



Talks with
SRI AUROBINDO

Vol. 1

Nirodbaran

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SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM
PONDICHERRY

Previous editions

Volume I 1966, 1986

Volume II 1971

Volume III 1973

Volume II-III 1985

Volume IV 1989

Present edition

Volumes 1 and 2 2001

ISBN 81-7058-634-8

© Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust 2001

Published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department

Typeset by Kolam Information Services Pvt. Ltd., Pondicherry

Printed at Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, Pondicherry

Printed in India

NOTE

These talks are from my notebooks. For several years I used to record most of the conversations which Sri Aurobindo had with us, his attendants, and a few others, after the accident to his right leg in November 1938. Besides myself, the regular participants were Purani, Champaklal, Satyendra, Mulshankar and Dr. Becharlal. Occasional visitors were Dr. Manilal, Dr. Rao and Dr. Savor.

As these notes were not seen by Sri Aurobindo himself, the responsibility for the Master's words rests entirely with me. I do not vouch for absolute accuracy, but I have tried my best to reproduce them faithfully. I have made the same attempt for the remarks of the others.

NIRODBARAN

PREFACE

The eve of the November Darshan, 1938. The Ashram humming with the arrival of visitors. On every face signs of joy, in every look calm expectation and happiness. Everybody has retired early, lights have gone out: great occasion demands greater silent preparation. The Ashram is bathed in an atmosphere of serene repose. Only one light keeps on burning in the corner room like a midnight vigil. Sri Aurobindo at work as usual.

A sudden noise! A rush and hurry of feet breaking the calm sleep. 2.00 a.m. Then an urgent call to Sri Aurobindo's room. There, lying on the floor with his right knee flexed, is he, clad in white dhoti, upper body bare, the Golden Purusha. The Mother, dressed in a sari, is sitting beside him. Purani, hearing the urgent ringing of the bell, had answered the call. Then Dr. Manilal, who fortunately had arrived for the Darshan, was called. Presently some of us came. Dr. Manilal has examined Sri Aurobindo. Yes, a fracture and of a serious type. All necessary first aid given, a specialist from Madras is sent for.

Meanwhile a deep gloom has overshadowed the Ashram. The Darshan has to be abandoned. The visitors leave, one by one, with heavy hearts and ardent prayers for the speedy recovery of their beloved Master and Friend.

He was laid on the bed for an indefinite period at the rigorous command of the doctors and attended by a few disciples. There followed regular conversations with those disciples, who were given the privilege of serving him from then onwards for twelve years. There was not a subject that was not touched upon, not a mystery that he did not illumine, not a phenomenon that passed unnoticed, humorous or serious, superficial or profound, mundane or mystic. Reminiscences, stories, talks on art and culture, on world-problems and spiritual life poured down in abundant streams from an otherwise silent and reticent vastitude of knowledge and love and bliss. It was an unforgettable reward he accorded to us for our humble service. "The Divine gives himself to those who give themselves." Those anxious days called forth our best and noblest and he gave in return his fathomless compassion, freely and divinely. All the talks could not be recorded, some have to be kept back, but the rest are presented here. They are as far as possible authentic, though the

words and expressions cannot be his own in all places.

Sometimes a question bore no relation to the one preceding it. Indeed, that was often the general trend of the talks. In a group like ours and in the milieu in which we worked, a methodical discussion of a subject was not always possible nor even very worthwhile. But the pronouncements of one day would often be completed on another when new aspects were brought up in conjunction with those expressed earlier.

One of the most exciting and significant features of our talks was in connection with the last World War. At its very start, a radio was installed in Sri Aurobindo's room and he used to listen to the war news three or four times a day. Then would follow comments and discussions on the war situation, international politics, India's vital role in the war and other allied topics. There we realised Sri Aurobindo's deep and firm grasp of world-politics and, what was most surprising, his penetrating insight into military affairs. Once someone asked him, "Did you ever use the military genius you seem to have?" He replied briefly, "Not in this life." Sri Aurobindo could foresee, as it were, the various strategic moves with their immediate or ultimate consequences on the fate of the war. Sometimes he would drop hints as to how by his spiritual force he was guiding, helping and protecting the Allies and safeguarding India's interests.

In the early period, the conversations took place in the evenings. Some five or six of us used to sit by Sri Aurobindo's bed and wait for his signal. The Mother's presence was an occasional feature that added a lively interest to our talks. Later, however, her work kept her away. Those who took part in the talks were the regular attendants, Purani, Satyendra, Nirodbaran, Champaklal, Mulshankar and Dr. Becharlal, and three occasional visitors, Dr. Manilal, Dr. Rao and Dr. Savor.

NIRODBARAN

TALKS WITH SRI AUROBINDO

Volume 1

10 DECEMBER 1938

Evening about 7.00 p.m. Sri Aurobindo lying on his bed. We, the regular attendants, sitting on the floor, very close together. Dr. Manilal opens the conversation with a question. Sri Aurobindo's voice is very soft, his speech slow.

DR. MANILAL: Why did you choose Pondicherry as the place for your sadhana?

SRI AUROBINDO: Because of an Adesh, a Command. I was ordered by a Voice to come here. When I was leaving Bombay for Calcutta, I asked Lele what I should do about my sadhana. He kept silent for a while, probably waiting to hear a voice from within, and then replied, "Meditate at a fixed time and hear the voice in the heart."

I didn't hear any voice from the heart but a quite different one from above, and dropped meditation at a fixed hour because meditation was going on all the time. When Lele came to Calcutta and heard about all this, he said to me, "The Devil has caught hold of you." I replied, "If it is the Devil, then I will follow him." The same Voice from above brought me to Pondicherry.

DR. MANILAL: We have heard that spirits used to come to you. The book *Yogic Sadhan* is said to have been written by the spirit of Keshab Sen.

SRI AUROBINDO: Keshab Sen? When I was writing it, always at the beginning and at the end the image of Ram Mohan Roy came before me. Somebody has evolved Keshab Sen out of Ram Mohan Roy. Do you know the origin of the name "Uttara Yogi" who is put as the author of the book?

DR. MANILAL: No, Sir.

SRI AUROBINDO: There was a famous Yogi in the South who, while dying, said to his disciples that a Purna (Integral) Yogi from the North (Uttara) would come down to the South and he would be known by three sayings. Those three sayings were

those I had written to my wife. They are published in *Mrinalinir Patra*. A Zamindar disciple of that Yogi found me out, took the book *Yogic Sadhan*, gave the author's name as Uttara Yogi and bore the cost of publication.

