy hands into the unseen hands of some visionary agency by means of a moment’s contact with a world of inspiration or revelation beyond him, a contact through his happy sip of what I may term the wine of words, his sudden heady thrill with the possibility of imaginative and rhythmic beauty, his heart’s response to the call of art from some domain of perfect name and form.

The dramatist in the poet has taken charge, he has broken loose from the immediate situation, introduced an expressive metaphor from a different universe of discourse, fused disparate elements in a single act of vision and become the channel
of a super-dramatisation outside even his dream.

This is all that in my essay I have tried to say the poet is always doing in one manner or another. Of course, a passionate desire for truth in a certain sense operates through the poet, but this truth cannot be tied down to his tangible personality or to his measurable feeling. The poet himself is not essentially a truth-teller, he is an image-maker and sound-fashioner and suggestion-shaper — in short, an artist — but he ever strains beyond himself and therefore beyond his own "truth" too and puts his being in tune with some archetypal lila (world-play) and becomes by his role of dramatist (lila-lover) the direct or indirect mouthpiece of the beautiful Truth that is Krishna.

A poet is sincere and rings true to the extent that he, as an artist, in dramatising his experience, responds to what we may traditionally term Krishna’s flute-call. Neither religion nor morality nor any particular psychological value is here involved. I would submit that the line I happened to write has poetic sincerity, while a substitute like

An Alp of work upon my fragile hands

would fall short in spite of holding the same surface significance. It is fair verse, but the subtle, finely fitting and justly disposed qualities that create reverberations of inner meaning and evoke a perfect presence, so to speak, behind the expression are wanting. Here the technique — the structural design of word, sound and metre — has a pointed say. The original line’s alliteration of the h-sound in the long word “Himalaya” at the start and in the short one “hands” at the close, its consecutive stresses on the two end-words “frail hands” as if there were a relentless weighing down of the objects meant — where are such qualities in the substitute line? It lacks in what we may define as “artistic truth”. Poetry is primarily concerned with truth of art, the precise dramatic communication of a secret sustaining substance of flawlessness by means of name and
form. The diverse manifestations of that substance may be designated the various Avatars of Krishna in poetry.

Are you still dissatisfied with me and my essay?
SOME COMMENTS ON SAVITRI

The opening passage of Sri Aurobindo’s Savitri — the block of the first 78 lines from

It was the hour before the Gods awake
to
All can be done if the god-touch is there

is often regarded as the most difficult, the most obscure in the whole epic. Its obscurity lies precisely in its description of an obscurity, a darkness, a night which covers the world. What is the nature of the tenebrous phenomenon pictured in lines 2-4 of the passage in relation to the 1st? —

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

The common impression is that the very beginning of the universal manifestation is spoken of. According to Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual philosophy, the manifestation, of which earth’s history is a part, begins with a stark Inconscience in which all that we understand by the Supreme Divine is submerged and concealed. From the total Involution cosmic Evolution starts: the submerged qualities of the Supreme Divine gradually emerge, the concealed powers of the Super-
conscience come out of the Inconscience, grade after grade. First, organised Matter takes shape — next, Life with its sensations and desires springs forth — then, Mind perceptive and concep­tive appears — and, finally, there will be a disclosure of all that lies beyond mentality, the various phases of the Supreme Divine culminating in the quaternary: Supermind (Vijnana), Bliss (Ananda), Consciousness-Force (Chit-tapas), Existence (Sat).

Now, does the Night, which features in Savitri’s opening passage, stand for this Inconscience at the commencement of things?

The initial clue to the right answer is in the very title of the Canto: “The Symbol Dawn.” The title refers to the dawn of the day which is characterised in the line which occurs at the end of the first canto:

This was the day when Satyavan must die.

The dawn in question serves as a symbol. The symbolic content is stated in the verses picturing the occult power that has the natural daybreak as its suggestive front and communicative medium:

A glamour from unreached transcendences
Iridescent with the glory of the Unseen.
A message from the unknown immortal Light
Ablaze upon creation’s quivering edge,
Dawn built her aura of magnificent hues
And buried its seed of grandeur in the hours.

A further pointer follows:

It wrote the lines of a significant myth
Telling of a greatness of spiritual dawns,...
Almost that day the epiphany was disclosed
Of which our thoughts and hopes are signal flares;
A lonely splendour from the invisible goal
Almost was flung on the opaque Inane.

In short, what is symbolised is the descent of the Supramental Godhead into the world’s mental human consciousness for a total transformative purpose. A brief fore-glimpse is given of the invasion of Cosmic Ignorance by the Transcendent Knowledge. This Cosmic Ignorance, whose highest term is the mind groping towards Truth, is itself an evolute from the basic Inconscience. If the Transcendent Knowledge is the Reality of which the symbol is the dawn of the last day in Satyavan’s life, this basic Inconscience would be the Reality of which the symbol is the night preceding that dawn. And actually the night and the dawn are connected by Sri Aurobindo when he first brings in the dawn motif:

A hope stole in that hardly dared to be
Amid the Night’s forlorn indifference.

These two lines come immediately after the opening passage of *Savitri* has closed with

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

Thus “the huge foreboding mind of Night” is linked with the Symbol Dawn. And already before the opening passage ends we have the mention of this dawn:

Insensibly somewhere a breach began:
A long lone line of hesitating hue
Like a vague smile tempting a desert heart
Troubled the far rim of life’s obscure sleep.

What arrives in the wake of the hesitating hue is an illuminating outbreak of the divine vision:
An eye of deity peered through the dumb deeps;

and the eye is called

A scout in a reconnaissence from the sun.

Nowhere do we find any disjunction between the symbol dawn and the night preceding it. All that we find is different phases of this night. From a condition which Sri Aurobindo describes by saying,

A fathomless zero occupied the world

and later

The impassive skies were neutral, empty, still

we pass to another state about which he says:

Then something in the inscrutable darkness stirred;
A nameless movement, an unthought Idea
Insistent, dissatisfied, without an aim,
Something that wished but knew not how to be,
Teased the Inconscient to wake Ignorance.

In other words, the symbolised Inconscience shades off into the less stark symbolised Ignorance — a state comparatively closer to the hesitating hue's "long lone line".

So much for the initial clue of the Canto's title. It has led us to several points in the whole passage driving home its suggestion. But in fact we do not need to go far afield to prove that the night is the particular period of darkness prior to the particular period of light during which Satyavan is going to die. We have only to consider turns of expression like the following, which occur on the heels of "the huge foreboding mind of Night".
Almost one felt, opaque, impenetrable,
In the sombre symbol of her eyeless muse
The abysm of the unbodied Infinite;
As in a dark beginning of all things,
A mute featureless semblance of the Unknown...
Cradled the cosmic drowse of ignorant Force...

Here directly the word “symbol” is used about the night and we are told that what is happening is “as if” at the time when the original Inconscience started to disgorge an evolving universe from its depths. We have an explicit comparison in either instance. Again, there is the obvious word “semblance” telling us that this night is not the “Unknown” itself but only something like it in muteness and featurelessness. And the line,

Almost one felt, opaque, impenetrable,

matches the two later ones commencing with “Almost”, which we have already quoted. Just as these declare the unmanifest Superconscience in the dawn-glamour, this one provides an inkling of the original Inconscience in the dark hour upon which that magic light breaks. It is this hour, and not anything else, that is spoken of in Savitri’s opening line. And in the line itself a subtle sign that we are not at “the dark beginning of all things” is caught from the difference in the tenses:

It was the hour before the Gods awake.

Why does Sri Aurobindo not write “awoke”? The reason is that he is pointing not to an event which once happened but to one that constantly and repeatedly happens. It will hardly do to say that the Historic Present — a literary device to secure vividness — is being used. If such is the case, what is the idea of not employing the same narrative device in the first half of the line? Why are we not told: “It is the hour...”? 
We get again a significant present tense slightly later when Sri Aurobindo tells us of the cosmic drowse of ignorant force

Whose moved creative slumber kindles the suns
And carries our lives in its somnambulist whirl.

A situation covering a long span of ages, including the continuous cosmic phenomenon of stars shining and the continuous terrestrial phenomenon of human history, finds an allusion in “kindles” and “carries”. The night described is not the primeval Inconscience but an image of it such as comes numberless times in that long span of the ages during which the kindling of suns and the carrying of lives are ever present. The coming, time and again, of the primeval Inconscience’s image in the form of night preceding day is clinched for us by Sri Aurobindo writing:

Thrown back once more into unthinking dreams,
Earth wheeled abandoned in the hollow gulfs
Forgetful of her spirit and her fate.

“Once more” is unmistakable in its implication. Nor is it an isolated locution. Its occurrence fairly early in the Night-passage links up with a reiteration of it at almost the conclusion of the passage and in the middle of the Dawn-passage following it:

But the oblivion that succeeds the fall,
Had blotted the crowded tablets of the past,
And all that was destroyed must be rebuilt
And old experience laboured out once more....

Once more a tread perturbed the vacant Vasts;
Infinity’s centre, a Face of rapturous calm
Parted the eternal lids that open heaven;
A Form from far beatitudes seemed to near.
Evidently what happened several times in the course of things is indicated — what is painfully recovered after each oblivious sleep which represents the primeval Inconscience, an obtruding on the night’s vacancy by the advent of the Dawn-goddess who momentarily lets the transcendent Light through. We may add that just a little before the one passage’s end we have a preparation of the next passage with the mention of the scout from the Sun. About the “message” of this “eye of deity” which “pierced through the dumb deeps” Sri Aurobindo continues:

Intervening in a mindless universe,
Its message crept through the reluctant hush
Calling the adventure of consciousness and joy
And, conquering Nature’s disillusioned breast,
Compelled renewed consent to see and feel.

Mark the adjective “renewed”. The “consent to see and feel” comes not just on one occasion but on a series of occasions as dawn follows night, time after time.

What, in fact, Sri Aurobindo posits in

It was the hour before the Gods awake

is a religio-mythic concept, that has been part of India’s temple-life for millennia: the daily awaking of the Gods.

