

## FORTY YEARS AGO

SAHANA DEVI

It was long ago that I came away to Sri Aurobindo Ashram, in November 1928. Since then more than forty years have elapsed in this sacred pilgrim centre sanctified by the tread of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo in observing their Divine Play.

At the time of my joining the Ashram the inmates were between sixty and seventy in number. Of these the sadhikas were not more than a dozen. In the facial expressions and glances of these one could detect that they had all received and acquired something, discernible in their firm movements — apparently all were concentratedly merged in their sadhana, in a sincere and vigilant effort to prepare themselves for the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo. This sadhana did not mean sitting down to meditate or following any set method for them but whatever they did, physical work or literary pursuits, individually or collectively, was all done in a spirit of sadhana. Thus, all did not follow one single way, one sole course, but each one took one's own inner bent in treading the Path, since there never was, nor is, any fixed, particular method or course. Neither did their actions follow the unalterable, age-long rules laid down from days of yore. It was clear that the sadhana here did not depend on them. What it did depend on was quite something else. What one felt with-<sup>1</sup> in very tangibly, coming not at all from the outside world, was the prevailing atmosphere of the Ashram. No sooner than one crossed the portals one seemed to step into a silence so solid that a single word uttered loudly seemed a jarring discordant noise to one's own ears. It did

not take one long to realise that the rhythms of life were quite other than the ordinary but felt that that on which the foundation of this rhythm was laid was densely pervading the silence reigning

there. The life of the inmates was unfolding through a delectable silence. One never came across gossipings, disturbances of any kind; very few were the lazy conversations indulged in. All seemed to be steeped in their inner feelings. The inmates hardly ever visited one another, except on specially needed occasions.

What we understand by the "Ashram" is the main building where the Mother and Sri Aurobindo have lived. It consisted of four small houses in an entire block, previously they must have been four separate houses, that were subsequently rebuilt according to the needs. In the house at the North-Eastern corner of the block the Mother and Sri Aurobindo lived on the first floor. On this floor too a room was used for "Darshan", where at other times the Mother used to interview those who sought to meet her. On the ground-floor in a couple of rooms lived Nolini Kanta Gupta and just next door lived Amrita. The hall in front of their rooms was the Meditation Hall. Just outside the Hall on the Eastern side of the passage was Ambalal Purani's room. Purani was at one time a leading light of the youth movement in Gujarat. In the other building attached to the house of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo lived 'Pavitra', a Frenchman named P. B. Saint-Hilaire, on the first floor. Chandulal, the Ashram engineer, lived in a room of the ground-floor of this building. This building, too, had a door leading to the road on the North. The Mother used this door to leave the Ashram premises for her daily

evening drive lasting for about an hour and a half. It was Pavitra who drove the Mother's car. Many inmates of the Ashram used to assemble near the door at the hour of the Mother's going out to get a glimpse of her. Later the old building was pulled down and a new one constructed on the site.

As one enters the main gate of the Ashram one comes at once to a house called the Library House. Previously Sri Aurobindo occupied the room at the South-eastern corner and the Mother the North room, both on the first floor. It

was in this room that Sri Aurobindo had one of his special realisations after which he withdrew from public gaze. When I joined the Ashram it was Anilbaran Roy who was living in that room. And the Mother's room was allotted to Champaklal, whom we always saw and still see as a devoted personal servitor of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo. On the ground-floor of this building was the Ashram library. In another room called the Reading Room were kept the newspapers arranged on mats covering the floor; the inmates, in the pauses of their daily duties and if they so wanted it, came here to glance through them. In the courtyard facing it was a thatched shed where the milkmen brought their cows supplying the milk required. Before milking, their udders used to be washed with a mild solution of potassium permanganate. The inmate who was in charge used to strain the freshly foaming milk through a clean piece of cloth. This inmate was called 'Dara' — a name given by Sri Aurobindo. He belonged to a well-to-do Arab Muslim family who had come to join

the Ashram about a month before me. The family consisted of three brothers and two sisters along with their step mother. All of them were handsome.

Across the Library House one stepped into a smaller courtyard. On the left of this there was a tiled hut used as the kitchen. Cooking was done by maid-servants, but food was served by the inmates. Sadhikas had not yet been engaged for these services which happened a year or two after my arrival. I too cooked twice a week. I was apt to use oils and butter in excess which was the occasion of a quip from Sri Aurobindo: "If Sahana were entrusted with the cooking, the Ashram would go bankrupt in three months." Soon the number of inmates went up and now it had increased so greatly that men had to be enlisted to tackle the problem. Chunibhai who was in full charge of everything concerning food was named by Sri Aurobindo "Dyuman". He went to the market for purchasing everything needed, undertaking various other commissions besides. The kitchen was named

Rosary House, beyond the courtyard of which one came to the building that housed the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Now one can hardly differentiate the old houses on the site of which stands the main building. What is now recognised as "The Ashram" is a large building including a spacious courtyard — a result of many demolitions and new constructions. In the middle of this courtyard shines in splendour the "Samadhi" of Sri Aurobindo. A newly built second floor over the very house where Sri Aurobindo lived, now houses the Mother.

At the time of my arrival most of the houses where the inmates lived were rented. Each one of them was given a particular name by the Mother and thus referred to by all.

Three meals were served every day. A big bowl of phosco that had a taste similar to cocoa but ever so much more tasty, a few slices of toast and one banana. The dining-room was a longish, average sized room with a tiled roof, situated at the . North-western corner of the main building. Among those who served our meals was Nolini, dishing out our phosco and toast. At mid-day we were given some rice and two courses of cooked vegetable or one of vegetable and another of dal (lentils), as a variation on some days we were served with khichree and several kinds of vegetables fried in butter. A big bowl of curd and two bananas were a regular feature. One could also have bread instead of rice or even bread and rice if one so wanted them. The evening meal, before darkness spread its cloak over the land, consisted of bread, a vegetable dish or dal and a big bowl of milk. Two or three times a week we got rice cooked in milk and sweetened — the quantity served was as much as the usual bowl of milk. There were some who did not sit at meals in the dining? room. These and the sadhikas were served in their room by maid-servants.

On the first day of every month the Mother used to distribute to all the inmates the necessities for the month in the shape of soap, oil, towels, etc. — of course regulated by a

quota and one had to keep within the limits of this quota. The distribution was done on the first floor hall of the Library House, which took place in the afternoon. The Mother sitting on a raised seat distributed to each sadhak who came forward to receive from her hands a cardboard box bearing his name containing the articles; along with this the Mother used to give us two rupees as pocket money.

The part flowers have played in the Ashram has been quite unique, perhaps astonishing to an observer from outside. Flowers have always had a deep rapport with life lived here. Each flower was recognised by its inner vibration by the Mother and named by her according to its significance, and it so happened that we were prone to forget the usual names of most flowers. For example, the Tulsi plant meant 'devotion'. We have become used to calling this plant 'devotion', receive it from the Mother as such and offering it to her in the same spirit. Similarly the flower 'shefali' is called 'aspiration'. In this way flowers are not looked upon as just flowers but seen from a different point of view. Flowers everywhere are associated with offerings as well as for decorating the house of God. Here it is something more — a silent language in our inner dealings with the Mother. Nearly always we express to the Mother through flowers our inner needs and aspirations, our obeissance surging from our heart and she, too, gives us her blessings and directives through flowers.

PRANAM

The daily march of our life every morning began after bowing down to our Mother and with her blessings. She used to come

downstairs at about 6.30 in the morning in one of the rooms on the eastern row of the courtyard. It is here that Bula, the sadhak in charge of the Electric Department is lodged now. A raised seat with velvet covering was placed for her. Just beside her in a tray were heaped flowers of various kind. One by one as we approached to bow to her,

she gave each one of us a flower after placing her hand on our heads. It was through these flowers that she gave her directions. We too took the flowers with an ardent effort to divine what she meant. With the flower in hand we used to come out of the room, except a few who sat in meditation there. Every living moment in those days was eked out in an attitude of becoming aware of the reason why life here was bound to something other, never to be forgotten, and why one was here. That which we felt seemed to open out a new line giving a fresh turn to everything — a change of one's point of view, as if we were learning things anew in a new light. Life was stirring to a new dream. Something within seemed to become alive rendering intensely concrete our asking and receiving.

There was a time when the Mother used to distribute soup every evening at eight o'clock in the reception room of the Library House facing the main gate. It was a ceremony rendering the atmosphere deep and intimate. She used to sit on a chair placed on a raised dais and all the lights, except a dim one, were put out. Just in front of her on a small table the large receptacle containing the soup was placed. She at first meditated for a while keeping both her hands stretched full length over

the container invoking Sri Aurobindo's power into it. The meditation over, the container was moved to the right side for her to begin the distribution. The disciples sat, each one of them at his place appointed by the Mother herself. Each one, an empty cup in hand, approached her and handing the cup over to her bowed down in pranam at her feet. As he or she got up the Mother gave him or her the cup. The cups received, the disciples, one by one, would leave the room. The distribution of soup took about an hour, and was accomplished in perfect silence; all were merged in a deep inner feeling in that dim light, a feeling of a different world, an impressive far-off existence pressed upon the consciousness of all and slowly spread all around the

room surcharging the atmosphere as if a tangible influence was at work consolidating all that was external and inner in a seeming vagueness of one's personal existence. We hardly understood where we were but became aware of all kinds of feelings of many worlds. How enchanting the Mother appeared then to our eyes! Also, it was at that hour that diverse divine expressions used to manifest from her. If one looked into her eyes, one became aware of a look in them, not quite human, a look that penetrated into the inner depths of our physical body, observing all, into the farthest corners. Her smile was beyond comparison. Often she entered into trance with the cup in her hand, motionless as a statue. But as soon as she returned to her bodily consciousness the distribution went on as before as if nothing had happened a short while ago — utterly simple and natural as ever.

At the time when I came here, Sri Aurobindo along with the Mother granted three Darshans every year — once on his birthday on the 15th of August, once on the Mother's birthday on the 21st February and once again on the 24th November. It was on this date in 1926 that there happened the "Descent of the Overmind" and from that date he withdrew into seclusion. He later wrote to Nirodbaran — "It was the descent of Krishna into the physical. Krishna is not the Supramental Light. The descent of Krishna would mean the descent of the overmind godhead preparing though not itself actually the descent of supermind and Ananda. Krishna is the Anandamaya, he supports the evolution through the overmind leading it towards the Ananda." It was also proclaimed that I was retiring — obviously to work things out." A few years later, from 1939 onwards—on the 24th April the day of Mother's final arrival, another Darshan was granted making four Darshans every year.

Let me relate here what it was that occurred, ushering in the Darshan in April as also of our painful feelings. Sri

Aurobindo could be seen only on the Darshan days and no other. Therefore to get his Darshan was something to eagerly look forward to — to wait from one Darshan to another with a thirst in the heart beating eagerly but not easily appeased. Can one ever have his expectations fulfilled, having seen Sri Aurobindo only once? Just seeing him cannot be called a Darshan of Sri Aurobindo. Each Darshan in our life was an experience, nearly a supra-realisation. It brought to us the golden opportunity to reach out to the unattainable. He instilled into us

something that no one else could. Thus as the Darshan day approached our minds, too leaned to a self-gathering, with a view to receiving rightly; this occupied the whole of ourselves. Darshan was to start at seven o'clock in the morning. I had a room, those days, in a small one-storied building across the road, opposite to the Darshan room. I lived alone. The room where Darshan used to be is the very next one to the Mother's room, just above the gate of that building, easily visible from my room. The decorations of the Darshan room began usually from the previous night. From my room I could hear the hum of those engaged in the work and see the arrival of flowers in abundance and other paraphernalia. The awareness of all this gave rise to waves of joy in me to feel that soon as the morning broke I would see Sri Aurobindo, approach him and receive his touch — things of such wonderful feelings. As I was proceeding for Darshan in the morning of 24th November 1938, someone told me, "There will be no Darshan today". I was shocked and promptly said, "What rot are you talking?" The speaker in a pale and hurt countenance said, "Please inform yourself", and moved away with his head lowered. In the meanwhile I had recovered myself to realise that I had been unnecessarily rude. I approached Nolini to find out what the matter was, meeting on the way many who had come for Darshan loitering with dejected mien. What I heard was that as Sri Aurobindo got up from his chair after replying to our letters, he stumbled on the stuffed head of a tiger skin.

Thee fall was the cause of fracturing the bone above the knee. One could easily surmise the mental anguish of the ashramities at this news. A dark dejection enveloped me, I felt as if all daylight had been extinguished. I could hardly recollect how the ; day passed. In the evening the Mother alone gave Darshan in the hall just in front of Amrita's room. Her compassion flowing in a hundred streams began to wash away the defection from our minds. She filled all the profound emptiness in our hearts with her incomparable heavenly smile. We were uplifted by her inspiration and strength and we found our feet to rise again. Still I must admit I could not bear for long to see her giving Darshan alone. The next Darshan was to be on the 21st February 1939, but this too did not take place. Then after thee two lapses the first Darshan was on the 24th April 1939, which has become since then a regular one.