DR. MANILAL: Did Lele have any realisation?

SRI AUROBINDO: Of course he had.

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. Faith is above mind, so any discussion or dispute spoils its action.

DR. MANILAL: 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. But when I came here again, I heard many conflicting things from people and didn't get the same result. I thought perhaps I couldn't open myself to you.

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.

DR. MANILAL: 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. The physical mind has doubts inherent in it and they come up at one time or another. 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 always speaking 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.

DR. MANILAL: Shouldn't those who broadcast these ideas be quarantined?

SRI AUROBINDO: I thought of that. But it is not possible. The Mother tried at one time to impose restrictions and regulations; it didn't work. One has to change from within. There are, of course, other Yogic systems which enforce strict disciplines. Buddhism is unique in that respect. In France also there is a school which enjoins rigorous silence.

NIRODBARAN: Is exterior imposition good?

SRI AUROBINDO: It can be good, provided one sincerely keeps to it. In that school in France, for example, people who enter know what they want and so keep to the regulations meant to help their object. Here the object is different. 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. But for this change a constant will is required. If that will is there, lots of things can be done for the man.

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! When one enters into the subconscious, it is like stepping on an unexplored continent. Previous Yogis came down to the vital level, they did not descend farther, and they were quite sensible in not doing so! But if I too had left it there, the real work would have remained undone. Once the subconscious is conquered, things will become easy for those who come after. That is what is meant by the "realisation of one in all".

NIRODBARAN: Then why should we take so much trouble? We can wait for that victory.

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: Ramakrishna has said that one need not be like a drawn bow.

SRI AUROBINDO: Where has he said that? A Yogi has to be always vigilant, especially in the early part of his sadhana, otherwise all he has gained can come down with a thud. People usually don't make sadhana the one thing of their lives. They have two parts, one internal and the other external which goes on with its ordinary movements, social contacts, etc. Sadhana must be made the one central thing.

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.

DR. MANILAL: 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: Of course, of course. 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 Meditations* a striking resemblance between your ideas and hers.

11 DECEMBER 1938

As usual, Sir Aurobindo lying on his bed and looking towards us.

Reports were reaching us that some people who had stayed in the Ashram for a number of years, but at last had to leave it for committing acts of treachery, were now spreading calumnies against us and were even

going to the length of saying that they would destroy the whole Ashram. One of these unbalanced vilifiers had been given refuge in the Ashram, not because of his Yogic capacity but on the intercession of a sincere sadhak who happened to be his relative. This man was now trying to bite the hand that had fed him. We were very indignant at such a brazen manifestation of ingratitude and at the same time amused by his presumptuous utterances. This incident brought in the general subject of our talk.

NIRODBARAN: Is there no justice? Surely such people will have to pay the penalty of their actions? But how is it they are the ones who succeed in life?

SRI AUROBINDO: Justice in this life? May not be, most probably not. But what is justice? It is not what most people believe it to be. The common idea is that the virtuous will be rewarded with happiness and prosperity in the next life while the wicked will have the opposite results. In that case the people you speak of must have been virtuous in their previous birth. Well, that's not my idea of justice. There is true justice in the sense that the good people advance towards a Sattwic nature while those with the contrary disposition go down the scale of humanity: they become more and more Asuric. That is what I have said in the *Arya*.

At this moment the Mother came in. It was the time for her to go downstairs to the Meditation Hall and give a general meditation. Every evening before going down, she used to come and sit for a while in Sri Aurobindo's room, sometimes taking part in the conversation, sometimes meditating. Naturally during her meditation we used to keep quiet. As soon as she entered, she asked Sri Aurobindo with a smile, "Are they again making you talk?" Dr. Manilal put in promptly, "No, Mother, no. We want him to take rest." Everyone, including Sri Aurobindo, burst into laughter. When the noise had subsided, the Mother, seated as usual on the sofa, inquired, "What is the talk about?" Sri Aurobindo replied on our behalf, "They are asking if justice exists." The Mother opened her eyes very wide, and we again laughed. Sri Aurobindo then narrated in brief the incidents which had prompted our talk and the turn the talk had taken.

THE MOTHER: Of course, there is justice. Do you think these people can have an easy and comfortable life? They can't; they suffer, they are tormented, they are not happy within.

NIRODBARAN: But that unhappiness does not seem to change them. They go from bad to worse.

THE MOTHER: Probably, but in some cases as the Divine pressure goes on acting on them, at one time or another, especially during some impending catastrophe, a sudden change takes place in them. We have seen a number of cases like that. For example, those who were trying to persecute Sri Aurobindo when he first came here.

But by justice you mustn't mean that certain qualities will not get results favourable to them. Among those people whom you mention, one may be a scoundrel, but if he has capacity and cleverness he will surely succeed in life, for it is these qualities that meet with success, not always virtue or piety.

NIRODBARAN: To know how to cheat people and get their money—is it cleverness?

THE MOTHER: Of course it is; or you may say it is a misuse of cleverness. I don't say that this kind of cleverness will not have its consequences, but it can't be denied at the same time that people with such qualities succeed in life.

NIRODBARAN: You have said in your *Prayers and Meditations* that justice exists and one can't avoid the law of Karma except by the Divine Grace. Why doesn't one believe in this Grace?

THE MOTHER (after looking for some time with meditative eyes): Because the human mind arranges and combines things, accepts or eliminates them according to its own notion and judgment. It does not leave any room for the Grace. For instance, one is cured of a disease or passes an examination; one thinks it is due to medicine or one's effort. One doesn't see that in between these factors or behind them there may be the Grace acting on one. (*Turning to Sri Aurobindo*) Isn't that so?

SRI AUROBINDO: People would call it luck, I suppose. (*Laughter*)

THE MOTHER: If one does not recognise the Grace, how can it work? It is as if one had shut one's door against it. Of course, it can work from below, underneath, so to speak.

NIRODBARAN: Doesn't the Grace act unconditionally?

THE MOTHER: It does, especially on those who have been predestined for some definite work in life. Yes, the Grace is unconditional; but at the same time how will it work if a man is throwing it away or doesn't recognise it? It would be like con-

stantly spilling from a cup in which something is being poured. If one recognises the Grace and expresses gratitude, it acts more quickly and more powerfully.

