

TALKS BY NIRODBARAN

December 1969 – July 1970

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by  
NIRODBARAN

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Edited by Sunayana and Maurice

Sri Aurobindo Ashram  
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## Foreword

Four years before Sri Aurobindo's birth centenary, at a teacher's request, Nirod-da agreed to speak to the students of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education about Sri Aurobindo. It was thought that this would help to prepare them for the occasion. Having had a privileged contact with the Master for twelve years as well as a voluminous correspondence with him, Nirod-da soon became a big draw with the students. As the audience kept increasing for his talks, the venue was shifted to the larger Hall of Harmony. Each week Nirod-da's talk to the students was tape-recorded on a cassette; then it was immediately transcribed and made available for the following session. In this way, a hundred and fifty talks were recorded and meticulously transcribed by Sudha and Kokila. It is interesting to note that Nirod-da's *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo* was born of notes taken for these talks; before the book was published, it was read out to the Mother in instalments by the author himself. "Thanks to Nirod," the Mother wrote, "we have a revelation of an altogether unknown side of what Sri Aurobindo was. It is extremely interesting and very instructive."

In his talks, Nirod-da related many revealing vignettes about Sri Aurobindo; his perceptive observations give us a picture of the Master's life at that time. Nirod-da also quoted extensively from his correspondence with Sri Aurobindo as well as from some reminiscences by other sadhaks; in the course of their exchanges, an extraordinary relationship developed between Master and disciple, full of warmth and wit and wisdom.

The Sri Aurobindo Ashram is happy to publish this new volume of Nirod-da's talks, which has been edited by Sunayana and Maurice. This book comprises talks from 31 December 1969 to 29 July 1970.

With regard to references, only the titles of the books have been mentioned without the respective page numbers. The quotations conform to the edition of the books from which they were taken. This explains the discrepancies in spellings, capitalisation, etc.

31 December 1969

Well, we have at last been provided with the New Hall! Before this new arrangement, I was told that our class would be held there in the verandah, and that inspired me to compose a rhyme. Now that we have been shifted here, I don't know whether it would be any good to read out that composition of mine. But had we been there, it could have been relevant. Here it is:

We are wandering from place to place  
Like Jewish foundlings of God!  
Now pushed next to open space  
We are held by wooden rail and rod.  
We wonder what awaits us next?  
Headlong crash or psychic rest (*Laughter*)  
Then all shall rush to see  
Our souls from school rooms free  
Were holding class in the air.  
Or still under T. K.'s care! (*Laughter*)

Now, the other day we ended our talk with a splendid vision of mine which I need not repeat. If some of you call it poetic imagination, I would remind you again of Joan of Arc's retort that it is in the form of imagination that visions come, or I may refer to a greater authority – almost my ancestor in some way – the poet Valmiki. He begins his *Ramayana* with a grand vision of the descent of Lord Vishnu and his consort and his divine companions, as Ram, Lakshman, etc... into this world. So, if you accept that vision why not accept mine! I have read somewhere that old men dream and young men see visions. You may put me into either of the categories – something of the dream, something of the vision.

Now, you remember perhaps, I told you of another vision of mine long, long ago which was published in *Mother India*<sup>1</sup> and established me as a great yogi and as a great poet – particularly a great yogi who could see a film and at the same time hold conversation with the Lord (*Laughter*). And you'll believe me when I say that I've received many letters of congratulations on that vision

1. Talk of August 6, 1969. *Mother India*, Nov-Dec. 1969

of mine, one of which I shall read out to you:

*The Mahabharata War and Sri Aurobindo* written by your expert self is lovely, amusing, filling, full,

– Wait, wait (*Laughter*)...

deep, clear, striking, enticing, inspiring.

– I have not exaggerated at all! So, you see a flood of epithets. Now if I get this vision of mine published then the cataract of epithets will blow their trumpets, but ladies and gentlemen, and particularly the ladies, all this praise I owe you, to a great extent, because of this class of which you were the initiators and inspirers. I owe the encomium, or whatever you like, to you of this class. Had there been no class I would have gone unheard, unsung! (*Laughter*) So, I share the credit with you and at the same time I would refuse to endorse the dictum on the ladies that says “women are the gate to etc., etc...”<sup>2</sup> I would on the other hand say that “Women are a shortcut to heaven.” (*Laughter*) Now in this respect I’m going to read out to you some extracts from Sri Aurobindo’s writings that a friend of mine received, where Sri Aurobindo comes in a very spirited defence of the ladies. Here they are:

The medieval ascetics hated women and thought they were created by God for the temptation of monks.

– We have no monks here. Now mark his humour –

One may be allowed to think more nobly both of God and of woman.

Second one:

If a woman has tempted thee...

– Young men, remember (*Laughter*) –

2. Women are the gate to hell – *Nari narakasya dwaram.*

... is it her fault or thine? Be not a fool and a self-deceiver.

Thirdly:

There are two ways of avoiding the snare of women, one is to shun all women,

– which won't be allowed in this Ashram of ours –

and the other to love all beings.<sup>3</sup>

– Not only women, remember, but to love all beings. So, you see, Sri Aurobindo has come in a very spirited defence, as I told you. I have also had discussions with him on that very spicy subject – they say. I don't remember whether I have read out this discussion to you but I suppose it can bear repetition... By the way, yes, a woman-acquaintance of mine whom I shall call my “Monaco-sister”, because she used to present me with a packet of Monaco biscuits (*Laughter*), bought a copy of my *Correspondence* and saw that there was a section on women. She was so piqued that at once she began to read it and the result was that by mail she asked me a lot of questions. Here I shall read out from *Correspondence*, the discussion Sri Aurobindo and I held in 1935.

[*Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*]:

**Myself:** *Is it not true that women are more receptive and psychic than men? All outward signs would direct that way, at any rate.*

**Sri Aurobindo:** Rubbish! Neither more receptive nor even more hysteric. Men, I find, can equal them even at that. It is true that they declare hunger-strikes more easily.

... because at that time, you don't know friends, there used to be a lot of hunger-strikes by ladies, and the Mother used to send me and others to persuade them to give up their hunger-strikes...

If you think with Gandhi that that is a sign of psychicism (soul force). But after all Non-cooperation has taken away even that inferiority from men.

3. *Thoughts and Aphorisms.*

– You know Gandhi went on hunger-strikes more than once. A few days later I wrote to Sri Aurobindo [*Correspondence*]...

*A medical man writes that in Greece and Rome during the Middle Ages women had great freedom and a superior form of instruction, yet they did nothing outstanding.... Then again, there have been no women of first rank in painting, music, literature etc. ...except Rosa Bonheur, who however had to shave her chin and dress as a man.*

Perhaps you know also that women novelists had to take men's names in order to get fame. Not so long ago – in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – George Eliot, as you know, was a woman.

**Sri Aurobindo:** In Greece woman was a domestic slave except the Hetairae and they were educated only to please. In Rome, 'She remained at home and spun wool,' was the highest eulogy for a woman. It was only for a brief period of the Empire that woman began to be more free, but she was never put on an equality with man. Your medical man was either an ignoramus or was talking through his hat at you.

What an argument – from exceptional conditions as against the habits of millenniums! What about administration, rule, business, in which women have shown themselves as capable, and more consistently capable, than men? These things need no brains? Any imbecile can do them?

**Myself:** *Of course no one can dispute that in another sphere. They are angels: by the side of death and disease, sorrow and suffering...*

**Sri Aurobindo:** It means that is what men have mainly demanded of them – to be their servants, nurses, cooks, children-bearers and rearers, ministers to their sex-desires etc. That has been their occupation and their aim in life and their natures have got adapted to their work....

They have been trained to it through the ages – that is why subjection, self-effacement, to be at the mercy of man has been their lot – it has given them that training. But it has left them also another kind of ego which is their spiritual obstacle – the ego which is behind the *abhimān* [hurt pride] and hunger-strikes –

**Myself:** *Here I have noticed that out of sheer love some women have followed their husbands into the travails of the*



*Unknown, but when the husbands have been assailed with doubts and depression, they have been sitting happily and confidently in the lap of the Divine.*

**Sri Aurobindo:** Great Scott! What a happy dream!

(Laughter)

**Myself:** *It seems that in Yoga women have one advantage, the sex-instinct in them is not as strong as in men.*

**Sri Aurobindo:** There is no universal rule. Women can be as sexual as men or more. But there are numbers of women who dislike sex and there are very few men. One Sukhdev<sup>4</sup> in a million, but many Dianas and Pallas Athenes<sup>5</sup>.

**Myself:** *This letter of mine is pretty long. I am waiting to hear from you a royal verdict covering and satisfying all the points.*

**Sri Aurobindo:** I can't cover and satisfy all points – it would need a volume.

I had kept your book in order to write something less flip-pant and insufficient than the marginal notes about this grave matter. But I have had enough work today for any two Sundays, so I had to leave aside all that was not urgent. The inferiority and superiority of women is not a subject that cannot wait, so it waits.

But I wouldn't let him off so easily. Some days later, I wrote back:

[Correspondence]

*Apropos our discussion, let me put before you Mother's opinion on the matter. She says that women are not more bound to the vital and material consciousness than men. On the contrary, as they do not have the arrogant mental pretensions of men, it is easier for them to discover their psychic being and be guided by it.*

**Sri Aurobindo:** No doubt, they can discover their psychic being more easily, but that is not enough. It is the first step. The next is to live in the psychic. The third is to make the psychic the ruler of the being. The fourth is to rise beyond the

4. Son of Vyasa (author of the *Mahabharata*), was famous for his celibacy.

5. Diana or Pallas Athene, the virgin goddess of knowledge, in Graeco-Roman mythology.

mind. The fifth is to bring what is beyond mind into the lower nature. I don't say it is always done in that order. But all that has to be done.

So, please don't comfort yourselves with what the Mother said.  
(*Laughter*)

*Myself: Mother also says that women are conscious in their sentiments, and that the best of them are conscious in their acts. If that is so, there is no more question about it, I think.*

Sri Aurobindo underlined the words “no more question.”

*That is too much to say. There may not be so much mental questioning but there may be a lot of vital questioning and resistance.*

**Sri Aurobindo:** Woman's living in the material and vital is not the cause – it is man's living in the vital and material that is the cause of his finding her an obstacle. She also finds him an obstacle and could say of him that he is *narakasya dwaram*<sup>6</sup>.

*Myself: Can we not then justify Buddha, Ramakrishna and others who advocated isolation from women? After all, is it not essentially the same principle here because if vital relations are debarred, nothing remains except a simple exchange of words?*

**Sri Aurobindo:** What about the true (not the pretended) psychic and spiritual – forgetting sex? The relation has to be limited as it is because sex immediately trots into the front. You are invited to live above the vital and deeper than the vital – then only you can use the vital aright. Buddha was for Nirvana, and what is the use of having relations with anybody if you are bound for Nirvana? Ramakrishna insisted on isolation during the period when a man is spiritually raw – he did not object to meeting when he became ripe and no longer a slave of sex.

*Myself: Now, I have learnt a lot on the subject, but it has not been wholly satisfying, since the answers are in the nature of marginal comments<sup>7</sup>, I would like to have a coherent,*

6. Written in Bengali – The gateway to Hell.

7. Sri Aurobindo's replies were mostly marginal comments on the correspondent's letter itself.

*harmonious whole. My notebook can wait on your table till Monday.*

**Sri Aurobindo:** Sorry, but you can't get today either the volume or the harmonious whole. Woman will have to wait as she has done through the centuries and may have to do again if Hitler and Mussolini have their way. The men have crowded her out. Next time better not discuss her yourself – that will save me from the temptation of marginals.

I told you what the effect was on Sri Aurobindo's *sadhana*, with the coming of the Mother and that the Mother persuaded him to open wide the doors to women. I told you how he gave her the whole charge of the Ashram – putting the Mother in the forefront – the Father went back into seclusion!

When we study Sri Aurobindo's life, we find that this seclusion business, this withdrawal from the public gaze, has been a very dominant character in his life. He has always shunned the public eye. He always loved and liked and preferred to act from behind the veil. And he said to us once that it suited his temperament fine.

Let us follow the steps from the very beginning and you'll see whether I am right or wrong in my assertion.

Let us consider his very birth – “A Colonist from Immortality,” came down and took birth in a common way, in a common family. Then in England he chucked off his I.C.S. opportunity and accepted a job in such a quiet place as Baroda and led there almost a solitary life, far from the crowd or the glamour of the Maharaja's Court. His Bengali teacher Dinendranath Roy, observing him from close quarters, remarked: “He is not a man, he is a god.”

Even in those early days when he was just a young man this preference for solitude was prominent in him. There he lived a quiet, scholarly life, with very few people knowing him to be what he was, with very few friends. Then he used to also prepare speeches for the Maharaja. The other day I was reading our talks with Sri Aurobindo, and there I found one of us telling Sri Aurobindo that the Maharaja of Baroda made a very famous speech once and got a lot of applause. Sri Aurobindo asked, “Which speech?” As it was a famous speech, Purani told him. Sri Aurobindo said, “Which one? Oh that one, it was written by me.” (*Laughter*)

Then you know his famous articles in *Indu Prakash* – they were

anonymous articles, nobody knew who had written them for he didn't reveal his name. Then we come to his revolutionary activity. I read out to you the other day about eight or ten years of revolutionary activity from behind the veil and pushing his brother Barin to the front. People knew more of Barin than of his brother Sri Aurobindo – the *agniyuger*<sup>8</sup> leader. Then, during his editorship of the paper *Bande Mataram*, he again pushed Bipin Pal to the front and he remained in the background. After that, in the Swaraj political movement, Tilak was in the forefront and he remained behind. In the Surat Congress – it was his secret order that broke up the meeting. You know throwing of chairs and shoes, and so on and so forth at the president. Sri Aurobindo ordered: “Swamp the Congress.” Nobody knew it was his idea. Then, one day, he said, the game was up due to his arrest by the British government and his name spread like wild fire, he became all at once a public figure.

But then the Divine intervened and snatched him away from the public light and put him into a solitary cell. Then, after that, the great step that he took, you know, from there. As soon as he was released from prison he came over here to Pondicherry – it was a great plunge. Not in any nook or corner of India did anybody know about it – as somebody has aptly said “*Pandava varjita desha*”<sup>9</sup>. There he came with a few associates and began to lead a life of solitude and seclusion, unrecognised, almost unknown.

So, there you are. You can see step by step how, little by little, he withdrew till at last he came to Pondicherry for a final withdrawal. He did not go out except on rare occasions. I was surprised to hear that he visited the marriage ceremony of one or two acquaintances. However... So, very rare visits on rare occasions, evening talks with his few associates and friends – that was the only outer contact he maintained in order to get in touch with what was happening in the outside world. You have read in Amrita-da's reminiscences<sup>10</sup> how poor Amrita-da, then a young boy, was dying to have a glimpse of Sri Aurobindo... Finally when the Mother came, Sri Aurobindo took the opportunity and he left all the charge of the Ashram to

8. The Revolutionary years.

9. An unknown place.

10. *A Pilgrimage to Sri Aurobindo*.

her and went into complete seclusion. But there also he was not to be left alone. Some people intruded into his seclusion. He tolerated it, bore it calmly, quietly.

So, I suppose I have established my thesis that that was his penchant, his predilection: always to remain behind and push others in front. From that secluded room what has he done and what has he not done? From there he has acted like a veritable god acting upon the movements of the world, invisibly, inscrutably, imperceptibly. You know very well how it was his force that crushed Hitler, how Stalin was checkmated, how Japan was crushed, how in the Spanish Civil War – in our talks he said – he was helping one party or another. And long before that, he said to us, he had helped in the Russian Revolution, he had helped in the Turkish Revolution, he had helped in the Irish Revolution. All this was done from behind – the spring was in Pondicherry – in him. Nobody knows from where the Force came. He warred for the world, the world unknowingly, as he says in “A God’s Labour”. Even today, completely invisible, he is working very hard, day and night, as the Mother has confirmed. The other day I heard that the Mother held a conversation with him for three hours. And sometimes, he helps poor Nirod to wake up from his sleep! (*Laughter*) And you others too. So, incessantly, constantly, without fail, he is working but always from behind. That is what I see... his predilection for being invisible, inscrutable, unknown. When I think of it I consider it a strangely significant fact that while almost all the Avatars had been recognised in their lifetime, the one Supreme Avatar has come and gone without our knowing him as Avatar. There is a verse in *Savitri*:

Heaven’s greatness came, but was too great to stay.

Generally, men recognise him at most as a Yogi, as a Rishi, that’s all, not more than that. The gross humanity is sleeping in its ignorance. God knows how long it will sleep like Kumbhakarna<sup>11</sup> and after how long this humanity will awake and bemoan its fateful ignorance. But he doesn’t care. He has come, he has gone, leaving a blazing trail for those who have eyes to see. But a day will surely

11. A character from the *Ramayana*, known for his deep and long sleep.

come... In fact, it is coming. More and more people, as you see, are recognising him as an Avatar – but about his being the Supramental Avatar, I suppose it will take some more time yet. He has said that he will come in a Supramental body, God knows when. In the meantime our mortal coil might be shuffled off and very probably we shall come back with him, if not in a Supramental body at least in a higher mental body. But meanwhile he has left us here to prepare the field for that Hour of Coming. He said to Barin in one of the letters that I read out to you. [*The Life of Sri Aurobindo* by A. B. Purani]

I do not want hundreds of thousands of disciples. It will be enough if I can get a hundred complete men...

– Very modest. Mark you “hundred complete men”. Mark the word “complete”

...purified of petty egoism, who will be instruments of God.

– I don’t know how far we are on the way.

Now let us go back to the Ashram life in the twenties – let us just begin so that we may take it up in the next class unless something else comes in between, which is always possible. I’ll have to fall back on Purani’s book and I have to read quite a lot. Some of you don’t like reading but I can’t help it!

You know that the Mother came here for good in April 1920. Purani notes here that it was in May or June that the Mother began to put on the sari – Mrinalini introduced her to it. Mrinalini Chattopadhyaya, by the way, was the sister of Harindranath Chattopadhyaya and related to Sarojini Naidu. Mrinalini used to visit Pondicherry now and then.

There was once some complaint about the food – especially about its taste.

– I’m not free from it, please!

When the matter was taken to Sri Aurobindo he said to the sadhak:

‘You should have no preference for food of a particular kind of taste. There is no truth in such preferences and demands. You have a body, and you have to keep it in good

condition. Lower quality or kind of food would be harmful to the health of the body, therefore you should take good food. But good food means food necessary for the body – not what the tongue likes.’

Sri Aurobindo himself took whatever food was given to him. He never said anything about its taste. The cooking, in those days, was done by pariah cooks and the food often used to taste terrible. Sometimes one of the inmates would remark after a meal, ‘Today there was no salt in the curry.’ Sri Aurobindo would just answer, ‘Yes, today there was no salt.’

(*Laughter*)

It is not that he was not aware of the taste, but that he had by *sadhana* cultivated perfect *samatā*, equanimity, even in his sense of taste. He used to say that it is possible, to experience equal delight – *samaānanda* – from all kinds of tastes.

By the way I’m getting it in the brinjal nowadays because they are putting a little more oil, I find! (*Laughter*)

When the Mother took charge there was a complete change in the management of the house. She took charge of the kitchen. Arrangements were made upstairs for Sri Aurobindo’s bath.

About the taste, I might repeat the story about our deceased sister Mridu who used to prepare *luchis* for Sri Aurobindo. But every now and then she was possessed by a tendency to commit suicide – not hunger-strike! Hunger-strike, of course, was nothing for her; it didn’t have any effect on her because she had a very bulky body which she could fill to the brim. (*Laughter*) And she used to threaten Sri Aurobindo whom she called ‘Baba’: “Baba, I’ll commit suicide.” And Sri Aurobindo would write to her in Bengali, “If you commit suicide who will prepare *luchis* for me?” (*Laughter*)

And she was very flattered!

Again I was looking through my old talks and I found something else in reference to Mridu. She used to bring all this food before Sri Aurobindo started his meal. One day Sri Aurobindo’s meal was over early and Mridu came late. She bounced up the stairs – think of that Falstaff-like body – Mrs. Falstaff, out of breath, panting. I’m

not exaggerating. (*Laughter*) Then I made a faux pas and told her, “Sri Aurobindo has finished his meal, you’re late.”

At once she kicked up a row, began to cry and wail, “*Ma ré! Baba ré!*”

Then she caught hold of Dr. Manilal who was present at that time, and began, “Please ask Baba why he has finished his meal? Why didn’t he wait for me? What am I to do now? I’ll commit suicide!” (*Laughter*)

Then Manilal came and reported the fact to Sri Aurobindo, and I confessed my faux pas. So, Sri Aurobindo said gently, quietly, “These things should not be told. (*Laughter*) You should have brought them in and eaten them.” (*Laughter*)

Then at the end he said, “But why should she be so grieved for it? It is I myself who should grieve because I lost the chance of eating *luchi*! And tell her that if she commits suicide, who will make *luchis* for me?”

### 7 January 1970

Well, we begin our talk today by adding a little more to our knowledge on the subject of women. That knowledge as you know, can never be exhausted because they say the subject is unknowable, (*Laughter*) even unknowable to the gods: ‘*devā najānanti kutah manushyāh*’<sup>12</sup>.

All the same, here is something I found accidentally, something nice though I don’t understand what it means. It is like this:

To be born a woman is to know that we must labour to be beautiful.

That’s a verse – I don’t know who the poet is. So, those who are born as women, please remember that! (*Laughter*) There is another verse which is very beautiful indeed, but the meaning is not the same as the first. Here it is:

12. Even gods cannot know so what to speak of men.



The history of a flower in the air  
 Liable but to breezes and to time,  
 As rich and purposeless as is the rose  
 Thy simple doom is to be beautiful.<sup>13</sup>

As you can see, it's addressed to woman. "Thy simple doom is to be beautiful". It is a doom! So, these are the two verses – beautiful flowers – that I have gathered for you. There is another reference to the subject in Purani's *Evening Talks*, which I shall read out. A disciple asks Sri Aurobindo:

*You said that some men have got in their vital being a special capacity that draws money to them.*

**Sri Aurobindo:** Yes. And some have it. And some women also have got it. Women can give a tremendous push to a man in anything he does. There are also women who are *lokkhichhādā*<sup>14</sup> – those that take away what you may have.

So, I leave it to you ladies, to find out for yourselves, to which category you belong! (*Laughter*) But I would cite an instance in my own case – not an example of the latter kind! (*Laughter*)

The instance goes back to my youth when I was just a lad like yourselves – sweet 16 or sweeter 17, of that age. It was during the hot days of the Non-cooperation movement. I don't think any of you have any idea today of those hot days. I, along with a close relative of mine, went to Calcutta for higher studies – college, after passing our matriculation. We were pursuing our studies quietly when the Non-cooperation movement had already started. Very soon the tempo increased and the movement began to grow by rapid strides. The whole of Calcutta was in its grip. One after another, leaders were being arrested and sent to jail, and they appealed to the country to come to their support. So, they were spreading all over the country, these waves of strike. The Hindus and Muslims had joined hands. Mill-hands were coming out of the mills, law-courts were boycotted and from the schools and colleges, some of the students began coming out, but not all. There was a tremendous upheaval, outbreak. As I said, leader after leader was being

13. *Marpessa* by Stephen Phillips.

14. Forsaken by Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth.

arrested by the police. C. R. Das was the leader in Calcutta. He took a very adventurous step by sending his wife and son for picketing. They were arrested and the whole population of Calcutta was very much perturbed, very much excited; it was as though fuel had been added to the fire. And now it was the students who were mostly appealed to: “What are you doing with your studies? You must take up the challenge”, etc. etc. So, among the students there was a deep stir but they hadn’t yet decided to leave their colleges and studies.

During this excited period of the movement, I went to visit my relative. There again it was the same discussion: leaders being arrested, ladies being arrested... There was no other talk anywhere. And certainly my relative said, “We would have been so proud of you if you had joined the movement!” I was taken aback. Well, those words, as I rambled along to my hostel, began to ring in my ears. To make the story short, it ended in my giving up studies and joining the Non-cooperation movement.

So, here is an example of how the ladies give a tremendous push to something nice. After that I had no occasion, of course, to come across any *lokkhichhādā* (*Laughter*). I pursued my studies and soon after that I came away here. So, there was no chance for the other half – not the better half (*Laughter*) to take possession of me.

From the Non-cooperation movement, I joined the other movement here. And here I, and you, and everybody else is being pushed by the Divine who has been born as a woman, (*Laughter*) but it took a lot of push from her to drive us, as you know very well, into action, but she has succeeded tremendously, wonderfully, as you see.

From a small and petty beginning of 6 or 8 *sadhaks* – no *sadhikas* – today in the Ashram *sadhikas* are more in number than the *sadhaks* (*Laughter*). And that is her achievement. You know how the Mother provokes us. She is a great expert in that business! (*Laughter*) She didn’t spare even Sri Aurobindo, if you please. I remember very well, when after the accident, Sri Aurobindo was beginning to recover, taking time, enjoying leisurely the much-needed and much-desired rest, one day Mother said – I don’t remember the exact words – “People from outside want a book from you. They want to publish a book of yours. They are waiting for your *Life Divine*. I suppose we have to prepare a table for you. (*Laughter*) You will sit on your bed and you will write on that table.” (*Laughter*)

That's her way! He could not say anything (*Laughter*). So, work started!

Now I shall go back to the early days of the Ashram and read out to you from Nolini-da's *Reminiscences*. I have already done it, but now to give you a picture of the prevailing condition of the Ashram, I shall repeat. It was not an Ashram at all, as you know very well. Sri Aurobindo came here with a few of his admirers and he refused to be called a "Guru" and he refused to have the name "Ashram". Now, for the benefit of those who are new-comers and for the others too, I shall read some portions.

[*Reminiscences* by Nolini]

This account would be incomplete without a few details as to our housekeeping. As to the furniture, I have already said the mat alone did duty for everything. Of servants we had only one...

Today we have practically one servant per head, thanks to the boundless grace of the Mother. Sri Aurobindo used to smile and make the comment, 'We have as many servants as there are *sadhaks* here.' We have now nearly as many teachers as we have students here! (*Laughter*)

We did the cooking ourselves and each of us developed a speciality. I made the rice, perhaps because that was the easiest. Moni took charge of dāl, and Bejoy being the expert had the vegetables and the curry. I suppose he was chef de cuisine. So, that was the kitchen front and that was the cooking they were doing.

Then I pass on. Ah yes, this is very amusing. – [*Reminiscences*]

One of the first needs we felt on coming here was for books, for at that time we had hardly anything we could call our own... Today you see what a fine Library we have, not one, but many... All this had its origin in the small collections we started every month. At first the books had to lie on the floor, for we had nothing like chairs or tables or shelves for our library. I may add that we had no such thing as a bedding either for our use. Each one of us possessed a mat, and this mat had to

serve as our bedstead, mattress, coverlet and pillow; this was all our furniture. And mosquito curtains? That was a luxury we could not even dream of. If there were too many mosquitoes, we would carry the mats out onto the terrace for a little air, assuming, that is, that there was any. Only for Sri Aurobindo we had somehow managed a chair and a table and a camp cot.

– That reminds me of my experience with mosquitoes which I'll tell you next time, because I couldn't find the exact words of Sri Aurobindo.

We lived a real camp life... And lights? Today you see such a profusion of electric lighting in every room and courtyard; we have mercury lights and flashlights and spotlights and torch-lights; we are even getting well into the lime-light! (*Laughter*) There is light everywhere, 'all here is shining with light', *sarvam idam vibhāti*<sup>15</sup>. ...

– So, Nolini-da goes on –

... Sri Aurobindo has taught me a number of languages. Here again his method has often evoked surprise.... He never asked me to begin the study of a new language with primary readers or children's books. He started at once with one of the classics, that is, a standard work in the language. He used to say that the education of children must begin with books written for children, but for adults, for those, that is, who had already had some education, the reading material must be adapted to their age and mental development. That is why, when I took up Greek, I began straightaway with Euripides' *Medea*<sup>16</sup>... Have I already told you about my French? There I started with Molière.

I am reminded of my learning French. I tried many teachers, failed in many, succeeded in one! (*Laughter*) I don't know whether you have heard of Monsieur Benjamin. He used to live in Cycle House (Children's Dispensary). I gave him a try. I wrote to Sri Aurobindo,

"I'm trying to pick up some French. What do you say?"

15. All here is shining.

16. An ancient Greek tragedy written by Euripides.

He said, "Good."

"My teacher will be Benjamin. What do you think of him?"

"Well," he said. "He's quite good but his tone is not French."

*(Laughter)*

But I couldn't get along very well. He was a lenient sort of a man, if I did not learn my lesson he did not mind. So, since he did not mind, I did not put my mind into the language. *(Laughter)* I broke away from him. After two years came one Monsieur Moutaiyyan – I don't know if you have heard of him – he was a strict grammarian. He said, "That won't do, sir, you have got to mug up your conjugations, otherwise I can't do anything with you."

So, day after day, we had to memorise conjugations: verbs of "premier groupe", etc... He used to make us stand up: "Verbe aller. Allez, allez-y!" *(Laughter)* Once "aller" was committed to memory, now "s'en aller" *(Laughter)* This is the way we had to pick up French – no Molière. He wasn't as gentle as Sri Aurobindo. He wouldn't understand that we were grown-up people, we had developed some intelligence. He said, "That won't do." But I must say that due to the hard path, not the sunlit one, I picked up French rather quickly. So, that's the story.

Then Nolini-da continues:

I should tell you what one gains by this method, at least what has been my personal experience. One feels as if one took a plunge into the innermost core of the language, into that secret heart where it is vibrant with life, with the quintessence of beauty, the fullness of strength. Perhaps it was this that has prompted me to write prose-poems and verse in French...

But it was not found possible for Sri Aurobindo to continue with his own studies or even to help us in ours. For, as I have already hinted, our mode of living, our life itself took a different turn with the arrival of the Mother. How and in what direction? It was like this. The Mother came and installed Sri Aurobindo on his high pedestal of Master and Lord of Yoga. We had hitherto known him as a dear friend and close companion, and although in our mind and heart he had the position of a Guru, in our outward relations we seemed to behave as if he were just like one of us. He too had been

averse to the use of the words ‘Guru’ and ‘Ashram’ in relation to himself, for there was hardly a place in His work of new creation for the old traditional associations these words conveyed. Nevertheless, the Mother taught by Her manner and speech, and showed us in actual practice, what was the meaning of disciple and master; She has always practised what She preached. She showed us, by not taking Her seat in front of or on the same level as Sri Aurobindo, but by sitting on the ground, what it meant to be respectful to one’s Master, what real courtesy was. Sri Aurobindo once said to us, perhaps with a tinge of regret, ‘I have tried to stoop as low as I can, and yet you do not reach me.’

It was the Mother who opened our eyes and gave us that vision which made us say, even as Arjuna had been made to say:

By whatever name I have called you, O Krishna, O Yadava, O Friend, thinking in my rashness that you were only a friend, and out of ignorance and from affection, not knowing this thy greatness; whatever disrespect I have shown you out of frivolity, whether sitting or lying down or eating, when I was alone or when you were present before me, – may I be pardoned for all that, O thou Infinite One.

So, there is the Mother’s first success with the small number of inmates pushing them to this action.

Then I shall give you a rapid sketch almost in the form of a diary, of what life was like in some of its details, from Purani’s book.

[*The Life of Sri Aurobindo*]

7 a.m. Tea, three slices of toast with butter. Before 11.30 a.m. all the inmates had to finish their bath, Sri Aurobindo took his bath last.

11.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. Lunch.

3.30 Afternoon tea prepared by the inmates of the house by turns.

There was no Darjeeling tea at that time! (*Laughter*)

9.30 p.m. Dinner, generally consisting of fish curry.

Please don’t turn your nose! Rice, curd and bread – this was the daily menu. About the other activities as far as I can gather, Sri

Aurobindo used to see some – very few – people, either visitors or people from the town. Then, it seems, in the evening there used to be talks with the inmates. Either before it or after it, there used to be a group meditation with Sri Aurobindo. So, this was the daily routine. And as you have seen, when the young people were free they used to go out and enjoy themselves playing football. Here, the Mother came to stay in what we now call the ‘Guest House’. Purani says here:

In September 1922 the residence was changed from 41, Rue François Martin to No. 9, Rue de la Marine. After that No. 41, Rue François Martin was called ‘The Guest House’. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother occupied the new house from September 1922 to February 8<sup>th</sup> 1928.

Here, Purani says:

On January 1<sup>st</sup> this year the Mother took charge of the entire management of the house... A visitor from Gujarat came to Pondicherry and wanted to see Sri Aurobindo. He brought some fruits as offering and asked for an appointment. Sri Aurobindo could not find time to see him. He became very angry. He began mixing with the secret police agents and tried to spread false rumours against Sri Aurobindo and the inmates of the house. He even tried threats but ultimately failed and went away.

He went to Raman Maharshi in Thiruvannamalai and questioned him about meat eating particularly with reference to Sri Aurobindo. Generally the Maharshi hardly replied to questions put by casual visitors. But to him, he said, ‘It is only a question of habit, and custom’.

Sri Aurobindo told us the story in our talks. Many of you here, my friends, I know who could not bear the smell of fish, now are enjoying it. So, it’s a question of habit and custom. He thought it was a great sin on Sri Aurobindo’s part. He told Maharshi, “I went to visit this place and there I found them eating fish and meat.” When he left Maharshi’s presence, it seems Maharshi remarked, “What a fool he is!” (*Laughter*)

Then an interesting piece of news:

In July 1922, Sri Aurobindo, in a letter sent through Amrita,

stated that he would not remain in Pondicherry for more than two years.

Even in those days he had not made up his mind about being here for good. He had an idea of going back after acquiring the Supramental Force, for the liberation of the country.

Here is an interesting thing that I will read out to you.

May 30. A dream-experience of Sri Aurobindo – a description given in the evening:

Some dreams have got meaning down to their very details. There was a scientist (mental) and a magician (psychic)...

– It's a dream, mind you, –

...and they both wanted to rescue a girl from alien enemies.

How does a scientist do that? I don't know! (*Laughter*)

... First the magician tried to save the girl. He failed. Then the scientist. He found himself baffled by the opponents (vital)... They were all going to some king's capital. Then they fled and the girl disappeared.... When the enemies fled they left their things behind and did not like to go to the capital wounded. The scientist then found, among the things left, a big book of geology – half as big as the room! – And he found the girl behind the cover and the pages!

Thus the secret of the earth, the physical nature, was symbolically given.

Well, then, I think I can finish with this. Here is a gentleman with a very high-sounding title – I don't know him at all: Brahmashri Subbarao.

It was in October, 1923, that I first saw Sri Aurobindo in his Ashram, at Pondicherry.

The Mother had already come. They were in the Library House – we used to call it that, or Prosperity building, as you do. Sri Aurobindo used to receive the visitors in the verandah.



... There was a small time-piece to indicate the progress of time, because everything here must be done according to precision and order.

– Remember, young student-friends.

Sri Aurobindo was dazzling bright in colour... He was dressed in fine cotton, not khaddar evidently...

Thank God! Though, ladies and gentlemen, I've put on *khaddar* [hand-spun cotton] and done *tapasya* for many years. Fortunately there were no skin-marks on the waist. But washing them was a big job. We had no servants at that time. We had to wash our *khadis* ourselves. I don't know how many kilos they weighed. We were *pukka swadeshis*, you won't believe it. Today, a transformation has taken place. Here this gentleman adds 'evidently', I don't know why...

His voice was low, but quite audible, quick and musical. He was fast in his flow of speech, clear like crystal and analytical to a degree...

– Here I beg to differ. Perhaps I should not differ, for some transformation had taken place in Sri Aurobindo as his skin was transformed, so was his pitch. It was not fast in the least, it was very slow indeed. But it might have been fast at that time, as I said.

... He was kind throughout, as to a child, but I could discern enough in his demeanour to conclude that he could be stern and imperious when required.

– '*trinādapi sunīchāni*  
*vajrādapi kathorāni*'<sup>17</sup>

That can be applied to the Mother too, as you know very well. I think she can be much harder than Sri Aurobindo. We have seen her in that form, terribly hard: Mahakali. I'll tell you a short

17. Humbler than grass  
Stronger than thunderbolt

story. Dilip-da was a... I can't get the phrase – someone who was not afraid of anything or anybody and with whom the Mother was always very kind – Mahalakshmi's smile, Maheshwari's grace, Mahasaraswati's patience and perfection, never Mahakali. One day, he said, "I went to the Pranam. And I began to shake – actually shake. My whole being began to shake looking at the Mother's eyes".

It was because he had done something which he should not have done. The Mother knew it and he could not meet her eyes. Such a hard look she gave him! So, even Dilip-da who was a dare-devil, trembled and began to quake in his shoes – though he had no shoes! (*Laughter*) So, fortunately she does not give that look often, but sometimes when she does, my God! She is very kind to you people.

### 14 January 1970

Well, first of all let me fulfil my promise given to you last time, about my complaint to Sri Aurobindo about mosquitoes and his answer.

The medical building was not what it is today. My bed was right inside, rather dark, and there was no ventilation at all. I found the summer time very hot, so I wanted to sleep outside. I thought sleeping in the open air would give me some good sleep. Because being preoccupied all day with patients and at night with the heat, life wasn't very comfortable. I have composed a doggerel of two lines:

*Diné rogi, rate gorome,  
Gèlo āmār dhorome, korome!*<sup>18</sup> (*Laughter*)

So, I told Sri Aurobindo that it's impossible to sleep inside, I want a camp cot. He said, "Yes."

And I got one. Then I said that I must have an electric light so that I may be able to read there. He said, "All right."

18. Patients through the day, heat at night:  
Pursuits spiritual mine – ah! in dire plight!

Then for the mosquito curtain there must be a frame, I wanted that too, he said, "All right."

Then the small annexe that you find there today wasn't there before. There was a small plot, a garden and a gardener. He is fortunately or unfortunately no more! He had planted very beautiful cannas. And they grew profusely and along with them profusely grew the mosquitoes (*Laughter*). So, I raised a signal of danger, my life was made intolerable, unbearable. Even the curtain could not protect me. I pleaded with Sri Aurobindo to strike off all these beautiful but pernicious plants, in this vein, in 1936:

*The hostile forces have made my life unbearable, sucking away every drop of blood. Can't sit outside even one minute under the breezy, starry sky. Their breeding place is in the thick bushes M has planted. Can you direct him to strike them off and save my precious life? What will happen if the Ashram doctor is to die of malaria? (Laughter)*

**Sri Aurobindo:** My dear sir, M will have a fit and you will have to treat him and probably he will kill you into the bargain. (*Laughter*)

You prefer a violent death to malaria? Where there is life there is hope, even if there are also mosquitoes. Why not negotiate with M himself? If you plead with him in a sweet, low, pathetic voice, he may have mercy. (*Laughter*)

Well, perhaps you would like to know the sequel. I had neither the cheek nor the pluck nor the sweet voice to negotiate with that gentleman who, I knew, was as hard as stone. So, I resigned myself to my fate! (*Laughter*)

Now next I will read out the unfinished part of the article, from the book. I don't know how far I have read, but I don't suppose that time will be lost in vain if I start from a little earlier.

[*The Life of Sri Aurobindo*] Here is the lecture delivered by one Mr Subbarao in 1951:

... He was dressed in fine cotton – not khaddar evidently.

I hope you know, young children, what *khaddar* is. Perhaps you don't, but I know it to my cost. Perhaps one day or next time I shall

give a lecture on my experience with *khaddar*.

... The lower part of the legs was slender, feminine and the feet were hidden in two small slippers.

That reminds me, by the way, of something. I saw a pair of slippers when I went there after the accident, lying unused under his cupboard. A few months later a new pair of slippers was presented by some devotee from Calcutta. Perhaps he thought that Sri Aurobindo was using slippers. And he remarked, "I have no use of slippers now, but you can give them to Nolini; he is fond of good slippers and shoes!" (*Laughter*)

So, they were given to him. He must have been very pleased, both for its newness and for the present from Sri Aurobindo... Yes and about Sri Aurobindo's skin colour, he says "dazzling bright in colour" – in 1923. Many people have remarked about his complexion. The other day, my bearded friend Champaklal told me that when he came here for the first time, somewhere in 1923 or 1924, he also noticed the brightness of Sri Aurobindo's skin. He showed me his own hand and said, "It was fairer than this colour of mine."

And in passing he said, he had the good opportunity or good fortune of being Sri Aurobindo's *sevak* – personal attendant as we say. He was the only one who had the privilege to serve the Master, do his room, etc. But he had no chance of meeting him very often. Now and then he could see him, he had a glimpse while he was passing by when he was doing the room. This reminds me of Yeats' line: 'Eternal Beauty wandering in her way'. So, he says, before the accident he had the occasion to see more than four or five times Sri Aurobindo's body becoming absolutely golden, gold-like. He had that occasion and he spoke about it to the Mother and she confirmed his vision and said, "Yes, it's true."

So, here 'dazzling bright in colour' confirms that view, as well. Now then,

... He was simple and courteous.

Please remember the word 'courteous'.

... It seemed as though he could know a man by the sweep of his eyes, and read men's minds from a survey of their photographs.

Here also, not only photographs... what was it? Yes, yes, a telegram came from somewhere, about somebody being seriously ill. Then another telegram came saying that the patient had gone to the other world. Then Sri Aurobindo said casually: "I knew it."

Then we had the cheek to ask him, "How did you know it?" (*Laughter*) He replied,

The first telegram carried an atmosphere.

So, you see there were these subtle, occult things.

That reminds me of another story. The gentleman whose statue has been installed there at the sea-side garden – what's his name? Ah, Selvaraj! Yes, yes. You know his story perhaps. He was shot in a political feud. Oh, there was a big commotion in town, and the wave of the commotion passed into our Ashram. (*Laughter*) The Mother was interested in the man's fate – what kind of fate, I don't know, whether this way or that. Anyway... He was a very notable public figure at that time, though he was a fisherman. But he made a big noise in town and there were political feuds going on in Pondicherry, all the time. Since there was no license on firearms, I could fire you mercilessly or mercifully. (*Laughter*) So, it was, in one such feud, that he was shot and was seriously wounded and then he was taken to hospital. I was, at that time, the medical attendant, attending on Sri Aurobindo. The Mother came and gave the news to Sri Aurobindo that such a thing had happened and the Mother said to me, "Will you go to the hospital and enquire about him? What is his condition?"

I didn't know why the Mother was taking so much interest in him. Anyway I tried my best. I used to wear a dhoti and shirt at that time – not even pyjamas. I went there timidly. I was not a very courageous man, I confess to you. (*Laughter*) I saw a big crowd at the gate and policemen were guarding the entrance. I thought hard, "What to do, how to pass by the police, in these native clothes?" Well, while I was thinking, wondering, suddenly a doctor came out, whom I knew as I had worked a bit in the hospital with him.

So, I caught hold of him and asked him, "How is he? What's his condition?"

From his face I guessed something but he was very equivocal – he did not commit himself. He gave me a noncommittal answer, "Serious, but he'll be all right."

Something of that sort. But his face showed that he wouldn't be all right, but I wasn't a psychologist at that time (*Laughter*). So, I came and reported to the Mother what I had heard. Then, I think, that evening or the next day, the patient died – the operation was successful, perhaps, and he died! (*Laughter*) So, I reported this to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, and he said in our talks, "I knew that he was finished, dead."

Then again we asked, "How did you know?" (*Laughter*)

He replied, "I saw him lying dead on the operation table!"

So, there you are. Two examples come to my mind.

I told you also how when we – particularly I – used to approach him with a guilty conscience and stand before him, how I used to flutter and think, "He is seeing through me!" (*Laughter*) If he could read through photographs, then a physical body and mind, he would see through and through, all my – you understand – indelicate thoughts, etc. (*Laughter*). Really, actually, I'm not exaggerating, I used to sometimes stand there and think thus. Let me go back to Mr. Subbarao's lecture:

... and at the end of the appointed fifteen minutes, he stood up looking at the clock, as if intimating that I should retire.

Behind this there was something else also. The time was fixed as to the length of the talk and I was told that the Mother used to sit behind the screen or curtain in the room itself. So, as soon as the allotted time was up, she used to ring the bell and that was the signal for retiring.

... Sri Aurobindo's letters dealing with Yoga...

Especially his instructions to his disciples in this early period,

... revealed him as the master-doctor who would diagnose in an instant the spiritual nature and conditions of the disease in men and things even through photographs...

In a case of psychic disorder, he wrote to his brother, Barindra:

You are inexperienced. You do not know how to deal with him. He needs an absolutely quiet and careful treatment. I'm too far off here; but be writing to me often.

His brother in Calcutta was in charge of a small centre and was looking after the people. But he didn't know much about yoga. All the same Sri Aurobindo gave him the charge and asked him to communicate with him – as he says “be writing to me often” – When once there was a delay in communication, he fell upon his brother like an avalanche and wrote:

This sort of evading instructions won't do with me. In my supramental state, everything must be done in order and with precision.

The great care which he was bestowing on the distant invalid was quite remarkable.... Now he was writing letters, now sending telegrams, now suggesting a change of treatment – but ever anxious about the distant invalid. He sent a telegram to one place; but not being sure that it would reach the addressee properly, he was not satisfied till he sent another to a second address, to make sure of its reaching.

Speaking about some visions, he says that these things are of common currency:

Mirra had them 100 times.

– Mind you, in 1923 Sri Aurobindo was addressing the Mother by her name, Mirra, and so were the inmates of that time. It was only afterwards, about which I shall speak to you, how Sri Aurobindo wanted them all to address her as “Mother” and he himself showed the example by calling her so. In all our talks, he used to always say “Have you told Mother about it? Mother is coming”, etc... –

This Mirra seems to be an extraordinary lady; and even in 1923, she was said to be the best of his disciples and was consulted by Sri Aurobindo on many affairs, including Yoga. No wonder, therefore, that she has been for a long time the acknowledged Mother of the Ashram.

This gentleman continues –

... Sri Aurobindo's life has been a unique and glorious one. It is unrivalled. His literary and intellectual output alone reaches

the highest Himalayan peaks of the world. His retirement, in bliss and solitude, for over 40 years in one and the same place surpasses the record of any muni, here or elsewhere. And the peace, wisdom, serenity and loyal and devoted following acquired in the Ashram are a new wonder in the world....

There you are. We have seen his appraisal, his understanding and his fine appreciation of Sri Aurobindo.

Now apropos of his care and attention and solicitude for sick, ill people, I can give you other examples from my direct knowledge: a devotee from Calcutta, a young man, wrote to a friend of his here that a helpless widow-relative had been robbed of her property and considerable amount of money by her own very near and dear family member. By robbed I mean deceived, not actually robbed. Repeated appeals, entreaties of the widow had no effect on him. So, some well-wisher advised her to file a suit in the court. But filing a suit is one thing, perhaps you have no knowledge of it, and carrying it out is another. It needs a lot of money and a lot of influence. She had neither. She was a poor widow. Who cares for widows? All the same she did file a suit, but without much effect. Then this relative wrote to Sri Aurobindo about her poor, helpless condition. When Sri Aurobindo heard about it, he exclaimed, "What, deceived of Rs. 15,000? Wonderful! And by a relative!"

Then the devotee prayed for Sri Aurobindo's intervention on behalf of the poor woman. On reading the letter Sri Aurobindo asked the devotee to send regular information regarding the widow's circumstances and the case that was proceeding in the court. After reading two or three letters, which I used to read out, and the answers communicated to me, Sri Aurobindo said, "Ask for more details."

But the devotee felt much reluctance to take his time in this personal matter of somebody else, particularly when the war was going on at that time and Sri Aurobindo was so much preoccupied, as all of you know, with the war problems. But all the same when a command had come from him, he began to send details of the case regularly. Finally the result was, I don't know after how long, the widow was saved from inevitable ruin and became quite well-off, afterwards. Though perhaps she didn't regain the whole property but this was the result.



Another case – that was also not of a devotee, but of the friend of a devotee. This was also a ‘she’. The ‘she’s seem to get into trouble very often! (*Laughter*) Well, she was from a rich family and there was no robbery here, but illness. She fell seriously ill and doctors couldn’t diagnose the disease, thus they had no clue about the treatment. As we say in Bengali: “*andhāré dhil chhundchhé*”<sup>19</sup>.

One doctor thought it was cancer, another doctor thought it was T.B., another something else, so the poor patient went on suffering. They took X-rays, they did blood tests, they took this and that, drained her money, but without a cure. This happened, by the way, I think about a month before Sri Aurobindo’s passing. I have noted it down in my small booklet *I am here, I am here*.

Then the lady decided that she would give up all medical treatment and take *Twamékam sharanam brajah* – take entire refuge at Sri Aurobindo’s feet. She wouldn’t touch a drop of medicine, wouldn’t call a doctor. Then in this case also Sri Aurobindo said, “Let me have all the details and information regularly.”

So, the descriptions and the symptoms began to come in, but it was a long protracted case, taking a lot of time. After some time for some reason or another, the letters stopped coming. Then the devotee went from here to enquire after the patient and he said while going that he would send regular information. The very same day, Sri Aurobindo asked, “What’s the matter?”

I said, “He left but yesterday, how do we expect any news just now? Let him reach there, find out the case and then he’ll send.”

Then on the second day he asked, “Any letter?”

I said, “No.”

And on the third day again there was no information. I noticed his tone had become a little grave, I don’t know how to put it. I won’t say he was angry, but a little irritated, a bit annoyed. Finally, he said, “How am I going to cure her if I don’t get the details?”

– A little heated, the tone was a little hard.

I don’t know, somehow, either due to some irritation, or his vexation, in the atmosphere there was some commotion, from the next day information began to come in regularly. (*Laughter*) He lost his patience but the happy result was there – the patient was cured completely. She came here from U.P. and settled here.

19. Throwing stones in the dark.

That was the occasion I think, when I saw a little bit of temper in him. In another case there was just a slight bit of temper, but this was a little more heard, a little more seen, a little more perceived. When I tried to plead, that I remember, he lost his temper with me also. When I said, "How can we expect the news to come in so short a time?"

"All right! All right!" he said tapping his hand on the pillow – like this. (*Laughter*) That was the only time when I saw him losing his patience. So, how much care he was taking, following the condition on a day-to-day basis, a case he took up, in the midst of so much work. That was surprising. These two are glaring instances that I remember still. There are others too. One day I shall read out to you some extracts from my medical experiences and my medical exchanges with him over patients. They are very interesting, highly illuminating and there also you will see how much interest Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were taking in our patients.

Now I follow Purani's diary here. This is again in 1923:

January 6. Some Congressmen from Cocanada Session came to Pondicherry. There was a row with the French Police while registering their names. There were people in the group known to the inmates of the Ashram. When the matter became too hot and there was a chance of the Ashram being involved in the trouble, Sri Aurobindo said: 'This is an effort of the outside forces to disturb the atmosphere of peace which I have established here with great difficulty.'

Then...

Sir Harisingh Gaur gave his vote in the Delhi Assembly against the Nationalist Party! He was one who came to Cambridge after Sri Aurobindo had joined King's College. During the evening talk he gave a reminiscence: 'He was one of the students with me in England; I heard him in Indian Majlis and in the College Union. I wonder if he had something serious in him but he was clever and spoke well. Once during his speech he said, 'The Egyptians rose up like a man' referring to their national spirit. This was repeated two or three times. So, someone from the audience asked: 'But how many times did they sit down?' (*Laughter*)

I think we can stop here, the bell has rung... Oh yes... here is another joke, I can read it: –

A funny reminiscence of Baroda life: ‘When Mr Eliot, the Maharaja’s tutor, came to Baroda from England, Mr Pavri, a Parsi officer, could not understand anything spoken by Mr Eliot because of the strangeness of his pronunciation. So Mr Pavri went on saying ‘Yes’ to everything. Then Mr Eliot put him a question to which he should have said ‘No’. But instead he said as usual ‘Yes’. Eliot got annoyed and said ‘Shall I take you for an ass?’ Pavri replied, ‘Yes!’ (*Laughter*)

### 21 January 1970

Well, young friends, my old friend, the cold has come to visit me after a long time so, I am somewhat nervous about it! (*Laughter*) If I cannot apply my whole concentration to the talk today, you will please excuse me because I believe you are my friends. But let us hope the friend leaves me as soon as possible. Now in my last talk I read out, you remember, something from a lecture. There I drew your attention to two things about Sri Aurobindo: the gentleman found Sri Aurobindo *extremely* courteous and also that he exacted order and precision in his Supramental world; secondly that he didn’t wear khadi. Well, I’d like to comment on these two or three points as briefly as possible. First of all one has to be courteous. Complaints have come to us now and then that our young friends here, I mean the young students, are not always very courteous, they are not well-behaved. If it is true, now you can see from the Master’s example that courtesy is a necessary and valuable quality that one should possess. You need not do away with it because you are going to be members of the New Race. Just as Sri Aurobindo told me that in order to be a candidate for Supermanhood, he did not give up common sense! (*Laughter*)

So, good manners are a sign of good breeding, and the stamp of a gentleman. One of the aims of our education is to teach our young students how to be well-behaved, how to observe good manners. We don’t blame them for not having them, for usually

they are taught at home; and here we have no home as such. We are free – as free as air. However, it is desirable. I don't say that to be a gentleman is easy; to be a true gentleman is really very difficult. The Mother said once, that in all her life, she found only *one true gentleman* and that is Sri Aurobindo. (*Laughter*) About herself she said that she was no gentleman! Well even if we cannot achieve that true Supramental perfection of our Master, we can follow his footsteps in a small way, for the final perfection.

Now I will come to the second point about which I gave you some intimation in my last talk – something about *khaddar* or khadi. Though khadi has fallen into disrepute today, it was not so before. Some people used to comment by saying '*khoddor ki bho-dor loké poré?*'<sup>20</sup> (*Laughter*), but that was in its downgraded times. It has a long romantic association, a long romantic history, though *khaddar* or khadi is somewhat a proxy word.

You remember, I told you, how, inspired by a fair relative of mine, I joined the Non-cooperation movement. Perhaps most of you have no idea of what it was except that you have heard the word, the name.

Non-cooperation movement was something like the Swadeshi movement of 1905 or 1906. Well, when the movement came I flung away my studies, my books, over the rails or through the window – not because I didn't like studies! Those were really glorious days, a reflection or perhaps a revival of the days of the Swadeshi movement about which I have spoken to you long, long ago, in which Sri Aurobindo participated and which Sri Aurobindo helped, inwardly as well as outwardly.

A similar movement was started by Mahatma Gandhi, later on, somewhere in 1921–24. And it involved the whole country: old as well as young, men as well as women, students as well as workers. It was a mass movement. I'll simply restrain myself to our own path. Students were coming out of schools and colleges, as I said, huge bonfires of foreign cloth were a daily spectacle, or jubilation, at the cross-roads, and the foreign cloth was to be replaced by khadi. If anybody put on foreign cloth, hordes of people would run after him to denude him of all his foreign stuff! (*Laughter*) Either he would not come out or he would skulk away through the narrow streets and

20. Do gentlemen wear khaddar?

lanes of the city. So, *ahimsa* was only a service. That was the day that also reflected in a certain manner, the spirit of the French Revolution which has been immortalised by two verses of Wordsworth:

Bliss it was in that dawn to be alive,  
But to be young was very heaven!