Another page of the chronicle of the Ashram was turned, a new era started: Sri Aurobindo's correspondence with the disciples came to an end as also the intimate interviews with the; Mother. She gave her own room as well as the one where She used to grant interviews, for the attention and service needed for Sri Aurobindo. The Mother went into another room which was so limited that to meet her alone was no longer convenient. Things had to be spoken before all those who were also assembled there for her directions on various matters. A small secluded corner was prepared for- her to rest in. But how little rest did she get! For the personal attention to Sri Aurobindo, Dr. Manilal of Baroda, Becharlal and Nirodbaran, Satyendra, Purani, Mulshankar and Champaklal, all inmates of the Ashram, were chosen. Later when Prabhat Sanyal began to visit the; Ashram he too was in attendance on

Sri Aurobindo. Whenever Nirod came out of Sri Aurobindo's presence we were all very eager and expectant to hear from him the words of Sri Aurobindo in the conversations he had with them. Nirod used to come often and join Dilip at breakfast where a few

other inmates gathered around to hear about Sri Aurobindo and his talks and we heard a good deal of talks of Sri Aurobindo. Nirod and the others attending used to glean out of him a lot of light with their questions on various matters touching upon subjects valuable and attractive. Their questions were of many sorts, multifarious were the topics dwelt upon. It hardly needs mentioning that any talk given by Sri Aurobindo is a priceless treasure. All that is in the treasure house of his knowledge cannot possibly be found anywhere else. With this in view Nirod and Purani too made all effort to get down in writing as much as they could without letting any opportunity escape. They were noting down as far as was possible all those talks of Sri Aurobindo. (Those talks, as "Evening Talks", have been published in a book by Purani. Nirod too has brought out a book called "Talks with Sri Aurobindo". Nirod has even translated his into Bengali and published it.) Moreover in these talks we often come across the amazing witticisms, razor sharp and skilful, of Sri Aurobindo as well as a great deal of the banter indulged in, highly appreciated by all. We heard a lot of amusing stories. The days were passed in listening to these amusing topics as well as spiritual experiences. Through our conversations with Nirod day after day we got, as it were, close to Sri Aurobindo in so many different ways.

Without these it would not have been possible to be aware of his many-sided personality with so much clarity; on the contrary, perhaps it would have remained quite beyond even our imagination. Since the time Nirod and others were with Sri Aurobindo, whenever it became necessary to tell him something important from us we would send it through Nirod and he got the answer from Sri Aurobindo not written down but given orally.

After being in the Ashram for some time gradually it became clear that the Mother or Sri Aurobindo as a rule gave no set directions as regards the sadhana. They helped to awaken the sadhak from within in the acquisition of the power to comprehend rather than to try and explain anything from

without. Sri Aurobindo's stress is on an "inner growth", "development of consciousness" and such other like insistences. Nevertheless, if a sadhak found himself in any unusual situation and needed anything in particular Sri Aurobindo answered after weighing from within the need and importance of the question. Sri Aurobindo's answer came in his letters whereas the Mother's did go by her influence. The Mother could be met and seen if the need for it was there. She usually kept apart about four hours every day for such meetings. If the need was urgent and a meeting was asked for it was granted. She herself would send for some. There were a few who met her once or twice a week; there were others whom she met once a fortnight or even once a month. There were also some who met her daily at a particular hour of the day for her directions on

matters of sadhana or work relating to the running of the Ashram. Quite often she would explain just by her look without a word being spoken. It has also been seen that anyone approaching the Mother for directions got them just by her meditating with the person and placing her hand on the head. Remarkable as it may seem, after the meditation the problem was no longer there, instead the whole being was suffused by her influence. To some she gave a written reply. Again, the aspirant may get the directions all by himself in going into an inner silence. The compassionate presence of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo is constantly working within us at all times whether we know it or not. That they have opened our inner vision is clearly understood. The very texture and hue of all we had asked for in life or all that we had been or felt or received so far were quite changed — we had begun to see everything differently from quite a different standpoint. The very aim of their yoga is a radical change of human consciousness — a complete transformation. It is for this they have taken upon themselves to bring down the supermind on earth and establish it there — a seemingly impossible endeavour. To bring

all to that path they hardly take any notice of their ceaseless and unrelenting effort as any trouble at all. Sri Aurobindo wrote to me thus: "We mind no trouble so long as we can carry you farther and farther on the path of transformation. Let the greater consciousness, the Vastness and the peace grow in you and the psychic liberated from the veils flood

you with the divine love and the soul's happiness. We shall certainly concentrate our endeavour to help you towards that."

Within a few days after my arrival as an aspirant to the Ashram, permission was granted to me to meet the Mother once a week. She even came to my room once in a while and sanctified it by her presence. It was on these occasions that I have been able to fill the pages of my "Book of Life" with her priceless instructions. It seemed as if she taught me to walk step by step, to see true by granting the inner vision, gave me the strength to know myself by sifting the rubbish heap of falsehoods to get at things that were true. She was moulding our entire life for a God-oriented existence, a birth into a new consciousness, an inner life. Before my coming here Nolini once wrote to me, "Very few things of the ordinary life would be of use here" — gradually this remark of his was becoming clear while living here. The Mother's visits to the sadhaks were usually timed as she was going out for her regular evening drives. Our meetings, however, when we wanted to see her used to be in the mornings. She used to come to Dilip's house on Sundays. An English lady named Miss Maitland once came here to stay for a period of six months. She too was asked to come to Dilip's place on Sundays in case she wanted to ask Mother any questions. Besides Miss Maitland, several of us regulars were also present namely, Doraiswami Iyer (not yet a regular Ashramite but a very old disciple and a frequent week-end visitor from Madras) who was a very well-known lawyer of Madras; an American couple called Mr. and Mrs. Von (Mrs. Von was given the name 'Shantimayi' by Sri Aurobindo),

Pavitra, Nolini, Dilip and myself. At the commencement the Mother used to meditate with us; at times she asked us to meditate on a special subject asking each one of us at the end about the result of meditation on that particular subject. She asked if anyone had any questions to ask, if there were any she answered them. These questions and answers were noted down by Shantimayi in shorthand. These questions and answers began on the 7th April 1929 and continued for fifteen weeks and were published in 1931 in book form having fifteen chapters titled "Conversations with the Mother". The book was meant for sadhaks to be distributed according to the Mother's choice and was not for sale. Much later, however, it came to be put up for sale. It was at Dilip's that I first had the opportunity to hear Mother giving answers to our questions. Our minds on these occasions became submerged in wonder at the touch of the light emanating from her vast and fathomless knowledge.

The Mother would sometimes take one of us by turn in her evening drives—of these we were the following: Doraiswami, Nolini and Chadwick (Chadwick, an Englishman, came to India as a lecturer in Philosophy at the Lucknow University, but later came away to the Ashram as a disciple of Sri Aurobindo who gave him the name 'Arjava'), Dilip and myself. It was Pavitra who drove Mother's car with Doraiswami at his side. We others followed in a small Fiat car. Our drives used to be quite long ones, at least so it seemed to us. I believe Pavitra was instructed before where to go and on arrival the Mother would get down from the car and we would follow. The Mother, it seemed, knew quite well the paths we traversed. These walks were at

times fairly long. Sometimes she would choose a spot and sit down and we would gather around her enjoying the scenery in the open — how pleasant it was with the Mother! She carried with her some sweets and gave one to each. Here too Mother often answered if anyone asked her a question. At times there was meditation. On one occasion while we were thus seated with

the Mother a local person approached with some fruits carefully wrapped in banana leaves and offered them to the Mother. On being asked by her if anyone wanted to eat them, I remember only Dilip and myself took one each. Another day I remember, we had seated ourselves comfortably when I saw an ugly looking insect creeping slowly towards me. Needless to say I began to feel rather uneasy and began to fidget, the whole of my attention was solely upon the insect and I was thinking of getting up if it became necessary. The Mother, however, quietly pushed it away without the slightest show of perturbation. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo never approved that anyone should be frightened at anything, as it is very harmful for sadhana. Sri Aurobindo once wrote to me, "All fear ought to be cast out."

The Mother fell seriously ill on 18th October in 1931, and we did not see her for a whole month. All this while we were very heavy of heart. When we again met her at "Pranam" what a joyful day it was! The intensity of our feelings was as thrilling as when we had the occasion of Sri Aurobindo's Darshan. It is quite impossible to express in words the

feelings of joy, a joy that is of a quite different quality — as if it was descending from heaven.

The trend of life in the Ashram became different after this illness of the Mother. The morning pranam was delayed even the place was changed, that is, from the usual room where it used to be, it was shifted to the hall in front of Amrita's room. The evening drives. Mother's visiting the sadhaks in their rooms, the distribution of soup at night, all these came to an end. It was fifteen years later, in 1946, that the Mother once again came out amongst us at the commencement of the sports activities. It became her daily routine to come to the playing fields to set in motion these activities of games etc.

A French lady named Madame Gaebélé used to come to the Ashram to teach French to the inmates. I do not recollect the year it began. She took several classes in the week. My

initiation to French was begun by her — there were quite a few of us who began studying the language. The lady was given a new name — Suvrata, by the Mother. She is a frequent visitor to the Ashram even now and is strongly attracted to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. After some time, however, I gave up attending her classes and was taken in hand by Nolini. Nolini, as is well-known, is a versatile scholar of the Greek, Latin, French and Italian languages as he had learnt them all from Sri Aurobindo himself. My study of French did not go very far and I gave up the study with only a smattering of it.

After the Mother's illness in 1931 we could go to her only if she asked us to come. All fixed hours of meeting her were also dispensed with. When one speaks of Mother's illness it means only what is apparent to all to an exterior view. This ' is what Sri Aurobindo wrote in answer to a question by a sadhak on this matter: "I have not yet said anything about the Mother's illness because to do so would have needed a long consideration of what those who are the centre of a work like this have to be, what they have to take upon themselves of human or terrestrial nature and its limitations and how much they have to bear of the difficulties of transformation. All that is not only difficult for me to write in such a way as to bring it home to those who have not our consciousness or our experience. I suppose it has to be written but I have not yet found the necessary form, the necessary leisure." (*Sri Aurobindo on the Mother*)

Soon after the Mother's illness she wrote in her *Prayers and Meditations* of the 24th November 1931, giving some idea of the real matter. Although all that is well beyond our conception yet I venture to quote it here: "O my Lord, my sweet Master, for the accomplishment of Thy work I have sunk down into the unfathomable depths of matter, I have touched with my finger the horror of the falsehood and the inconscience, I have reached the seat of oblivion and supreme obscurity! But in my heart was the Remembrance,

from my heart there leaped the call which could arrive at Thee: 'Lord, Lord, everywhere Thy enemies are triumphant; falsehood is the monarch

of the world; life without Thee is death, a perpetual hell; doubt has usurped the place of Hope and revolt has pushed out submission, Faith is spent, Gratitude is not born; blind passions and murderous instincts and a guilty weakness have covered and stifled Thy sweet law of love. Lord, wilt Thou permit Thy enemies, falsehood and ugliness and suffering to triumph? Lord, give me command to conquer and victory will be there. I know we are unworthy, I know the world is not yet ready. But I cry to Thee with an absolute faith in Thy Grace and I know that Thy Grace will save us'. Thus my prayer rushed towards Thee; and from the depth of the abyss, I beheld Thee in Thy radiant Splendour; Thou didst appear and Thou didst to me: 'Lose not courage, be firm, be confident, — I COME' ".

I began to correspond regularly with Sri Aurobindo from 1932. Perhaps I began to write even from 1930 but that was intermittently and not regularly and the regular writing continued till November 1938, when Sri Aurobindo met with that accident. In the letters all my inner states, movements of my mind, stages of sadhana, all were mentioned. He too wanted to know everything in detail. He wrote, "It is absolutely necessary to write everything and write daily." Thus good or bad everything had to" be written. It was not often that the mind would agree to write all, quite frequently some ruse was in the offing to enable one to side-track the entire truth of the matter. Nevertheless, we could detect these games of the mind around us. All communications were addressed to the Mother but were answered by Sri Aurobindo. My letters were written in Bengali and English as well according to the need, but Sri Aurobindo's answers were all in English. I have, however, received a

line or two from him in Bengali as well. What was amusing was that even if before beginning to write one had decided to keep back something, at the end it was seen that nothing was left untold in the letter — as if someone

from behind was at work. I remember once I was very reluctant to write, not that I did not realise that one should not pamper this unwillingness, so I wrote to say, "I do not feel like writing today", in answer the letter came back with three large notes of exclamation (!!!) on the left margin. On receiving it I had hardly any idea whether to laugh or to cry. One day arose a great desire in me to eat a few things and I was quite unable to resist it. The mind was busy trying to find some pretext or other. In the end I wrote “ Mother , I feel extremely greedy to-day. Do you know that I would like to eat? – eggs, lobsters and some kind of sardines. Either you remove this desire from me or permit me to eat them with your protection.” Sri Aurobindo wrote an answer next day! “Certainly not! You can eat up your desire – that is the only fish or flesh that can be given to you! It is an old samskara rising from subconscious – these things have never to be indulged, they rise in order to be dismissed.” (12-11-33) –a banter replete with laughter! But strange to relate, soon after sending the letter all that inclination to eat had completely gone— this filled me with an unalloyed joy and satisfaction. The joy one feels to be able to rise above desire was first brought home to me on that day. There were a few lines of Nolani, I have forgotten when I had read them, shining bright before my eyes:” ... when you grant me a vital desire I

am not pleased, your granting shows that the vital is still unprepared to forgo its food. But when you withhold from me an earthly satisfaction, a secret ease and joy flow into me; by this sign I feel I am ready for the Delight that is yours.” – every word of these lines was impressed in my feelings.