NIRODBARAN: Isn't it because we are ignorant that we don't recognise it?

THE MOTHER: No; I know many ignorant people who having received the Grace have expressed a deep gratitude welling up from the heart.

DR. MANILAL: We should like the Grace to act like a mother feeding her infant when it is hungry and supplying things when needed.

SRI AUROBINDO: And who is this infant here? (*Loud laughter*)

THE MOTHER: But the Grace does not work according to human standards or demands. It has its own law and its own way. How can it act otherwise? Very often what seems to be a great blow or calamity at the present moment may turn out to be a great blessing after ten years or so, and people say that their real life began only after that mishap.

(*After a short pause in a half-withdrawn mood, then taking up the thread of the original topic*) I am interested to see what will be the reactions of those people. The results may be different in each, but I can't say just now in what way.

NIRODBARAN: Will it be only a difference of degree?

THE MOTHER: No, a difference of quality also; for one may be more stupid and blind than another who may be conscious of what he is aiming at. So the former has less power to harm.

NIRODBARAN: Perhaps one of them may change for the better.

THE MOTHER: In what sense?

NIRODBARAN: He may turn to the divine life again.

THE MOTHER: That is romance!

NIRODBARAN: But Satyendra may come to the Ashram once more — since he was here a good number of years.

THE MOTHER (*amused*): Do you think so? When a man who has been given a chance deliberately turns his back on the Divine, he spoils his possibility. That he had a possibility is, on the other hand, shown by the fact that he was given a chance.

With these words the Mother left for the general meditation and we formed our usual ring around Sri Aurobindo. Dr. Manilal started the talk.

He began by describing at length the Jain law of Karma, most of which was too deep for some of us. He was, by the way, very fond of quoting Jain Shastras whenever an opportunity presented itself and seemed to be quite an adept. Terms like Jiva, Tirthankara, Utkata Karma, etc. used to flow frequently from him and Sri Aurobindo also used to show interest in his declamations, sometimes joking at his theories and putting him into tight corners from which he tried to wriggle out somehow. At times he used to take Sri Aurobindo's railleries and cross-questioning very seriously. Looking far towards some horizon, with eyes slightly narrowed as if he had gone into the times of Mahavira and surveyed the history of Jainism, he would begin, in one of his characteristic manners, "Jainism says, Sir—" But before he had time to indulge his eloquent fervour, we would sometimes shout, "There, there, the doctor with his Jainism again," and there would be chuckles all over the room. As it is difficult to report abstruse technical things correctly, it is best to touch only on some relevant portions of the talk, with an apology if justice is not wholly done to the theories expounded.

Dr. Manilal began to expound the Jain law of Karma and ended by saying how even the Tirthankaras could not escape this rigorous law: they also had to pay in exact mathematical measures.

SRI AUROBINDO: It seems to be a great thing—but too wonderful and mathematical to be true! There was an illustration of this mathematical theory in the example of a son who, although he lived only for a short time, cost his father a great deal of money because of his ill-health. It was explained that the father had been the debtor of the son in his previous life and the son had realised by these expenses the exact amount of money he had lent to the father. Well, what do you say?

DR. MANILAL: No, Sir. That can't be the real explanation. Somebody must have cut a joke or exaggerated. There is what is called Vikacit Karma or Utkata Karma, which can't be avoided. It is like a knot which can't be untied.

SRI AUROBINDO: It may be then this Utkata Karma that caused my accident!

DR. MANILAL: Why this unmerited suffering in your case?

SRI AUROBINDO: How do you know it is unmerited? Perhaps it was to give me knowledge of intense pain. The pains I had experienced so far were of an ordinary nature which I could transform into Ananda. But this was intense. And since it came swiftly and suddenly, I could not change it into Ananda. But when

it settled down into a steady sensation I could. Besides, we shall see afterwards its full significance. Of course, I accept it as a part of the battle.

DR. MANILAL: When will you be cured?

SRI AUROBINDO: I can't say and, even if I could, the hostile forces would at once rush up to prevent the cure. That is why I don't want to prophesy about anything. Not that things are not known beforehand or possibilities not seen. There are things about which I have definitely pronounced in advance. But where it is a question of possibilities, I don't tie myself down to any; for if I do that, I commit myself in advance to certain lines of movement and the result of them may not be what I wanted. Consequently I would not be able to bring down what I was striving for.

But plenty of people can prophesy and among Yogis that capacity is very common. When I was arrested, my maternal grand-aunt asked Vishuddhananda, "What will happen to our Auro?" He replied, "The Divine Mother has taken him in her arms: nothing will happen to him. But he is not *your* Aurobindo, he is the world's Aurobindo and the world will be filled with his perfume." Narayan Jyotishi also, who did not know me, foretold my three trials, my white enemies and my release. When my horoscope was shown to him, he said there was some mistake about the time of my birth. When it was corrected, he remarked, "Ah, the lead is turned into gold now."

(Turning to Dr. Manilal) Have you had any prophetic dreams?

DR. MANILAL: Not as far as I remember, but Ambegaukar's daughter-in-law once said that she had seen him being carried to the burning ghat and exactly two hours later he died.

SRI AUROBINDO: That's a good instance.

DR. MANILAL: But, as in the case of you and Vishuddhananda, can one prophesy about a person without even knowing him?

SRI AUROBINDO: Why not? Prophesying is an intuitive power. I once tried to see a man whom we wanted to get appointed as Governor here. I saw a figure seated in an office, but a person totally unknown and quite different from the one we wanted. After some time, a quarrel broke out between my brother-in-law Bose and a Government official. He was summoned to the office, but the letter addressed to him bore by mistake the name

“Ghose” instead of “Bose”. So I had to go and I found to my surprise the very man in my vision sitting as the Governor.

On another occasion, a friend of C. R. was coming to see me. I wanted to have a vision of the man. I saw a man with a clean-shaven head and a bull-dog face, but when he turned up it was a man with quite a different appearance—regular South Indian Brahmin features. But curiously enough, about two years later when I met him again I found that he had completely changed to what I had seen in my vision! These things are thrown out in this way from the subtle world to the surface consciousness.

Take another instance. I was in the past a great tea-addict; I could not do any work without my cup of tea. Now, the management of the tea was in the hands of my brother-in-law. He used to bring it any time he woke up from his sleep. One day I had a lot of work to do but couldn't get into it without the tea. I began to think, “When will he bring it, why doesn't he come?” So far I had never asked anybody for anything for myself. Suddenly I found that a particular time was written on the wall before me, and exactly at that time the tea was brought in.