The Gods are the Powers that carry on the harmonious functions by which the universe moves on its progressive path. According to an old belief, based on a subtle knowledge of the antagonism between the Lords of Falsehood and the Lords of Truth, the period of night interrupts the work of the Truth-Lords by its obscuration of sight and by its pulling down of the consciousness into sleep. Each day, with the onset of darkness the Gods are stopped in their functions by the Demons: the Gods pass into an oblivious slumber. Each day, with the advent of light they emerge into activity and con-
tinue their progress-creating career. Traditionally the moment of their awaking, termed “Brahma-muhurta”, is 4 a.m. Every temple in India rings its bells and clangs its cymbals at 4 a.m. to stir the deities, no less than the devotees, into action. The “hour”, therefore, which Savitri depicts at its start may be taken, if we are to be literal, as 3-4 a.m. The termination of this hour is “the divine Event” mentioned in the second line.

That this is so and that a particular religious custom which points to a local and temporal occurrence is in view are most aptly indicated by the 4th line, stating the place where Night’s mind was alone:

In her unlit temple of eternity.

Connecting the event of the Gods’ awaking after the hour between 3 and 4 a.m. every day in Indian temples, there is the hit-in-the-eye word “temple” used by Sri Aurobindo.

Yes, the common impression that the very beginning of the universal manifestation is depicted is definitely off the mark. But we must not overlook the background of such an impression. The original primeval Inconscience from which all manifestation has sprung is certainly a looming enormity visible through the Night-passage. If it were not so the passage would not be as symbolic as the Dawn-passage. The exaggeration we must guard against is the forgetting of the symbolic act: we must refrain from mixing up the Symbol and the Reality.

Perhaps we may effect a species of reconciliation between the common impression and our explanation by another manner of presenting the symbolisation — a manner which also can be justified from Sri Aurobindo. Here we have to say: “There is in each night a small temporary Inconscience, a passing snatch of the Great Darkness that is the divinely ordained womb of our cosmos. In this snatch we can glimpse the movement by which the Darkness grew less and less impenetrable and passed into what we may call Dimness awaiting illumi-
nation: the phenomenon which Sri Aurobindo tersely catches in the phrase about the Inconscient being teased to wake Ignorance. The symbolisation consists in each night being the primeval Night itself in a local transient miniature.

Before we close our discussion we may warn against the temptation to say: “Sri Aurobindo is sketching the old Indian conception of the Cosmos passing into laya, non-manifestation again and again and emerging repeatedly out of that Darkness into phenomenal existence.” First of all, laya is not Darkness: it is simply non-manifestation. Secondly the emergence of Ignorance from the Inconscient, the appearance of half-knowledge or finite consciousness, on the way to plenary knowledge or Super-conscious by means of a progressive evolution, is not considered by Sri Aurobindo a repetitive process. He conceives it to be one extreme possibility of self-revelation adopted by the Divine in the course of His varied “adventure of consciousness and joy” in terms of time and space. For, as Sri Aurobindo says in The Riddle of This World,1 “once manifestation began infinite possibility also began and among the infinite possibilities, which it is the function of the universal manifestation to work out, the negation, the apparent effective negation — with all its consequences — of the Power, Light, Peace, Bliss was very evidently one.” Here is a unique dire experiment, a horrific wager with Himself that the Almighty makes because this too must appear at some point as a mode of phenomenal self-projection. Besides, an actual full repetition of “a dark beginning of all things” would never be called a “symbol”, a “semblance” and introduced by “as if”.

* * *

So far we have gone by internal evidences and general considerations. Now for a couple of quotations from Sri Aurobindo’s letters on Savitri, providing an indirect elucidation of the problem. When we say “indirect”, we do not mean that they leave any doubt lingering: we merely mean that they are

not directly meant to solve the difficulty. The solution emerges in the course of answers to other questions.

The first excerpt runs:

"...do you seriously want me to give an accurate scientific description of the earth half in darkness and half in light so as to spoil my impressionist symbol or else to revert to the conception of earth as a flat and immobile surface? I am not writing a scientific treatise, I am selecting certain ideas and impressions to form a symbol of a partial and temporary darkness of the soul and Nature which seems to a temporary feeling of that which is caught in the Night as if it were universal and eternal. One who is lost in that Night does not think of the other half of the earth as full of light; to him all is Night and the earth a forsaken wanderer in an enduring darkness. If I sacrifice his impressionism and abandon the image of the earth wheeling through dark space I might as well abandon the symbol altogether, for this is a necessary part of it. As a matter of fact in the passage itself earth in its wheeling does come into the dawn and pass from darkness into the light. You must take the idea as a whole and in all its transitions and not press one detail with too literal an insistence..."

Obviously the objection to which Sri Aurobindo replies is that the opening passage of Savitri suggests the whole earth to be plunged in darkness whereas the actuality disclosed by post-Copernican science is half-earth experiencing night and half-earth experiencing day. The very terms of the objection imply the view we have presented in our comments — namely, that Sri Aurobindo's immediate subject is one particular earthly night. If this view had been wrong, Sri Aurobindo would at once have criticised it. But his reply proceeds on the same view and thereby supports our presentation and, while thus proceeding, he has several expressions which leave no room for the notion that the original Inconscience prior to the earth was the explicit vision. The explicit vision is: "the image of the earth wheeling through dark space...." Through this image a number of profound insights are conveyed, but
nowhere does it lose its central and frontal position. And we have to mark the adjectives in the phrase: "a symbol of a partial and temporary darkness of the soul and Nature" — as well as to observe the clear pointers everywhere that it is the earth’s partial and temporary night that impressionistically serves for the symbolisation.

Our next excerpt dwells further on the symbolisation, in answer to a critic’s feeling that the poet is drawing out his description to an inordinate length. Sri Aurobindo’s defence goes:

"His objection of longeur would be perfectly just if the description of the night and the dawn had been simply of physical night and physical dawn; but here the physical night and physical dawn are, as the title of the canto clearly suggests, a symbol, although what may be called a real symbol of an inner reality and the main purpose is to describe by suggestion the thing symbolised; here it is a relapse into Inconscience broken by a slow and difficult return of consciousness followed by a brief but splendid and prophetic outbreak of spiritual light leaving behind the 'day' of ordinary human consciousness in which the prophecy has to be worked out. The whole of Savitri is, according to the title of the poem, a legend that is a symbol and this opening canto is, it may be said, a key beginning and announcement. So understood there is nothing here otiose or unnecessary; all is needed to bring out by suggestion some aspect of the thing symbolised and so start adequately the working out of the significance of the whole poem."

The chief operative turn of speech for our purpose in the above is "a relapse into Inconscience". The term "relapse" indicates indisputably a new setback, involving in the case before us a particular occasion for the unconscious condition such as happens each night in the course of the 24-hour cycle through which the earth passes repeatedly. We may also note that what makes the symbol of an inner reality and so takes us beyond the merely physical in import is, after all, the physical
night and physical dawn constituting the earth's daily phases. The Inconscience that is there is primarily the one in which the soul and Nature sink during the recurrent nocturnal phase. Even though "the main purpose" of the description is to conjure up the "dark beginning of all things" as a presence, it is only through an instance of the earth's recurrent nocturnal phase that this presence is conjured up.

2

*Savitri* opens with a single self-sufficing line — a complete sentence in iambic pentameter consisting of eight words:

> It was the hour before the Gods awake.

This line is the shortest start of any epic. The *Iliad* has a dactylic line starting the theme with a greater number of syllables proper to the quantitative hexameter — a number which Pope is obliged to match by a full heroic couplet:

> Achilles' wrath, to Greece the direful spring
> Of woes unnumbered, heavenly Goddess, sing!

Virgil's *Aeneid* has two hexameters and an extra foot for the initial grammatical unit. C. Day Lewis represents them by:

> To tell of the war and the hero who first from Troy's frontier,
> Displaced by destiny, came to the Lavinian shores, To Italy...

Dante's *Divina Commedia* runs its start into a trio of lines setting the *terza rima* moving. In Dorothy Sayers's version we have:

> Midway this way of life we're bound upon,
> I woke to find myself in a dark wood,
Where the right road was wholly lost and gone.

Milton's *Paradise Lost* beats all by his long-drawn-out overture:

Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world and all our woe,
With loss of Eden, till one Greater Man
Restore us and regain the blissful seat,
Sing, Heavenly Muse...

But Sri Aurobindo's opening, though the shortest, is not by any means the simplest. As we have seen, it preludes the most tough "knot" of the whole poem. It has cosmogonic overtones, metaphysico-religious implications, and refers to a religio-mythic concept: the moment of the Gods' awaking.

The next line —

Across the path of the divine Event —

at once recalls with its two concluding words Tennyson's well-known

And one far-off divine event
To which the whole creation moves.

But there is no direct parity between the Aurobindonian "Event" and the Tennysonian. Sri Aurobindo points to a daily occurrence, while Tennyson presumably talks of the end of universal history. And yet, behind the daily working of divine forces to which Sri Aurobindo alludes, we may discern a final "divine Event", when the Gods, the Lords of Truth and Light, will awake forever and the *Avidya*, the Ignorance, in which the world's consciousness lives at present, will be dispelled for good. As we have already observed, the habitual awaking
of the Gods on the particular day with which Savitri begins its story is infused with a brief appearance of the ultimate glory: a touch of the "epiphany" is seen for a short while. The "one far­off divine event" is momentarily glimpsed. Yes, a Tennysonian suggestion glimmers in the background. But, of course, the consummation which Tennyson alludes to is not quite the same as the world-fulfilment Sri Aurobindo's yoga labours towards. Tennyson has a Christian outlook, and strains his eyes in the direction of a world-end leading to a Supreme Hereafter for all the elements of the Creation, which Christ, reappearing, will gather up into God. Sri Aurobindo has in view a crowning of the world's evolutionary effort by an establishment of the Supermind here in time and space with a divinised mind, vitality and body. Unlike the Christian visionary, he is spiritually this-worldly not only in "organic process" but also in ultimate achievement.

We may note in passing that Sri Aurobindo does not particularise his "Event" by qualifying it as "this" or "that": he employs only the general definite article "the". A sort of known generality is indicated: there is no pinning down of the Event to a specific occasion nor is any direct attention focused on it: it is named unobtrusively in spite of its magnitude — as if it were a matter of recurrent greatness, a common uncom­monness — a splendour to be repeated interminably. The use of "the" rather than "this" or "that" turns us away again from some once-and-for-all Event and conforms to the pattern we have drawn of a night like any other in the long series of dark intervals, except that Satyavan is to die during the ensuing day.

