“The limitations of the body are a mould; soul and mind have to pour themselves into them, break them and constantly remould them in wider limits till the formula of agreement is found between this finite and their own infinity.”

Thoughts and Glimpses, SABCL, Vol. 16, p. 386

Sweet Mother, how should we understand: “the limitations of the body are a mould”?

If you did not have a body with a precise form, if you were not a formed individuality, fully conscious and having its own qualities, you would all be fused into one another and be indistinguishable. Even if we go only a little inwards, into the most material vital being, there is such a mixture between the vibrations of different people that it is very difficult to distinguish any of you. And if you did not have a body, it would be a sort of inextricable pulp. Therefore, it is the form, this precise and apparently rigid form of the body, which distinguishes you one from another. So this form serves as a mould. (Speaking to the child) Do you know what a mould is? — Yes! One pours something inside, in a liquid or semi-liquid form, and when it cools down one can break the mould and have the object in a precise form. Well, the form of the body serves as a mould in which the vital and mental forces can take a precise form, so that you can become an individual being separate from others.

It is only gradually, very slowly, through the movements of life and a more or less careful and thorough education that you begin to have sensations which are personal to you, feelings and ideas which are personal to you. An individualised mind is something extremely rare, which comes only after a long education;
otherwise it is a kind of thought-current passing through your brain and then through another's and then through a multitude of other brains, and all this is in perpetual movement and has no individuality. One thinks what others are thinking, others think what still others are thinking, and everybody thinks like that in a great mixture, because these are currents, vibrations of thought passing from one to another. If you look at yourself attentively, you will very quickly become aware that very few thoughts in you are personal. Where do you draw them from? — From what you have heard, from what you have read, what you have been taught, and how many of these thoughts you have are the result of your own experience, your own reflection, your purely personal observation? — Not many.

Only those who have an intense intellectual life, who are in the habit of reflecting, observing, putting ideas together, gradually form a mental individuality for themselves.

Most people — and not only those who are uneducated but even the well-read — can have the most contradictory, the most opposite ideas in their heads without even being aware of the contradictions. I have seen numerous examples like that, of people who cherished ideas and even had political, social, religious opinions on all the so-called higher fields of human intelligence, who had absolutely contradictory opinions on the same subject, and were not aware of it. And if you observe yourself, you will see that you have many ideas which ought to be linked by a sequence of intermediate ideas which are the result of a considerable widening of the thought if they are not to coexist in an absurd way.

Therefore, before an individuality becomes truly individual and has its own qualities, it must be contained in a vessel, otherwise it would spread out like water and would no longer have any form at all. Some people, at a rather lower level, know themselves only by the name they bear. They would not be able to distinguish themselves from their neighbours except by their name. They are asked, “Who are you?” — “My name is this.”
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A little later they tell you the name of their occupation or about their main characteristic. If they are asked, “Who are you?” — “I am a painter.”

But at a certain level the only answer is the name. And what is a name? It is nothing but a word, isn’t that so? And what is there behind? Nothing. It is a whole collection of vague things which do not at all represent a person as different from his neighbour. He is differentiated only because he has another name. If everybody bore the same name, it would be very difficult to distinguish one person from another!

I read to you the other day from that book on aviation\footnote{Saint-Exupéry, \textit{Terre des hommes}.} the story of the slave who, whenever he was asked a question, always answered by his name. But that was already a progress compared with all those who were given the name of slave — for all of them it was the same one — and they all accepted to have the same name, and therefore to be the same person. For they had no individuality at all, they only had an occupation; and that occupation being the same for a successive number of slaves, they all had the same name.

One lives by a kind of habit which is barely half-conscious — one lives, does not even objectify what one does, why one does it, how one does it. One does it by habit. All those who are born in a certain environment, a certain country, automatically take the habits of that environment, not only material habits but habits of thought, habits of feeling and habits of acting. They do it without watching themselves doing it, quite naturally, and if someone points this out to them they are astonished.

As a matter of fact, one has the habit of sleeping, speaking, eating, moving and one does all this as something quite natural, without wondering why or how... And many other things. All the time one does things automatically, by force of habit, one does not watch oneself. And so, when one lives in a particular society, one automatically does what is normally done in that
society. And if somebody begins to watch himself acting, watch himself feeling and thinking, he looks like a kind of phenomenal monster compared with the environment he lives in.

Therefore, individuality is not at all the rule, it is an exception, and if you do not have that sort of bag, a particular form which is your outer body and your appearance, you could hardly be distinguished from one another.

Individuality is a conquest. And, as Sri Aurobindo says here, this first conquest is only a first stage, and once you have realised within you something like a personal independent and conscious being, then what you have to do is to break the form and go farther. For example, if you want to progress mentally, you must break all your mental forms, all your mental constructions to be able to make new ones. So, to begin with, a tremendous labour is required to individualise oneself, and afterwards one must demolish all that has been done in order to progress. But as you do not watch yourself doing things and as it is the custom — not everywhere, of course; let us say here — the custom to work, to read, to develop yourself, to try to do something, to form yourself a little, you do it quite naturally and without even watching yourself, as I said.

And only when these external forms come into a mutual friction you begin to feel that you are different from others. Otherwise you are this person or that, according to the name you bear. It is only when there is a friction, when something does not go smoothly, that you become aware of a difference, then you see that you are different, otherwise you are not aware of it and you are not different. In fact, you are very, very little different from one another.

How many things in your life are done at least essentially in the same way as others. For instance, sleeping, moving and eating, and all sorts of things like that. Never have you asked yourselves why you do a thing in one way and not another. You wouldn’t be able to say. If I asked you, “Why do you act in this way and not that?” you wouldn’t know what to say. But it is
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quite simply because you were born in certain conditions and it is the habit to be like that in these conditions. Otherwise, if you had been born in another age and other conditions, you would act altogether differently without even realising the difference, it would appear absolutely natural to you.... For instance — a very, very small instance — in most Western countries and even in some Eastern ones, people sew like this, from right to left; in Japan they sew from left to right. Well, it seems quite natural to you to sew from right to left, doesn’t it? That is how you have been taught and you don’t think about it, you sew in that way. If you go to Japan and they see you sewing, it makes them laugh, for they are in the habit of sewing differently. It is the same thing with writing. You write like this, from left to right, but there are people who write from top to bottom, and others who write from right to left, and they do it most naturally. I am not speaking of those who have studied, reflected, compared ways of writing, I am not speaking of more or less learned people, no, I am speaking of quite ordinary people, and above all of children who do what is done around them, quite spontaneously and without questioning. But then, when by chance or circumstance they are faced with a different way, it is a tremendous revelation for them that things can be done in a different way from theirs.

And these are quite simple things, I mean the ones which strike you, but this is true down to the smallest detail. You do things in this way because in the place and environment in which you live they are done in this way. And you do not watch yourself doing them.

Indeed, the source was One, you see, and creation had to be manifold. And it must have represented quite a considerable labour to make this multiplicity conscious of being multiple.

And if one observes very attentively, if creation had kept the memory of its origin, it would perhaps never have become a diverse multiplicity. There would have been at the centre of each being the sense of perfect unity, and the diversity would — perhaps — never have been expressed.
Through the loss of the memory of this unity began the possibility of becoming conscious of differences; and when one goes into the inconscient, at the other end, one falls back into a sort of unity that’s unconscious of itself, in which the diversity is as unexpressed as it is in the origin.

At both ends there is the same absence of diversity. In one case it is through a supreme consciousness of unity, in the other through a perfect unconsciousness of unity.

The fixity of form is the means by which individuality can be formed.

That’s all, then.