DR. MANILAL: Is the consciousness of the Divine possible in even the physical cells?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, the cells can have peace and joy and other things. When they are quite conscious, they can throw opposing forces out. When peace descends into the physical being, it is a great force for cure.

NIRODBARAN: Can one have peace without knowing it?

SRI AUROBINDO: That would be neutral peace, though it would be more than quietude. But there is a positive peace which one knows and feels. Truth also can descend into the physical—and power as well, but very few can bear power. There is a descent of light too.

There is an infinite sea of peace, power, Ananda just above the head—what we call “overhead”. (*Looking at Nirodbaran*) And if one is in contact with it one can get these things always.

DR. MANILAL: Do any thoughts or suggestions come to you?

SRI AUROBINDO: How do you mean? Thoughts and suggestions come to me from every side and I don't refuse them. I accept them and see what they are like. But if you mean thinking, I never do that. Thinking ceased a long time ago—it has stopped ever since

that experience of mine with Lele, the Silence and Nirvana at Baroda. Thoughts, as I said, come to me from all sides and from above and the receptive mind remains quiet or it enlarges itself to receive them. True thoughts always come in this way. You can't think out such thoughts. If you try to do so, you only make what the Mother calls mental constructions.

DR. MANILAL: Was the *Arya* with its thousands of pages written in this way?

SRI AUROBINDO: No, it was transmitted directly into the pen. It is a great relief to get out of the responsibility.

DR. MANILAL: Oh yes, Sir.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't mean responsibility in general, but of thinking about everything. Some thoughts are given, some are reflected from above. It is not that I don't look for knowledge. When I want knowledge, I call for it. The higher faculty sees thoughts as if they were written on a wall.

DR. MANILAL: Vishuddhananda is said to be able to produce all sorts of smells, for which he has been known as Gandhibaba. Do you think it possible to do such things?

SRI AUROBINDO: It is difficult to know if the smells are all materialisations or subtle smells projected into the physical or on the senses.

Many people have experiences of subtle realities. Paul Brunton told us he was always aware of some Presence accompanying him but could not identify it. When he saw my photo it did not at all resemble his vision, but when he saw me at Darshan time he at once recognised me as the Presence.

DR. MANILAL: Why didn't he remain here if he had an opening to you and also admiration for you?

SRI AUROBINDO: We did not advise him to remain. The Mother, after a meditation with him, told him about some of his difficulties and he admitted she was right.

At one time I thought that physical Siddhi, spiritual power over matter, was impossible. But in the Alipore Jail I found once after my meditation that my body had taken a position which was physically impossible: it was actually raised some inches above the ground; there was what is known as levitation. Then again, I practised for a time raising my hands and keeping them suspended in the air without any muscular control. Once in that condition I fell asleep. The warder saw me in that posture and reported that

I was dead. The authorities came and found me quite alive. I told them the warder was a fool.

There is a French author, Jules Romains, who is a mystic as well as a medical man. He can see with other parts of the body than the eyes. He says the eyes are only a specialised part; other parts can also be trained to see while the eyes remain closed. He even gave a demonstration to scientists; but they refused to admit its validity.

12 DECEMBER 1938

This talk took place before the others had come up, when Nirodbaran was all alone with Sri Aurobindo. Nirodbaran read out some of Tagore's last poems, which were supposed to express spiritual experiences.

NIRODBARAN: Is there anything here?

SRI AUROBINDO (*smiling*): Nothing much, except that he speaks of some light in the first poem.

NIRODBARAN: In the rest he speaks of losing the body-consciousness and of the world-memory getting fainter and fainter.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, but that means death.

NIRODBARAN: Doesn't it mean that he is getting into another world? He speaks of stars, etc.

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, if he was getting into another world, why on earth doesn't he say so? The poem is hazy. The Vaishnava poets have clearly stated their experiences.

NIRODBARAN: Dilip told me that once Tagore in an agony of pain tried hard to concentrate and ultimately he separated himself from his pain and got relief. Isn't that a spiritual experience?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, that is a spiritual experience.

NIRODBARAN: I remember also to have read in his autobiography, *Jivan Smriti*, that one day he felt a sudden outburst of joy and all Nature seemed to be full of Ananda. The outcome of that feeling or experience of bliss is supposed to be the poem "Nirjharer Swapna Bhanga" ("Interruption of the Dream of the Fountain").

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, that too is a spiritual experience. What does he say in the poem?

NIRODBARAN: He speaks of a fountain breaking all barriers and rushing towards the sea in Ananda.

SRI AUROBINDO: But why does he take that symbol? Was it in that symbolic form that the experience came?

NIRODBARAN: I don't think so.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then why doesn't he write the experience as he got it? Nobody reading the poem will realise that he wrote it from some experience. He has a tendency to be decorative, and the danger of decorativeness is that the main thing gets suppressed by it.

Take, as an opposite example, that line about Usha, the Mystic Dawn, from the Rig Veda, which I have quoted in *The Future Poetry*:

Vyuchanti jivam udirayanti usa mritam kancana bodhayanti.

Raising high the living, awakening someone dead.

When one reads it, one feels at once that it is written out of experience. It tells us directly of the Dawn-Goddess that she is raising higher and higher whatever is manifested and brings out all that has remained latent, unmanifested. Of course, one has to be familiar with the symbols; then the thing becomes quite clear.

NIRODBARAN: But mystic poetry is bound to be a little hazy and vague, at least to those who are not mystically minded. Tagore also has written simple and clear poems in his *Gitanjali*: for example, "*Amar matha nata kare dao*" ("Let my head bow down"). Perhaps one can write poetry of that kind mentally too. Is personal experience always necessary?

SRI AUROBINDO: No. One need not have personal experience for such poetry.

NIRODBARAN: You once compared mystic poetry to moonlight and spiritual poetry to sunlight.

SRI AUROBINDO: No, I meant occult poetry to be like moonlight. There are two kinds of mystic poetry: occult-mystic and spiritual-mystic. That poem of mine, "Trance", with its moon and star, or my "Bird of Fire" is occult-mystic, while the sonnets are spiritual-mystic. For instance in the sonnet "Nirvana", I have put exactly what Nirvana is. One is at liberty to use any symbol or image, but what one says must be very clear through the symbol or the image. Say, for example, those lines from the Rig Veda:

Condition after condition is born,
Covering after covering becomes conscious;
In the lap of the Mother he sees.