In the line that follows —

The huge foreboding mind of Night, alone —

what is it that is foreboded? One may argue that it must be an unpleasant thing — a deeper and larger gloom — rather than a pleasant thing, namely, the light to come. One may imagine
the deeper and larger darkness to be the original Inconscience, which was the beginning of the world; but how can that Inconscience be boded in advance? "Fore" implies a future, not a past. What is symbolised is not the same as what is anticipated. We should think only of the light to come. But then the atmosphere of gold that would go with this light would stand in the way: forebodings are gloomy, whereas the anticipation of light would be cheerful. However, we must remember two points. First, it is gloom that is in an anticipatory state: so the anticipation has itself to be gloomy, sharing as it does the nature of the anticipating entity, even though what is anticipated is bright. Secondly, what is anticipated would spell the end of gloom and surely gloom anticipating its own end cannot be cheerful about it! Psychologically it cannot help being gloomy about the event which would deal a death-blow to it.

"The event" — there we have named the very identity of the blow-dealer. What the mind of night forebodes is the preceding line’s "divine Event" — the moment of the Gods’ awakening. Actually the word "before" of the first line of *Savitri* should identify the object of night’s foreboding activity.

Now we may dwell on the literary, as distinguished from the psychological, quality of the participial adjective. From Sri Aurobindo’s manuscripts we learn that the third line of *Savitri* originally ran:

> The huge unslumbering spirit of Night, alone —

and was followed, two lines later, by:

> Lay stretched Immobile upon Silence’ marge,  
> Mute with the expectation of her change.

Later the final line became:

> Mute with the unplumbed prevision of her change.
In the present version of the opening passage the substance of both forms of the line in question has been concentrated in "foreboding" in the immediate context and later assimilated into two lines:

An unshaped consciousness desired light
And a blank prescience yearned towards distant change.

We are pointing this out by the way; the literary problem we should like to raise is: how would an adjective like "expectant" or "previsioning" do as a substitute for "foreboding"?

"Previsioning" would not be quite amiss, especially in view of the verse coming some 150 lines or so afterwards about the Dawn-Goddess:

On life's thin border awhile the Vision stood.

But "previsioning" will introduce an anapaest in the line's third foot and spoil the steady, slow and even sombre movement: a kind of skip would come with the anapaestic intrusion. Besides, the quantitative values of the word — one semilong and three intrinsic shorts — would be out of accord with the large-vowelled rhythm:

The huge foreboding mind of Night, alone.

There are six intrinsic longs and all the five stresses of the pentameter coincide with five out of these six voice-lengths. The line remarkably bears out by its sound the sense of the immense solitariness of the brooding Night-mind.

If one may be forgiven for recalling some verses of one's own I would quote:

One with night's incommunicable mind

and
A loneliness of superhuman night.

But, though here too by Sri Aurobindo's estimation is overhead poetry and at least in the last line a pure Mantra, still there is not such a succession of long vowels mostly driven home by strong stresses as in Sri Aurobindo's picture — a picture supported grandly, after a one-line interval, by the vision of the verse which is concerned directly with the disposition of Night's mind:

Lay stretched immobile upon Silence' marge

— again six quantitative longs and five stresses rendered more effective by the long quantities under them, particularly the stupendous opening spondee which seems to give a Presence extending right across the whole horizon that is "Silence' marge" at this occult hour with which Savitri breaks upon us. ("Stretched", I may remark, has a vowel which for all its intrinsic shortness is stretched out by the three consonantal sounds following it no less than preceding it.)

As for "expectant" instead of "previsioning", it is still worse. Even apart from the ridiculous suggestion of a woman expecting the birth of a baby, the poetry suffers an irremediable fall. There is a lack of suggestion in the adjective — it has a drab vacuous neutrality. It makes an abstract prose statement — no conjuring up of a presence, no calling forth of Night's characteristic mentality. And the whole sound rings flat and false, coming between "huge" and "mind". "Previsioning" had at least four syllables to suggest some kind of length making up for the brevity of the vowel-values. "Expectant" has nothing except three short vowels.

Finally, both these adjectives are wanting in the peculiar beauty and aptness of the two long o's that belong to "foreboding". Without their occurrence the long o of "alone" concluding the line would itself be alone and the word in which it figures would toll its bell as if in a void. Perhaps a more
appropriate way of speaking would be: the void, which the line suggests, would be a dead one instead of a living "fathomless zero" (to quote a Savitri-expression a little further on) if "alone", which rounds off the verse, were not prepared by what we may call — using a term from elsewhere in the poem — the "ciphered round" of each of the two o's earlier in the line. Echoing them, it fills out with a vibrant mystery.

What we may consider in contrast an insubstantial vacuity is caught in the line which intervenes between the two that are actively related to Night's mind, namely,

In her unlit temple of eternity.

The rhythmic antithesis to those two verses is complete: there is not a single quantitative long in the 11 syllables — short vowel follows short vowel to create the impression of a sheer lack of substantial reality. The semi-long of the first e in "eternity" hardly avails as a break. In addition to the short-vowelled character of the line, we should observe that there are only three real stresses as against the five in the other pair. Further, the line begins with an anapaest, as though a quick movement were easily possible in the utterly unresisting "atmosphere" of the temple. Lastly, we have no strong close as with "alone" and "marge" but a weak falling away into some endless unknown: "eternity" is without a true accent in its terminal syllable, a sort of half-pressure falls there merely because the line comes to an end: no actual end occurs and we get the sense of an indeterminable void with no life in it.

One more technical remark. In the earlier version of Savitri when there was "the huge unslumbering spirit of Night", our line stood:

In her unlit temple of immensity.

Now, with "eternity", Sri Aurobindo does not describe the temple's dimensions but the object to which the temple was dedi-
cated: Night serves eternity in her temple. This change further takes away "substance" from what is described. "Immensity" is a positive term and indicates magnitude, the power of a spatial extension: "eternity" is non-indicative of any spatial as well as of any temporal continuity. We are carried off into the indefinite and imponderable.

The three lines about Night’s mind lying lonely upon the marge of Silence in eternity’s temple bring to my mind the three that come much later (in Canto 3 of Book One):

The superconscient realms of motionless Peace
Where judgment ceases and the word is mute
And the Unconceived lies pathless and alone.

The lying immobile and silent and lonely recur, though the ultimate mood is different — the all-freeing tranquillity of an unnamable Nirvana instead of the ominous profundity of a hushed emptiness. What, from the standpoint of literary psychophonetics, links the two passages is the end-term "alone" in the second line of the one and in the closing line of the other. We encounter this effect elsewhere too in Savitri, but not so impressively as here, nor does it confront us with such a self-contained poetic generality — except once, as we shall soon see. No doubt, "foreboding" actually points to a particular object — the divine Event of the Gods’ awaking — yet it can stand on its own as the expression of a psychological movement typical of and natural to the mind of Night, a movement fraught with a formless fear of the future. Again, in the other line the "And" at the start points to a special context and is necessary to the progressive revelation, yet metrically it is a superfluous conjunction, making the initial foot a glide-anapaest when the line could be a perfect pentameter without it and have the first foot an iamb.

Comparable self-contained small-scale masterpieces with the same termination to various descriptive, reflective or suggestive phrases may be cited. There is Housman’s delightfully
atmospheric snatch from Nature:

The cuckoo shouts all day at nothing
   In leafy dells, alone.

There is the deeply poignant religious conviction of an early Sonnetteer:

   All love is lost except on God alone.

Wordsworth’s greatest moment is that unfathomable phrase about Newton’s bust at Cambridge with its silent face that is the marble index of a mind for ever

   Voyaging through strange seas of thought, alone.

John Chadwick, “Arjava” to the inmates of Sri Aurobindo’s Ashram, matches the Upanishadic mystery and magnificence of Wordsworth by his lines:

   This patter of Time’s marring steps across the solitude
   Of Truth’s abidingness, Self-blissful and alone.

A mixture of the descriptive, reflective and suggestive in four verses of terrific power, with a cosmic sweep of imagination, meets us in Canto 2 of Savitri’s “Book of Fate”:

   As a star, uncompanioned, moves in heaven
   Unastonished by the immensities of Space,
   Travelling infinity by its own light,
   The great are strongest when they stand alone.

These verses have a special interest and importance for us because they are some of the absolutely last that Sri Aurobindo dictated to Nirodbaran a little before December 5, the day when not Satyavan but Sri Aurobindo himself was to
"die" and when, as a result of his passing into the inner planes, his co-worker and companion, the Mother, would undergo the fact of loneliness on the visible earth-stage — although God-given her strength can battle against doom.
MIND OF LIGHT

("The Supermind had descended long ago — very long ago — into the mind and even into the vital: it was working in the physical also, but indirectly through those intermediaries. The question now was about the direct action of the Supermind in the physical. Sri Aurobindo said it could be possible only if the physical mind received the supramental light: the physical mind was the instrument for direct action upon the most material. The physical mind receiving the supramental light Sri Aurobindo called the Mind of Light." — Note received from the Mother)

The core of a deathless sun is now the brain
And each grey cell bursts to omniscient gold.
Thought leaps — and an inmost light speaks out from things;
Will, a new miraclesed Matter’s dense white flame,
Swerves with one touch the sweep of the brute world.
Eyes focus now the Perfect everywhere.
In a body changing to chiselled translucency,
Through nerve on fire-cleansed nerve a wine of the Vast
Thrills from heaven-piercing head to earth-blessing feet.
The whole sky weighs down with love of the abyss.
Deeper than death the all-penetrant rays take root
To make the Eternal’s sun a rose of the dust.

4.4.54
When the Mother read this poem, she was extremely struck with the two opening lines. She remarked that they were sheer revelation, expressing exactly what had happened when the Mind of Light had been realised. The rest of the lines she regarded as having been produced by imaginative reconstruction.
THIS TOO IS HER LOVE

(The background of this poem is the following letter, dated May 11, 1955, to the Mother: "I was waiting for you outside your bathroom yesterday. When you came out, you did not look at me at all. I couldn't understand why and it was simply awful — but, as always, I tried to feel that every act of yours is really a grace to me and is meant to remould me into the Divine Truth. The incident moved me to write a poem. Here it is — a symbolic transcription of my faith — but, of course, I hope I shan't have to write such poems very often.")

This too is her love — that with unseeing gaze
She goes as if I were but empty space.
Not my poor soul's ill-carven presence now
But all the dreamed perfection, the pure brow
And falterless foot of the God unborn in me,
The white Absence of my mortality
Her eyes are fixed on, calling into time
The Eternal Truth whose gold my days begrime
And teaching me the time-transfigurant art
To make her alchemy's crucible my heart.