So, these are the lines that have stood their test and have now become part of immortality. This exactly was the spirit at that time – “to be young was very heaven”. Now, when some of you grow old, you will feel, on looking back, the same spirit. But I don’t expect you to ever grow old because the Supramental Sun will keep you evergreen. (*Laughter*)

One of the wheels that carried the Non-cooperation movement forward was this khadi movement. I can even say that the khadi movement was synonymous with the Non-cooperation movement. I don’t know if you would understand what is meant by khadi. To give you an idea, it is what Bimala-di does there in our Weaving Department – homespun cloth out of native yarn, not imported from Africa! So, all wore khadi dhotis, khadi saris, khadi shirts, etc. And it had just started. Therefore you can understand what would have been the quality, the quantity and the cost. But it was Mahatma Gandhi’s brainwave, so it was executed. He also made a rule that everybody, including the leaders, must spin a certain amount of yarn and put on *khaddar* clothes. You have seen pictures in the newspapers how Morarji Desai spins, and others too. Even now he has stuck – true disciple that he is – to Gandhi’s instructions. All of us tried to observe it, no matter if the homespun cloth was coarse, heavy and costly. No matter if it was very difficult to keep in its place – we had to tie a string around the waist, it was so heavy! No matter if it was difficult to wash. You can understand, we had no servants as we have today, we took the trouble of washing it and it soon got dirty (*Laughter*) because it was coarse. No matter if it had worn away quickly and torn away quickly. There were no ladies to mend them – no mothers, no sisters, we were in the hostel.

But all we bore with a cheer, with a smile for the sake of the love of the country. It gave us, truly speaking, a sort of a feeling of exaltation, a feeling of uplift, a sense of purity because we

observed it as a religious ceremony, as a spiritual rebirth.

Mahatma Gandhi gave us this temptation that if we observed this rule, Swaraj would come within a year. So, that was another push to our observance of this very difficult, tedious and sometimes painful, but exalting function. So, that was khadi.

In spite of all the formidable difficulties on the way, we were martyrs to the cause of the country. Swaraj didn't come within a year! Foreign cloth was banished from the country to a great extent. Lancashire and Manchester were paralysed, so we thought Swaraj would come very soon. That was the movement around khadi. You remember Sri Aurobindo and other leaders also started the same slogan. But wisely or unwisely they were not so restrictive, they said, "We shall boycott foreign cloth, but we can put on indigenous cloth made in the mill." Here Gandhi is... well... an extremist. As Sri Aurobindo says, he goes to extremes in everything – if celibacy, celibacy for everyone. If starvation, starvation for everybody. (*Laughter*) If *ahimsa*, *ahimsa* for everybody. But Sri Aurobindo has a more compromising spirit and some other leaders too agreed with him.

So, mill-made cloth was allowed and that gave a fillip to the starting, to the foundation of new industries – Banga-Lakshmi Mills and others... But Mahatma Gandhi is Mahatma Gandhi! However, there was a comic side to it. There were two kinds of 'kapdā's<sup>21</sup> that were in vogue at that time: "meeting *kā kapdā* and *gharkā kapdā*".<sup>22</sup> (*Laughter*) One day I happened to visit a leader for some purpose and he was to go out somewhere, I heard him ordering his *chaprāsi*<sup>23</sup>, "Meeting *kā kapdā léāo!*" (*Laughter*)

You understand, he was going to address a meeting, so "meeting *ka kapdā*", and "*ghar ka kapdā*" you also understand! So, this is what was going on behind.

Unfortunately I would not keep to this khadi for long, to my shame, let me confess, because at some point I resumed my studies and I went to college, putting on mill-made cloth, not khadi. So, that's the story about the khadi movement. There are many others – khadi led us to many bypaths – those we shall see later on and I'll speak about them if there is an occasion or a need.

21. Cloth or material or clothes.

22. Clothes worn at meetings and clothes worn at home.

23. Servant.

Now I come to another topic. I want to read out to you, ladies and gentlemen, something from *Mother India*... please don't turn your nose! Some of you may have read it. Others may just say, "Oh, *Mother India!*" and frown upon it. It may not be so popular with you, but I might tell you, you don't know perhaps, that it has a glorious past – a glorious career.

Well, *Mother India* launched its career somewhere in 1940. It came out from Bombay, and I think it was the brainchild of our friend Navajat. He has had many brainchildren and one of them is *Mother India*. Then they began to hunt for another editor. The problem came up before Sri Aurobindo and they began to suggest or propose this name, that name – and finally they struck upon my three-legged friend with anapaestic<sup>24</sup> movement, Amal (*Laughter*). He himself says his movement is anapaestic – those of you who have read poetry will understand! (*Laughter*) He is not four-legged, by the way! (*Laughter*) So, he was chosen as editor and he has filled his editorship very well indeed.

He used to send all his articles to Sri Aurobindo, and once when some people began to protest against some articles, Sri Aurobindo came up in support of Amal and claimed that *Mother India* was his paper. Soon the *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* came out, and Mother said it was her paper! (*Laughter*) No rivalry, I'm just narrating the sequence (*Laughter*). Sri Aurobindo used to dictate, anonymously of course, its policy and correct some articles written by my friend Amal. It was a political paper mostly. But now, as you see, it is everything except politics. Some of you might say: "Oh, the only thing that I read there is *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*. Sometimes others might sail in, but their sails are not moon-imprinted, So, what is there of interest for us?" (*Laughter*)

But I am addressing those people who have an ambition to flourish as writers or poets. Here is a fine scope given to you in *Mother India*, my friends. You know the world is hard, you'll find it hard to get your articles published outside. (*Laughter*)

24. Anapaestic: A poetic metre which has four metrical feet. Each foot has two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed syllable. As Amal Kiran used to walk with a stick, due to a deformation of the foot caused by polio, Nirod-da calls him three-legged and his gait 'anapaestic', with two long and one short step.

So, like the rishi<sup>25</sup>, Amal will accept all your ‘offsprings,’ provided they are good. So, I request you on behalf of *Mother India* and my friend Amal, to smile a little benignantly and charitably upon the journal. He has not paid me anything, by the way, for pleading his case! (*Laughter*) Oh, yes – when it came out, all the writers were very handsomely paid, though I was always paid very meagrely, miserly. Somehow my luck with Lord Ganesh is not all that good. (*Laughter*) Here is the article and I shall read out the extracts that I found very interesting: (*Mother India*, December 1969, p. 755)

“The Last Darshan – and After”

Some personal experiences –

The memory of the last Darshan of the Master on November 24, 1950...

– we shall talk about it later on –

...will ever remain imprinted in the shrine of my heart. I felt his calm eyes resting full on me... We were asked not to halt before him but file past as quickly as possible.

– It is a fact that visitors were asked to move as quickly as possible which was not done before. But one could have one’s fill. –

How little did I know then that the strong and radiant vibrations received at that momentous moment would sustain me all my life, especially after December 5, the same year, when Sri Aurobindo withdrew from his body. It was most difficult to recover from the shock of that event... After the passing of Sri Aurobindo, the oneness of the Mother with him became more and more concrete to my experience... Several times I had the vision of the Mother at the Samadhi, her face lit up with smiles.

Now, about a new kind of experience. It began like this:

I wrote a letter to the Mother and sent it. While awaiting the reply, all of a sudden my consciousness began to rise... the body

25. This is probably a reference to Rishi Kanwa who adopted the baby Shankuntala, the offspring of Rishi Vishwamitra and the nymph Menaka.



lay inert. Thus passed the whole midday... when the Mother was informed about my state, She said, 'Don't disturb him, he is fully conscious,' at about 9 p.m. She sent some water through a sadhak, which looked lime-white, to my inner eye and nectar-sweet as I drank it. Later I learnt it was pure water.

This isn't an experience; he wants to tell you, young friends, what kind of things can happen to us and how we face them.

Now I pass on to our old book [*The Life of Sri Aurobindo*] and follow the sequence here. It's the year 1924, everything will stop within two years – in 1926. Sri Aurobindo will retire. Let us try to cover these two years as quickly as we can.

At that time there was group meditation as is being done today. But all of a sudden on January 22<sup>nd</sup>, Sri Aurobindo decided that group meditation should be stopped.

When he was asked about the group meditation, he said: "It always requires an individual who can create the necessary spiritual atmosphere. That atmosphere is due to his presence, it cannot be created by effort."

But please remember that it may not be applied today. Because from 1924 to 1970, things have come, as you know, very far indeed. There were evening sittings too in which Sri Aurobindo used to talk, which were also stopped. Naturally many sadhaks were disturbed because they were deprived of Sri Aurobindo's presence or contact, but two days – Tuesday and Saturday – were set apart to help some disciples in meditation and others were given Thursday and Saturday for personal interviews. I believe afterwards again the group talk was taken up.

One of the reasons then known for stopping collective meditation was that 'it obliges Sri Aurobindo to descend lower in the consciousness'... Afterwards i.e. after 24<sup>th</sup> November 1926, – Sri Aurobindo decided to entrust the work of helping all to the Mother.

And here is a talk about Supramental perfection:

To a sadhak Sri Aurobindo gave hints about taste; he also explained to him that if he wanted to read a book he could

certainly do so but not because he was unable to control his mind.

– Remember that –

That is real freedom in action. Yoga means mastery over the lower nature...

– not that you *can't* control, you *must* control –

...and establishing the action of the Higher Nature in its place. One has to offer his free self to the Divine. Afterwards the Divine will choose the action in you.

Now an interesting question:

*Do you believe that this work will be done this time?* [26<sup>th</sup> March 1924]

**Sri Aurobindo:** I know it can be done; but I don't want to prophesy. I cannot say, 'It will be done'. But this I can say: 'Something will be done this time'... The whole thing is ready behind.

And now about doubt – many of us suffer from it and I myself have suffered a lot! Sri Aurobindo said:

Intellectual doubt? But who of us has not had it? In my case, it followed me for years together and only for the last two years has the last shadow of doubt about the Yoga and its being practised under the present condition of human nature and practicality, disappeared.

Then, this next question was asked in 1939 – in our time – I still remember. It was my senior, my boss, if you like, Dr. Manilal. He used to ask many interesting questions, childlike questions, childish questions. This is not childish, of course. One day I'll read out to you from our talks, it's very interesting. He asked:

*What happens when the human consciousness is replaced by the divine?*

Many of you also ask this question – what will be our inner condition? The answer:

One feels perpetual calm, perpetual strength, is aware of Infinity, lives in Eternity. Everything becomes a manifestation of the Brahman. For instance as I look around the room I see everything as the Brahman – it is not thinking, it is a concrete experience, even the wall, the book is Brahman. I see you not as Dr Manilal but as the divine being in the Divine. It is a wonderful experience.

So, my young friends, this is what you will have, and this is what they are working for day and night – for us.

Now here again is something interesting [*The Life of Sri Aurobindo*]. A reminiscence of Sri Aurobindo's jail life:

I wanted to get rid of cruelty and violence, etc. following the conventional method of Yoga. The result was that all the conventional thoughts and sanskaras – impressions – were completely uprooted. For eight or ten days all kinds of cruel and violent things went on happening outside and rising within.

He wanted to conquer cruelty and violence instead of which everything began to rise up.

When the mind stopped reacting to them then they all ceased.

Sometimes it does happen, my friends. Some of you must have had the experience. When you try to control something it becomes all the more aggravated. If you want to conquer your lust for *rasagollas* you'll find them everywhere. You'll be hankering, hankering and keep hankering for them. Whatever you want to control or conquer for a time, that *very* thing, as it were, comes from all sides. If you want to remain calm, you will see incident after incident happening to give you disturbance. So, it doesn't mean that you should give up the fight, but as Sri Aurobindo says, your mind must not react to it. Because the craving for *rasagolla* has come, you don't go to Ganpatram (Cottage restaurant) and gulp one after another, to satisfy that craving, to satisfy that desire. Desires *never* get satisfied – that all of

you know. So, if you are perceptive enough, you must have seen that you have made up your mind today, taken a pious resolution not to be disturbed by whatever happens, you'll remain calm and quiet, and the blessed thing – as soon as the day begins, you see that your servant is absent! (*Laughter*)... and it starts. So, one after the other, as if some mischievous elfins and goblins are at your heels, trying to test you. So, the only thing to do is to remain quiet. Here too, in Sri Aurobindo's case you can see – he wanted to get rid of cruelty and violence and they went on happening outside. That's very interesting. Why his trying to control these movements, should have an effect outside?

Then in July, Kapali Shastri – perhaps you have heard his name – he was... how shall I put it... our Madhav Pandit's elder or teacher, if you like, he met Sri Aurobindo. He too noticed a remarkable change in the colour of Sri Aurobindo's skin.

Then, on August 15<sup>th</sup>, Sri Aurobindo's birthday, he spoke for a short time. And somebody asked him about celebrating the 15<sup>th</sup> of August. Sri Aurobindo replied:

What is the significance of the 15<sup>th</sup>? I want to make it as ordinary as any other day.

– You know how we celebrate our birthdays. I am not an exception! –

What has it to do with the stomach? It has an inner significance, and if there is a way of celebrating it in a fitting manner I have no objection. I do not like any sort of vital manifestation on that day after taking the new turn in Yoga.

Well, we tried to do it in as yogic a manner as possible! (*Laughter*) Here is something he said in the *Evening Talks*:

What I find is that it is not necessary to have a full and rich development of the mental and vital being for the descent of the Supermind. It is enough if there is a sufficient basis to start the higher working.

– It's a great consolation to me! –

If you have to wait for the full development of the mental and the vital being then it would require centuries; I do not think it necessary. Rather, too much development is an obstacle sometimes. I find that what the mind attains with great effort is easily attained in the Supermind with simplicity and directness... In my own case, I found the mental effort a great obstacle. But I had to do it...

– Mind that, please –

... in order to get the necessary knowledge. Mind is like an infinite snake curling round and round.

Please understand it in the right spirit, young students. Don't think that your mind can be thrown into Ravindra's cold storage. (*Laughter*) Not a full development but some development is necessary.

Then here is something very important, either for yoga or *bhoga*<sup>26</sup>, whatever you like.

Need of samata – the quality and common sense in Yoga sadhana.

Sri Aurobindo had said to me in one of his letters:

Common sense is exceedingly uncommon in this Asram. Sometimes I think the Mother and myself alone have our stock left unexhausted and all the rest have sent theirs flying sky high. However! (*Laughter*)

So, please... a very important element indeed. He said about himself:

A perfect yogi requires perfect balance. That was the thing that saved me – I mean the perfect balance.

– Neither too much of this nor too much of that, is perfect balance. Many of our *sadhaks* have gone 'phut' (lost their minds) because they tried to reach the Supermind overnight. But somehow your life has been regulated in such a way that you are forced to keep some balance in your normal life. It is essentially necessary, my

26. Enjoyment.

friends, not too much sleep, not too much gossip, not too much eating – moderation, measure, proportion, that's balance. So:

First of all I believed that nothing was impossible and at the same time I could question everything.

– He would not accept everything as gospel truth. He believed it but at the same time, he tested it.

There are some people who don't believe that at all, "oh, that's all bosh!" There are others who say, "Nonsense!" And some ridiculous people say, "Ah yes, yes, it's true. Supermind has descended, ah yes," and they start worshipping him. – "If I had believed in everything that came I would have been like Bijoy Goswami."

Then the last one about his biography, he said:

To write my biography is impossible. The idea is quite wrong. Who could write it? Not only in my case but in that of poets, philosophers and yogis it is no use attempting a biography, because they do not live in their external life. Their real life is inner and how can anyone else know that life? It is different with men of action like Napoleon or Julius Caesar, men who develop themselves through action. Even in their case it would be best if they wrote their biographies themselves.

Sri Aurobindo said à propos,

I do not want to be murdered by my own disciples in cold print.

I suppose we can stop here. We are coming to 24<sup>th</sup> November 1926.

28 January 1970

Well, I have been reading out to you some extracts from the talks that Sri Aurobindo used to hold with his young friends, in the 1920s. It seems as if such talks were a customary feature in Sri Aurobindo's mode of life.

In Calcutta, during the hectic period of his political activity or afterwards, perhaps, I'm not quite sure about it, he used to have such talks – private talks – with a few of his young friends, some automatic writing and various other diversions too. Even in jail, I understand, when they were all living together in one hall, young people used to crowd around him to make him talk, even when he was engaged in absorbing *sadhana*. Had the Mother been there at that time, she would have come and asked smiling: “Are they making you talk?”

And Sri Aurobindo somewhat bashfully, would have answered: “I am talking to them about my poet-brother.” (*Laughter*)

In our days, long after those periods, as you know very well, beginning from 1938 downwards, we used to have some talks of that sort, which we have recorded. We used to listen as you are listening today – I hope, avidly – to the talks, at the same time recording them surreptitiously, behind his back, for our future hungry generation who won't tread them down I hope, for our great grandchildren: yourselves and others. Had he known that we were recording them, I wonder what he would have done. But perhaps in his silent self he had some inkling that mischievous Nirod and Purani were recording his inspiring, impromptu utterings, in black and white.

So, the talks of 1920s have been recorded by my friend and colleague Purani in his 2<sup>nd</sup> volume of *Evening Talks*. As you can see, he has done precious service to all of us. At one time, during Sri Aurobindo's corporeal presence, the Mother demanded that all those recorded talks should be submitted to her. (*Laughter*) I don't know the sequence, whether Purani submitted them or not. I heard that there were some who had submitted, whether they were confiscated or given back, I have no idea. But it seems from these talks that either Purani had a duplicate or he did not submit to the demand. (*Laughter*) Whatever it is, we are grateful to him for having

recorded them and brought them out in book form. They are indeed very precious. So many people come to us now, thanking us for the service we have done. How we did it, etc. doesn't matter very much, I suppose, but you will see, some of you at least, if you compare the previous talks with the later ones, the difference between the two. The development in Sri Aurobindo, our questions, the scope, the background, etc. All have an interesting difference. Some researchers may take up the subject someday and I'm sure you will find it very interesting.

Now, I suppose, all of you will be very much interested to know the setting and atmosphere in which these talks were held.

There were just a handful of disciples at that time, though more in number than we were. I propose to read out from Purani's record the setting, which is very well-written and very interesting, and thus we will come to know much about those times.

[*Evening Talks*]

*Guru-griha-vāsa* – 'staying in the home of the Guru' – is a very old Indian ideal maintained by seekers through the ages. The Aranyakas – 'the ancient teachings in the forest-Groves' – are perhaps the oldest records of the institution. It was not for 'education' in the modern sense of the term that men who want to live with the Guru; for the Guru is not a 'teacher'. The Guru is one who is 'enlightened', who is a seer, a Rishi, one who has the vision and has lived in the Truth.

...In ancient times seekers went to the Guru with many questions, difficulties and doubts but also with earnestness. Their questions were preliminary to the quest.

I suppose that *Guru-griha-vāsa* was a very significant feature of our Indian spiritual civilisation in the Upanishadic days, and afterwards, I might venture one day, to tell you something about Aranyakas though I'm not very confident about them, neither as well-versed in them as Sisir would be. All the same, for you young children, I might try to recapture the ideal, the time and the life of those young pupils, like yourselves, who went to their teachers in the sense described here. If I may say so, perhaps the Mother is trying to recapture that system, that tradition but naturally suitable to the modern times – modern *yuga-dharma* – time-spirit, putting old wine in a new bottle! So many of you, pupils, have



come here to the *Guru-griha-vāsa*. You are being given modern education, not the Upanishadic one. At that time the *shishyas* used to live with their gurus without paying anything, but they had to serve the guru with all their might and right – doing all his domestic duties. Sometimes the guru had many cows and the disciple had to take, maybe, one cow to the forest with the order that he should not return till the cow produced a hundred cows! So, all the beautiful inscriptions and teachings were learnt in this way. Now things have changed. We say that you must learn by heart Wordsworth's ode to Immortality. If you don't learn, we don't ask you not to come to the class. (*Laughter*)

Well, this is the age of democracy. It was very interesting that the basis was spirituality not intellectuality. And as far as I know, there was no distinction of colour or creed. It would be interesting to read about them and see how far we have travelled from those ancient ideals, how far we have developed, we have evolved, and perhaps we are coming back to those same ideals in a new way. But the sense of it is that the Guru is one who knows the Truth and says implicitly or explicitly "Cling to Truth". The Truth of whose embodiment are Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and that Truth we must cling to, that is the principle.

The Master, the Guru, set at rest the puzzled human mind by his illuminating answers, perhaps even more by his silent consciousness, so that it might be able to pursue unhampered the path of realisation of the Truth...

Wherever the Master is, there is Light. And *Guru-griha* – the home of the Master – can be his private dwelling place. So much was this feeling a part of Sri Aurobindo's nature and so particular was he to maintain the personal character of his work that during the first few years – after 1923 – he did not like his house to be called an 'Ashram'...

– And he did not like to be called a 'Guru'. And, as I have told you, he met his friends his disciples on equal terms. They used to sit around him on chairs, eat with him, talk with him, etc.

But there was no doubt that the flower of Divinity had blossomed in him, and disciples, like bees seeking honey, came to him. It is no exaggeration to say that these Evening Talks

were to the small company of disciples what the Aranyakas were to the ancient seekers. Seeking the Light, they came to the dwelling place of their Guru, the greatest seer of the age, and found it their spiritual home – the home of their parents, for, the Mother, his companion in the great mission, had come. And these spiritual parents bestowed upon the disciples freely of their Light, their consciousness, their power and their grace...

Even though the disciples may be very imperfect representations of what he aimed at in them, still they are his creations. It is in order to repay, in however infinitesimal a degree, the debt which we owe to him that the effort is made to partake of the joy of his company – the evening talks – with the larger public.

[*Evening Talks*]

Sri Aurobindo was never a social man in the current sense of the term and definitely he was not a man of the crowd

– You remember, when he was in Baroda somebody asked him why he didn't go to the *majlis* or the *darbar* court. He replied, "They are not interesting."

After Baroda when he went to Calcutta there was hardly any time in the storm and stress of revolutionary politics to permit him to lead a 'social life'.... In the *Karmayogin* office he used to sit after the office hours till late chatting with a few persons or trying automatic writing. Strange dictations used to be received sometimes: one of them was the following: 'Moni (Suresh Chakravarty)...

– You remember it was he who came here first to see to Sri Aurobindo's accommodation to stay here, and he was a young man of 15 or 16<sup>27</sup> –

...will bomb Sir Edward Grey when he comes as the Viceroy of India. In later years at Pondicherry there used to be a joke that Sir Edward took such a fright at the prospect of Moni's bombing him that he never came to India!

27. He was born in 1891, so he must have been 18 or 19 at that time.

... How much were the sittings dependent on him may be gathered from the fact that there were days when more than three-fourths of the time passed in complete silence without any outer suggestions from him, or there was only an abrupt 'Yes' or 'No' to all attempts of drawing him out in conversation.

– We know this very well, to our cost! –

... What was spoken was what he felt necessary to speak... a question from one of the group, occasionally, some remark or query from himself would set the ball rolling for the talk.

– You remember I gave you some instances from our talks, like “Nirod” – I – “was found snoring,” or “Purani dashed against something and broke it!” (*Laughter*) –

The whole thing was so informal that one could never predict the turn the conversation would take. The whole house therefore was in a mood to enjoy the freshness and the delight of meeting the unexpected. There were peals of laughter and light talk, jokes...

If you allow me a medical joke which I remember, it was so unforgettable. It has not seen the light of the day and perhaps it won't, because people are somewhat... you understand... ultra-puritan. As he was compelled to a sedentary life, after the accident, and almost confined to bed, he could make no movements, his bowels would not move... you understand... that's a common thing so you don't need to feel shy about it. So, we were very much concerned about it, but he was most unconcerned, as in everything. At that time the war was going on and everywhere there were restrictions about food, etc... One day we said that the motion was very scanty. He said with a calm reserve, in the British manner, “War economy!” (*Laughter*) and there were peals of laughter... you know... but he kept calm and quiet. So, there you are.

There were peals of laughter and light talk, jokes and criticism which might be called personal – there was seriousness and earnestness in abundance.

These sittings, in fact, furnished Sri Aurobindo with an

occasion to admit and feel the outer atmosphere and that of the group living with him... Through his outer personality it was the Divine Consciousness that he allowed to act. All along behind the outer manifestation that appeared human, there was the influence and presence of the Divine.

What was talked in the small group informally was not intended by Sri Aurobindo to be the independent expression of his views on the subjects, events or the persons discussed. Very often what he said was in answer to the spiritual needs of the individual or of the collective atmosphere.... The net result of some talks very often was to point out to the disciple the inherent incapacity of the human intellect and its secondary place in the search for the ultimate Reality.

It was always so, even in our correspondence days, the answers to our letters were always, or almost always, individual, particular, that's why we were not encouraged to show our letters to other people. They could have said, "Whatever has been said to him is true for me."

That was not so. For instance, he encouraged meditation, or wanted me to meditate while for another man he would say it is not necessary. So, if a correspondent saw that Sri Aurobindo encouraged meditation to him, somebody else would try and the result would have perhaps been awful. Similarly, I remember, I don't know how far it's true, but *perhaps* it's true: the Mother used to make some distinction between Nolini-da and Amrita-da, as regards their outward ways. Nolini-da could read all kinds of novels but, the Mother said Amrita-da shouldn't read novels. So, similar distinctions were always made and we human beings always generalise things, and I had some beatings because I had the tendency to generalise! (*Laughter*) Then –

But there were occasions when he did give independently his personal views on some problems, on events and other subjects.

– Naturally some political problem, some intellectual problem... they were different –

Even then it was never an authoritarian pronouncement.

– Remember that, please, he was not dogmatic. –

Most often it appeared to be a logically worked out and almost inevitable conclusion expressed quite impersonally though with firm and sincere conviction. This impersonality was such a prominent trait of his personality!

– This is so *true*. I have talked about it, and to some extent, in our previous talks: how the Lord was quite a different person during the daytime and another person during the talks. In the daytime he showed, or it appeared, that he didn't know Nirod at all. And in the evening, "Oh, Nirod is my most dear friend!" (*Laughter*)

Even in matters like despatching a letter or a telegram it would not be a command from him to a disciple to carry out the task... He would hold out the letter or the telegram, would say in the most amiable and yet the most impersonal way: 'I suppose this has to be sent.' (*Laughter*)

This is very true indeed, very true. He would never say, "Give me this". I won't say never, but very, very rarely. And very rarely he would call us "Nirod", "Champaklal" or "Purani" – very rarely, and therefore it was doubly precious, you understand, hundred times more precious when we heard him calling us by our names. You understand that... You might think he did not call us by our names in order to make it rare... But it is not so. His whole nature was of this type... Not like the Mother's. He said, "Could this be done? Could I have this? How about this? Could I have a book?"

One of my friends, I won't tell you his name, was very much vexed about it and said, "Why can't he utter my name? Why can't he utter it?"

So, that was his nature, always –

And it would be for someone in the group instantly to volunteer and take it. The expressions he very often used were 'It was done', 'It happened', not 'I did'.

– No "I" anywhere. Only once do I remember, he said, "I do not profess like others that I am nothing. How can I say I'm nothing

when I know that I'm not nothing?" (*Laughter*)

There were two places where the sittings took place... From 1918 to 1922 we gathered at No. 41, Rue François Martin, called the Guest House<sup>28</sup> ...

– These ladies' Guest House (pointing to some ladies living there), they are guests there! –

...upstairs, on a broad verandah... From 1922 to 1926 at No. 9, Rue de la Marine (Prosperity), where he and the Mother had shifted, was the place where the sittings were held... There was a table covered with a better cloth than the one in Guest House...

– because the Mother has come! –

...a small flower vase...

The evening sittings used to be after meditation at 4 or 4.30 p.m. After November 24, 1926, the sitting began to get later and later, till the limit of 1 a.m. was reached. Then the curtains fell. Sri Aurobindo retired completely after December 1926 and the sittings came to a close.

Then the accident took place.

The long period of the Second World War, with all its vicissitudes, passed through these years. It was a priceless experience to see how he devoted his energies to the task of saving humanity from the threatened reign of Nazism. It was a practical lesson of solid work done for humanity without any thought of return or reward, without even letting humanity know what he was doing for it! Thus he lived the Divine and showed us how the Divine cares for the world, how he comes down and works for man. I shall never forget how he was at one time – in his own words – “not merely a non-co-operator but an enemy of British Imperialism” bestowed such anxious care on the health of Churchill, listening carefully to the health-bulletins!

28. Later on the Mother named it “Dortoir Annexe”.

– Perhaps some of you know that at one time Churchill was seriously ill during the war. –

It was the work of the Divine, it was the Divine's work for the world.

Here are the names of the participants in the evening talks, from 1923-26:

1. Barindra Kumar Ghose – Sri Aurobindo's younger brother.
2. Nolini Kanta Gupta
3. Bijoy Kumar Nag – who doesn't exist in this world.
4. Suresh Chakravarty – “Moni”
5. Amrita
6. B. P. Verma
7. Tirupati
8. A. B. Purani
9. Pavitra
10. Champaklal
11. Kanai, etc...

Then from 1938-50:

1. My humble self (*Laughter*)
2. Champaklal's great self
3. Satyendra – I don't know what self! (*Laughter*)
4. Mulshankar
5. A. B. Purani
6. Becharlal.

About the later participants like Manilal and others, perhaps there will be an occasion to tell you something now and then, when we come to that period.

Now, there are 5 minutes for the bell, let me proceed with the other book [*The Life of Sri Aurobindo*] and give you some extracts from the *Talks*. It is mainly for the youngsters who don't know, perhaps, anything about it. (p. 236)

Talk on Art. He said during the talk: ‘Really speaking I got my true taste (for painting) in Alipore Jail. I used to meditate and I saw pictures and colours and then I found that the critical

faculty also arose in me. I did not know the thing intellectually but I caught at the real spirit. But my natural preference is for architecture and sculpture.

So, my young friends, you see what yoga can do to us. Sri Aurobindo knew nothing of art, I mean in this life, but all on a sudden by the process of yoga, as he said to us, it opened in him. And he always showed it and produced it as an evidence of what is latent, or what cannot be done, can be done by yoga, though I was not very much... well... (*Laughter*) So, all of a sudden the vision opened for painting with no apparent rhyme or reason and he said he could understand and appreciate painting though he did not know the technique. He could even discuss about painting. So, that is something which is very promising for all of us and particularly for you young people. Of course, we have to take some trouble, I suppose. Then he said:

I used to get fever and something would come down and reject it successfully, while at other times I had to go on working at one thing again and again.

I have seen that, at times, the strongest faith does not succeed. Again, you may have the strongest will and yet the thing does not get done. Not that faith is not necessary or the will not useful. But they both require something – a third element – which when it comes down brings success. Even if there is opposition yet the success comes.

Once, I remember, I was suffering from some ailment and I heard all of a sudden, Sri Aurobindo's voice, very distinctly: "This must stop."

But I am sorry to say it didn't stop immediately, but of course, it did stop after some time, perhaps because I had no faith, it didn't stop immediately. I shall finish with this:

There was talk about quinine...

– Now quinine seems to be out of the picture, thank God! How much quinine my poor body has taken, you have no idea! I was suffering from malaria during my childhood too – had quite a big tummy – had to take many injections, swallow lots of bitter quinine



and *pāchan*<sup>29</sup>. I remember still, I was about five or six years old. I would refuse to swallow the bitter quinine and four or five people had to hold me (*Laughter*), open my mouth, put a deer horn there and through it pour the quinine mixture. (*Laughter*) I felt a giant's strength in me! (*Laughter*) It was tragic and humorous. If I write about it, it will seem a comedy. So, Sri Aurobindo said:

... The last time I took quinine was in Alipore Jail in 1909. It had no effect. The fever was very high and in that state I somehow staggered to the door of the cell and told the watchman to bring some water. He brought very cold – about ice-cold – water. I drank the whole quantity he had brought. Then feeling very weak I lay down in bed. In 10 mins the fever left me. After that I did not get that kind of fever.

– So, you see, he had high fever and such cold water cured him!

#### 4 February 1970

Well, after a long journey, through a long way, we have arrived at a crucial point of the year 1926.

It was the year of the descent of the Overmind leading to the other manifestation of the Supermind. So, it was a crucial year in Sri Aurobindo's *sadhana*. It can be compared with the astronauts finding a permanent base in space! When the Supramental manifested itself in the Playground in 1956, some of you may have heard of it, or had had the experience of it... I had no conscious experience, to tell you frankly, none of us knew anything about it. Though it seems the whole Playground was flooded with its light, with the Golden Light and all were bathed in it, even swam perhaps, but without knowing anything of it. The Mother expected that most of us would fall flat by this onrush of gold! But she was surprised to see everybody sitting bolt upright (*Laughter*) against the onrush of that Light. So, I suppose, either we were so wide open that we could

29. A digestive.

take in the flow, or we were so resistant – like blacksmiths' crude iron – that we remained quite upright.

But far otherwise was the case when the Overmind descended. We shall see what it was like, presently. For the moment, let's go back to the month of February 1926 where we ended our talk. Then covering a few months we shall step on the momentous day of November 24<sup>th</sup> which has been known as Sri Aurobindo's Siddhi Day.

Now, if you remember, we read about an experience which was somewhat unusual, something unheard of, that he had when Sri Aurobindo was in jail. He had very high fever, protracted fever which even our wonderful discovery of that time, quinine, could not cure. Quinine was like penicillin or streptomycine and other drugs, but it failed to cure Sri Aurobindo. Then he did something astounding – he asked the warden to bring some water, and he brought ice-cold water which Sri Aurobindo drank, the whole quantity, and found that he was cured of the fever completely.

As I said, it's something unheard of in our allopathic medicine, or in homoeopathy, or in Ayurveda – as far as I know. Many such unusual, unheard-of things have happened in Sri Aurobindo's life. I would like to repeat them just in passing. For instance, you know Sri Aurobindo used to suffer from some sort of eczema and he cured it by pouring boiling water! And he said, "Of course, I can't recommend it to others!"

Then again, you remember, that he used to take a bath with boiling water. That also, I suppose, he couldn't recommend to us! (*Laughter*) Then what are the other incidents? ... Yes, he observed a fast for twenty-three days and broke it in a very normal way. That again is breaking all medical rules. Doctors always advise that the fast must be broken gradually, judiciously: first a sip of water, then fruits, then solid food. But for the Master, it was not necessary and he had the most normal meal. If you and I had done the same, we would have gone to the other world!

Then we have seen him taking his first meal – call it breakfast, call it lunch, call it dinner at about 3 or 4 o'clock in the afternoon. It was pushed from 10 and 11, to 12, 1 o'clock, 2 o'clock... or even to 4 o'clock. And one day perhaps, it was even later than that. And in between, except for a glass of water, he took nothing and didn't even feel hungry.

The story of his correspondence you know very well: eight or nine hours at a time at night, for so many years continuously without a wink of sleep.

And he told us that during his political days, while on tour, he lived simply on bananas. And he recommended by saying that it was very good and wholesome food.

Then... I'm not quite sure about it, I have heard that while he was doing his intense *sadhana* here, the story goes, he was experimenting with all sorts of things, and one of them was what these hippies take: narcotics – opium. It seems he took a lump of opium – fit to kill an elephant but it had no effect on him. (*Laughter*)

So, won't you call these somewhat unusual, these unheard-of incidents, as extraordinary, that happen very rarely even in exceptional cases?

You know also that while he was in England as a boy and then a man, for so many years he went on without a proper breakfast, proper lunch; he lived on trifles like sandwiches and some cups of tea, had no winter coat during the freezing climate, though his father was quite well-off, but without any complaint, without any grumbling. He wrote to me in 1935 that poverty had no terror for him, when I was talking like Samuel Smiles – a moralist. So many people say, "Oh! Poverty is the curse of life."

Then, yes – there is the famous incident of I.C.S. Now I.C.S. [known as the I.A.S. since Independence] is quite common – as common as water. One or two of our pupils have shone there and they are seeing plenty of asses! (*Laughter*) In Sri Aurobindo's time it was a much-coveted job indeed. It was the crown of the British Civil Service. And, Sri Aurobindo, a young man, took it carelessly and threw it off as carelessly and nonchalantly. He came home after the riding test and said to his brothers, a little smiling, perhaps, "I'm chucked out!"

And his elder brother Manomohan flew into a rage and hurled, perhaps, some brotherly epithets – fool, idiot... (*Laughter*) Sri Aurobindo digested all that quietly and began to play cards. (*Laughter*)

So, there are many other such incidents, friends, to show that he was not the stuff that we are made of, or dreams are made of. That is why when he asked me and others to do what he had

done and set his own example, I refused to accept! He went on belabouring me saying, “Till you accept, I shall go on beating you.”

... And I grew blacker in the face and fairer like the Ethiopian prince (*Laughter*), but I did not yield. I don't know what you will say. I might ask you, “Who was on the side of reason?” (*Laughter*) Perhaps your love and loyalty will abandon me and you'll say,

All things betray thee who betrayest Me.<sup>30</sup>

Now I shall go back, there are a few interesting items here, I can read them out to you.

[*The Life of Sri Aurobindo*]

February 24. Tirupati, a sadhak... lost his mental balance...

– There have been some unbalanced people here –

... and so, he was sent away. He came back to Pondicherry without permission. He had been informed by a wire not to come: ‘Inform Tirupati my anger, prevent coming to Pondicherry. I refuse to receive him.’

One could see here that Sri Aurobindo could be hard when necessary whether his ‘anger’ was the ordinary emotion felt or was it a yogic reaction? Once speaking of ‘anger’ he said about his own experience...,

– I told you, Sri Aurobindo said to us that anger was foreign to his nature – he did not know how to become angry. So, there again, can we follow him? I suppose we can! So, you see, Sri Aurobindo recounts his experience:

In my case I once saw anger coming up and possessing me.

– Again a very interesting psychological experience. How does anger come up? Anger possessing us, I understand. Yes, it was a vivid experience I still remember he was relating to me – perhaps I have told you this. It was in the Guest House. He was sitting

30. Lines quoted from *The Hound of Heaven* by Francis Thompson.

upstairs in the verandah, some people had come to see him. What their psychological condition was, I don't know. But Sri Aurobindo saw this impulse or this emotion of anger, coming up from those people sitting there. It came up like smoke or vapour – a force, and possessed him. So, you see friends, anger, jealousy, love, etc. are all forces that come out of us. These emotions and feelings possess the other person. For instance, a friend of yours boiling with anger, coming to have a chat with you, can leave you a nice present of friendship! (*Laughter*) This happens so often to us. That's why they say that we have to be very careful about our contact with people. All the time exchanges are going on. Sri Aurobindo had the occult vision, so he saw very clearly the force of anger mounting up in the form of smoke. Those who are a little sensitive, do see such things; it's not very rare. So, he says:

It was absolutely uncontrollable when it came. I was very much surprised to see it in my nature. Anger has always been foreign to me... But by 'anger' I do not mean the Rudra-Bhāva which I had a few times.

– *Rudra-bhāva* is divine wrath, Shiva's wrath, something divine, whereas anger is something asuric or human. He said, "I freely admit that apart from the public platform I shouted only four or five times in my life." And once he wrote to me in a context: "I gave a sublimated supramental shout!" I think, I've told you about this incident. There was an old *sadhak*, he is no longer here, he was a good man but bad-tempered and he was very close to the Mother. She gave him quite a few chances. That's what happens when you get a few chances from somebody, you abuse him, you misuse him. He could see the Mother whenever he liked, at the foot of the stairs. So, one day, I don't know what time it was, Sri Aurobindo was in the room where visitors sit, and the Mother was at the door. And this fellow – by the way he was a medical man (*Laughter*) – medical men are often short-tempered, the patients make them so! He began to argue with the Mother about something and his voice began to rise in pitch and volume. The Mother quietly listened to the wayward child. His shouting reached Sri Aurobindo's ear, somehow Shiva's *Rudra-bhāva* came into him and he shouted from there, "Who is there shouting at the Mother?"

As soon as the Lion roared (*Laughter*) the lamb shuddered, quietly tucked its tail and went away. (*Laughter*) So, that's what he calls "sublimated, supramental shout". Then he says:

In 1909 I got the yogic fancy for taking only rice, ghee and plantains...

What a combination, good Lord!

... which I carried out – though desire for meat was there in the vital being.

Then we come to the month of May. This gentleman Tirupati came again to Pondicherry. A stiff letter asking him to go back was sent by Sri Aurobindo.

Then the diary comes to June 10<sup>th</sup>:

During this period – 1924-26 – Sri Aurobindo used to get cooked fish ready for feeding the cats.

– We shall speak about it later on, it is very interesting. –

In the evening he said: 'I was once a violent non-vegetarian as Champaklal is at present, a violent vegetarian. Then I found that it was my own vital being that was demanding meat.'

– So, you see he had an attachment. That gives me some consolation! (*Laughter*)

Well, I gave it up and for years together I went on taking whatever came. Then I discovered that what people call tasteless and bad food has got its own taste.

On September 4<sup>th</sup>, Sri Aurobindo said:

If I had stuck to my job, I would have been a principal, perhaps written some poetry, and lived in comfort like a bourgeois. All the energy I have I owe to yoga. Even the energy I put forth in politics came from yoga.

After this entry, Purani comes to 24<sup>th</sup> November 1926. It's somewhat long and very interesting, but I'm afraid, my young

friends may not quite understand what we are talking about. All the same, I think I had better read it, but before that there is something else. [*Evening Talks*] It is Sri Aurobindo's speech on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1926. That means a few months before his great realisation. And it must have been also his last speech, because, as you know, after November he went into seclusion.

So, he said:

I shall say a few words today about the 15<sup>th</sup> of August.

I shall now speak about the positive side of the matter... something in general.... It is the bringing down of a Consciousness, a Power, a Light, a Reality that is other than the consciousness which satisfies the ordinary man upon Earth: a Consciousness, a Power and Light of Truth, Divine Reality which is destined to raise the Earth-consciousness and transform everything here.... Once this Consciousness, the Power descends it is there for all times and every day for those who are willing and fit to receive it.

Well, it's a matter of great hope that what Sri Aurobindo was trying has happened. The Supramental Light and Power have come down and settled themselves for ever. But to give us this reward, this present, he sacrificed his life, his body. It was at the great cost of his body! So, this is what he said in 1926, and that's what happened in 1950, and the full manifestation in 1956. Before that it was going and coming, coming and going; the Mother and Sri Aurobindo could not fix it. And their whole *tapasya* and work was to fix it forever. And you see here he says that we must be willing....

It is a day which ought to be a day of consecration, of self-examination and a preparation for future advance, if possible, for the reception of a special Power which would carry on the work of advance.

– He said 15<sup>th</sup> of August is a day of great descents, similarly the Mother's birthday which is coming. –

This can only be done in each individually if he takes up the true attitude and lives on that day under the right conditions.

– You know, Hitler knowingly or unknowingly fixed 15<sup>th</sup> of August

as the day when he would land in England and establish himself in Buckingham Palace.... How did he choose the 15<sup>th</sup>? But he didn't know what he was bargaining for. The 15<sup>th</sup> of August is Sri Aurobindo's birthday, and he dared to say that the Asura would find victory on this day. So, he met his doom. Napoleon, by the way, was born on 15<sup>th</sup> of August. I missed it by three months! (*Laughter*) But somehow I came a little before his Siddhi Day. Well, some of you may be lucky.

He says what must be our attitude on this day:

... So in the transformation also, mind cannot be transformed unless the Vital Being is transformed. And if the Vital Being is not transformed nothing can be realised; because it is the Vital Being that realises. So, if the mind is only partially changed, and if the Vital Being is open and also partially changed, it is not sufficient for our purpose. Because the whole range of the Vital Being cannot be done, unless the Physical Being also is opened and changed, for the divine Vital cannot realise itself in an unfitting environmental life.

And it is not enough for the inner Physical Being to be changed if the external man is not transformed.

– So, all these are in a chain. This is where the crux of the problem lies. He has chided us again and again, saying, “Unless the external man is changed, my yoga hasn't succeeded.”

I suppose, my young friends know what is meant by 'external man'? It is to go on in the ordinary ways of life. It will not do at all for Sri Aurobindo's yoga. You might get bright, brilliant experiences in the mind, you may see the Light, you may see the darkness, but this 'external man' must change – the 'external man' who goes on in the customary rounds of daily life: a good meal, good clothing, good company – *rasagolla* gives me joy, *brinjal* gives me sorrow, and so on and so forth. This is the 'external man'. He has ambition, takes pride in things; so many human reactions of which we are full – likes and dislikes, self-justification, anger, loathing, disgust. All these are part of our heritage. And my love of tea! (*Laughter*) So, my friends, this is what he insists on, and the Mother too insists – that our outer life *must* change, we *must*



go above our preferences, our attachments. A fight is going on there. Now let me just finish with this. So, he says:

... All has to be changed before anything permanently can be changed... if all is to be changed and done then there must be complete surrender.

– to the Divine, to the Mother –

It means there must be no reservation in any part of the being...

– That does not mean you should give up everything but keep something back for foul weather, who knows! So often do we hear: “Don’t work so hard, you’ll fall ill. Don’t waste your energy. Oh, Mother says that, we know what she means!” We are full of such things, unfortunately.

... any compromise with old customary thoughts and human ways of doing things.

Wherever anything is reserved, it means the Truth is not accepted and we shall commit, again, the old mistake of partial achievement and transformation. We should leave no field for the indulgence of ignorance. Each step you have to take as a mark, as an encouragement, for a step towards the Beyond. On one side no slackening of resolution and the zeal for the victory to be won, on the other no hasty impatience, nor depression. But the calm certainty in the Divine Will – and the calm will that it shall be done in us and the aspiration that it may be done for us so that it may be done for the world.

11 February 1970

So, today we have arrived at the Great Day that I intimated to you last time – 24<sup>th</sup> November 1926 – Sri Aurobindo’s Siddhi Day, Day of Victory, or to apply the modern term of war – D-Day! (*Laughter*) Sri Aurobindo has written to us himself about the significance of that day. We know it as the Descent of the Overmind, and here, in his own words, is the significance. He wrote this in 1935, to one of us:

[*The Life of Sri Aurobindo*]

The 24<sup>th</sup> November, 1926 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 his Ananda.

These are big terms. I don’t know how far you can make anything out of it. I do understand a little bit intellectually, but nothing in my consciousness, because the Overmind is far, far away from my mind (*Laughter*), not to speak anything about the Supermind! Well, I swallow them! Perhaps a little understanding has been given to me through the correspondence and other letters, but still they are something very, very abstract. I tried to think about them by my understanding, mental, reasoning faculty. What Sri Aurobindo means by this significance, perhaps, to put it as simply as possible, is that he became Sri Krishna himself even in his physical being, physical consciousness, outward nature, outward consciousness. That means the Consciousness that was Sri Krishna became the Consciousness that was Sri Aurobindo – right from the mind down to the physical. That’s why he says “descent into the physical”. What he was in essence, he becomes now in fact, in actuality, in his outer consciousness, in his exterior or physical consciousness – as we call it. By this we mean the consciousness that guides you, that does action through you, in your outer life. So, even this physical consciousness became the consciousness of the Overmind or Sri Krishna. Well, if you have understood anything

by it, so far so good. I can't go further than that! Now what will be that Consciousness? Those who are philosophers may read the chapter on Overmind in *The Life Divine*, and try to get into it, and get something out of it. (*Laughter*) However... So, that's what happened. And this much we can say that it was a very big step in his *sadhana*; because Overmind is the basis, as I said, the other day, from which you make 'sorties' – to use the modern expression – into the region of the Supramental. You visit that Supramental off and on, frequently, you live there, you bring its consciousness into yourself or into Matter. So, it's a very big step indeed. You have been told, how during his political activity, in his *sadhana*, Sri Krishna was guiding him from behind, at every step, till at last he took a fancy to take him away from political activity and put him into jail saying, "I've brought you here on a definite purpose. I am preparing you for further action, future action," – which was not political, at all. There he gave him one of the most major experiences, that of the Vasudeva Consciousness: seeing Sri Krishna everywhere, in everything.

So, that was the first meeting face to face, heart to heart, which prepared him for the final act, identification, if you like, with Sri Krishna in 1926 – complete union with him. The Master has been preparing for this end, for this goal, ever since 1910. Not the goal of the Overmind, but for the Supermind. The idea was clear to him even in 1910, and little by little, more and more, it became clearer till 1920. I shall read out to you a letter written by him to his brother Barin – I can read that very illuminating part of the letter. He says here:

[*The Life of Sri Aurobindo*]

For the last 10 years (1910-1920) the Divine has been giving me the experience of that element and developing it in me, though the work is not yet finished. Without reaching the Supramental it is impossible to know the ultimate secret of the world. The riddle of the world cannot be solved without it.

That is why Shankara has said that this world is *maya*<sup>32</sup>. For many other philosophers and yogis have left this world saying that it cannot be changed, this world is like a dog's tail, and so on and so forth. It is because they stop short of the Supermind. If by any good

32. Illusion.

luck Shankara had shot up to the Supermind, through the Overmind, he would have said, "This world is full of Bliss," not of *maya*.

So, when you go to the Supermind, then only do you see this world from a different vision. It's no longer *maya*. That is why Sri Aurobindo says that only the Supramental realisation can solve the riddle of this world. And that is what he and the Mother are after, the riddle of this world must be solved and also that the change of this nature is not possible unless and until that Supreme realisation is attained. That is why all other attempts, if they have been made at all, to change, have failed. That's the point and that's what Sri Aurobindo envisioned. He saw this already in 1920, as he says. And all his *sadhana* pointed towards that; and the first step towards that realisation is, as I said, the Siddhi Day. And it is very interesting to note that while this intense *sadhana* was going on the Mother joined him – in 1920. Both of them – colossal, spiritual figures as they are, joined together. Their *sadhana* got such an *accelerated speed*, perhaps it outsped your velocity of sound – supersonic! (*Laughter*) I told you what Sri Aurobindo had said about the Mother – that she has been able to achieve in one year what would have been done in 10 years. That is the dynamism and intensity that the Mother brought with her and joined Sri Aurobindo in that collaboration.

As I have said, repeated again and again, had the Mother not been here, the daughters would not have had a place here – the sons, yes! (*Laughter*) However, I have used the terms Overmind and Supermind – Sri Aurobindo warned us by saying,

Don't understand by this that Supermind was, as it were, just a little above the Overmind. Don't think that you have only to take one step forward from the former to reach the latter. It's true that the Overmind is the next step below the Supermind, but there is a big gulf between the two.

I shall quote just four lines from *Savitri* to show the distance, if you like, between them. It's very beautifully transcribed in verse:

As if a torch held by a power of God,  
The radiant world of the everlasting Truth  
Glimmered like a faint star bordering the night  
Above the golden Overmind's shimmering ridge.

So, if you stand, either in dream or in imagination, on the ridge of the Overmind and look up you'll see the Supermind like a *faint* star! Just as the stars appear to us from this world of ours, you'll see it as a faint glimmer. Now you can imagine or have a faint idea of the distance, physically, between the two. And he says: "the golden Overmind's shimmering ridge" – what a beautiful, concrete and vivid picture. Then he says:

But its attainment is not easy. After 15 years, I'm just now rising to the lowest of the three layers of the Supermind and trying to draw up all my movements into it. But when the Siddhi is complete, then there is no doubt that the Divine will give the Siddhi of the Supermind to others through me with very little effort.

So, a big hope! He has said "through me", afterwards he said "through the Mother" – we have to go through the gate of the Mother. She is the mediatrix between the two. But since it was written in 1920 when the Mother was still behind, he presented himself before the *sadhaks* and said "through me". But you know very well, afterwards, all the time he has been putting her forward before us saying that she is the mediatrix between us and the Supermind. Without her Grace it is impossible. So, you have to please the Mother and get her Grace! (*Laughter*) – which is easier, I believe!

But the most encouraging part of it is that with a little effort we shall be able to do it. On this point we tried to catch him many times, by saying, "You have said with a little effort..."

He replied, "Oh, you don't want to do *sadhana*!" (*Laughter*)

Then we said, "Those who come afterwards, it will be easier for them."

Then he said, smiling again, "Oh you want to shirk your responsibility!" (*Laughter*)

However, it's quite true. No human effort, all by itself, can go even above the mind to intuition and other levels, leave alone Supermind. And he has said again and again, as you know, that this Supermind for which they have come down, is not for them. They don't need anything. It is for us, for this woe-begotten world; out of pity, out of compassion for the suffering, wailing humanity that they have come down. And by their tremendous *tapasya* and hardship, they are bringing down the Supermind in order to change

this blessed world. They have said, “We have come down for that, we have been *sent* for that,” – “colonists from Immortality”.

How much they have suffered, how much the Mother suffers – I mean in the human way – all of us know very well. They could have very well lived in Bliss, in Felicity, in Ananda, above. But for us, us alone they have descended. Then he says after this – “Then my *real work* will begin.”

You know when the real work began – when you kids began to flood the Ashram and the Mother had to start a Dispensary, Playground and this blessed school in which we have to lecture, etc. (*Laughter*) So, the work started in 1943. So, I believe, by that time the Supramental had come down and covered much ground over here, because he wrote in one of the letters that the Overmind is getting more and more Supramentalised. So, it was only when the Mother was sure of her ground that she started the physical activity.

I am not in a hurry to accomplish my work... I do not want to jump into the field of action, like a madman running hither and thither, with the power of his petty egoism...

Again, you remember, he had said in his letter to Barin:

I do not want hundreds of thousands of disciples. It will be enough if I can get 100 complete men.

– And see the condition –

... empty of petty egoism, who will be instruments of God – This work is not mine, it is the Divine’s...

That was in 1922, today in 1970, nearly 50 years have passed. Well... well! (*Laughter*) Now... We have gone a little off the track. That always happens in talks, my friends. Now, to come back to the 24<sup>th</sup>, from the trend of the talks around that time, months previous to that day, Purani notes:

It was becoming clear that something was going to happen and some of the sadhaks were feeling actually that some big thing was imminent.

As I say in my colloquial vulgar tongue – some big fish was going to be caught (*Laughter*) or some big deal was going to be made; a great descent was near at hand.

The atmosphere was surcharged with something. There was intensity in concentration, in meditation. Sri Aurobindo was coming later and later to his evening sittings. The scheduled time was 4:30 p.m. and all those inmates, a few in number, used to sit there and wait for Sri Aurobindo's coming; but both his time for sittings and lunch, began to be pushed, pushed, pushed further and further. Nolini-da records that his lunchtime was pushed from four o'clock to twelve midnight! And naturally the sittings even further! So, Purani says:

Instead of coming to the evening sittings at half-past four, the usual time, Sri Aurobindo came at six or seven, or eight o'clock. One day the record was two o'clock in the morning! It was evident that all his great energies were entirely taken up by the mighty task of bringing about the descent of the Higher Consciousness.