Here images are used but it is very clear to anyone knowing the symbols what is meant and that it is a result of genuine experience. Or take another example:

The Seers climb Indra like a ladder,

Along with the ascent all that remains to be done becomes clear.

It is an extraordinary passage, expressing perfectly the experience. Do you see that? Indra is the Divine Mind and, as one ascends higher and higher, whatever has still to be done grows visible and distinct. One who has had that experience can testify how perfectly true it is and that it must have been written from experience, not from any power of imagination.

NIRODBARAN: But sometimes cannot one write truly about spiritual things without experiencing them or being conscious of them?

SRI AUROBINDO: Why not? The inner being can have the vision and express it, without the outer having the least awareness of it.

NIRODBARAN: Can one who is not a mystic write mystic poems? Tagore—or Harin before he came here?

SRI AUROBINDO: Tagore had a tradition of religious tendencies in his family. Harin had a mystic part in him. Unfortunately, he had many other parts also. Reading his earlier poems I predicted that he could be a spiritual poet. As soon as he came here, he went on very well in the first year of his sadhana; his inner mind opened and the things he wrote about the Mother were felt by him. His poetry was always associated with his higher parts.

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The Mother came to Sri Aurobindo's room at about 6.00 p.m. and began to meditate. All of us started meditating with her. After half an hour or so she went away. Sri Aurobindo looked twice at Dr. Manilal who seemed to be struggling to meditate.

SRI AUROBINDO (*smiling*): Meditating?

DR. MANILAL (*smiling back*): Trying hard, Sir, but without success since last Wednesday when I had a splendid meditation. Many undesirable things come to disturb me.

SRI AUROBINDO: What are they?

DR. MANILAL: Some nonsense.

SRI AUROBINDO: Some extraordinary nonsense like the thought of perpetual attendance on your Maharaja patron or of the likely successor to Mussolini?

DR. MANILAL: No, Sir. Thoughts of the Maharaja come very rarely. But why doesn't one succeed in meditation even after so much trying, while on some days it comes very suddenly?

SRI AUROBINDO: That happens often to everybody except those Yogis who make meditation their only business. And even they have their blank periods.

DR. MANILAL: I see my friend Nirodbaran goes at once into meditation and starts drooping his head.

NIRODBARAN: Yes, in despair. (*Laughter*)

SRI AUROBINDO (*to Nirodbaran*): Do you go to sleep?

DR. MANILAL: Can one go to sleep in despair?

SRI AUROBINDO: As an escape, yes. There are some people who go to sleep standing. There was, for example, Rajnarayan Bose who would sleep standing, like a horse.

NIRODBARAN: Did he use to practise meditation?

SRI AUROBINDO: Meditation of some sort. (*Turning to Nirodbaran*) But you had a look of deep concentration on your face. Are appearances deceptive here?

DR. MANILAL: No, Sir. As he is a poet he lives in higher regions.

SRI AUROBINDO: What about Shakespeare's statement that poetry creates fictions, tells lies?

DR. MANILAL: He is not a poet of that sort.

How is it that some people lose at once their consciousness in meditation, and their body sways this side and that, even falls to the ground?

SRI AUROBINDO: That happens with many. And that is why some Yogis bind themselves to a support to prevent falling. The Yogis who practise Asanas remain erect.

DR. MANILAL: How can one succeed in meditation?

SRI AUROBINDO: By quietude of mind. There is not only the Infinite in itself, but also an infinite sea of peace, joy, light, power above the head. The golden lid, Hiranmaya patram, intervenes between the mind and what is above the mind. Once you break this lid (*making a movement of the hand above the head*) they can come

down any time at your will. But for that, quietude is essential. Of course, there are people who can get them without first establishing the quietude, but it is very difficult.

NIRODBARAN: Is there a veil in the heart also?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, a veil or wall of the vital being with its surface consciousness and emotional disturbances. One has to break through that to what is behind the heart. In some people the Force works behind the veil because it would meet with many obstacles and resistances if it worked in front. It goes on building or breaking whatever is necessary till one day the veil drops off and one finds oneself living in the Infinite.

NIRODBARAN: Does the Force work all the time, even when there is no aspiration in the being?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, in those who have an inner urge. The intermittent bouts of aspiration may be due to the action of the Force behind.

DR. MANILAL: We request you to tell us how to get all that peace, joy, light, power.

SRI AUROBINDO: The secret is to want it and nothing else. (*Smiling*) Too difficult, isn't it? Well then, you have to wait. Yoga demands patience. The old Yogas say that one has to wait for twelve years before one can hope to get any experience. Only after such waiting can one complain. But you once said that you had many experiences. You have no right to complain.

DR. MANILAL: True, Sir. I told you how meditation used to come spontaneously at Baroda at any time and I simply had to sit down to meditate, it used to come with such force! Occasionally it would come when I was just about to go to the hospital, and the experiences of peace and of other things would last for days. And then came the period of lull: nothing happened at all. But surely meditation should visit us once a fortnight? Sometimes I feel a pull on the head upwards.

SRI AUROBINDO: Of course, it isn't the physical head. It is a happening in the subtle body, the mind trying to ascend towards the higher consciousness.

NIRODBARAN: One sees things like hills or seas in dreams or visions. What is their significance?

SRI AUROBINDO: They are symbols: the sea of energy and the hill of being with its different planes and parts, with the Divine at the summit. They are quite common. When one feels the

wideness, a vastness as if one were expanding, that increases the opening. The heart can expand just as the mind can.

(Turning to Dr. Manilal) Have you never felt your inner being?

DR. MANILAL: I have, Sir. I told you how I had found it and then lost it through fear. I felt as if I were going to die.

SRI AUROBINDO (*laughing*): Ah, I forgot that tragedy!

DR. MANILAL: At one time I felt as if my head were lying at the Mother's feet. What does that mean, Sir?

SRI AUROBINDO: It is the experience of the psychic being. So you had the psychic experience.

DR. MANILAL: But unfortunately I couldn't recognise it. (*Laughter*)

SRI AUROBINDO: It is this "I" that comes in the way. One must forget it, as if the experiences were happening to somebody else. If one could do this, it would be a great conquest. When I had the experience of Nirvana, I forgot myself completely. I was a sort of nobody. What's the use of Dr. Manilal So-and-so living with this "I"? If in discovering your inner being, you had even died, it would have been a glorious death.