When self-submerged in her vision's depth, I cease
To my own thought and grow a nameless peace,
Then all that's crude will fade to an apocalypt flare
And ever her-eyes will rest on the light laid bare
By my dense clay she treats now like thin air!

10.5.1955
The Mother read the poem carefully and then, turning to the writer, said: "But I did look at you." The writer protested: "How is it I never saw you doing it?" The Mother coolly replied: "I did it from the corner of my eye." This evoked the plea: "That won't do, Mother. Please be more direct in the future."
NO RETURN

I stand here for all time, less rooted in God.
A thousand heart-gropes find each root their goal.
I am caught by a depth and a warmth of eternal Love,
Love that by being eternity is true earth,
The rock-grip of a bliss that cannot end.
Here is my Country, my Creatrix, my World's Core.
To the old out-scattered life there is no return.

But my fixed tree is a branching magnificence:
Everywhere spread huge arms that pierce all space,
Nothing the sweep of the universe can give
Eludes; but now from a stainless height I search
Earth's distances of lost divinity.
Here is the Abroad, the All-Mother, the World's Edge.
To the low rush, the blind grasp there is no return.

27.5.1954

The Mother went through the poem most attentively and
seemed to accept it as a very important declaration for the writer. On finishing her perusal, she looked up with a smile, at once tender and calm, and said: “Bon!” (“Good!”)
"PRANAM" TO THE DIVINE MOTHER

There are two ways of bowing
To you, O Splendour sweet!
One craves the boon of blessedness,
One gives the soul to your feet.

Pulling your touch to ourselves we feel
Holy and happy — we think huge heaven
Comes close with you that we may pluck
A redder dawn, a purpler even.

This is but rapturous robbery
Deaf to infinity's call
That we should leap and plunge in you
Our aching empty all

And, in the surge of being your own,
Grow blind and quite forget
Whether our day be a richer rose,
A wealthier violet.

Precious each moment laid in your hands,
Whatever the hue it bear —
A flame and fragrance just because
Your fingers hold it dear.

Make me your nothing, my whole life
I would drown in your vastnesses —
A cry to be ruled by your flawless touch,
Your will alone my peace.

6.6.1954
After reading this lyric, the Mother passed it on to the dozen people or so who were present along with the writer. She asked them to read it — evidently because she considered it as expressing a basic truth for all who participated in the daily Pranam in the Ashram and, in general, for whoever approached the embodied Divine or the Guru with a gesture of obeisance and devotion.
THE MOTHER: TWO PHASES

Infinite Bliss at work
   In self-elected chains,
Bearing with a luminous smile
   Love’s load of a myriad pains —
The Universal Mother,
   Eternity seized by Time,
Dealing out hourly blessings
   To earth for a goal sublime.

Infinite Bliss at play
   In a fetter light as flowers,
Laughing with radiant motion
   In the midst of hampering hours —
The Transcendental Mother,
   Triumphant over all,
Swinging a care-free racquet
   As if earth were a tennis ball!

18.8.1954
TENNIS WITH THE MOTHER

She seems but playing tennis —
    The whole world is in that game!
A little ball she is striking —
    What is struck is a huge white flame
Leaping across time’s barrier
    Between God’s hush, man’s heart,
And while the exchange goes speeding
    The two shall never part.

In scoring the play’s progress
    The result of minds that move,
One word in constant usage
    Is the mystic syllable “Love”.
And the one high act repeated
    Over and over again
By either side is “Service”,
    And it never is done in vain.
For, whether defeat or triumph
    Is the end, each movement goes
Soulward: through this short pastime
    Eternity comes more close!

27.5.1954
HER CHANGING EYES

Brims there a fathomless blue?
Then love's deep surge has made her ocean-souled!
Shed they a fiery hue?
Then truth has lit her mind to pure sun-gold!

Are they like purple wine?
O she is drunk with the Ineffable!
Outbeams a dark dew-shine?
With pity of your gloom her lustres fill.

But when that varied glance
Is fading to a quiet none can see
Behind snow-lids of trance,
She's waking in you all eternity!

20.9.33
A POET IN THE MAKING

A LYRIC WITH SRI AUROBINDO’S CORRECTIONS
AND COMMENTS

In the early days of my stay in the Ashram, I wrote as follows to Sri Aurobindo about a poem by my sister Minnie, now Mrs. N.F. Canteenwalla, who was eighteen years old at the time and had come with my mother and brother on a visit:

“My sister has off and on been writing poetry. Here is her most recent effort, the first poem she has written in Pondicherry. In a few places I have made some corrections. Substantially the poem stands as she wrote it. Perhaps my most important change was to substitute ‘phantom’ for ‘seductive’ in stanza 5. Will you kindly give your opinion on the lyric as well as advice, if possible, as to her potentialities and the method of developing them?”

AMAL KIRAN

(The corrective touches by Sri Aurobindo are shown in italics above the original lines.)

AT EVENTIDE

On many an eve at the gloaming hour,
I at my cabin window sit;
The shôre is barren and lonesome am I:
My mate is the light-house with beacons lit.
An amber twilight floods the beach;
It dances on the wayward sea,
*It lights*
(Lights) the cliff with a purple hue
And stops at my cabin to peep at me.

The ocean croons a lullaby
To the wild sea-birds wending home.
But always it is a sad, sad song
That comes from the heart of the gleaming foam.

I hear a call, a sigh, a strain,
*It mingles* the
(Mingled) with (that) song each day,
so
Oh! unlike any earthly music —
A yearning chant from far-away.

*it's*
The fishers say ('tis) the dreaded call

Of (the) phantom vampire of the deep;
*Or they say it's the winds that laugh and frolic*
(Or maybe 'tis the winds at frolic)
As in and out of the caves they leap.

But to me it sounds a sweeter thing;
As I shut my eyes at that peaceful hour,
I can hear the voices of angels sing
Out of the clouds as from a bower.

And thus I sit with eyes locked fast,
Till the night comes creeping from afar.
Beside me stands my faithful light-house

Returning the blinks of (the) distant star.

10.11.1931
A Poet in the Making

SRI AUROBINDO'S GENERAL COMMENT

Your sister is surely a born poet. There are just a few slight mistakes in the rhythm and turns of language; but the only serious blunder is the "seductive vampire". There are of course echoes — a mixture of Christina Rossetti and Heine (I don’t know if she has read translations of Heine, it may be an indirect influence); but that was inevitable. I have suggested a few changes (in addition to yours) for the sake of perfection; but, even as it is, the poem is remarkable for a beginner. Advice? I don’t know; let her remain true to the spontaneity of her gift and allow it to develop from within.

24.11.1931

SRI AUROBINDO'S COMMENT IN THE MARGIN AGAINST LINES 5-10

These six lines are the best; they could have been the work of a mature poet already master of his instrument. The same can be said of the marked two lines [2 & 4] in the last verse.
THE HERO

AN EPISODE OF THE EIGHTEEN-SEVENTIES

A SHORT STORY

Quiet, to a musician, is not relief from sound; it is only a chance to make him listen better to the voice of his art. André Chaudanson found night the happiest time, for he could then concentrate most intently on the sounds that rose and fell continually through his mind. And on this particular night he listened more intently than ever because he felt the sorest need of soothing harmonies. Life was breaking up all around him; discords were written on the face of every man he met. The Prussians were reported to be less than thirty miles from the town where he lived. Any moment the tide of war might sweep towards the inhabitants of Rocheville and submerge the slow sweet routines of peace. Hitherto the red waves had boomed elsewhere, but a sudden contretemps had turned them south to Rouen and if the little army opposing them failed to stem the rush, there would be Uhlans galloping through the streets and German gutturals and polysyllables shattering the air of Gallic grace which played round the thoughts and emotions of Rocheville.

André kept on his piano a picture of his Master, and before composing anything he would gaze a long time into those eyes of deep fire and at that brow at once narrow and high which spoke the pure intensity of the soul of René de Bourneval. Surely that face had seen a glory beyond our world; and why should he, André, doubt it who had watched
the Master at work and marvelled at that religious passion of
his which made the white hair look like a halo over his head.
It was not only music that bound André to his Master; it was
the particular glow of the Beyond, the far-away note, in the
music. He himself had striven to keep the same note sounding
in his own work, so that his music might have the distance
of a deep slumber as well as the immediacy of a tremendous
hand stretched across that distance to touch the hearts of men
and guide them towards some great living peace. And now
when two nations were at bitter strife, peace was indeed a
thing to be desired. So André gazed and gazed at the picture,
praying for inspiration.

He imagined the face in front of him to be full of a slow
movement, alive with intimate expression conveying to him
what he should put into his music. He thought the eyes
shifted gently upwards, and with that motion something in
André seemed to pierce a veil of silence extended infinitely
above his head, and through the rent in that veil he felt a thin
light stream down. With a start he looked up: it was only the
skylight letting in from the roof the rays of the moon that
had climbed high over the housetops of Rocheville. But how
could he have felt that moonlight? It flowed in a line behind
his book and he had not caught any reflection of it in his eyes.
Strange that he should have had that luminous feeling and the
moon should have just thrown a thin silver thread through the
skylight. There was indeed the candle burning before him but
its flicker could not have caused the faint tremble of white fire
above his head. What blending of the occult and the natural
was here — experienced by him as though through his Mas-
ter’s eyes? Anyway, it was no use keeping the candle burn-
ing now that the moon was gradually beautifying the room.
André blew out the delicate cone that had kept a wavering
play of gleam and shade over the Master’s picture; but with
the puff with which he blew it out he breathed a spontaneous
sigh — an unconscious self-expression, but no sooner had it
escaped him than a far music floated to his ears in answer to
his yearning and seemed to pass across his face, as it were, fluttering his eyelids, caressing his nostrils with a strange fragrance, curving his mouth into a mysterious smile — until a flame possessed his brain, thrilled through his nerves and the hands ran up and down the keyboard.

There was a tinkle of bells and there was the rush of a mighty wind, both almost combined as if a tempest had set dancing an innumerable carillon. But the tempest itself, as it swept again and again round that invisible belfry, became a giant tune — so immense that André feared his piano might burst with that endless sonority. What puzzled him was that the ringing of bells persisted in spite of the large music and it was a steady unvarying sweetness, a centre to the changing and sweeping glory and rapture. Then his fingers leaped and glided through a more subdued pattern of sound, yet in and out of the controlled harmony the old energy moved until there appeared to be no need any more for power to hurl itself gorgeously at some intractable enemy and a restrained richness swayed like some virgin goddess through the room, all her body a multiform moonlit message of pure peace. Suddenly André stopped; an ominous thud came from afar — another — still one more — and he was on his feet. A scurrying of steps led to his door and his wife rushed in.