And mind you, all of them waited, no one went away, they had an evening walk and came back. They waited till two o'clock for the Lord. So, he was so wholly occupied, entirely occupied with that work that he forgot everything. I remember, later on, during the period of my correspondence days, he used to be very, very brief and short – laconic as we see – one or two words in answer. I raised many questions, trying to drag him out as much as I could – illé! [no] (*Laughter*) I failed! He just put in something, two words, as if in a hurry, and not to disappoint me completely, no elaboration: “Yes”, “no”, “that could be done...”

His answers were very short, very dry. I was wondering: “What is the matter? Have I done something wrong?” Then, I dared to ask him: What's the matter with you, Sir? (*Laughter*) Why don't you give me long answers?

Then he confessed,

I'm busy trying to get down something. Now that I have got an opportunity, I am at it.

Then I understood and kept quiet. All right, Sir, have your way.  
(*Laughter*)

So, here too, you see, Purani writes:

Days, months and years passed; but Sri Aurobindo did not seem at all in a hurry to begin his work.... In one evening talk he said that he was engaged in the tremendous task of opening up the physical cells to the Divine Light and the resistance of the Inconscient was formidable.

So, that is what he was after. Then Purani records:

At last the great day arrived. From the beginning of November the pressure of the Higher Power began to be unbearable. The day for which the Mother had been waiting for so many long years came on the 24<sup>th</sup> November. The sun had almost set... when the Mother sent round word to all the disciples to assemble as soon as possible in the verandah where the usual meditation was held... on the wall near Sri Aurobindo's door, just behind his chair, a black silk curtain with gold lace work with three Chinese dragons, was hung... the tail of one reached up to the mouth of the other.... We came to know afterwards that there is a prophecy in China that the Truth will manifest itself on Earth when the three dragons (the dragons of the earth, of the mind region and of the sky) meet. Today on 24<sup>th</sup> November the Truth was descending and the hanging of the curtain was significant.

There was a deep silence.... Many saw an oceanic flood of Light rushing down from above. Everyone felt the pressure above his head. The whole atmosphere was surcharged with some electrical energy. In that silence... the usual, yet on this day quite unusual, sound was heard behind the door of the entrance.

– The usual sound, it seems, was the ringing of a bell.

Expectation grows in a flood. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother could be seen through the half-opened door. The Mother with a gesture of her eyes requested Sri Aurobindo to step out first. Sri Aurobindo with a similar gesture suggested to her to do the same. With a slow dignified step the Mother came out first, followed by Sri Aurobindo with his majestic gait.



You will be glad to hear, I suppose, that the Mother came clad in a sari, and Sri Aurobindo in his usual dhoti.

... living silence – not merely living but overflowing with divinity. The meditation lasted about forty-five minutes. After that one by one the disciples bowed to the Mother.

She and Sri Aurobindo gave blessings to them. Whenever a disciple bowed to the Mother, Sri Aurobindo's right hand came forward behind the Mother's as if blessing him through the Mother.

... When all was over they felt as if they had awakened from a divine dream. Then they felt the grandeur, the poetry and the absolute beauty of the occasion. It was not as if a handful of disciples were receiving blessings from their Supreme Master and Mother in one little corner of the earth....

It was far greater than that.

The deep impress of divinity which everyone got was for him a priceless treasure.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother went inside. Immediately Datta was inspired.

Datta, by the way, was an English lady who gave up everything and took up yoga. She was the Mother's personal attendant. Unfortunately, she passed away – I don't know when exactly, somewhere in 1945-46, I think. Now Vasudha is doing that work – the personal work. She was a very fine lady. So, –

In that silence she spoke: 'The Lord has descended into the physical today.'

That's the 24<sup>th</sup> and that was the occasion, as you see. There were about 24 disciples present.

Now I shall read a similar account from another source, perhaps a little different here and there. This is Nolini-da's account. [*Mother India*, December 1962, p. 30]

Even before that date (November 24<sup>th</sup>, 1926), for some time past, Sri Aurobindo had been more and more withdrawing into himself and retiring within. An external sign of this be-

came visible to us as his lunch hour shifted towards the afternoon. We used to have our meal together and the Mother too ate with us... in the room now used as the fruit-room.... On the previous day, Sri Aurobindo came down to lunch when it was past four.

Then the great day arrived. Everybody was called by the Mother.

I came running and went straight up, to the verandah facing the Prosperity room... As I came up, a strange scene met my eyes. Sri Aurobindo was seated in his chair, the Mother sat at his feet, both of them with their faces turned towards us.... The whole scene and atmosphere had a heavenly halo.

Sri Aurobindo held his left hand above the Mother's head and his right hand was extended to us in benediction.... Then we bowed at the feet of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother... Both of them went inside... And then Datta exclaimed as though an inspired Prophetess of the old mysteries, 'The Lord has descended. He has conquered death and sorrow. He has brought down immortality.'

From this time, Sri Aurobindo went into retirement.

It seems that for some days he continued, till he stopped completely. And that would be, I think, quite à la Sri Aurobindo. He didn't stop anything at once.

The Mother made her appearance and it was with Her that we started our contacts.

Now I think we should stop here and in our next talk should take up the Mother's role – how she came more and more to the front and took up charge of the Ashram and the *sadhana* of the people. It is very interesting.

18 February 1970

Friends, today opens the golden chapter of our talk – that of the Divine Mother, and three days hence is her birthday. So, let this talk be our simple, grateful and loving offering to her – to whose existence we owe our own existence; to whose coming and living here we owe our – brothers and sisters and friends – coming and living together and be created into a new life by her Divine Love. Let there be only one prayer from our heart: “Let us be worthy of her Love.” So long we have talked mostly of the Divine Father! The Divine Mother has come in incidentally – has peeped from behind and from above to see how the Divine Father was getting on, without her: whether he had been taken proper care of, how he was getting on with his work in her absence. She might not have been very happy about it! (*Laughter*) But she didn’t think that time was propitious or proper, to step in – she waited and waited. Meanwhile the Divine Father – though he doesn’t like to be called “Father” – except by the ladies – went on, as we say, ploughing a lonely furrow – trying to find out the Path and make the field ready for the Mother’s coming. He was certainly sending a prayer to the Supreme Mother so that She herself came down for the sake of her woe-begotten children, not for himself. Let me read those lines where the Supreme Mother answers his prayer. I need not read the prayer – it’s rather long.

His prayer sank down in the resisting Night  
Oppressed by the thousand forces that deny,  
As if too weak to climb to the Supreme.  
But there arose a wide consenting Voice;  
The spirit of beauty was revealed in sound:  
Light floated round the marvellous Vision’s brow  
And on her lips the Immortal’s joy took shape.  
‘O strong forerunner, I have heard thy cry.  
One shall descend and break the iron Law,  
Change Nature’s doom by the lone spirit’s power.  
Our limitless Mind that can contain the world,  
A sweet and violent heart of ardent calms  
Moved by the passions of the gods shall come.  
All mights and greatnesses shall join in her;

Beauty shall walk celestial on the earth,  
 Delight shall sleep in the cloud-net of her hair,  
 And in her body as on his homing tree  
 Immortal Love shall beat his glorious wings.  
 A music of griefless things shall weave her charm,  
 The harps of the Perfect shall attune her voice,  
 The streams of Heaven shall murmur in her laugh,  
 Her lips shall be the honeycombs of God,  
 Her limbs his golden jars of ecstasy,  
 Her breasts the rapture-flowers of Paradise.  
 She shall bear Wisdom in her voiceless bosom,  
 Strength shall be with her like a conqueror's sword  
 And from her eyes the Eternal's bliss shall gaze.  
 A seed shall be sown in Death's tremendous hour,  
 A branch of heaven transplant to human soil,  
 Nature shall overleap her mortal step,  
 Fate shall be changed by an unchanging will.<sup>33</sup>

That's the answer. So, the Divine Mother at last decides to join the Father, and builds a centre under whose brooding wings people come, people of the future, children of the New Age are born and grow up. They spread a Light everywhere – across the seas, beyond the hills and if I may say so, even beyond the sky. But the Father now relieved of his burden, goes back, withdraws, leaving the entire field to the charge of the Mother. This is the song Narad is going to sing through his counterpart! (*Laughter*)

You know, I suppose, that the Mother came here for good on 24<sup>th</sup> April 1920. I have told you in the previous talks, when she came first, how long she stayed, etc... I need not repeat all that. You remember, perhaps, how she first stayed in Bayoud House – Norman Dowsett's house at present – and how a providential storm appointed Sri Aurobindo to remove the Mother from that house to the present Guest House<sup>34</sup>. And since then Mother started living with Sri Aurobindo. From Guest House they shifted to Library House – Prosperity – from there to the present place.

Well then, the period from 1920-26 is somewhat dark, in the

33. *Savitri*, Book III, Canto IV.

34. Dortoir Annexe.

sense that we have not much information about it. Very little has come to light about the Mother's activities in those days, much less so about the period from 1920-22 in the Guest House. Whatever I have been able to gather about these two years is something like this – but I'm open to correction.

On the whole it has been said that the Mother was keeping all to herself. She used to come out very rarely. One doesn't know what she was doing. Sri Aurobindo was seeing people and having talks with the few inmates. The Mother was not taking part at all in these sittings. Someone told me that the inmates used to sit round Sri Aurobindo, sometimes meditating, sometimes talking and now and then they had a glimpse of the Mother going from one room to the other. When Champaklal came – a lad of sixteen or so, he said he didn't have the occasion to see the Mother. But she told him later that she had seen him. Naturally, she must have been taking interest in all, from behind, without their knowing. But one activity of hers is very well known that she took personal charge of Sri Aurobindo's physical life – physical comfort. She at once saw that nobody was taking good care of him, (*Laughter*) so she looked after his food, his rest, looked after his other necessities. And there was a definite change in the cooking arrangement of the house. About the rest we know nothing.

In 1920 May-June, Mother began to put on a sari introduced by a lady called Mrinalini Chattopadhyay. Then there is a note by Sri Aurobindo himself:

The Mother, when the Ashram was still unformed, was wearing patched cotton sarees. When she took up the work it was necessary to change her habit. So she did so.

Another note from somebody else:

The Mother lived most simply. She had no more than two or three plain sarees which she herself used to wash. There was nothing to which she wouldn't lend a willing worker's hand.

Then I find something else: Sri Aurobindo writes in *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and On the Mother* somebody asked Sri Aurobindo that he had heard that between 1915 and 1920 – just before the Mother's coming – there was hardly any *sadhana* going on.

Sri Aurobindo answers:

... Sadhana and the work were waiting for the Mother's coming.

So, that is what I say, he was preparing the field for the Mother. There was no *sadhana* done by the inmates, he was himself doing *sadhana*. He didn't like to or care to impose his *sadhana* on the others. So, it is a very significant note. Then he says in another letter:

Before the Mother came all were living in the mind with only some mental realisations and experiences. The vital and everything else were unregenerated and the psychic behind the veil. I am not aware that anyone of them at that time entered the Cosmic Consciousness. At that time I was still seeking my way for the transformation and the passage to the Supramental... and acted very much on the principle of *laissez faire* with the few *sadhaks* who were there. X is one of those who have never ceased regretting that *laissez faire* – he regrets the vital liberty and absence of discipline they then had.

As you know, Sri Aurobindo never liked to be looked upon as 'Guru' and others to be considered as *shishyas*, neither had he any intentions of establishing an Ashram. Even at that period he was thinking that one day he would go back and work for the independence of India.

So, there was no *sadhana* at all. He says he was trying to find out the path for the transformation of nature, etc. Perhaps he thought if his *sadhana* became victorious, others could enjoy the fruit of it. So, *sadhana* was waiting for the Mother. You know perhaps what those few young people were doing? And Nolini-da himself has written in his *Reminiscences* that some of them used to go out in the afternoon to play football, they were members of the Cercle Sportif... and others were thinking of food! At most there was some study, reading literature..., but no *sadhana* so far. And so with the coming of the Mother, as you know very well, she would not allow such liberty. So, little by little, I suppose, from behind, she tightened the screws (*Laughter*) and started, without their knowing, some kind of *sadhana*.

Now there is quite a bit of information in Nolini-da's book *Reminiscences* – a sort of a general information because he doesn't give any chronological order in his reminiscences – maybe because he doesn't give much importance to chronology, and statistics. I shall read them from here and there – some extracts which are very interesting and important.

[*Reminiscences*]

... The Mother came and installed Sri Aurobindo on his high pedestal of Master and Lord of Yoga. We had hitherto known him as a dear friend and close companion, and although in our mind and heart he had the position of Guru, in our outward relations we seemed to behave as if he were just like one of ourselves... the Mother taught by her manner and speech, and showed us in actual practice, what was the meaning of disciple and master....

– So, this is the first thing that the Mother did: no sitting before Sri Aurobindo on the chair, no liberty, no *laissez-faire*. But I must say, as you will see here, that it was mostly his attitude towards them that made them deal with him like a friend. I remember an incident – once Sri Aurobindo's foot touched somebody and he said, "I beg your pardon." – A gentleman to the tip of his fingers. So, if the youngsters sat before him on chairs, joked with him, that's because he allowed it. If we took so much liberty with him by uttering such blasphemies as: "I swear by the Guru", etc. – it is because he allowed us. He gives us liberty, he takes it away. We have nothing to say. Then there is a very fine and interesting chapter: I Bow to The Mother –

Those of you who came to the Ashram as children recognised the Mother and called her by that name practically from your birth... We grown-ups did not have that privilege...

The first time I heard about the Mother was shortly after our arrival here. It was Sri Aurobindo Himself who told us about a French lady from Paris who was a great initiate. She was desirous of establishing personal contact with Sri Aurobindo....

The Divine Mother, One who is fairer than the fairest and lovelier than infinite beauty had to come down and enter the darkness and evil of this human life, for how else could these poor mortals have a chance?

When it first came to be bruited about that a Great Lady like this was to come and live close to us, we were faced with a problem: how should we behave? Should there be a change in our manners? For we had been accustomed to a bohemian sort of life, we dressed and talked, slept and ate and moved about in a free unfettered style.... Nevertheless, it was finally agreed that we should stick as far as possible to our old ways even under the new circumstances, for why should we permit our freedom and ease to be compromised or lost? This indeed is the way in which the arrogance and ignorance of man assert the glory of his individuality!

– So, they did keep their liberty and *laissez-faire*. They didn't care. European! They must have turned up their nose – European! They were intensely patriotic. So would I have done, I suppose. I don't blame them! She was called 'Mirra' by everybody. So, Mother had to bear all that, with a sense of humour, I suppose. So, that is the attitude all of them bore towards her.

... The Mother arrived. She would meet Sri Aurobindo in company with the rest of us at our afternoon sessions. She spoke very little. We were out most of the time, but also dropped in occasionally... it was she herself who helped M. Richard in his translation of the writings of Sri Aurobindo into French for the French edition of the 'Arya'.... Once every week all of us used to call at her residence accompanied by Sri Aurobindo and had our dinner together.... She used to cook one or two dishes with her own hands...

– This took place when she came here for the first time and continued when she came back for good, in the Guest House –

At one stage, the Mother showed a special interest in cats. Not only has she been concerned with human beings, but the animal creation and the life of plants too have shared in her direct touch...

She took a few cats as representatives of the animal world. She said, the king of the cats who ruled in the occult world – you might call it perhaps Super-cat – had set up a sort of friendship with her.

Later on, you will be told how she set up friendship with the



snake-world, the fly-world and there are no worlds with which she did not establish a contact. At one time there was a tremendous invasion of flies in the Ashram and we were killing them mercilessly. There was a specially great invasion in the Bakery and they put up fly-leaves, etc. In Sri Aurobindo's Room we used to kill them with gusto and joy! (*Laughter*) with no 'ahimsa' [non-violence] at all, rather full of 'himsa' [violence] and joy! Afterwards we learned that the king of flies or the queen of flies – came to plead with the Mother about our merciless killing and there was a pact with her. Similarly there was a pact with the king of the snake world when they were being mercilessly killed in Cazanove<sup>35</sup>. So, there you are. Nolini-da continues:

How this feline brood appeared first in our midst is somewhat interesting. One day all of a sudden a wild-looking cat made its appearance at the Guest House... it just happened to come along and stayed on.... When it had kittens, Sri Aurobindo gave to the first-born the name of Sundari<sup>36</sup>. (*Laughter*)

So, please, *sundaris*, remember that! (*Laughter*)

... for she was very fair with pure white fur. One of Sundari's kittens was styled Bushy... It was about this Bushy that the story runs that she used to pick up with her teeth all her kittens one by one and drop them at the Mother's feet as soon as they were old enough to use their eyes – as if she offered them to the Mother and craved her blessings. Two of these kittens of Bushy are well-known names and became great favourites with the Mother, one was Big Boy and the younger one was Kiki...

... The style in which these cats were treated was something extraordinary. The arrangements made for their food were quite a festive affair, it was for them alone that special cooking was done, with milk and fish and the appropriate dressings, as if they were children of some royal family, – all was according to schedule. They received an equally good training: they would never commit nuisance indoors.... They were nothing like the gypsy-bedouin cats of our Ardhendu.

It is true to the word. We had also the chance to see something

35. One of the Ashram farms.

36. Beautiful one.

of this, I don't know, I seem to remember the name of the cat was Bushy. But how can it be? How royally and majestically she used to go anywhere she liked. We were meditating and she would come and stretch herself – you could never disturb her. And the rumour ran in the Ashram that if you displeased her and if she bit you and showed her displeasure, you would invite the Mother's displeasure! (*Laughter*) At the most awkward places she would come and lie down. You know the ways of cats. You are going up and suddenly across the staircase she would lie down – “Across the path of the divine Event”! (*Laughter*) You are walking and for no reason she will scratch you. (*Laughter*) Why? Well, Sir, I don't like you! (*Laughter*) That's all! And really it is a fact that all of us took particular care to avoid this Bushy or Pushy – and never teased her, neither tried to please her. If possible always avoid – *pothé nāri biborjita*<sup>37</sup>. I shall read to you Sri Aurobindo's letters to me on the subject of cats – very interesting. Sri Aurobindo says there that this Bushy will surely have a better birth. Rajangam was specially appointed by the Mother or Sri Aurobindo to go to the market and buy fish for the cats. And the Mother used to look after these: boil them, take out the bones and feed the cats. Later on, I understand, Sri Aurobindo was given this work! (*Laughter*) Rajangam told me himself, an interesting incident. While they were in the Guest House they had the opportunity of sitting around Sri Aurobindo – on chairs – and meditate. One day they were sitting before him and there was some noise in the courtyard – some repair work was going on there. So, one of them said, “Oh, we can't meditate!”

Sri Aurobindo said, “What? Can't you meditate? You must be able to do so even in the midst of a battlefield.”

But Rajangam had the habit of practising meditation at all times, in all postures: while walking, while sitting... He would meditate! As he was going to the market to buy fish for the cats – riding a bicycle, people have seen him actually dozing. (*Laughter*) So, Sri Aurobindo said in this context, “But don't meditate when you are going to the market!” (*Laughter*)

... You all know about the deep oneness and sympathy the Mother has with plants.... As with the world of animals and

37. You must abandon women on the way.

men, so with the beings of the supraphysical worlds – from the little elves and fairies to the high and mighty gods, all have had their contacts with the Mother, all have shared in her Grace as you may have heard, but the Grace could mean at times thrashings too!... One of the things the Mother has been trying to teach us both by the word and example is this, namely, that to keep our outer life and its materials in proper order and neat and tidy is a very necessary element in our life upon earth.... How many of us have realised that beauty is at least half the sense of life and serves to double its value? And even if we do sometimes realise, how many are impelled to shape our lives accordingly? The Mother taught us to use our things with care, but there was more to it than this. She uses things not merely with care but with love and affection. For, to her, material things are not simply inanimate objects, not mere lifeless implements.... They have a consciousness that responds to pleasure and pain.... We are all aware how carefully the Mother treasures old things and does not like them to be thrown away simply because they are old. The reason for this is not niggardliness or a conservative spirit; the reason is that old things are to her like old friends, living companions all.

Let me illustrate the point with something Sri Aurobindo once said. One of the inmates had written to him that as the gate of his house seemed to have got jammed and could not be opened, he had to open it by giving it a strong kick. The door did open but it hurt the foot rather badly. So, what he wanted now was some ointment along with Sri Aurobindo's blessings. Do you know the answer he had from Sri Aurobindo? "If you kick door the door will kick you back!" (*Laughter*).

25 February 1970

Well, friends, last time I read to you Nolini-da's account [from *Reminiscences*] of the Mother's arrival, her staying with them as one of the members, as one of the inmates – I won't say of the Ashram, because there was no Ashram then, as you know. He speaks also of the restrained attitude of the few inmates towards the Mother; to put it more bluntly, the attitude was rather indifferent. One can understand why it was so: because they were all young people, young revolutionaries who had a strong antipathy towards everything European. Didn't matter whether the European was British or French or German, a man or a woman! They were all painted with the same brush – they were all Europeans! Particularly because the Mother was a woman, they thought... well! (*Laughter*) So, they were indifferent – though not all of them. As Nolini-da says, they at least decided to have their own way – bohemian way, as you know. She was not to intervene in their affairs! Let her do what she had to do! That was the attitude, to begin with, in spite of the fact that Sri Aurobindo had told them that she was an initiate into spiritual life, very cultured, etc ... But, you know, young people don't care much for these things. They cared more about football and other such things, and as regards spirituality, they thought they knew more than the Mother! (*Laughter*)

So, this was the attitude in general. It was the time when the Mother and they were staying in the Guest House and I have told you that she did not take part in the active life, she kept herself aloof, withdrawn, with no contact with people – neither with outsiders nor with insiders. She had her own life, but she took particular care of Sri Aurobindo's needs and necessities. What else she did nobody knows. And Nolini-da also says how, little by little, she came to exercise a sobering influence, a cultural influence upon them, in spite of themselves.

Then he refers to a very interesting incident – the Mother's taking interest in cats. You remember how Sri Aurobindo had given a poetic name to one of the cats! Nolini-da gives a description in some detail of another cat whose name was Bushy because she was bushy in appearance. I have also told you that during our time – that is, somewhere in the 1930s, we also met a cat of the same

name. Both can't be the same, for that would give Bushy a life span of more than 15 to 20 years. I don't know, biologists would be able to tell us what the life span of a cat is. But I suppose she must have been one of the grandchildren of the first Bushy, whom the Mother had adopted and given the same name.

This Bushy of our time also had much to tell us! She was very self-conscious, she knew about her place and position and so did we. So, we held her in great respect – she was the Mother's favourite. You remember what Nolini-da said – how she used to bring all her kittens and place them one by one before the Mother as an offering. That seems to be true of this Bushy as well, unless Nolini-da has mixed up the two. But this much I know that our Bushy used to do the same – as soon as the litter was delivered. One by one, as mothers do with their children, she placed them before the Mother who would select one or two and send the rest into the bosom of the sea – mercifully!

However, this cat was very self-conscious, she expected us to respect her and consider her, and if we didn't she went into a temper!

Then Sri Aurobindo wrote to me – I shall find out the letter – about this Bushy, how she was getting more and more spiritualised, perhaps more rapidly than we were! (*Laughter*) He mentioned in some context that when he and the Mother used to meditate together, this cat would present herself before them, sit quietly and absorb as much as she could. At one time she went into a trance and was on the point of passing away, but somehow she was revived. So, he strongly affirmed to me that she would have a higher life next birth. I don't know if some of you students of English literature have read Gray's elegy on a cat – but that poor cat had a very tragic end and Gray moralises by saying that the favourites always have such an end. But the Mother's Bushy had better luck – naturally!

And I don't know whether it is about this or another one – you remember Sri Aurobindo's poem on the four-footed Brahman ["Despair on the Staircase"]? Just as I have immortalised an Ashram servant of that time whose name was Muthu, asking Sri Aurobindo whether the Divine had the power to supramentalise him, similarly I asked him if Bushy could be given a spiritual rebirth. So, I have the knack of immortalising animals and men, including myself! (*Laughter*) But we very often had a discussion amongst us

as to why the Mother showed such favour to cats. I don't know whether our conclusions had any truth in them, or were they our supposition, our speculation, our high fantastic imagination – but one came to believe that cats, like women, were very psychic and receptive. So, this animal-*sadhika* would have a higher life.

Now I fall back on the further account that Nolini-da has written about the Mother [*Reminiscences*]:

As I told you in the beginning, the Mother did not appear to us, the older people, as the Mother at the outset; She came to us first in this garb of Beauty. We received Her as a friend and companion, as one very close to ourselves, first because Sri Aurobindo himself received Her like that, and secondly because of Her qualities.

That seems to contradict what I have said, but I don't think there is any contradiction, because this must have been a later development, or exceptional with some people like Nolini-da, and there were other people who weren't like Nolini-da – they were a little high-spirited! –

Now that we are on this subject of Her qualities, although it is not necessary for a child to proclaim the virtues of his mother, I cannot here refrain from telling you about another point in Her teaching. This concerns something deeper. The first time Sri Aurobindo happened to describe Her qualities, He said He had never seen anywhere a self-surrender so absolute and unreserved.

– Surrender which is the essence of our yoga without which nothing can be done, and which takes, as you know, friends, young and old, a long time to do. The Mother has done it all at one stroke. Of course, those of you who have read *Prayers and Meditations* and *Conversations* – you know, when she came here – how old was she? – yes, 42 – even in 1914 she had had a very high realisation, all alone, doing yoga all by herself. So, it's not a wonder at all that she should be able, at first sight, to surrender herself completely to Sri Aurobindo. Some of you might remember our observation on their surrender to each other. When we were attending on Sri

Aurobindo, serving him, Satyendra my colleague, remarked, “In this yoga, surrender has been done only by two persons – the Mother to Sri Aurobindo and Sri Aurobindo to the Mother, no one else!” Nolini-da continues:

He had added a comment...

– it will be gratifying to the ladies here –

... that perhaps it was only women who were capable of giving themselves so entirely and with such sovereign ease.... When She came here, She gave herself up to the Lord, Sri Aurobindo, with the candid simplicity of a child, after erasing from Herself all her past, all Her spiritual attainments, all the riches of her consciousness. Like a new-born babe, She felt she possessed nothing; She was to learn everything right from the start, as if She had known or heard about nothing.

– There you are. This is what, in our Shastras and Puranas, we say in the case of Radha – her surrender to Krishna. That is why he said ‘absolute self-surrender’ – that is the Radha-consciousness.

I remember a small incident: when we were attending on Sri Aurobindo, he was taking his food on the portable table before him and he was on his bed. The Mother had served his lunch and we were standing around – five of us – watching him eating and hearing the Mother talk. Sri Aurobindo as usual very laconic, “Yes”, “No”, “I see,” etc., nothing more. The Mother was giving a report of something, I don’t remember exactly all the details, and she said, “I am supposed to do this,” or “I’m asked to do this.”

Then Sri Aurobindo, all of a sudden, commented, “Why should you do it?”

And the Mother said, “Oh, you don’t approve?”

Finished! (*Laughter*) He simply said that and that was final. So, that was the kind of relation – a gesture, a word, both from the Mother’s and Sri Aurobindo’s side decided the issue. But at the same time I shall also say that Sri Aurobindo very, very rarely intervened. Even when he did, he said it casually, without insisting. That is all. They could make out from the tone of it – which meant “positively no”, which was “neutral”, etc... (*Laughter*) So, from the tone you had to get the shade of the meaning.

I did not know then that She might have other gifts; these were revealed to me gradually. First I came to know that She was a very fine painter; and afterwards that She was an equally gifted musician. But there were other surprises in store. For instance, She had an intellectual side no less richly endowed, She had read and studied enormously, had been engaged in intellectual pursuits even as the learned do.

That reminds me of what she once said to me. We were talking of literature. I don't know what meaning she puts to it but she said, "I can tell you that I have read more than a thousand books and I find only here and there scattered, just a little bit of intuition, the rest is all rubbish!"

And she even told me at that time of one passage in French literature, by Zola – he has a book, I forget the name, where there is a beautiful passage describing a garden. She said, "That is something I remember". So, some such things here and there, all the rest is a heap of nonsense! Of course you know, I suppose, that she is very fond of Jules Romain and Anatole France – Jules Romain particularly, for his occult, intuitive insight and his language. And she recommends all French students to read him in order to know the language.

... As I was saying, this capacity for an entire rejection of the past has been one of the powers of Her spiritual consciousness and realisation. It is not an easy thing for a human being to wash himself clean of all his past acquisitions, be it intellectual knowledge or the habits of the vital, not to speak of the body's needs, and step forth in his nude purity.

The Mother has often said that the past is a great hindrance to our progress. It holds us back. We should forget the past completely – of course I don't know that you children have much of a past! (*Laughter*) Anyway, it is very difficult to cease completely, the past – what we call the fleshpots of Egypt. Looking back lovingly, lingeringly, particularly when we are traversing the desert, or 'the dark night of the soul' as the Christians say, naturally it comes to our mind – the white night that we have left behind! –

And yet this is the first and most important step in the spiritual discipline. The Mother has given us a living example of



this. That is why She decided to shed all Her past, forget all about it and begin anew the a-b-c of Her training and initiation with Sri Aurobindo. And it was in fact at the hands of Sri Aurobindo that She received as a token and outward symbol Her first lessons in Bengali and Sanskrit, beginning with the alphabet.

This is real humility, to say, “I know nothing” as Socrates said, or as Newton said. I suppose all the great people have said it. But we small people say, “What do you know?”

But all this is simply an attempt on the part of the small to comprehend something of the Vast, it is as if a particle of sand was trying to reflect a little of the sun’s rays, a dwarf trying to catch at the high tree-top with his uplifted arms, a child prattling of his mother’s beauty.

Now here follows something very interesting.

In the beginning, Sri Aurobindo would refer to the Mother quite distinctly as Mira.

So would all the rest, naturally! (*Laughter*)

For some time afterwards we could notice that he stopped at the sound of M and uttered the full name Mira as if after a slight hesitation. To us it looked rather queer at the time, but later we came to know the reason. Sri Aurobindo’s lips were on the verge of saying ‘Mother’, but we had yet to get ready, so he ended with Mira instead of saying ‘Mother’. No one knows for certain on which particular date at what auspicious moment, the word ‘Mother’ was uttered by the lips of Sri Aurobindo. But that was a divine moment in unrecorded time, a moment of destiny in the history of man and earth; for it was at this supreme moment that the Mother was established on this material earth, in the external consciousness of man.

This is very much like Sri Aurobindo. He proceeded in a very slow manner – gave plenty of time to get ready. As I said, he gives you a long rope: either to hang yourself with (*Laughter*) or to wander about. On this very point I questioned him, “Why do you give us a long rope?”

He replied: "It is necessary."

But about calling the Mother so, there is something more, as interesting. My bearded lion-friend, Champaklal, told me, and others corroborate, that it was he who first addressed the Mother as "Mother," and Sri Aurobindo as "Father". He came here first in 1921, I think, and he was a lad of 17 or 18. Sri Aurobindo lived at that time in the Guest House. Champaklal came with a few friends or to put it the other way, a few friends brought him. At that time the Mother was behind the veil, if you like, and wasn't seeing anybody. Sri Aurobindo was seeing people. So, when Champaklal approached Sri Aurobindo, he simply fell prostrate at his feet – he stretched his hands and caught hold of his feet. And, please remember, he lay in that position for about an hour, Sri Aurobindo sitting like that, he lying stretched for an hour! Then, he said, he knew nothing about time and space, but he felt some sensation which he took to be a spiritual experience or something of that sort. When he got up he saw that his body had been covered all over with ants, biting him (*Laughter*). Isn't it remarkable? But again, as you see, it was Sri Aurobindo's way. He said, "Come tomorrow."

He went again, and again he said: "Come tomorrow."

In this way it went on for about 7 days – always: "Come tomorrow, come tomorrow."

And after the 7<sup>th</sup> day he said, "Now you may go." (*Laughter*)

That is his way – so typical of him. He always keeps you hanging, hoping – a little tantalising, I suppose. So, there you are. Now I shall finish this last part, and back to this again. There is something more. Nolini-da continues:

Let me now end this story for today with a last word about myself. I have said that so far the Mother had been to us a friend and companion, a comrade almost, at the most an object of reverence and respect. I was now about to start on my annual trip to Bengal... and that was perhaps my last trip. Before leaving, I felt a desire to see the Mother.

This was, by the way, in the Library House, not in Guest House.

The Mother had not yet come out of Her seclusion and Sri Aurobindo had not yet retired behind the scenes. I said to

Him, 'I would like to see Her before I go.' – Her with a capital H, in place of the Mother, for we had not yet started using that name.

So, it was some time later, as Nolini-da has said, that Sri Aurobindo initiated them into addressing the Mother as "Mother".

Sri Aurobindo informed the Mother ... I entered and waited in the Prosperity room ... The Mother came in from Her room and stood near the door. I approached Her and said, 'I am going,' and then lay prostrate at Her feet. That was my first Pranam to the Mother. She said, "Come back soon." This "come back soon" meant in the end, "come back for good".

So, that is the difference between the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo allowed – he would say, "go... go" or "come... come" (*Laughter*) – a long rope till you decide for yourself. But Mother – nothing doing. But now she has become like Sri Aurobindo – if you want to go, go. Even if she doesn't like, she won't compel.

So, I was telling you about my friend Champaklal.

[*Life in Sri Aurobindo Ashram* by Narayan Prasad]  
Champaklal came to Pondicherry in 1923 for good.

And Champaklal met the Mother in 1923 in the Library House – the first visit was in 1921 and he was 18. So, that means the Mother and Sri Aurobindo had shifted from Guest House to the Library House.

From the start he addressed Sri Aurobindo as Father and the Mother as Mother. This was at a time when the Mother had not been openly so recognised by all of Sri Aurobindo's followers.

– He told me that when he came here, even at that time he heard Sri Aurobindo addressing the Mother as Mirra, and the others too. Perhaps Sri Aurobindo got a clue from Champaklal (*Laughter*) – a suggestion – don't laugh, it is quite possible. They take suggestions from everybody, they are humble. I wouldn't be surprised. He either took suggestions or hastened the process! So, he said that

some time later, the Mother came to be called “Mother”. Then the next interesting incident:

One day, in the early period of his stay, he approached the Mother and said, “I intend to wash my Father’s dhoti.” In reply the Mother said that she would speak to Sri Aurobindo. At that time the way of life among those who were around Sri Aurobindo was neither meditation nor work. (*Laughter*)

All *phurti*<sup>38</sup>! Some intellectual studies, some *addas*<sup>39</sup>, football, that’s all, no meditation, no work – work is only for menials! So, that was the spirit and atmosphere.

... So, when service was not at all thought of seriously, Sri Aurobindo told Champaklal apropos of the latter’s offer, “People will laugh at you, joke about you, mock you. Are you ready?” The young disciple was ready. Here was the first example of the body’s direct service to the Divine.

So, he was first in two things: in establishing the Mother as “Mother” and offering the body’s service to the Divine. His was the example. Before that even for Sri Aurobindo it was “fend for yourself”, “have your own food”, etc... I don’t know whether he washed his own dishes! (*Laughter*) Perhaps not, there were servants, of course. So, this is what was happening in 1923-24. Champaklal became the pioneer in these two memorable historic events.

Now as we come here to this part of the Mother’s and Sri Aurobindo’s life from 1922 to 1926, we shall be able to give a few more details perhaps, gathered from them. The first fact is that even here – Library House – the Mother was living in solitude, but she used to see the visitors from behind the screen. She was very much interested in seeing what kind of people were coming – whether they were interested in yoga or in other things. Her main concern was nothing else but spirituality, not interested in intellectual talks or political discussions. But, if an interested visitor had come...

I remember an incident which I think Sri Aurobindo told us. When Dilip Kumar Roy came to see him, perhaps in 1924, the

38. Fun.

39. Chatting and having fun.

Mother peeped from behind the screen and remarked to Sri Aurobindo, "What a magnificent vital!"

So, she used to do that.

Also, I told you, the time was fixed for the interview or discussion. It was not supposed to exceed the given time, because the programme was all fixed as soon as the Mother came. So, as the allotted hour was nearing, a bell was rung from behind and Sri Aurobindo got up at once, just as I have done now! (*Laughter*) Time is up, we shall continue next time.

#### 4 March 1970

We have introduced in our talk what I may call the "Champaklal Episode". I was telling him the story that I have narrated to you about him, and he added something important which I had forgotten to mention.

You remember how he came with a small group of people here – he being the youngest – and how Sri Aurobindo was deferring, or, to use a simpler word, postponing their departure from day to day till, Champaklal says, he himself felt that that was the last day of their stay here, and it actually was so. But before their taking leave, Sri Aurobindo told them: "If you are in difficulty, think of me."

He repeated it three or four times and said it in a very mild, gentle voice, as was his habit – that is my addition!

Well, Champaklal said that the message, which acted like a mantra, filled him with strength and courage, and hope, wherever he went, while he was outside. He simply showed us "I felt like this" (showing strength) very graphically. Well, I am sure all of you here know enough of Champaklal to believe that every word of it is true. I don't think there is anyone in the Ashram from the highest to the lowest, from the oldest to the youngest who doesn't know him. You cannot go to heaven (*Laughter*) – I don't imply anything – without passing through the gates of Champaklal! And perhaps you have tasted some of his sweetness... I don't need to comment

further... So, that was what he felt when he was just a lad of 18.

A similar message was given to somebody else, long, long ago, somewhere in 1908 or 1909. It was given to nobody else than our famous (in another way) friend Sudhir-da – your Mona-da's father.

You know some of them were transported for life to the Andamans after the famous Alipore trial. He told us that before their departure Sri Aurobindo had told them, I don't know the exact words, "Think of me." Andamans, by the way, was not what it is today. It was a symbol of hell on earth. Those who were sent there were given up for good. The worst and the most dangerous kinds of criminals were sent there, and since at that time the Swadeshi boys were the most dangerous enemies of the government, they couldn't have found a better place than the Andamans – safe from the British rule in India, and governed by the worst British people there – the jailors and wardens.

What amount of persecution, tyranny they have undergone, words cannot express. One of them actually went mad. But luckily Sudhir-da came out quite sane in the head, if you would believe it, and sound in health. I don't know whether he used the mantra or not, but I am sure it was Sri Aurobindo's protection, his power that enveloped him all through his life and saved him at the end. As a result of which Sudhir-da got married, had children, brought them all here – one of whom is one of the best captains you have among yourselves.

So, perhaps all this was the reward for his self-sacrifice for the sake of the country and for the sake of Sri Aurobindo. You can see then that even in 1908 or 1909 Sri Aurobindo knew who he was or what he was, or at least he knew this much that he had a power which could save people from any dangerous situation or critical condition of life. Of course, later on when the Ashram started, the Mother had come in, he changed the formula – he didn't say, "Think of me". Instead, he said all the time, "Think of the Mother, remember the Mother" – not himself. Well, this is a bit of digression. Let us come back to Champaklal.

The next information he added was that when this group visited Sri Aurobindo again, after a year or so, and when they were leaving, Sri Aurobindo told the senior-most man of the group, "When you

come next time, bring Champaklal with you.”

So, Sri Aurobindo had his eye on Champaklal from the very start. But it took Champaklal two years to fulfil Sri Aurobindo’s wish. So, when he came here, he had a room – he is not quite sure which one – in the Guest House. That means the Mother and Sri Aurobindo had shifted over to the Library House. There were at that time these two establishments. Nolini-da, Amrita-da and a few others, who had been with Sri Aurobindo since his coming here, had the good opportunity or privilege of staying with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo in that house. Champaklal and some others stayed in the Guest House, but he had the chance of seeing Sri Aurobindo every day – not the Mother. She wasn’t seeing anybody except through the shutters!

So, he went to do *pranam* to him every day. If necessary they had some talk with him or listened to his table-talk – nothing more by way of *sadhana* or work. But Champaklal did not feel very comfortable in the company of these people in the Guest House. He was the youngest and rather timid, whereas the others were somewhat sophisticated, superior. One of them, particularly, was very much amused by him and often teased him. One thing Champaklal did not have much, today perhaps it’s somewhat improved – is a sense of humour. He himself says very frankly, “I don’t understand humour.”

So, that person was poking fun at him, more because he couldn’t appreciate humour. He was very uncomfortable and couldn’t stand this superior air – the sense of “I am somebody, you must serve me. You must obey me.” Even at that age he was of such an independent spirit, he wouldn’t bow down to anybody’s dictate.

Then, he says, an opportunity offered itself. I won’t go into the details – it is not relevant to our purpose. The chance was to go to Madras to attend upon a medical case concerning someone of that group, so he took that chance to absent himself from the Ashram for two or three months.

But when he came back, he found himself in the company of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, in the Library House!

Now about the two establishments – it seems those who lived in the Guest House had to fend for themselves. In other words, they had to meet their own expenses. Sri Aurobindo helped them

with their house rent and other special items which they couldn't defray from their own pockets. But remember that house rents were not Rs. 300 or 400 as they are today. Just Rs. 15 or 20 for the Guest House! Life was – if you will allow my using that expression – damn cheap!

In the Library House it was Sri Aurobindo who met all the expenses for themselves and the members.

Champaklal learnt later on that when he used to visit Sri Aurobindo, the Mother had seen him through the shutters and had remarked to Sri Aurobindo, "This boy will do my work."

Similarly when Pavitra-da came – I think I told you this long, long ago – there too the Mother saw him through the shutters and made the same remark.

Now if you reflect upon it: just one glance – one peep, and the Mother makes such a prophetic remark, which comes so true – every word of it. From that time up to today, you know how Champaklal has been serving the Mother – so closely. You know that before she arrived here, she had achieved high spiritual realisations and she had also acquired profound occult knowledge. She learned it under a great master of occultism – Monsieur Théon in Algeria – I have read to you all that. And he seems to have observed that a greater occultist than the Mother he had hardly seen. It seems that he was surpassed in this occult knowledge by her. It was a case of the disciple surpassing the master – as in the case of Sri Aurobindo and Lele. So, it is no wonder that the Mother could predict at one single glance, the past, the present and the future of persons.

The Champaklal episode can be postponed for a while.

Let me say something, very little though, of what the Mother's work was before 1926. It seems she used to come down every morning to buy milk from the milkmen who used to come there with their cows, and as they do even today. So, she got the cows milked in her presence, and got the milk strained through a piece of cloth which she took with her – so that no dirt, no contamination could go in.

You know our milkmen, how dirty they are. They don't believe that this filth or dirt does any harm. The cow is, after all, sacred, our mother, everything is Brahman (*Laughter*), so milk can't do



any harm. But the Mother didn't believe in such Brahmanhood! So, she protected herself against infections by some germs, either from men or from cows. You can see, then, how particular she was about cleanliness and hygiene.

Then another instance of her particular attention to cleanliness is given in Narayan Prasad's book. It is something like this. Champaklal used to get milk from the bazaar. By the way, he is very fond of milk. He is a sattvic Brahmin. As I love tea, he loves milk – the more the merrier! He can live on milk and bananas. The Mother didn't like his buying; so to save him from getting infection, she asked him to put his pot at a particular place, so that she would fill it up with the milk she bought for the others. I suppose she bought the milk for Sri Aurobindo's and others' tea.

One day, it seems, the Mother noticed a very tiny dark spot in Champaklal's milk pot and she pointed it out to him. There you are – one tiny dark spot, one grain of dirt did not escape her eye! A tiny spot outside or inside cannot escape her! (*Laughter*)

I remember, when I took up the Dispensary work, the first advice or instruction that I received from the Mother, through Sri Aurobindo, was not about patients or disease, but that I must keep the Dispensary meticulously clean! Perhaps the Mother knew that I was somewhat lax on that point. Everywhere in the Ashram you see that – though it was cleaner before. I think that it was due to the Mother's unwritten law: "cleanliness is godliness". You know how it has been exacted in all our departments – particularly in the Dining Room and the Mother's kitchen as well. When there was some contagious disease outside, the Mother wanted all the fruits and vegetables – either for personal or collective consumption, to be washed, antisepticised, in red or pink water, you know. That was the order sent from heaven to the earthly people everywhere. When I heard that the same injunction was in the Mother's kitchen too, I was the doctor at that time, I asked Sri Aurobindo:

*... At times I wonder why the Divine is so meticulously particular as regards contagion, infection. Is he vulnerable to the viruses, bacilli, microbes, etc.?*

His answer, as always, is very humorous – mark his tone:

And why on earth should you expect the Divine to feed himself on germs and bacilli and poisons of all kinds? Singular theology yours!

Then she started another activity, you will be surprised to hear – I don't know how to put it – a commercial enterprise or a spiritual commercial enterprise, if I may use the euphemism. But I don't think it is quite euphemistic, there must be some truth to it; the Mother doesn't do anything from the worldly point of view. She must have had some spiritual point there. Well, we shall try to see if my intuition or fertile imagination can find it out. But this is what she did – you know, she was the daughter of a banker, so this business instinct was in her blood! (*Laughter*) I hope she will excuse my frivolity or frivolous truth. I told you the other day that even during her first visit she had started a business, and not only that, but had encouraged it in some people. So, this business instinct has come in full flood today – the Vaishya-yoga as we say. However, what was the business enterprise? She comes from Paris which you know is famous for many fine products: all the toiletry, silk, writing pads – we used to have them during our time. For one thing they were finer products than we have in India, secondly they were cheaper because there was no customs duty at that time. Pondicherry was a free port. That is why plenty of people, during the weekend, came here to enjoy themselves! (*Laughter*) So, the fine products from Paris – perfumes, etc. – came from there and the Mother used to keep a stock of them and sell them, if you please, perhaps at a cheaper rate, to people who were willing to buy them for personal use. And my former colleague Dr. Rajangam, who has remained almost the same as he was so many years ago, was the seller, or agent, or a go-between for the Mother and these people. He would go around from door to door and ask each customer, “Would you like to buy?”

Perhaps they did buy, for it was a thriving concern. So, Rajangam had the privilege of having a direct contact with the Mother. He alone could see her, for these exchanges, daily. So, he had that unique chance – to use our favourite expression. And he was always blessed, you know, with the Mother's bewitching smile. One day he missed that smile for some reason or another, I don't know, and he was very sad about it. It was before Sri Aurobindo had retired.

Either he told Sri Aurobindo or the latter heard about it and asked Rajangam, "Why are you sad? My smile is not sweet?" (*Laughter*)

He had another duty added to it by the Mother: every day he had to go to the exchange office in order to give the Mother the news about the value of the franc. You know, especially after the War, the value of the franc used to fluctuate: today it is Rs. 3 or Rs. 5, tomorrow it could be Rs. 2, and so on and so forth. The Mother was very particular about knowing the rate because depending on it, naturally, she would order things, and increase or decrease the prices.

The third duty I told you was to buy fish for the cats – he would go on his cycle, dozing and meditating!

Now it seems to me that this was the spiritual intent behind it. The Mother was not prepared, at that time, to meet all the people personally. So, she established this indirect contact with them – to prepare them in some way, by this exchange of atmosphere and influence through these material things. This is my reading, please don't take it for absolute truth! But we know this much that the Mother has many ways of dealing with people. As Sri Aurobindo says, in one of the aspects of the Mother, her ways are infinite and too subtle for human understanding to catch them. We have seen, to give you one or two instances: Sri Aurobindo had pens and pencils for his use, and for no apparent reason, the Mother allotted the work of filling the fountain pens with ink to one person and pencil sharpening to another. She would tell us, "As soon as the ink is over, you will hand over the pen to me, I shall give it to X for filling."

And there were other ways too, God knows with what intention or purpose. This person came to clean Sri Aurobindo's room, that person cleaned his furniture, etc. One day some typing work had to be done and she asked in front of Sri Aurobindo: "Who will do the typing?"

I knew a little bit of it so I volunteered... foolishly! (*Laughter*) and said, "Mother I shall do it."

She kept quiet... Then she gave the work to the person she had already intended it for, though I had not much work at that time! So, this is the way she engages people. Similarly, her business also was one of those subtle occult ways that she adopts so often.

Here is another instance. You know that I had given up Dispensary work long, long ago. I had no connection at all, not even in my

dreams. I was happy about it! The Mother had not yet moved to the new room. She was on the first floor where she would see people. One day, somebody came with some trouble in the eye, and I was suddenly called, and she told me, "Have a look."

I looked at it and gave my opinion and the treatment – it was very simple. And she said, "Do whatever is necessary!"

So, in my small room I had to get a stool, the lotions and everything just for nothing when Nripendra's Dispensary was just there on the other side. One or two other cases also I had to treat in this way, God knows for what purpose. And the rumour went round that the Mother was opening a dispensary upstairs and Nirod would be in charge! (*Laughter*) After a few days the whole thing was shelved and I felt greatly relieved. It is impossible to divine the ways of the Divine!

So, here too I am sure that it was not a simple commercial enterprise. She always passes something through whatever she gives, that we know, either through words or through the eyes or through a smile. Therefore, when people received things, they received something else as well. And came nearer, I suppose, in their inner world. They would not accept the Mother, because they had perhaps a grudge that she was taking Sri Aurobindo away from their midst. However, this is the second activity that I gathered from my medical friend Rajangam.

The third activity will be very interesting to my sisters.... The Mother had a small, or shall I say, average-sized store. You see, she was getting things from Paris and she had her own things either bought or got as presents, she collected them all. Her store was in the room from where we get our Prosperity things on the 1<sup>st</sup> of every month. Champaklal's room was her sleeping or dressing room, and Noren Singh's stamp room was Sri Aurobindo's room. It seems that one of her main preoccupations was to examine these things, arrange and rearrange them, spending quite a lot of time with them. Champaklal was at that time her close assistant, so he started work with her from that time. If you have seen the photo album prepared by Tara and others, of Sri Aurobindo's room and the utensils he had used, you must have seen some China pots from Japan, and other things which the Mother had brought... they were broken... and Champaklal repaired them all. You have heard already how the Mother was very particular about taking care of

things. Not like us. So, whenever she had nothing important, I suppose, she would go over and check, and clean and arrange them. Just as maybe you ladies do, with your wardrobe: one sari your parents gave you on such and such a birthday, and you have precious and endearingly preserved it, another frock given by a friend on her parting day, etc., etc. So, you see, that this is very much a feminine trait that the Mother had. Even today, I understand... today means recently... we have heard she spends a lot of time over this big store of things that she has preserved – some here, some there, some in a third place. And usually she remembers what thing she has kept where. Sometimes she forgets and there is an altercation between Champaklal and her. She says, “I had put it here.”

Champaklal says, “No, Mother, you put it there.” (*Laughter*)

The story goes... I don't know... please don't take it as the gospel truth. It seems, one day Sri Aurobindo was waiting and waiting for hours, for the Mother's coming – from morning till evening. And he was waiting standing and someone was by his side – that person must have been getting impatient I am sure! But Sri Aurobindo would not budge, till the Mother came out hours afterwards. And the Mother was surprised to see him waiting and apologised, saying, “I forgot all about it, I was busy arranging my things.”

Whether the story is true or not, I don't know, it might be an Addisonian<sup>40</sup> gentle satire.

So, these are some of the activities that we have come to know about; and the last is, if you will allow me, her spiritual activity. It seems near about 1926 that the Mother started doing meditation, first with one or two ladies – there were very few of them at that time – they practised it for some time during the day. Then Champaklal joined and slowly, mind you, one after another all the members of both the establishments joined of their own accord, voluntarily. There, you see, now.

Mother didn't invite anyone, they came of their own accord, when they saw other people were joining and doing meditation with her... till at last the whole assembly gathered together. And that was, I believe, the foundation of the Ashram!

40. Joseph Addison (1672-1719) was an English satirist.

11 March 1970

Let me start by making a confession – of the type of Rousseau's or St. Augustine's – a small personal experience, nothing spiritual – an experience of daily life. Today, all on a sudden, my small servant-boy told me that he would leave me, leave my service, without any warning or notice. He is a very nice boy. He was working well without giving me any trouble – well almost. But when, all on a sudden he made this revelation to me, I thought how wicked the boy is! He is leaving me in the lurch and where shall I go now to find another servant? It came as a shock, and I became sad over the fact that such a small incident had made me lose my balance. Sri Aurobindo has insisted so much on keeping a balance over matters, however great or small, and here a very sad revelation... and my balance was gone! I didn't become unbalanced! (*Laughter*) but became unhappy for a moment. And I was wondering when we will be able to do all that Sri Aurobindo has asked us to practise. How far away we are from the ideal – to be troubled, and to be agitated over such small incidents? What about the more important situations of life? So, I began to philosophise over my failures. But most unexpectedly ... how shall I put it? ... The Grace was there! There walked in my old servant and offered to serve me. Of course he is the cousin of this young boy, and it is he who had brought the boy to me, when he had taken up a job in the mill where he was getting a big salary. You can understand what had happened.... On learning that this boy was leaving me, he took compassion on my pitiable condition, and offered his service. Only, he made a small bargain saying: "If you offer me Rs. 1.50<sup>41</sup>, I shall be satisfied."

That certainly will do, because that is the rule for older servants. So, there you are! The Grace stepped in most unexpectedly. These are minor things, but very interesting and revelatory. I don't feel I have lost in the bargain.

Well, now ... first of all let me set right some of the inaccuracies that have been unintentionally committed in my last account.

It was my friend Champaklal who pointed out these slight mistakes. He is a man, you should know, who cannot stand even small,

41. Rs. 1.50 per day for a servant represented an important sum in 1970.

slight faults – he wants to be precise, exact, as much as is possible.

The first mistake that I committed was when I said that the Mother began meditating with two ladies and that Champaklal joined next. He says it's not true. Three of them began together with the Mother, for which reason one of the inmates used to tease him saying, "There are three ladies!" (*Laughter*)

The second is when I said that the Mother started a spiritual commercial enterprise. Champaklal objected to the word "commercial". He said it is hardly the word to be used here because it has the sense of ... well ... you know... business motive, that is, of profit and loss. So, the Mother had no such motive at all. What she wanted to do was to help these inmates with their useful commodities at a cheaper rate – that's all – no commercial motive at all. The spiritual intention, of course, remains unquestioned, and given silent and tacit consent!

The third mistake ... I don't remember, let me have a look ... yes ... was about the incident of the pot that the Mother was filling with milk. He says there was no such incident at all. It was all Narayan Prasad's fabrication! (*Laughter*) Yes, the Mother was filling the pot, but there was no dark spot or anything of the kind.

The fourth one was a slip of the tongue, I suppose, when I said that the Mother used to herself *buy* milk. There again, he protested. The Mother did not *buy* milk. She got it strained through a piece of cloth, for them. Buying and paying was somebody else's business. She simply helped them in getting the milk early in the morning.

So, one of the advantages of his listening to my recorded talks is this: he corrects whenever there are slips and adds some other new information that has not been obtained so far. Sometimes I have a fear of the lion – that Champaklal is – when his claws will scratch me, but somehow he keeps a cool temper!

Now these were the external activities of the Mother before 1926 that we have come to know about, the internal activities nobody can tell anything about. But there are records of what happened and what her activities were after 1926 – for which I have to take help from those who recorded. Again perhaps there will be quite a few inaccuracies for which I shall have to face Champaklal's chagrin or his remarks, I don't know. Anyway, I had no time to consult him about these reports and records. I shall read them out to you just now.