Let me now relate here two very strange dreams, so clear and tangible that I realized immediately that they were not just dreams. The significance of these dreams as was received by me, I wrote to the Mother. I am setting down here the two dreams with the answer from Sri Aurobindo:

First dream: From my room I observed that the sea -waves were rushing from afar towards my room and were swelling

tremendously, as high as the mountains. I felt that if these terrible waves broke in then the entire town where I lived would be totally washed away. Yet in spite of being face to face with this deadly peril I was not the least afraid or perturbed. It seemed I was in safe protection. Even if there came a flood on the breaking of these waves they will flow over my room and there were no danger or harm that could touch me nor come anywhere near me — such a feeling of safety as an armour was within me. So quite unruffled I was observing that tide from behind the glass panes of my window. Soon I saw that in fact the waves broke with water covering all around. There were several waves that broke and as soon as they were breaking the mass of water like an inundation was flowing past my room extending far behind it. I was observing it all

without any excitement as if all this had nothing to do with me. I was a mere observer of that huge flood. When the flood waters had subsided and as I came out to look at all "that had happened, I saw all on a sudden that a portion of the house I was staying in was broken but through it I could see a part of a new construction coming up. Surprised I thought, "hallo, it is strange that I was not at all aware that under the old house one had begun to build a new one — once could only see that because a portion of the old house had fallen." As if it only waited for the flood to demolish that part of the mansion to reveal the new building as it was being constructed! In a mood of appreciation I was wondering how it could happen, strange that the new building was not seen even after so much work had been done! For some reason or other I had entered the house but as I came out again the old house standing as a covering had totally crumbled and in its stead was standing a new house of a new design. Even the material of which the new house was made was quite other than that of the old one. The idea of the dream seemed as if the room in which I was feeling quite safe in the midst of danger was a Divine protection which did not allow the danger to enter there but had made it to pass over. I was

quite untouched within. Perhaps the sense of it was that the flood of one's desires and longings surging from the vital plane comes to drown one but if at that moment one could invoke the Divine protection in one's true self then the flood passes over without touching one and one could detaching oneself observe the huge waves passing over. To me the

significance of the first half of the dream was that. I am noting down also the significance of the second half of the dream, that is, as much as was clear to me: The old house where I resided was the external being with its old value, — from the depths of the old nature unperceived one goes on building the new nature; the new edifice is not visible as one is not conscious, thus when the veil of obscurity of the old nature is rent (that is what was meant by the crumbling of a portion of the old house) I become somewhat conscious how much the Divine unperceived has built up from within the covering of the old nature and still continues to build. And in the measure of the growth of consciousness the veil of darkness is gradually dropping away. In the end I saw in the true light of consciousness the aspect of the integral transformation of nature. The new building was the symbol of the integral transformation of the ordinary human nature."

To all this Sri Aurobindo replied: "It was a good symbolic dream and your interpretation seems to me correct except for one detail. The sea cannot be the tide of distress; it must be the flood of the world forces.

Second dream: A few of us were walking along the seashore. It was a different sort of sea, something frightening and terrible it was, jet black was the water packed tight with the beasts of the sea, so thick they were that one could see less of the water and they were ugly to a degree bringing uncomfortable feelings to the mind and body. Of these beasts a species of huge reptiles were preponderant, long, thick and black were they, really frightful to see. There were no waves. As far as one could see it looked like a black mountain of

frightfulness lying stretched creating horrors. Far away one could discern an island, a beautiful one where the Mother and Sri Aurobindo were. I must go to them but could see no way to do so. On one hand the dark deep waters, on the other all kinds of terrible beasts filled it so thickly that it would be doubtful if one could find enough space to swim through them — one was sure to come in bodily contact with them. All on a sudden as soon as my companions had gone on a little ahead I found that plunging into the water I was swimming through those wriggling beasts. I was moving straight and fast pushing these beasts away from me with my hands, there were more of these beasts I was touching than the water but I hardly noticed them aiming only to reach the island where were the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, nothing else came within my purview. As I came quite close to the island, my feet touched the ground and ceasing to swim I began to wade up towards the shore. All on a sudden I saw Sri Aurobindo lift me out of the water with outstretched hands and said, "so, you have come across". It felt strange to have heard him. Even when I awoke from the dream this thought was constantly in my mind: I am sure to cross when it is Sri Aurobindo who has said so. The dream became clear to me signifying what the Mother and Sri Aurobindo mean by "taking the plunge". I realised that if one did not look at any other side, did not wait to weigh the pros and cons, but plunged in only for the Divine then He himself took one up to the shore. For as long as one continued to debate with the mind to find a way one could never take the plunge. Once one has plunged in then all worrying

thoughts of what one should or should not do, all obstacles, all dangers could find no foothold. In fact, the dream showed the way fraught with so much dangers but nothing could matter. At the moment of plunging in, one did so, nothing could impede or draw one back, one did go through all those dangers aiming only for that island where Sri Aurobindo himself drew one on to the bank. In spite of being a dream the experience received was

indelibly impressed for ever. Next morning, my day for meeting the Mother, I related to her all in detail. She listened with great attention then placing her hand on my head for some time she looked straight into my eyes and said in a slow measured tone, "It is not just a dream". She added much more but it is not possible to speak of it here.

This is all about dreams. Now let me tell here of a remarkable experience while singing — there used to be quite a number of such strange things. Here is a letter I wrote to the Mother: (20-12-31) "Mother mine, I had a strange experience, I can hardly wait to write about it to you. I was singing a song of Kabir ("In whose heart resides Sri Rama...") on the roof of my house at about 7 p.m., with the idea of singing this very song to you the next Friday. Quite frequently I have had fine experiences while singing; often have I felt the descent of a Presence bringing in its wake the idea in my mind as if I was just the instrument expressing the movement of that Presence through my song. At times I have felt a total inner opening through which from a deep source an aspiration like a mounting flame was lifting the whole of my being up. I

have had such experiences before as well. But what has come today I have never experienced before. This is what happened. After singing the song for a while I could feel the Power descending in me and I was aware that the volume of my voice was increasing as well. Not only was there an inner opening but remarkably fine improvisations were spontaneously issuing forth with an amazing rapidity that I can hardly find words adequate to tell you. I was astounded to see these unimaginable expressions and improvisations and the surpassing increase of the volume of my voice. I felt, too, unmistakably that all this was not mine at all, they were only being expressed through me — they were crowding into me in a rapid and impatient succession to express themselves. As all this was taking place the strength of my voice seemed to have doubled — so powerful it seemed. Further, not only did I feel it but

actually heard another voice coming through my throat; when this came home to me, this other voice bursting out, I became somewhat nonplussed. I became more clearly sure that it was not I who was singing at my own volition. Even it became impossible for me to stop singing as it did not depend on me. I have never before sung a song for so long — I had no hold upon my voice which was moving with ease over the notes touching them lightly and the tone was so fine that I myself was charmed and felt overwhelmed at all that was revealed."

Sri Aurobindo wrote to say: "Yes, it was quite right and a very high experience."

Since this experience I often noticed that whenever I sang sitting on the roof in the presence of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo the songs I sang became quite other than when I sang elsewhere. So I wrote to the Mother (18-3-1932): Mother, I have remarked that when I sing in your presence on the roof, my voice becomes much more powerful. At any other place the timber of my voice is different. So I wrote to tell you that I tangibly feel singing in quite a different manner feeling at the same time a particular influence of a power which was much more prominent. This is your power, is it not? I, nevertheless, am aware that it is your power in me that is compelling me to sing. It is far more intense than anywhere else, the difference is so clear. But why should it be so? If it is your power then it should be the same wherever I might sing. If between you and me there is a direct contact through the psychic then there should not be any difference on account of a change of place and time? Is it because one is not in the right consciousness, a true condition, that the difference creeps in?" Sri Aurobindo wrote: "You have seen very accurately (as expressed in today's letter) the reasons for the difference between your singing on the roof and your singing elsewhere. But that is no reason why you should not sing elsewhere."

Even, so many years ago, that is, when I first arrived here,

the Mother used to accord us the special blessings of the New Year at midnight. It used to be a remarkable experience for us at that hour, in the silent depths of us all everything seemed to be self-gathered within in tune with the sombre night. The Mother too seemed to reveal herself in

an eternity of expressive beauty. We too lost our limited selves as we silently mounted the stairs to receive the eternal touch from her carefully guarding within the aspiration of the possibility of a new birth. On crossing the threshold into the room we would see the Mother seated on a chair faintly illumined by only a dim pink light — a dreamland of roseate hue. Her face alone was bright, as bright as the first glow of dawn. What we felt must remain unuttered as no language could properly express it. As we got up after bowing to her she blessed us with her radiant smile handing us something more concrete in the shape of an orange or a piece of chocolate. Whatever she gave, however, apparently insignificant, seemed to us as something designed to shatter our sleep in ignorance. For three years this was the manner in which the Mother blessed us at the moment when the New Year arrived. Since 1932, however, after her illness, the procedure was changed. Everyone was gathered in the meditation hall below and in the courtyard merged, as it were, in meditation — in those days whatever we did was connected with a spirit of being withdrawn within — when just at the right moment like a flash of light tearing asunder the veil of darkness, peeled out a resonant chord from the organ and with it flooded out her voice in song. Her voice had a quality of magical power rising from the profundities as if endeavouring to awaken our consciousness to meet the light from above. To call it fascinatingly marvellous is quite inadequate. The singing over, we trooped in to receive the Mother's Blessings as well as something or other in the shape of fruits or sweets in the very room dimly lit. She was seated there as if with a world of gifts to bestow on

us. Every New Year she did play upon the organ but perhaps we heard her sing only a couple of times

We too were in eager expectation every year of that night of music. Her music was her own that came readily to her as she sat down to play after a short concentration with closed eyes before she touched the keys, without any prior preparation, with never a false jarring note. Since 1939, that is, after the accident to Sri Aurobindo's right leg, her organ was shifted to Pavitra's room and she played from there. Since this year too we did not meet her after the music as before but met her on the stairs at six in the morning to be greeted by her with "Bonne Année"; we too replied with the same greeting receiving from her a bunch of leaves signifying "New Birth". I remember, however, that she used to give us the blessings of "New Birth" on the 24th December —this was before 1939.

For many years the Mother could be seen on the north balcony adjoining Pavitra's room. She used to look towards the East before sunrise ere the morning was bright. One or two of the Ashramites found this out and used to await her arrival on the balcony. Gradually instead of the few who saw her there the entire Ashram came to get a glimpse of her and assembled on the street below. This came to be known as the "Balcony Darshan". Later even outsiders, visitors from abroad and also a number of people of Pondicherry too gathered there. At this "Darshan" the Mother after concentrating for a few minutes used to sweep her eyes of benevolence over all who had come. This Darshan came to end on the

16th March 1962 when the Mother was somewhat seriously ill. In those days she used to bless us all also in the evening downstairs at the foot of the staircase in the meditation hall after a short meditation of about half an hour. As we approached her in a line she would occasionally, while blessing us, go into a trance, which lasted on rare occasions for even an hour and the sadhak or sadhika just in front had to wait motionlessly till she came out of her trance — once or perhaps on several occasions the hand of the recipient was in her grasp when the trance began and he or she could not

withdraw the hand for fear of breaking upon her self-gathered condition. It was on account of her trance that the blessing hour used to stretch even up to midnight before it was over. Incidentally I may mention here that before all this that I have narrated just above, the Mother used to come down to the meditation hall the evening before the Darshan day to bless us all and also at 5 a.m. on the Darshan day. I do not recollect the exact period during which the two blessing hours used to take place. Needless to say both the occasions were as always most delectable for us.

My elder sister Amiya came here on a visit in September 1930 with her two sons Bula and Kunal. They were lodged in a house on the sea front specially hired for them for three months. I remember the Mother walked all the way from Dilip's house along the strand by the sea to have a look at the house, we came with her too. This was before their arrival. The Mother came twice to this house on being specially requested by my sister—meanwhile Nolina the sister next to Amiya had come to the same house with her son. The house was rented from

September to November as the sisters with their sons were to leave at the end of the period. When the Mother heard of their impending departure, she came to see them a few days before. That day as she was looking at the sea from a window she suddenly said "It is better not to be on the sea now". Amiya too was undecided as to what to do when the Mother herself suggested that they leave on the 1st January next year. On being told that the house had to be vacated on the tenure of lease being over, she made all arrangements for them to be lodged in one of the Ashram houses. Amiya thus came to stay with me at the Savary House (It is renamed Huta House now), in the south room of the first floor. Bula and Kunal were lodged in the Guest House also on a first floor room. This house is now a boarding for children called Dortoir. I well remember the day on which Amiya and her sons were to set sail for Burma originally: there came a

tremendous cyclone. It was a catastrophic storm uprooting many trees and razing houses to the ground, many roofs of houses were blown away. We could hardly keep our doors and windows shut, the bolts being useless, such was the fury of the storm — it was quite a battle that we waged against the storm to keep the door and windows closed but with partial success and as a result our rooms were flooded with incoming rain. I have never before witnessed such a terrible storm. After the storm had abated Nolini and Amrita all wrapped in blankets came to Amiya's house sent by the Mother to find out how she and her sons were faring — they were even then in the rented house on the sea front. When

the storm broke I was at Dilip's. As I tried to return hurriedly to my house I could hardly walk on the street, the force of the wind was pushing me towards the sea, that was the direction in which the wind was blowing to. With a lot of difficulty on arriving I felt a great danger had swept over me. Later I came to learn that during the storm Sri Aurobindo was in his room with all the doors and windows wide open but he was merged deep in his work heedless of what was happening all around.