“Oh André, Jacques just came to say that our gallant men have lost. We’re at the mercy of the enemy. What shall we do?”

“Be at rest, my treasure. Whatever happens, no harm can befall you.”

“Jacques also says the whole town is astir to put up a defence.”

“That would be extraordinary! We’d be the first to bring a civilian force — a step of men brave indeed. All my sympathy is with them. But I must have a short spell of leisure before it’s too late. Leave me a while, and I’ll be down with you presently.”

She left. André took out his blank sheets of paper and
The F-Iero 173

scribbled hastily. The music was still fresh in his ears; he wrote
for nearly an hour, adding as he went along, pursuing further
in his mind strains he had been too excited to capture wholly;
but he felt that what he had got was only a fragment — greater
revelations, more powerful enchantments were to come; for
he had echoed but the first few footfalls of some divine peace
harmonising the life of the earth — the peace he had invoked
in face of the ruin that threatened the town. There was too
much noise and confusion in the rest of the house and in the
street. The whole town was up; men were shouting, women
talked shrilly, and repeated calls reached him from below. He
got up and went to meet the general clamour.

"It's unavoidable!" A chorus of voices enveloped him. "We
must fight — they are within a few miles. The barricades are
already raised. Not an inch of French soil will be surrendered
without being soaked in our blood. But what about our fami­
lies? There's no time for them to fly."

"We don't care," cried André's own wife. "We shall stand
beside you. But don't let the Prussians mock at us as at cow­
ards."

André was surprised at the fierce energy shown by his
pretty little wife. He was a gentle citizen, he had never been
a fighter, but the defiant note in the woman's voice stirred
him. Yes, manhood must be upheld. Let them not take the
citizens like rabbits; they will have to march over the mur­
dered body of a heroic resistance. Most of the citizens already
carried pistols and rifles. André walked back to his house, and
pulled down from the wall his gun, opened the breech and
started loading it. Then he carried the fire-arm upstairs to his
music-room. The piano stood invitingly, his dear companion;
he laid the gun aside, went to the still unshut keyboard, let
his fingers drag lovingly over the ivories; a sudden tremor
ran through his frame — and he heard music again. A shout of
joy escaped him as he darted to his stool and sat — but no!
he wouldn't play: how could he? All the same, there was no
harm in recording as rapidly and as quietly as he could the
in-flowing harmonies. So he picked up the score-sheets he had cast off and began writing; but before he had gone a couple of lines forward he felt guilty. Was this the time to waste on art? His fellows were preparing to face death. What if the Prussians were known not to molest anybody who offered no resistance? He could not stick at home and let others fight: his manhood was greater than his art... But he hated killing; he had never indulged even in shooting birds, he had been almost squeamish about these things. He felt terribly perplexed. Flinging away his papers, he fell on his knees. Tears gushed from his eyes, as he spoke, slowly and with deep resolution: "Holy Spirit, ruler of this world — Spirit to whom I have prayed for peace — here I kneel before you, offering up my life at the altar of that Conscience which you have planted in me. If your voice there points me to the battle-field, I will not hang back. Bring out the hero hidden in me as in each man — slay my personal fears, my personal attachments. Let me serve you alone. I have prayed for peace, and I will not shrink when you offer me the peace of the grave."

The door flung open and his wife sank beside him: "Oh André, my hero, I have heard you. But forgive me for being weak. Stay back, do not go: I have your child in me — and who shall protect me if you die? I spoke rashly in the street."

"Would my child like to know that its father was a coward?"

Joséphine was silent.

"Besides, you will not starve, my dear. Your father has enough to keep you happily."

"Happily? How shall I live without you? It is not starvation I dread. Why are you so cruel?"

"Why count on my death?" And yet he knew that short of death there was no issue out of the problem — none save shirking the problem altogether. Men were aware of his frail health; they would not mind if he kept back with his wife and her aged father. But he could not: his health was after all not so broken really as to excuse him at this critical hour; all the
fibres of his manhood protested.

He got up from his knees, took his gun and led his wife downstairs. When he made his appearance outside, his thin hands holding the rifle all the men shouted "Bravo!" and came and slapped him with a rough affection on his shoulders. But it was not for their praise that he was giving the sacrifice.

*A*

A week later, an old man was on his way to Rocheville. He reached it towards nightfall, much hampered on the route by Prussian officials who held up the train often to inspect the passengers. Here in the town, however, there were only a few of the enemy left, as after capturing it and shooting many of the surviving civilian fighters they had surged onward in a westerly direction. Hardly anybody knew who the old man was. Some months ago he had visited the place and a number of interested youths had clustered round him, but those youths were to be seen no more. And because André was one of them the Master had come down from Paris to collect whatever he could of his pupil's papers and to console the young widow.

She was sitting beside her father, near the fire. On seeing René de Bourneval through the window, she rushed to the door.

"Oh my friend, you've come! But poor André! How happy he would have been. André my hero."

And then the whole pathetic story was related. How his wife had overheard his prayer, that heart-rending self-dedication. Then the fight in the streets and the supreme courage displayed by the weak musician. He was among the first to meet the Uhlans. His comrades had wavered a moment at sight of the overwhelming numbers against them, and André had jumped forward, calling on them to follow. The scuffle had been short but fierce. André was struck down; yet his example had put miraculous valour into his friends and they had fought desperately. Even the Prussians remarked, later,
on the recklessness with which the men had given battle. And
special consideration was shown towards the young widow
of that fair-haired and frail berserk who had led the charge. It
was a great honour that even an enemy reputed to be brutal
had shown chivalrous appreciation.

As the story proceeded, two or three wounded men joined
the group and added their testimony to the dead musician’s
boldness. One of them who had evidently heard about that
last prayer remarked:

“He had the soul to live music, not only write it. He moved
to his death to the glorious harmony of rifle shots. Admirable
I call it. Man who knew the voice of God in his conscience!”

The Master kept silent. Words of consolation failed him.
When the talk was over, he expressed a wish to see his dear
pupil’s papers. “Here they are, sir,” cried Joséphine. “I have
tied them up carefully; they contain the last thing he com­
posed; he was disturbed in the middle of it by the guns.”

The Master opened the roll and glanced at the last sheets;
his face lit up. “Where is the piano?” he asked, but now in
tones almost threatening. Joséphine, a little frightened, led
him upstairs. He sat and played the unfinished piece. Once
more the unearthly bells and the storm of music; once more
the controlled cadences and the paths of peace. The old
man got up, trembling — kept a check upon his features
and insisted on leaving. “I’ll come back,” he said, “I want to
breathe the open air.”

Out into the darkness he walked. Across the streets he
went into the clear night of the adjoining fields. And there he
stood, his face buried in his hands. Tears rolled down through
his fingers. Like a child he wept. Then in the midst of those
tears a great fury broke from his lips.

“Fool! Imbecile! To think that he could serve God by hero­
ism. Who ever created him to be a hero? Thousands of men
can fight — not one in a thousand can produce masterpieces
of music — and he sacrificed himself to the ideal of man­
hood just to please his petty conscience, when he was made
the receptacle of God's rarest gift — that superhuman gift — genius! Sot with the mind of a genius and the conscience of a paltry patriot. Waster, disgusting traitor to God, coward enough not to be able to resist his third-rate conscience and serve the Divine. Hero forsooth! Bah..."
"Is there forgiveness for me? Tell me, holy father, what should I have done? My eyes are dimming and my own voice comes from afar as came those sounds that made me hurry across the Piazza. A terrible fire was eating up the house, and when I saw its hungry colours leap madly laughing above and around, and all the crowd helpless in the street, I forgot that I was lame and my body rushed like a moth towards the glare.

"Before I knew where I was, I found myself plunging through smoke and cracking wood-work, up the stairs to the room where my old mother lay, sick and stifled in a ring of fire. The door was open and I could have burst in to drag my darling out. Oh I loved her as no man ever loved his sweetheart — my little frail mother with that soft glance full of understanding!

"But I saw a still fiercer confusion of flames raging higher up where the stairs reached the second floor. And in a flash I remembered the man whose room was there. He could not be in, for he returned late every night from a lonely walk. His firm short step I used to hear on the landing, and he would be humming to himself in a slow and rhythmic tone. I had often seen him in those humming moods — his large gaze forgetful of everything, the nostrils of his curved nose quivering as if he had run and were breathless. What a strange man, with a long melancholy face and with eyes for ever absorbed to recall
some felicity lost like a dream. He looked almost a priest. If he had your robe, father, he would suit it as even priests seldom do. He seemed to have no interest any more in life — but there was something unbreakable in him, hard like a diamond and like a diamond precious...”

After a pause the weak voice went on.

“Yes, his room was above, there where the flames were hissing most violently. I stood on the edge of one terrible moment of decision — then tore myself away from my mother’s chamber and stumbled upstairs, fighting through that golden torture which shrieked like a hundred devils. My clothes were ripped by the keen fire, the flesh of my legs sizzled, but I clove my way undaunted.

“Through the door I rushed. I saw his big lamp, which had been left burning, overturned somehow and splintered. I knew where his table stood, and with a blind hand I searched the dazzle that now enveloped it. The bundle I was looking for was there; I grabbed it just in time — a mass of sparks and ashes flew from its wrapper, but to my great delight the contents seemed almost undamaged. I thrust the heap into my doublet and dashed downstairs. But here it was indeed too late. My mother attempting to rise had fallen upon the floor. Her face and hair were so horribly burnt that I nearly swooned at the sight...

“My heart has known pain such as nobody will guess. What had I done? I had killed my mother, for I could have saved her. I had killed her for a mere bundle of manuscript. I myself would have gladly dropped beside the dear flesh all ruined now. It would have been a joy to get rid of a heart seared with grief and a soul consumed by sin — but I could not let go that manuscript. I ran down the scorching stair and afterwards I knew nothing. The people in the street must have caught me as I staggered out, and carried me here.”