The great change that came over the Ashram after 1926, as I

hinted to you, was ... what shall I say? To use a political slogan – there was a transfer of power from Sri Aurobindo to the Mother! To put it simply, the Mother took over the entire charge of the Ashram. It was being prepared already, gradually, when she took over some of the duties and was holding meditations with people. So, that was the spiritual turn that was given, very tactfully – spiritual tact – to the free bohemian life that was lived at that time by the inmates. I told you how, one by one, everyone joined the meditation and that also laid the foundation of the Ashram.

You know, Sri Aurobindo had said that he was not concerned with the disciples – whether they were disciples or not. He never admitted them as such. They were given freedom to live their own life, in their own way; and there was no question at all of leading them to a spiritual path, to a higher spiritual achievement or realisation. So, it was the Mother who gave it a spiritual turn by bringing them one by one to meditation. So, the preparation was already taken up and at the same time Sri Aurobindo was little by little coming later and later for the evening talks, which was also a preparation for his withdrawal or seclusion.

This is the way, if I may say so, in which they work. There is no dramatic movement in their action, they do not believe in it. All the changes that have been brought about in the Ashram from stage to stage, though they have been revolutionary, they were evolutionary. Just as a plant grows, the Ashram has grown from one step to another, from one change to another, without any previous formal intimation. There was no such formal declaration by Sri Aurobindo that the Mother would henceforth take charge of the Ashram. It was done smoothly, informally and very naturally. That is one of the characteristics of perhaps all spiritual life, particularly I think, of Sri Aurobindo's yoga. In your own life you will see how changes have come about here – not pre-planned, not pre-arranged but as life grows, as the demand comes up, it is met or it is rejected. Similarly, my friends, if you, one day, find yourselves to have become Supermen or Superwomen, you will see that it has been realised in a gradual process of evolution. The change that is going on in the Mother's body I won't be able to see till one day the whole colour has changed and she has become supramentalised! Most non-dramatic, natural and lifelike.

Now when the change came over, that means after 1926, we have



heard that some people didn't take it – what shall I say – in the right spirit. To put it mildly, there was some discontentment, dissatisfaction in them. Why? First, because, I suppose, they lost Sri Aurobindo's company. They had come to the Ashram, not to do any yoga but to have his company. Some of them had been his disciples in the political field and his personality, the charm of talks, etc., had bound them to him by some invisible, unbreakable tie. So, they were rooted, as it were, in his life. Therefore when he withdrew, they found themselves uprooted. The long association with him was lost. So, I understand there was bound to be some discontentment over the loss of their most beloved guide, helper and friend.

Secondly, I believe, again it is my belief, that some of them were not prepared to accept the Mother as their Guru. There was a certain resentment, that's true, because I read in one of the letters, and I remember when I came in 1930, there was a very fiery letter from Sri Aurobindo on one of the inmates' attitude.

However, that we shall see later on; but the revolt subsided, the Mother was accepted as the Guru and people handed over the charge of their life and their spiritual destiny into her hands. Some of them did so because Sri Aurobindo had asked them to do so. As Nolini-da and Amrita-da recorded, "What objection could we make when it came from Sri Aurobindo, as the final word?"

So, they accepted Sri Aurobindo's word.

My friend Rajangam (I have many friends, by the way, which means I have no friends!) (*Laughter*) was telling me that for some days before the final retirement, when he was referring all his troubles and difficulties to Sri Aurobindo, as he used to do, Sri Aurobindo told him, "Now tell all this to the Mother, not to me."

He couldn't question why – neither did Sri Aurobindo say why.

Now I shall read out Nolini-da's account of what the activities were after 1926. By the way, the period from 1926 to 1930, or even a little afterwards, has been called "The Brilliant Period of the Ashram". Just as there were in history brilliant periods or golden periods during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I or during the reign of Louis XIV or during the Swadeshi movement started by Sri Aurobindo – so in our Ashram too there was such a period. What it was like, we shall see, as I read these accounts. So, here is the narration:

[*Mother India*, Dec. 1962, p. 31].

From this time onwards, Sri Aurobindo went into retirement, that is to say, did not come out any more for his evening talks. The Mother made her appearance and it was with the Mother that we started our contacts.

Purani records that this withdrawal also took place step by step. It wasn't an abrupt cessation. Even after 24th November, Sri Aurobindo continued coming. That is again one of Sri Aurobindo's features – he doesn't do anything abruptly. He prepares you. And his final withdrawal in 1950, that also we have seen how gradually it took place. We could see the steps one by one. So, that has been the whole characteristic feature of all his life and his Ashram: nothing in a hurry, nothing in haste – as if one had eternity – as he has said.

The Mother would now sit down daily for her meditations with all of us together, in the evening after nightfall.... She made a special arrangement for our seating. To her right would sit one group and to her left another, both arranged in rows. The right side of the Mother represented Light, on the left was Power. Each of us found a seat right or left according to the turn of our nature or the inner being. I was to her right, Amrita sat on her left.

In everything the Mother does – not now of course... I don't know ... now the Supramental order – whatever you like! (*Laughter*) – always an order, a precision, either a subtle one or a physical one. Of course, now the Ashram has become 'unmanageable', and children don't maintain much order; they have been given freedom. But at that time, as we shall see later on, order was so tacitly observed. Nolini says,

A strange thing used to happen every day at these meditations. Purushottam was one of our number in those days.

– By the way, Purushottam left the Ashram long ago. I have seen him so he must have left some time before Sri Aurobindo's accident. He was in charge of 'Prosperity' – now we have Harikant.

He used to sit directly in front of the Mother, a little apart from the rest of us. As soon as meditation began, he would begin to sway his body and even move about with his eyes

closed, while still meditating. He would come and get hold of some of us, give them a thorough kneading and would not even hesitate to tear at the hair on the head or face. In those days, almost all of us...

– Nolini-da's fine use of the word –

sported a beard and a moustache and wore our hair long. He used to say that this was his allotted work, this work of purification and helping in the purification. Not only did anyone never raise an objection to this kind of molestation,

– I wonder what these ladies would have done, with long hair!  
(*Laughter*)

It was accepted by all with perfect equanimity, with joy almost; it was considered to be a necessity, a sign of the Mother's Grace.

He was doing all this before the Mother, in the presence of the Mother.

But these attentions were reserved only for two or three people. During this process, the Mother of course remained silent and engrossed in meditation. All was done, no doubt, under her control and guidance. But from an inner poise. One day, Purushottam proclaimed to the Mother in a loud voice, '... the Mother, just as you are the highest Force of the Supreme, even so I am the lowest force of this earth-nature. You have given me the privilege of being a collaborator in your Work.' He used to say ... he was the spirit of the Inconscience... his task was to work in that darkness, sweep it clean and make room for Light, the Higher Forces of the Mother. This manner of working continued for some time; then it came to a halt, and we had only meditation.

Naturally! (*Laughter*). So, you see, the strange story. Champaklal also told me that he too was once pulled by the hair; but he did not feel any pain or suffering – on the other hand, he had a sense of joy. He, and many others, actually felt that. That's why they could keep their equanimity. So, even in pain there was joy!

I remember because I myself have seen Purushottam, as I told you. He was a darkish fellow, quite a comely appearance, some attraction, some charm was on the face – I saw that. There was some sense of calm and poise. He had curly hair of shoulder length.

One day I actually saw him, myself, in such a mood. In 1933 or 1934 in the Meditation Hall below, there was a musical soirée or matinée, by Dilip-da (Dilip Kumar Roy) and Sahana-di, before the Mother. The Mother was sitting on a little raised seat ... and, I believe, it was Sahana-di who started to sing. It was exquisite, as you can imagine – 35 years earlier she had been “the nightingale”, as she was called. What a rapturous voice she had! All of us were, according to our capacity, trying to go inside ... some had experiences, etc., etc. She sang with just a harmonium, I think. Then it was Dilip-da’s turn. He, you know, had to have the whole entourage. So, he started with the harmonium, tanpura and tabla. As soon as the tabla-*chanti*<sup>42</sup> started, we saw somebody begin to dance, and it was none other than Purushottam – dancing there before all of us. (*Laughter*) Then Dilip-da wrote to Sri Aurobindo,

Why was he dancing? Did some Power descend to make him dance?

Sri Aurobindo wrote back humorously,

No, it was not the Power, it was the power of the tabla that made him dance. (*Laughter*)

No, he had actually to be controlled, his movements became so energetic. Two or three people – one of them was Champaklal – had to hold him down. Now, why this strange phenomenon?

The Mother’s endeavour at that time was for a new creation, the creation here of a new inner world of the Divine Consciousness. A central feature of that endeavour was that She had placed each of us in touch with his inner godhead.

– I don’t think I need to explain all this; it will spoil the effect. –

42. Beat or rhythm.

Every individual has what may be described as his line of spiritual descent and also ascent.

– Mark you, each one of us has a line. I have heard it being said that Pavitra-da's line was that of Sri Ramakrishna. Somebody has misinterpreted it by saying that Pavitra-da was Sri Ramakrishna. It was not so. Sri Aurobindo once said to me that I was in Anilbaran's line ... I don't know what his line was! That is why perhaps my name is Nirodbaran and his is Anilbaran – two common “barans” are there.

To bear inwardly the touch of this divinity and found it securely within oneself, to concentrate on it and become one with it, to go on manifesting it in one's outer life, this was the aim of the sadhana at that time.

– To put it more simply for my young friends – Sri Aurobindo told us that the Mother was, at that time, trying to bring down the gods; that doesn't mean gods as persons but their characteristic power, their personality. And she was actually bringing down these gods into some people. That is why it is called the “golden” or “brilliant” period or age of the Ashram. So, this was the atmosphere of the *sadhana* at that time. Nolini-da continues –

This was a period of extreme concentration and one-pointedness, ‘a tortoise phase’ of the sadhana one might call it. Like the tortoise one had to gather oneself in, limbs and all, and hide as in a shell by cutting oneself off from all outward touches.

I told you ... we were living as it were in quarantine, at that time. So, this condition – not the descent of the gods, but living like a tortoise – continued for a long time. I had the taste of it to a certain extent ... with some exceptions of tea<sup>43</sup>, etc. on the whole that ring – the “cordon sanitaire” as they say – was there. This was a temporary necessity in order to maintain the consciousness of the individual and the collectivity always at a high level and keep it unsullied and unchanged.

– So, here again, my friend Champaklal said, “Oh people were...”

43. Special allowance of tea was made for some sadhaks. Against a background of a rather ascetic and restricted life, tea was almost a luxury.

Of course, he was passing his own comment. "They thought they were doing great meditation at that time, and when I went to see somebody, he hardly came out of his room. Through his half-open door he asked 'what, 'what' ... 'can't' ... and pushed me off."  
(*Laughter*)

So, that was the atmosphere.

Our give and take with the outside world was very little indeed and it was carried on under the strictest vigilance ...

I was consulting my notes, the letters that I had written to Sri Aurobindo at that time, and I came across accidentally one of the letters where I had written – I shall read it out later – it was after 1933 – out of temptation or greed, or whatever you like, I went out and had a dosa in a restaurant. And came back with a heart full of remorse as if I had committed a great sin almost! And some of my student-friends will remember "Before I taught my tongue to wound my conscience with a sinful sound" [Henry Vaughan, "The Retreat"]. And what a pathetic letter I wrote to Sri Aurobindo:

Please forgive me, I have committed this sin, I'll never do it again. Please tell Mother to forgive me!

It was in this strain; that was the tone ... it was genuine! (*Laughter*) Now when I look at it, I laugh ... so penitent! Nolini-da says,

To use the poetic language of Tagore, we seemed to be blossoming forth.

'Like a flower in the air, stemless  
And sufficient unto itself...'

– I think this is a quotation from Tagore's famous poem *Urvasie*.

Let me just illustrate, from my own experience, to what extent we had become self-gathered and indrawn at that time. One day... I happened to have come out of the Ashram precincts and away from its atmosphere... I was going through the market area. Suddenly, I began to feel rather strange, as if I were not walking on the ground. There was no weight in my legs – Moon! (*Laughter*) I floated on air

through a mist, as in a dream ... I felt terribly uneasy, almost like a fish out of water. I hurried my steps back and it was not till I had reached the Ashram precincts that I heaved a sigh of relief.

– So, you see what the Mother was doing. We have left that stage far behind us now. We have, in fact, reached the opposite end perhaps. We have taken a plunge outwards, identified ourselves with the outer being, a tendency against which the Upanishad has used a word of warning: Our senses have a natural pull towards the outer things<sup>44</sup>. The Upanishad has a famous verse which says that we have been created in such a way, as if the windows are open outside. But this too was necessary and still is. We form part of the world, we are united with it and inseparable ... we have to share in its work and suffer its deeds... (Noise in the street) Sri Aurobindo said to Rajangam that even in this noise you have to be able to meditate. Remember? Even Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have not spared themselves this, but that is another matter...

Not to become wholly externalised, a tendency which is uppermost here in our collective life today, but to keep the path open for the inner *sadhana*, this should be our endeavour. We have to harmonise the two extremes, for not to disjoin but to unite, that is Yoga.

But my friends, terribly hard to mix with you and yet not to mix with you! A very fine metaphor is given in a Vaishnava poem; I didn't understand when I first read it: "You will have a bath yet you will not make your clothes wet."

Or to put it in a more familiar metaphor of Sri Ramakrishna: "When you eat jackfruit, smear your hand with mustard oil, so that it doesn't become sticky."

Or another metaphor of the fish – Sri Ramakrishna was excellent in all these familiar metaphors: "You live in the mud like a *pākāl māchh*."<sup>45</sup>

It lives in the mud but is not touched by it. How to do it?

So, that's what he says – you live in the world and yet not in the world – like Rajarshi Janak<sup>46</sup>.

44. Katha Upanishad.

45. A fish that lives in muddy water.

46. King of Mithila, Sita's father.

18 March 1970

Well, I am happy to declare to you that in our last talk, in our story, my friend the supramental perfectionist, Champaklal, did not find any inaccuracies. I have told you, and perhaps it is your experience as well, that I am very much afraid of him, at the same time, fond of him!

Now, I had said that the Mother came in front and Sri Aurobindo went behind. And that was the arrangement that continued throughout, and is continuing even today, will continue hereafter till he chooses to reappear in a supramentalised body, as he has promised – I hope he will keep the promise! (*Laughter*) But I won't be there, perhaps, to see it fulfilled. Some of you might be sufficiently supramentalised, to see that millennium happening, to reach him and perhaps to take my former job with him. (*Laughter*)

Now there was, I told you, among some of the inmates, some bickering, some protest, out of love of course, some *abhimān* [hurt pride] towards this seclusion or withdrawal and that erupted now and then, not the least eruption from also another friend of mine, Dilip Kumar Roy. I followed in my small voice also. I said to him once ... of course in several letters of his, he tried to pacify us, console us, by giving various reasons for his withdrawal. But reasons, as you know, don't satisfy.

In 1945 Dilip asked Sri Aurobindo when he would come out and Sri Aurobindo dictated to me the answer. It runs like this:

[*Life in Sri Aurobindo Ashram*]

I have no intention, I can assure you, of cutting off connection in the future. What restrictions there have been were due to unavoidable causes. My retirement itself was indispensable, otherwise I would not be now where I am, that is, personally, near the goal. When the goal is reached, it will be different.

So, the writer of the book, our friend Narayan Prasad, says:

What this life in seclusion meant for Him and what burden He has borne upon His shoulders quietly, can be gauged from the following lines written in 1934:



“It is only divine Love which can bear the burden I have to bear, that all have to bear who have sacrificed everything else to the one aim of uplifting earth out of its darkness towards the Divine.”

So, here you can see the *raison d'être* of his retirement and the Mother's coming in front and taking up the charge of our *sadhana*, after 1926.

Now let's go back a bit. From Nolini-da's account you had an idea, the other day, of what the Mother was intending or trying to do with the small number of *sadhaks*, during that period, and why it was called the “brilliant” or “golden” period of the Ashram. Though we didn't understand much about the full import of what the Mother was aiming at, everybody felt that something big was being tried, for to bring down the gods or their power into this pigmy, paltry, human frame, is not easy nor are the results always very happy. But the Mother's very nature always lies in taking risks. To borrow Sri Aurobindo's phrase – she also likes to live dangerously. And if she wanted to live dangerously, it's all right, we have no objection (*Laughter*) – her free will ... but fortunately or unfortunately she wants to drag us in her dangerous steps!

Sri Aurobindo once wrote to me –

Mother's pressure for change is always strong – even when She doesn't put it in force it is there by the very nature of the Divine Energy in Her ...

Well ... so she tried this great experiment but it had to be given up, for what reason, I shall narrate to you just soon after. But for the few years that the experiment prevailed, I told you, the inmates lived in another world altogether. They were free from all worries, all the desires and pettiness of human nature. They were filled with god-like nature: delight, peace, joy, bliss, power and they never felt a want or need for anything human. When you have joy and peace what else do you want?

You remember Nolini-da's account of his experience of the outside world – when he went to the bazaar, what he felt, and how he had to run to the shelter of the Ashram, from that foreign,

exotic atmosphere. I asked again my friend Champaklal: “How did you feel?”

He replied, “I felt like this (strong).”

Rajangam also told me the same story. What we are trying to have today, to possess, that they had acquired almost entirely, completely. But unfortunately that is not the whole story; we shall come to it.

So, they were self-fulfilled, self-sufficient. They did not have any games, any sports, any company. And the Mother said, referring to that golden period – she recalled in her talk to the children, in 1955:

In the old days we started with about 35 or 36 disciples and I used to manage them in a certain special way; a way which continued even when there were 150 or so.

That means when I was one of them. I came at the tail end, a bit.

They were held as if within the shell of an egg by my consciousness that I could guide all their inner and outer movements all the time: everything was under complete control, each moment of the day and night. Naturally, I should say, they made a lot of progress at that time and it was really a fact that all the time I was doing sadhana for them.

So, you see, what she was doing, kept all of them as if in an egg shell. Today the shell has burst, all of you have come out! I told you how I felt when I went out of the shell and perpetrated some – shall I say – sin! I wrote this letter to Sri Aurobindo, you’ll laugh at it, I suppose – I laugh at it myself. This was in 1934. As you see we were about 150 – the number had increased, but there was still the cordon sanitaire – all of us were more or less trying to live in the Mother’s womb – some of us were very fidgety trying to come out, felt very uncomfortable. So, at least for once I did come out and did this. I write:

Mother,

I have done a very great offence today. Only yesterday I refused some food offered to X by Y and cooked for you and today I have taken some bazaar food which is strictly forbidden by you! This is moreover the second time I have violated this injunction. I have no excuses to offer and nothing to say

or add but to ask thy pardon for this time and the last.  
I thought not to write about it...

– *chālāki!* [trying to be clever!](*Laughter*) –

... but to resolve not to repeat the same offence.

– This is the masquerade that plays in the mind, you know. The devil says, “Why tell them! Resolve in the mind not to do it again!” Very pious resolution! But ... the trick of the Forces wouldn’t be the right attitude, it seemed.

And by writing to you, I save myself against any future like-occurrence.

I am really very sorry. You are giving me so much by personal examples, seen and unseen forces, experiences, etc. I cannot observe at least one rule demanded by you!

Soliciting for thy forgiveness and Blessings,  
Nirod

P.S.

People say – it is not to show my great yogic capacity – that I am so sincere in Yoga!! My God, with so many faults and insincerities which you and I alone know? If only they knew!  
(*Laughter*)

So, that is the self-confession. I meant it, as I said. Sri Aurobindo makes no comment there, except that when I write:

I thought not to write about it but to resolve not to repeat the same offence.

He writes in the margin,

It is always better to say.

So, that’s how we were living and see the vast difference between 1934 and 1970. If I go to the bazaar now or to Ganpatram<sup>47</sup>, I would take it to be the right attitude! (*Laughter*) Or at least not the

47. Cottage Restaurant.

wrong attitude! I have become so much established in yogic poise, what does it matter if I take one *rasagolla*? Well, there, how things change, how the atmosphere changes. How we have progressed from the quarantine – I don't know to what – to this freedom, to this wideness.

In trying to explain the phenomenon Nolini-da said, you remember, that Mother was trying to put each of them in connection with his inner godhead. And I also told you in that context, that each of us has a particular line, that each of us represents a type – each of us. He is saying the same thing in other terms – particular line. For instance I, Nirod, represent a type of many other Nirods behind. So with you – many other Bithis ... many other Sudhas... you represent that type. If per chance – by luck or grace – it comes to the same thing... (*Laughter*) I get changed, all the Nirods that I bear on my back have the potentiality to get changed. I can say, in other words, that I am doing *sadhana* for them. That is why our *sadhana* is a bit difficult – we are not doing it for ourselves alone. Sri Aurobindo wrote in another context, but it has a bearing to what I have said:

[*Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*]

There is a coward in every human being – precisely the part in him which insists on 'safety' – for that is certainly not a brave attitude. I admit however that I would like safety myself if I could have it – perhaps that is why I have always managed instead to live dangerously and follow the dangerous paths dragging so many poor Nirods in my train.

So, just as I am dragging on my back, he is dragging in his train, so many poor Nirods!

Now after the spiritual account of the *sadhana*, let us say something about the factual account of Mother's activities during those few years. I have taken all that from my friend Narayan Prasad's book – the account seems to be authentic. Here, for instance, is the Mother's programme [*Life in Sri Aurobindo Ashram*]:

In 1927 the Mother used to get up by 4 a.m. or earlier.

–By the way, even today she does that. I think by half past 4 she is up.

By 6 a.m. She would be ready and go up to the terrace.

So, I think the Mother and Sri Aurobindo had shifted from Library House to the present house.

Some of the inmates would accompany her ... then Pranam and Blessings would start upstairs in the Meditation Hall...

– where the Mother used to give Darshan –

... lasting an hour or two. This was followed by personal interviews till noon.

She used to give interviews, sitting on the Darshan couch.

Then She moved to the dining room and gave to each of us a dish of food, herself putting bananas in it.

– The Dining Room was, by the way, the room in which Prithwi Singh now has the opportunity to reside<sup>48</sup> –

In the afternoon she visited sadhaks in their rooms by turns on fixed dates.... In the evening the Mother had a drive.

They had somehow managed to get a car – I have seen it – very old, in which the Mother used to go for a drive. Pavitra-da was the driver, and often she used to take one of the *sadhaks* with her. Champaklall used to go with her, Rajangam and many others too, perhaps.

On her return She would enter Sri Aurobindo's room and after a time come ... to the Prosperity Hall. Here She sat in meditation with a few sadhaks, each of whom had been given a number and they would take their seats in a fixed order.

– this Nolini-da has mentioned in his account. Remember?

On the publication of *Conversations with the Mother* from Madras in 1931, the Mother gave a copy to each with his number inscribed in it.

48. This is the room next to the present cold storage.

By the way I too received a copy – I forgot the number. I received, not here, I was outside. All on a sudden it came without any previous notice. There was a number, the Mother's blessings and her signature. I told you about it.

After meditation She would at times read some passage from the manuscript of *Prayers and Meditations* in French. This was followed by a "Flower Game".

She was trying to develop the power of intuition through this game.

Once She asked Dyuman to thrust a paper-cutter into a book... it was found that it related to Buddha ... "No, it is not for you, try again." When he did so, the Mother opened the book and read the passage meant for him.

Of course he has nothing of Buddha in him, that all of you know. After some 30 years, in the *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education*, August 1960 (p.57), we hear an echo of the same voice:

... If you have an inner problem to solve, you concentrate on the problem... If you are curious to know what the invisible knowledge has to tell you, you keep quiet for a moment and silent and you open the book. It is good to use a paper cutter for it is sharp; as you are concentrated you thrust the paper-cutter into the book and look at the passage shown by the point.

I think many of you have had this experience, whether with Sri Aurobindo's books or *Prayers and Meditations*. When you have been in trouble, you have opened a page randomly and found exactly the solution that you needed. That has very often been our experience. Then the next activity:

The distribution of soup was started from 1927.

When I came in 1930, it was in the Reception Room that the soup was distributed. I shall talk about it later on when my turn comes.

... When the Mother came down into the soup room a cauldron of hot soup would be put in front of her. She went into

deep meditation and after a while, although Her eyes were still shut, Her hands stretched out, palms downwards, over the pot as if blessing it or pouring spiritual power into it.

This I have seen myself. We learned later on what she was actually doing – she was invoking Sri Aurobindo's Force into the soup.

... She poured the soup into a cup, took it up to Her lips, then gave it to the sadhaks.

– This part, by the way, I didn't see: "Taking the cup to her lips." But it's quite possible that she had done it to begin with.

... At times she would be in half meditation or completely lost in the inner consciousness holding the cup empty or full or half-filled. All of a sudden She would emerge from the trance or inner vision and, with a smile continue Her work.

– That we have seen. Either the ladle is completely empty or a little has been poured – something out of the cup, something into it. She is in a beatific trance. You are holding the cup before her, gazing into her eyes. You also don't know where the soup is falling!  
(*Laughter*)

The introduction of the soup was quite a new thing in the long history of the spiritual sadhana of India. There is a deeper and inner meaning as to why it was introduced just after the great Siddhi of November 24, 1926 and it had its immediate effect upon those who could receive it but it is a pity that we could not assimilate the effect.

That is a pity indeed. The Mother has tried so many things with us. She had to try them one after another. Take up one – give up, take up another, give up – follow another line – give up.

Its significance is thus described by the Master: "The soup was instituted in order to establish a means by which the sadhak might receive something from the Mother by an interchange in the material consciousness."

Mark that it is important: "in the material consciousness". Therefore, there has to be some material exchange.

Between 1926 and 1927, the Mother was trying to bring down the Overmind gods into our beings ... there were some violent reactions though some had very good experiences. There was a sadhak whose consciousness was so open that he could know what the Mother and the Master were talking about.

That is dangerous! (*Laughter*) But see:

There were others who thought that the Supermind had descended into them.

– There is the rub! –

One or two got mentally unbalanced because of inability to stand the pressure. X left off taking food, saying that he was having nectar and had no need of ordinary food but could not pull on for long.

So, this was the other side, of the shield or medal. However high your condition of consciousness may be, my friends, as soon as you start thinking that food and sleep are not necessary for you, you are prepared for another world! (*Laughter*) We have seen many such cases. As soon as they get some experience they either think that they have become Supermen, even before the Mother and Sri Aurobindo themselves, or they think that they are having nectar! More than once have the Mother and Sri Aurobindo warned us that normal life *must* be led. Normal food, normal sleep, are essentially necessary, however high our condition may be. So, these are very good indications of whether you are here or into the blazes or have started for it! When you think that food is not necessary for you, or sleep is not necessary for you – that is the royal road ... well ... the opposite of what we want! However, there you are.

So, the whole procedure of the sadhana had to be changed. The Mother stopped giving soup with Her own hands and it lost its special and spiritual significance. But for the sake of health it is still given to those who need it.

– So, from the spiritual need it has come to the physical need.

... In 1930, 5 days in a week there was pranam in the morning and soup at night. If anyone had any trouble, the Mother



would at once inquire about it. Even a torn shirt did not escape Her notice, so everyone took care to be clean and tidy.

– So, this was her daily programme in an outline.

At another place he writes about the atmosphere of the Ashram, between 1926 and 1938.

After 1926 there came a perceptible change in the inner and outer atmosphere of the Ashram.... Before 1926 Sri Aurobindo used to give a short speech on 15<sup>th</sup> August, now this practice has discontinued. Instead, there reigned a silence, pregnant with Power, emanating divinity ... what the Mother and Sri Aurobindo gave on Darshan days seemed to deepen the spiritual atmosphere of the pervasive silence.... The Ashram would vibrate with various activities but there was no vital exuberance.

No putting on nice saris! Excuse me!

Each would approach with a prayerful heart and come down enriched with something ineffable.

But unfortunately it was not always so, at least in my case. Sometimes I used to come down with great bliss, sometimes with great depression! Well... but he is talking of those periods...

The following remarks by Sri Aurobindo may give us an idea of how rapid was the progress in the beginning and why the sadhana was brought into the physical.

The gist is almost the same but these are words of the Master:

... if the Mother were able to bring out the Divine Personalities and Powers into Her body and physical being as She was doing for several months without break, some years ago, the brightest period in the history of the Ashram, things would be much more easy and all these dangerous attacks, that now take place would be dealt with rapidly and would in fact be impossible. In those days when the Mother was either receiving the sadhaks for meditation or otherwise working and concentrating all night and day without sleep and with very irregular food, there was no ill-health and no fatigue in

Her and things were proceeding with lightning swiftness ... Afterwards, because the lower vital and the physical of the sadhaks could not follow, the Mother had to push the Divine Personalities and Powers ... behind a veil and come down into the physical human level and act according to its conditions and that means difficulty, struggle, illness, ignorance and inertia.

That's what happens. So, she had to push back the Divine Personalities – he says. Our too small human frame could not bear them. Again, Sri Ramakrishna expresses it in his characteristic metaphor:

When an elephant comes down into a small pool, you know what happens.

So, that's what happened, she had to withdraw all the Forces and come down into, what he calls the blessed subconscious ... and unfortunately it is at that period that I stepped in! And again and again, Sri Aurobindo referred to that fact. Whenever I was lamenting over something that I could not have, he would say:

You have come in at a very bad period. You have come when the *Sadhana* is in the subconscious.

– And he would pacify me,

... Subconscious! Subconscious!

## 25 March 1970

Well... I fear that our talks are coming to a close since the purpose which this class was intended to serve has been fulfilled. I have told you all about Sri Aurobindo's life up to the year 1926 and now the Mother's life begins, which is not my province.

Sri Aurobindo has withdrawn, gone behind the veil, and there is very little to say. The little that I knew, you have already drawn out of me. I had thought of going step by step but you were so eager, you couldn't wait. So, what shall I talk about now?

For the intervening period – from 1926 to 1930 or 1933 – I covered some ground, about the rest I have to go from people to people, gathering news like a press reporter, and piece them together. How reliable and authentic they will be, I don't know. You know the Mother's remark about press reporters ...! (*Laughter*) However, in this mood, to use a slang ... I caught hold of a very old fish – to fish out something from him, about the old story, the ancient story. He is not a *raghob boal*,<sup>49</sup> as we say in Bengali – the yogic term that I would apply. All of you are familiar with him – Jyotin-da. I call him “Bagania”<sup>50</sup> – that is my own coinage. And I have composed a poem on him and he returned the compliment by composing another poem on me. (*Laughter*)

However ... this also has come to me as a sort of Guru's grace, I should say, for I was really wondering what sort of fish, or what sort of meal, I should serve you today, and I had no time to prepare. So far I have relied heavily and very comfortably on the books, long reports and speeches which have helped me enormously. But now I have to rely on my own resources: either gathering reports from people, or I have to stretch my imagination till it touches some reality, and so on and so forth. And as I have told you, again all this has to be reported to my friend Champaklal and I feel very nervous about it, for I don't know when he might suddenly catch my throat. So, my imagination also has to be somewhat realistic!

... So, as I said, the Guru's grace dawned upon me since I could not devote any time last night. The calm moonlit night and the vast serene sky and my little roof ... how could I devote my time to prepare a lesson? So, I went into a trance, a beautiful trance it was ... to quote Wordsworth – where are all my student-friends? There! “This corporeal frame” became still, all my animal activity suspended, and “I became a living soul.” And “I saw into the life of things.” That was all very well, but in the morning (*Laughter*) ... my headache started. So, in this predicament, at 8 o'clock, my friend Jyotin-da turned up on the horizon, and I said, “Here is a man I can tap into, because he came here somewhere in 1927.”

And I was successful to a certain extent. So, here, don't you think, is an evidence of Divine Grace? I take it in that light. Divine

49. A fish which can grow very big and eats other fish.

50. A gardener.

Grace is everywhere, my friends, if you have the eyes to see and if you have the heart to feel. Sometimes you doubt, “how is that?” or you don’t take note of the fact, but it is before your eyes. The Mother says that even if you have it, you don’t know that you have it, and you don’t believe it and let it pass by. The more you recognise it and admit it, the more the grace comes down. It comes in various forms, as you see. I hope all of you will accept it as an act of Divine Grace. But there are some, I am sure, who will say: “This is a coincidence. It has nothing to do with Divine Grace at all.” Now, each one has his “métier” or belief. I was a skeptic and I have come round to believing in acts of grace. This much improvement there has been!

But before I begin my story, I would like to read out to you a very interesting letter that I received, a letter of appreciation of one of my talks that was published in the last issue of *Mother India*. I think you will be very pleased to hear the compliments that have been showered upon me, thanks to the young ladies and to you, young friends, who have taken so much interest, and given me inspiration. Sometimes inspiration doesn’t come. So, I shall read now. Just have some patience for the other story. This is interesting. It comes from a very distant place, up in the North, and please remember that this gentleman was so inspired after reading the talk that he got up at 1 o’clock in the morning and started writing. Isn’t it inspiration? Now:

Srijut Nirodbaran,

Association with Sri Aurobindo: Your talk to students impressed upon my mind – something quite new. While I remembered Uma – the poem published in the January issue of *Mother India*, at once my attention, thereafter fixed over the 19<sup>th</sup> November 1969 – and then the New Mind as if presiding over – all-the-statements of Truth: attracted and concentrated my thought-attention cum imagination: – so also I feel the same thing at the moment I am writing these words, at about 1 a.m. on 18<sup>th</sup> March; – Could you – do you – recall and remember any mental clairvoyance: of – about – since this time? “Will you please write to me, if you can remember – about your ‘happenings’ within your Mind, of this aforesaid timing i.e., 1 to 2 a.m. on 18<sup>th</sup> March 1970? (*Laughter*)

Please shut your eyes over the English, his feeling you must see. And my English-student friends, don't write this kind of English, please. (*Laughter*)

He is very enthusiastic, as you see. What he felt at that time, did I feel the same thing here? (*Laughter*) That clairvoyance... I have not advanced so much in yoga to have this telepathic communication with a person who is living hundreds of miles away and I am fast asleep! (*Laughter*) Then he gives a long quotation in Hindi. The purport of which is this: that they are obliged to swallow all these traditional books on the evolution of the human body. It is all old stuff which has no relevance today and which has no reference to Sri Aurobindo's new vision of evolution. So, he gives quotations from the books he has read, and fortunately I don't know Hindi (*Laughter*) to go through all these. Here and there a little sprinkling of English:

All life is yoga... The Mother... Supramental consciousness, etc.

That does not attract me at all. Now, after that he says, (my friends have translated the rest into English):

Will you introduce yourself to me? You are new to me and I am unknown to you.

All this is in Hindi, if you please.

Still reading your talk to the students, I prefer your style to the others'. This is a sort of unknown faith. Is it right? If nothing else, I too am a student and I have heard your talk in the same way as your students have. And I hope in the same context I shall hear your further talks. Association!

– Now a bit rambling –

Why this all to you? Last night I was listening to the radio. There was a film song going on – so the song is like this. 'From those bygone days let nobody call me.' Then suddenly as if I was inspired to write – 'Introduced by Nirodbaran' so instead of sending these papers to Ravindraji, I've sent them to you ... this is the last page of the letter. Do you know Hindi? Therefore

I began in English. But as my mother-tongue is Hindi therefore Hindi came to me. In English the 'uninterrupted flow' is less. Otherwise English is very dear to me ... However – as it is, this letter now goes to you, with all faith and mutual pre-understanding – awaiting response from you – please. Sincerely ...

So, this is the letter that has been showered upon me, very interesting. It should be given to *Mother India*, I think, as a letter of appreciation! (*Laughter*)

Now ... in my last talk I read out to you one or two pages of my self-confession about, you remember, some violation that I had committed. Apropos of that there are two or three interesting instances which I might relate to you, in order to give you a picture or an idea of how we lived, as the Mother says, in an egg shell.

Now, this instance concerns a big gun, the other one was a shot gun! – He was almost a VIP at that time – Dilip Kumar Roy. I was the doctor then and he fell ill – mild fever. He was prescribed some egg for breakfast, since at night we had starved him. Once, he felt very hungry in the morning and took two eggs, toast, etc. Quite a heavy breakfast, and he said to me, "Please write to Guru that out of greed I have eaten two eggs." Out of greed, not out of necessity. Then I reported verbatim what he had said. Sri Aurobindo wrote in the margin:

Quite safe! (*Laughter*)

Another instance, I remembered afterwards, there I was, the culprit again, and it took place long after. I was invited to a friend's place who had come from outside, with his family. I don't remember whether it was breakfast or lunch, they were taking eggs and asked me if I would take some, and offered me. There was a small inner fight (*Laughter*), I said I would try, I succumbed. Just at that very moment we heard footsteps on the staircase and somebody bawled out, "Ila!" – it was Ila's place. I got a shiver down the spine because we knew this lady and at that very moment her coming was a very bad omen! She came, she looked round, had a glance over my dish – the egg was there! I knew what she would do. She was a village gossip: buzzy, fussy, hussy dame. "Here is a nice, spicy interesting news that Nirod is eating eggs," she must have thought.

And we were sure that as soon as she would go out, the first person she got hold of, she would say, “Do you know what I saw?”... And that’s exactly what she did.

She told some people, and the news ultimately reached the divine ears. Somehow Sri Aurobindo didn’t refer it to me at all, but I came to know later on that to somebody he wrote,

He has taken perhaps out of medical reasons. (*Laughter*)

So, he shielded me!

There is again another instance that is a little bit mixed with pathos. Somewhere after 1945 or so when my mother had come and was living here, the poor lady entreated me so much to take eggs, and I with an adamant, Bhishma-like resolution said, “No! Nothing doing, I won’t take eggs, I am a *sadhak*.”

Poor lady persuaded, entreated, but to no avail. I didn’t yield. Now perhaps she is looking from heaven and smiling at my adamant resolution – taking eggs in the morning and in the evening!

So, this is what happens. Now as you see, eggs and fish and meat flow in from Corner House [the house where the students of the Ashram school eat] to the middle house and another house! (*Laughter*) But all these have a reason behind, as all of you know – there is some truth. I don’t think I need to go into it.

Yes, I remember another instance. I am recounting these one after the other, in order to impress upon you the fact that how rigorously, rigidly we were made to observe these unwritten laws or rules. It surprised me also very much. There was an old *sadhak*, truly a very sincere man who had never touched anything out of the menu prescribed by the Ashram, never even by mistake. And I saw this gentleman taking fried things – what you call *bhajias*<sup>51</sup> and other things. I got first of all a shock that he also was breaking these rules. But afterwards I came to know that it was for health reasons: his medical man, a Kaviraj forced him to take this special food. So, for the sake of health these things were allowed, not otherwise. And now also, for the sake of health, I understand, your Corner House has come into existence.

51. Fritters.

Things change, friends, according to the demands of life – as Sri Aurobindo has always said – life is our giver of lessons. We must shape ourselves according to its demands – no rigidity. There must be a plasticity and we must follow these demands or necessities of life. As all of you came, invaded the Ashram, as I said, the School had to be started, the Dispensary had to come into existence, sports, the Playground, and so on and so forth, and therefore we have meat and fish and egg, to build up your health.

Anyhow, this was the austere life that we were leading. You will see, those of you who have read the correspondence, how guilty we felt when we committed any – what today will appear like trivial – faults.

So, I am writing in 1936:

[*Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*]

*I must admit that of late I have been rather lax, especially regarding food. I mean eating with friends on Sundays. Does this Sunday indulgence have any connection with the resistance that came up in me? What was the real reason for it?*

**Sri Aurobindo:** Laxity and a self-externalising consciousness more occupied with outer than with inner things.... About foods, tea, etc., the aim of Yoga is to have no hankerings, no slavery either to the stomach or the palate ... With a thing like tea, the strongest and easiest way is to stop it. (*Laughter*)

... As to food, the best way usually is to take the food given you, practise non-attachment and follow no fancies. That would mean giving up the Sunday indulgence. The rest must be done by an inner change of consciousness and not by external means.

**Myself:** *I suppose that this is what you mean by having the complete attitude of the sadhak and giving up that of the man of the world.*

**Sri Aurobindo:** All these are external things that have their use. But what I mean is something more inward. I mean not to be interested in outward things for their own sake, following after them with desire, but at all times to be intent on one's soul, living centrally in the inner being and its progress, taking outward things and action only as a means for the inner progress.

**Myself:** *The question of food is to some extent, within one's*



*control, but it is not so easy to control the habitual movement of thoughts in the mind.*

**Sri Aurobindo:** Detach yourself from it – make your mind external to it, something that you can observe as you observe things occurring in the street. So long as you do not do that it is difficult to be the mind's master.

– Next, I'm asking about somebody else.

*Myself: Now about tea and butter. All these were, it seems, generously granted by you to X.*

**Sri Aurobindo:** It is not butter – it is tea and talk ... They were granted by me as a concession to his nature, because by self-deprivation he would land himself in the seas of despair – not as a method of reaching the Brahman. He was trying to do what his nature would not allow. It was only if he got intense spiritual experience that he could give up tea and talk without wallowing in misery. Is it so difficult to understand a simple thing like that? I should have thought it would be self-evident even to the dullest intelligence.

– So, you understand the implication! (*Laughter*) Then he writes –

Because I allowed him to talk ... does it follow that talk and tea were given as part of his yoga? If the Mother allowed butter or eggs to Y for his physical growth, does it follow that butter and eggs are the bases of the Brahman? If somebody has a stomach-ache, and I send him to the Dispensary, does it follow that stomach-ache, the Dispensary, Nirod and allopathic drugs are the perfect way to spiritualisation? ... Don't be an ass, I mean a Gandhi-like logician!

– So, there you are. I believe now you are free from all attachments. You take without any attachment at all, fully detached from whatever is given to you. No, no, I believe it. (*Laughter*) I believe it. What we had... there was some sort of a suppression in us ... some sort ... but now I also indulge in eggs, etc. but not with that kind of, you know, hankering. If you give me I'll say, "Yes, pleased to take it". If you don't, well ... *swāda vā nā swāda vā*<sup>52</sup>. So, some sort of a detachment has been arrived at as regards food. I wish detachment as

52. Whether there's taste or no taste.

regards other things were there too. But the Mother has achieved this one after great, great experiment and struggle. I shall narrate all this, how a fight went on between some persons on the one hand and the Mother on the other hand, about food, in the Dining Room, a very interesting duel.

Now, to come to our story about Jyotin-da. As I saw him there upstairs, I called him to pay me a visit. He came with his usual smile. He used to wear always an eternal smile, so we used to call him *sadā hāsya*<sup>53</sup>. Now, perhaps, it is not so evident. Sometimes there is a cloud over his lips, his fine white teeth covered over with the cloud. And it is natural that he used to smile so broadly because he keeps company with his beloved flowers – though beloveds are not always so cheerful! It reminds me of Wordsworth's line,

Flowers laugh before thee in their beds ...

That was exactly what Jyotin-da was, but now pressure of yoga and pressure of age, and demands from various quarters ... poor fellow. However, we had a short dialogue and I asked him, "When did you visit the Ashram?"

He said, "Somewhere in July 1927, and I was staying in the Guest House."

So, somewhere in July I think, 1927, he came for the first time. Before that he was in communication with the Ashram because there was a small centre in Chittagong and they were trying to practise Sri Aurobindo's yoga there. Some of them used to write letters to Sri Aurobindo, before the Mother's coming. Another interesting news I got from him is that as the Mother came and took charge of the Ashram, direction was sent from here not to write letters to Sri Aurobindo henceforth, but to address all of them to her.

Then Jyotin-da said in the next letter, "I would like to visit the Ashram ... and I would like to see the Mother."

He came, Sri Aurobindo had retired, the Mother also, he couldn't see her all at once. Then I asked him, "What were the activities at that time, in the Ashram?"

He stayed for three or four months. He said that all that Narayan

53. One who is always smiling.

Prasad has written about is factually correct: the Mother was giving Pranam, going out in the afternoon, there was soup distribution and she was distributing food also. So, that's an interesting detail I got from him, it was not so well put here. As I told you the Dining Room was in Prithwi Singh's room. At about 12 or 1 o'clock, after the interview, the Mother used to go there, sit on a chair, and dishes were served. In one dish, a bowl, rice, curry and some other things were handed over, offered to the Mother first, by somebody and the *sadhaks* used to come before her, do *pranam* to her and take the dish from her. This was the ceremony that was observed every day.

But Jyotin-da was not allowed, because he was a new-comer, to take food along with the others. His food was served and somebody with the Mother's blessings would take it to his room in the Guest House. A similar thing was done to me when I came first, but that was afterwards. And I also stayed in the Guest House, in the room where now you play table-tennis. So, all those people, I think, I see, who came from Chittagong were placed in the Guest House. Long-haired Biren stayed there, Sanjiban, Jyotin-da, myself – all of us were there. However, what did I say? ... Yes, his food was served there.

Barin-da – Sri Aurobindo's brother – was at that time the unofficial secretary. He was looking after everybody, taking their news and information to the Mother. He was fond of Jyotin-da, who was young, and he would every time ask him, "When are you going? When are you going? There is as a piece of good news: Sri Aurobindo is giving Darshan on his birthday – August 15<sup>th</sup>."

So, after his retirement in November 1926, that was the first Darshan – August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1927. It was held in the Darshan Room itself where there is a long couch. It seems it was there that the first three or four Darshans took place. As was the habit, Sri Aurobindo was sitting there and the Mother to his right side. He, as you have seen in the photograph, bare upper torso with a *chadar* across, and the Mother in her usual sari. So, Jyotin-da did *pranam* first to Sri Aurobindo and he was simply speechless. No words to express what he had seen. So, he said, "I saw all his hair was silver and the body was '*jyotirmaya*.'"

– Full of Light, as he says. Then he is not sure, either he heard it or felt it, as it were, Sri Aurobindo telling him, "My child, do *pranam* first to the Mother."

– But that was after he had done *pranam* to Sri Aurobindo. Then

he went to Mother and bowed – bowed where? He says, “Our usual custom is to bow at the Mother’s feet; but her feet were completely covered by the sari. Not even a toe was exposed. But I wanted to bow and touch her feet.”

There were about 60 or 70 persons who had come. More than half were from outside – either local or Doraiswami’s friends. You know him, I suppose. Jyotin-da was 12<sup>th</sup> in number. All were given numbers and couldn’t go as they liked. So, he remembers very well that he was behind Barin-da, and his number was 12. He went before the Mother and began to fumble to uncover her feet (*Laughter*) and he had the daring courage, soul’s courage, if you like, to remove a little bit of the sari and expose her feet, and do *pranam* there. It seems he started the practice – that was the first time, and the Mother afterwards exposed the feet herself and allowed the people to bow down there.

Then when he went down, Barin-da accosted him: “What did you do? How did you do *pranam* to the Mother?”

He said, “I did *pranam* at her feet.”

“How? Where were the feet?”

Then he narrated, he explained what he had done.

“Ah! *Shabbash!*” (*Laughter*) “You are a nice fellow!”

So, that was his first experience of the Darshan.

Then... yes ... after the Darshan, it seems, the Mother paid a visit to his room. She asked him, “How long will you stay? When are you going?”

“Mother, I’ll have to go soon.”

Then she asked him, “Do you know meditation?”

He said, “No, Mother, I don’t know how to meditate.”

She said, “Doesn’t matter. Let’s meditate a little.”

They meditated, then she came away.

Afterwards Barin-da came and asked him, “When are you going?”

He said he didn’t know. Then he stayed on, August, September and October. Another piece of news came to him – that Sri Aurobindo would give Darshan on November 24<sup>th</sup>. So, he stayed on for the second Darshan too!

After that perhaps, he wanted to go, and he had an interview with the Mother, or she called him. Then the Mother asked, “When are you going? Do you want to go? Why do you want to go?”

He replied, "Mother, I have left things without any settled order, so I'll have to go and put them in order. But I want to stay here, only I shall have to go and put them in order. But I want to stay here, only I shall have to go once and then I shall come back."

And the Mother said, "Sri Aurobindo doesn't want you to go, you have made much progress in these 4 months. He is satisfied with you."

Then he said, "Very well Mother, if he doesn't want me to go, I won't go."

The Mother thought a little and said, "No, since you say your things are unsettled, it's better you go, settle them and come back quickly!"

At that time, as I told you, the Mother used to distribute soup. She sent word through Barin-da that she had a wristwatch that she would give Jyotin-da, so that he may get it repaired and bring it on his way back. She told Barin-da, "When he comes for soup, I shall give it to him myself."

So, Jyotin-da got the news and came at the usual soup time. He stretched his hands to receive the watch, but Mother said, "No, give me your wrist."

And she put it round his wrist, saying: "Take it on your wrist otherwise the customs people will catch you. It is moving but not working perfectly, so get it repaired and bring it back."

So, he went back, and I forgot to ask him when he came, perhaps in 1928 or 1929, I don't know exactly. This is, in short, how his fate was sealed.

Then when he came back it seems, the room in which I stay and the adjacent room of Debou, were used as Sri Aurobindo's kitchen... Yes, that brings me to the story of the construction of the house: there were two blocks, one Pavitra's room side, the other consisting of Meditation Hall, Sri Aurobindo's room, etc. In between there was a one-storied house. That house was demolished and a new building, with the passage, was built afterwards. So, before this new construction there was no passage connecting the Mother's room and Pavitra-da's room. And the new building contained Debou's room, mine and others.

In that kitchen, Purani and Barin-da used to cook for Sri Aurobindo. There was another kitchen – the place where now all

your notices are put up. There was no terrace then, it was an open place. There was a third place, also used for cooking, now there is no vestige of it at all, it has been taken up by the Samadhi.

The interesting story is this that when Jyotin-da came people had to cook turn by turn, so Barin-da approached him and asked him to cook one day. He said, "But Barin-da, I know nothing of cooking."

"Oh, doesn't matter, whatever you can, you do. What do you need?"

He said, "I need some potatoes and *poshto*."

So, he cooked a dish and it was sent to Sri Aurobindo. It seems they had the privilege of placing the dish of food on a table outside Sri Aurobindo's room, at noon. As for all the other cooking, usually Sri Aurobindo tasted only a little bit and the rest became *Prasad* [sanctified food which was later eaten by devotees]. Champaklal was, of course, looking after all the service, and he used to bring back the dishes from Sri Aurobindo's room and place them at the head of the stairs where you put your letters now; and people used to come and take away the dishes. So, that day Jyotin-da came to take the dish back and Champaklal asked him, "Who prepared the dish today?"

He said, "Why? I prepared it."

"Sri Aurobindo took half of what you sent."

Naturally, you understand! So, there ends our story.

## 8 April 1970

Well, to tell you the truth, I am feeling a little dullish and I hope by your contact and by the atmosphere of the room, the dullness will disappear and the genial spirit will be found. The cause of dullness is nothing but a very simple one – the fact that we have missed one day. As a matter of fact that should have made no difference, but because of that holiday, I find that my memory has taken leave of me. I don't recollect or rather I mistily recollect what we talked about and where we stopped. I don't go into the philosophy of having holidays; most of you like them, enjoy them, I do as well. But sometimes I find the reverse action, particularly when the

stream of something is interrupted, the fire dies. It is very difficult to rake up that fire; that is why, perhaps, some of us are thinking now what to do with our holidays! However, there is a good point too as regards holidays: those people who are particularly hard-working, need some rest.

In my attempt to recall what I said in my last talk, I fear there might be repetitions but they are unintentional. If you feel bored, plug your ears till I come to something new. But repetition has a place, particularly in literature. It is a part of what you call *alankār shāstra* or figure of speech. And nowadays when I go to the Sports Ground very commonly I hear: I repeat, I repeat<sup>54</sup> (*Laughter*). So, “twice or thrice repeated, once remembered”, is the adage which I have culled from my pedagogic experience.

Now, if I may be allowed to recapitulate the principal points in order to connect us with the stream – they were these: the Mother has started intense *sadhana*. She has divided her days or her spiritual work into three parts: Pranam, interview and soup distribution. Of course, you know, Sri Aurobindo has retired and she has taken charge of the Ashram. So, most of her time during the day as well as the night – but about the night I don’t say anything just now – was occupied with the *sadhana* of the *sadhaks* ... I have mentioned what she was doing during soup time, the interview and the Pranam. And into their details I shall enter later on, where I can speak also from some of the personal experience that I had when I came and settled here permanently. But just now these are the principal items. I told you how the Mother was bringing down the gods, then she had to send them back. Then the *sadhana* came down into the subconscious and she was busy with something else. I might say in my own way – it was not the bringing down of gods, but bringing down of the devils or descent of the devils into the subconscious.

Now I shall read one or two extracts from our talks; perhaps I have done more than once – either read or talked, but here are Sri Aurobindo’s words. I think I can read a little from the preceding part which is also very interesting, till I come down to our proper subject. We were talking about cures – not by medicines, but by

54. They repeat the athletics results over the public address system.

faith, whether faith has the power to cure diseases.

[Talks with Sri Aurobindo]

**Dr. Manilal:** *It is said that Christ used to heal simply by a touch. Is such healing possible?*

**Sri Aurobindo:** Why not? There are many instances of such cures. No doubt faith is necessary. Christ himself said: "Thy faith has made thee whole."

**Nirodbaran:** *Is faith always necessary?*

**Sri Aurobindo:** No, not always. Cures can be effected without faith, especially when one doesn't know what is being done.

So, here "ignorance is bliss."

– Faith is above mind, so any discussion or dispute spoils its action.

Please, remember this, young people. Then our medical chief, Dr. Manilal says:

*Yes, I know of instances of cure or help by faith. When I first came to see you, you told me to remember you in any difficulty. I followed your advice and passed unscathed through many troubles.*

This is before the Mother came, I suppose. I have given you many instances of where Sri Aurobindo asked people to remember him in cases of difficulties. Here is another.

**Sri Aurobindo:** Yours was what is known as simple faith. Some call it blind faith. When Ramakrishna was asked the nature of faith, he replied, "All faith is blind, otherwise it is not faith." And he was quite right.

**Nirodbaran:** *Is it because there is something in our nature or in the surrounding atmosphere that doubts come and the results are not as before?*

**Sri Aurobindo:** For both reasons... By contact with other people also, the faith gets obscured. I know one or two shocking instances in the Ashram itself. Once a truthful man came to pay a visit. Someone told him that the habit of speaking always the truth was nothing but a superstition and that one



must be free to say whatever one likes. There is another instance of someone advocating sex-indulgence. He said that it was not a hindrance to yoga and that everybody must have his Shakti! When such ideas are spread, it is no wonder they cast a bad influence on people.

Manilal could not bear all this ...he was some sort of purist, so...

**Dr. Manilal:** *Shouldn't those who broadcast these ideas be quarantined? (Laughter)*

**Sri Aurobindo:** I thought of that. But it is not possible ... One has to change from within.

**Nirodbaran:** *Is exterior imposition good?*

**Sri Aurobindo:** It can be good, provided one sincerely keeps to it ... Ours is a problem of world-change. People here are an epitome of the world. Each one represents a type of humanity. If he is changed, it means a victory for all who belong to his type and thus a great achievement for our work.

If you remember, this was what I tried to tell you one day, but I suppose, in a somewhat obscure and confused way.

But for this change a constant will is required. If that will is there, lots of things can be done for the man.

Now we come to our point.