Amiya with her sons left as arranged on the 1st of January after receiving the New Years's Blessings. They returned in January 1932, Nolina too came with them. On that occasion too they were lodged in Budi House on the sea front.

My elder sister Aruna arrived here in April with her two infant sons. They were lodged in the same house then but were shifted to another house close to the Ashram main building. This too was a hired house, and in those days was named 'Vigie House', now it has been renamed Jhun Jhun Boarding. One remembers that in those days Nolini and Amrita used to come to this house in the evenings at the request of my sisters. From them we used to hear of the happenings of the early days of their life with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Those evenings became memorable as they related many incidents connected with the Mother and Sri

Aurobindo, very enjoyable too were these talks. It was from Nolini we heard how Sri Aurobindo avoiding detection came by boat all the way

from Calcutta to Pondicherry. Another very amusing incident we heard was how Amrita's tuft of hair, emblem of his brahminhood, was done away with by plying deft a pair of scissors. Then we heard also the incident of how pieces of brickbats used to be showered in the room although the doors and windows were closed all the time? materialising from thin air as it were — a fascinating tale that we heard with rapt attention. From Nolini we heard of their fiery revolutionary days centering round the garden house at Muraripukoor; the day of the police raid and the search. Then the story of their famous trial — also how a revolver was passed to them secretly and used to kill Noren Goswami who had treacherously turned an approver. We heard as well their association with Sri Aurobindo in jail, the manner of their spending their days in prison. In this way we came to know of the true happenings of those days that had often come to us garbled in fantastic dressings.

All that we did in those days was done after informing the Mother. The root idea of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga is to consecrate all of oneself to the Mother. It is she who would do in one whatever she decided in her own way. Thus we too could hardly dream of doing anything or meeting anyone or going out anywhere without informing her. To behave in this way, to order our day to day life, gave us an inner joy, the taste of which was quite of another sort. As an illustration I may cite here a letter of Sri Aurobindo in the matter of the visit of a relative of mine — evidently I had asked for his directions. This is what he wrote: "As for your inner attitude it must remain the same. Not to be excited or drawn to outward life by the coming of a new element is the rule; they must come in like waves into an untroubled sea and mix in it and become themselves

untroubled and serene.... You must remain vigilant always. For when the condition is good the lower movements have a habit of subsiding and become

quiescent, hiding as it were, or they go out of the nature and remain at a distance. But if they see that the sadhaka is losing his vigilance, then they slowly begin to rise or draw nearer, most often unseen, and when he is quite off his guard, surge up suddenly or make a sudden irruption. This continues until the nature, mental, vital, physical down to the very subconscious is enlightened, conscious, full of the Divine. Till that happens one must always remain watchful in a sleepless vigilance." (26-5-1932)

The Mother and Sri Aurobindo had explained to us in minute detail without sparing themselves the time needed to do so that nothing is negligible or trash. With what insistence did they teach us to realise that nothing whatsoever happens without an inner meaning and cause, time after time by removing the covering veil of our outer consciousness. Once I wrote to Sri Aurobindo thus:

"Lord Sri Aurobindo,

You have written to point out to me that my physical consciousness has the habit of responding to illnesses. How am I to become conscious of that which I am not even aware? I can only understand that I do not want them, or, often I have remarked how much harm they do to me. That is why I would like to know how I could become conscious in

this regard. How to understand it all? If you will please let me know I could try to follow the method." He replied:

"To get rid of that one must awaken a will and consciousness in the body itself that refuses to allow these things to impose themselves upon it. But to get that, still more to get it completely is difficult. One step towards it is to get the inner consciousness separate from the body — to feel that it is not you who are ill but it is only something taking place in the body — and affecting your consciousness. It is then possible to see this separate body consciousness, what it feels, what are its reactions to things, how it works. One can then act on it to change its consciousness and reaction."

Many were the questions put to the Mother and Sri

Aurobindo and they were of various kinds; they were asked to clearly understand if there were any doubts or difficulties and as long as they were not made clear the mind was not tranquil. Sri Aurobindo too not only answered them but did so in great detail and at length till there remained nothing obscure and he dwelt on each point with great care. As an example I am quoting here a letter of his in answer to mine. I asked: "If I saw some one attacking the Truth and exalting falsehood then what should be the attitude of the sadhaka? Would it be proper to remain indifferent maintaining a yogic equality or take up arms against the falsehood in support of the Truth?" This letter was the outcome of a letter I had read where the Mother and Sri Aurobindo were the target of attack. Needless to say I was very annoyed. A feeling of disgust had

spread over my mind and I felt that I should have no truck with such people. The mind, however, felt: should one take such a drastic step? I had asked another sadhak who was very firm to indicate that we should never compromise in this regard. Sri Aurobindo wrote in answer:

"No doubt hatred and cursing are not the proper attitude. It is true that to look upon all things, and all people with a calm and clear vision, to be uninvolved and impartial in one's judgment is a quite proper yogic attitude. A condition of perfect *samatā* can be established in which one sees all as equal, friends and enemies included, and is not disturbed by what men do or by what happens. The question is whether this is all that is demanded from us. If so, then the general attitude will be one of a neutral indifference to everything. But the Gita which strongly insists on a perfect and absolute *samatā* goes on to say, 'Fight, destroy the adversary, conquer.' If there is no kind of general action wanted, no loyalty to Truth as against Falsehood except for one's personal sadhana, no will for the Truth to conquer, then the *samatā* of indifference will suffice. But here there is a work to be done, a Truth to be established against which immense forces are arrayed, invisible forces which can use visible things and

persons and actions for their instruments. If one is among the disciples, the seeker of this Truth, one has to take sides for the Truth, to stand against the forces that attack it and seek to stifle it. Arjuna wanted not to stand for either side, to refuse any action of hostility even to the assailants. Sri Krishna, who insisted so much on *samatā*, strongly

rebuked his attitude and insisted on his fighting the adversary, 'Have *samatā*,' he said, 'and seeing clearly the Truth, fight.' Therefore to take sides with the Truth and to refuse to concede anything to the falsehood that attacks, to be unflinchingly loyal and against the hostiles and the attackers, is not inconsistent with equality. It is the personal and egoistic feeling that has to be thrown away; hatred and vital ill-will have to be rejected. But loyalty and refusal to compromise with the assailant and the hostile or to dally with their idea and demands and say, 'After all we can compromise with what they ask from us,' or to accept them as companions and our -own people—these things have a great importance. If the attack were a physical menace to the Mother and the work and the Ashram, one would see this at once. But because the attack is of a subtler kind, can a passive attitude be right? It is a spiritual battle inward and outward — by neutrality and Compromise or even passivity one may allow the enemy forces to pass and crush down the Truth and its children. If you look at this point "you will see that if the inner spiritual equality is right, the active loyalty and firm taking of sides which Y. insists on is as right; and the two cannot be incompatible.

"I have of course treated it as a general question apart from all particular cases or personal question. It is a principle of action that has to be seen in its right light and proportion." (13-9-1936)

One day all on a sudden I was plunged into a heated discussion. The matter for contention was the 'mind'. The others were of the opinion that the 'mind' has the capacity to discriminate between truth and falsehood, big and small, valuable

and worthless etc. It is the 'mind' that is able to differentiate between belief and blind faith, truth and untruth. I could not quite accept this and was thinking of what the Mother and Sri Aurobindo have said that it is the psychic being that alone is able to see correctly. On this I wrote to Sri Aurobindo and asked his opinion. I reproduce here a portion of my letter to him: "I don't believe that it is our mind that helps us to know the truth from the falsehood and so on, but our true being, our psychic, that helps us to know things, it is when the mind is influenced by the psychic consciously or unconsciously that the true discrimination can come, otherwise if the physical mind is left alone, however great it is, it always confuses things, and *prevents them being seen in the true way.*" (The italics was done by Sri Aurobindo)

He wrote: "To see the Truth does not depend on a big intellect or a small intellect. It depends on being in contact with the Truth, and the mind silent and quiet to receive it. The biggest intellect can make errors of worst kind and confuse Truth and falsehood if they have not the contact with the Truth or the direct experience."

From these letters of questions and answers some indications of our way of life may be had, as perhaps some angles are discernible, although that our outward life is different from the inner root may not be quite easily grasped. It, however, matters little if it is not seen. The wish to write about the Mother and Sri Aurobindo is a joyful thing. The very first thing that strikes one wanting to write of all that we have received from them, if it is at all truly possible, is can one really weigh all that, or can it be possibly compared with anything else acquired in life? Or have

we the necessary command of language to give it a real shape or even the capacity to do so? This only I know that to recount these sacred happenings the heart overflows with gratitude to feel their presence and their boundless compassion for us. The opportunity to write of them brings this satisfaction.

There was a time when I was ailing a great deal from

insomnia. Night after night, even day after day of effort was of no avail to close the eyelids in sleep. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo too were thinking much about it, doing all they could by pouring an endless affection in their letters. I can never forget the day when I had gone to meet the Mother. The soft soothing look she gave me, how deeply compassionate was that wonderful gaze! After a while in the softest of voices looking into my eyes, she said very sweetly, "You want to sleep?" With these words my eyes became filled with tears blurring my vision. This was not all, as the next day I got the following letter from Sri Aurobindo: "Mother said you looked rather thin and pulled down. Is it only the absence of sleep or are you eating too little? You said you had hunger — if so you ought to eat well because underfeeding is not good for the nerves."

Once this ailment of sleeplessness persisted very much and as a result Sri Aurobindo suggested that some medical treatment may be made use of. I, however, took this advice wrongly and was adamantly against any such imagining that he meant to keep me away from his influence. A perusal of the following letter of Sri Aurobindo will clearly

show my wrong interpretation and reaction. His letter was so full of compassion.

"It was precisely out of solicitude for you, because the suffering of insomnia and the spasms had been excessive, that I proposed to you to take the help of treatment. This is a fact of my experience that when the resistance in the body is too strong and persistent, it can help to take some aid of physical means that as an instrumentation for the Force to work more directly on the body itself; for the body then feels itself supported against the resistance from both sides, by means both physical as well as supraphysical. The Mother's force can work through both together. It is surprising that you should take my suggestion in this way as if it meant an abandonment and refusal to help you! But it is still more surprising that you should have taken Mother's smile at pranam for

sarcasm! The only thing she put in it was an insistence for the cloud that she saw covering the body consciousness and interfering with its receptivity to light. You must not allow this clouding attack to come between your mind and the Mother. Reject this distorting suggestion and keep its openness so that it may help to reopen up a full receptivity in the material body also. If you do not like to take any treatment, I will try to manage without that, if you keep me informed everyday without fail, even on those days you feel relieved till all trace of the attack is over".  
(1.9.36)

I have seen many images of such variegated cloudiness of the mind — they will be apparent from Sri Aurobindo's letter. One such was as follows:

"There is nothing to be discouraged about. The fact is that after being so long in the mental and vital plane you have become aware of the physical consciousness; and the physical consciousness in everybody is like this. It is inert, conservative, does not want to move, to change, it clings to its habits (what people call their character) or its habits (habitual movements) cling to it and repeat themselves (like a clock working on a persistent mechanical way). When you have cleared your vital somewhat, things go down and stick there, you see, if you have become self-conscious, you put pressure perhaps, but the physical responds very slowly, hardly at first seems to move at all. The remedy? Aspiration steady and unchanging, patient work, coalescing the psychic in the physical. Calling down the light and force into these obscure parts. The light brings the consciousness of what is there; the force has to follow and work on them till they change or disappear."

And another.

"I see that you have not sent your book, nor any letter and I am told that you did not come for pranam. Are you then determined to reject us and our help and shut yourself up in your despondency?"

"But what is the reason for so violent a change? The Mother

and myself at least have not changed towards you and the causes you alleged for feeling otherwise are so small and trifling that they could not support any such idea once you looked at them straight.

"There remains the difficulty of your sadhana. But you have had much more violent difficulties and downfalls and recovered from them and found your way clearer. Why should now a recrudescence of certain movement which you yourself say was slight or the sense of the difficulty of overcoming egoism (which everybody feels and not yourself) lead to such persistence in despair and turning away from help and light?

"I hope that you will gather yourself together, make an effort and get out of this groove quickly into the joy and love of the Divine which you had before. On our side nothing is changed — the love and the help are there as before and I hope you will feel them behind these few lines."

On reading this letter everything disappeared, washed away by my tears.

Often a remark such as this is heard: all those who are in the Ashram are they all fit for this yoga?

I brought this to Sri Aurobindo's notice and said what I thought about it. Sri Aurobindo replied: "What you say about whom we receive that if one part of them sincerely desires the Divine — we give them their chance — is quite true. If we demanded more at the beginning, exceedingly few would be able to commence the journey towards the Divine." (2.4.35)

Usually while writing to the Mother or Sri Aurobindo it was in English. At times that what was meant could not be properly expressed

in English and I used to write in Bengali, within brackets I used to ask what it would be in English, Sri Aurobindo used to translate the exact words and placed them above each Bengali word.