DR. MANILAL: What happens when the human consciousness is replaced by the divine consciousness?

SRI AUROBINDO: One feels a perpetual calm, a perpetual strength, one is aware of Infinity and lives not only in Infinity but also in Eternity. One feels Immortality and does not care about the death of the body. And then one has the consciousness of the One in all. Everything becomes the manifestation of the Brahman. For instance, as I look round this room, I see everything as the Brahman. No, it is not mere thinking, it is a concrete experience. Even the wall, the books are the Brahman. I see you no more as Dr. Manilal but as the Divine living in the Divine. It is a wonderful experience.

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Time about 5.30 p.m.; silent atmosphere, Dr. Manilal meditating, Nirodbaran sitting by his side. Sri Aurobindo cast a glance at Dr. Manilal. After a few minutes Nirodbaran tried to kill a mosquito and made a clapping sound. Sri Aurobindo looked at him. Dr. Manilal opened his eyes. Nirodbaran felt both embarrassed and amused.

DR. MANILAL: You make such a noise to kill a mosquito!

NIRODBARAN: I am sorry to have spoiled your meditation.

DR. MANILAL: Meditation can't be spoiled. We shall meditate when the Mother comes. (*Laughter*)

The talk turned to Theosophy.

DR. MANILAL: The Theosophists speak of Mahatmas from whom they receive messages.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, Morya and Koothoomi are two of their Mahatmas. The Mahatmas are said to be living somewhere in Bhutan among Rishis who are thousands of years old, I hear.

DR. MANILAL: Not true? You wrote, a long time ago, a poem on Koothoomi in the *Standard-Bearer*. From it we have thought of a being with great spiritual realisation.

SRI AUROBINDO: It was purely a play of the poetic imagination.

DR. MANILAL: What do you think of Madame Blavatsky?

SRI AUROBINDO: She was a remarkable woman.

DR. MANILAL: Were you ever a freemason?

SRI AUROBINDO: My eldest brother was. I gathered that there was nothing in it. But it certainly had something when it was first started.

Have you heard of Cagliostro? He was a mystic freemason with a great prophetic power. He never charged anyone any money and yet he was affluent. It was said he could make gold. He prophesied about the French Revolution, the taking of the Bastille and the guillotining of the King and Queen. He used to prophesy about race-horses too. This got him into trouble. He was imprisoned and died in prison.

(*After a few minutes' silence*) Have you heard of Nostradamus? No? He was a Jew. At that time the Jews had a lot of knowledge. He wrote a book of prophecy in an obscure language and foretold, among other things, the execution of Charles I, the establishment of the British Empire and the lasting of the Empire for 330 years.

NIRODBARAN: Then there is a long time before it goes.

SRI AUROBINDO: No. It is to be counted from the beginning of Britain's colonies. That means from James I. In that case it should end now.

DR. MANILAL: Judging from Chamberlain's utterance lately, it looks as if Britain were not obliged to side with France in case of war.

SRI AUROBINDO: The English always keep their policy open so that they may change according as they like or want.

DR. MANILAL: But they can't join Germany or Italy, can they?

SRI AUROBINDO: Why not? They can share with them France's African colonies.

At this time the Mother came in. Seeing her, we changed our positions from near Sri Aurobindo's bed.

THE MOTHER: Don't move, don't move!

DR. MANILAL: Mother, we have decided to meditate when you come.

The Mother opened her eyes wide and all of us laughed.

MOTHER: But if I want to hear the talk?

DR. MANILAL: Then, of course, we shall talk.

SRI AUROBINDO (*to the Mother*): I am giving the doctor a few prophecies of Cagliostro and Nostradamus whom he has never heard of.

Then Buddhism came in as a topic.

NIRODBARAN: Lokanath Bhikshu, an Italian convert, tried to call me back from here. I found him rather illogical.

SRI AUROBINDO: All preachers are illogical. Were you a fervent Buddhist? Is there much Buddhism where you come from?

NIRODBARAN: There are about one or two million Buddhists, but there is practically nothing of Buddhism.

THE MOTHER: Is Northern or Southern Buddhism professed?

NIRODBARAN: Southern.

THE MOTHER: In China and Japan too no real Buddhism is found—only ceremonies. In Ceylon, they say, there is still some authentic Buddhism.

NIRODBARAN: Also in Burma nothing authentic remains, I am told, but the Burmese people show a great respect for their Bhikshus.

DR. MANILAL: Yes, respect for the appearance and not for the reality.

SRI AUROBINDO: Lele also used to think that the appearance has some value. Once I met X with him. He asked me, "Why don't you bow down to him?" I replied that I didn't believe in the man. He said, "But you must respect the yellow robe."

As the Mother had gone into meditation all of us tried to meditate with her. At about 7.00 she departed and we gathered again round Sri Aurobindo's bed.

SRI AUROBINDO (*addressing Nirodbaran*): You seem to have had Ananda in your meditation. Your face is beaming.

DR. MANILAL: Yes, Sir. Nirodbaran nowadays beams with Ananda.

NIRODBARAN: I fell into deep sleep, I think. But I had also some visions which seemed to be quite distinctly outside me.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then why do you call it sleep? It may be the psychic being or the inner being watching what was happening. Sometimes one goes into a deep state and remembers nothing of the outer consciousness though many things may be occurring on the surface. What is called dreamless sleep is really a sleep where many dreams are passing on, only one doesn't know of them. Sometimes one discusses important problems in such a condition. At other times, one gets the ecstasy of union with the Divine. One may also go into other worlds with a part of one's being and meet all kinds of forms. This is, of course, the first stage and a kind of beginning of Samadhi.

From what you describe, it may be an inner-being experience and not a psychic one. Even then, there is no doubt that your face is beaming with Ananda. It is on seeing it like this that I thought you had gone within.

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NIRODBARAN: Can one get diagnoses of diseases in such a state?

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh yes. Many people are said to have had their problems solved when they had gone within. I remember a peculiar experience of mine. As I was meditating, I saw some writings crossing above my head. Then a blank. Then again those writings with a gap in the middle which meant that things were going on though I was not conscious of them.

(*Addressing Dr. Manilal*) Now what about your meditation?

DR. MANILAL: Not successful, Sir!