**Nirodbaran:** *We gather that sadhana was going on very well in the Ashram at the beginning and things became sluggish only afterwards.*

**Sri Aurobindo:** Yes, it is when the sadhana came down into the physical and subconscious that things became very difficult. I myself had to struggle for two years. For, the subconscious is absolutely inert, like stone. Though my mind was quite awake above, it could not exert any influence down below. It is a Herculean labour. If I had been made to see it before, probably I would have been less enthusiastic about it. There is the virtue of blind faith! ... Once the subconscious is conquered, things will become easy for those who come after. That is what is meant by 'realisation of one in all'.

**Nirodbaran:** *Then why should we take so much trouble? We can wait for that victory.*

– He smiled and said:

**Sri Aurobindo:** You want an easy path?

**Dr. Manilal:** *More than an easy path; we want to be carried about like a baby. Not possible, Sir?*

**Sri Aurobindo:** Why not? But you have to be a genuine baby! ...

**Nirodbaran:** *You once spoke of the brilliant period of the Ashram.*

**Sri Aurobindo:** Yes, it was when sadhana was going on in the vital level. Then everything was joy, peace, ananda. And if we had stopped there, we could have started a big religion or a vast organisation. But the real work would have been left unattempted and unachieved.

So, you see what a big sacrifice has been made!

**Nirodbaran:** *Why did you retire? Was it to concentrate more on your work?*

**Sri Aurobindo:** No. It was in order to withdraw from the general physical atmosphere. If I had to do what the Mother is doing, I would hardly have found time to do my own work, besides, it would have entailed a tremendous labour.

**Nirodbaran:** *The Mother's coming must have greatly helped you in your work and in your sadhana.*

Sri Aurobindo was very warm! (*Laughter*)

**Sri Aurobindo:** Of course, of course...

– very rarely seen! (*Laughter*)

... All my realisations – Nirvana and others – would have remained theoretical, as it were, so far as the outer world was concerned. It is the Mother who showed the way to a practical form. Without her, no organised manifestation would have been possible. She has been doing this kind of sadhana and work from her very childhood.

**Nirodbaran:** *Yes. We also find in the Mother's Prayers and Mediations a striking resemblance between your ideas and hers.*

So, you will agree, my friends, that such things do bear repetition.

Now I'll give you an instance of what was the effect of the descents of the gods. I have already told you something and I referred to one gentleman or *sadhak* whose name was Purushottam. Some of you might remember, particularly our teachers. He was made a sort of an instrument between the Mother and the *sadhaks*. You remember how he used to pull or tug at people's hair, in order to make them straight as it were! But the poor man himself had to leave the Ashram, later on. He was here till the time I came. I saw him. He was in charge of Prosperity; a very fine man indeed. But later on what happened to him I've recorded from my correspondence. It was in 1936, I wrote. You are familiar with my writing to Sri Aurobindo. So, please don't get shocked – the new ones here! I write:

By the way what is happening? Supramental descending?  
Purushottam going *fut*...

– I hope you understand the slang “*fut*” – All thought that he was doing serious *sadhana*, as a result Purushottam descended into him and he was calling Sri Aurobindo to come and bow to him –

... What next? Makes me shake to the bones!

Sri Aurobindo's reply:

It appears that Purushottam has recognised that his Purushottama head was indeed all *fut*! He says he felt some evil forces making him do and say these things but he was so helpless that he was forced to obey them! That is a fall from Purushottama heights but a return to sanity if only temporary. (But let us hope it will increase). But that is evidently what happened.

Then to the other part, “he was doing serious *sadhana*”.

He answers:

Serious? You mean not to sleep and all that sort of things? Well it is just that kind of seriousness which brings these

attacks. – Earnestness of this sort does call down that kind of Purushottama or rather call him – for it is a horizontal not a vertical descent.

Then I asked,

*What next?*

So, he answered that point:

Next? Perhaps he will want you also to come and bow to him, and pummel you if you don't. (*Laughter*)

And I had said, “makes me shake to the bones”, Sri Aurobindo replied,

Only the bones? (*Laughter*)

So, there you are. Poor fellow, that's what happened. Then I write:

*Already I am feeling awfully pulled down, on top of that Madangopal sits – where the Purushottama crowns them all, ask myself – whither, whither are you going, my friend and what awaits you?”*

**Sri Aurobindo:** Perhaps the parātpara purusha<sup>55</sup> beyond even the Purushottama. But why this pulled downness? You are not pulling down Purushottama or any other gentleman from the upper story, are you? It is strain and want of rest, I suppose. Sleep, sleep! Read Mark Twain or write humorous stories, (*Laughter*) then you will be chirpy and even Madangopal won't feel heavy to you.

Now there is something very revealing which I forgot to read out to you. It was recorded in 1954. I had an occasion, I don't remember how, to hear this talk of the Mother:

Today Mother was unusually late in going to the bathroom. She came to see some people before going and began to talk to Dr. Sanyal:

55. Transcendental Self.

“For eight days (or ten) I remained without a drop of food and sleep except for 1 ½ hours resting, due to heavy pressure of work. It was in Library House after Sri Aurobindo had retired and I had taken charge of the Ashram. There were about 30 people, Amrita was one of them, he knows all about it. I was giving three times meditation and doing another work, cooking Sri Aurobindo’s meals. Suddenly one day I found that the tea cup I was carrying felt heavy; then I noticed that my hands had become very thin like sticks. Sri Aurobindo also drew my attention to it and said jokingly: “You are not looking pretty.” I was then young and then I began to eat. But I used to take inner wash and kept my bowels thoroughly clean. There was no water in the body, which is considered by doctors as dangerous. I also found out that breathing flowers e.g., jasmine, gave energy. So, you see, people saying that they can’t go on without food or sleep, is not true.”

This is what the Mother said to Dr. Sanyal.

But you are young people, you are advised to have seven or eight hours sleep. But the fact to be established is that one can do fasting – Sri Aurobindo has experimented, you’ve heard about it.

Now we go forward. Champaklal, my friend, a very difficult friend indeed, but very ... what shall I say? ... Well I won’t say anything! ... has given me some details about the Mother’s and Sri Aurobindo’s work, or his own work during these periods. They are very interesting.

You know he was their personal attendant from the time they came to the Library House; so, he had to be all the time practically around them. He was given a key for the main door – at the top of the stairs, which used to be always locked. Now the reverse – it’s always open! Anyone can enter and do some mischief or whatever one likes. Now that the Supermind has descended, the door is always open! You know plenty of people come and go, nobody knows for what. No restriction at all. So is the case with the main gate. As I said, Champaklal was given the key so that he could come at any time needed. There were some others who used to look to the cleaning of the rooms upstairs: Sri Aurobindo’s room, the passage, the meditation hall, etc. I am talking of the beginning when the

Mother's salon – the room where you wait for the interview, which is packed with Champaklal's things, that hadn't been built yet, neither Mother's boudoir inside. Then I don't know exactly, as yet, what was Champaklal's work in the morning. His evening or afternoon programme he has told me. But I am waiting for an opportune moment or for his good humour, to tell me about the morning. Just now he is not in such good humour. Well ... but one thing, he was in charge of making Sri Aurobindo's bed, and that it seems, Sri Aurobindo told the Mother and assigned this work to him.

Some of you may have heard of Haradhan – who has gone into another world – sending other people to that world.<sup>56</sup> He was in charge, at that time, of some work. There was a joke, I remember now, when he was in charge, and was important – there have been many important people, my friends, and importance has gone from them later on. Either they were really great or greatness was thrust upon them. So, the joke about Haradhan was this. Some new person came and asked him, “Can you tell me who is the most advanced *sadhak* here?”

“No, no, no. I don't know.” He tried to send him off with a rebuff.

But the man insisted, “No, no, you must know, you are in charge of this, you are an important person, please tell me.”

Then after so much persuasion and coaxing he said, “All right, come, I'll tell you in your ears. Don't tell anybody”, and he was very eager and said, “You know there are two persons who are most advanced – you and I.” (*Laughter*)

However, he was somewhat changed later and Champaklal was entrusted, as I said, with the work of making Sri Aurobindo's bed and it continued till the last days. I have also shared with him in my own way, in making the bed.

Now, it was understood that while these people were busy cleaning the other rooms, Sri Aurobindo's room was always kept shut. When they had finished those rooms, he would shift to the corner room and they would clean his room. So, he was always kept invisible, unobserved and shut up, except for Champaklal,

56. It was Haradhan's work to organise the cremation when a member of the Ashram died.

because he was his personal attendant. Naturally, the Master and servant had to cross their ways, so met sometimes.

Yes... another piece of information I got...I told you the Mother was giving interviews to people, that used to continue till 12 or 1 o'clock, that is in the Darshan room, on the couch. I had an interview there, also, in the first years of my coming.

That reminds me of the subconscious. I may as well tell it to you just now. It was my first interview, on my birthday. I went to the Mother, she was sitting there: very gracious, very beautiful, full of smiles. Then she told me about the nature of the work that was going on. She asked me some personal questions. She also asked me what my aspiration was, what I wanted. She put it in a very formal manner... the words a little abstract, which took me some time to understand. I was not very efficient in English at that time ... my medical knowledge, you know!

"How is your aspiration formulated?" she asked.

What it meant, I couldn't understand. Then perhaps, she explained and made it simpler, and I said, "Mother, I want Ananda."

"Ananda! It is very difficult, very difficult. It comes and goes, it doesn't remain."

Then I said, "Well then, shall I give it up?"

"No, no, no, don't give it up."

That is their way. They will never discourage you in anything, they will show you.

"No, no, you can have it, but I only say that it is very difficult."

But, well ... certainly by her grace, I had an experience of Ananda later on, all on a sudden. I have written about it in my correspondence. But that is by the way. She had also asked me, "Do you know what work we are doing? We are working in the subconscious. Have you any idea about the subconscious?"

I said, "No Mother."

She said, "It is like a pool, the water on the surface is very transparent, but all the mud is sitting below. So, what we are doing now is, we are agitating, we are stirring the mud. Consequently the whole water becomes turbid, muddy, murky. That is the work that's going on."

I am afraid it is still going on. We are, as we say, still not out of the woods. Now to come back to our story.

After the interviews were over, it was Champaklal's turn to go

and see the Mother, every day. He would lay down his head on the lap of the Mother and let it rest and go to sleep. After a while the Mother would gently lift up his head and put it down on the couch. She would go to Sri Aurobindo's room, open the door so that Sri Aurobindo may have some air and light, have some drink with him and come back and wake up Champaklal. So, what a happy time he had, you see.

It seems that Sri Aurobindo also had to do some work. There used to be plenty of vases with flowers in the Mother's room, which had to be put outside in the evening. And it was his work, if you please, to do that. So, you see, Mother made him work, as well! I have told you how he had to boil fish for cats. He wrote to me, giving me instances of physical work – which I wasn't very willing to do. You know, as is his habit, always giving personal examples.

Champaklal wrote to Sri Aurobindo who answered him:

At one time I was absolutely unfit for any physical work and cared only for the mental, but I trained myself in doing physical things with care and perfection so as to overcome this glaring defect in my being and make the bodily instrument apt and conscious ...

That's how he used to encourage us.

In the evening, I don't know at what time exactly, Champaklal used to bring in a flask of soup for the Mother, and he poured it into a bowl, in the presence of Sri Aurobindo. The Mother was in her room, and Sri Aurobindo himself carried the bowl to the Mother. Champaklal said rather humorously that it was a sight for the gods, how Sri Aurobindo carried the bowl – so carefully, so steadily, as if it were an offering he was taking.

Then before the salon was ready, the Mother was living, I told you, in the corner room, facing Pavitra's room, and the adjacent room, where I have the privilege to work, was her toilet room. You know perhaps that even today the Mother has no proper bed. She has a sort of a couch, I don't know the length and breadth – mathematics doesn't come to me easily! But it's just enough, I think, for her body. She never lies flat, because that is a *tamasic* position... So, ladies and gentlemen, don't lie flat on your mat or your bed, always try to be propped up. I have seen the difference



myself. Though the flat position is very comfortable, it is *tamasic*.

So, in that small room in the corner, she had a couch where she would rest rather than sleep, I suppose, and once she fell ill. Sri Aurobindo used to take for her some fruit juice in a flask. One day, the flask being somewhat new, he didn't know how to open it. He called Champaklal to help him, and he did it in no time. Here Champaklal said that he called him in a very humorous way, he doesn't remember the words, but the faint memory of humour has stuck.

Another instance: they had in their room a revolving fan. Sri Aurobindo wanted to make it steady. He didn't know how to do it. Again he had to take the help of Champaklal and asked him, "Do you know how to do it?"

Champaklal didn't know (*Laughter*) but he didn't acknowledge it. (*Laughter*) He was always an experimenter. Always sees, tries this and that. So, he put his hand and luckily his finger went to the right spot and it became steady! Sri Aurobindo smiled, "Oh! So simple!" (*Laughter*)

Then the other work Champaklal had to do was to bring hot water for Sri Aurobindo's bath, near about 10 p.m., but the time was never fixed, it was 10, 11, 12, 1 or even 2 a.m. – of course after the Mother had retired. Champaklal says that it was very hot water. I asked him, "How do you know that it's very hot water?"

He said, "When I went there after the bath I used to dip my fingers into the water that remained, and it was extremely hot."

So, not knowing when Sri Aurobindo would have his bath or when he would finish, Champaklal had to keep duty throughout, for so many hours. You know where the bathroom is – facing the staircase door upstairs. I don't know where Champaklal used to remain, either at the staircase listening to the splashes or the running down of water. But he had to wait there, because he had to clean the room after the bath was over. Sometimes ... I have spoken of Nishikanto's and my promenades and coming back at midnight or after, passing under that window we used to hear the sound of water gurgling down the pipe, and we would say, "He is taking a bath."

We were night birds!

Sri Aurobindo, after the bath, would go for his dinner or supper or whatever light meal, and come back to rinse his mouth. So,

meanwhile Champaklal had to wash and clean the bathroom and also remove all the dishes after his meal. You can see then from 10 o'clock to 3 or 4 in the morning he worked, and went back.

I hope he won't contradict any of the things I have said here. Let us see!

### 15 April 1970

Well, first of all, let me congratulate myself, since you won't do it, on having passed creditably, the test imposed by Champaklal! My reporting was correct, there was no criticism, and he even went to the point of enjoying something and gave a hearty laugh, which is nowadays rarely heard or seen. He is a hard taskmaster; perhaps some of my old and new students will say, "Not as hard as you!" (*Laughter*) Well, however, his hearty laughter was over the joke, you will remember, by our former *sadhak* Haradhan. As a matter of fact, it was Champaklal himself who reported the joke to Sri Aurobindo. In that context there are two other jokes which you will enjoy, I believe. I shall read them out.

[Talks with Sri Aurobindo]

**Champaklal:** *Haradhan, when he used to work with the Mother, was asked by somebody who are the advanced sadhaks here?" He replied: "I don't know." Then after he had been repeatedly pressed, he said: "I will tell you but you must not tell anybody else. There are only two advanced sadhaks here – you and I."*

– There was quite a hilarious laughter in the presence of Sri Aurobindo who also smiled, then he added:

This instance of two reminds me of a joke about Hugo.

– Students of French must have heard of him –

Balzac is supposed to have told a friend, "There are only two men who know how to write French – myself and Hugo." When this was reported to Hugo, he said: "But why Balzac?"

Then he added another anecdote. You see how Sri Aurobindo himself was full of anecdotes.

There is also the story of a Calvinist lady. The Calvinists have the doctrine that people are predestined to go to either Heaven or Hell. She was asked whether she knew where the congregation to which she belonged would go. She said, “All will go to Hell, except myself and the Minister – and I have doubts even about the Minister.”

So, this is the joke about the two. Note that Sri Aurobindo also, in spite of his great genius and being an Avatar, used to cherish and store and produce and reproduce all these jokes that he had heard long, long ago. So, I would encourage you, in order to please your students or ourselves, to collect these for they are very handy and useful. You see how apt they are, just at the right place.

One or two interesting tidbits I gathered from Champaklal about our friend Haradhan. I told you that he occupied an important place and played an important role in the beginning. It seems he had some occult faculties, so he was used by the Mother as a medium, as Purushottam was used, for her work. And he had the unique privilege, because of that, I suppose – Champaklal said – to prepare two garlands of jasmine and put them round the Mother’s wrists, every day. That, you can see at once, is a unique and great privilege. It’s an evidence that he had certainly some faculty which Mother wanted to use.

I saw him in the days of his fallen glory. So, the occultism that he had, had come down into the dark side rather than in light. He could not keep up that glory, as often happens, and his greatness vanished. He was too conscious of it, I suppose. The other incident is a humorous one. There was, you know, a tiger skin in Sri Aurobindo’s room, and Haradhan was in charge of cleaning these rooms upstairs. So, whenever he went to clean Sri Aurobindo’s room, after he had finished, he would touch the tail of the tiger skin to his forehead! Purani, who was no occultist or didn’t believe in it, used to cut jokes by imitating him: touching the tail to his forehead. As I was telling you, I saw him long afterwards – when the angel had fallen. He had a very fine figure, though a bit dark like myself; a tall and sturdy figure, the middle somewhat bulging, (*Laughter*) hair a

little long, he had a vermilion stain on the forehead ... what else? ... carried quite a thick stick, and a basket, the dhoti was very dirty.

Well, he has passed into another world, I shouldn't be so hard on him. So, I leave aside all these physical descriptions. I come to the more interesting point. But he was a man who could make his way anywhere. You put him in the desert, he would make his existence – he would talk to the plants, talk to the sand, and make something out of them!

He took upon himself the job which Vishwabani does now. Nobody gave him, he just took it upon himself, and started sitting there and distributing flowers and incense sticks gathered from God knows where! And he had a very suave, molly tongue – full of honey.

*“Dada, ashoon ashoon, ei phool niye jan, shomadhite din.”*<sup>57</sup>

– Everybody was *dada* and *didi*. That was his way. He behaved very sweetly with everyone, as you can understand.

But the strange thing is this. He used to put on huge sandals, very heavy, a little up-turned – fitting in with his character and manner – something strange about them. So, one day I saw in the boiler room, he had taken out one of his sandals and was trying to kill something. What is it? What's the matter? I went to see. He did not even look at me. Something was slipping away in that small room, from one place to another, hiding itself, and he was trying to catch it. Finally he succeeded. I saw that it was a small, poor lizard. He had smashed and killed it! ... I am sorry, ladies! (*Laughter*) And you will be surprised to hear what he did with it: he took it and put it into his waistband here!

So, silver fish, cockroaches and all these insects were his sworn enemies. They are sworn enemies to us also – as soon as we see a silver fish whether it's silver or not, it doesn't matter, we kill it, right away, but that's for another reason. He killed them and put them here or into his basket from an occult motive. So, he was the dark occultist. People say that he used to keep all sorts of things in his room, and used to utter some mantras. That's what he was doing.

He was a good storyteller too, but all the stories were rather of the dark world. Once when I heard that he was a good story-teller,

57. Dada, come, come, take these flowers and offer them on the Samadhi.

I wanted to test and taste – both of them – so I went to hear. I remember only one thing, it was entirely an occult story: he was lying down, all on a sudden he saw something coming out of his stomach – from here – it was a very huge, dark dog! I said, “Enough of it, I won’t go again to hear his stories!”

So, this is the story about our Haradhan.

Now we continue our story, this was a kind of digression. I don’t remember where we stopped ... Yes, I think I was telling another saga – that of Champaklal: how he was attending as a personal servant, on the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. I was telling you, I think, how he passed most of his time at night on the staircase, waiting for Sri Aurobindo’s bath to be finished. I think that’s where we stopped. But before I continue, I’ll tell you an interesting incident of Sri Aurobindo’s life, which I couldn’t find at that time and found it accidentally, now. As I was looking into my old notes, I found it.

It was again our Dr. Manilal who started the talk. He said, addressing Sri Aurobindo:

*The Gaekwar used to always refer to you as ‘my secretary’.*

You know perhaps that Sri Aurobindo served him for a time, as secretary. Then Sri Aurobindo said smiling:

Not a troublesome one!

**Manilal:** *No, Sir.*

– Then he reported

*Somebody once said, Sir, that you were fined Rs. 50 while you were with him in Kashmir.*

**Sri Aurobindo:** Not Kashmir, in Baroda. I refused to attend office on Sundays and on holidays so he fined me. Then I said, “Let him fine me as much as he likes.” The Maharaja heard this and didn’t fine me.

So, there you see a little bit of Sri Aurobindo: he refused to attend though he was serving the Maharaja. That’s the personality. Some of you might remember, I think I have told you, his eldest brother’s remark about Sri Aurobindo, when he was young. His brother said Sri Aurobindo was very nice in every way, but he was very obstinate.

So, this obstinacy came now and then to manifest itself, as in this case. The Maharaja must have found him a very hard nut!

Now about our story ... yes, after his bath Sri Aurobindo used to go for his meal – somewhere about 12 o'clock, 1 or 2 o'clock. The meal was necessarily light, Champaklal said. It used to be brought in a tray and put on the table. The menu consisted of some soup, vegetable, banana and tea. Champaklal himself used to prepare the tea and bring it in a tea-pot and cover it with a cosy. There were two cups, please remember, in which he poured sugar and milk and covered them. The Mother used to put some biscuits in a tin – before she retired. So, all that Sri Aurobindo had to do was to remove the cosy, take the tea pot and pour the tea into the two cups. This was his meal at the dead of night. But what is interesting to me is that he used to take two cups – not one! (*Laughter*) And Champaklal was preparing tea, God knows what kind it was!

So, while he was having his meal, Champaklal had to come to the bathroom and clean it. Of course Sri Aurobindo must have taken some time, not like some of you finishing your meal in 5 minutes – offering it to your stomach – he was offering to the Divine. So, very slowly he must have eaten, at least half an hour. Champaklal cleaned it thoroughly – you know he is a very meticulous worker. Not a drop anywhere, not a speck of dust. Then Sri Aurobindo would come to the bathroom, and Champaklal would go to the corner room to remove the trays and clean everything. It was arranged in that orderly fashion, almost mechanically. Then Sri Aurobindo would come out and sit on the chair in the passage, just outside the main room – where you see a table and a lamp – and according to Champaklal, he used to write and recite lines of his epic poem *Savitri*. Sometimes when he had finished his work, he had to go and sit on the staircase, and from there he could hear the verses recited by Sri Aurobindo. So, practically the whole night he spent there, without sleep, without food. The one motto, he says, in his life was to serve. Service was the only food that he needed. He says, if you take away service from him, you may as well dismiss him. If he has work to do, that's his food and sleep, and that is literally true. We think 12 o'clock: Dining Room is calling! 10 o'clock: sleeping time!

When the Mother fell ill, I have seen him on the landing of the staircase, just near the entrance to Mother's room, sitting all night,

tight, upright like a bolt. No food, no sleep, and she was ill for two or three days. He wouldn't go – if you don't mind, even to answer nature's call – because, what if the Mother needed something? That's what is called service. If you offer to help him – no thank you! He gets very angry with you, so be careful. He'll say, "You are taking away my job."

I remember one instance – there are many others. We have worked together for 12 years, though at times there were some minor clashes, on the whole, I must say, he was somewhat kind to me.

I don't know what time Sri Aurobindo's bed was made. Usually Champaklal and Satyendra used to do that work together. One day ... I remember it still... it so happened that Champaklal was late, he had gone somewhere. Sri Aurobindo was sitting on a chair with a table in front of him, and as the bed had to be made, Satyendra and I were doing it. All of a sudden, I find Champaklal running and storming into the room. I was tucking the bed sheet, and he simply snatched it away from my hands! Sri Aurobindo, sitting there, smiled. (*Laughter*) He didn't care for either Sri Aurobindo's presence or my feeling ... no, he has no politeness of that sort. So, you approve or you don't approve, that's his attitude.

Yes, another small incident he remembered, he told me, it's this. I told you the Mother's salon was not ready, it was being prepared. The windows had been fixed, but for one reason or another they were not closed and there was heavy rain. The Mother was in the corner room. She told Sri Aurobindo that the windows were open, the rain would come inside and spoil everything, so if he could go and ask Champaklal whether he knew how to close them. They are a little strange, you have seen perhaps, they are fixed with rods and have graded holes. Champaklal answered that, yes, he knew. Sri Aurobindo came back with the answer and told the Mother that Champaklal knew. (*Laughter*) Then the Mother sent him back to tell Champaklal that he may close the windows (*Laughter*) and like a very obedient boy, he went and told Champaklal to shut them. You see now ... so ladies, please remember this, and the lords as well. How they had their relation, you can see.

Now one or two incidents I forgot to tell you before were when Champaklal came here with a friend, with the intention of settling for good. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo were in the Guest House. They hadn't yet shifted. He was accepted on one condition that

he wouldn't be able to stay in the Guest House. He would have to stay outside, though he could come there during the day time. Neither could he take his meals with them. I don't know for what reason, very probably because those inmates were taking fish and he was a Brahmin, a vegetarian. He was given the work of doing the shopping – for vegetables and other things. He said he used to go on cycle, buy the things and bring them. He would not engage a coolie, a porter, in order to save money for these people. So, how conscientious he was even at that young age – how considerate. He knew that these people had not much money.

Now ... the daytime passed somehow but night was difficult to pass, because he and his friend had to sleep outside. He came to know a local *bhakta* who used to come to Sri Aurobindo and who offered them a place in his house, which was just on the border of the Canal. But the Canal was not what it is today, my friends. I don't say that it is much better today, but ... well, it's the worst possible thing. It reminds me of the River Styx in hell! Poor fellows, couldn't have a wink of sleep, because of the great invasion of the dark forces from the Canal – you can understand. (*Laughter*) And he was a fellow who would not keep any clothes on his body – as bare as possible. So, these invasive forces used to suck his Brahmin blood, merrily! They had to run away and sleep on the pier – the pier that is now half undone by forces of nature. And even there, when they had comfortably slept, another kind of force would come: “Get up, get up, this is not the place to sleep!” – the police dog! So, poor people had to come back again to their den and suffer at the mercy of those tiny insects! This is the way, then, they passed the nights. You can see the *tapasyā*.

However, as I said, during the daytime they used to come here. One day, they came early, at about 2 o'clock. Both of them were sitting in the courtyard. The inmates, you know, were a little high-browed because they were older people and these were youngsters. So, in a condescending tone someone asked them, “Why have you come so early? You will see Sri Aurobindo only at 4 o'clock. It's no use coming and sitting here.”

Then they said, “We know, we are just sitting.”

So, they sat from 2 to 4 or 5 o'clock – much better than loitering about or remaining outside. Suddenly, Champaklal saw Sri Aurobindo coming down from the first floor, going to his bathroom.



He was on the point of turning at the foot of the wooden staircase when Champaklal rushed and fell at his feet. Sri Aurobindo looked and calmly blessed him, and went his way.

Then another incident: Champaklal was dying to have a little bit of Sri Aurobindo's prasād, but these people wouldn't think of giving him anything. No Grace! So, on Sri Aurobindo's birthday, at least, he expected to get some. All of them enjoyed, but nobody thought of calling them and giving a little bit – he was expecting every moment to be called and given "*kanikā prasād*"<sup>58</sup> as we say. There was no Mridu at that time. Nobody thought of him and his friend. But he was dying to have it. So, one day he thought he would do something. When nobody was there, everything was quiet, he entered their kitchen – the room where Tara lives now. He entered, looked this way and that, furtively ... he couldn't find any food stuff. He saw the sugar tin, opened it, took a pinch of it and put it into his mouth. He says, "How delicious it tasted. What a joy it was, thinking that from this sugar Sri Aurobindo must have tasted!" (*Laughter*)

Poor fellow, was extremely happy, naturally. Now, these are things my friends, you can see. I don't need to comment further on them.

Yes, another story Sri Aurobindo told us. When Champaklal came and settled here, naturally his parents didn't like it. They wanted to take him away and select a good bride for him and put him in chains! I'm sorry! (*Laughter*) They wrote a letter to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, to send him at least once. Sri Aurobindo read the letter and said in his presence: "Champaklal, we shall have to send you back."

Poor fellow became pale with fright. Then Sri Aurobindo smiled and said, "Champaklal doesn't understand humour!" (*Laughter*)

Now that finishes, for the present, Champaklal's story.

We shall make a little more progress. I have told you what the main activities of that time were – 1928 – and now I may as well give you some details which are very interesting, and they will show you what a vast difference there is between those good old days and the present time. Remembering those old nostalgic days,

58. A grain of prasād.

the old *sadhaks* – myself no less. But I, who am more adapted to the circumstances, heave a sigh and say, “Ah, those golden days!”

Now you have come and ousted us all completely. Among those old people there are only a few – the veterans like Champaklal, Dyuman ... Bula also a bit ... then Sahana-di ... and among the younger ones Kamala and Vasudha. So, these are the few who still remain to tell us something of the old glory. Such a transformation has taken place today. You may call it a supramental transformation, almost.

I want to give you a little bit of the picture of those days, which I have certainly done now and then, giving hints and glimpses. Now I have to fall back on Sahana-di’s reminiscences, combining them with Narayan Prasad’s accounts. She writes that she came here in 1928, just at the time when the *sadhana* had come down into the subconscious. And she says that since then she has been here for so many years, her foot firmly planted in the Ashram soil. Her voice is still strong, though her feet may not be. She has kept her famous nightingale’s voice even today.

Then there were about 60 or 70 members, when she came, and about 10 or 15 women. So, the number had already increased, you remember in 1924 there were about 30. One thing that could not be missed was the quietness of the Ashram. As soon as you entered the Ashram compound there was a peace pervading the whole atmosphere. If you talked aloud you felt as though you were wounding your own ears – so softly, so quietly everyone talked. But even otherwise there was hardly any exchange of words between two people – not even a smile, not even to say “bonjour!” Nowadays, if you don’t say bonjour ... the reaction may be: “I’ll show him!”  
(*Laughter*)

The thing has become so ... you understand. But, then, each one to his own work, to his own duty. I don’t know what kind of work there was, but for each one according to his nature. Some had their literature, music, but with an intensity which couldn’t have been missed; they were all, as it were, absorbed in their *sadhana*. They knew what they were doing. They knew what they had come for. As Sri Aurobindo has said – I read out to you the other day – *sadhana* was the one thing in their life. That is one of the striking features of those days. I have seen a bit of it when I came in 1930. Here,

that's her observation. That was the tradition if you like, that was the spiritual atmosphere vibrating with some Power, some Peace, some Light and some Ananda. So much so that everyone, as if, fell into the stream, as soon as he came. Now, by contrast, you can see what a change!

There were no visits from one *sadhak* to another, naturally no birthday presents, nothing of that sort at all. And if one had to visit somebody in his room, the Mother's permission had to be taken. It was not expressly said so but they felt like that. Even for going to the bazaar – one had to inform the Mother about it.

So, that was the kind of life being led at that time – an intense concentrated *sadhana*. Our friend Narayan Prasad has given a very detailed account of it, I might read a bit from here.

Here somebody raises the question about the external discipline.

*[Life in Sri Aurobindo Ashram]*

To D the Mother had said that She had to frame some rules simply because no institution could possibly be run or any kind of corporate life be held together without some laws laid down for general guidance. “But,” she added, “I do mean it when I say that I would have no rules at all if the Ashram could be run without them. But I am wide awake and have always held that all rules should come from within. So I never consent to formulating more rules or codes of general conduct than are absolutely necessary and minimum.”

I shall stop here, my friends. Let us brood over it and try to see into the liberty, the freedom that has been given to us. I won't be a schoolmaster and preach!

22 April 1970

This time, I have some wrong reporting to be corrected. I would have let it pass, but my taskmaster would not let me...

Well, he accuses me of loss of memory to which certainly I plead guilty; but I consider it as a sign of Supramentalisation. Once when Dr. Manilal complained of loss of power of meditation and concentration, Sri Aurobindo asked him: "Are you becoming stupid?"

He said, "Yes, Sir".

Then Sri Aurobindo replied, "You are making good progress!"  
(*Laughter*)

Poor doctor, didn't know how to take that statement. Which Guru could be so trifling, so humorous upon such a serious subject? There you are then... my loss of memory is a sign that I am going rapidly towards that!

Well, however, I was mistaken about one or two points, it seems.

One, it was on his first visit and not on his second one that Champaklal was waiting to see Sri Aurobindo, when all on a sudden, as I told you, he saw him coming down and rushed and fell at his feet. It was the very day he was to see Sri Aurobindo in the afternoon, the very first day.

Secondly, it was during his second visit that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had shifted to the Library House, and he and his friend were living for some time in the mosquito-infested house. So, these are the two points which are very important to him because he wants to be supramentally precise and exact. The others are what you call peccadilloes which we can pass.

Now to come to our subject, we were talking about the atmosphere of the Ashram during those days, from Sahana-di's account, from Narayan Prasad's, with a little of mine added to them. You have come to have an idea of it: concentrated, indrawn, very little contact, etc... Nolini-da gives, if you remember, a very original and revealing image: like a tortoise. So, that was the condition. I don't need to stress upon it further, only I shall add my own experience a bit. When I visited the Ashram in 1930 I found the same atmosphere. We were given, my niece and I, a room in the Guest House, the room which is now used for table-tennis. It was divided into three small compartments.

We knew very few people at that time, the others were all strangers. We stayed for about a month, but during this period I don't think we made contact with more than two or three people. It was, as it were... we were all living together but separate from one another. The only time that we used to see many faces was during Pranam which was at about 6.30 in the morning, and soup time in the evening. I am giving you just a bare outline, the details I shall take up when I come to these topics... so we saw many faces during these times but they were very silent faces – very few had anything of a smile – very grave and very silent. We could have met them also during the meals, but since we were outsiders, we were excluded from that privilege of taking food together, in the common mess. Our food used to be sent to our room. It would have been very hard to pass time for young men like me – a little vitalistic, very little prone to spirituality, had there not been my niece with me. When ladies are there, you know, they can talk a lot. Please excuse me! But talking becomes a little, you understand – hackneyed, monotonous, too subjective. The point is, we didn't know how to pass our time. Within a month, once or twice of course, Dilip Kumar Roy invited us to tea, and we had some music; I think, that's all as a diversion. And there was an Englishman called Arjava, you have perhaps heard his name, who was living in the same house as Dilip-da in Trésor House. So, we were introduced to him, he took a fancy to us and once or twice he too invited us to tea. That's all the company we had. With the rest hardly any exchange. We used to see quite a number of faces passing silently during the Pranam, but afterwards the streets were deserted, the Ashram building no less, as if all of them had entered their homes or caves! God knows where. So, you have an impression of those days.

There is one side-event that I can narrate, perhaps you will find it interesting. When we were coming here, a friend of ours, a young man, a Mohamedan at that, took a fancy to accompany us. He would not leave us. He couldn't get the permission and we knew that it had to be obtained before coming here. Not like nowadays, you come and go whenever you like. But he was like a leech and said, "No, I am going with you."

God knows whether he was coming because he liked us or because he was curious about the Ashram! (*Laughter*) So, he came. He was short, a little stumpy chap, very restless, fidgety, but he was

a good soul. When we were given a room in the Guest House, poor fellow, he wasn't given a room in the Ashram. He had to live outside. And we came to know later on that it was very indiscreet on our part to have brought him here, because he wasn't ready, and it was even said that it would have done him much harm. I'm afraid it turned out to be true. This is in order to stress upon the point that when one is not ready – I'm talking of that time, I'm not talking of now – if one even paid a visit, it could do him a lot of harm.

As I'm talking about my own experience, I might tell you one or two incidents of that time.

The Pranam used to take place in Bula's room [The room which is second to the left as you come out of the Meditation Hall], that small room. There were about 60 or 70 members, some 10 or 15 used to sit in the room and meditate as long as the Mother was there, and the rest had to go one after the other in a queue, and we had to do the same.

As I said, we didn't know what to do, being fond of outward diversions. One day we took a fancy to bathe in the sea, but you know nothing could be done without the Mother's permission or approval, so we sent word through Nolini-da for the permission. We waited for the answer, till the Mother went upstairs, as you people used to do later on; we were under the palm tree near the Meditation Hall. After the Mother had finished Pranam, she was going that way, she looked at me – that was the first time she spoke to me, and said, "Oh, you want to take a bath in the sea?"

I said, "Yes, Mother."

She smiled and said, "Take care, there are lots of jellyfish here." (*Laughter*) That's all!

The second incident I remember – there are others but these I'm telling you because of some personal contact. I told you that the Mother used to go out for drives in the afternoon. Once the Ashram had held an exhibition of flowers and plants in the Colonial Garden – I don't know who was in charge. But the fact is that the Mother went there. She remained for quite a long time in the stall, along with Mme Suvrata. She had a very close contact with the Mother at that time. She was young, she was beautiful – it's not because of that that she had familiarity with the Mother. (*Laughter*) Our Ashram people also went to see the exhibition, I too had the chance to go there. Some of the ladies, not many, were walking

around our stall to have a close touch, a close sight of the Mother. The Mother naturally went there in a sari, and she looked exquisite. Suvrata, I don't remember whether she was in her sari or her European dress. So, this was one thing I saw.

Now... Oh, I think, I can interrupt a little... now that we were talking of my friend Champaklal, I might read out to you the homage paid to him by Madhav Pandit, in *The Advent*. [February 1970, p. 23]

#### The Man I love:

Someone had asked the Mother for the meaning of Her message, "Cling to Truth". "What is Truth?" was the query. The Mother turned to each one who was around and looked for the answer, She passed from person to person till the turn came of this one. He replied: "There is no need to define Truth, if one is sincere, one knows what Truth is."

"Exactly," said the Mother who was pleased with the straight answer.

That is my man. Straightforward in nature, he always goes straight to the heart of things. He may protest that he is not learned in philosophy and such like high subjects. But that is his virtue. Give him any piece of writing, make him listen to any discourse, he will immediately react to the right note if there be one... All claim his impartial and entire attention when they come before him... To him all is '*samambrahma*', the watchword of every yoga.

He will again protest that he does not know *yoga* and says that he is only a worker whose mantra is Service. True, he is the embodiment of Service and the manner and the extent to which he has been privileged to serve both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother for over five decades has no parallel. Neither food nor sleep have claims over his time... Did he not one day say to the Mother in the anguish of his soul: 'Mother, all these years, I have served as I wanted to serve, now I want to serve as you would want me to do.' Hanuman could have hardly bettered this... In his very childhood he perceived that Service to the Divine was the mould of his soul. He serves the Divine in and as the Guru, the Mother Supreme... I have always held that he is the one man in our world here who stands for principles and

who will fight for them, no matter what the consequences... Like a child, *bālavat*, he will tell you how anger has been his curse, how he cannot help it and you begin to feel sorry for creating a situation that caused the flareup...”

You know who the man is. I forgot to mention one thing – again loss of memory – about Champaklal. I told you how service was his spiritual food; when the Mother fell ill, how for so many days, from morning till evening, he sat on the top landing, without any food or sleep, without answering nature’s call even.

A similar instance was when Sri Aurobindo left his body. At the foot of his bed he sat for three days without taking anything. The Mother used to come at midnight with a glass of milk to feed him, that’s all.

Certainly it was not what we call *kartavya karma* in the sense of moral duty that he was doing it. There was spiritual urge, love.

Now we come to Narayan Prasad’s *Life in Sri Aurobindo Ashram*:

In the thirties, the atmosphere of sadhana was marked by a spirit of self-imposed discipline. Everybody was careful not to do anything that the Mother might not approve of. That was almost the law that ruled our life. We knew only one delight: to sense what the Mother would like us to do and then to act accordingly.

One would not call on another without his consent or without reference to the Mother. Presents made to a sadhaka would be sent up to the Mother who would send them back to the sadhaka concerned. Then the person would feel free from any sense of having succumbed to a temptation.

Most of us were exclusively shut up within ourselves. There was no off-time enjoyment of mutual companionship or talk, no merrymaking, feasting or gossiping. Why this isolation, which you don’t find existing today. The Mother gives an explanation.

Usually you open yourself in all directions to everything and everybody in the world. So inside you there comes about what we can call a hotch-potch of all contrary and contradictory movements and that creates difficulties without number. Now instead of that, live away from the surface, ...and open up to the Divine and receive nothing but the Divine force. If you



can do that, all difficulties practically disappear... Unless one is alchemically conditioned, it is an impossibility to have relations with people, to talk to them, to deal with them, have interchanges with them and yet not absorb something out of them... people in ancient days who wanted an easier path took to solitude, into the depths of the forest, on the top of a hill or under a cave so that they might not have to do with people – for that naturally reduces undesirable interchange.

Well, Sri Aurobindo has written many letters on this interchange – vital interchange, mixing, messing, etc... I don't know if some of you are conscious of it, but there is always a vital interchange going on, even here, behind the physical one. You take from people things conducive to you or unconducive, and similarly you pass your things to others. That's a very simple psychological truth, I think. In the beginning, Sri Aurobindo told me quite a few times that he had observed more than once how I took the depression from D, unknowingly, unwittingly. I was so happy before going to the friend, and he was so happy to meet me; both of us along with two or three others, enjoyed tea, good talk, humour, etc. Good Lord! When I came back there was a pall of darkness or depression over me. And as there was correspondence at that time I wrote, we used to write frankly many things:

What's happened to me, I have again fallen in the pit of depression, what have I done? Only this that I was so happy, I went to see D, we had a long talk, good tea... And when I come back as morose as an owl.

Sri Aurobindo knew the condition of that person. So, he said:

More than once I have observed you taking this contagion of depression from your friend, that's why I affiliate you to him!

There, you see, I never knew at all that behind this façade of cheerfulness and gaiety, there was a man inside who was so melancholic, so depressed ... on the point of going away, leaving the Ashram.

So, those of you who are a little sensitive, you might be able to feel what contacts are desirable, what contacts are unhealthy, and regulate your life accordingly. I think now we are living in cosmic

consciousness, no such things are necessary and particularly for young people. Further on Narayan Prasad says:

The evening service in the Dining Room being over by sunset, hardly anybody could be seen in the streets except for some urgent work.

So, again when I came... We used to finish our food by 6.30 or 7.00 and be ready for soup by 8 o'clock. One reason, I suppose, was physical inconvenience, but the more important reason was spiritual. Going to bed with a loaded stomach is not good at all for a *sadhak* or *sadhika* – all of you know. So, the Mother made it a rule that dinner must be finished at sunset or before, and that is also, I think, the spiritual discipline in our country. Now we are breaking all the rules. Then, he says here:

We feel tempted to reproduce here a letter from the pen of the great Bengali littérateur, Sarat Chandra Chatterjee. It refers to Barin's reaction to the Ashram discipline and to his feeling about the Mother as he had seen Her while he was here in the 20s (1920-29).

I told you Barin-da was here and he left the Ashram. So, Sarat writes to Dilip – they were very good friends and they used to have an exchange of letters. –

I often meet Barin these days. He says he will not turn his face again towards Pondicherry. He wonders how he could remain caged in so long under such rigorous discipline! But in the depths of his heart he has intense devotion for your Mother. He says that it is hardly possible to meet a personality like Hers, Her power of subtle vision, says he, is unequalled. Her capacity for action is as high as the intellect and inner faculty of maintaining discipline. Problems of every *sadhaka* are always before her eyes...

Yes, this last observation... The other day I was consulting my notes, my medical reports. Most of the answers were given by Sri Aurobindo, but now and then the Mother used to take up the pen, for practical reasons. A local boy working here, needed some meat extract for health. I was the doctor then, so I wrote to the

Mother, if I could give it to him. She said:

Yes, but it is better if he takes it in the dispensary itself as a medicine. Because if he takes it to his home, his mother may very well take it instead of he. (*Laughter*)

So, you see how vigilant she is – knows everything ... he had to take it in my presence.

Yes, Barin-da used to joke, and I remember one joke. When we went back from here after our first stay, he came to visit our place. “Oh, you are going back to the Ashram?” he asked.

“Yes,” we answered.

“Good, very good.” Then after this and that he said, “You know I had been there for many years, but I had not been able to see even the tail of God – *bhogobanér lèjo dékhini!*” (*Laughter*)

But I didn't think he meant it very seriously. However, that was his way. Then Narayan Prasad writes about the Mother in 1940:

In the Yoga-Ashram of Pondicherry the Mother is the living embodiment of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga. The touch of Her creative genius has given the Ashram its present shape... It is doubtful if there is any other place on earth where such a big family could be seen carrying on like clock-work its day-to-day activities in silence and in harmony, without a shade of conflict.

A little exaggeration perhaps, but that can pass. (*Laughter*) But on the whole I think it is true. Conflicts or quarrels were all so episodic, not a permanent feature. At times quarrels and quarrels everywhere, and at other times peace and peace. As Champaklal used to say now and then to me, “Oh, now I'm passing through a very bad time. I don't know, I lose my temper for nothing, and afterwards it comes to settle itself, then again...”

So, similarly all things here in the Ashram, I don't know about outside life, there are some periods when for instance craving for food comes, everyone has it, so craving for quarrels, everyone. You don't know, at one time quarrels became so intense, raised to such a pitch, the Mother had to solve the problem. Just as you see in the Meditation Hall placards saying, “Do not lean”, so placards were put everywhere “No quarrels, No quarrels”. (*Laughter*) I think some of

these young people came at that time. I remember in Nanteuil where they play table tennis, a notice saying, "No quarrels!" was there. (*Laughter*) And at that very time our ex-President Radhakrishnan paid a visit. The Mother used to give Pranam downstairs, in the morning. It was some commission and Radhakrishnan was the leader, and with his keen eyes... he observed the placards and made this remark: "Oh, then there are quarrels in the Ashram!" (*Laughter*)

So, these are spiritually true, friends, that we have passed through such phases. At one time going out for picnics and at another time something else. Barin-da says:

Sri Aurobindo once said to me that He doubted if there was in the past any figure embodying so great a Yogic power. He added that He had done 10 years' Yoga in one year by being in contact with Her... Day by day the Pondicherry Ashram grew into a Yogic place of pilgrimage for the entire world. An aspirant had a vision: the Mother and Sri Aurobindo were inside a golden tabernacle on top of a luminous hill, and men from different climes, from all directions, thronged to the place in endless streams. Today his vision has materialised."

Here I might relate another vision. I wrote to Sri Aurobindo in 1936:

[*Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*]

**Myself:** *The Americans, it seems, were much impressed. And the one who took the longest time, had a vision, I hear, of the whole of America bowing at your feet! What a wonderful thing it would be, by Jove!*

**Sri Aurobindo:** That was what he was calling for and he believed he got the answer.

**Myself:** *So, if that vision were to come true, it would be marvellous. Somehow I feel that America would be the first to accept your message and through it your work will spread all over the West. True?*

**Sri Aurobindo:** Possibly. Mother has always expected something special from America.

Barin-da continues:

From the angle of yogic vision the Mother has no equal even

in India, the *tapobhumi* (the land of Tapasya).”

Today is the Mother’s birthday. On this blessed day, this is a tribute at her Feet from her erring child. Whatever my deviations into wrong paths, however grave my errors, my labyrinthine movements will at length lead me into the Temple of the Mother’s Consciousness, for where else except in the Mother’s lap can her son find the end of his journey?

So, there is Barin-da’s account. I told you how he ran away. The Mother asked him not to go, so he knew he could not tell her and go, so without seeing her, he left.

### 29 April 1970

I believe, now your mind is impressed with the picture of the atmosphere in the latter part of the 1920s, that I tried to create. It was an atmosphere that was serious and profound, and it was maintained through and in the activities that were going on at that time: the Pranam, soup, interviews, physical work, even eating, sleeping, all penetrated with the spirit of *sadhana*. So, that’s in a nutshell the atmosphere.

Now I would like to take up individually these activities, some of them I have already told about... But there are some events and incidents that have been left out here and there, which I suppose would be of interest to you. These I saw myself when I came here for the first time in 1930.

First about the Pranam: one thing I forgot to mention was the giving of flowers. Some of you have seen later on, the Mother used to give a flower to each one – the same flower: Divine Solitude. I mean in the distribution. But at that time we used to receive more than one flower, and each one was different, sometimes two, sometimes three, even four, either separately or combined in a sort of a bunch, or one flower embedded in the bosom of another and all with a meaning already in the Mother’s mind. With the different flowers put together you had to understand yourself what the meaning would be. For instance, inside the flower ‘Faith’ she would

put the flower 'Aspiration' and we had to make out the significance: whether we shall have faith then aspiration, or if we have aspiration, faith will come. That was the way or mode of flower-giving.

And each one of us too used to give flowers according to our inner need. Sometimes perhaps when waking up in the morning, I felt the need of faith, I would take the flower called 'Faith' to the Mother and she looked like that (intently). So, this silent communication through flower language was the usual custom of the Pranam. I suppose it is much more eloquent than expressing through our crude human speech, as the Mother says or as the poet Keats says: "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter..."

Earlier than that, Champaklal told me the story of how the Mother used to play the "Flower Game" with them. One day she made a chain or a garland of some flowers, and she invited each one of the *sadhaks* present there, to find out what it would mean. The sentence had been already framed and written down by Sri Aurobindo beforehand, so they had to devise their intuition or their intellectual faculty to find out the exact meaning of the flowers given. And it appears that not the intellectuals but the non-intellectual – Champaklal – was the only one who correctly made the sentence, just as Sri Aurobindo had written it down!

I do not need to dilate upon the function of flowers in our life – most of you know why the Mother has chosen them as the medium of communication. What I wonder at is the Mother sitting there for more than an hour, in one posture, without moving, I can't sit in one position for more than 5 minutes! That I understand, is perhaps, due to age, but even then... She was sitting there and all of us putting our head, bowing at her feet, and she blessing each one... Sometimes some *sadhaks* wouldn't like to move away from her feet...

So, this was 1930, I saw with my own eyes. Of course, the number wasn't great – as Sahana-di has recorded – 60 or 70. But when I came back in 1933, Pranam was discontinued, why and how, we shall come to it afterwards.

Now the next one about the soup. I have given a general idea, description of what the soup distribution, the atmosphere, was like, but here I would like to add a little personal flavour.

In 1930 the soup distribution was in full swing. It used to take place around 8 pm, after our meal. Each member had a fixed seat

– everything precise, orderly, and the Mother fixed them – he will sit here, she there, etc. and this person will go after him, that person after her... Rigidly fixed, you couldn't violate it. We had the privilege or the bad luck of sitting outside – you know the verandah of the Reception Room where our Charupada holds his court! – (*Laughter*), because I suppose, we were newcomers, the atmosphere would have been too much for us... But from outside, you can understand, we could hardly see what was going on inside.

The Mother was sitting where Sri Aurobindo's bust is, against the wall, just there. People who had come for Darshan were before us and were blocking our view. We were told that such and such a person will go, then we'd go after him or her. So, we used to wait for our turn. It would go on for one or two hours because the Mother, very often, used to go into trance, and I being a fresh person, not inclined to spirituality at all, it was a torture for me. I would gaze at the stars, or look inside to see what thoughts were going on – very far away from the Divine atmosphere, waiting, waiting, dozing sometimes with a loaded stomach. (*Laughter*)

After some time when the Darshan people had gone away, the crowd had become a little thinner, we had the opportunity of sitting inside. That also had to be after the permission obtained from the Mother. There again you see how strict she was. If it had been left to me I don't think I would have advanced a step to take permission, but my niece – ladies know all this. You see, their devotion makes its way. She went forward and asked Nolini-da if we could sit inside. Like Purusha I was observing and giving to Prakriti, my sanction. (*Laughter*) However, willingly or unwillingly, I was dragged inside and made to sit there. The atmosphere was very fine certainly, but it was too much for a novice like me – a new fight. You know the story of too much that Sri Aurobindo himself narrated to us. I have already told it to you before. The short and plump Boer soldier who was running away from his British pursuers, and fell off his horse, he tried to jump on to his saddle shouting: "Lord, help me to my saddle", and fell on the other side, and said: "Lord, thou hast helped me too much!" (*Laughter*)

So, here the atmosphere was a little too much for me. I was not habituated to meditation at all. And though the Mother was very fine, ravishing, how long can you go on looking? So, after a time I began wondering whether it was right or good for me to come

in, or should I have remained outside! I used to look at the people – meditating sitting upright, some dozing, all sorts of things going on.

However, one day I had a small boil on the shoulder, I still remember – I was boiling even then! (*Laughter*) It is less now but psychologically it's still there, not physically. Well, you know, those of you who suffer from boils, there's a sort of throbbing – and with that throbbing I went before the Mother, perhaps my facial expression betrayed something. She looked like this (intently, piercing). I still remember... you see how small things somehow stick to your memory. The atmosphere was like that, half light, half darkness – penumbra as they say. And in that how could she make out my expression and gaze like that? I could not tell her either through words or through gestures – pointing out, I was a newcomer. So, that was one experience I had; how particular she was for everything that was passing, not only spiritually but even physically. I told you the incident of Sailen's finger, the other day. Inside, she is in a highly spiritual atmosphere somewhere far above, but externally, she was there, noting even small things.

That reminds me of a funny incident. Don't laugh, please! You know, most of the time I remain leaving my upper body bare... But when I went to Sri Aurobindo, upstairs to attend upon him, I thought it would be uncivilised on my part to go only in dhoti, so I used to put on a jersey. But I felt so hot... I couldn't take it out completely, so I found a device – I rolled it up from below. Champaklal used to enjoy this attire of mine very much. He laughed and laughed and even made a sketch of it, (*Laughter*) and showed it to the Mother. The Mother said, "Yes, I have noticed it!" (*Laughter*) and Champaklal used the expression, "It's just like a lady's blouse!" (*Laughter*)

But one thing which none of these people mention, and perhaps you have not heard of, is the grand spectacle after the Soup was over – when the Mother was going back from the Soup Room, through, I suppose, the Reading Room, across the courtyard, turning left towards Madhav's office and going up, it was a grand sight. And particularly if it was a moonlit night, it was splendid. The courtyard was not as it is today. I told you there was a thatched cottage where the Samadhi is, and in front there was a small passage and in addition to it there were two arches, I don't know what they were



for. The Mother had to pass through them, she had to bend her head, she was quite conscious. But that is not the grand spectacle I'm talking about. The spectacle lies in this that she was led by two disciples – one was Anilbaran, the other was Dara. The latter, as his name shows, was Muslim. Some of you have heard of him, perhaps. His was the first Muslim family, I believe, to come to the Ashram. He came with one brother, two sisters, I think, and his stepmother. They were very pretty, the two sisters. One of them, Chinmayee, was the Mother's personal attendant. So, Dara was on one side with a Chinese lantern and an incense bowl in his hands. And Anilbaran was a tall figure, bright in complexion, and his gait was very steady and firm. He looked like a veritable Aryan Brahmin at that time. Dara also had a good figure: quite tall, a little plump. Both had long hair and wore a *chadar* across the chest. The Mother, of course, you can understand, was in a sari. She wore a crown... She looked splendid, superb, coming out of the meditative atmosphere, majestic gait, slowly and with a smile on her face. Behind her there were some other *sadhaks*, perhaps Champaklal, Nolini-da, etc. So, this was the spectacle every evening after soup. Some of us used to stand by the boiler-room, you know, to watch the procession. But when I came back in 1933 the Soup Distribution was over, pranam gone, some other activities gone, due to some reason. So, in three years many changes had come about.

Now from the climax I shall come to the anticlimax... No, no, I suppose it is not at all an anticlimax, it is the climax of all problems – the food problem, the very urgent one indeed.