Here I quote a few of such remarkable translations: I wrote: Let me grow into the true consciousness and the veil

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of darkness that still keeps you separate from me drop down, and with your light let my temple become " 'aglean with light and radiant and may the downpour of the rays of the Light remove all veil of division in me and may I find you within me in your complete self-revelation.' " One more: " I feel now the inexpressible sweetness of that which is beyond description forming between you and me. It is such a satisfying experience." (The words within " ' ' " are Sri Aurobindo's translations.)

There was a period when the Mother used to go on to the terrace and remain there for sometime, this she did nearly everyday in the evening. I recount here what occurred one day and wrote to the Mother. "Recently I notice that when you come down from the terrace in the evenings you stand for a longer time and I feel just at that time you give us something special, so I also concentrate to receive and feel what you give; but this evening suddenly I saw your physical body had disappeared, there was no sign of your body, then again in a few seconds your figure reappeared. I felt at that moment that" 'you became merged in the sky (ether?) and became one with all things.' "

On this Sri Aurobindo wrote: "The Mother makes an invocation or aspiration and stands till the movement is over. Yesterday she passed for

sometime beyond the sense of the body! and it is perhaps this that made you see in that way."

My mistakes in English used to be corrected by Sri Aurobindo, it was at my coaxing that he took this trouble in spite of his being so pressed for time. It seems to those who deal with the heaven, the earth and the nether regions even a grain of sand on the seashore is not insignificant!

The Mother and Sri Aurobindo came to me as Guru although I hardly understood at first what and how much is meant by the word "Guru". Slowly and much later I saw them installed in the temple of my life as my God and Beloved — they are that to me and I know no more nor do I wish to know.

In 1934 a proposal was made to translate into Bengali the "Six Poems" of Sri Aurobindo and offer them to him printed in a small booklet.

Six sadhaks were to translate those six poems. It was Nolini who asked me to try one of them. The other five chosen were Nolini, Suresh Chakravarti, Anilbaran Roy, Dilip and Behari Barua. The one I was asked to try was "In Horis Aeternum", a difficult poem, and I was in doubt if it could be done by me. Yet I was rather reluctant to let go such a lucky opportunity. Depending on the force from the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, I agreed. On being asked, Sri Aurobindo too approved of it. With a great enthusiasm I began the translation. At nearly every step I was asking Sri Aurobindo much about the poem. I am quoting here a few of the diminutive letters. I wrote to Sri Aurobindo: "I am in great

difficulty with your poem 'In Horis Aeternum'. Many say it is a very difficult poem seemingly impossible to translate, quite a few have made an essay but have failed. It is only Nolini who supports me from another angle and that is, it is always beneficial to try. We are all quite aware that the poem is a difficult one, yet I have set myself to do it not depending wholly on my power or ability but depending fully on your help and inspiration with this idea that as I am relying on the force of one who can turn something impossible into a possibility," it may come to fruition! Moreover to be able to feel and give a form to your expressions brings in its wake a great satisfaction and joy. I have, however, translated four lines tentatively which will be much changed as I go on. Dilip has already seen them but he does not seem to think as if they will do, for he says, 'It is hardly anything at all, they will have to be recast all over'. I am quite prepared to do them over again but I am still uncertain as to what it would be. Do you, too, think that this poem is truly untranslatable, if so then please tell me as much, and I too shall not cling to an impossibility."

Sri Aurobindo's reply: "The poem is not at all easy to

translate but one cannot say that it is impossible, one can always try provided one is prepared not to mind if it is a failure or a half-success. To try sometimes even impossible things can be a very good training for the capacity."

I wrote again: "No one can hope to come to a par with the original while translating some works of the Mother's or yours. Still is it not

adequate enough to come as near as possible assimilating the inspiration from you maintaining the thought and movement generally?"

SRI AUROBINDO: "Yes. A complete equivalent is not likely — but something approximative can be done."

SELF: "One thing more, I have begun the work in blank verse. Dilip strongly objects saying 'how can it be done without rhyme?' Are you, too, of the same opinion?"

SRI AUROBINDO: "If it can be done in rhyme so much the better—as the original is in rhyme. But if not, it can be tried in blank verse. The form will not be so near, but to keep something of the movement may not be impossible."

SELF: "Lord Sri Aurobindo, I have begun it anew and in rhyme this time. I find it difficult but very enjoyable. There is a strong urge and I am putting all my ability into it. Even now the first four lines are not to my satisfaction — I can feel the movement but the words to express it are still eluding. Thus I am not satisfied yet with the result. Something has been done in the 'yogic rhyme' in long lines. Nolini remarks that it is slightly heavy and consequently I am changing again. I am still unable to find the right words in Bengali to express "unchangeable monotone". H. has come and given a few good suggestions and he feels very pleased about it. Normally they are beautiful but somehow somewhere they do not seem to bring out that grandeur, that restrained note is missed, missed too that solemnity. Please enlighten me and inspire me as well. Let me try some more. I would like a little clarification here:

Over its head like a gold ball the sun tossed by the gods in their play

Follows its curve...

This second 'its means the sun, does it not? At least that is what it seems to me.”

SRI AUROBINDO: "It is the sun's own curve."

SELF : "Whether I am able to do your poem or not, I nevertheless feel transported with joy. I feel a constant contact with you — the consciousness is ever turned upward. That is why I have set myself to do it. If you would say so, I could send you the little bit done, as a sample, as then you can see if it will pass muster.”

SRI AUROBINDO: "Yes, you can send."

And the sample was sent.

Sri Aurobindo's remark on the sample: "You have given an excellent start."

SELF: "Lord Sri Aurobindo, will you pray explain this bit to me as I don't get it correctly 'Something that waits, something that wonders and settles not, a nothing that was all and is found.'—this underlined portion”

Sri Aurobindo replied to me in Bengali (translated here):

"The inner thought is this 'a something inexpressible — as if it is nothing, inexistent, yet that is all, everything is in it, — it is not there, yet can be found; further when this is found everything has been found. I don't know if I have made it clear."

SELF: "Lord Sri Aurobindo, I am in no way satisfied with the translation of the last line of your poem. Something is missing somewhere. I am trying hard and changing some. Dilip insists on further change and is helping a lot — the last three words as changed by Dilip are being sent here, please go over them. If they meet with your approval, and the change by Dilip is better, then they will be accepted."

SRI AUROBINDO: "I cannot say that I approved of either of Dilip's last three words or of any of the other alterations suggested by N. All seem to miss the mark."

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The poem after many alterations later did come to stand. Dilip worked a great deal with me on this translation. Without his help and Nolini's ardent enthusiasm perhaps this poem that seemed impossible would not have been made possible. When the poem was at last done Dilip wrote a letter to Sri Aurobindo. This episode will be closed here with Dilip's letter and Sri Aurobindo's answer to it. It will be well understood from these letters with how much of patience and in how many ways Sri Aurobindo has taught us all these things with his help.

Dilip wrote: "I feel the last verse makes clear meaning anyway, but since Sahana is not pleased with it and she has been labouring at it for days, I think I may have mistaken your meaning. Doubtless, the 'something' I could not keep is, I took it to mean, that the passing movement reflects the Eternal when "caught by the spirit in sense". Tell me therefore O Lord, I must stop. Dilip." Sri Aurobindo wrote to Dilip: "I think it is a very fine rendering. For line 4, however, I would not say

that there is not today as a movement of time but only to the noon, the day as sunlit space rather than time, it is the fixed moment as it were, the motionless scene of noon. The eye is of course the sun itself, I mark by the dash that I have finished with my first symbol of the gold ball and go off to a second quite different one. In the last line your translation is indeed very clear and precise in meaning, but it is perhaps too precise — the 'something' twice repeated is meant to give a sense of just the opposite, an imprecise, unseizable something which is at once nothing and all things at a time. It is found no doubt in the momentary things and all is there, but the finding is less definite than your translation suggests. But the expression *nāsti rūpe silo se sarvāsti* is very good.

One point more, 'caught by a spirit in sense' means there is a spirit in sense (sense not being sense alone) that catches (the eternal out of the perishable hours in these things."

At one period I set myself to writing a lot of poems, this 10

may be called a bright period of poetry. Many were they who wrote — Nolini Gupta, Suresh Chakravarty had been doing so for many years — even Anilbaran Roy was found writing. Dilip and Nishikanta had increased their tempo, even Behari Barua, Jotin Das of Chittagong were at it. Nirod's niece Jyotirmala (she was called Jyotirmoye before) began writing after her coming here and did remarkably well. Nirod too got down to it and was flowering out. Even from my youthful days I had put my hand to composing poems but it was always when I felt the urge and again for quite long periods I did nothing. Anil Bhatta was also at it.

Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna) wrote in English which he has been doing very well even before but here his poetry took a different turn. Arjava (Chadwick) began here and soon became a renowned poet, leaving behind a lot of his work that was brought out in book form after his death. Romen, although a youngster, began in English and was doing well. Nolini, Dilip, Nirod wrote in English as well as in Bengali — perhaps Anilbaran also was in this group. Nolini, versatile linguist that he is, wrote poems in French too. Harin Chattopadhyay came with his genius and wrote a large number of poems and did most of them at his typewriter. He was, however, a recognised poet. Sri Aurobindo has spoken much about his poems in his book "Future Poetry" and elsewhere too. Nishikanta began writing while he was at Shantiniketan and his extraordinary genius began to show itself even there, but here his poetry reached a level quite other than where it was before. Sri Aurobindo has been profuse in high praise of his poetry.

We, Jyotirmala, Nirodbaran, Anil Bhatta, Amiya and myself, began to learn poetics from Dilip, who had then attained a good mastery over the subject. It was from Dilip that I learnt a particular kind of Sanskrit rhyming. Dilip and Nishikanta were experimenting with Sanskritic metre and rhyme that they toiled to introduce into Bengali poetry —I believe they have succeeded in doing so.

Jyotirmala, Nirod, Anil Bhatta and myself used to sit down to write daily at a fixed hour calling down Sri Aurobindo's force with prayers to him, as we tried to make this too as a limb of our sadhana. With what

enthusiasm we aspired to water the very roots of our poetry with the inspiration cascading down from Sri Aurobindo! We, all of us, were moving together with the sole and sincere effort towards progress through poetry. A new taste in writing was ours aided by a constant impetus from Sri Aurobindo. Every poem written was eagerly submitted for Sri Aurobindo's perusal and with a greater eagerness we were waiting to receive his comment brought by Nolini the next morning. It was Nolini's job to distribute to everyone letters from Sri Aurobindo. By 7 a.m. we got our letters. His comments, "good", "fine" or occasionally "very beautiful" were hailed with joy filling our efforts to the brim. All these were fresh experiences and delightful feelings. We often asked for not only his comments but his suggestions also and whenever a suggestion was due he rarely failed to give it. When several expressions giving the same idea were put before him for the better choice, he indicated them with such remarks as "On the whole this seems to me better".

We were as it were moulded by hand to learn from him. We probed not only into poetic thoughts but also into rhyme and metre, the intricacies of these made the taste more and more delectable to write and read poetry. Dabbling in metre and rhyme I suddenly found a closed door — writing English poems — open and many lines began to form and this I could hardly believe. My knowledge of English is hardly worth mentioning and yet the following lines came as if by themselves:

"Mother, in my deep heart I find  
A jewel shines amidst the night,  
When all the mortal senses are blind  
It speaks to the stars of unknown height.

"Mother, a flower of eternity  
Unfolds its petals within my soul.  
I sing to the light that unveils to me  
The crystal tower, your shining goal.

"Mother, in my precious secret spot,  
I am nestled on your breast alone  
Where all my pasts are gathered and brought  
Before the dream of your opening dawn."

When these lines came to me our correspondence with Sri Aurobindo had stopped, so Nirod was entrusted with it to be shown to Sri Aurobindo, who corrected and re-cast it as below:

Mother! deep in my heart I find  
A jewel glimmering in the night,  
When every mortal sense is blind  
It speaks to stars of unknown height

Mother! a love-flame swift and sweet  
Swaying along the path of gold,  
It rises to your heavenly feet  
Where sun and moon and stars you mould.

Mother! the flower of eternity  
Unfolds its petals in my soul,  
I sing to its light that unveils to me

A crystal tower, your shining gold.

Mother! in a lonely secret spot

I am cradled on your breast alone

When all of me is gathered, brought

Into your dream of opening Dawn.

It will be appropriate to mention another incident here. It

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was the period when I was working with the 'Building Service', superintending the work of masons, carpenters and others. One day the house called "Nanteuil" was being whitewashed. I was sitting and keeping a watch on the work when I heard within a line like a refrain continually coming — 'Travels from height to height unseen', —I could not make it out at first because in spite of my repeated pushing it away it did not stop coming before my mind's eye. Then I got hold of a piece of paper and went on writing the whole thing. That piece of paper is now lost, perhaps the result of negligence, but I have the other piece where Sri Aurobindo did the correction. It is thus:

"An emerald soul of peaks within

Travels from height to height unseen;

The shadow of the Infinite falls on earth's pain

A golden desire, a heavenly rain!

Transcendent of Time's moment's power

Come encircling the eternal hour.

The sun above the moon below  
Unheard footfalls come soft and slow,  
A bell rings from Eternity.  
Whirling the Almighty's power, She  
Creates a land of blue and white  
Within the smoke and doze of night:  
She comes in her golden robe of fire  
To release God-music from earth's lyre."