Niccolo Scalza, the young poet of Udine, was too exhausted to continue. He stared straight in front of him while his mouth endeavoured vainly to form words. At last he mumbled for
water and the friar put it to the ashen lips. Then, with a weak twisting of them, the disfigured man continued:

"When I look back, I shudder, if I had saved her, I would have saved myself too; but there is no hope now. I must be ugly, father, with the signature of fire all over my face — ugly as my own crime. But I knew also that I could not have acted otherwise. For I was aware of what lay hidden in that manuscript. It is a miracle, it is a word born from the skies. To let so much of the mind's magnificence perish would have been to fling away the Creator's grace — not only to our time but to the endless future as well...

"Where is my friend? He will be mad with sorrow, thinking his work has been destroyed, but he will come to see me — my corpse. Give then the treasure to him; it is his ten years' labour, and when the world will see it he shall wear the crown of immortality. Even the cruel city that has exiled him will bow at his feet and repent the miseries and humiliations heaped on his head...

"Whose face is this? Is she still alive? I wish she were and it was not only my wandering brain which painted her. But she had most understanding eyes, and perhaps she will forgive me. Father, is there mercy for me from God? Why are you silent? Ah, you have not read the divine poem."

"My son, yours is a deed most unbelievable. You have sacrificed two lives. May God look at the heart of your folly, not at its cruel exterior.

"Give me your hand, father. My head is throbbing with too sharp a pain. I am a little afraid of the coming darkness."

"There is a Love in which often the darkness feared by the world proves to be pure light. I commend your soul to that Love. Pass in peace."

The friar performed the last ministrations. The dying man listened, tried to smile and before the smile could fade from his lips life was gone. The friar arranged the thin scorched hands, put a crucifix in them and turned sadly to the open window. The town of Udine was asleep, for it was near mid-
night. The clear Italian sky was filled with stars. He moved back to the bed where in one corner the saved manuscript was lying. As he lifted it, the last sheet broke in two, owing to the effect of the fire; but luckily there were only a few lines scribbled there. The friar bent his head and puckered his eyes to decipher them and slowly read a music unknown yet to the world:

All’alta fantasia qui mancò possa;
ma già volgeva il mio disio e il velle,
si come rota ch’igualmente è mossa,
l’Amor che move il sole e l’altre stelle.1

1. Then vigour failed the towering fantasy;
   Yet, like a wheel whose speed no tremble mars,
   Desire rushed on, its spur unceasingly
   The Love that moves the sun and the other stars.
A LETTER TO A CRITICAL FRIEND

What you say about my two short stories may very well be right. They certainly cannot be as good as my poetry — for the simple reason that poetry is almost my life-breath while fiction is not. Your remarks — "They lack point of concentration, a quality so essential in a short story; then, the background is too philosophical and the final effect always presenting an ethical problem" — are very interesting indeed. You have read with care enough to see things in a certain focus and even if I were to disagree with your pronouncement I would feel flattered at finding that you have given my work sufficient attention.

But do I disagree? Well, it is difficult to speak with confidence when I am so little of a short-story writer; but if you are prepared to take my own self-valuation for what it may be worth and with a faith in my assurance that I am trying to speak with as much impartiality and impersonality as possible, I’ll tell you what I think.

The philosophical background is there: I doubt, however, if it is too philosophical. In A Mere Manuscript the issue is left sufficiently to the imagination not to be considered too philosophically suggested: the point of the story is not only that a poet has saved a fellow-poet’s masterpiece at the sacrifice of his own mother’s life though not necessarily as a deliberate act of callousness towards her — the point is also that the masterpiece saved is the Divina Commedia of Dante. If you enter imaginatively into the importance felt of this poem by
all who read poetry with their deepest soul as well as with their living entrails and if you share their burning conviction that such a work of genius is no mere human achievement but something miraculous and superhuman, something of the nature of a revelation, you will understand the tense vibrating core of imagination and emotion from which the brief incident of the story is drawn. Whatever philosophy there may be is submerged in or fused with that white heat — and the limited ethical question is transcended. It is doubtful whether the solution can be called ethical when it is so contrary to ordinary ethical instincts. There would have been a strain of didacticism if I had made the story the illustration of a normally noble or virtuous action. But here you have a transcendence — and the mere emphasis or intensity of it need not be a fault — of ethical values by the divinations and the verities of the art-consciousness.

The Hero belongs to the same plane: both the tales are for artists and can bring to them most acutely a "point of concentration". The "average reader" is bound to feel that the case is not strongly made out — that an unnatural over-stress is there on a certain side which is not part of his flesh and blood. All the same, there is here no plea of art for art's sake: the self-satisfied shallow aestheticism which is usually the meaning of art for art's sake is entirely absent. What is at work is an imaginative passion, a life-thrill coloured or touched by a veiled mystic vision of art. In The Hero I present an artist deluded in spite of his instinct; in A Mere Manuscript, an artist triumphant in face of the most powerful temptation. The closing speech of the old maestro in which he rails at André Chaudanson is no cheap intellectual tag: it has its roots in the heart-throbs of the old man, in the soul-sight a true artist is gifted with. And what saves the speech from being a slick conclusion even as an expression of such a heart-throb or soul-sight is that it comes with an unexpected shock, a flash which reveals the hitherto white as black and vice versa, a sudden yet self-justifying anti-climax. Because the turn is so unexpected and
sudden, you feel that the point of concentration, the final crys-
tallisation, is not there but if you look back and see how the
call of art comes like a divine voice while André’s wrestling
with his conscience is a poor human tragedy compounded
of the man’s response to conventional morality and to his
pseudo-manly *amour propre*, you will trace the undertones
and the overtones which emerge and precipitate themselves
in an articulate intensity in the outburst of the Master which
ends the story. And the action in both the pieces seems too
little because the drama is more psychologically than physi-
cally stressed: much is left to suggestion — the descriptions
are compressed, the movement given a track inward rather
than outward without being taken clean off the material plane
into an abstract philosophy of art: the living quivering fibre of
emotion is touched and the action is felt there and not princip-
ally in the physical sphere, though the one story deals with
a battle and the other with a fire.

So that’s that. I hope I don’t seem too biased in favour of
my brain-children: if you knew the amount of rejection I do,
the vast quantities of written matter I put aside in my effort
to reach the utmost poise and passion of self-expression, you
would surely feel that so rigorous a discipline of self-criticism
might leave one not especially a philoprogenitive old dod-
derer. Of course I don’t pretend that the stories I have written
are the quintessence of me as my poems are, but I am afraid
you have applied to them a criterion not exactly arising from
the type of work they attempt. There are various genres of the
short story and each genre requires a special consideration,
just as each class of poetry does. Still, your criticism is very
welcome and when I attempt a short story again, I’ll try to
make the qualities which appear to you missing more explicit
in order to gain a wider range of effectivity.

P.S. In the meantime, may I show you the comments of Sri
Aurobindo on the two pieces — comments which naturally
bucked me up no end? They are enclosed with this letter.
SRI AUROBINDO'S COMMENTS

On The Hero

It seems to me a good story and certainly it is very well written.

Only, where did you get the idea of the civilians of a town being expected to fight against the invading army? I believe according to the laws of war, as they were then at least, no one was entitled to join in the fighting except the regular military forces. If any others took up arms, the enemy was entitled to shoot them, when captured, without mercy and could not be blamed for doing so. Even the franc tireurs (I think that was the name), volunteers who fought as irregulars in 1870, were considered by the Prussians to come in this category.

It seems to me that what you have written has very distinct qualities as a story (idea, building, writing out) and also narrative power.

16.11.1936

On A Mere Manuscript

It is very good both in language and form and its substance and idea.
SUPPLEMENT

THE MOTHER AND SEHRA
PREFACE

In regard to Sehra’s relation to the Mother I may draw attention to just a couple of points as a brief introduction.

Both are contained in the chapter, “What came out of an Easter Egg”, in my book, Our Light and Delight: Recollections of Life with the Mother, a chapter first published in Mother India before Sehra passed away.

What primarily stands forth as an act of super-Grace on the Mother’s part is the letter she wrote to Sehra after I had brought, on my visit to Pondicherry for the Darshan of 24 April 1953, the Easter Egg Sehra had prepared for her.

As there were some temperamental hitches, as well as unfavourable-seeming circumstances, in the way of Sehra’s entering the Ashram along with me that very year, I told the Mother: “If you directly ask her to come, she will.” The Mother said: “I have never directly asked anybody to come and stay here.” Half jocularly half seriously I ventured to suggest: “Why not make a good beginning now? Do invite her.” The Mother kept quiet with a thoughtful face. But a day or so later she did write a letter of direct invitation.

Unfortunately Sehra received it in surprise and dismay and a surface reaction as if she had been put in a fix and forced to come in spite of her sense of untimeliness. Afterwards there was a deeper understanding of the Mother’s unique gesture. Sehra begged the Mother to forgive her, and expressed her willingness to accompany me in the near future.

On 19 February 1954 we arrived at the Ashram for permanent stay. At the end of a few uncertain months Sehra opened so beautifully to the Mother for good that the extraordinary
letter seemed justified. And here comes the second of the two things I wish to record.

Once the Mother said to me in Sehra's presence: "She knows better than you how to love. Do you know where her soul is?" Then the Mother pointed to the middle of her own chest and continued: "It dwells here quite snugly all the time."

Of course the psychic being's keenly devotional move towards the Divine does not change one's whole nature at once. The rest of the being has itself to consent to change. In measuring progress many factors need weighing. Still, intense love for the Mother is the golden key to a divine future — and whenever we think of Sehra in the wake of her departure from life at about 10.15 a.m. on 24 April 1980, we may remember the Mother's pointer to where her devoted disciple's soul had permanently settled during her life in the Ashram.

AMALKIRAN
A LETTER TO THE MOTHER
AND HER ANSWER

Mother my dearest,

I want to tell you how I meet you in the morning and how in the evening. In the morning I give you with all my love all that is best in myself. In the evening, with love I pick out from God's finest gifts to the earth — gifts like sunsets, mountain-sceneries, seascapes, woods and flowers — the essence of beauty and add to it the essence of beauty from the whole universe, the world of moon and stars, and then I offer it all to you.

Do you know why I do this? It is because when I sit at the Distribution I see three types of people coming to you. There are a very few who offer you their love. A fairly large group is more or less indifferent. Then there is a third batch, still larger, who just grab from you things for themselves because they are thinking only of themselves. So I get very miserable and try to make up for what these people take away.

I think my own love not sufficient because these people are too many; and it is necessary to give you all the best from everywhere.