Today the food from the Dining Room, I'm not talking about Corner House, has become very democratic. At that time, Sahana-di writes and I've also tasted the food, the cooking was done by some maid servants, as *sadhaks* and *sadhikas* were few in number. The ladies hadn't yet come forward to lend their hand in their special function! But soon after, Sahana-di says, the ladies came forward and she had also her turn to cook twice a week. But it seems, one day Sri Aurobindo remarked somewhat jokingly, "If Sahana goes on cooking in this way, for some time, the Ashram will go insolvent", by which he meant that she was a little more liberal than Dyuman in using ghee, oil and spices. I don't know what the effect of this remark was upon her.

But the food supplied at that time was really very fine. In the

morning – toast with a drink called Phosco, which is much better and more delicious than cocoa, and one or two bananas. At noon – rice or bread, *khichudi* some days, two curries, sometimes fried brinjals, and at times *payash* – and all these very well cooked. In the evening also good food. So, the menu was very fine. Even I, coming from outside, liked it very much, found it very tasty. But unfortunately, you see, a young man with vigorous health, the amount for me was rather... (*Laughter*) so, I used to always go half-fed, with only half a bowl of rice.

My niece also found it less, but still she tried to give her share to me, seeing that I was going hungry! Nowadays ladies don't eat much, they say they want to keep their figure!... I may be mistaken... But at that time there was no such fear! So, the sad part of it is that I remained one month, half-hungry. I thought perhaps this was the way of the *sadhaks* never to fill their stomach, to eat in such a way that you'd feel your stomach had not eaten anything. (*Laughter*) My digestive apparatus was very active, a lot of gastric juices, so I digested the food in no time. So, in the afternoon, I used to be hungry by four o'clock and had to wait till six o'clock, like a hungry wolf! In the morning also the same thing. Now you might ask: "Why didn't you buy something?"

I told you, it was not allowed to buy anything from the bazaar, or from hotels or shops. Then, incidentally I mentioned casually about this meagre quantity of food, of my sorrow, to a friend and he said, "Why? Why do you get a small quantity? We get as much as we like. Why don't you write a note to give you more rice?"

Well, I felt some hesitation. I, a newcomer, this is Sri Aurobindo's yogic Ashram, how can I ask for more? (*Laughter*) But I had to put my shame into my pocket because this person (*showing the stomach*) was getting more and more insistent and clamorous. So, I wrote a note:

Please do give us some more rice, if possible.

No reply! (*Laughter*) God knows whether it had gone to the right quarter! More than once I had to write the note, but everytime I was cheated by luck. So, I remained hungry... You can understand what happened at night – midnight, one o'clock, I felt hungry, drank some water. (*Laughter*) This actually happened, I tell you.

One day our new friend Arjava, whose English name was Chadwick, gave me or presented us some butter. He said, “You can take this. I don’t need it because I have plenty of it.”

He insisted so much that we had to accept it. But butter with what? (*Laughter*) We were not those creatures who can simply swallow butter! So, that was my personal flavour. Here too, when I came back in 1933, a big change had come in the Dining Room: *payash* had gone, *khichudi* had gone, brinjal had gone, and all these were replaced by something like what we have today. Not in the Corner House! But, I believe all this *payash*, etc. took rebirth in the Corner House! (*Laughter*) And our kitchen remained OK means “old kitchen” (*Laughter*) in both the senses! But there had been a lot of protest, a lot of dissatisfaction and complaint about this food business since 1933 or even earlier, and that there have been attempts at improvement now and then.

Dyuman admirably solves the problem, as you see now. At that time it was difficult to solve. For one reason, the Gujaratis had one taste, the Bengalis had another, so he didn’t know whose taste to satisfy. It was a problem like Indira Gandhi in her home politics – whom to satisfy? Or as it was before her, it was her father’s problem – to satisfy which foreign power? So, you see now how the solution has come – we have no complaint. It satisfies the Gujaratis as well as the Bengalis, it satisfies or doesn’t satisfy anybody! (*Laughter*)

Now there is an interesting thing in our friend Narayan Prasad’s book – how the Mother used to take personal interest in this matter of food. I shall read out some extracts from here – the Mother is giving advice about cooking:

[*Life in Sri Aurobindo Ashram*]

A new turn was given to the kitchen service when two Gujarati girls gave themselves to the Mother and were prepared to take up the kitchen work.

After a time (1932) one of them began to ask how to cook certain dishes. To a certain question Sri Aurobindo replied on behalf of the Mother: ‘A sauce with saffron, coriander, cumin, black seeds as was written for the cabbage. If there are a few tomatoes to add in the sauce, it will be better.’

To another question: “*How to prepare this sauce, Mother?*”

**Sri Aurobindo:** Dissolve the rice flour in a small quantity of cold liquid.

Ladies, please remember that. (*Laughter*)

Add little by little hot milk, stirring all the time, bring to boiling point and then mix with the cooked greens and mashed potatoes...

So, you see how precise. This is to point out how the Mother had her eye on everything. –

Then Dyuman began buying food with Rs. 5/- a day... In order that everything might be done under the Mother's guidance. Dyuman began to report to her the day's working. Sadhaks were free to have as many slices of bread or bowls of rice as they liked but previous intimation had to be given of the quantity required for the day... These intimations, when signed by Sri Aurobindo, were acted upon.

... A sadhika who has had the good fortune to be here from the early age of 10..., said in the course of a talk about the Mother: 'She is my real Mother, I have no other to call my mother. The love I enjoy of the Mother, I have never enjoyed from my human mother. All I do is for the Mother, I do not do yoga nor bother to know about it.'

– that is bad (*Laughter*) –

'I look to Her for what she wants me to do. That is my Yoga.' This is the typical attitude of many Sadhaks towards work.

... One must bear in mind that nothing is imposed on us. 'I believe', repeats the Mother in one of her recent writings, 'more in the Power of the atmosphere and of the example than in any rigorous teaching. I rely more on the thing that awakes in the being by contagion than by a regulated, disciplined effort.'

... Perhaps after all something is preparing and one day it will leap forth outside. That is my hope.

– Very modest. The Mother says:

...In a general way my force is there constantly at work, constantly shifting the psychological elements of your being to put them in new relation, defining to yourself the different facets of your nature so that you may see what should be changed, developed, rejected.

Now, here are as illustrations, some answers of our children in the later days, they are very interesting:

On a Diwali day, when fireworks are the rage, a small boy of the kindergarten invited another of his age to such play. The latter said, "But Mother doesn't like it."

"Mother is not here now."

"She is everywhere and she sees everything."

And there rested the matter.

A *sadhak* playfully asked a small girl of under five, "Well, will you tell me how to meditate?"

"Yes", came the reply. "Sit down properly, not in a shuffling way, think of nothing, only call the Mother in silence. Every moment one is tested how far one is siding with the light of the truth or running counter to it."

"Once when a person passed some remark about the Ashram, a *sadhak* spoke something in the same vein. At once he heard a voice in his heart, in a challenging tone – 'You also speak like that?' Then and there he became conscious of his folly."

So, there are, here and there, many fine things. I think it's time now. Should I stop? One thing then. I finish with Sahana-di's reminiscences, something about the Mother's sitting, and her drive in the car, in the evening:

I told you She visited different *Sadhaks* on different days, and the Mother made it a point to visit Dilip-da's place every Sunday, since 1929. He came here a little before that. And there, there used to be a small assembly gathering consisting of one Miss Madeleine, who, it seems, was distantly related to a king

– Some third or fourth or fifth cousin to him, another couple

from America, Mr. and Mrs. McPheaters, Vaun and Janet or Shantimayi. Her name was naturally given by the Mother. And among the *sadhaks* and *sadhikas*: Nolini-da, Pavitra-da, Sahana-di and Dilip-da, of course. There the Mother used to talk on various topics.

It began with meditation on a particular theme, and Mother used to ask at the end of the meditation what the effect was – if they had received anything, etc. Then talks would go on and Shantimayi, the American lady, used to write down in shorthand, all the talks – which came out later in the form of *Conversations with the Mother*. The whole book in fifteen sittings, fifteen weeks, was composed, and came out for private circulation somewhere in 1931, and I told you how I received a copy most unexpectedly with blessings signed by Mother.

So this was about the sittings. And about the drive Sahana-di gives a fine account which I leave for the next day. Perhaps your Corner House is calling you!

### 6 May 1970

Well, I begin with an apology – I am feeling somewhat dry. That was my usual complaint to Sri Aurobindo, adding that there is no reason for it, then he would scowl by saying: “If there is no reason why should you feel dry?”

Well, the complaint is there, though no reason for it, or maybe either due to excessive heat or lack of some spiritual meat! I don’t know which. If you can help me in some way, young hearts, then perhaps the talk will be a bit interesting.

Now apropos of the two children’s spontaneous responses that I read out to you the other day from Narayan Prasad’s book, I came to know of a recent example. It concerns a boy of five or six who told his aunt, “If you feel like beating me, just think before doing it, and explain to me what you want me to do. Because if you beat me, God is within me everywhere and He will get hurt. Don’t you get hurt when somebody beats you?”

So, you see, a remarkable perception for such a little boy. I heard

the Mother said about him that he is very intelligent.

I heard the story of another boy last year, when his sister was drowned in the swimming pool. The whole family was very upset, as you can understand. This child remained very unperturbed and began to advise and console the whole family, "Why are you getting so upset? Her soul has gone to the Mother."

And I am sure many of you who have the unique opportunity of coming in close contact with these children of ours, hear many such examples of extraordinary perception and attitude. Some of us may brush them aside by saying, "These are nothing but mere imaginations of a child, he may be highly imaginative, that's all."

Bernard Shaw said, I've told you before, that it's through imagination that Gods speak to us – but it may be a Shavian stunt... Well, even to imagine things of that sort, to have such imagination and so vividly and spontaneously expressed, is something, I should say, very rare indeed. I'm quoting or echoing here Sri Aurobindo's words which have been uttered in another context, in relation to another child.

I shall tell you the story which happened in the early or mid-1930s, when I came here, about a girl of six or eight who came here for the first time with her parents. Her close relative was here, so perhaps drawn by him, the parents came with the child to visit the Ashram. The father was not much of a *bhakta* though he had some intellectual regard for Sri Aurobindo, he was not spiritual-minded at all. The mother was perhaps better.

I am keeping the identity a secret because of obvious reasons – the relative of this child, is very well-known.

Well, the girl was extremely pretty, but of a different sort – not of a flamboyant, glamorous type – she was very delicate, features very refined and extremely sweet, shy and modest in bearing. I suppose shyness and modesty enhance the beauty – very quiet indeed. In all her ways, in all her movements there was a fine delicacy which you would not expect in a girl of that age. By the way, she was the only child of her parents who were very rich and very well-placed in society – one of the aristocratic families of Bengal, very well-known. The girl was very different from her parents. Even at that age she had a fine and genuine call for spirituality, though she didn't know about it, it was intuitive.

There used to be Pranam at that time... And there were very few

children then naturally, three or four of that age. When she used to come, all of us would wait to see her do Pranam to the Mother – it was something so touching. And whatever things she possessed or whatever presents were given to her by her parents, she would bring all that to the Mother and place them in her lap. Her ornaments also she gave as an offering. The Mother was extremely... how shall I put it? ...If the Divine can be said to be so... fond of her.

They went back, and then there were two or three successive visits. I believe, in the interval the father passed away and the mother used to come with the child. Once the mother went away leaving the girl for a short while. I spoke to you about my niece who was here at that time, well for some reason the Mother gave the responsibility of the child to her. She was to look after her, she was to teach her, she was to be her companion. So, I came to know something about her through my niece.

This girl also had an extraordinary faculty of imagination – to use that much-abused term – she used to have visions and hear voices – something of the sort of Jeanne d'Arc's, if I may compare at all. She would speak of some of these visions to my niece and sometimes to her mother, perhaps. I remember one or two... When she went home from the Pranam or from some other place, she said that the Mother used to accompany her till her house. It seems also... she used to see some beings sitting in the palm tree during the Pranam.

These things were brushed aside by the elders, dubbing them, as it were, her fancies. Once I had an occasion to write to Sri Aurobindo about these visions, and reporting at the same time that the girl is being very much discouraged in this extraordinary faculty. Sri Aurobindo wrote back:

It is a pity that she is being discouraged because these are true things, and I hope they won't destroy this faculty by their adverse criticism.

Now what happened is this. In her mother's absence, the girl decided to stay on here. She was a minor, the Mother didn't object to it, allowing time to take its course, perhaps. And her mother also was not definitely told about the girl's decision. Somehow the thing went out and her mother got a fright – and a very unfortunate



thing happened. She had a distant relative here, who was a deputy and whom she informed about this, and he took upon himself the charge of “liberating” the girl from the “clutches” of the Ashram.

He filed a suit against the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, in the court, saying that they were trying to keep by force or persuasion, a minor girl here, with the intention of grabbing her property! So, such a false accusation was made. When she came to know about the false charges, and that she would have to forcibly leave the Ashram, she wept copiously! And the police came, I remember, to investigate, and at the end the girl had to go. That was the sad ending of her story.

So, you see, ladies and gentlemen, how some parents... Well...

Now, I wrote to Sri Aurobindo in this context:

She has been forcibly dragged away, is there a chance of her coming back and taking up spiritual life?

I don't remember whether I wrote it, or asked him during the talks. Perhaps, I wrote. Sri Aurobindo answered:

One can't say positively; if her soul needs some experience then she may not come back.

So, you see, it is a question of the soul's choice. Now she has taken up married life, and it seems she's thinking of paying a visit to the Ashram, but her mother, who is old and invalid, is keeping her tied down. She can't be left alone. So, this is how Fate works – how we can make or remake our fate, build it or destroy it, how others, our “wellwishers” or our parents, can be the instrument of that fate!

So, she was about ten years old when she went back from here, she was still devoted to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. A very remarkable incident was reported to us. I shall tell it to you. I told you they came from a very rich and aristocratic family. Once in their house there was a tea party. All the rich and well-known people had gathered there to take tea and waste time in gossip as they always do. Big doctors, lawyers and other officers were there. The mother and the child were naturally there.

Soon somebody set the ball rolling by talking about the Ashram, “The Ashram was not what it is today.” It came in for very strong

and vicious attacks, particularly in Bengal, in the cultured society. We don't know what harm we had done to them... But they were up against us. We didn't ask for a pie from them. People came, as Sri Aurobindo said, "I called nobody, but they came, stayed and went away."

And still people say, "Pondicherry Ashram is taking away all our people." It was because of her grudge. So, here in this party, they started talking in very bad spirit, all sorts of calumnies, ills, they didn't spare even the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. This girl was sitting all the while quietly, because she was just a minor, and all the others were her superiors – aged father, grandfather, highly placed. What could she do? At one moment, addressing the gentleman who was criticising the Ashram, she said, "Look here, if you utter another word against my Gurus, I'll give you such a slap that you will roll down the stairs!"

Everybody was dumbfounded, it came like a bolt from the blue. Not another word was uttered from any mouth! So, that was the spirit, that was the girl. We reported this to Sri Aurobindo. He enjoyed it very much and said, "She is an extraordinary girl!"

So, you see, ladies and gentlemen, these instances: the present ones, the old ones lead us to believe and hope for great things. The hope that the Mother is building up a new race to which many of you belong and some of you have been told that you are chosen. How much ground is being prepared slowly and unconsciously. I see the difference between our old generation and your young generation – what a vast difference. How much we had to fight for every inch of ground.

It was yesterday that I was looking again at my letters written to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and I came across one written in 1933, to him about the tug-of-war going on over tea-taking and not tea-taking! Yes, when I landed in Pondicherry in 1933 – you won't mind my self-confession and won't be affected by it I hope – I smoked the last cigar at the station and threw it away. I was not a heavy smoker, but all the same, I did smoke. So was the case with tea. For about seven or eight months I was a teetotaller, but after that the repression or suppression, whatever you like, began to rise from the subconscious. And there was a hankering for tea, not for smoking. A wrestle, a tussle was going on – particularly some friends were in the habit of drinking tea, I saw them and the

contagion spread! I wrote to Sri Aurobindo:

I have become a persistent tea-drinker, going against your instructions, though the mind does not see any harm from a cup of tea!

So, you see, finally I succumbed to it, the old habit established itself. Then Sri Aurobindo wrote back, yielding to my entreaty, perhaps:

You can take it. It is a question of self-mastery, that is all.

That was the answer! For every bit of weakness we had to struggle hard – either to conquer it or to have mastery over it. Now, I believe, most of you young people are free from such a passionate grip over life. You are enjoying things in a different way.

Well, now I shall relate to you another story – I am in a story mood today – of a *sadhika*. She came here somewhere in the 1940s, I believe, and decided to stay on. She had, from her childhood, some occult experiences, not necessarily spiritual in character, which showed that she was not destined for a common household life, though she did marry. Well, in Bengal or in India, I suppose young girls are helpless, so she had to marry. But fortunately or unfortunately the husband died (*Laughter*) and she was free. So, she came over here and the Mother gave her shelter. Here she had a dream-experience in which – you will see how – the Mother gives precise and detailed instructions. It is something like this. One night, the Mother visited her in her dream and said, “Come, I will show you your work.”

Then she led her along Dupleix Street towards the West – turned towards Ganapati House where there was the granary. The Mother took her in and said, “You see this machine. You have to guide it in this way, you have to sweep the place, clean these, etc.”

Then she took her to the terrace and said, “You see there are grains which you have to clean, dry and air, can you do it?”

“Yes, Mother, I can do.”

“You’ll have to drive away the crows.”

“Yes, Mother, I’ll do.”

She led her back to the Cocotier House, through the garden and there also was a sort of a store in which were grains. The Mother

repeated the same thing, “Will you be able to look after the work well? You’ll have to pour the grain in this machine’s hole and collect them into a sack.”

“Yes, Mother.”

Then she led her from beneath the Cotton tree to Aroumé House [the Dining Room] and there again on the terrace, the same story, and after that she brought her back, left her at her place and went away. Remember, friends, all this took place in a dream.

Next day, or two days after that, word came to her from Pavitra-da that the Mother had given her work in the granary. She was very much surprised, she hadn’t spoken of her dream to anybody. As she was a newcomer somebody took her to the place and showed her everything and she said, “Everything was familiar to me, I had seen it all in my dream.”

There you are, friends, a remarkable experience of how things can be done in dreams. There are some other experiences of hers, quite revealing too but I don’t need to tell you all those. Unfortunately, while I was doing medical work Mother didn’t come and give me any instructions in my dream, about medicines! Perhaps I was too... you understand... not receptive, perceptive, psychic like this *sadhika* – I was too much of a mentalised man, perhaps.

These are all diversions which lead us a little away from our talks... Now I shall take up Sahana-di’s saga. I told you the story of the Mother’s meeting with these people in Dilip Kumar Roy’s house. Next thing she writes about is her drive with the Mother, in the evening. The Mother used to take, turn by turn, the *sadhaks* and *sadhikas* at that time, to accompany her in her drive. In Sahana-di’s batch were Doraiswamy, Nolini-da, Arjava – Chadwick who was professor of philosophy at Lucknow before he came here – Dilip-da and Sahana-di. Once a week they went. Pavitra-da was the driver, to his left Doraiswamy sat, and in another car, a Fiat car – I have seen it – the others used to go, following the Mother.

Doraiswamy, a famous lawyer, perhaps some of you may know, has a fine story to tell, but that will come hereafter. By the way, I may tell you when we came here for the first visit and stayed here for a month, on our way back we had the privilege of staying at Doraiswamy’s place in Madras for a fortnight or so. He was very kind and hospitable – a very fine building he had. I had a fancy, it was not very genuine, forced to a certain extent, to find a job

in Madras, so that I would be able to keep close contact with the Ashram, at the same time. Doraiswamy was a very influential man, had a good practice, so he tried to secure for me a job, but failed. It was destined, or that I had no luck! So, that was the first occasion when I came to know him. Afterwards, we had seen quite a lot of him – a fine man indeed, very noble. I might, when I come back to my own saga, tell you something of what I have seen of him. How life changes, takes zigzag courses – unpredictable. One doesn't know what the mystery behind it is, what is moving us, which direction we are taking. Strange indeed is life. And one such case is Doraiswamy's. As I said, whatever turn he may have taken today, the man is essentially fine. We have deep respect for him. Whatever he used to earn, he used to offer generously to the Mother.

So, Sahana-di and the others used to follow the Mother in her drive to various places, very distant ones. She says:

At one place we used to get down, the Mother first, and She used to walk for some time, near about the place and we followed behind.

You can understand to walk with the Mother from behind, from side or even from a distance, is a rare privilege. The Mother used to take some white sweets – lozenges from France, which she gave to these people.

At that time, they would ask any question and She would reply. Sometimes She meditated with them in that calm, quiet and peaceful atmosphere.

One day it so happened that seeing us all there, a man from the village came over with some palm-fruits. You know them, they are very delicious when tender. So, the Mother asked us if we would like to have some. Everybody else said no, except Dilip-da and myself who expressed a desire to taste them. And we took one or two.

I remember, another day, we had gone to visit some place and we were sitting there comfortably when I saw an insect that was very queer, ugly, loathsome, and it was crawling slowly towards me.

You can imagine, ladies, what happened!

Then my whole mind went towards the insect, I forgot the Mother, forgot everything – the insect took possession of my mind. My intention was that if it came too near me I would get up and run away! But what I saw was that the Mother drew away the insect very calmly and quietly, without being in the least troubled or upset. She didn't like at all my being so perturbed over such a small thing; because you see, you know, fear of any sort is most unfavourable to sadhana – whether fear of man or animal or insects.

And Sri Aurobindo has written all fear must be cast away. To add to my comment on it, I find, don't know for what reason, our ladies – young and old – are very much afraid of cockroaches, silverfish and other insects. (*Laughter*) Very strange! I think it is their sensitiveness to beauty that makes them recoil from anything loathsome... Let us hope...

### 13 May 1970

In our talks, more than once, I have alluded to “my niece”, not “my nieces”, and it seems some of you have been very much intrigued by this frequent reference. You have been thinking, conjuring up all sorts of ideas, notions and fancies about it. It seems some of you have gone to the extent of thinking that due to my yogic confusion of worldly relations, or some senility coming up, I might be mistaking my cousin for my niece! And some others must be going a little further in this colourful imagination... Well then it's high time I think that I clear up the mystery forthwith before such speculations are abroad! There is not much of a mystery in it. Maybe you are labouring under the impression that nieces are younger than the uncle – it is so, my nieces are, but the simple fact is that this niece was the daughter of my stepsister<sup>59</sup>. At once, that

59. Nirodbaran's father had remarried after the death of his first wife. Nirodbaran was the son of the second wife and Jyotirmoyee's mother was the daughter

solves the mystery which is neither that of Agatha Christie nor of Sherlock Holmes, it is just a mare's nest that you have built up. So, that's all for the present.

Now we come to Sahana-di's account of the Ashram life of those days. In the reminiscences she now takes up the event of great mystic beauty and profound significance – it is about the New Year celebration that was, I think, observed since 1930. You have had some taste of it, those of you who have grown up now – young and old, just a pale cast of the old mystic beauty and significance. It continued for some years so that when I came in 1933 I had also the opportunity or privilege to participate in this celebration.

The account of it is somewhat like this in Sahana-di's own words. I am not giving my account. Hers is quite authentic. She says:

The Mother used to give us blessings on New Year's day after midnight. All of us used to assemble in the Meditation Hall below and in the courtyard. Most of us came much earlier than 12 o'clock. There was a fine silence, calmness among the *sadhaks* and *sadhikas*.

There were only grown-ups, no children. They were quite conscious of what they were waiting for, and the atmosphere helped them very much because it was midnight when all the world was under the shelter of sleep.

Then at the stroke of 12 we heard from Pavitra-da's room, the organ being played by the Mother – the pealing sound reverberating through the air and all of us quietly sat and listened to the music. And accompanying the music, the Mother's voice was heard. She used to sing in a very melodious, vibrant voice, as you can imagine. The atmosphere was surcharged with that vibration and all of us were in a sort of trance. Afterwards She used to give us Her blessings. She would come to the Darshan Room upstairs and in the middle where there is a sofa, She would sit there, exquisitely dressed. The whole room dark and by Her side – which side I don't remember, a dim red light with a shade over it, was burning.

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of the first wife. So, she was his niece, the daughter of his stepsister, but they were almost of the same age. Jyotirmoyee went to England to study Economics and Nirod-da was sent with her so that she would not be alone.

– as Milton says ‘dim religious light’.

So that created at once the atmosphere of mystic beauty as well as significance. Against that background when we went to do Pranam to the Mother, She had a radiant smile on Her face – She looked like the Divine Bride! We would bow down at Her Feet, She would bless us, we would look into Her eyes, and She would look back, as you have done in your pranams. Such an enchanting smile that one’s being was filled up with joy, with peace, with beauty. Everything passing, mind you, very quietly indeed. Each one of us would go up the stairs one by one as silently as possible – no whispers, no talk, all indrawn. Then when the Pranam was over She would give each one of us either a bar of chocolate or an orange. Some of us would offer in our turn, something to the Mother – incense sticks, biscuits, fruits, etc. It would go on for more than two or three hours.

When I came, there was quite a big number, about 200 or so, so if each one of us took at least two or three minutes you can see how many hours it must have lasted.

The atmosphere would be superb if the New Year’s day fell on a moonlit night.

– Particularly my poetic soul would have come to the front!

And after our turn most of us would remain in the courtyard quietly sitting, and wouldn’t retire to our rooms till four or five o’clock. So the whole night would pass wide awake – the memory of the Face, the memory of the Sound echoing in our consciousness somewhere. We would sometimes think whether these didn’t excel even the Darshan, the atmosphere being so fine and intense.

The Darshan was a little disturbed because so many people used to come from outside and there was such a big crowd, as you understand. And it was held during the day, so much of the night’s silence and mystic atmosphere was lost. But here everything was packed as it were. So, when she says,

We used to be transported to another world of light and beauty.



– it was very true.

Each one of us was at that time conscious of what we were seeking for, and all of us were grown-up – 30 and above, not 20 or below.

So, this was the Mother's unique way of observing the New Year's day. Always silence, quietness, stillness – no clamour, no noise as they do outside. I have seen to a certain extent how they observe New Year's day in other countries – dancing, singing, parties, only physical and vital joy.

As I said, this went on for some years. Afterwards only the music was played from Pavitra-da's room. But she used to come in the morning at 6 or 6.30 to give us blessings. She used to stand or sit in the passage at the head of the stairs and all of us would go, as some of you have done in 1940s or 1950s – and to each one she would give a bunch of 'New Birth' wishing 'Bonne Année', and we in turn wished her 'Bonne Année'. (*Laughter*) So, this was about the New Year – quite an unforgettable experience even today.

Next she takes up the episode of the Balcony Darshan – all of you have participated in it, it continued till 1961 or 1962 and you have seen in films the Mother's coming and going. Now, how it started she doesn't know, neither do I. It started in the middle of the 1930s, because I remember that I wrote to Sri Aurobindo – when I came a little closer to him – that if we began our day with the Mother's Darshan, I believe everything would go well with us. Whether they took my suggestion or from some other motive, the Mother started the Balcony Darshan, I cannot vouchsafe. But don't dismiss my idea that Sri Aurobindo would be likely to accept my suggestion! She had told us that they did accept suggestions. They see what the suggestions are, what their worth or value is, and accordingly take or reject.

On another occasion I remember, I came to know later on, that I was given the medical job in the Dispensary here, at the suggestion of somebody else, when the incumbent or the man in charge of the Dispensary had to leave for some reason. I was looking up my correspondence the other day... Sri Aurobindo wrote that they were wondering who could fill that gap. They had learnt that I was not very willing to take up my medical profession. So, in the beginning

they did not approach me, lest I should refuse at once saying: “No, thank you!” (*Laughter*)

So, they are very sensitive like us human beings. But as I said somebody told me, “When in this predicament there was nobody to fill this place, I suggested your name, ‘Why not Nirod?’”

So, you see, they acted upon that suggestion. And there are many other instances when the Divine has accepted suggestions from human beings, and even from Nirod!

About the Balcony Darshan then, ... whatever may be the genesis, it started. Sahana-di writes that one day the Mother came in the morning at about six or half past six, and stood on the balcony. There was nobody because nobody knew about it. That is the Mother’s way: she does not advertise, she does not put up a notice on the board! You have to be open, you have to be alert, you have to be vigilant. By the way, the word “open” is, it seems, the key word of our Yoga. You must know how to open, if you can’t be open, you are closed, and you will remain closed till doomsday! (*Laughter*) In all the letters in the *Bases of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo has used this word “open”. You will read it so many times “open, open, open” – it will be ringing in your ears. Some sadhaks used to be very much concerned over the word and the problem: “How to open? I don’t know how to do it, I don’t know the meaning.”

But you have to be open, that’s all. So, that is the key word, I should say to Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga. If you don’t know how to open to the Mother’s influence, well, you keep closed till something touches you and you open like a shell. However, please don’t mind my diversions and digressions, from time to time.

What was I saying? ... Yes, she used to stand there all alone, either giving an inner call to the *sadhaks* to come, or as she says, “gazing towards the horizon”. In my words it would be, “gazing towards the two Infinities of the sea and sky”. So, the first day perhaps, nobody saw her and the second day she came and two or three persons saw her, and at once word went round that the Mother comes at 6 or 6.30 to the balcony, so the people started going – a crowd – and the Balcony Darshan started. As I said, all of you have seen in the documentary films of the Darshan, how all the *sadhaks* and *sadhikas* – concentrated, drawn inward, devoted, lifting their faces towards the Mother. And Mother’s look, hovering over everyone, resting upon each one almost, sweeping across everybody, goes to

the horizon to the infinite and comes back, rests a while, and the Infinite withdraws slowly, as you have seen, backwards in the finite room of Pavitra-da. (*Laughter*) Yes, that reminds me... It seems sometimes Pavitra-da used to be caught napping when the Mother passed that way – A slumber used to seal his spirit [“A slumber did my Spirit Seal” by Wordsworth] – so the Mother would give him a good shake, “Pavitra! Pavitra! Réveillez-vous!”

That also used to happen. Another incident about this Balcony Darshan is very interesting, humorous, which we have witnessed in our own days, when we were serving Sri Aurobindo. I think I have recounted it in one manner or another in some talk.

The Mother made it a point to always come to the Balcony Darshan after having Sri Aurobindo’s *darshan*.

As far as I remember, the time was near about 6.30 and a little before that, naturally, the Mother came. It was at that time in the morning for Champaklal’s and my duty. Sri Aurobindo left us a strict injunction – perhaps the word ‘strict’ is rather misplaced. Sri Aurobindo could not be strict at all with us in anything, except with himself. So, I don’t know which word to use. In our Bengali parlance we use the word very commonly and loosely “*bolé-chhén*”<sup>60</sup> which will cover many sins, just as non-Bengalis taunt us by saying, “Yes, Bengalis eat rice, and eat water!”

So, *bolé-chhén* expresses all our ideas. Therefore I shall say, “Sri Aurobindo *bollén*”<sup>61</sup>, ‘You must wake me up before Mother comes, so that he could be ready to receive her.’

Poor Sri Aurobindo ... Sorry! (*Laughter*) It was in the early hours that he used to enjoy his sleep. The whole night perhaps he had been working, like the Mother. So, these one or two hours were the only ones in which he could get rest, but he told us very clearly, “Wake me up before Mother comes.”

Sometimes naturally he would wake up by himself and get ready sitting bolt upright to receive her. At other times he was fast asleep like a child. The time... I was there – six o’clock, ten past six, fifteen past six. The Mother would come any time. What to do? Should or I should I not wake him up? That was the problem. Sleeping in godly repose. How can you wake a child from his sleep, when he is

60. Literally it means “he has said”.

61. Sri Aurobindo said.

enjoying those last hours? But there was the order: “Wake me up!”

Sometimes I used to have friendly altercations with Champaklal. I as a man of science, obeying the letter of the law, was for waking him up. And Champaklal as a *bhakta*, obeying the spirit of the law, was for letting the Lord sleep! (*Laughter*)

So, sometimes the Mother would come, peep in... and go away... Never would she disturb him. If she was early she would come back again. If she found him still sleeping she would make a gesture as if to say, “No, don’t wake him.” Sometimes she would come after the Balcony Darshan. If meanwhile Sri Aurobindo woke up, with a start, he would say, “What’s the time?” (*Laughter*). Always the first thing he would ask was, “What’s the time?”

If we said, “Half past six”, then he would ask, “Oh, Mother has gone to the balcony!”

At times he would wake up just in the nick of time and sit up like that, and we would rush and make him sit up (*Laughter*) and the Mother would come in with a broad smile to greet him, and he with just a pleasant smile (*Laughter*), but that pleasant smile you can understand full of... – ladies will understand! (*Laughter*)

Sometimes when Champaklal was absent I used to devise all sorts of ways and means, make fictitious sounds (*Laughter*) to wake him up. And at times I did succeed: either coughing or tapping on the table. Then he would wake up, “What’s the time? Ah! I must get up.”

So, these were some devices and tricks that I used to employ on the Divine in order to wake him up and receive the Divine, no self-interest! (*Laughter*) Well, this was our experience – Balcony Darshan experience with Sri Aurobindo.

I have heard that some people of the young generation, when the Mother came to the Balcony and we had her physical Darshan, they were enjoying seeing her in dreams – may not be true!

Then there was another interesting phenomenon that took place during this Balcony Darshan. Just as human beings took part in the Darshan, getting her blessings, some animals also used to come. Some bullocks and cows. And you know, our friend Jalad used to bring his “*balad*” (cattle) (*Laughter*) for the Darshan. I know it happened, so I enquired about the fact how it happened. It seems one of the bulls or bullocks died due to some disease and the Mother asked Jalad to bring them all in the morning so that she could see

them. So, he brought quite a herd of them every morning. But there was also the cow that he used to bring, which had a beautiful calf. Somehow word went round that it was Sri Aurobindo's cow (*Laughter*), because he used to drink her milk. So, we all became fond of the cow and the calf. We used to caress them, and they, you understand, enjoyed the attention. But later on we saw that Sri Aurobindo didn't touch a drop of milk (*Laughter*) but I suppose from milk some other preparations were made and he would take those. Well, the cow was known as Sri Aurobindo's cow.

These were some of the things Sahana-di has written. Now about correspondence. It seems to have started somewhere in 1930. I believe that since the *sadhana* had come down to the subconscious, a lot of troubles and difficulties were rising – the mud was coming up. And the *sadhaks* and *sadhikas* didn't know how to deal with these, so the Mother and Sri Aurobindo felt the necessity of this communication in written form from those who felt the need for it.

So, in other words, they wrote about their *sadhana* and to some, the Mother would reply, to others Sri Aurobindo replied on behalf of the Mother, but always, it seems, on matters of *sadhana*, consulting the Mother.

Everybody was not obliged to write, but some were, as in the case of Sahana-di. Sri Aurobindo wrote to her:

It is absolutely necessary to write daily.

Mark the adverb "absolutely". So, there might have been others too who had to write daily.

I told you how I also had the opportunity of getting a reply from Sri Aurobindo, in 1930, when I was just a casual visitor.

Sahana-di writes that everything, good or bad, had to be written – a frank opening, no concealing, no hide-and-seek, so there lay the great test of sincerity. Some wrong movement, "No, no, what's the use of writing this?"

So, you play with your own conscience, "It's a small thing after all, why should I write?"

All these ploys and tricks of our being were, at that time, very finely observed – sometimes exposed, sometimes kept back – self-deception. The mind used to try to conceal wrong movements or utter half-truths or minimise the commission of guilt – all these were at play. Sahana-di writes:

One day I didn't feel at all like writing, so I wrote it to Sri Aurobindo.

We used to write in notebooks with a cover on them.

So, when the notebook came back the next day, against that writing no other answer but three big exclamation marks. And I didn't know whether to laugh or to weep. What was the meaning?

And that was typical of Sri Aurobindo: either an exclamation mark, or an interrogation mark, or "eh", or "ah", or "I see" (*Laughter*) – very eloquent.

Then, another day it seems ... please don't tell her that I am telling you all these stories, though they have been made public (*Laughter*)... So, one day she fell a prey to a violent greed or to use your jargon "terrific greed". It simply possessed her. Greed of what? She says to take some eggs, some *chingdi mächh* [prawns] and some sardines. So, she wrote to the Mother:

An overwhelming greed has taken possession of me. Please give me permission to enjoy them for once, giving me at the same time your protection, (*Laughter*) or remove this desire from me.

So, she was very frank. Then the next day Sri Aurobindo's answer came in these words:

Certainly not! You can eat up your desire. (*Laughter*)

That is the only fish or flesh that can be given to you! It is only an old *sanskara* rising from the subconscious – these things have never to be indulged in, they rise in order to be dismissed.

This was in 1933. So, there you are, see what a difference now – Corner House, Ganpatram (Cottage Restaurant), home-cooking. How free we have become from such gripping desires – I hope so, at least! I have told you about my tussle-wrestle with a small cup of tea, how I felt so guilty about it, and now I can swallow ten cups without feeling the least compunction. I have become so free inwardly! (*Laughter*) But she says, the wonder of it is that:

As soon as I received the letter all my desire left me. I felt an immense joy filling up my whole being.

So, these are her accounts, there are one or two other interesting things. I shall read one which will be interesting for some of you, at least for those who are musicians. You know she is a great musician. This is an actual fact that happened in 1931. She writes to the Mother,

It was about 7 o'clock in the evening, I was all alone on the terrace singing a song by Kabir...

– you know the mystic songs –

... with the intention of singing this song to you on Friday.

There used to be all these sittings before the Mother – Dilip-da and Sahana-di used to sing – So, she was practising.

As I was going on singing absorbed, as I used to be very often, there was a descent of Peace, and I had various other experiences, and felt as if I were just an instrument, nothing more. I forgot my personality, my identity and was an instrument in the hand of the Divine. And the whole inner movement expressed itself through music. I felt that some power was descending into me and at the same time the volume of my voice was increasing. Then all those variations in the tune, improvisations as they are called without any conscious effort, or attempt, came most spontaneously. Then lastly, to make it short, not only the increase of volume or pitch but I heard very clearly another voice expressing itself through my voice.

That means another voice singing through her.

And it was bursting out, I was at a loss, I almost felt on the point of losing my inner consciousness.

Then she wrote the whole experience to the Mother, and Sri Aurobindo wrote back:

Yes, it was quite right and a very high experience.

Then she writes,

Whenever I used to sing all alone sitting on the terrace, I felt so different from singing anywhere else.

Then she wrote back asking for an explanation. Sri Aurobindo replied:

You have seen very accurately the reason for the difference between your singing on the roof and your singing elsewhere, as you have yourself said, lies in the difference of consciousness. But that is no reason why you should not sing elsewhere.

There lies the beauty. It won't do to remain shut up and enjoy your own songs. You must give enjoyment to others as well, and conquer the situation and the circumstances.

### 20 May 1970

I shall start by reading – I mean translating – the dream-experience of the *sadhika* about whom I have already given you some intimation. There is a very fine experience, I think it would be well for you to know about such things:

A dark night. I was deeply asleep, somebody came and called me from behind, in a very sweet voice: 'Come, I shall take you somewhere for a walk.' It was a woman's voice. I wasn't very willing to go, and said 'No'. But again with the same sweetness and affection she said, 'It is a very fine place, you have never seen the like of it, come, you'll have no trouble. I shall lead you.' Well her insistence, eagerness and her sweet persuasive voice made me accompany her. She caught hold of me from behind, with both her hands and ferried me across the void. I couldn't see her face. This unknown 'angel'-'pari' – carried me along and said, 'I'll show you how man dies'. We entered a house – a man was lying in his bed, another man was standing by the side of his head – a luminous figure. He had a cage of gold in his hand, symptoms of death were



evident on the face of the first man. Soon after a human figure no bigger than the thumb, came out of his body; the luminous man stretched his hands out and this subtle body slowly came to rest upon his hands. He took his body and placed it before the cage. Entering into it, the figure began to walk about, and I saw within many other such figures. And all of a sudden the luminous Purusha disappeared from sight.

Then the messenger took me up and we began to fly till we came to a deep blue place. All the houses were as transparent as crystal. We saw many small beings wandering like butterflies. Their bodies were multicoloured and transparent. I asked my companion, 'Where have you brought me? Who are these beings?' The messenger replied, '*Jivas* – human beings or those who have life, after their death, come here. They rest for a while, then go to other worlds.' Then she began to carry me still higher through the empty space. Now we came to a much more beautiful place: a bright blue colour covered everything; and it was brighter and more charming than the first one. The beings of this world were all luminous and free. I asked what this place was. The reply was: 'After having rested on the first plane, the *jivas* come to this world.'

We resumed our journey, went higher and higher and came to a world quite different.... It was not of light at all, but of intense darkness, consolidated darkness, kingdom of darkness. The gaze came back baffled from all directions and hideous, pitiable and heart-rending cries came out from the bosom of that darkness. Very much frightened, trembling, in a shaky voice I asked, 'What a hideous place this is, where have you brought me?' – 'Well,' she said, 'you say that when one commits a sin or crimes, there is punishment, suffering, he is sent to hell – this is it.' Then I told her in a spirited voice, 'Take me away, take me away from here; it's terrible, I feel suffocated!' So, we left the place and continued our journey. Then as we passed through the blue sky, the healthy atmosphere made me forget the ugly, loathesome scene left a while ago. We were going further and further, and it was a pilgrimage full of joy and beauty.

Then from far came to our sight many palaces which were quite different from those of our world: no grossness, no crudeness – subtle, bright and splendid. We entered into one – I cannot describe the beauty, the calm and coolness of the atmosphere. Then we saw an office where many workers were

busy working without any sound. They all had a human figure, but full of light, radiant. The houses were of light, chairs were of light and tables too. Everything was full of light. Then she took me to another place, spoke to some people there: they exchanged some words – but I couldn't understand a thing. They offered me something to eat, the like of which I have never tasted in my life. It was, very probably, something of the sort of nectar. I felt very blissful and had no feeling to drink anything else, not even water, because my whole body was full of peace and coolness.

She at once lifted me up and we started again our journey, but this time back to our native world. Gradually the familiar trees, houses came into sight and we came back to our place. So long I was not aware of myself at all. All of a sudden I became aware, looked at my body and cried out, 'What is this? I have no clothes on, where have I left them?' I felt ashamed, shy, I looked for my unknown, unfamiliar friend but she had vanished!

So, you see, friends, there is a ring of authenticity here. It's not for me to explain all these various places of the higher worlds – they are very vivid as you see. She had this dream, I think, just a little before passing away from this world of ours. Naturally, that must have been an easy passage after having had the vision of these luminous worlds – except the unluminous one.

Now we come back to Sahana-di's reminiscences. You remember we ended our talk last time with her extraordinary experience during singing. All of you understand that it's a very significant and encouraging experience even. The significance lies in this that it's not restricted to singing alone, but happens in every activity, if properly done – I mean done with the right attitude. We come to feel that there's a great power that takes up our activity – we are used as instruments and the whole thing is done by the power itself. Therefore, I believe, the work will be flawless, more perfect. Whether we are scientists or artists, teachers or students, it doesn't matter at all. Certainly if we persist in doing all that we do, in the right attitude, one day we shall feel that we are '*nimitta matra*', simply instruments, that's the message, that's the significance we read in this extraordinary experience which, as Sri Aurobindo himself has said, is a high experience. I am sure some of you here, at one

time or another, have felt something coming down, taking possession of you and doing whatever work you are doing. It is that power, again and again, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have impressed upon us and that is the very essence of yogic experience.

In one of my letters – I remembered just now – Sri Aurobindo had said:

When all this purification will be done, the question will remain of bringing down the gods into our adharas.

The letter was written at the beginning – when I had come. I couldn't catch the full significance of it, so I lost a chance of making him say a little more (*Laughter*). Whether he would have told it or not I don't know, but he gave me an opening to which my closed brain didn't accept all at once! That, I believe, was what the Mother was trying to do in the Golden Period, and the consequences were not at all happy. But I believe the result will be happy when one day the *adharas* will be completely ready – the descent – as he says, anticipates, of the gods or their powers into them and possession of them as instruments. So, *pangum langhayate girim* [makes the lame man cross mountains] is not a myth, my friends, don't judge these things by appearance. Sahana-di had very high experiences, if I may speak about them, at the very beginning of her *sadhana*. When we people were lamenting and wallowing in doubt and despair, she was soaring on wings of faith and experience.

For myself, when I was writing poetry, I didn't feel actually that some power had taken possession of me – even if it had, I would have doubted it, I suppose, because as Sri Aurobindo says, I was a “doubting Thomas”! (*Laughter*) But for me, Nirod, to write the stuff that I have written, without understanding a bit of it, even I couldn't doubt that it was not my power which was at work. So, that gave me some faith, some hope that such things are possible. When Dilip Kumar Roy used to sing – he was another doubter – we heard that the gods he invoked – Krishna or Shiva, used to be present during his singing. But poor fellow, he didn't know anything about it though he used to sing inspired, with great élan and people used to be charmed, and much of it, as you can understand, was due to the influence of the presence of these gods, whom he

had the power to invoke, but without knowing.

Now Sahana-di relates here her dream-experience, like the earlier ones, which again, I think will be profitable to you.

Now here I shall read an extract from my correspondence, before reading out Sahana-di's experiences:

[*Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*]

*Myself: One sees many defects and difficulties in the outer being. How can there be inner development as long as they are not removed? Sadhana must be much obstructed by them.*

Then Sri Aurobindo gives me a concrete instance of how the outer difficulties need not always be an obstruction:

...Y has also a day or two ago had the experience of the ascent above and of the wideness of peace and joy of the Infinite... Also the descent down to the Muladhara.

– I'm afraid the youngsters will not be able to catch the meaning of the tantric, yogic term "muladhara". In our medical terms it is the bottom of the spine.

She does not know the names or technicalities of these things, but her description which was minute and full of details was unmistakable. There are three or four others who have had this experience recently so that we may suppose...

– Sri Aurobindo's humour –

... the working of the Force is not altogether in vain, as his experience is a very big affair and is supposed to be, if stabilised, the summit of the old Yogas. For us it is only a beginning of spiritual transformation. I have said this though it is personal, so that you may understand that outside defects and obstacles in the nature or the appearance of un-yogicness does not necessarily mean that a person can do or is doing more sadhana.

– From there let's not jump to the other conclusions! (*Laughter*)  
Then I ask:

*I want to know the secret of it. Is she all the time thinking of*

*the Mother within? I think she has a great love for the Mother. Is that the secret?*

Then Sri Aurobindo:

Partly. She got hold of the sadhana by the right end in her mind and applied it.

– She did not take pride in doubting and using the intellect for the purpose, was sensible enough to see that was not what she came here for. She did not want to question everything and be satisfied in her limited intellect before she took the way of spiritual self-giving and inner experience.

There you are... “limited, doubting that intellect,”... A dig at our male pride! So, this was she about whom I talked to you just now – Sahana-di. How far Sri Aurobindo goes you can see.

I shall read another one. This was in 1937:

*Myself: Some people have looked down upon the sadhaks here, saying that they would count for nothing in the world outside.*

– I think some of us still do...

**Sri Aurobindo:** The quality of the sadhaks is so low? I should say there is a considerable amount of ability and capacity in the Asram. Only the standard demanded is higher than outside even in spiritual matters. There are half a dozen people here perhaps who live in the Brahman consciousness – outside they would make a big noise and be considered as great Yogis – here, their condition is not known and in the Yoga it is regarded not as siddhi but only as a beginning.

– So, please do not think of us in small terms! (*Laughter*) Then here [*Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*]:

**Sri Aurobindo:** Allow me to point out that here there are any number of people who have had experiences which could be highly prized outside. There are even one or two who have had the Brahman realisation in a single year. But it is the fashion here to shout and despair and say we have got nothing and no-

body can get anything in this Yoga. I believe the pretensions of the Pondicherry sadhaks to have an easy and jolly canter to the goal or else think themselves baffled martyrs would be stared at with surprise in any other Asram. (*Laughter*)

So, ladies and gentlemen, think of our Ashram and us in a little more kindly manner. Don't judge us by our faults! I told you about Sahana-di, that she had caught, in the early days of her *sadhana*, many big fishes, though you people don't know her. She is hiding her light under some bushel, which you don't see. You are caught by the brilliance of the VIPs! She has been here since 1928 – just think of it, and today is 1970. So many years! And she has not budged a single step from this place. Not to your Red Hills, not even to your Lake. She was invited to go to Madras to record her music, her voice. She refused. She was invited to go to Calcutta – nothing doing. So, she has not passed a single night out of the Ashram atmosphere. Then just think where she got all this strength from. Though she looks a bit frail, shaky, there is solid stuff inside. She was a brilliant musician in Calcutta, as you know, but she hadn't done any yoga. She came here and took her plunge at once, as I will show you just now, how she took *sadhana* by “the right end”, as Sri Aurobindo says.

Only here these things don't count much because Sri Aurobindo again and again is harping on one thing: the blessed transformation or the transformation of the blessed nature which refuses to be transformed. Now let me read one or two of her experiences, but not the highest ones, because it was the beginning. – It's a dream-experience:

I was looking at the sea from inside my room. It began to come nearer and nearer and began to swell and swell and became immense – the waves of the size of mountains. It appeared that at any moment it would burst and sweep away the whole town, including my little house. And we would be all carried away by the flood. But in spite of this danger which was so imminent, I had no fear at all, I was not in the least perturbed. I felt, as it were, I was under the safe protection of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. So, with a fearless heart I was looking. Then I saw the sea has burst, everything has been flooded – water, water everywhere... And part of my

house has broken down. But I was completely detached. I was witnessing the scene calmly and quietly. Then when the flood had stopped, water had ebbed away, I came out of my house and went round; all of a sudden I saw in a part of the broken house, some new house has been built from within. I was very much surprised. How is it, I hadn't noticed it so long? And also under the cover of the old house a new one is being constructed, about which I knew nothing. Then as I was looking at it, I felt that the new house has entered into the old house, and it has come up. Then the significance...

– perhaps some of you have got it, was clear to me.

I wrote it to the Mother. The old house was certainly the external being with its old nature. And from behind or from within this old nature, our new nature, the divine nature, the new consciousness was being built up. That was the significance I felt to be: the significance of the integral transformation of the ordinary human nature.

Then Sri Aurobindo wrote back:

Yes, it was a good symbolic dream and your interpretation seems to be correct, but for one detail, the sea cannot be the tide of vital distress, it must be the flood of the world forces.

Then the second experience:

Some of us were walking along the sea, but it was not the usual common sea we are familiar with, but something dreadful. The water was as dark as it could be and it was full of monstrous creatures: crocodiles, fish, etc. most of them were reptiles, huge and hideous. As far as the sight went, it was, as though there was no water, only these. But faraway I saw an island – a beautiful island where the Mother and Sri Aurobindo were living. I had to go there, but no way could be found. Dark, deep water inhabited by these monstrous creatures, life would be in great danger, if I tried to go. But I had to go. My companions had left me, and I was all alone. Then I jumped into the sea, began to paddle, began to swim, across the swarms of reptiles. My one aim, one purpose was to reach that island. Then when

I approached the island, my feet touched the ground and I felt very happy and began to walk. All of a sudden I saw Sri Aurobindo standing on the edge of the island with outstretched arms. As soon as I neared Him, He caught hold of me and lifted me up saying: "You have crossed." You can imagine how happy I felt when I heard Him saying that.

– Then Sahana-di says:

This is what the Mother and Sri Aurobindo call 'to take the plunge' – without looking right or left, without thinking, without considering the pros and cons. – To want Him and Him alone. Once you take that inevitable plunge, you can see what happens.

The next day I met the Mother and narrated the experience. She said this was not just a dream. And She said many other things which I won't say.

So, these are the two dreams which are symbolic and the meaning you can see is quite clear to us.

Then, thirdly... This is not an experience, but she tells about her sister's coming here... Her elder sister with her two sons Bula and Kunal. You know them, I suppose – particularly Bula, you cannot but know him. And she relates how the Mother got interested. A house was taken on lease on the seaside. One evening the Mother started on foot, from Dilip-da's place, Trésor House, to the seaside, followed by Sahana's sister's family. She went to visit them because they had prayed to her for her visit.

They stayed on and after three months when the time for their departure neared – somewhere in November, the Mother heard about it and said, "It is a pity that they are going away."

Then, well, pity or not, they had to go – the date was also fixed. Then again the Mother went to see them, she stood near the window, looked across at the sea and said, "It is better not to be on the sea now."

Well, her sister didn't know what to do: the date was fixed, people were expecting them. And here was the Mother's verdict! Then she said, "Go on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January."

Meanwhile, it was learnt that the house had to be vacated. So, the Mother brought all of them to lodge in our Ashram house. But



what happened a few days before they were to go? There was a terrible cyclone. Somewhere around that time, and in July, there used to be cyclones. I have seen two or three terrible ones. The ravage of one of the cyclones you still have here: the remnant of the old pier. So, Sahana-di describes the ravage caused by the cyclone: houses fallen down, trees uprooted, roofs blown away, the windows broken etc.... She says she was in another place at that time, and wanted to go to see what was being done by the storm. But it was a very unwise step she took. As soon as she came out into the street the storm wanted to carry her away to another world. It was extremely difficult for her to take even one step forward. She was in her sari so you can understand what must have been her condition.

Later on we heard that during the storm Sri Aurobindo in his room was all absorbed, and knew nothing about the happenings!

So, they left on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January with the Mother's blessings. And then they came back some time later, to settle here for good. Well, what the Mother had said, "It's a pity", is exactly what happened.

Oh yes... After the storm, the next day... see the Mother's consideration... she sent Nolini-da and Amrita-da to enquire about how they were faring, their condition after the storm. Both had gone wrapped up in rugs.

That ends Sahana-di's story. Now I don't know what to begin next time, unless God helps me, but I have to help myself!

### 3 June 1970

I have chosen today's topic for obvious reasons. All of you – particularly the new generation – know how to laugh, some of you at times how to weep! And peals of laughter that come out, ring like chiming of bells in our old hearts. We feel for the moment, that we have become a little younger than what we are, reminding me of the two beautiful lines of Vaughan who says:

... feel through all this fleshly dress  
Bright shoots of everlastingness.

I am talking of Sri Aurobindo's humour which he has lavished upon me in his bounty. The reason is far to seek; it is one of those imponderables among the metaphysicians. Why such a man – descriptive adjectives may be used according to taste – has been so lavishly favoured by such humour? My friends, imaginative vision leads me to suspect that perhaps he, in his *trikāla drishti* [vision of Past, Present and Future] saw that I would be a teacher one day and come in contact with young hearts, and would be useful in distributing generously the Divine Prasad, and efface the solemn, austere, grand and aloof Sri Aurobindo known to many of us. But there was an immediate reason, I believe. Each morning when the Divine post carrying my two notebooks – one personal, another medical – used to come, perfumed with the fragrance of Divine humour, you might imagine how I felt. Alone in the Dispensary, in the midst of the stinking smell of Lysol, iodine and what not – please don't tell it to Nripen-da, friends! – I used to feel wretched. So, this humour acted like leaven. But I couldn't quite share the joy. I read and read, laughed and laughed, finding nobody to share my joy with. Sometimes my old colleague Dr. Becharlal used to be there and out of sheer necessity of expressing my joy, I would read here and there. I don't know how far he understood but he used to be very happy and when he was happy tears rolled down his cheeks and he was on the point of embracing me! (*Laughter*)

But about the rest, all were deeply steeped in their *sadhana*, so deeply as not to care for this external jollity. Only Dilip-da and myself were the dark and brown sheep, who used to roll with laughter, swim and bathe in this *Alakānanda* [river of heavenly bliss] of the Divine humour.