A few days later as I sat down to write at the usual hour a poem in Bengali began to come in whose meaning was escaping my understanding. It was mysterious, since Bengali is my mother-tongue and yet I could understand nothing. So I tore it to pieces and got up. But every time I took up the pen the same poem came repeatedly and this went on for six days. At last quite exasperated I spoke to Nirod thus: "I don't know what's happening. Whenever I sit down to write

there comes in this one and only poem that I can make no head or tail of and I do not want to write it for the same reason. And I am continually throwing it into the waste paper basket. What do you think I should do ?

Nirod asked: "What sort of lines? Can you recall a few lines?"

The lines had impressed themselves upon my memory as they were being repeated themselves for the last six days. So I recited the lines. On hearing them Nirod said "Are you sure this is not a mystic poem, Sahanadi ? I seem to feel they are mystic lines coming to you. Don't

throw them away. Please write down the whole of it and I will show them to Sri Aurobindo."

So it was written down and given to Nirod. While writing it gave me a good deal of pleasure although it was not intelligible. Nirod, as he returned after showing the poem to Sri Aurobindo, said before I could ask, "Sri Aurobindo said after reading the poem — 'If Sahana throws away this sort of inspiration, then what kind of inspiration can I give her?' " The meaning that Sri Aurobindo gave to the lines not only left me "astonished but I was stupified to think how it was possible that through my pen matters of unseen worlds could be expressed. Nirod encouraged me to go on writing even if nothing was understood. I too kept myself at it for some time. At times a word here. or there would come that I had never heard of before. So I looked them up in a dictionary or asked someone to find out if such words did really exist. There came a poem that when read seemed to indicate that I was a great pundit of the Bengali language. Later there dawned upon my eye of consciousness the image of Shiva although the poem was still unintelligible and a great feeling of satisfaction was pervading in me as I wrote. After I had completed I took it to Nolini who can not only penetrate into the meaning but likes mystic poetry. He said that it was a poem on Shiva. Nirod took it to Sri Aurobindo who also said it was Shiva and related to the higher regions beyond my com-

prehension. I dare not put here all that Sri Aurobindo said. However, after writing some mystic poems it became clear to me that no mystic

poem can be written by any mental effort; nor can it be corrected, as the words come they have to be put down on paper accurately; moreover, if any change is needed that too comes in like manner and no mental effort is called for. For, what a mystic poem wants to reveal is not known ordinarily, the mind cannot reach it. The only thing the intellect can do is to become a docile instrument. This became very clear to me after several attempts. Mystic poems create an atmosphere of their own and the language made use of often hides the inner meaning under a shroud of mysterious words. It seems that the words can reveal an infinity of messages replete with boundless knowledge, the more one can go deep within the more light they shed seemingly withholding much more as one goes on into its depth.

Nolini translated one of my mystic poems, and with that let me close the chapter of mystic poems.

The first tremor of the Light, lo the dream-journey  
Night's desire is now appeased, she feels the Sun within her,  
The Mother of Infinity holds in her bosom her first guest:  
The call awakes in the lotus-scented senses!

On the far shore where moves the Fiery Wheel  
Rose, unheeded, the cry of the Spaces —  
It spread and enveloped even our shadowy horizons:  
A golden vision flutters on earth's eye-lids, As the flaming spider  
weaves his luminous web around himself!

The Bard wheels onward in his sweeping march:

He gathers in perfect rhythm the soul's obeissances,  
Urges secreted in the heart of the sun-flower,  
Hymns limned in her petalled gold!

Darkness massed on darkness has burst all on a sudden:  
Eyes once closed open to the Lightning's flare!

Once I asked Sri Aurobindo if song and poetry were akin to each other. This was his answer:

"No, a song is not a kind of poem; or need not be. There are some very good songs which are not poems at all. In Europe, song-writers or the writers of the librettos of the great operas are not classed among poets. In Asia the attempt to combine song-quality with poetic value has been more common, but this is not essential. In ancient Greece also lyric poetry was often composed with a view to being set to music. But still poetry and song-writing, though they can be combined, are two different arts.

"The difference is not that poetry has to be understood and music or singing felt (*anubhūti*). If you only understand the intellectual content of a poem, its words and ideas, you <sup>a</sup> have not really appreciated the poem at all. And a poem which contains only that and nothing else, is not true poetry. A true poem contains something else which has to be felt just as you feel music and that is its more important and essential part. It has first, a rhythm, just as music has, though of a different kind, and it is the rhythm that helps this something else to come out through the medium of words. The words by themselves do not carry it or cannot

bring it out altogether, and this is shown by the fact that the same words written in a different order and without rhythm or without the proper rhythm would not at all move or impress you in the same way. This something else is an inner content or suggestion, a soul-feeling or a soul-experience, or vital feeling or life experience, a mental emotion, vision or experience (not merely an idea) and it is only if you can catch this and reproduce the experience in yourself, then you have got what the poem can give you, not otherwise.

"The real difference between a poem and a song is that a

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song is written with a view to being set to musical rhythm and a poem is written with a view to poetic rhythm or word music. These two rhythms are quite different. That is why a poem cannot be set to music unless it has either been written with an eye to both kinds of rhythms or else happens to have (without specially intending it) a movement which makes it easy or at least possible to set it to music. This happens often with lyrical poetry, less often with other kinds. There is also this usual character of a song that it is satisfied to be very simple in its content, bringing out a single idea or feeling, and leaving it to the music to develop it; but this is not always done." (4.7.31)

The French litterateur and poet Maurice Magre was coming. I was busy embroidering a curtain for the big door of the Mother's room on the design submitted by Sanjiban, one of the best artists in the Ashram. The old French houses of Pondicherry have large doors and windows. Consequently the curtain too was large.

I had gone to ask the Mother about some points as regards the curtain when, after a moment's reflection, she asked, "Maurice Magre is expected, do you think you will be able to finish the curtain before his arrival? There are still three months in hand." Guessing her intention, I said enthusiastically, "Yes, Mother, most certainly." Mother was very pleased and blessed me, I too made my obeissance. She gave me a big red rose, signifying "All passion turned into love for the Divine." This gave me further impetus to finish the curtain in time, cost what it may. Mentally working it out, it seemed that to finish the curtain within three months would entail a work of eleven to twelve hours a day, which I put in, but strange to say I never felt tired even after such long hours of work. The work was intricate and extensive — a very thick trunk of a tree spreading proportionate branches mounting upwards, on a branch towards the top a white peacock looking down and on a lower branch another white peacock gazing up towards the other bird. The size

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of the birds would come up to the stature of a full grown Bengali girl. The design was superb too. I was surprised at the energy with which I was able to complete the work without tiring — it was clearly derived from the Mother herself. When it was taken to the Mother and spread on the floor for her inspection, I can hardly describe the expression of her eyes, I wonder if I have ever seen anyone appreciating in like manner. After looking at it for a long time, with a face beaming with joy, she said in French, "Oh! c'est magnifique!" Even today the same curtain is hung in Sri Aurobindo's room on every Darshan day of the 24th November;

and each time I remember and gaze at it in wonder; I try to imagine what I had offered the Mother and how she has transformed it, that even after nearly four decades it hangs as perfectly as on the first occasion—a perfect example of preserving a thing with the utmost possible care.

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I am quoting from my earlier writing "On the way to Pondicherry", some portions about my coming here:

"I started from Madras for Pondicherry on the 21st November 1928. Leaving Egmore station at 9 p.m. arrived at 5 a.m. next morning, that is on the 22nd November. The whole night in the train was passed in a self-gathered state of consciousness. Thus I came here in the end, a sort of one journey's end to start afresh on a new journey.

With the first hint of daylight, accompanied by two sadhaks who had come to meet the train, my steps were directed towards the Ashram.

The sadhaks, after depositing me at the room allotted to me, left after informing me that Nolini would be coming to meet me there. My room was in the "Ladies' House", now used for Sewing and embroidering work for the Mother. Just across the street is the Ashram main building. I was delightfully surprised to be lodged in such a beautiful room,

never having expected anything more than a thatched room at best.

Nolini came along with another gentleman wearing his hair long and his face covered with a beard and moustache. Soon it became

apparent from a few words that he uttered that he was a very witty person and given to bantering a lot. It would have been impossible to guess that he was a Tamil brahmin from the way he spoke Bengali faultlessly. Nolini introduced him to me as Amrita. Of Nolini I had heard much before as an eminent writer, although I was quite wrong about his figure — having imagined him to be a man of grave demeanour, thick set and reserved, whereas I found him to be quite lean having a broad forehead and the look in his eyes was deeply indrawn and extraordinary. He was a man of few words and informed me that the Mother would meet me at 9.30 a.m. and I should be at the gate a few minutes earlier and he would himself take me to her. I was beside myself to feel that the Mother would see me so soon and so I shut the door of my room trying to be more within myself. As I opened the door to a knock at about 8.30 a.m. I saw a maid-servant with my breakfast on a tray — the sumptuousness of the meal surprised me no less. All arrangements were perfect even to a pitcher of drinking water and a glass. The maid-servant quietly did the routine cleaning of the room, and left as quietly no sooner that the work was done. Normally everything seemed commonplace to an external point of view but one could feel something above the ordinary pressing from behind the veil. The Ashramites seemed to be all very satisfied with something not quite mundane, their affairs were other-worldly.

What was a dream seemed to have taken on the garb of a sacred reality—my day of days to meet the Mother!

A little before 9.30 a.m. Nolini met me at the gate and asked me to follow him. We came to the house where the Mother and Sri Aurobindo lived and mounted the stairs to

the first floor where in a small room at the eastern side the Mother was seated on a couch with her feet tucked in and holding on to one end of the sari covering over her head. At the very first glance although hers was a human material body yet it became quite clear to me that hers was rather an incarnated divine form. I gazed at her spell-bound and remained standing with joined hands. As she bestowed her heavenly smile and looked at me I bent to place my head on her feet. The touch of her hand on my head seemed to melt the whole of my being in an inner ecstasy. As she removed her hand, I sat near her feet. She again put her hand on my head and my eyes closed by themselves, my consciousness seemed to ascend rapidly and a force came down to spread itself over the nerves and the entire body filling them completely. I could hardly open my eyes till the Mother touched a spot on my forehead between the eyes when I saw the Mother looking deeply into me, into the remotest recesses of my being. She then asked me if I had anything to say—She listened attentively to all I had to tell her — about myself and my life. When I had finished she drew me into her 'arms and kissed my forehead. It is impossible for me to translate that touch into words. Then she raised my face tilting it with her hand gazing into my eyes with an expression of compassionate consolation. Thus she accepted me. My eyes became full with tears of joy.

I returned to my room and when there I felt the Mother's presence all the time and cried and cried — whence did they come, all those ceaseless tears! But they were tears of happiness never before tasted.

Next day the Mother came to my room at five in the evening. After sitting down on a chair I had specially arranged for her she asked me to sing. I sang to her the well-known Bhajan of Mirabai, "Keep me as your servitor", after which she asked me to sing some more. Thus I sang four or five songs to her. Afterwards as she was leaving she said in great affection. "Don't hesitate to let me know if you need any-

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thing or feel inconvenienced in any way" — a fascinating embodiment of compassion.

The next day was the Darshan of Sri Aurobindo; 24th November. My first Darshan. From early childhood days he had been enshrined in our heart and mind as the greatest among the great as the tales, truths, were dinned into our ears by the elders, of his nobleness, his scholarship, his love for humanity and his great sacrifice. We were told if there were any worthy of worship it was he. Much later he came into my life as my Guru.

Darshan day. The very atmosphere of the Ashram was charged. Many visitors had arrived from outside replete with eagerness to come to him. The countenances of the Ashramites were suffused with an inner light of ecstasy quietly yet expectantly waiting to receive the blessings from him to whom their lives were dedicated.

The Darshan was arranged in the room where the Mother gave interviews. It began at 7 a.m. There was a list of names of all those who had come for Darshan with the time given to each, hung at the foot of the stairs leading to the upper storey. In the Meditation Hall below were spread carpets where people were seated awaiting their turn. The entire building presented a sanctified air as the perfume of incense filled it — a solemn atmosphere. As his turn came, each one mounted the stairs to enter the holy precincts. The next one waiting on the last step. A profound silence reigned everywhere; even the slightest whisper was absent. As my turn came to wait on the last step, I saw Sri Aurobindo seated on a sofa leaning back, still and majestic like the Himalayas, a perfect image of a glorious sublimity. As I came before him I was enchanted by his amazing handsomeness. The Mother was seated on his right in a dazzling splendour. As I bowed down and touched her feet with my head, the Mother placing both her hands on my head, blessed me, then on raising my head she poured into me the nectar of her incomparable smile. Then my gaze came upon the fascinating

feet of Sri Aurobindo. My head as it lowered itself on those feet was quite reluctant to leave them as the whole of my being was brimful of all that came into it and in particular a feeling of supreme reliance pervaded me. The touch of his hand was soft and reassuring. What I received from that touch cannot be described but it was certain never before had anything similar been received. As I looked into his eyes an unfathomable profundity was there — I could not take my gaze away till

he himself shifted his. Slowly I came away to my room. I remembered not at all how the day was spent as my entire awareness was all the time surcharged with what I had seen.

Thus I had my first Darshan of Sri Aurobindo. Him I saw to whom all my life was dedicated even from before. Whenever I had thought of God it was his image that used to come before my mind's eye.