22.10.1955

The Mother's Answer

We have a poet. It is very nice. I mean, it is true poetry, not false poetry.
A DREAM-VISION ON 14 JUNE, 1956

A LETTER TO THE MOTHER

After the Distribution at the Playground, instead of going into your room you are sitting in a broad gold chair with red plush, which is like a throne. Nobody is there except Amiyo standing near you. There is no electric light. The effect in the atmosphere is as of very faint moonlight. Your dress is also gold and red, both in a different shade from that of the chair, a lighter shade.

I come towards you, hesitatingly, uncertainly, I am wondering what you are doing. You call me. When I go close, you pull me to yourself. I kneel at your side. As I can’t understand what you want to do, I look at you. You catch me by the shoulders and pull me so that my head is in your lap. The feeling is as if I were pulled inside you. You ask me: “Don’t you want it? You have asked for it so many times!” Then I say: “Mother, are you really going to give it to me?” You laugh and reply: “Certainly.” Then you separate me from my body and say: “Now you will never feel separate from me.”

SEHRA
à Sehra
Bonne fête

Programme for the year 1956.

1) Love me more and more perfectly
2) Be more and more happy through that love, knowing that I love you.
3) Be always in good health so that your body never prevents you from coming to me.

With all my love and

blessings

9.9.56
First Statement

This is my experience during the meditation. I had no sense of body. There was nothing except infinite space. Then I heard a voice which said: "From now on, I will rule the world." I asked "Who is that 'I'?" The answer came: "The Supermind." Then I laughed and asked: "But who is the Supermind?" At the same time I said "Sri Aurobindo" as if addressing him — and then there was a sort of stroke on my mind and I knew that I had uttered the answer.

It was all darkness. It was from this darkness that the voice came. When the last answer "Sri Aurobindo" came I was looking into the darkness. Out of it very slowly an egg-shaped fire came. At first it was quite red, then it became a little golden together with red. Then it began to move round and round me. This was the Supermind come forward to rule the world.

Second Statement

When I asked Mother what was the meaning of "From now on", she said: "The very moment the meditation started at 10 o'clock in the morning. So far Sri Aurobindo was not doing anything." Mother herself saw the oval lit-up picture, which was there, of Sri Aurobindo becoming red at first and then golden. It was something grand and intense. The background
of the light was all dark and in the darkness all the gods — Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva — were lying as if heaped like rocks. It meant that their reign had been over and Sri Aurobindo's had begun.
Perhaps the most frightening peep into the unknown which Sehra ever had was recounted by her to the Mother in a letter dated 11 March 1957:

"Before going to bed I asked myself why my prayer for quick recovery in the Mother’s eye-trouble had not been answered. Then I went to sleep. Suddenly someone spoke: ‘Would you like to know why your prayer is not answered and why this attack has come on the Mother’s body?’ He took my hand and we went down and down as if into a deep well. Soon I found myself in a place which was dark and yet visible. The Voice said: ‘The sun never shines here. This place is always as you see it now.’

“I saw people there with human forms, but they were not human beings. They were very huge and hideous, with one or two or three teeth protruding from the mouth. The women were good-looking, yet there was something vicious and dreadful in them. Then we walked along and on a sudden we came to a narrow street. There on both sides human corpses were heaped, bodies over bodies. We went a little further and I saw those strange ugly beings dragging out the corpses, tearing them into pieces and each one looking at his possession and saying, ‘Look what I have got.’

“The bleeding pieces from different parts of the bodies re-
presented different desires and feelings — lust, greed, hatred, jealousy, etc. And the beings who took the pieces and some of whom started eating them were themselves representative of the same desires and feelings. Each got what corresponded to his own nature. All were enjoying themselves over the hold they had on human beings. Many of the corpses were also enjoying what was happening to them. They were not really dead but only looked so: they were alive. A few of them were repelled by the touch of those non-human creatures, yet even these had somewhere a tiny bit in themselves that found enjoyment.

"Then I said, 'Oh please take me away from here.' And the Voice replied, 'This is where the Mother's work is going on and where the attack comes from. Her work is to pull all the human corpses away from this darkness and from these people. The corpses don't allow her to save them. They on the contrary throw on her their evil desires and feelings. So your prayer cannot be answered quickly.'"

When Sehra met the Mother the next day, she told her how utterly sick she was feeling. (She actually took over a fortnight to recover.) The Mother said: "You have seen correctly. I am now working in the subconscient. It is a very terrible region and even worse than what you have described. I am not surprised that you are feeling unwell. But be calm and call my protection and light. You will recover. There is something written by Sri Aurobindo on the subject. I shall tell Nolini to show it to you."

What exactly Nolini showed Sehra — or whether he could find anything quite to the point — is not within recollection. But I do remember Sehra and me thinking: "How little we realise what a stupendous labour of love the Mother has undertaken for us all."
A DREAM-VISION: JANUARY 3, 1962

A LETTER TO THE MOTHER

Early this morning — a little before 3:30 a.m. — I had a dream. I saw you standing in a room high up in a very tall building. You are standing with your back turned towards the door and talking with someone inside. I am standing far below in a garden and looking up at you and saying, "There is Mother standing."

I suddenly see fire coming out of a door on the floor just below the level at which you are. And I realise that the flame is most rapidly mounting up. I see that in a few minutes it will touch your dress. But how am I to warn you? I am so far down that if I climb up it will take too long. So I want to shout. But somebody from behind holds me tight and I feel as if my mouth were shut up by somebody’s hand. I struggle to move away that hand and to shout. But the one who is behind me and shutting my mouth says, "Wait. Just look!"

Then, with the fear that the fire would touch you. I close my eyes and say to myself, in an appeal to Sri Aurobindo, "How can this happen? Mother is divine and she must know that the fire is below her!" Then I open my eyes and see that you are now facing the door and looking at the fire. The fire is touching you and yet nothing happens: it is as if it were playing with you and as if you were talking with it.

The whole scene changes. Now I see you standing in the Ashram where you daily give flowers to people. You are near the chest of drawers and holding a plate in which there is a heap of roses meaning "Surrender". You tell everybody, "Now I will give only this flower, because all of you need it." You push all the other flowers away. But to Vasudha you laugh and say, "I won't give you this." Then you pick out some other
flower and give it to her. I don't know what it is.

Next you look at me where I always stand. You tell me, "Choose your own flower, because I won't give you the Surrender rose." You distribute the roses and I am searching for my flower from a tray near me. Many kinds of flowers are there. After distributing the roses, you come to me saying, "Which flower have you chosen?" I say, "Mother, the one I want is not there." So you say, "All right. Then I will give you the one you want." Already you have something in one hand which you are keeping closed. From the tray you also pick up a flower with the other hand. You come over to where you always give flowers to me.

Then you open the palm which you were keeping closed, and you ask me, "Is this the flower you want?" I search for the flower in your palm, but I don't see it. Yet I feel and know inside me that there is a flower. So I look at you and say, "Mother, I know the flower is there. How is it I can't see it?" You reply, "My child, that is the very flower you have chosen — the flower meaning 'The Divine's Invisible Truth'. You have been searching for this truth. Already I have made you see something of it today when you saw me at the edge of the door high up with the fire mounting towards me. Looking with your human eyes you feared, but at the end you saw the truth that I am the Divine and so the fear you had was gone."

Then you pull me near to you and I put out my hands to hold you as I usually do. Suddenly I see that there are many people behind you and I draw back. Then you say, "Let them see. They must know everything now." And you take me in your arms and give me the flower which you were holding in your other hand. The flower is: "The Joy of Faithfulness." And inside this flower there is just one petal of "The Divine's Love". You say, "At present take this. It will do. By and by you will find the whole of the flower meaning 'The Divine's Invisible Truth'."

SEHRA
Sehra: Mother, did you read my letter mentioning the predictions made by astrologers about February?

Mother: Yes. Many people have asked me about these predictions. The astrologers say that something bad will happen. Even Punditji says so. Every time I hear all those things I try to see what the truth is. But always there is a blank. I see nothing. There is neither a Yes nor a No. This may mean that nothing is going to happen. Or else it may be the Supreme's Will that I should know nothing and not interfere with anything. Usually I don't interfere with happenings in Nature.

Sehra: But, Mother, aren't you and the Supreme the same?

Mother: Yes, and when I go into a trance I see everything. Even in the present case I must have seen everything, but when I come back into the outer consciousness I sometimes forget and there is a blank.

Sehra: You mean you want to forget and so you don't remember.

Mother: You may put it like that if you wish. But when I am meant to interfere I clearly remember everything I see in my trance. For instance, I see the great threat of a world war, and I put all my force against it to prevent anything that may develop into a world war. Even lately I have done that.

Sehra: I am asking you about the astrologers' predictions because it is said that half of Bombay will be submerged in water. I feel very worried; my people are staying just opposite the beach in Bombay. Will the predictions come true?
Mother: Well, if anything bad threatens to happen, we’ll see about it and prevent that also.

23 February 1962

Mother: Why were you so late? You are always in time here.

Sehra: I was cooking for my guests.

Mother: Have you come straight from your cooking?

Sehra: Yes.

Mother: Oh, that’s why I have such a delicious smell. You must have prepared something very nice. It is so nice that I would like to eat it. I keep on smelling it. Yes, it is delicious. But, you know, I can’t eat at present because my teeth are weak. When I get a new set of teeth — I mean not false, the real ones — then I’ll ask you to prepare some food for me.

24 February 1962

Mother: You must have been in Egypt once, an Egyptian lady.

Sehra: Mother, why do you say this?

Mother: Because I saw, just now, behind your shoulders, an Egyptian god with a head-gear on which there was an eagle. You were as if standing held and protected by him.

Sehra: You are protecting me now. So it must be you at that time also.

Mother: Yes, I know, but I don’t like always to say it was I or that I have done this or that. You see, it must have been a promise given at that time and it is being fulfilled now. Similarly the promise which is given now will be fulfilled in the course of time — in the future.
AN EXPERIENCE RECOLLECTED

A REPORT BY AMAL KIRAN

It was in 1963. Sehra was ill. I informed the Mother. Having acted as usual with her spiritual force she expected a result. But somehow the attack of asthma continued. Then a strange incident took place. I wrote to the Mother about it.

On the night of January 13, racked by a terrible asthmatic spasm, Sehra was sitting on her bed with her legs hanging to the floor. She felt her feet were getting cold; so she wanted to put on her sandals. When she bent towards them she became aware of something at once very soothing and very energising. To her great surprise she faced the Mother’s bare feet putting on her own sandals as if getting ready to go out. Immediately Sehra touched those feet and exclaimed: “Oh the Mother is here!” Soon afterwards, she lay down in bed and went to sleep. When she woke up, she was completely cured.