SRI AUROBINDO: How? I saw you grim and powerful, wrestling your way towards the Brahman. (*Loud laughter*)

DR. MANILAL: Plenty of thoughts invaded me. I tried to reject them and make myself empty.

SRI AUROBINDO: And the result was emptiness?

NIRODBARAN: But that is meditation, surely?

DR. MANILAL: No, no, it isn't. I couldn't go within. I didn't feel the pressure. Was it meditation, Sir?

SRI AUROBINDO: That is the beginning, the first stage. The mind must first be quiet for other things to come down. But one must not dictate to the meditation what it should or should not be. One must accept whatever it brings. Do you always have to try to meditate?

DR. MANILAL: Not always. I have told you that sometimes it visits me all on a sudden and then I have to sit down. But was I right in saying what I did just now? I said that I was able to reject thoughts.

SRI AUROBINDO (*laughing*): How do I know? You are the man to know it. I was only making comments on your statements.

DR. MANILAL: You don't know? We consider you omniscient.

SRI AUROBINDO: You don't expect me, surely, to know how many fishes the fishermen of Pondicherry have caught or how much money they have made out of the catch. People from Bombay used to ask me if the price of cotton would go up, if this or that horse would win a race and if the child they had lost would be found again. What's the use of knowing all these things? You must have heard Ramakrishna's story of a Sannyasin's river-crossing by occult power. Of course, if necessary, one can know all those things in a Swapna Samadhi. Besides, I am not occupied with details of occult working. I have left them to the Mother. She often hears what is said at a distance, meets sadhaks on the subtle planes, talks to them. She saw exactly what was going to happen in the recent European trouble. We know whatever we have to know for our work.

NIRODBARAN: What puzzles me is that you have never told me anything when I have asked you about the condition of a patient or my diagnosis of his complaint.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why do you expect me to do your work?

NIRODBARAN: Oh, that's different. But you said you have no latent medico in you and hence you couldn't say anything. I thought you could by your intuition.

Then the talk drifted to the subject of intuition and doctors getting their diagnoses in sleep. Nirodbaran mentioned the Mother's advice to him to get intuition through silence of the mind. The results were discussed.

SRI AUROBINDO (addressing Dr. Manilal): I was telling you we know what we have got to do. But it is not always good to know. For instance, if I know a thing is going to happen, I am bound to it and even if it is not what I want I have to accept it and this prevents my having a greater or another possibility. So I want to keep myself free and deal with various possibilities. Below the Supermind everything is a question of possibilities. Hence I keep myself free to accept or reject as I like. Destiny does not mean that a thing is fixed. It is just a sum of forces which can be changed.

NIRODBARAN: Without knowledge of the thing, how will one work? After knowing, can't one reject?

SRI AUROBINDO: Knowledge comes by intuition. One can reject, but the result is not sure, though one's failure may show the way to a later success.

DR. MANILAL: You have said that you have conquered the death which comes by a natural process but that you have no complete control over accidents.

SRI AUROBINDO: Where did I say that?

NIRODBARAN: If I remember rightly, you wrote to me that diseases can't end your life but still you can't wholly control accidents.

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh! Diseases usually run a long course, so one has time to act on them. But if there are diseases of a sudden or severe nature that can end one's life immediately, then conquest is not possible. And about accidents, the body has its own consciousness and is always alert. But if the mind is occupied with other things, an accident can take one unaware. As regards violence—for example, a riot—I would have to concentrate for four or five days in order to protect myself.

The hostile forces have tried many times to prevent things like the Darshan, but I have succeeded in warding off all their attacks. At the time the accident to my leg happened, I was more occupied with guarding the Mother and I forgot about myself. I didn't think the hostiles would attack me. That was my mistake. As for the Ashram, I have been extremely successful, but while I have tried to work on the world the results have been varied. In Spain, in Madrid, I was splendidly successful. General Miaja was an admir-

able instrument to work on. Basque was an utter failure. Negus was a good instrument but the people around him, though good warriors, were too ill-organised and ill-equipped. The work in Egypt was not a success. In Ireland and Turkey the success was tremendous. In Ireland I have done exactly what I wanted to do in Bengal. The Turks are a silent race.

NIRODBARAN: Did you stop war the last time there was a chance of it?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes—for many reasons war was not favourable at that time.

NIRODBARAN: But you stopped it at the cost of the humiliation of some great Powers.

SRI AUROBINDO: I didn't care for that.

NIRODBARAN: What do you think of the Sino-Japanese War?

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't think much of either party. They are six of one and half-dozen of the other. Both too materialistic. But if I were to choose, I would side with Japan, for Japan at one time had an ideal. The power of the Japanese for self-sacrifice, patriotism, self-abnegation and silence was remarkable. They would never lose their temper in front of anybody, though perhaps they might stab afterwards. They could work so silently and secretly that no one knew anything before the Russo-Japanese War broke out. All of a sudden it broke out. The Japanese are Kshatriyas, and their aesthetic sense is of course well known. But European influence has spoiled all that, and see now how brutal they have become—a thoroughly un-Japanese thing. Formerly they could look upon their opponents with sympathy. Look at Japanese sentries boxing European officers. Not that the latter don't deserve it. Look also at the Japanese commander challenging Chiang-Kai-Shek to come out into the open field. This sort of bragging is not at all truly Japanese.

NIRODBARAN: But, without brutalities like the killing of innocent citizens, won't it be difficult for them to win the war?

SRI AUROBINDO: God knows! The Japanese are such fine warriors, such a patriotic and self-sacrificing nation, that one would believe the contrary. But they are doing these things probably because of two supposed reasons: first, financial shortage, which is not a very convincing reason since they have an immense power of sacrifice; second, the population of China.

NIRODBARAN: And foreign help to China—for example, from the Soviet Union?

SRI AUROBINDO: That's a possibility, but the internal condition of the Soviet Union is such that it can't think of giving external help to others.

NIRODBARAN: What about India's independence? Is it developing along your lines?

SRI AUROBINDO: Surely not. India is now going towards European Socialism, which is dangerous for her, whereas we were trying to evolve the genius of the race along Indian lines and all working for independence. Take the Bengal Movement. The whole country was awakened within a short time. People who were cowards and trembled at the sight of a revolver were in a short period so much changed that the police officials used to say, "That insolent Barisal look!" It was the soul of the race that awoke, throwing up very fine personalities. The leaders of the Movement were either Yogis or disciples of Yogis—men like Monoranjan Guha Thakurtha, the disciple of Bejoy Goswami.