Did I get him as my Guru? The soul answered — not only ^ as the Guru. Then was it as the wisest of sages or a great Yogi? not even that. As the Seer of the Integral Yoga? No, not that either, but as Sri Aurobindo himself, the one and only Sri Aurobindo, the supreme Beloved.

The first time that I was nervous to sing was when I sang in Sri Aurobindo's presence on the 15th August 1929. It was four in the afternoon when the Mother was distributing the blessing flowers to all. Both Dilip and myself were to sing. This was on the first floor Meditation Hall; Sri Aurobindo was in the next room, his own, and only a curtain separated us from him. First I began to sing a famous song of D. L. Roy, "How can I worship Thee in any single image, when the entire universe is Thy image". My throat seemed to dry up, the voice had lost its flexibility. The song was very plain and I was disappointed. Often have I sung before large audiences, with Rabindranath on many occasions, but never had such a thing happened to me. Dilip sang after me but he too did not fare very well. After his song we sang a duet, the famous Bhajan of Mirabai, "O

Lord keep me as Thy servitor". Later I asked the Mother the cause of my nervousness. She said: "You are forgetting in whose presence you were singing. It was your vital being that was nervous in his presence."

Nearly once every month or at times once in two months there used to be some sittings of musical performances mainly by Dilip and myself. Occasionally some other ashramites who could sing were taken in hand by Dilip and joined us. They were held in front of Amrita's room in the Mother's presence. It was all a sort of votive offering to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo through music. The presence of the Mother was instrumental in infusing a special spirit other than what usually these sittings did manifest. The Mother was very fond of listening to Dilip's European songs. There I ' ' was also Lalita who used to play the piano as also an English lady who was named Nandini by Sri Aurobindo who used to be a remarkable performer on the Cello. The Mother was very fond of her playing. Sri Aurobindo said of her that she was a born musician. Once in 1932 we arranged for a special musical performance on the 24th April. The Mother gave the following message written in her own hand:

"To all those who took part in today's singing and music: Sri Aurobindo and myself have felt that there was a great progress this time. It was not only from the external point of view of execution, but in the greater aim of the concentration behind and in the inner attitude. May the day bring its benediction to all". (24.4.32)

The first part of Dilip's "Geetashri" was coming out containing many songs with their notations. I agreed to his proposal to help him with the notations of a few songs.

I am not well conversant with the technique of Indian classical music so I sat down with some recognised books on classical music by Krishnadhan Bandopadhyay and Pandit Bhatkhande. But, how much can books help when the training was lacking? So I appealed to the Mother and Sri

Aurobindo in my helplessness. The result was that unbeknown to me theretofore I was yet able to do the work that later seemed to be not mine at all, yet the notations were done. Even when I tried to sing them later I had to do exactly as one trying a completely new thing. So on my appeal to Sri Aurobindo to clarify it, he wrote:

"As you have opened yourself to the Force and made yourself a channel for the energy to work, it is quite natural that when you want to do this musical work the Force should flow and act in the way that is wanted or the way that is needed and for the effect that is needed. When one has made oneself a channel, the Force is not necessarily bound by the limitation or disabilities of the instrument; it can disregard them and act in its own power. In doing so it may use the instrument simply as a medium and leave him as soon as the work is finished just what he was before, incapable in his ordinary movements of doing such good work; but also it may by its action set the instrument right, accustom it to the necessary intuitive knowledge and movement so that it can at will

command the action of the Force. As for the technique, there are two different things, the intellectual knowledge which one applies, the intuitive cognition which acts in its own right, even if it is not actually possessed by the worker. Many poets for instance have little knowledge of metrical or linguistic technique and cannot explain how they wrote or what are the qualities and elements of their success, but they work all the same things that are perfect in rhythm and language. Intellectual knowledge of technique helps of course, provided one does not make of it a mere device or a rigid fetter. There are some arts that cannot be done well without some technical knowledge, e.g., painting, sculpture.

What you write is your own in the sense that you have been the instrument of its manifestation — that is so with every artist or worker. You need have no scruple about putting your name, though of course for sadhana, it is necessary to

recognise that the real power was not yourself and you were simply the instrument in which it played its tune.

The Ananda of creation is not the pleasure of the ego in having personally done well and being somebody, that is something extraneous which attaches itself to the joy of work and creation. The Ananda comes from the inrush of a greater power, the thrill of being possessed and used by it, the *āveśā*, the exultation of the uplifting of the consciousness, its illumination and its greatened and heightened action and also the joy of the beauty, power and perfection that is being created. However, one feels it depends on the condition of the consciousness at the time, the

temperament, the activity of the vital. The yogi of course (or even certain strong calm minds) is not carried away by the Ananda, he holds and watches it and there is no mere excitement mixed with the flow of it through mind, vital or body. Naturally the Ananda of *a&samarpan* or spiritual realisation or divine love is something far greater, but the Ananda of creation has its place."

Another letter from Sri Aurobindo:

"If you wish to be free from people's expectation and the sense of obligation it is indeed best not to take from anybody; for the sense of claim will otherwise be there. Not that it will be entirely absent even if you take nothing, but you will not be bound any longer.

"What you write about the singing is perfectly correct. You sing your best only when you forget yourself and let it come out from within without thinking of the need of excellence or the impression it may make. The (great singer) should indeed disappear into the past, it is only so that the inner singer can take her place." (22.8.37)

There was a wish in my mind: why should I not dance before the Mother? Not that I knew anything of dancing, but why should the Mother not see the little that I could do ? When I came I had thought that perhaps I would have to renounce singing and dancing altogether for sadhana. But

Sri Aurobindo assured me in a letter "The development of capacities is not only permissible but right, when it can be made a part of the yoga; one can give not only one's soul, but all one's power to the Divine."

Then I took courage and wrote to the Mother of my wish. She agreed to see me dancing. With a happy heart I prepared a dance, which she did witness. Thus was my wish fulfilled. I have loved dancing since my childhood, as much as singing.

On the first day I prepared a dance on Rabindranath's song "In the steps of the dance" and the dance was accompanied by the song, sung by Dilip. This was sometime in 1932. The Mother then gave us the idea of a dance on Radha. Dilip was entrusted to compose the song for the dance and I was to translate it into a dance. There were four movements — first, a vast emptiness had enveloped Radha, within as well as outside — she was groping in the dark; the second — longing without finding what she was seeking; the third—the revelation of Krishna; the last—the surrender of Radha. Dilip composed a marvellous song for the dance much praised by both the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. I can hardly check myself from mentioning here two humorous remarks of Sri Aurobindo. When the idea of showing the dance to the Mother was first mooted, we asked her to allot a particular room for practising, but in the room below resided a sadhak. Sri Aurobindo wrote in answer to our request: "He is too serious to be danced over"—while later when asked where could one practice the 'Radha dance', he indicated that very room. Much astonished I wrote mentioning about the sadhak: "You had written to say, 'He is too serious to be danced over'". He replied at once: "Perhaps before long he will cease to be too serious."

The practising of the dance was on, when something happened. It was this: Dilip had composed another song entitled: "The Dawn-dance". This one too I was preparing along with the Radha-dance but in my own

room. This one, the Dawn-dance soon got ready and easily. From this dance

I had a novel experience and I wrote about it to the Mother. I am quoting here portions of that letter: "It seems to me I have at once understood something new while preparing the dance. When I began the Radha-dance I started with the idea of expressing the inner mood of the song through the movements of my dancing; the mood expressed in the song I have tried first to feel and then tried to give it a form, but when I began the Dawn-dance then there did not arise in me any definite form of the mood of the dance. What has actually taken form is from a feeling that came before I could even realise the language of the mood the song had in it, as if the mood, the movement of vibration of the song were spontaneously expressing themselves through the movements of my dance; I was paying no attention to the words of the song rather, it seemed, I was following only the inner movement. Thus it appears to be a new experience of mine, and there is some truth in it. Perhaps these words of mine are too big, but what I am trying to say is this that the song for the Radha-dance from the point of view of the composition is much more easily understood than the Dawn-dance. Whereas the mood that the Dawn-dance has expressed, we are not very familiar with it. It is no doubt a new creation from the point of view of the inner expression, the form, expression all are unfamiliar to us and the composition too is quite intricate, at least it is so to me. This is just what I am trying to tell: I did not try to grasp a definite form at the outset, spontaneously the

vibration of the inner movement came to me and the movements of the dance followed. That is why I wrote to tell you that the Dawn-dance is fairly easy, but I have not grasped why it is easy. As dance the inner vibration is becoming clear, as it were, I understand well an inner movement. I am writing to you to find out if there is any truth in it." Sri Aurobindo replied: "To feel the vibration and develop from it the rhythm of the dance is the right way to create something true; the other way, to understand with the mind and work it out with the mind only or mainly

is the mental way; it is laborious and difficult and has not got the same spontaneous movement."

In spite of my efforts with the Radha-dance the result was not up to my expectations, it seemed the real thing was eluding me. I realised that I was following the second way of which Sri Aurobindo told me, that is, my mind was more at work. Although I met the Mother often who watched my dance with a lot of care and affection and eagerness too, encouraging me a good deal, yet I seemed to be in the same dark alley and was not able to open myself in the manner I wanted to and consequently what I wanted remained unexpressed. In the end I veered off towards the Dawn-dance leaving the Radha-dance in abeyance.

All of us living here a life of slow awakening of consciousness, we begin to see why we are not able to do certain things and where we go astray in spite of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo helping with their force to crown every one of our resolutions with success, in spite of their sentinel-like vigilance watching over all our efforts. Be that as it may,

when I was trying to shape the last movement of the Radha-dance I got a priceless letter from the Mother, written in her own hand. A letter like this one will show the manner of their help and explain how daily they are trying to raise us up, where and in what way. This episode on dancing will end with the quoting of the Mother's letter. This is what she wrote:

"Sahana,

To complete what I told you yesterday about Radha's dance I have noted down as an indication of the thought and feeling Radha must have within her when she stands finally in front of Krishna: 'Every thought of my mind, each emotion of my heart, every movement of my being, every feeling and sensation, each cell of my body, each drop of my blood, all, all is yours, yours without reserve. You can decide my life or my death, my happiness or my sorrow, my 'pleasure or my pain, whatever you *do* with me,

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whatever comes to me from you will lead me to Divine Rapture."

I had noted when I arrived that there were no separate arrangements for cooking the meals of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo nor any separate kitchen. Some sadhaks and sadhikas with their sanction cooked something or other and offered it to them. A few cooked daily for them, some once or twice a week, again there were some who occasionally did some cooking for them. This is how things were going on, there were no regular cooking of meals for the Mother or Sri Aurobindo nor was anyone given any direction as to what should be

cooked and in what way. Whatever was offered with devotion by whosoever they accepted that. They, however, were very small eaters. I, too, did cook for them twice a week. We all knew where the tray of our cooked offering had to be placed and at what hour of the day, or it was given into Champaklal's hand; what a fine taste of joy we had in doing that! In the evening again we used to bring back our trays containing their 'prasad', which some of us shared. There lived in the Ashram an English lady, who was given the name Datta by Sri Aurobindo, she too often took in the tray from us and kept it in its appointed place. We have heard it said that even when she was in Europe she was a companion to the Mother for quite some time and also travelled with her to many countries. The very sight of this lady was indeed a pleasure, she seemed to us a pure white flower consecrated to the Divine.

In those days every sadhaka or sadhika was allotted a separate room. Their rooms had the following furniture — a bedstead, a table, a chair and a clothes horse. A domestic servant too was allotted to one for about an hour or an hour and a half according to the minimum need. No one did any cooking in his or her room except those used to drinking tea, who made it themselves in their rooms over a stove. All our regular meals were partaken at the dining hall.

It is only after coming to the Ashram that I realised how

small are our real needs, elsewhere we are apt to make much of them. It should, however, be noted that in our Ashram the path of sadhana followed is not that of austerities. The Mother has therefore provided for

all that is really necessary so that we could devote all our mind and energy to the seeking after the Divine.

At the beginning the stress in me was for meditation, not so much for work. There was felt no great impetus to work or to realise the true value of work. The necessity for work grew in me slowly by degrees, gradually the joy of work too was born. Still after taking up some work I used to feel the need for meditating in the pause of work, at those periods I used to forget the work and become merged within. Soon a doubt arose, if it were desirable to meditate at the hours of work, as naturally while meditating the attention on the work was not there. I wrote to the Mother about it and she herself replied: "... when you are at work it is always better to remain fully aware of your body and its action. With my love and blessings."

Bit by bit I came to realise that unless one went through work it would not be possible to arrive at what the Mother and Sri Aurobindo were aiming at — the entire transmutation of our nature and consciousness.

I feel like quoting here a few letters of the Mother to clarify the point. The Mother wrote:

"It is very good- to have recovered the calm. It is in the calm that the body can increase its receptivity and gain the power to contain. With love and blessings."

"Sadhana is always difficult and everybody has conflicting elements in his nature and it is difficult to make the vital give up its ingrained habits."

"That is no reason for giving up sadhana. One has to keep up the central aspiration, which is always sincere and go on steadily in spite of temporary failures, and it is then inevitable that the change will come."

"Our help is always with you. With my love and blessings."

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"Sahana,

I am very glad to hear of this new opening and fine experience. Always when one faces difficulties and overcomes them it brings a new spiritual opening and victory. Our love and blessings are with you."