The Mother confirmed later that Sehra had not indulged her imagination. The Mother’s feet had been really there — rather something of her that took the form of her feet in order to become perceptible to Sehra.

I have learnt on reliable authority that when the Mother recounted this whole incident to a French disciple she gave it as an example of what could happen by way of an automatic response on her part and introduced it with the words: “Quelqu’un qui m’aime vraiment, c’est Sehra, la femme d’Amal...” (“Someone who loves me truly, it is Sehra, the wife of Amal...”)
The Letter

Last night Amal told me that you had spoken of “a permanent home of Sri Aurobindo in the subtle-physical”. At once my mind went back to a dream in last September.

This is how it ran:

I enter the Ashram and see that there is some difference in the building. I say, “Well, something has changed.” And I see a staircase and climb up. I pass through a corridor upstairs towards a room at the end of it. In this room there are cupboards very high, reaching near to the ceiling. All the walls are lined with such cupboards which have moon-silver panels and glass doors. On top of the cupboards there are lovely vases of various colours and designs — vases such as we never find on earth. I am standing at the door of the room. On the floor I see a carpet one-foot thick, adorned with beautiful designs and I say to myself, “This room with book-cupboards is not Mother’s room. It belongs to Sri Aurobindo. All these books are written by him.”

Then I look for another room, thinking Mother might be there. I see a room and go to its door. But I find something quite different from what I was expecting. It is not Mother’s room. The whole room is made as if of moon-silver. And the
furniture consists of two beds, two cupboards, two dressing-tables — everything two. All the furniture is carved out of moon-silver. And the arrangement of things draws from me the exclamation, “How beautiful!” Then I say to myself again, “Some day in the future, Mother and Sri Aurobindo will come and stay here.”

So again I search for another room where I may see Mother. I find a third room. This room is not of moon-silver. It is a little golden in colour. The carpet is also as if of gold stuff — very soft, with a flower-design in red. And I see on the carpet four or five low small Japanese tables, all carved in gold. On the tables there are plates with fruits that we never see on earth. And there are some tiny toys on the carpet — rabbits and deer and other animals — as if they were decorations. Then I just kneel down and stretch my hand to touch and pick up one of the toys. Suddenly the toy becomes alive and runs away. All the others also start moving to form a new pattern. Then I know that all these animals are real ones. I say to myself, “Oh this is the dining room. But where can I see Mother?”

While I am wondering, I hear a voice saying, “Mother is with Sri Aurobindo and very busy. So you won’t see her today.” I turn back to go away and say, “My God, so much wealth is here — more than the wealth of the whole world, and why is Mother always telling me I must bring wealth to her?” Then I go down the stairs and — wake up.

Mother, what do you think of my dream? Have I seen something really there? Is it Sri Aurobindo’s permanent home?

I may add that the whole dream — everything in it — was bathed in an atmosphere and a light of moon-silver.

When I told Amal about it, he quoted to me four lines from Sri Aurobindo’s poem, *A God’s Labour*:

A little more and the new life’s doors
Shall be carved in silver light
Sri Aurobindo's Home in the Subtle-Physical

With its aureate roof and mosaic floors
In a great world bare and bright.

27.2.1963

The Mother's Reply

It is certainly part of His permanent home in the subtle-physical— a part of it only. Once, surely, you will meet Him there.
Dearest Mother,

I am very sorry to trouble you but a certain experience needs to be told so that I may have your guidance.

It has been going on for several months and now it is more intense. All objects around me — including bottles and soaps and even stones and walls — are like living beings. You know that I was always in contact with the life of trees, but this is something new. To make you see how far it has gone I will tell you my experience of last night.

I woke up suddenly from sleep as if somebody had been calling me. I sat puzzled for a while and then thought of going to the bathroom. The moment I entered it, all objects started speaking to me. The mug said, “You haven’t put me in my right place near the pail.” And the water in the pail said, “You didn’t wash your face with me but with tap-water.” There were also other things I had not done as usual — things which I purposely do every day to satisfy the demand of the objects.

So I understood that these objects had woken me up. I felt as if they were beginning to possess me. I don’t mind making them happy, but I shouldn’t get cracked. What is happening and what should I do?
The Mother's Remarks

There is nothing to be alarmed about. I consider this sensitivity as natural. It is simply that you are becoming more conscious, and there is not much difficulty in telling these things, before you retire, to keep quiet during the night in order not to disturb your sleep.

With love and blessings.

Sehra's Interview: 1.10.1963

As soon as I went to Mother, she asked, "Are you still in contact with them?"

"With whom?" I questioned, a little surprised.

"With the objects around you."

"Yes, Mother, but I must tell you that after I wrote to you I felt rather guilty. At night they seemed to say, 'So you have told Mother about us.'"

"There is nothing to feel guilty about. And, as I wrote to you, you must keep in contact with them, because you will then begin to see many things. But you must have some control over the objects. To them you are like a God and they will obey and do what you want. You must be calm and firm with them and not allow them to grip you in any way.

"You know how, when I used to give flowers, the flowers spoke to me, sometimes asking to be picked up. Even when I was in France, objects used to speak. I had a vegetable and flower garden. Often the vegetables would call me from afar when I was in my own room. They would say, 'Pick us up, we are ready.' And I would go and see and find they were right... It is good to open yourself. You will learn a lot."
Dearest Mother

Some time back I said to you that I would like to tell you something about my state of health and mind.

In 1956 or 1957 I had a dream. Some being was saying to me what my life would be like if I stayed here with you. I was shown everything. There was darkness, and big stones were thrown from all sides on my body, completely breaking it. Then the being showing me this said: "If you live with the Mother, this is what she will do to you." I replied: "Never mind. Let the body break."

Then again the being said: "Not only your body but also your mind will break." And again I replied: "It doesn't matter. Let her do what she likes."

Then I was shown the other side. If I left you, my body would be quite healthy and everything would be most pleasant. After seeing this, I still said: "I have chosen to live with the Mother."

So far, my eyes were shut during the dream. Then, in the dream itself, I opened them. Everything was quiet, and on the horizon I saw a band of light.

Mother, I want to know the meaning of all this. The dream has come true in regard to my body and mind. My body is becoming weaker and weaker. All my energy is going and I can't work even to occupy my mind. I feel as if I were being broken to pieces. And I get ideas which are not healthy. This condition is there not only in Pondicherry but more or less in
Bombay too. The general feeling is as if you were breaking me in order to make from me something that you wish. Is that true?

And what about that band of light on the horizon? Is it something meant to be after this life or in this life itself?

Please let me know the truth.

With love,

SEHRA

The Mother’s Interpretation

The eyes closed represent ordinary consciousness which is blind to the truth.

When you opened your eyes you saw the light of the truth towards which you are going. What is needed is the endurance and the patience to face the apparently unpleasant preparation that is making you ready to emerge in the light of the truth.

Keep your faith in the Divine and all will be well.
A MESSAGE HEARD ON
NOVEMBER 17, 1974

BEFORE PASSING IN A QUEUE THROUGH THE MOTHER'S ROOM

"Do not look for me only in my room. I have liberated myself from my human body. I am now everywhere."

SEHRA
A DREAM-VISION OF THE MOTHER

Outside Sri Aurobindo’s room I was waiting for the Mother to come from the room in the eastern wing where she used to stand and receive people in the course of every morning. Some people were in that room. The Mother entered it, spoke with them and then turned and saw me.

Smiling, she put both her arms forward as if to draw me towards her. I went and held her hands and told her: “Mother, I am depressed because I’ve to see you only in my dreams — and that also not every night.”

She then took me near Sri Aurobindo’s room and said a little angrily: “Why can’t you open your eyes and see me whenever you want to see? I am always there. Why should people think they can see me only in their dreams?”

I replied: “Mother, I am an ordinary person. Many a time I feel your presence just next to me, and I try to see you but I can’t. How can I with my eyes open — unless you do something for me?”

She laughed and, tapping my left shoulder, said: “Have some patience.”

1974

SEHRA
TWO INDEPENDENT REMEMBRANCES

(These remembrances are independent not only in the sense that both record individual impressions that arose spontaneously on the two occasions mentioned but also in the sense that neither author saw the writing of the other before putting down his own vision.)

SEHRA — LAST VIEW (25.4.1980)

by Ravindra Khanna

I entered the room a little trepidant — expecting to see a face with all the mental agonies and physical afflictions engraed on it. But a most marvellous sight met my gaze. Such beauty of a blissful calm enveloped it that its ripples could be felt all over the room. She was no longer the Sehra I had been seeing over the years — as if all the ravages of long physical agonies had been effaced and given place to the radiance of a spiritual love and compassion for all. All through my stay in the room I could not take my eyes off this spiritual beauty suffusing a human body and it was impossible to believe that it was a corpse with all life extinct from it.

Surely her soul chose this blessed hour to depart obeying some gesture from Above. Even to recall her face in imagination opens up new heights for the soul. I could visualise what Sri Aurobindo had meant when he wrote:
Calm faces of the gods on backgrounds vast...

There was no trace of any dissatisfaction or disgust with life but only a benign and compassionate goodwill for all from one who had left the unquiet lands far away.

12.5.1980

2

FREEDOM — 24.4.1980

by Amal Kiran

With the Far-away’s call
Quickening your heart-beat
You freed yourself from all
Earth’s bitter-sweet.

Terrible at times the means
By which the soul
Drops out of mortal space
To its inmost goal.

A moment your whole life hung
'Twixt heaven and abyss;
Then the Great Mother caught you
In Her arms of bliss.

No shadow fell from the past.
A smiling future’s light
Flowered through your face to answer
Our clamorous questioning sight.

26.4.1980
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51. India and the World Scene
K. D. Sethna, otherwise known as Amal Kiran – a name given to him by Sri Aurobindo, is a radiant multifaceted genius living unassumingly in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Born in 1904 he joined the Ashram in 1927 and is one of the foremost disciples of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, fortunately still amongst us today. He is a distinguished poet, a literary critic, an artist and a seer. (kavi). Apart from his own poems he is a great prose writer on a wide variety of subjects – poetry, literature, history, Christianity, philosophy and of course Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. He has been the editor of Mother India, the monthly periodical from Pondicherry, since 1949.