The purpose was that the Man of Sorrows who used to visit me too often, when he saw that I was in such fine humour, had to depart! So, my *sadhana*, if I did anything at all, was only remembering the jokes of Sri Aurobindo. That is how he made me do the *sadhana* apart from many other things he did or perhaps tried to do and failed! The Divine, as you know, has many purposes to one single action. It's a multipurpose Divine. Other benefits spiritual and physical, etc. would be too long to enumerate, and you are getting impatient to come to the matter itself.

Well, these jokes I'm going to read out to you just now, I term as “medical humour”, because they were part of my medical

correspondence. Some of them have been published, many others not. Reason again is obvious: if some of the patients hear about being frowned upon, may not like it. However when some friends of mine from time to time used to ask me, "Have you exhausted your stock? Is there nothing else?"

I said with a pitiful smile (if I'm capable of it!), "No, my friends, I have exhausted all."

Till lately I, along with that friend of mine (Sudha), discovered that there was a lot still to be copied, to be enjoyed. While she was copying, she forgot to copy and began to laugh and laugh, I had to pull her up! Then you will mark that some humour was private, naturally, but I disclose it to you today, taking upon my head the sin of violation just for the reason that Arindam told about in his story when he spoke to you last week. I hope the Guru will forgive me for my commission. But you will note when I read these that his humour extends from the most serious to trivial matters. In every little thing he found and created *rasa*, to quote my friend Poojalal's 4 lines from the poem on the Samadhi published in *Mother India*, May 1970:

Thou art the conscious core of slumberous clay,  
The highest height inclined to the lowest layer,  
The everlasting dark – dissolving day,  
Love leniently responsive to our prayer!

So, there you are, he was *rasovai sah*, he is verily the delight. That is why he found joy, I suppose, in every little thing and he was always on the lookout to catch me on my wrong foot, neither did I spare him! (*Laughter*) but as you can imagine, I was always worsted. So, what a game we played, is beyond imagination! But when I came in personal contact with him, face to face with him, I missed that humour which he had lavishly dealt out to me. He was humorous, but those of you who have read the *Talks*, will see what a difference there is. Naturally, when you are in the company of four or five you can't be so intimate. Or, I don't know... there are some people who are very free with their pen but not so much with their speech.

It is interesting to note that one day the Mother, on entering Sri Aurobindo's room, saw a vision of Sri Aurobindo and myself playing with each other like two babies, on his bed.

This was my introduction – a bit long – now I come to the subject. How I came to occupy that unpleasant position. But at the same time that unpleasant job – medical profession – led me to have the Divine profession – it was a gate of entry, we will need a little bit of explanation. Here, some of you may have read the letter, but I may read it again because Sri Aurobindo's language and humour are always fresh and of course inimitable.

Sri Aurobindo: I was under the impression that you were not enthusiastic over medicine or at least over the practice of it.

The reference here... In one of my moods, I don't know now what mood exactly, I wrote to him that I didn't know the purpose of my being in the carpentry godown, and I had spent Rs. 20,000 in England to have a medical education. So, he says:

If we had known that you were anxious to justify the 20,000 we would have utilised you in that direction. Are you serious about it? Well, Mother had thought of you when we wanted somebody to fill up the hole left by the erratic D.S. and we also don't know what we shall do when B goes. We had rejected the idea because we thought you might not only be not enthusiastic but the reverse of enthusiastic about your being a medical gent. When however you wrote so lovingly and hungrily about the 20,000 (*Laughter*), I rubbed my eyes and thought, 'Well, well, here's a chance!...'

That's all. (*Laughter*)

So, I wrote to him:

*Now that I am in charge of the Dispensary I feel afraid about my prestige. People expect great things from an England-returned doctor (who, I may confide in you, hasn't had enough time for experience). If you can't save my prestige, save at least my face. (Laughter)*

Sri Aurobindo: People are exceedingly silly – but I suppose they can't help themselves. The more I observe humanity, the more that forces itself upon me – the abysses of silliness of which its mind is capable.

The prestige I can't guarantee, but hope to save something of the face. (*Laughter*)

Now please give me some time to consult my notes, they are all scattered!

Just on the eve of taking up the Dispensary work, he writes offering me the job – in 1935. I came in 1933. I knocked about here and there and on many doors before accepting this job.... To come to serious matters – mark the tone –

What would you say if the Mother actually proposed to you to exchange the timber-trade for medicine? E.g. (1) to transfer your worldly and unworldly goods and your learned noble person to the Dispensary and take physical charge of keeping it in order. (2) to help Becharlal in ministering to the physical ills of the sadhaks – with the provision that you may have hereafter to take the main charge, if he takes a trip to Gujarat.

The Mother is rather anxious that you should take up this work; she had the idea, as I told you, when D.S. broke down (which was a pity because he was in many respects the ideal man for the charge), but she did not propose it because she was not sure you would like it. As yet the suggestion is confidential, for pending your answer, we have said nothing to Becharlal.

Now I shall plunge into the humour. I told you that it starts from the most trivial things to the most serious, so, I'll start with the trivial.

In the medical report I wrote Achanchar instead of Achanchal. Sri Aurobindo commented:

Is this r or l? If r, please transform it into l. (*Laughter*)

**Myself:** *If it is l and not r why do they pronounce Achanchar? Is it like our saying 'ab' instead of 'am'? Oh, the very word 'am' takes you, Sir, to the land of...!*

**Sri Aurobindo:** God knows! I have not heard their pronunciation. But it is l alright. r and l are however phonetically interchangeable since the beginnings of human speech.

– So, from where to what depths he comes.

Once I wrote the patient's name as "Ambala" instead of Ambalal, then Sri Aurobindo wrote back:

I say! This is the name of a town not of a person. (*Laughter*)

Then about another patient, I wrote:

*... Surely yogis ought to be able to try to bear a little suffering and you ought to encourage or allow it, Sir!*

**Sri Aurobindo:** She is not that kind of yogi. She would only scream and get as wild as Durvasa<sup>62</sup> (*Laughter*) and stop going to the dispensary – apart from copious weeping, etc. (*Laughter*)

Then this is a bit more medical. Phosphates are very important ingredients of good health so when drained out you understand what happens... I wrote:

*Passing excessive phosphate, shall we make a microscopic exam?*

**Sri Aurobindo:** Do you want to microscope him out of existence? (*Laughter*) the loss of phosphate I suppose explains his weakness.

**Myself:** *Shall we then turn a deaf ear to his complaints?*

**Sri Aurobindo:** What complaints? Phosphates? Tell him to learn to economise his phosphates instead of squandering them and he will become strong and healthy as a tiger. (*Laughter*)

Another patient had a disease with a Latin name “phimosis”. Sri Aurobindo was ignorant of it, and asked:

What kind of medical animal is this? (*Laughter*)

Then I explained to him that it’s chronic difficulty with passing of urine. Then Sri Aurobindo wrote:

My dear sir, if you clap a word like that on an illness, do you think it is easy for the patient to recover? (*Laughter*)

Now, I hope the ladies won’t mind it!

**Myself:** *A doctor says that one has to be firm, stern and hard with women. They may not like it superficially, but they*

62. A Rishi notorious for his anger.

*enjoy it and stick to the doctor who gives them hard knocks. Cave-man spirit? (Laughter)*

**Sri Aurobindo:** He must have been a he-man. She-women enjoy it from he-men, but all women are not she-women and all men are not he-men. Moreover there is an art as well as a nature in that kind of thing which you lack. *(Laughter)*

**Myself:** *Dr R is no less a firebrand than myself, but women seem to like him.*

**Sri Aurobindo:** He's a he-man. Even so, the women here have ended by saying 'No more of R!'

– And about me he writes:

Well, I don't know why, but you have the reputation of being a fierce and firebrand doctor who considers it a crime for patients to have an illness. *(Laughter)*

I'm sure you will agree that I have changed a lot! *(Laughter)* A Supramental change! He continues:

You may be right but Tradition demands that a doctor should be soft like butter, soothing like treacle, sweet like sugar and jolly like jam. So! *(Laughter)*

– Then I write back:

*If the tradition demands, we shall try to be softer than butter, but we may be too tempting and evoke a response from the patients' palate for making delicious toast. Who will save us then? (Laughter)*

**Sri Aurobindo:** Of course, if you are too too sweet. You must draw the line somewhere. *(Laughter)*

I used to have trouble with my nose. It took to the bad habit of boiling, and nose boil, toothache, ear pain, all of you know, my friends – even the philosophers can't bear them. *(Laughter)* I was neither a philosopher nor a yogi, so nose boil used to make me constantly boil and complain to the Lord about it.

**Myself:** *Nose boil boiling down, headache, fever too. Feeling fed up, really!*

**Sri Aurobindo:** Cellular bolshevism probably. *(Laughter)*

**Myself:** *What's this "cellular bolshevism"?*

**Sri Aurobindo:** Bolshevism of the cells surging up against the Tsar (yourself). Also the Bolsheviks carry on their propaganda by creating communistic "cells" everywhere, (*Laughter*) in the army, in industries, etc. You don't seem to be very up in contemporary history. (*Laughter*)

Then we were consulting – two doctors, about a patient, but consultation in order to disagree more than agree. (*Laughter*) That adage, you know – "doctors differ". So, I asked Sri Aurobindo:

*Have you asked R his opinion?*

**Sri Aurobindo:** Haven't asked him. Afraid of a resonant explanation which would leave me gobbrified and flabbergasted but no wiser than before. (*Laughter*)

There was the case of a sadhak who let out a terrifying scowl – the occasion I need not tell you just now and Sri Aurobindo reacted to it. So, I wrote to him:

*It seems, Sir, you gave a terrific shout to his scowl?*

**Sri Aurobindo:** It wasn't a scowl, even a thundering surrealist one – it was a tympanum-piercing howl – so one had to do something. (*Laughter*)

Then we made some chemical examination of a patient's specimens and gave him an explanation because he wanted to know everything in detail. He wouldn't be satisfied with a rough and ready sort of an explanation. There must be the detailed thoroughness. So, I explained:

*We examine chemically first a sample of urine, i.e. by chemical reagents, which is called qualitative test. You ought to know that from your English Public School Chemistry, Sir!*

**Sri Aurobindo:** Never learned a word of chemistry or any damned science in my school. My school, sir, was too aristocratic for such plebeian things. (*Laughter*)

**Myself:** *It is very strange your school had no chemistry, but for I.C.S you had no science? Perhaps these new-fangled things didn't come down then?*

**Sri Aurobindo:** It may have had in a corner, but I had nothing to do with such stuff. Certainly not in I.C.S – you can



choose your own subjects.

They were newfangled and not yet respectable. (*Laughter*)

I had an Englishman as patient. Somewhat neurotic. He used to grumble all the time before Sri Aurobindo and not before us though we were looking after him! I wrote to Sri Aurobindo:

*Why the devil does he write all these things to you? Are you prescribing or are we? (Laughter) And what the devil is the use of knowing the medicines and doses, pray? He could have asked me.*

**Sri Aurobindo:** Well, what about the free Englishman's right to grumble? This is not London and there is no "Times" to write to. So, he writes a letter to me instead of to the "Times". (*Laughter*)

Then I said:

*Surely there is a twist somewhere.*

**Sri Aurobindo:** There is always a twist, sir, always. (*Laughter*)

I was in a rage about this Englishman and said:

*I feel like tearing my hair.*

So, he says:

Don't. (*Laughter*) Losing one's hair is always a useless operation. Keep your hair on. (*Laughter*)

Then I wrote back:

*Only tell him, please, that he ought to let us know instead of sending a boy with an empty bottle, if he doesn't want to present his honourship here, or shall I tell him myself?*

**Sri Aurobindo:** Dear Sir, tell him yourself, tell him yourself. I will pat you on the back in silence from a safe distance. (*Laughter*)

**Myself:** *People say I am getting absolutely bald, Sir. Two things I feared – one a big tummy and another a smooth baldness. Couldn't be saved from one. If you can't grow new hair,*

*please help me to preserve the few I have, Sir.*

**Sri Aurobindo:** What one fears most is usually what happens. Even if there were no other disposition, the fear calls it in. Who knows, if you had not feared, you might have had the waist of a race-runner and the hair of Samson.

**Myself:** *I read in 'Conversations' that skin, hair and teeth are very near to Matter and so Spiritual Force takes a long time in acting on them. Is it true?*

**Sri Aurobindo:** Painfully true. (*Laughter*)

**Myself:** *Then I have no chance till Supermind descends?*

**Sri Aurobindo:** I suppose not. (*Laughter*) And who knows what fancies the Supramental may have. (*Laughter*)

There was a medicine, I don't know if it's in vogue now, which used to be known as 'Takadiastase'. So, I wrote if we should buy a bottle. He wrote back:

Buy the take-a-distaste and keep his liver quiet for God's sake. He shows signs of starting his lamentations again. The bottle to keep the baby quiet. (*Laughter*)

Then,

*Again blessed boil inside the left nostril – painful, feverish.  
A dose of Force please!*

'Dose' reminds me – one day I spelt it as d-o-z-e, then he wrote z instead of s of "dosing" and wrote:

This is a medical spelling! (*Laughter*)

I remember still, Manoj's father enjoyed the joke very much and told me, "So, you have written like that!" (*Laughter*)

I wrote to him:

*Again I have a blessed boil inside the left nostril – painful.  
I feel feverish. A dose of Force, please!*

Now look at his reply:

As the modernist poet says

Oh blessed blessed boil within the nostril,  
How with pure pleasure dost thou make thy boss thrill!

He sings of thee with sobbing trill and cross trill,  
O blessed, blessed boil within the nostril.

I hope this stotra (*Laughter*) will propitiate the boil and make it disappear, satisfied. (*Laughter*)

Then I wrote once:

*I feel sometimes like addressing you as 'Father' – not a Bengali father but an English father who is more understanding and sympathetic, who treats his children like friends.*

Then he wrote back:

Father is too domestic and Semitic – Abba Father!<sup>63</sup> I feel as if I had suddenly become a twin-brother of the Lord Jehovah. (*Laughter*) Besides there are suggestions of a paternal smile and a hand uplifted to smite which do not suit me.

*Ladies think of you as father and call you so. If they come to know of your refusal, I'll have to run with smelling salts from one lady to another!* (*Laughter*)

Answer:

Let the ladies 'father' me if smelling salts are the only alternative, but let it not be generalised. (*Laughter*)

Then about correspondence, he writes:

Correspondence suspended till after the 21<sup>st</sup> and resumable only on notice. But under cover of your medical cloak, you can carry on. (*Laughter*) Only mum about it! Otherwise people might get jealous and give you a headache. (*Laughter*)

Then, here it is, my logical fallacy he is pointing out. It is a bit delicate but I think it is highly enjoyable. He writes:

No, Sir – ce n'est pas ça. You are illegitimately connecting two disconnected syllogisms. 1<sup>st</sup> syllogism – all the poets are sex-gland-active. Nirod is a poet, therefore Nirod is sex-

63. Hebrew term for father.

gland-active. 2<sup>nd</sup> syllogism – all sex-gland-actives are poets, Nirod is sex-gland-active, therefore Nirod is a poet. The second proposition does not follow from the first as you seem illogically to think. All poets may be sex-gland-active, but it does not follow that all sex-gland-actives are poets. So don't start building an epic on your sex-glands, please. (*Laughter*)

I wrote to him:

*I have given you my timetable so that you may concentrate on me at the exact time. I hope the mathematical figures won't give you a shock!*

He answers:

No fear, Mathematics are more likely to send me to sleep than give a shock. (*Laughter*)

I wrote:

*I am obliged to sleep out for a few days because of repairs in our house. The whole building is smelling of lime, lime and lime.*

If you want to be a real Yogi go on sniffing and sniffing at the lime till the smell creates an ecstasy in the nose and you realise that all smells and stinks are sweet and beautiful with the sweetness and beauty of the Brahman. (*Laughter*)

I think that's enough...

### 10 June 1970

Well, after two interventions from above I have to take up my old burden. When the afflatus of those interventions is still flowing in our memory, I am afraid the usual course of our talks dealing with a chronicle of facts and figures, may not be so very interesting. But I have to do my job with equanimity, *samata* and you have to take it too with as much equality. Today I am going to revive the

spirit of Sahana-di in our talks. I intimated to you perhaps that her reminiscences were practically finished, after which I received some more files of these reminiscences in which I find many interesting things. Some of them may be of common interest as well as of some advantage and profit. We spoke about the soup distribution after 1926. Sahana-di came around that time and had a share in it, so had I for some time.

Now she says that a month or so after her arrival she received a very rude shock from the Mother. Before that the Mother was all smiling, affable but for no apparent reason she became very severe, solemn, when Sahana-di used to go in the evening to take soup from the Mother. As I told you, you did pranam to the Mother on arriving then gave her the bowl for the soup, received it and came back. Now what happened in her case was – she did bow first and then handed over the bowl to the Mother. The Mother filled it with soup, but didn't look at her at all. On the other hand she turned away her face in a sort of a wilful gesture; Sahana-di was very much nonplussed. She thought, "What could be the reason? Is it her displeasure? Is it some wrong movement that I have started without my knowing?"

So, a very complex psychoanalysis started. (*Laughter*) The next day the same thing happened – the Mother turned away her face like that and gave the bowl in this way. The tension increased – Sahana-di could not sleep! Perhaps some of you have felt this experience of the Mother's displeasure or at least apparent displeasure. We had quite a bit of our share of it! And Sahana-di used to come home in a very desperate condition – no joy in life. If the Mother doesn't smile what's the use of living? This went on for six days. So, very evidently there was some indication that something had gone wrong. She was staying at that time with Vasudha, who was just 15 years of age, in the same house where Vasudha stays today [Mother's Embroidery Department]. Vasudha had come just six months before her. But months don't matter. Sahana-di used to recount her sorrowful tale to Vasudha who sympathised with her but couldn't find any clue to the Mother's mysterious behaviour. What could it be? So, after the fifth day the tension became so much that she went to Nolini-da and spoke about it, "What is it? What wrong have I done? Please ask her to pardon me for whatever sin or crime I have committed and I won't repeat it."

Nolini-da knew about it, the Mother had told him. So, he explained in his quiet manner, “It seems you have cut off from Sri Aurobindo’s photo, the portion of the feet and thrown it in front of your house, and it was rolling in dust. Somebody picked it up and brought it to the Mother saying, ‘The Feet that we adore and worship, to be rolling in the dust and trampled upon by wayfarers, is something I can’t bear.’ So, this is what happened. And the Mother said, ‘I wouldn’t have minded so much if something similar about me had happened. But I can’t bear Sri Aurobindo being treated this way.’”

Well, I have told you, this is the play between them! Sri Aurobindo can’t bear the Mother being treated that way and the Mother can’t bear Sri Aurobindo being treated this way! (*Laughter*) But, of course, the Mother’s reaction is stronger and immediate while Sri Aurobindo... “Why should you behave like that!” (*Laughter*) Then poor Sahana-di came and told Vasudha about it and as soon as Vasudha heard the story she began to weep and said, “How could you do that? Sri Aurobindo’s feet! You could throw them away into the street!”

Sahana-di says:

I received another shock. A girl of 14 or 15 reacting in this way! What a difference between me and her. For her there is no difference between Sri Aurobindo and his photo, for me it is just a photo – not something living.

But what actually happened is this – she had got a beautiful frame from somebody and she had a photo of Sri Aurobindo, but these two did not fit together. (*Laughter*) So, a very simple device (*Laughter*), cut away the feet and put the other part into the frame – very utilitarian attitude (*Laughter*). So, she explained and perhaps afterwards the Mother’s displeasure was replaced by pleasure and a gracious smile, because she asked for the Mother’s forgiveness. Many of you must know about it – those of you who have come very close to the Mother – her ways, her attitude, her gestures, her movements, her silence... everything is expressive and eloquent – for those who are familiar, but even for those who are not, it doesn’t matter to her at all, you have to be familiar with her ways. I think in one of her talks in the *Bulletin*, she has said:

If I can't control by a simple gesture, the whole movement, then I am not master of the situation. Talks and other things are useless.

That's the way she acts: either her silence, or one single gesture, one single look, you have to understand, but if you can't understand, she is very easy to approach, you can ask her. But this is one of the typical ways she treats if not all *sadhaks* and *sadhikas*, at least some who know her ways. We have seen during Pranam, all these gestures and movements, as Sri Aurobindo has said in *The Mother*:

Mahalakshmi's ways are too swift and too subtle to try to be understood by the mind.

Sometimes, during Pranam, she just put the tip of one finger, (*Laughter*) sometimes she looked down, sometimes averted her eyes like that, sometimes the whole palm like this (*Laughter*). You could not predict from moment to moment what her movement would be – and each one with a precise, definite meaning. Not the meaning that our surface mind will know but our inner mind understands. And if we are receptive and something has gone wrong, we can correct the movement. Sometimes we would speculate, “Oh, what have I done?”

We have written so many letters to Sri Aurobindo on this drama of the Pranam. There were some who used to make a lot of fuss about these things. I have also made a little, not much though. At times we used to go entirely wrong. She looked solemn and grave. We interpreted it as something gone wrong with us, and wrote to Sri Aurobindo, “This and this has happened. Is it due to this reason?”

He said, “Mother knows nothing about it!” (*Laughter*)

But I'll tell you a personal experience of mine – exactly what happened to me, just as it happened to Sahana-di. It was not so long ago, before the Mother's illness, when I was going to her every morning to see her, everything went on all right for quite a long time. Suddenly one day, as in the case with Sahana-di – she gave me flowers, blessed me but didn't look at me at all – her face turned away! Well, I didn't weep, I was a bit disturbed. But all the same this went on for about two weeks. Just think of it: going close to the Mother, receiving flowers, her blessings and her face quite affable,

but at the same time avoiding my eyes... and I coming away. Of course I didn't ask her why she wasn't looking at me, but I think I knew well what the reason was, that I can tell you. You know that I have suffered a lot from what Sri Aurobindo called the Man of Sorrows – and he had not left me completely. Now and then I used to be a victim of this Man and this was one of the occasions. It was not some personal trouble or anything of that sort – it was quite impersonal. I was visiting the wife of a friend of mine, who was suffering from an incurable disease. It was a torture – the anguish, the agony, the suffering she was going through, was really unbearable. And she used to cry out, appeal to me, “Please do something. Tell the Mother to do something, now it has become intolerable, I can't bear it. Either let her save me, or let me die.”

So, such a plaint you can understand... I tried hard not to be touched by it – consciously I succeeded, but that gloom, that burden I used to carry to the Mother every morning; and she at once felt it – at once. You know, if there is one thing she does not like at all, that is gloom and depression. You must be always smiling. Even if you do something wrong try to keep a smile on! But you can't deceive her, impossible. That's one experience. I have had many experiences before, but this was consistent for two weeks, and afterwards I was trying and trying and the thing disappeared, the Mother's smile reappeared. She was as gracious, and sweet as before – gave flowers, caressed – I came away happy. So, this is her typical way. I will, one day, perhaps gather all our stories of being upset and speculations about Pranam – you'll see the kind of drama or melodrama we did!

Then Sahana-di notes that in contrast to the Mother's severity, you'll see her other phase of softness. It took place some time later. One day she received a note from the Mother saying, “Pavitra is taking the car out this afternoon. I thought Aruna and her two children...” – You know, Bula and Kunal – “...might like to go for a drive, and Kunal is strong enough for that ride, it will do him good. Will you inform them that Pavitra will be at their house with the car, at 4:30 pm?”

You see the other soft phase of the Mother. Sahana-di was very much delighted to have this note, unasked for.

Then, I told you how in the year 1931, all this programme had to



be stopped: the Soup, the Pranam, the Mother's going out, her seeing people in their rooms – all these activities had to be given up. Why? Because, all on a sudden, the Mother fell seriously ill. And that was due to our wrong movements.

However, this took place in 1931. She writes:

For about a month we couldn't see Her. She was confined to Her room.

When after a month She came to Pranam what a joy it was, it was like the joy of the Darshan – there are no words to describe such 'ananda', it was something ethereal.

Since then we could go to see Her only when She called us.

And someone asked Sri Aurobindo what could be the reason of the Mother's illness. I shall read out the reply that Sri Aurobindo sent:

I have not said anything about the Mother's illness because to do so would have needed a long consideration of what those who are at 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 in itself for the mind to understand but 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 or the necessary leisure.

I don't remember if he has written about it anywhere. Then soon after the Mother's recovery from that illness, she wrote a prayer on 24th November 1931, and there one can have a glimpse of the reason of her illness or disturbance in the body. It is most touching:

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 a supreme obscurity! But in my heart was the Remembrance, from my heart there leaped the call which could arrive to Thee: 'Lord, Lord, everywhere Thy enemies appear triumphant; falsehood is the monarch of the world; life without

There 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 to prevail, falsehood and ugliness and suffering to triumph? Lord, give the 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.

Thus my prayer rushed up towards Thee, and from the depths of the abyss, I beheld Thee in Thy radiant splendour; Thou didst appear and Thou saidst to me: "Lose not courage, be firm, be confident, – I COME." –

This was in 1931. I think there is a similar experience of Sri Aurobindo – the touching of Matter in the subconscious in 'A God's Labour', those of you who have read will remember. It is reminiscent of the same experience.

Then there is something else which is interesting but of a different order. Sahana-di writes to Sri Aurobindo,

Here in the Ashram many people say, "Mother and Sri Aurobindo want that sadhaks and sadhikas should dress well." Is it true?

Sri Aurobindo replied:

After realisation whatever the Higher Will demands is the best but first detachment is the rule. To reach Freedom without discipline and detachment is given to few. The Mother and myself went for years, through the utmost self-imposed bareness of life.

Now, here is a letter on a very important subject. She writes:

Among us there was a controversy or an argument that if somebody stands against the Truth, attacks the Truth, what should a *sadhak* do, what should his attitude be? Should one keep just a sort of equality and be indifferent to what is being said or should one take side with the Truth and fight the Falsehood?

The topic came up in this way: a relative of a *sadhak* had started attacking Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and abusing them. There were many opinions as to what attitude one should take. Some said that one should not tolerate it, others had in their expression, hatred, cursing this person; yet there were some who advocated some softness, indifference and said we shouldn't be concerned with all this. '*Pagolé ki na bole, chhagolé ki na khay*'. [Madmen say all sorts of things and goats eat all sorts of things]. So, let's be indifferent.

You see that it's a very important subject, So, she referred it to Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo gave her a very long answer which is highly revealing:

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 own judgement 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 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, one has 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 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 assailants and the hostiles or to dally with their ideas and demands and say, 'After all we can compromise with what they ask for,' 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 Asram, 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 K 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 questions. It is a principle of action that has to be seen in its right light and proportion.

In our *shastras* [scriptures] it is said there is no sin which is greater than *guru-ninda* – abuse of the Guru – one who does it and one who hears it will go to hell – something of that sort.

Now, you remember the classical story of the girl of 8 or 10 who had boldly told a guest who was criticising the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, "If you speak one more word against my Gurus, I shall give you such a slap that you'll go rolling down the stairs!"

Perhaps the atmosphere has changed a lot now, very few people criticise the Ashram. But at one time, as the Mother said, they had to face a lot of criticism, even from important people.

**12 June 1970**

**Sri Aurobindo, the perfect gentleman.**

Friends, some of you at least must have been amused, others intrigued by the title of today's talk. Some of you may even smell some irreverence because we have been accustomed to hearing of Sri Aurobindo as the Lord of Yoga, as the supreme Poet, and

the greatest Philosopher – to talk of him as a perfect gentleman is rather to bring him down to our own level, because we also claim to be some sort of gentlemen. I was told that the Mother was amused to hear of this title, but I throw the whole responsibility or irresponsibility of it on the Mother's shoulders, because it was she herself who in a piquant situation remarked:

Sri Aurobindo is a perfect gentleman, I am not a gentleman.

Well, it came as a shot from a cross-bow. We laughed at this outburst of temper, being familiar with her strangely changing moods, but still at this offhand remark of hers, I was somewhat taken aback, and it made me think a bit. Earlier I had read – and most of you, students, teachers and professors must have read too – the celebrated piece by J. H. Newman on “A Gentleman”. When I read it I thought it was something utopian which could not be found in this world of ours, Newman's description seemed unrealisable. And when the Mother brought into our view, Sri Aurobindo as the example of a perfect gentleman, I thought, “Yes, if there is anyone in the world who can be styled a perfect gentleman, it is Sri Aurobindo!”

Now, for those of you who are not familiar with this passage, I shall read out some extracts, so that you may be able to see why I make this seemingly exaggerated statement.

Well, in the very first sentence, we find almost the quintessential character of a gentleman. Newman says:

It is almost a definition of a gentleman to say he is one who never inflicts pain... He is mainly occupied in merely removing the obstacles which hinder the free and unembarrassed action of those about him; and he concurs with their movements rather than takes the initiative himself.

In the Gita it is said, if I remember correctly, that a yogi never begins anything. Then,

The true gentleman in like manner carefully avoids whatever may cause a jar or a jolt in the minds of those with whom he is cast; – all clashing of opinion, or collision of feeling, all restraint or suspicion, or gloom or resentment; his great concern being to make everyone at their ease and at home... he guards against unseasonable allusions, or topics which may irritate...

He is seldom prominent in conversation... He never speaks of himself except when compelled, never defends himself by a mere retort, he has no ear for slander or gossip; ... he is never mean or little in disputes, never takes unfair advantage, never mistakes personalities or sharp sayings for arguments... He has too much good sense to be affronted at insults, he is too well employed to remember injuries, and too indolent to bear malice. He is patient, forbearing, and resigned, on philosophical principles.

I think this is enough to give you some idea of what a true gentleman is like. From the description that I shall try to put before you, you will be able to judge for yourself how much this passage is applicable to Sri Aurobindo. For my part, I can say – correlating these two – that in every fibre of his being Sri Aurobindo was a perfect gentleman. I have chosen this subject because the others are beyond me, and on this one I can speak with some authority because, as most of you know, we had the great good fortune to come close to him, to see him face to face, to touch him, even to breathe him (but not to taste him!) – so, it is a subject about which I may claim, not egoistically, to have some confidence.

But before I plunge into it, let us go back a little and see whether Sri Aurobindo the gentleman was also a “gentle boy”.

Very little is known of his childhood, of his youth, as a matter of fact of his whole life. You know he has said that his life has not been on the surface. It has been shrouded in deep mystery, except when he chose to lift the veil now and then – that’s all.

Now, about his childhood: it was in 1956 or so that our artist *sadhak*, Pramode Chatterji, made a painting from Sri Aurobindo’s boyhood picture, and brought it before the Mother. We were there sitting by her side. The Mother remarked (as I noted down at the time, not knowing that it would be used today):

You have caught something of the spontaneity and freshness of the nature and something candid with which he came into this world. His inner being was on the surface. He knew nothing of this world.

So, that was an authoritative statement from the Mother. Another statement we have from his eldest brother is that he was a very nice and gentle boy except that he could be very obstinate.

Then what about the period of his youth in England? At the beginning, the brothers were very comfortable, affluent, but suddenly something went amiss and they found themselves in great penury. All the three brothers were almost stranded. The father for some mysterious reason stopped their allowances. Gray's elegy says about some poor people:

Chill Penury... froze the genial current of the soul.

That was not the case with Sri Aurobindo. He took it calmly, quietly, in spite of two or three hard years, missing a square meal, living on some sandwiches, three cups of tea, some sausages, and in the cold climate of London without sufficient warm clothing. But, as he has written to me, poverty was no terror for him, nor an incentive. He said that I was talking like Samuel Smiles! Then he failed in the I.C.S. riding test. He did it, as you know, deliberately by remaining absent as if by a tangle of unavoidable circumstances, in order not to hurt his hopeful father, not to inflict any pain on him, he had to resort to a trick.

Well, I would not like to dwell long on the early period. I want to come as soon as possible to the period when I was an eyewitness. But these are very interesting sidelights at any rate.

At Cambridge, his tutor took upon himself, coming to know of the strained circumstances of his pupil, to write to the father in a somewhat cold tone, that the son was running the danger of being hauled up at the court failing to pay up some arrears.

The father at once sent the remittances but wrote an admonishing letter to the son, Sri Aurobindo, that he was too extravagant! Sri Aurobindo said to us, smiling,

When we had not even one sufficient meal a day, where was the question of being extravagant?

But he had no feeling of resentment or bitterness towards his father. Whenever he spoke of him it was always with affection and tenderness.

Then we come to the Baroda period. There again we know very little except that he knew nothing about money. He said to us, "Yes, the Maharaja offered me a job saying he would pay Rs. 200. My brothers accepted, for they knew no better than I, and the

Maharaja bragged that he had bagged an I.C.S. for Rs. 200!”

However, Sri Aurobindo left behind a reputation of fair play, sincerity, honesty. He was loved by his students and all those who came in contact with him, though he wasn't a social man at all. He had a few chosen friends, lived a very simple life, and yet he could command the respect and honour of almost all the people there, high or low, with whom he came in touch or who heard his name. Even the Maharaja of Baroda held him in high esteem. But Sri Aurobindo showed his mettle. Once, the Maharaja issued a circular that all the officers had to attend office on Sundays, and even on holidays. Sri Aurobindo didn't go. Then the Maharaja wanted to fine him, and Sri Aurobindo said, “Let him fine as much as he likes, I am not going.”

And the Maharaja gave up! He saw that Sri Aurobindo couldn't be bent down by such threats.

The most revelatory remark of the period that has come to us was from his Bengali tutor, Dinendranath Roy, who, I suppose, was the first to say, because he lived closely with Sri Aurobindo, “Aurobindo is not a man, he is a god.”

Next he comes to Calcutta, to the political field which, you know, is not much better today, or is perhaps worse. Sri Aurobindo said to us, quoting C. R. Das's opinion that “the political field is a rendezvous of the worst kind of criminals...”

And that field, when Sri Aurobindo worked in it, he raised to a level of sincerity and integrity, at least in his own example, even if others didn't always follow. He shunned crookedness, duplicity, lust for power and all the other vices of political life. Sri Aurobindo's ‘soul was like a star and dwelt apart’, and he raised the political consciousness of at least some people to his own level and he did it all because he was through and through sincere – “Sincerity,” Carlyle has said, “is the greatest virtue of a great man.”

And all of us know very well the Mother's emphasis on sincerity. There is a line in *Savitri* referring to Savitri herself, which can be as well applied to Sri Aurobindo by a change of gender,

*His* mind, a sea of white sincerity.  
 Passionate in flow, had not one turbid wave.

In all the political disputes and negotiations, some of which are reflected in his speeches, there was never a tinge of meanness, of



duplicity or crookedness that is so common, even so much courted by the politicians. Thus he acquired the esteem of all and sundry, friends and foes. The young students loved him, the young revolutionaries adored him, and all the others respected him for his integrity, for his sincerity, for his self-sacrifice.

Also, there are one or two instances of his domestic life which will be illuminating. His younger brother, Barin, writes that when they were living together in Calcutta, their sister, Sarojini, used to complain to Sri Aurobindo about the misbehaviour, the rude conduct, of the cook. Sri Aurobindo paid no heed, he kept quiet. Finally Sarojini applied her *brahmastra* [ultimate weapon] – she began to weep. Now Sri Aurobindo had to do something. He called for the servant, and everybody was waiting for something to happen. Addressing the servant he said, “Well, it seems you are behaving rudely. Don’t do it again.”

That was all, and all those people were so disappointed – much ado about nothing! And the cook went away smiling.

Here is the second instance. One day some political leaders had come to meet Sri Aurobindo. He wanted to go and meet them. He saw that his sandals were missing. He thought: What has happened? His *mashi* [maternal aunt] had the habit of putting on his sandals and knocking about, so Sri Aurobindo called out, “Mashi, Mashi, people have come to see me; bring me back my sandals.”

There is an instance too from jail. He was living for a time with all the young prisoners in one cell, and pandemonium was let loose: songs, dancing, shouting... But Sri Aurobindo was most unconcerned with what was going on there. He was absorbed in his own *sadhana*, in one corner. One day those youngsters sat together and began to discuss a very momentous affair: “Why does Sri Aurobindo’s hair shine so much? Where does he get oil from? We don’t get a single drop!”

So, a great problem was to be solved. But how to find the solution? They said someone could go and ask, but nobody dared to. Then a young chap of 16 or 17 said, “I’ll go.” He went and asked, “Sir, your hair is shining. Where do you get oil from?”

Sri Aurobindo placed his hand on his shoulder and very calmly and softly said: “Oil, my boy? I don’t use any.”

The boy said, “But your hair is shining,” to which Sri Aurobindo

replied, "Yes, it is shining as a result of my yoga."

The boy went back satisfied. In all these examples you see that he was a gentleman and I don't need to multiply instances. I can say, again slightly adapting a verse from *Savitri*:

All in *him* pointed to a nobler kind.

Let us come now to our own period in Pondicherry. The early years of Pondicherry life – when he was living with his young comrades, sharing the same food, even sharing the same towel – are common knowledge.

In 1930 or so, the period of correspondence began. Those of you who have gone through these volumes of letters must have noticed with what great patience and indulgence he has again and again written about the same subjects, to so many people in different ways, without the least annoyance or displeasure. You'll be very much amused to hear what kind of questions some people used to ask. I have heard that someone asked, "When I walk, shall I put my left foot first or my right foot? When I put sugar in the milk, shall I stir it this way or that way?"

And Sri Aurobindo answered them calmly and quietly, in a serious manner. Well, of course, I had my share too, of such foolishness as you know very well. He had given me the great privilege to ask him anything. I have attacked his yoga, I have called him inconsistent – with impunity! But calmly and affably, and in a very indulgent tone, he has borne all. Those who have read the correspondence will be able to confirm it.

Then we come to the routine which he gave me when once I told him that he had plenty of time to concentrate. He wrote:

From 4-6.30 p.m. afternoon correspondence, newspapers.  
Evening correspondence 7.30-9 p.m. 9-10 p.m. concentration. 12-2.30 a.m. bath, meal, rest. 2.30-5 or 6 correspondence, unless I am lucky.

Once he wrote:

Correspondence suspended, resumable on notice. But under cover of your medical cloak you can carry on, only mum

about it. Otherwise people might get ideas and give you a headache.

I quote another letter in which he sweetly admonishes me to become gentle with the patients. He writes:

Well, I don't know why, but you have the reputation of being a fierce and firebrand doctor who considers it a sin for a patient to have an illness. You may be right but tradition demands that a doctor should be soft like butter, soothing like treacle, sweet like sugar and jolly like jam.

So, throughout the correspondence this was the tone. Though my correspondence was specially seasoned with humour, with everyone he was always gentle, very patient.

Now about the Darshans. Some people used to grumble – myself being one of them – saying:

*You are so grand, aloof, austere, we are afraid of coming to you.*

He replied to me:

O rubbish! I am austere and grand, grim and stern! every blasted thing that I never was! I groan in an un-Aurobindonian despair when I hear such things.

After the correspondence, when we came face to face, we had the privilege to serve him when he was confined to bed, after the accident. One day, when after my duty, I had gone to have some rest, suddenly the person on duty came to call me, "Sri Aurobindo is calling you, something has gone wrong."

I was very much perturbed, ran upstairs, but when I came near, he said, "Oh, it is nothing, it is nothing."

He was so apologetic in his tone, as if he had put me to inconvenience by calling me. Then, pointing to his right thigh, he said, "There has been some pain here for some time, can you do anything?"

Sri Aurobindo was not a person to call somebody because of a slight pain. It must have been very acute and he must have been suffering badly for a long time. But it was just like him to say: "Oh, it is nothing!" and offer me an apology! Fortunately by some adjustment the discomfort was set right.

Now a second instance, Dr. Manilal, who was our chief, advised that we should give Sri Aurobindo some massage. He had left for Gujarat, leaving me in charge, and the time that could suit Sri Aurobindo and us was a very odd one – 4 o’ clock or so, early in the morning. Two or three of us began to massage, the lower part of the leg particularly, and he suffered the torture for some time. After a few days he called me and asked, “Is this massage necessary? You see, these early hours of the morning are the only time when I have some sleep. Unless it is absolutely necessary, can it be postponed or stopped?”

I said, “Certainly we can stop it.”

That’s the way he acted.

Now, during the massage we used to talk to him, asking many questions and he answered them. One typical answer of his was “Perhaps”! To three out of four questions he replied, “Perhaps.”

Then one of us asked, “Why do you answer by saying ‘perhaps’? Can’t you give a definite answer?”

He said, “When the supramental descends, I’ll give a definite answer.”

One day, the Mother brought the report of a *sadhak* flying into a temper and belabouring somebody, and it was not the first or the second occasion. So, the Mother said to Sri Aurobindo, “I ask for your sanction.” in the French sense [she meant – “I ask for your permission to punish him”]. He heard her quietly and said, “Let him be given a warning.”

No more than that!

Then, when he was writing *The Life Divine*, sitting on the bed, there was no ceiling fan at that time, just a table fan two or three metres away. As you know, the Pondicherry current is both weak and unreliable. The fan was just like the waft of a tiny bird’s wing. But he was in another consciousness: whether there was a fan or not did not matter to him in the least. He went on writing, quite absorbed. When the writing was over we saw his whole dhoti soaked and his bed sheet underneath drenched with perspiration. He was sitting, almost literally, in a small pool of water! No complaint in the least. Then sometimes even that fan would stop, thanks to the whim of the Pondicherry electricity, but he would not ask to be cooled by a hand-fan. One of us on duty would fan him, and he would accept it, but would never ask for it.

And whenever he needed anything, he would look this way, that way, to see if the attendant was free or engaged. After being sure that he was free, he would say: "Could I have this? Could I have that?" – Always in a mild and detached tone. I may mention that he could be even quite impersonal. Purani records in the early period a typical instance of Sri Aurobindo's nature. Somewhere, on the terrace perhaps, they were all waiting, and Sri Aurobindo came out of his room with a telegram in his hand and, looking at nobody in particular, said, "I suppose this telegram has to be sent."

And this was his way with us too. Those of you who have read the *Talks* must be thinking that we always had a familiar relation with him. In fact, there was for at least half the day an impersonal attitude on his part towards everything – a notable distance which yet had nothing of an aloof "superiority".

Let me give you another instance. He was lying in bed. The ceiling fan had been installed. It was revolving at great speed. My colleague Satyendra was on duty, and he felt Sri Aurobindo wanted something. So, he went and asked, "Sir, are you looking for something?"

"Oh, no... is Nirod there?"

"No, Sir, he is not there."

Sri Aurobindo would not say anything further, but Satyendra pushed on, "Can I do anything?"

"I was thinking if the speed of the fan could be reduced!"

"I can do it, Sir."

"Oh, can you?"

Well, he inquired for me because at the very beginning, as are the Mother's ways, she had given me the charge of the fan and some other things. Sri Aurobindo wouldn't violate that rule!

Again, he went without a real direct bath for quite a long time because there was no convenience to give it to one who had had a fracture. He had to be satisfied – well, that is our human way of putting it, for satisfaction or dissatisfaction did not apply to him in the least and it was we who were satisfied or dissatisfied – with only a sponge-bath for six months or so – until the new bathroom was made. And his long hair went unwashed for quite a time. He didn't mind at all. Not that he was indifferent to bathing or was trying to imitate Louis XIV who had only two baths in his life, one when he was born and the other when he died! So

goes the story. It was not that at all (you have noticed in my earlier statement that he used to take his bath at 2.30 a.m. daily), but his principle of life, as all of us are aware, was that he would not initiate anything. He left himself, entrusted himself, completely to the Divine or to the Mother. He knew very well that whatever had to be done would be done at the right time. He had no worry, he had no concern.

Once a colleague of ours, very much impressed by Sri Aurobindo's look, tried to make a plaster cast, with the aid of a so-called sculptor from outside. He took great pride in it, and began to show it to people – a select few. The Mother came to know of this and didn't like the idea at all, and she came and reported it to Sri Aurobindo – such and such a thing was being done and the man should be asked to hand over the cast at once. So, there you see the Mother is not a gentleman! She can be Mahakali. Sri Aurobindo did not take such a serious view of it, but said, "All right, I'll speak to him."

When the disciple came up, he called him, and in a very quiet and affectionate manner explained to him the impropriety of his action.

Again, another *sadhak* – I am not complaining against *sadhaks*, I am only trying to bring out what I have proposed to do: Sri Aurobindo's natural character – another *sadhak* used to write letters critical of some actions of the Mother. Sri Aurobindo tolerated them once, twice, thrice, answering his points, but when it became a little too much he said to me, a little vexed perhaps, "Why does he write like that about the Mother?"

That was all. One thing that Sri Aurobindo didn't like was criticism of the Mother, and one thing that the Mother doesn't like is criticism of Sri Aurobindo ! But when he answered – I know because at that time he used to dictate letters to me – the tone betrayed nothing of the irritation or vexation – all he sent was very calm and quiet reasoned argument. And to this same *sadhak*, when once he was finding it very difficult to stay here and wanted to leave the Ashram, Sri Aurobindo wrote back – the *sadhak* told me himself – "I beg of you, I pray to you".

Sri Aurobindo saying this to a disciple, however cherished he might be – what humility! It reminds me of Sri Krishna, who, it seems, washed the feet of the Brahmins in some sacrifice. So, there you have Sri Aurobindo.

About his food we saw that his lunch which was slated for 10 o'clock gradually shifted to 3 or 4 o'clock. He waited patiently – perhaps I shouldn't use this adverb, it is too ordinary – he just waited without a word till the Mother would be free from her work and bring the food. Only on a single occasion, later on, after 1945 or so, we heard him saying, "I am terribly hungry."

Not that he was taking anything in between – at times a simple glass of water. He was very much concerned that the Mother should not be, in any way, tied to his convenience or comfort.

His whole programme was made in such a way as to suit that of the Mother. And he left us an injunction – perhaps it is not the right word – that the Mother should not be kept waiting under any circumstance. We must keep things ready. Because, as you know, from early morning till late night, every moment is precious for the Mother, so he didn't want her time to be wasted.

Well, I shall finish by giving one instance more – from our talks. The full talk will be in the next issue of *Mother India*. War was on, Hitler was on the ascendant. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother declared that Hitler represented a hostile force and so we had to, all, side with the Allies who were on the side of the Divine. But still many in India and Europe were much enchanted by Hitler and wanted him to win. And even in our camp, knowing very well that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were supporting the Allies, some had the temerity to wish for Hitler's victory. Of course, the root cause was not that they loved Hitler but that they did not love the British, India's rulers. So, when Sri Aurobindo heard about it, he told us:

It seems it is not five or six of our people but more than half that are in sympathy with Hitler, and want him to win. It is a very serious matter. The Government can dissolve the Ashram at any moment. The whole of Pondicherry is against us. Only because Governor Bonvin is friendly to us, they can't do anything.... If these people want that the Ashram should be dissolved, they can come and tell me, and I will dissolve it instead of the police doing. They have no idea about the world, and talk like children. Hitlerism is the greatest menace that the world has ever met.

Mark the tone. From what depth of sorrow Sri Aurobindo must have said this. He could easily have sent away all these ignorant and harmful people.

Now, if I have been able, by all these instances, to prove to you that Sri Aurobindo was a perfect gentleman, I'll be satisfied. If you demur to the common appellation 'gentleman', let us call him 'a Supramental perfect gentleman'. But the one impression that he has left with us is that he was Shiva. He had a magnanimity such as the verse in *Savitri* suggests:

A magnanimity as of sea or sky  
Enveloped with its greatness all that came.

Indifferent as it were to everything that was going on in the world, his gaze fixed far away and yet in his cosmic consciousness supporting all things and each one of us – that is the impression that always floats before my eyes whenever I think of Sri Aurobindo.

### 17 June 1970

Today I have a somewhat croaky voice, don't listen to it but to that which is spoken through the voice. It is almost asinine... but it's better not to use that word! Now I shall read to you the talk that will appear next year ... oh, I'm sorry... You see my brain is already affected... I have become muddle-headed – it will appear next month. I thought it would be a good idea to read it out to you. The talk took place in 1940, somewhere in May: (*Mother India*, July 1970, p. 323.)

**Q:** *Hitler's declaration that before August 15<sup>th</sup> the war has to be finished and peace agreed upon seems significant.*

**Sri Aurobindo:** That is the sign that he is the enemy of our work. And from the values concerned in the conflict it would be quite clear that what is behind him is the Asuric, the Titanic power.

**Q:** *It is strange how he takes his decisions.*

**Sri Aurobindo:** It is not he that takes the decisions. The Being behind him decides.



*Q: It knows perhaps that, August 15<sup>th</sup> being your birthday, there is going to be some descent of the Divine on that date.*

**Sri Aurobindo:** I don't think it believes in any such descent. It would say, "I must make some decisive movement before anything decisive happens on that date." This Being comes here from time to time and sees what kind of work is going on.

*Q: Just as the Asuras are against the human race there must be other Beings who help the human race.*

**Sri Aurobindo:** Yes. Human beings by themselves are no match for the Asuras. If it is an influence, influence from the Asuras, the result may depend on the influence. Here in Hitler's case it is not an influence but a possession, even perhaps an incarnation. The case of Stalin is similar. The Vital World has descended upon the physical. That is why the intellectuals are getting perplexed at the destruction of their civilisation...

The rest is about the war and I don't think it will interest you.

So, here is the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's direct knowledge, and you see how powerful the Asura is. I won't be surprised if he had a hand in causing Sri Aurobindo's accident.

Now... to take up our journey, I was reading Sahana-di's memoirs. She gave you the soft and hard sides of the Mother, to which I added a bit of my experience. I don't suppose that you young people were very much concerned with reading in the looks of the Mother, pleasure, displeasure, etc. etc. You were happy-go-lucky, it didn't matter whether the Mother looked at you or not, you look at yourselves and are happy. (*Laughter*) But it was not so with us, we were sophisticated, you understand, and particularly because, I believe, all our life was centred round the One. We had no diversions, no distractions. Well, when that happens, our life hangs on the looks, on the words, etc. of the Master and the Mother, not on friends or enemies. And all these were decided during the Pranam because there we came face to face with the Mother. And her looks and expressions were sometimes mysterious, sometimes eloquent, sometimes born from our fancy... but they were very expressive indeed!

That's one of the reasons, I suppose, why the Mother always welcomed the children, because they go there without any arrièr-

pensée, while we go with all our accumulated prejudices and ideas, burdens of miseries, before her. Christ was right in saying, "Suffer the children to come to me."

I could write a small pamphlet on this Pranam episode and I have collected all the data to show you how interesting it was. Now to prepare you for the coming event if I have the patience to follow it up, I shall give you one or two instances, how I had my share of these expressions of softness and hardness of the Mother. There used to be regular Pranam in the morning. So, once before the Darshan, I went to the Mother as usual, after finishing my pranam when I looked at her eyes, they were very solemn, very serious; naturally I was very much disturbed. All the thought-process started – what have I done? I began to go over all my words, thoughts and deeds of that day or the day before and I thought my conscience was quite clear. Then why did the Mother look so grave and serious? In the evening I wrote to Sri Aurobindo that such and such a thing had happened and added, "Have I done anything wrong? I'm sorry." I addressed the letter to the Mother as we usually did:

*Mother, in these two pranams you seem to have indicated to me that I have done something wrong, somewhere.*

Sri Aurobindo answered,

Nonsense! (*Laughter*)

Then I wrote:

*Coming just before the Darshan, it rather weighs like a load. With such a forbidding stern look cringing my whole being, how am I going to face the Darshan?*

**Sri Aurobindo:** Nothing at all. All this is quite imaginary! (*Laughter*)

However, my writing had an effect. As soon as I went for the Darshan, after doing *pranam* to Sri Aurobindo when I went to her, she was so gracious, as if the whole personality of Mahalakshmi had manifested in her, and she wiped away all my grievances, my burnings. Whether it was due to the presence of Shiva or her own compassion, I don't know! (*Laughter*) Another instance took

place before Shiva himself! The Mother had come to do his hair. But Champaklal and myself used to be present there at that time. So, she was talking to Sri Aurobindo. I faintly remember what it was about. I butted in without having anything to do with it – an impertinence. I don't know how, sometimes we become foolish trying to be wise! And the Mother reacted sharply. I don't remember the words, either 'Stop' or 'You don't know anything about it' – something of that sort. Sri Aurobindo did not say anything. So, the thing passed, I repented. I didn't mind so much the Mother's harsh words, I realised my impertinence. They did not invite my opinion, they were talking between themselves, and I had butted in.

But this was in the morning. I remember still, in the afternoon I was in Sri Aurobindo's room. She called me from the passage and as soon as I arrived she put her hand on my shoulder and began to walk along the passage. The purport of it was that she thought I was very much wounded, and she wanted to pacify my wounded feelings. Not expressing in words, she was trying to say as it were, that she was sorry for what she had said. I exclaimed, "Mother, I didn't mind at all, on the other hand it was I who made a fool of myself" – but she went on explaining. So, here again is the soft side.

Then, here is another instance. All of a sudden, Pranam was stopped on the very day of my birthday. The previous day there was Pranam, and that very next day she stopped it. I was very much upset, as you understand, and thought how unlucky I was. Then I wrote again to Sri Aurobindo in the usual course,

*Is it because I enjoyed a feast that you stopped the Pranam?*

Mother herself replied, "Have no fear, it is not because of your feast. I will give you your interview tomorrow."

How silly or how egoistic it is, you can see. That because I enjoyed a good feast, the Mother will stop the whole Pranam! (*Laughter*) How absurd!

There are many others, by and by you will enjoy them, seeing our foolishness, our sensitiveness, and how we used to bother the Mother and Sri Aurobindo over the same theme again and again, like children.

I shall read another incident about a big boy or a big child. He was older than myself and came here before me. He was too old to go for a sea bath, but he went and got a pain and what you call – a catch on the left side, and he had fever. He came to me at the Dispensary. I examined him and said, “Perhaps there is some strain in the chest muscles and it may be due to the sea bath which you were not wise enough to do.” We were on friendly terms. I gave the medical report to the Mother. Then the next day after the Pranam he comes to me and says, “Hey, Nirod, have you written about this affair of mine to the Mother?”

“Why do you say that?”

“Mother rolled her big eyes at me, so perhaps you had written about the indiscretion of my sea bath.”

But it seems Sri Aurobindo answered to him,

It’s too small an incident! (*Laughter*)

Then I wrote back to Sri Aurobindo:

*This fellow came to me and was rather upset and tried to blame me for giving this report. But of course I didn’t show him. And it seems you wrote to him, ‘It’s too small an incident’?*

Sri Aurobindo answered,

That is a polite way of putting it! (*Laughter*) I intimated to him that he was a silly ass to think that the Mother would get excited about his sea bath. But this silly ‘assness’ is incorrigible in him. He is doing it all the time and weeping and raging over his imagination. (*Laughter*) No sadhak has the right to cross examine the doctor about his reports to the Mother. They must be treated as confidential. So that’s that.