And yet another:

"Sahana, my dear child,

You have indeed passed from one life to another, but it is in your body that this new birth took place, and now the road is wide open before you for a new progress. With my love and blessings." (19.4.1966)

It was here in the Ashram that a new world opened in front of me at the touch of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo — in that light I saw a vast unknown world bringing in the possibility of being born into a new consciousness. It is not the method of the Mother or Sri Aurobindo to lead forward as one leads a blind. Thus inspired by their marvellous teaching my journey began in the inner regions, in the very depths of consciousness through a variety of experiences. Gradually things began to clear where they were vague. The feeling was that in those regions there were no end of steps.

The hour struck when the Mother and Sri Aurobindo gave me the direction to tell them all without reserve, even the tiniest movement of my mind.

I had asked Sri Aurobindo to understand in clear and understandable terms about consciousness and transformation. This was the letter he wrote: "As for your question about consciousness and transformation, the answer is that consciousness is made up of two elements, awareness of self and things and forces and conscious power. Awareness is the first thing necessary, you have to be aware of things in the right consciousness, in the right way, seeing them in their truth, but awareness by itself is not enough. There must be a will and a force that makes the consciousness effective. Somebody may have the full consciousness of what has to be changed, what has to go and what has to come in its place

but may be helpless to make the change. Another may have the will-force but for want of the right awareness may be unable to apply it in the right way at the right place. The advantage of being in the psychic consciousness is that you have the right consciousness and its will being in harmony with the Mother's will, you can call in the Mother's force to make the change. Those who live in the mind and the vital are not so well able to do this; they are obliged to use mostly their personal effort and as the awareness and will and force of mind and vital are divided and imperfect, the work done is imperfect and not definitive. It is only in

the supermind that awareness, will and force are always one movement and automatically effective."

If one could place oneself in tune with the force of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo constantly at work on us, amazing things are apt to happen. One can discern one's life moving in another rhythm, one gets a state of entering into a world quite different. Once one can enter into the current one can see that one has nothing else to do. Whatsoever there is to be done, accepted or rejected, is done automatically. There is no effort, no questions, no feeling of pain in rejecting anything nor even any vain pleasure to become someone. One feels oneself to be someone quite different living in another world, watching all from another level. One can feel "an endless ardour, a love for all, that comes from elsewhere. All this is the natural movement of the consciousness that grows in one and leads towards its own particular goal. The most remarkable thing felt is that one hardly comes across the 'I' that before used to be so much in the front. When a trial comes in life one is rarely able to keep the right attitude, it is this failure that is the cause of much trouble,—this truth is clearly projected. One becomes aware that in truth we are reft from the inner contact of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, and are plunged in turbulent waters. The intensity and wakefulness required are no longer there and one flounders in that region where the ego is

master, where the vision is blurred, from where sprouts all pain and sorrow. All these observations I have made known to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo as I was directed to do. Sri Aurobindo sent me a letter in

reply: "The automatic tendency is a good sign as it shows that it is the inner being opening to the Truth which is pressing forward the necessary change.

"The attitude you describe is quite the right one.

"As you say, it is the failure of the right attitude that comes in the way of passing through the ordeals to a change of nature. The pressure is being greater now for this change of character even more than for decisive yoga experience—for if the experience comes it fails to be decisive because of the want of the requisite change of nature. The mind for instance gets the experience of the One in all, but the vital cannot follow because it is dominated by the ego-reaction and ego-nature or the habits of the outer nature keep up a way of thinking, feeling, acting, living, which is quite out of harmony with these experiences. For the psychic and part of the mind and internal being feel frequently the closeness of the Mother, but the rest of the nature is unoffered and goes its own way prolonging division from her nearness creating distance. It is because the sadhaks have never even tried to have the yogic attitude in all things — they have been contented with the common ideas, common view of things, common motives of life — only varied by inner experience and transferred to the frame-work of the Ashram instead of that of the world-outside. It is not enough and there is great need that it should change." (9.9.1936)

I was keen to see what Sri Aurobindo has to say about "intellect" and "intellectuals" although I had heard from others his point of view, as I was not quite clear about them. Sri Aurobindo's answer:

"D asked me the question and I answered it on the basis | of the current meaning of "intellect" and "intellectual". |People in ordinary speech do not make any distinction be-

tween intellect and intelligence, though of course it is quite true that a man may have a good or even a fine intelligence without being an intellectual. But ordinarily all thinking is attributed to the intellect; an intellectual therefore is a man whose main business or activity is to think about things — a philosopher, a poet, a scientist, a critic of art and literature or of life, are all classed together as intellectuals. A theorist on economy and politics is an intellectual, a politician or a financier is not, unless he theorises on his own subject or is a thinker on another.

"N's distinction is based on those I have made here, but these distinctions are not current in ordinary speech, except one or two and those even in a very imperfect way. If I go by these distinctions then the intellectuals will no longer be called intellectuals but thinkers and creators — or an intellectual thinker will then be one who is a thinker by his reason or mainly by his reason — e.g. Bertrand Russell, Bernard Shaw, Wells etc. Tagore thinks by vision, imagination, feeling or by intuition, not by the reason — at least that is true of his writings. C. R. Das himself would not be an intellectual — in politics, literature and everything else he was an "intuitive" and "emotive" man. But, as I say, these would be distinctions not ordinarily current. In ordinary parlance Tagore, Das and everybody else of the kind would all be called intellectuals also. The general mind does not make these subtle

distinctions, it takes things in the mass roughly and it is right in doing so, for otherwise it would lose itself altogether.

"As for barristers etc., a man to succeed as barrister must have legal knowledge, and the power to apply it. It is not necessary that he should be a thinker, even on his own subject, or an intellectual. It is the same with all professional men—doctors, engineers, etc. etc.; they may be intellectuals as well as successful in their professions, but they need not be.

"P.S. Argument properly speaking needs some power of

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logical intellect; but it can be specialised in a certain line. The power of argument does not by itself make a man an intellectual."

Now with a few minor questions and answers from Sri Aurobindo I shall bring to a close the chapter on my life in the Ashram of the old days:

QUESTION: How can things go on unless 'rejection' can be made effective?

ANSWER: It will be easier when you bring down a settled peace and equanimity into that part of the being. There will then be more of an automatic rejection of such movements and less need of tapasya.

QUESTION: O Mother! How to bring down a settled peace and equanimity? If you tell me how, I may try and see.

ANSWER: The Mother's peace is above you—by aspiration and quiet self-giving it descends. When it takes hold of the vital and the body, then equanimity becomes easy and the end automatic. (25.8.33)

QUESTION: O Mother! I am immersed in my writings, is it right, what I am doing, I don't know. Now I do not seem to have grasped your opinion about my efforts on writing a novel. So I am dubious if I am doing something not approved by you, if so, I will stop it. I had thought of offering the completed novel on my birthday.

SRI AUROBINDO'S ANSWER: Mother does not disapprove of your writing a book — what she does not like is your being so lost in it that you can do nothing else. You must be master of what you do and not possessed by it. She quite agrees to your finishing and offering the book on your birthday if that can be done — but you must not be carried away. You must keep your full contact with higher things. (1.5.34)

QUESTION: Mother, may I ask something now? Whenever, I get any doubt or some such thing, I have seen that automatically I begin to feel more strengthened in faith, aspiration — a feeling as if my faith covers me as behind a shield, an unshakable faith is concretely discerned. When I

hear about doubts my strength increases — strange, is it not? Is there any meaning in this?

SRI AUROBINDO'S ANSWER: It is the reaction of the psychic to mental doubt and the vital disturbance which caused it. The psychic knows that the Divine is and affirms its knowledge against all appearances. (1.9.33)

QUESTION: When I close my eyes for meditation my physical mind becomes too active, and instead of allowing it to go deeper, it

pushes me on to the surface, and then I feel heaviness on my forehead because I feel the movement moving about there only; I find when I am at my work I am quite cheerful and enthusiastic, happy, quiet but after such a meditation I feel I am in discomfort.

O Mother, how to improve my meditation? I think I could meditate better. After straining to meditate is it possible to have a fall in the consciousness? The difficulty is this that I am no more able to go deeper at all. Anyhow you will know what is wrong there.

SRI AUROBINDO'S ANSWER: It is on the surface that the transformation is done. One comes up to the surface with what one has gained in the depth, to change it. It may be you need to go in and find it difficult to make the movement back quickly. When the whole being becomes plastic you will be able to make whatever movement is needed more quickly.

QUESTION: Today I took my afternoon meal with A. Do you think I have taken a risk in doing so?

SRI AUROBINDO'S ANSWER: If you keep the intensity, it is all right — but you must see that the intensity continues and is not replaced by some other condition in which you only feel at ease and do not notice that the intense condition is gone—for, if that happens then something may again begin to matter. (13.7.32)

SELF: I am always aspiring for Sri Aurobindo's light in my mind. Tell me, Mother gracious, will I ever be capable of receiving the touch of His Light in my mind?

SRI AUROBINDO : It can always come in the mind if you aspire patiently. But the basic condition, if you want that Light, is to get rid of other mental influences. (22.5.32)

SELF: What a turmoil came this afternoon as I was resting after the mid-day meal! A sea of images of my earlier life and that of many people were coming and receding one after another. I seemed to be smothered in that crowd. I got up to meditate, but wonder of wonders, there too they were coming in hordes, no meditation was possible. Much as I tried to reject them, it was still the same kaleidoscopic cinema show into which I was plunged with no possibility of detaching myself from all that. All this renders the peace of forging ahead to stop, the mind heavy, depressed within.

SRI AUROBINDO : So long you have not learned the lesson, the past had to touch you, it comes back on you. Notice carefully what kind of remembrances come, you will see that they are connected with some psychological movement in you that has to be got rid of. So you must be prepared to recognise all that was not right in you and is still not corrected, not allow any vanity or self-righteousness to cloud your vision. (24.10.32)

SELF: Slowly I am beginning to understand from where the impulse to blame others or slander comes, what is behind these motives or in what spirit one indulges in them.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is the petty ego in each that likes to discover and talk about the "real or unreal" defects of others — and it does not matter whether they are real or unreal, the ego has no right to judge them, because it has not the right view or the right spirit. It is only the

calm, disinterested, dispassionate, all-compassionate and all-loving Spirit that can judge and see rightly the strength and weakness in each being. (12.6.34)

SELF: Whereas I should gather myself in I seem to be all dispersed. It seems to me that if I could detach myself internally from every thing and all, consider myself quite alone then perhaps I shall be able to do sincerely that which I am

here to do. What wants to be only in my petty mind concerned with petty things forgetting all else, this depresses me a lot.

SRI AUROBINDO : You must gather yourself more firmly. If you disperse yourself constantly, go out of the inner circle, you will constantly move about in the pettiness of the ordinary outer nature and under the influence to which it is open. Learn to live within, to act always from within from a constant communion with the Mother. It may be difficult at first to do it always and completely, but it can be done if one sticks to it — and it is at that price, by learning to do that, that one can have the siddhi in the Yoga. (5.6.34)

SELF: Why is it that I think that weeping opens the door through which weakness gets a way of entry into us, an opportunity to allow the force to get in which saps our strength of mind?

SRI AUROBINDO: It is quite correct that weeping brings in the forces that should be kept outside — for weeping is a giving away of the inner control and an expression of vital reaction and ego. It is only the psychic weeping that does not open the door to these forces — but that

is without infliction, tears of bhakti, spiritual emotion or Ananda.  
(3.7.37)

In answer to a letter Sri Aurobindo wrote:

The ananda you describe is evidently that of the inner vital when it is full of the psychic influence and floods with it the external vital also. It is the true ananda and there is nothing in it of the old vital nature. When the psychic thus uses the vital to express itself, this kind of intense ecstasy is the natural form it takes. This intensity and the old vital excitement are two quite different things and must not be confused together. Where there is the intensity with a pure and full satisfaction, content and gratitude leaving no room for claim, demand or depressing reaction, that is the true vital movement. (6.12.31)

SELF: How can the right relation between all of ourselves be established and what should it be like?

SRI AUROBINDO : What you must have with other sadhaks is a harmonious relation, free from any mere vital attachment (indifference is not asked from you) and free from any indulgence in wrong movement of the opposite kind (such as dislike, jealousy or ill-will). It is through the psychic consciousness that you have found it possible to be in a true constant relation with the Mother and your aim is to make that the basis of all of your life, action and feeling, all in you, all you feel, say and do should be consistent with that basis. If all proceeds from that psychic union of your consciousness with the Mother, dedicating everything to her then you will develop the right relation with others. (10.2.32)

Here ends the memory-image of my life in the Ashram of the old days. But before that I would like to reproduce a rendering by Sri Aurobindo of one of my songs.

Since thou hast called me, see that I  
Go not from thee, — surrounding me stand.  
In thy own love's diviner way  
Make me too love thee without end.

My fathomless blackness hast thou cleft  
With thy infinity of light,  
Then waken in my mortal voice  
Thy music of illumined sight.

Make me thy eternal journey's mate  
Tying my life around thy feet.  
Let thy own hand my boat unmoor,  
Sailing the world thyself to meet.

Fill full of thee my day and night,  
Let all my being mingle with thine  
And every tremor of my soul  
Echo thy flute of flutes divine.

Come in thy chariot, Charioteer,  
And drive me whither thou wouldst go.  
All within me and all my acts  
Make luminous with surrender's glow.