So, my friends, don’t think that I have only enjoyed fun from Sri Aurobindo. He said, you remember, I told you that he won’t forsake me but beat me a lot. And he has beaten me verily and veritably lot, though not himself but through his Shakti – the Mother (*Laughter*) – a psychological beating of course. That’s their game. If the Mother beats from below Sri Aurobindo puts balmy oil from above (*Laughter*) and if Sri Aurobindo beats, the Mother caresses! (*Laughter*)

That's the Divine diplomacy which we have seen – we know it very well indeed. You see when the Mother's face was severe, looks were stern, we wrote to Sri Aurobindo and he said, "Nothing at all, all imagination!"

Certainly they were imaginations, no doubt about it. She had nothing in her mind, it was our guilty conscience. How severely she thrashed me, will perhaps be part of a story later on.

Now we can proceed with Sahana-di's story. Here also there is some drama. I hope she doesn't mind. She writes:

I have become disobedient to you on two points. I couldn't give up tea for good, now and then I take one cup. Then some days ago, out of greed I took an egg.

She wrote in Bengali, and Sri Aurobindo answered in Bengali,

It doesn't matter if now and then you take a cup of tea, but you must not make it a habit, for tea is an enemy of nerves, and egg an enemy of digestion. It makes you feel heavy and feel hot.

I don't think our friend Pranab will believe a bit of it, (*Laughter*) particularly the egg business. But I have seen myself that eggs do make you feel hot, especially at night. Pranab said the other day in Orissa House (Home of Progress) that food doesn't matter at all. You can enjoy any food and be in '*brahmaloka*.' (*Laughter*) Well, well!

Now she passes through – as we have done – some trouble. So much so that it's a kind of revolt. She doesn't say exactly why, but she is very heavy at heart, she stops sending her notebook to Sri Aurobindo, she stops going to Pranam and there is a revolt. Her *abhimān* is increasing little by little, has become very big indeed. So, she confines herself to her room. And what suffering!

Then Sri Aurobindo wrote to her:

I see that you have not sent your book nor any letter and I am told 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 a certain movement which you yourself say was slight or the sense of the difficulty of overcoming ego is (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 the groove quickly into the joy and love of the Divine which you had before. On our side nothing is changed – the love and help are there as before and I hope you will feel them behind these few lines.

The other day I was talking about Sri Aurobindo as a perfect gentleman, here it is – his compassion, his solicitude. The Guru writing to the disciple, the relationship between the Guru and the disciple – I think my friend Arindam could give you a better lecture. I don't need to dilate or dwell upon it – you see, it is so sacred. Once you are accepted as disciple, you see the love and help and compassion given. At that time, funnily enough, we thought, all of us almost, that by remaining here we were obliging the Mother and Sri Aurobindo! (*Laughter*) It is their business to keep us happy, contented and our business to threaten them at every step (*Laughter*) 'I am going away. Keep me if you can!' that was the attitude. *Mān, abhimān*, [tantrums, hurt pride] hunger strikes, as Sri Aurobindo said, were very common indeed. (*Laughter*) And the Mother had to administer to all these unyogic attitudes and feelings, just like human parents. Then naturally after this letter she melted, so Sri Aurobindo wrote back:

We are very glad to know that you have recovered. Your true self got covered up by a dark cloud of a foreign Force. Covered up your reason and took away from you your will. You must always in future, turn back from any movement that allows this to come. At the least trouble turn to take refuge in our protection and love.

The other day I came across my letter where I wrote to him:

*I realise at every moment that I am neither made for the path*

*of the Spirit nor any big endeavour in life. I know I shall be unhappy, but are all men born to be happy?*

Then he wrote back,

Man of sorrows! Man of sorrows! Knock him off, man, knock him off! (*Laughter*)

Then Sahana-di was once suffering from insomnia, day after day, night after night, not a wink of sleep. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo were doing all they could: writing letters, giving suggestions. She went to see the Mother. With deep sympathy looking into her eyes, she told her, "I want you to sleep."

Then the very next day, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

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 under-feeding is not good for the nerves.

Then in a somewhat long letter Sri Aurobindo writes apropos of this:

It was precisely out of solicitude for you because the suffering of insomnia and the spasms had been excessive that I propose to you to take the help of treatment. It 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 that 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 a full receptivity in the material body also. If you do not like to take

my treatment, I will try to manage without that, if you keep me informed every day without fail, even on those days you feel relieved till all traces of the attack are over.

She says, sometimes when she would find it difficult to express herself in English, then she would write in Bengali and ask Sri Aurobindo to put it into English – would translate it, filling up the blanks. Here she gives an example. It is interesting. She writes:

I am feeling so quiet inwardly as if the main gate of a passage which was always busy with the crowd and traffic of all sorts of desires and impulses and cravings, is closed, or the passage has become...

– She couldn't find the words and writes in Bengali –

*nistabda, janashunna*

Sri Aurobindo filled in the words “hushed and solitary”. Then again another instance,

Let me grow into the true consciousness, and let the veil of darkness that still keeps you separate from me, drop down, and with your light let my temple become...

– She fell back on the Bengali which Sri Aurobindo translated and wrote:

aglean with light and radiance and may the downpour of the rays of the Light remove all veil and division in me and may I find you within me in your complete self-revelation.

A third instance –

I feel so energetic and enthusiastic, and I feel so happy to pray to you – it arises from deep within and I find it comes with an intense joy...

– then she expresses a feeling in Bengali which Sri Aurobindo translates –



... I feel now the inexpressible sweetness of that which is beyond description forming between you and me. It is such a satisfying experience.

During this period the Mother used to come to the terrace every day and remain there for a while. One day Sahana-di had an experience and she wrote about it:

Mother,

Recently I noticed that before you go down from the terrace in the evening, you stand for a longer time and I feel just at that time, you give us something especially, 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 it! Then again in a few seconds your figure reappeared. I felt at that moment you mixed with the sky (ether) and became one with all things.

Then Sri Aurobindo gives the interpretation of the experience,

The Mother makes an invocation or aspiration and stands till the movement is over. Yesterday she passed for some time beyond the sense of the body and it is perhaps this that made you see in that way.

Then, there is another interesting question. She says there was a discussion, or some argument among friends, on the question of whether one can love another's children as one's own.

Sri Aurobindo's answer:

It is certainly possible because it often happens – especially with women in whom the maternal instinct is easily aroused, but it happens to men also. Especially the very fact of bringing up a child in that intimate way has a tendency to create a feeling which may be of tenderness or affection only, but may be and often is a strong love.

Then, during those times, as I told you, there used to be some musical soirées. Now, once Dilip-da and Sahana-di had the idea or inspiration to sing before Sri Aurobindo – by 'before him' I mean not directly but from the side room, he would see and enjoy from there. So, Sahana-di writes that this was the first time in her life

that she felt very nervous. I can't imagine her being nervous. However that was on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1929 – the Darshan Day. The Darshan was over in the morning. At four o'clock they were to sing in the Meditation Hall. She had sung in many big audiences but never knew what nervousness was, she had even sung on the stage and danced before Rabindranath. So, they went, and Sahana-di started singing first – a song of D. L. Roy.

And I found my voice had turned absolutely wooden. It would not come out properly. All the subtle turns, etc. I couldn't bring out at all. There was no flexibility in my voice – it became hard, stone-like as never before. I sang but it was a dismal failure. Then Dilip started, it was not so bad with him but not so good either. Then we started a duet: '*Mane chakar rakhoji*' – then some improvement; felt a little free, perhaps due to Dilip's support. Then after the performance I asked the Mother frankly, "What's the matter, Mother, why did I feel so nervous which I've never felt before?"

The Mother replied, "You forget whose Presence you were singing in? Your vital being became nervous before that Divine Presence."

Every month or every two months they used to sing before the Mother. Here she gives a list of all the singers: Harin, Doraiswamy, a European or South African – Nandini – you may have heard the name. She used to play the cello very well and the Mother observed that she was a born musician.

Then there was a performance on 24<sup>th</sup> April, most probably to celebrate the coming of the Mother on that day. This was long before the April Darshan had started. The Mother wrote to her:

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 exterior point of view of execution, but in the greater aim of the concentration behind it and in the inner attitude.

May that day bring its benediction to all. (24.4.32)

Then there was a big performance for the first time, in public, when our Aroumé – our famous Dining Room – was taken. The Mother was present there, the Governor – I think M. Baron – was

invited and there were a few high officials. Our friend Ardhendu, the cat-master (*Laughter*) and Jhumur's family – father, uncle and many others – were there. The rest I'll tell you the next time.

### 15 July 1970

Some of you might have been disappointed to find no fresh discovery on the notice board, and some of you tell me that I intended to give *phanki* [give it a miss] this time as well! (*Laughter*) Well, I couldn't manage it. I would have done it if I could!

However, you had a long glorious interlude. Now you see the same old familiar face, familiar voice, the same manner and the same flower (*Laughter*) of the last Moghul, as some friends call me. (*Laughter*) I won't wonder if during this long interlude, the outline of the familiar face has got somewhat blurred, the voice has become somewhat faint, though perhaps the mannerism persists. It is quite natural as you had such flashing brilliant addresses from these visitants from above or outside. In fact I myself find myself a little stranger. Why? I don't know exactly.

I ask myself – was it the face, the voice that animated and inspired the young faces? But it is said, "Old friends are like old wines", but you may not appreciate the exotic comparison. Well, while you enjoyed the addresses of our friends, I enjoyed however my own quiet rest, but not for long, because Sri Aurobindo's yoga does not allow longer rest! This word, as it were, does not exist in Sri Aurobindo's yogic dictionary. Shakespeare's famous line 'After life's fitful fever, he sleeps well' – if I may replace it by saying 'he rests well', it would have no jurisdiction in Sri Aurobindo's yoga. For even from that psychic repose you are brought down. You see how the Mother is working day and night – if somewhat unwell in the morning – her wheel turns vigorously in the afternoon. Now, Sri Aurobindo's Action has come to reinforce the battery, so much so that it makes me fall into some sort of a rhyme:

Action, action everywhere  
Not a wink of rest,

To find the way to God  
 Action is the best.  
 Be conscious even in sleep,  
 Don't sink into the subconscious deep.  
 Even if overtaken by death  
 Prepare for a new breath!

So, this is Sri Aurobindo's gospel of work if I may put it into verse form. Let us then go straight into action!

By the way, it is Sahana-di's action I was telling you about. And I had forgotten one important episode, particularly interesting for one section of our audience – the ladies. It concerns something in their home front, their native genius – embroidery. So, Sahana-di took to embroidery and it was in full swing. She was once called by the Mother in connection with Maurice Magre's visit of which I've spoken to you – to prepare a special kind of screen. The Mother said, "I want you to make a very big screen which will be hung in the room where I'm going to see him. There are still three months to go. Will you be able to do it?"

Well, naturally Sahana-di was very much taken up by the proposal, seeing the Mother's wish and eagerness. She said, "Certainly, Mother, I shall do it."

But she knew at the same time that it was a very big task she was taking in hand. So, she worked for 11 hours a day! She finished it and then she went up to the Mother to show it. Many of you ladies may have noticed it. Perhaps the boys won't be interested in having a long and detailed description of it. It is the screen which is usually hung during November Darshan, in the door which separates Sri Aurobindo's bathroom from his room. It is some sort of a red – I hope my friend won't take me to task for my colour sense! – with two white peacocks, both facing each other. Now perhaps, you recollect. It should remind you of the symbolic birds of the Upanishadic story, perhaps there is some such meaning in the embroidery. So, it was done in 1930 or so and even today it is going strong, so fresh, so beautiful. And Sahana-di draws our attention to the fact of how the Mother takes care of all these things. When she took it up to the Mother, she was all rapture and when the Mother is in rapture or ecstasy you know how she looks and how she communicates that ecstasy to us – through her eyes, her face, by the pressure of her

hands – all these are familiar things to you. So, naturally Sahana-di was overjoyed that she was able to do something for the Mother – a sort of a disinterested, yogic work, and in the right time. She spread the whole screen before the Mother who looked into every detail and enquired into every fact.

I might add some comments which may not be very pleasant to some of you. Now embroidery, as you see, has become a paying concern. Beauty added to utility. At that time utility was far off our mark. It was beauty, it was yoga – doing for the sake of yoga, but naturally it must be done very beautifully. And there was another incentive to it – ladies found by preparing or making these screens, an opportunity to feel her contact more closely. So, they fell for it avidly and most ladies took it up. While we, the lords (*Laughter*) took up poetry as our profession.

However, the Mother also found it a very good occasion as she is very clever in finding out all these – to use these means as a very natural and effective way of yoga. So, the ladies were employing their leisure time for this. And our friend Sanjiban was the divine designer! (*Laughter*) By the way, both of us came from the same place. I don't mean anything else (*Laughter*) and we started on the same day, from the same place, in the same train and arrived on the same day.

While I was getting ready to leave, some friend of his came to me and said, “So and so would like to go to Pondicherry. He is a young man, you are more experienced. Will you take him with you?”

I said, “Certainly. I hope he won't be a burden to me.”

So, both of us, Sanjiban and I started. I found him a very nice fellow and very sweet. And when we came here, I think we stayed together for a while, then we got separated. He found his job while I was knocking at various doors. The Mother made him her designer – he was an artist already, I don't know whether born or unborn (*Laughter*) but he had done some art, just as Sahana-di had taken up embroidery – a born musician, and unborn poet, and a dancer. And now she is a tailor – whether a success or failure, ladies know! (*Laughter*) We can take up any work according to the convenience and according to the pressure from some higher Force. You know very well I was a ‘timber god’, then a dispensary doctor and now a sort of a teacher. (*Laughter*) So, about Sanjiban,

if you are interested in knowing him a bit, he is a very sweet and nice fellow, somewhat shy, shuns limelight. He took yoga, I can say, by the right end from the very beginning. He did not indulge in the things not prescribed by our yogic rules of the Ashram – no tea (*Laughter*), didn't go out for excursions... The Mother was very pleased with him. The intermediate period I skip, now you see he has found his job, he has found his god or his goddess. He is not concerned with Sri Aurobindo's Action or any action or your action at all, he is concerned with his own action of which the immortal piece you see here. [The Mother's big photo in the Hall of Harmony which was coloured by hand by Sanjiban-da]. By the way, he was a singer too.

The other day I met him and said, "Hello, how is the world going on?"

Then with half a smile, he said, "Getting bald, teeth falling, getting old, but I am happy."

'But I am happy' – So, there. Not concerned in the least with world affairs of the Ashram – so is my belief. He reminds me of two lines of a song:

*'Onno shobai korbe jaha korook  
Ami shudhu gaybo tomar gaan'*

Let the others do whatever they like, my business is to sing your songs.

And the immortal masterpiece that you see behind is a testimony to what he is doing. Most of us frittered away our energy running here, running there, finding out what is meant for us and what is not meant for us – and not able to find out even now. That reminds me of the question I asked Sri Aurobindo, long ago, "What am I fit for? What am I destined to be? What is my *métier*?"

He said, "Go inside and find out." I have tried to go inside, I found half, the other half has not been revealed to me. So, I'm plodding on the way, with the hope that one day the psychic fellow – no disrespect please (*Laughter*) – will reveal himself and I'll be able to find out what I am meant for, perhaps while I am preparing for a new birth.

So, this is about embroidery.

We were talking about the musical performance held in Aroumé – the first public performance. It is not, I believe, to celebrate the possession of Aroumé but a suitable occasion for a performance. I don't know the Mother's motives – first of all she is the Divine and she is... You know (*Laughter*)

Dilip-da was naturally the chef d'orchestre and Sahana-di the assistant. She writes that Ardhendu used to visit the Ashram now and then – he was a very fine musician. Now you see him, poor fellow, in his decadent glory! Even now he plays the sitar very well, when he takes it up, but he has no time! And the Mother used to even call him up to hear him play the sitar. So, Ardhendu was here on that occasion of the opening of Aroumé. So, Dilip-da, Sahana-di, Ardhendu and a surprisingly young little chap who is no longer young – my foster child or adopted child – Romen. I looked after him if you'd believe it. (*Laughter*) The Mother put him in my charge though he was a very difficult charge indeed. (*Laughter*) He came here just at the age of ten, I think. He had learnt from Ardhendu how to play the sitar.

So, it was a great success. The Mother was very pleased and so were M. Baron and the high officials.

I can say something about my adopted son – no longer adopted. Now he can adopt me (*Laughter*) – Romen. He was not only a musician, but also an artist and a poet. So, he was running three horses together, while we couldn't manage even one, because he was an excellent medium. His heart was open to the Superior Light and received it abundantly. Not that he could translate all that Light into his pictures but the little that he could was a great success. I can say about his poetry because I used to read and send it to Sri Aurobindo for correction. He was about twelve or thirteen, had not studied any poetry, not even the English language, had no sense of poetic rhythm... Of course, when you are open that way to higher Light, sometimes it is a flop but at other times it's a great success. So, very often that was the case with him. The Mother was very much impressed by his painting – something of a mystic impression and atmosphere he could bring out. So was the case with poetry. Out of so many lines which were somewhat flat, somewhat plain, some lines were magnificent. And now and then one or two poems would beat hollow our hundred poems. While we were plodding and plodding, that fellow takes up the pen, or Saraswati

takes up the pen and writes for him. And Sri Aurobindo made a remark that he is a genius. That is Romen when he was a child. Now that he is a man, I see that literature is there, poetry now and then, he's trying to be a storyteller also, but the painting perhaps is lost. And music – certainly he is a music master, you all know.

About Sunil I can say a few words. He was a young boy when he came here. He was also a shy fellow. All shy fellows are good fellows! (*Laughter*) Myself included! It seems he was given the charge of the students performing dance-dramas. So, from the very start he got that training and now as you know, he has become famous as the Mother's musician. The Europeans, it seems, are mad after his music. They call it Indian music and Indians call it European music. (*Laughter*) But whatever it is, everybody likes it and is in ecstasy over it, I too but without understanding much. The Mother says, the most strange thing is that when you hear it, you feel as if it were an orchestra, where if not hundred at least twenty or thirty instruments were being played. But you'll find to your surprise when you enter his music room, of what instruments this orchestra is made. You will see some kitchen utensils are being used – some mud vessels, tumblers, etc. So, a true genius is this friend of ours – musician Sunil.

At one time we were good friends. We had a club for going out on excursions, on Sundays and on holidays. Sunil used to supply all the necessities of the outings, for he has a family which sends him some money – and he has a wife too who used to prepare all the dishes for us. And we used to have a very good feast going out on cycles. I was the president. (*Laughter*) Tejen was the secretary, Sunil supplier of necessities and Jyotin supplier of tea. So, we four were members of the club. But now you see what a transformation has taken place, which makes me believe that transformation will come to everyone of us. As Sri Aurobindo wrote to me in one of his letters:

I trust that a blue moon will rise in everybody's heaven who has on one side the patience to go through and on the other no fundamental and self-expulsive wickedness in his nature. Even for these others the blue moon will rise one day, though later, – if they have once sought for it.

So, let us have hope.



So, in Sunil's case now you can see how engrossed, how absorbed he is, you don't even see his tail! God knows how he lives and where he lives!

Then, there was another great musician, Bhismadev. We had the rare fortune of having three great musicians: Dilip Roy and Bhismadev and Sahana-di, of course – the Nightingale of Bengal. I don't know how exactly Bhismadev dropped in. He was perhaps a friend of Sunil's family. Dilip too came up, but there was a difference between the two musicians: Bhismadev was a classical singer and Dilip – I don't know how to name his music – singer of the New Way, perhaps.

But all the same, both of them got on very well. Bhismadev sang very well, and played superbly on the harmonium as well as on the tabla. So, three instruments he had mastered. Once he started singing he went on and on like an '*Ustad*', the whole night would be over, still he kept singing. And there have been soirées when he has sung at Dilip's place, till the early hours of the morning – completely identified himself with the spirit of music. But unluckily again, a misfortune: something happened to his throat and the Mother asked him not to sing. So, he stopped completely. Whether he suppressed it or grew detached from it, I don't know, but sometimes we used to see him muttering something, and his hands doing 'mudras' of music. He couldn't control himself, became completely unconscious of the movement, and the spirit of music overpowered him so completely – all of a sudden he would become aware of the fact and stop. But then later on things became worse, he had to go away. Now I hear he has no trouble and sings well.

This is another example of how things come to you.

Now something else – there is a long letter here written by Sri Aurobindo to Sahana-di, with which I can end the talk today.

It seems, Dilip was bringing out a book on music, with notations and Sahana-di was asked to contribute. She was a good singer but had no confidence in the technical part of it – particularly, how to write notations of songs. But due to Dilip's persuasion and Sri Aurobindo's consent she started and found that she did the job well; so much so that following the notations when she sang her own songs, she saw they were not the same ones she was singing, it was quite a different affair. So, very much surprised by this turn, she wrote to Sri Aurobindo about it. He gave a long reply which

will be of general interest to us – to the artists, to the singers, to the yogis – the budding or the flowering ones:

... 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 wanted 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 limitations or disabilities of the instrument,...

– I gave you an example of Romen – what the instrument was and how the Force worked. And I can give my poor example as well –

... 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 own ordinary moments of doing such good work; but also it may be by its action set the instrument right, accustom it to the necessary intuitive knowledge and movements 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... 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 write or what are the qualities and elements of their success, but they write all the same, things that are perfect in rhythm and language. Intellectual knowledge 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, eg. painting and 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

‘avesh’, the exultation of the uplifting of the consciousness, its illumination and its greatened and heightened action and also the joy of the beauty, power or perfection that is being created.

However one feels it depends on the condition of the consciousness at that time, the temperament, the activity of the vital. The yogi of course (or even certain strong and calm minds) is not carried away by the Ananda he holds and watches it and there is no more excitement mixed with the flow of it through the mind, vital or body. Naturally the Ananda of samarpan or spiritual realisation or divine love is something far greater, but the Ananda of creation has its place.

Now it is exactly 11.30, we can stop here. In the next episode we shall see Sahana-di dancing.

## 22 July 1970

We ended our last talk with a very important letter on the action of the Force. It is important because it implies a distinction between the old yogas and ours on the one hand, and the action of the yogic Force on the other – in life and its activities as well as in our inner realisation. I would like to, therefore, dwell on it at some length, particularly for the advantage of our younger people who have perhaps heard much about the Force, its action and to a certain extent, had some experience of it – not for the experienced ones. Well, what does the letter say in effect? That there is a Force in the Ashram, as Sri Aurobindo has used the term somewhere – ‘circulating in the Asram’ – which, when one is open to it, can be used, for the purpose you have in hand.

This is the first point. And you can have, if you are sufficiently advanced, a command over that Force.

The second point is that the Force is not bound by the limitations of the instrument. In other words, if I can, by hook or crook, open myself to the Force, it can turn the fool that I am into a wise man! Only the instrument will have to be somewhat sincere, receptive – certainly.

And the third point which may be a corollary to this one, this yogic Force can awaken, or open in us, faculties which are latent or dormant in our being, or somewhere in the universal being, as Sri Aurobindo says, and it can work through us. So, if I am not a poet and want to become one, sincerely, then the Force, if I am open to it, can make me a poet. And I can say very modestly that it has done so with me and you have also seen in Sahana-di's case how during her singing, a great Force had descended and done things which were impossible for her own power to do. I also gave you the instance of Romen. And there are many other instances and I am sure in your case too you have felt some Force has come in and worked miracles. As in athletics you must have done miracles and felt that something has come and touched you. So, '*pangum langhayate girim*'<sup>64</sup> is not simply a phrase without meaning; and '*yogah karmasu kaushalam*'<sup>65</sup> is also another one which illustrates the idea. We are all very much familiar with this Force coming down into us, into the *ādihāra*, and certainly all of us have felt – particularly in cases of difficulty after we have prayed to the Mother to cure us, to save us – and felt it tangibly. So, Sri Aurobindo said that this Force is there in the Ashram, very active, very conscious, silent. He wrote in another letter – to write poetry or to do some artistic work, one can come in contact with that Force and make the Force do that work. Of course, there are certain conditions to be fulfilled in everything. By our personal effort, which also counts, we can do very little, but aided, supported, sustained by this yogic Force, one can do miracles. And I would ask my students to try to get in contact with this Force in their studies – not try to break their heads by their personal effort. So, the difference between the traditional yogas and our yoga, lies in this that our yoga has, as Sri Aurobindo says, a Force which is used in life's activities, whereas the traditional yogas, they don't accept life – life is a *māyā*, an illusion, so there is no question of the Force being applied there. They were far from speaking about the Guru pumping Force into the disciples. I haven't found any concrete instance of that sort. For instance, it has been said that in the presence of Ramana Maharishi, those who sat around him, felt peace coming into them and filling their whole being. But the question is whether that

64. He (Lord) makes the lame cross over the mountain.

65. Yoga is skill in works.

peace was deliberately used by Ramana Maharshi for the benefit of the disciples. Was there a deliberate will, or did it simply radiate from his personality? That is one case. Another case is about Buddha. I read out what Sri Aurobindo wrote to me about Buddha's position in regard to it. After many other things, he says:

[*Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*]

... Buddhist Yoga is an uphill business like the Adwaita Vedanta. You have to do the whole thing off your own bat, and even Tota Puri, Ramakrishna's teacher in Adwaita, was after thirty years of sadhana far from his goal, so much so that he went off to the Ganges to drown himself there – only Ramakrishna and Kali interfered in a miraculous way; that at least is the story.

The Buddhist Church, however, proved weak and admitted '*saranam*'<sup>66</sup> in Buddha as well as in the Dharma and the Sangha.

*Myself:* Didn't he really "pump" his force into his disciples as you do into us?

*Sri Aurobindo:* Surely not. He would have considered it a wrong thing altogether – even if he had any idea about pumping force, which he probably never had. At least I never heard of his doing this operation. He might have given enlightenment, but I think only through *upadesh* – not certainly by pumping light into them... I won't swear that without meaning it he did not influence his disciples in more secret and subtle ways.

– 'Without meaning it', but Sri Aurobindo and the Mother here mean it! (*Laughter*) Of course, Buddha's teaching was that one is master of oneself, therefore there is no room for another master to pump force into you. That's why Sri Aurobindo says, 'it is an uphill business'. So, that yoga would have been far from my capacity!

What about Sri Ramakrishna? Here also we have no positive evidence. He, it seems, just by a finger-touch put Vivekananda in some sort of a trance, from which he came out wailing and lamenting. Apart from that we don't know whether Sri Ramakrishna pumped force into his disciples across Time and Space, or in Time and Space. Never heard of it. He may have also done in secret or subtle ways but not openly. Vivekananda is supposed to have felt

66. Refuge.

his presence in America while delivering his famous address and also felt his force guiding him. But that was Sri Ramakrishna in his disembodied presence – that is possible.

What about Christ? He cured people by a simple touch. But did he cure the mental maladies and vital propensities by the pumping of the force?

So, these are my questions. I leave it to the connoisseurs who know better than I, whether that was done at all in other traditional yogas, leaving aside the application of the Force in life's activity. Tantra, of course, is a Shakti-cult, I don't know anything about it.

Here the phenomenon of the Force acting all the while – consciously or unconsciously – as soon as we are open to it... or even when we are not open to it, it makes an opening, it drills into our shut brain-box. So, it is a very common experience with many of us. The Mother does not need to sit over there and send me a current of Force whenever I call it. She does that, they have done it. But even without their knowledge – if I pray for the Force it does come, if I pray for Peace, I feel it – I don't mean the individual 'I' – the general, common 'I' I'm speaking of. So, this is very concrete. Even if I am unconscious, the Force is very conscious. It makes us do the right thing, in the right way, only we have to be a bit open to it.

What is this Force? I don't dare go very deep into it because my knowledge is very shaky. Yes... my friend Arindam gave you a concrete example the other day of how hundreds of miles away he felt, through a flower sent by the Mother, a tremendous Force coming down into him which he called *Shaktipāta*<sup>67</sup>. A flower sent across so many seas, so many lands, after so many days; he takes it, he breathes it and feels a tremendous Light and Force coming into him.

Now... I wrote to Sri Aurobindo, in the case of a boy or a man who fell ill and was supposed to have been cured by Sri Aurobindo's Force – quite a serious illness. He was brought over from his native place, and without the help of any doctors, cured by the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's Force. But there were some friends with whom we had a very heated debate over this case. There could have been some other force, why do you say that it was Sri Aurobindo's Force that cured him?

67. The descent of the Shakti.

What is Sri Aurobindo's force? It is not a personal property of this body or mind. It is a higher Force used by me or acting through me.

So, what is Sri Aurobindo's Force? There is only one Force – the Divine Force – and Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, by their immense and tremendous *sadhana*, have acquired, have possessed that Force and utilise it night and day for our purpose. And they have established that Force in the atmosphere so that we can draw upon it at any moment we like. We can breathe it consciously or unconsciously, and we are doing so.

Now a bit of a digression if you don't mind – I shall go a little backward from Sahana-di's reminiscences to my saga, to illustrate, to prove or disprove the existence of the Force which I have felt.

As soon as we enter, as newcomers into the Ashram, we cry out the one mantric utterance of our yogic life which is: call down the Force, aspire for the Force and peace, etc. One cannot miss it. Either you are vocally conscious of it or you are silently conscious of it. Some people are lucky enough, for as soon as they enter they feel a widening, enlarging, calm and quiet peace pervasive over the whole atmosphere of the Ashram, so also the Force. It depends on the need and the opening of the person himself. So, as soon as I entered the Ashram or became a sort of a member, the first thing I came to know from people was: 'You have to aspire, you have to cry, you have to call.' I didn't believe much in that, I was a Buddhist. All the same, this is the incessant cry, either from silence or from the noise that dings into our ears, the need for help from above, from the Guru.

I had not much experience of that Force in the medical field, perhaps I wasn't a very good medical man, for my scientific doubt came in, in order to drive away the action of the Force from my conscious field. I mean I felt something but I could not give a concrete instance of the Force acting. Whereas a friend of mine, a great homoeopath, somewhat eccentric, a genius – geniuses are a bit eccentric – the fact that I am not a genius proves perhaps that I am a sane, sound man! (*Laughter*) ...Well... he used to tell me that when he put his hand, for example, on the abdomen of a patient, he would feel very tangibly the Force coming down into his hands and through them into the system of the patient.

Well, I would not have believed him if Sri Aurobindo had not ratified it, because he was on the one hand a good man and an efficient man, on the other hand a great bluffer! So, I had to take everything with a pinch of salt. But... you have seen in the *Correspondence*, Sri Aurobindo confirmed that he could bring down the Force and do some miracles. As a matter of fact, he was accepted in the Ashram because the Mother saw a great Force behind him. And before coming here also, he had a great reputation for curing innumerable diseases. But sometimes that Force went awry, perhaps because he drew too much of it. You remember the story of too much or too little!

So, that was not the case with me in the medical field. I used to believe, of course, that the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's Force is acting on the patient but not through me consciously, whereas in the field of poetry, now and then, I have felt the Force – now and then. Why is it so? In order to explain it I have to go back to my yogic beginning. Well, when I came I found the place, as I said – calm, quiet, but hardly with any notion of yoga. How I came into it God alone knows. I stumbled into it. Or I'd rather say it is the Mother who roped me in, and Sri Aurobindo who made the rope a little tighter (*Laughter*) so that I could not escape. It was too late! I had no intention of doing this business, at all, but I was caught.

So, I had very little faith, no experience, and no knowledge either. I found it a good place to do some serious intellectual business.

Then one day I had a talk with my old friend Sanjiban. I said, "Well, Sanjiban, what do you say? Do you feel some Force in the atmosphere?"

"Yes, certainly there is a great Force."

I said, "I don't believe it. I believe that there is some moral force but no spiritual force as such."

He was not very pleased with my answer. I continued, "Yes, I see the people living a very calm life, very serious in their business, and they are good people, but I don't think it is due to the spiritual force, but a moral force – just as in any other religious institution."

Sanjiban must have done some yoga before – because in Chitragong there was a Sri Aurobindo Centre, and he was one of the members, so he must have had some touch of the Force because of which he felt something of it here. Though I was older and more experienced in life I was far behind in this respect – an agnostic, if



not an atheist. That was my position. But still I wanted to stay here. I wrote to Sri Aurobindo, "I'd like to settle here for good. I like the place, my aspiration is growing."

So, Sri Aurobindo accepted me provisionally. He wrote back:

Before deciding forever, we can take a period of time and see  
– say till August.

So, he gave me six months – a long rope! February – then August was the Darshan, very probably he would focus his vision upon me and see me through and through and make the decision.

But this was all a play, I know. He wanted me to decide for myself, because the Mother had seen my stuff – knew what I was good for or bad for. However, that gave me a sort of thinking to do. Now Sri Aurobindo has made some provision, if during the Darshan I failed in the test, then I would have to pack my things and go back, so I had to do some serious *sadhana*. And gathering some titbits from here and there, I came to call down the Force, and did some meditation without knowing how to do it, regularly. I can tell all these things because they are not private or even deep, but commonplace. After a certain time, I began to feel the descent of the Force – first like a trickle, then a stream, then as Sri Aurobindo says – like a downpour, but not an avalanche. But before that Force descended I had to make a Herculean effort – my mind used to roam about thinking of this and that. In spite of all that, I knew the time limit – August! Damocles' sword hanging over my head! (*Laughter*) So, I had to do something – persisted, trying to call down and down. After a lot of effort the Force used to respond, at first grudgingly (*Laughter*) then a little more generously. And had the experience of it coming down with great pressure upon the head – so much so that it was as if somebody were pressing my head down, and I went into a half-sleep or meditation or trance, whatever you like, and came up like a seal from the bottom of the sea! And popped up!

So, that was a very concrete experience of the Force that I had. Then I didn't know, what tremendous Force Sri Aurobindo had put into his words, but these six months passed magnificently. I don't know how time flew. I was in another atmosphere, in another consciousness. I was living in Budhi House near the Press

– so far away – and had to come for meals to the Ashram. I used to pace for an hour or so, just in front of the Reception Room, where the rockery is, waiting for the Soup distribution. People used to perhaps think me mad, pacing up and down, not talking to anyone. At that time I didn't feel concretely any Force. Now when I think of it, I don't know what had happened to me and how it happened. This was before the Soup distribution. And then, there was Pranam in the morning, in the Meditation Hall in front of Amrita's room. For the Pranam, whenever I went... as I went to the Mother ...I feel a little shy to speak about it... She simply poured her beatific smile every day, for these few months. The other people around used to wonder why the Mother was smiling so graciously at me.

Then afterwards, of course, I did not have to ask Sri Aurobindo whether I had passed the test. I had my own inner conviction that I had passed it. And I remained. Neither did he raise the question, nor did I.

These are small experiences but very illuminating for me.

The second was when I came to possess the 'timber throne' (*Laughter*), in other words when I began to supervise the carpenters. How that occupation was thrust upon me I need not tell you. Only it was some machination of our late engineer friend Chandulal. I don't know why he made this selection. However, I had to supervise and supervision is not my line – and particularly of the carpenters! So, the work did not interest me at all. I would let them have their own free will or their fate and I took up my position at a table and was reading *Essays on the Gita* or this or that. I did not take this Yoga of Works very seriously! Neither had I any idea that the Mother and Sri Aurobindo were very serious about it. I thought that it was just to keep us occupied – to keep us away from doing mischief! (*Laughter*) However, one day I wrote to Sri Aurobindo. As yet the familiarity had not come – I was just any Tom, Dick or Harry – and our relation was very formal. So, I wrote to him, "May I do some reading during my work?"

He replied, "I don't know your work."

That gave me such a slap to my consciousness. I felt something there – Sri Aurobindo saying he doesn't know my work – it's impossible. So, I understood at once the implication. After that day I threw away the books and started doing the work seriously. You

see, one simple sentence! He knew very well because at that time all our correspondence – particularly about the work – was read before the Mother and she must have told Sri Aurobindo that this was my work.

So, since that slap which I've never forgotten and will never forget in my life, a turn, a conversion came to me and I put my heart and soul into my work. And my familiarity with Sri Aurobindo began at least soon after.

My work was as dry as sawdust! Perhaps some of you would have been better workers...

My work was to supervise the carpenters whose work was cutting wood. And Chandulal used to send logs from many places. I had to measure them, number them, and enter them into a register, if you please! Then supply them whenever it was demanded. I don't think you'll blame me if I didn't find sufficient interest in this work...

Well, one day there was a quarrel between me and a young worker – a boy. The time was up, the workers were in a hurry to go home. But the rule was to put everything in order before going away. This boy didn't do it. I observed, "No, you have got to do it well and then go."

I was a young man, he was a young boy... And I was a young god too... He tried to resist and I lost my temper. Fortunately, the other carpenters took my side and persuaded him to do it, and grudgingly and distempered he left. Then I sent a report, as we had to do, to the Mother that such and such a thing had happened and I am sorry I lost my temper. Then Sri Aurobindo wrote back, "That was the wrong thing you did. You should not have lost your temper, but quietly and calmly insisted that it must be done."

There are many other letters about the Force that I have written to Sri Aurobindo. There is an interesting one, written in 1935 – two years after I came, so I have grown into a believer in the Force.

[*Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*]

**Myself:** *I feel that your Force gives us the necessary inspiration for poetry, but I often doubt that you send it in a continuous current.*

**Sri Aurobindo:** Of course not. Why should I? It is not necessary. I put my Force from time to time and let it work out what has to be worked out. It is true that with some I have

to put it often to prevent too long stretches of unproductivity, but even there I don't put a continuous current. I haven't time for such things.

Then another letter:

One can feel it (Force) in the same way if it descends in the body. But sometimes it simply works from above or behind or within and in that case one may be conscious of the result, the energy given without feeling the Force itself.

– so unconsciously you do the thing without feeling the Force.

That reminds me of how we felt a tremendous energy while we were working with Sri Aurobindo. We had to keep watch night and day for two or three months. We hardly had any sleep – for two or three hours at most, and no respite at noon either. But we did not feel the energy tangibly or concretely. And how happy and cheerful we all were – not the least fatigue in our body! I conclude that Sri Aurobindo was either deliberately circulating that Force or the Force was radiating incessantly, unendingly from his Supramental body.

Then to come back to my point, I said I could never imagine that some days I shall have an expert knowledge of carpentry and regulate the work. He answered:

Well, get Energy from above (the Force) and put it forcefully on the carpenters.

This is the point I'm trying to drive at: not only receive it for yourself but you can channelise it into others. So, he said, 'put it forcefully on the carpenters', and I was just a novice, I had no idea about it at all. Then he continues:

If one day you can do that, you will amply justify your timber-throne... One must also aspire for the Force and for the consciousness of the Force. There is a lid in between. Remove that and the Force will come tumbling down into you... Much more easy if you have the force to make a carpenter to carpent properly than to propel a sadhak in the way he should go. Receptivity is all-important for the sadhana – it counts but not so much in getting an ordinary thing done by an ordinary man.

– I was not satisfied, I wanted a little more detail. So, he says:

Direct (the Force) upon them (the workers) in a steady stream.  
If Force can come into you, why can't it go out from you too?

So, there you are. It has not gone out of me yet... I haven't tried it.

## 29 July 1970

Our class has fallen on a very fine day, an important day, a significant day – the day of the opening of the Sri Aurobindo's Action office. It is a very happy coincidence. Now I shall read out the message. Here they are:

1. Truth is stronger than falsehood. There is an immortal Power that governs the world. Its decision always prevails. Join with It and you are sure of the final victory.
2. To speak well is good  
To act well is better.  
Never let your actions be below your words.

Today I propose to have some further discourse on our last week's subject – therefore I called it a happy coincidence, as this is also Sri Aurobindo's action in general. In our last talk I tried to demonstrate the Force's action in life and its activities, the practical application of it. Today I shall try to show you the wider scope of the Force – across Time and Space – its great application.

You know why Sri Aurobindo came here, to Pondicherry. He came not only for the purpose of doing yoga, but because he thought that if there is a spiritual power and if he could possess it he could apply it for the purpose of gaining the freedom of the country. So you see, even at that time, he had that idea of applying the yogic force in the practical field of life. And this is indeed, as I told you in the last talk, the characteristic feature of Sri Aurobindo's yoga.

Today I'll show you further how Sri Aurobindo has not only specialised in the possession and application of that Force, but had also gained a very thorough and accurate knowledge of that Force. Just as a man of science does so had he made it a yogic science and studied it thoroughly in all its applications and aspects in detail of which he has given us some glimpse in his letters. I don't think you find these in his big treatises – they are more metaphysical and general. I shall read some of these letters from Correspondence.

Now, this problem of Force has been very intriguing, even fascinating, to me. Since I heard that there is a Force which can be applied to life and its activities I speculated upon it. What is this Force? How does it act and under what conditions? What is its degree of effectiveness? And so on... Naturally, it is too vast a subject for my small brain! And I was wondering how Sri Aurobindo applied this Force over which he had gained a tremendous mastery – for instance in the case of disease.

If you come to think of it a little more intellectually it becomes very interesting. Is this Force omniscient, omnipotent? Does it know all about the maladies? I have trouble with my lungs or kidney. How does the Force cure me of them? Does it know all the symptoms? Many such problems crop up. Take the instance of giving inspiration to a poet. Does it give us the ideas, the words, the rhythm? Then it must be omniscient. Or does Sri Aurobindo will from upstairs: "Let him have inspiration." (*Laughter*) Just a will and the will does everything – "*tathastu*" – something of that sort.

In so many other cases whether engineering or world politics or war? He is sending the Force against Hitler, to Churchill. How does it work? So that is a cosmic problem to which no human mind even at its best can find any solution, because these are occult things which surpass the understanding of any human being. He commands the Force, he sends it and the Force does everything. He need not be at the back of that Force. He renews it from time to time, when it flags in its power, but he doesn't always dictate. So, as I said, these are highly intriguing for me.

Sri Ramakrishna would say, "Why bother about all these? If you have a *rasagolla* eat it (*Laughter*). Why try to find out the 'what' and 'wherefore' of it? Your business is to get the Divine, that's all." So, such a great problem will make you lose your head trying to solve it. It'll be – to use a simile of his – like a *nooner putul*, a doll

made of salt, trying to measure the depth of the sea, before it has gone “full fathom five” – dissolved, no “sea change”. (*Laughter*) So even if these questions cropped up in the minds of the disciples, they were not encouraged to go into them and find the solutions. On the other hand Sri Aurobindo, at least to some of us, whenever we have asked any questions, and wherever it has been possible, he has solved them. Never threw a wet blanket on these queries. Either a long answer, or a short answer, or a simple sentence or “I have no time today, I’ll see again”. He never said, “Don’t bother me with these things.”

I shall read some of them on various topics.

The other day I told you he asked me to direct the Force into the carpenters and I said that I didn’t know whether I could. My friend Arindam questioned that, he said he wasn’t sure. (*Laughter*) Well, he has placed me in his very high esteem, almost a demi-god. Well, I am grateful to him for such an opinion. There are friends who are sometimes blind, (*Laughter*) there are some friends who are critical, there are some friends who have very little in common, still they are friends...Well, I won’t go into another subject just now! (*Laughter*) But I will read out to you a very fine quotation on true friendship:

When the beauty of understanding  
Within our lives has trod,  
Sometimes we call it friendship  
Though we know that it is God.

“The beauty of understanding”, mark the poetry. I need not comment on it, you are sensitive enough.

Now, after this preface or introduction, I’ll show you how Sri Aurobindo, for the first time, has given a detailed, thorough description of the working of the Force, just as he has given us a description of the world-stair up to the Overmind and the Supermind – a wonderful, graphic, scientific, accurate description. Here too, in one or two letters especially, you will see how he shows the action of the Force. He is unique in that and in many other things. Once, I remember, he said, “I have done two or three impossible things.”

Then we asked, “Why don’t you do this then?”

He said, "What more do you expect from me?" Unfortunately, we didn't record it, only I remember it. One was in the political field, I believe, and the other in yoga.

Here he has opened the field for us to travel, to gain experience and in our turn, if possible, to explore it further and do something more. The seeds are there of which we should be proud, which we should develop more, after exploring.

This has nothing to do with the Force, just a jotting from my correspondence. I may read it now.

*Myself: I hear that X is now shedding tears of joy at the sight of apples, oranges, prunes etc. Tears of sorrow, tears of joy, oh dear!*

**Sri Aurobindo:** "Fruity" tears of joy. They moved me to poetry:

O apples, apples, oranges and prunes,  
You are God's bliss incarnate in a fruit!  
Meeting you after many desolate moons  
I sob and sniff and make a joyous bruit.

Admit that you yourself could not have done better as a poetic and mantric comment on this touching situation. (*Laughter*)

Then, since I have opened this notebook, let me start from here. I won't follow a sequence, that's not possible for me! I am a bit of a poet to stick to these systems. I write here:

*Guru, this is the month when your thrice blessed disciple came into the physical world. (Laughter) But thinking again – what will the poor Guru do if the big disciple doesn't fulfill the conditions? Is that so?*

Then he replies:

The one hope is then that he may last on to fulfill the condition without his knowing that he is doing it! What do you think of that device?

So here again is the question of receiving the Force without knowing it. If it depends on our knowing it, we would have never



been changed and would have remained just as we are!

Then another one:

*Myself: I don't know if your "pressure" includes in its action my precious self. If it does I'll be glad, if it doesn't, I'd pray to be included. Even if I don't feel the pressure, matters little, let it act surreptitiously and my nature break, what?*

**Sri Aurobindo:** The pressure is general but necessarily it is felt or received without feeling it in accordance with the readiness of the sadhak. It includes everybody who can be included and aims at drawing in those who can't.

So there is hope for every one of us.

Now I shall read out from *Correspondence*. Because Sri Aurobindo says that all he has become, all his accomplishments and achievements, are due to his yoga – it is yoga that has developed his style by the development of consciousness, fineness and accuracy of thought and vision, increasing inspiration etc.... So I write a little boldly:

*Methinks you are making just a little too much of Yogic Force. It's potency as regards matters spiritual is undeniable, but for artistic or intellectual things one can't be so sure about its effectiveness. Take Dilip's case, one could very well say, "Why give credit to the Force? Had he been assiduous, sincere elsewhere, he would have done just the same."*

He writes:

Will you explain to me how Dilip who could not write a single good poem and had no power over rhythm and metre before he came here, suddenly, not after long "assiduous" efforts blossomed into a poet, rhythmist and metrist after he came here? Why was Tagore dumbfounded by a "lame man throwing away his crutches and running" freely and surely on the paths of rhythm? Why was it that I who never understood or cared for painting, suddenly in a single hour by opening of vision got the eye to see and the mind of understanding about colour, line and design?

Then, how and why, one after the other he piles upon my head in order to break it! (*Laughter*) Then he says,

Kindly reflect a little and don't talk facile nonsense. (*Laughter*) ...By the way, please try to understand that the supra-intellectual (not the supramental only) – is the field of a spontaneous automatic action. To get it or to get yourself open to it needs effort, but once it acts, there is no effort. Your grey matter does not easily open; (*Laughter*) it closes up also too easily, (*Laughter*) so each time an effort has to be made, perhaps too much effort – if your grey matter would sensibly accommodate itself to the automatic flow there would not be the difficulty and the need of 'assiduous, earnest and sincere endeavour' each time. Methinks. Well?

Then he continues. He won't leave me!

...I challenge your assertion that the Force is more easily potent to produce spiritual results than mental (literary) results. It seems to be the other way round.

Then he says he laboured five hours a day etc., all that you know. Why is it so?

...Because there is less resistance, more cooperation from the confounded lower members for these things than for a psychic or a spiritual change. That is easy to understand at least. Well?

Then I say,

*I have no objection to your being the Supreme, only it stupefies one to think of you as such!*

**Sri Aurobindo:** But there was no question about my being the Supreme.... I don't see why it should stupefy one (you?) in spite of your absence of personal objections to think of me as such (the Supreme)...

Leave aside the question of Divine or undivine, no spiritual man who acts dynamically is limited to physical contact – the idea that physical contact through writing, speech, meeting is indispensable to the action of the spiritual force is self-contradictory, for then it would not be a spiritual force... If you have the spiritual force, it can act on people thousands of miles away who do not know and never will know that you are acting on them or that they are being acted upon – they only feel

that there is a force enabling them to do things and may very well suppose it is their own great energy and genius.

So there we can see the nature, the character of the Force. You see Sri Aurobindo sitting here during the War and sending the Force. How does it happen? Then again here, he elaborates the same theme:

...Yogic Force simply means a higher consciousness using its power, a spiritual and supraphysical force acting on the physical world directly... The Divine does not work arbitrarily or as a thaumaturge; He acts upon the world along the lines that have been fixed by the nature and the purpose of the world we live in...If it were so, there would be no need of yoga or time or human action or instrument or of a Master and disciple or of a Descent or anything else.

It could simply be a matter for the *tathastu* and nothing more. But that would be irrational, if you like, and worse than irrational – ‘childish’. This does not mean that intervention, things apparently miraculous, do not happen – they do. But all cannot be like that.

Then the question I raised last time: “What is Sri Aurobindo’s Force?” I was having a discussion with somebody and I told him, “I don’t see how you can deny the reality of this Force. Were you able to write with such vigour before you came here?”

X said, “Yes, I could work a lot. Surely that was not Sri Aurobindo’s Force! And world figures like Y and Z and the giants who sway men – is that also the Divine Force?”

The discussion went on in this vein. I wrote about it to Sri Aurobindo saying, “Kindly throw some light on the matter.”

His reply:

What is Sri Aurobindo’s force? It is not a personal property of this body or mind. It is a higher Force used by me or acting through me. Of course, it is a Divine Force, for there is only one Force acting in the world, but it acts according to the nature of the instrument...If the Force were a mere freak or miracle it would be equally trivial and unimportant, even if well-attested.

Then he tells me how it manifests in various ways.

...It is neither a magician's wand nor a child's bauble, but something one has to observe, understand, develop, master before one can use it aright or else – for few can use it except in a limited manner – be its instrument. This is only a preface.

Then further on in our discussion he says:

In that particular case it was not the Supramental Force that was used. It was mental-spiritual.

Now you see there are also hierarchies of these forces. The Supramental Force certainly has not been operative till today.

In such cases the object of the Force has always the right to say "No".

But it has such a force that there is no choice left.

I put the Force on him because he said he wanted to change, but his vital refused – as it had the right to do. If nothing in him had asked for the change, I would not have tried it, but simply put another force on him for another purpose.

He would have developed poetry, not asked for the change. Paradoxically enough this Force which is so potent in many other fields, is not so potent in changing human nature. There the greatest of obstacles and stumblings it has to face.

He said once in some connections:

I have been trying and trying, I could not change even Pondicherry – a small town. (*Laughter*)

Then, I wrote:

*Everyone thinks that as soon as you read our letters we get the necessary help and not before that. In my own case I got relief only after the Mother's touch at Pranam or after I had written my whole trouble. Prayers are not heard then?*

His reply:

It depends how far the inner being is awake – otherwise one needs a physical support. There are some people who get the relief only after we read a letter, others get it immediately they write or before it has reached us or after it has reached but before we have read. Others get it simply by referring the whole matter to us mentally.

I remember again a small instance. A patient got very much upset either due to my rude behaviour or I don't know what. So I wrote to Sri Aurobindo that such and such a thing had happened. The patient was very much upset. He wanted him to put his Force to give him peace. Then the next morning comes the answer:

As soon as I received your letter I opened the tap. (*Laughter*) And I came to know that the patient came home and fell into a deep sleep, then woke up having forgotten everything! That's how you see he responded. Fortunately the patient was receptive.

In another case again, a friend of mine who was somewhat unsteady ...He was all the time getting into trouble and writing to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo to rescue him. And Sri Aurobindo commented, "What a phenomenon!" (*Laughter*)

So in this case however, he had a very faithful servant who fell very seriously ill – had smallpox. And my friend was very much disturbed because he liked him very much. He sent a telegram to save the life of his servant. After some time a letter came that the servant had passed away. What happened? The Master couldn't save him.

Then Sri Aurobindo told me, "I was busy saving the master." (*Laughter*)

You see the master could have got the disease, and his life was more precious than the servant's. So it's not *samam Brahman*.

Now there are many other interesting letters on the subject.  
I write to him:

*Do you think the Yogic Force will enable a doctor even if he is not trained to do things like cutting off an appendix or a cataract?*

**Sri Aurobindo:** Good Heavens, no! (*Laughter*) The Force has to prepare its instrument first. It is not a miracle-monger. The Force can develop in you intuition and skill if you are sufficiently open, even if you did not have it before

– but not like that. That kind of thing happens once in a way.

That also happens but it is not the fixed method of the Divine to act like that.

Because, as he says, there are laws that the Divine also has to obey. He cannot intervene at every step.

Then another letter:

*Myself: I tried hard to write a poem but failed in spite of prayer and call. Then I had to appeal to your Force. Before the letter had reached you, lo, the miracle was done! Can you explain the process?*

**Sri Aurobindo:** I usually read your soul-stirring communications (medical or other) at 7.30 or 8 o'clock thereabouts. This one I must have got only after 10 p.m. But that makes no difference. The call for the Force is very often sufficient; not absolutely necessary that it should reach my physical mind first. Many get as soon as they write – or (if they are outside), when the letter reaches the atmosphere. Yes, it is the success in establishing the contact that is important. It is a sort of hitching on or getting hold of the invisible button or whatever you like to call it.

It is like “hitch your wagon to a star”.

I write:

*Sometimes “the Force that is always operating” is not enough for me. You have to leave all relaxed repose and sit up and regain curvilinear proportions and send a dose! This is what must have happened today.*

**Sri Aurobindo:** It is enough if you hitch on to the operating Force which is always rotating or hanging about over your head or over my head or over the general head of the Asram or the (terrestrial) universe. It does not much matter where

you hitch on, so long as you somehow do it. But in this case there may have been some connection with my curvilinear recovery which took place somewhere about 9.30.

I hope you understand the humour of “curvilinear proportions”. I hinted at his body a little!

You understand – curves and lines of the body. I still remember I was reading something and I came across this phrase and said, “Wonderful phrase. I’ll apply it to the Master!”

So he took it up at once. He continues:

But if so, it can only have been because the Force rotated more forcibly by the impulsion of my recovery, for the conscious sending of Force to you took place only when I was reading the letter.

*Myself: When you send the Force is there a time limit for its functioning or does it work itself out in the long run or get washed off after a while, finding the ādhār unreceptive?*

**Sri Aurobindo:** There is no time limit. I have known cases in which I have put a Force for getting a thing done and it seemed to fail damnably at the moment, but after two years everything carried itself out in exact detail and order, just as I had arranged it.

So he arranges also. Not just send a Force and let it do what it likes – you ought to know, but I suppose you don’t, that “psychic” research in Europe has proved that all so-called “psychic” communications can sink into the consciousness without being noticed and turn up long afterwards. It is like that with the communication of the Force also.

There you are. I think I have said enough for today.