NIRODBARAN: Was he a Nationalist?

SRI AUROBINDO: Good Lord! He was my fellow-worker and also took part in the Secret Society. Then there were others, like Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya. The influence of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda worked from behind. The Movement and the Secret Society became so formidable that in any other country with a political past they would have led to something like the French Revolution. The sympathy of the whole nation was on our side. Even shopkeepers were reading *Jugantar*. I'll tell you an instance. While a young man was fleeing after killing a police officer in Shyam Bazar, he forgot to throw away his revolver. It remained in his hand. One shopkeeper cried out, "Hide your revolver, hide your revolver!" And, of course, you have heard of Jatin Mukherji?

DR. MANILAL: Yes, Sir.

SRI AUROBINDO: A wonderful man. He was a man who would belong to the front rank of humanity anywhere. Such beauty and strength together I haven't seen, and his stature was like a warrior's. Then there was Pulin Das.

NIRODBARAN: Pulin Das, I hear, turned out to be a spy.

SRI AUROBINDO: A spy? I don't believe it. He may have become a Moderate but not a spy. Such were the leaders at that time, and look at Bengal now!

NIRODBARAN: What about Gandhi's Movement?

SRI AUROBINDO: Gandhi has taken India a great step forward towards freedom, but his Movement has touched only the upper middle classes while ours comprised even the lower middle classes.

NIRODBARAN: Has it diminished the spirit of revolution?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes.

NIRODBARAN: Was it Anderson, the Governor of Bengal, who killed the revolutionary movement?

SRI AUROBINDO: Certainly not. It was the Force behind that receded and people became corrupted. No such leaders as before were forthcoming.

NIRODBARAN: Is the last terrorist movement a part of the one of 1905?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, it is the remnant of that.

NIRODBARAN: During the war of 1914-1918 the revolutionaries were perhaps deceived by British promises.

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh no, the revolutionaries are not people to be deceived by promises.

NIRODBARAN: Gandhi seems to have given much courage and strength to the people. In Bengal we were so afraid of the police. I think it was Gandhi who imparted strength there.

SRI AUROBINDO: Did Bengal need it?

NIRODBARAN: What do you think of C. R. Das?

SRI AUROBINDO: He was the last of the old group. He came here and wanted to be a disciple. I said he wouldn't be able to go through in Yoga as long as he was in the political movement. Besides, his health was shattered. I restored it to a certain extent but there was a relapse when he went back. You know he became Anukul Thakur's disciple.

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The Mother came. Dr. Savor also had called.

NIRODBARAN (to Dr. Savor): When you give a homoeopathic medicine, how do you select it? By intuition? And how do you know that your intuition is correct?

DR. SAVOOR: Intuition by its very definition means something not obtained by logical reasoning; so it must be correct.

NIRODBARAN (to Sri Aurobindo): You told me that Dr. Ramachandra uses mental intuition. So there must be various levels of intuition.

SRI AUROBINDO: By mental intuition I mean that the intuition coming from above gets mixed with the mind. I don't say that mental intuition must be incorrect but because of the mixture it can't always be relied upon. There is also vital intuition, which very often gets mixed up with one's desires.

NIRODBARAN: How is one to get intuition? By calmness of mind?

SRI AUROBINDO: Calmness is not enough. The mind must become silent.

NIRODBARAN: Then it will take a long time.

SRI AUROBINDO: Can't say. It may take a short or a long time.

NIRODBARAN: But it won't be possible to keep the silence until one has realised the Spirit.

SRI AUROBINDO: One can train one's mind to be silent.

Dr. Savor took his leave and, as the Mother lapsed into meditation, we all tried to do the same. Then after she left about 7.00 p.m., we collected round Sri Aurobindo. He looked once or twice at Dr. Manilal.

NIRODBARAN: Dr. Manilal is beaming today.

DR. MANILAL: Couldn't meditate well, Sir, because I have lumbago. But I felt some vibration at the back and felt happy.

NIRODBARAN: That must be the Kundalini!

DR. MANILAL: I don't believe in it. Is this vibration the Force, Sir?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. It was trying to cure your lumbago perhaps and the first sign was a little aggravation. (*Laughter*) You don't believe in the Kundalini?

DR. MANILAL: No, Sir.

SRI AUROBINDO: But you were telling us about your experience of ascent and descent.

DR. MANILAL. Was it an experience of the Kundalini? I didn't know it. (*Laughter*) But the Kundalini is not in the line of our Yoga and you haven't mentioned about it anywhere.

PURANI: Oh yes he has, in *Lights on Yoga*.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. The Kundalini is, of course, a Tantric idea. The Shakti lying coiled in the Muladhara Chakra awakes, rises up and carries the consciousness upward, opening all the Chakras up to the Brahmrandhra and then meets the Brahman and after that the descent begins. The Tantric process is more technical.

It is curious to see the action of the Force in some cases. Some feel as if a drilling were being done in the brain. Some can't keep the Force in: they sway from side to side, make peculiar sounds. I remember one practising Pranayama rigorously and making horrible sounds. I didn't hear of his getting any good results. Sometimes the Force raises up what lies below in order to be able to deal with it.

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NIRODBARAN: The other day, while we were talking about poetry, you quoted some passages from the Veda. I would like to know how the Mantras in the Vedas and the Upanishads were composed. It seems they were actually heard by the Rishis. Is it an inner hearing?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, it is an inner hearing. Sometimes one hears a line, or a passage, or even a whole poem; sometimes they simply come down. The best poetry is always written in that way.

NIRODBARAN: I remember very well that line of mine, "A fathomless beauty in a sphere of pain," coming as if someone had whispered it into my ear.

SRI AUROBINDO: Quite; that is the inner hearing. But occasionally one may be deceived. Inspiration from the lower planes also can come in an automatic way.

NIRODBARAN: Oh yes. I have been deceived many times like that. Lines which came at once and automatically and which I thought high-class turned out quite ordinary by your remarks.

SRI AUROBINDO: One writes wonderful poems in dreams, surrealist poems; but when they are written down on paper they seem worthless.

Even in a poet like Shakespeare, in whom, I suppose, poetry always flowed, there are differences of inspiration. In the passage in *Henry IV*, invoking sleep, the three lines:

Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast
Seal up the ship-boy's eyes and rock his brains
In cradle of the rude imperious surge?

leap out strikingly from the rest. There is no doubt at all that they have descended from above without any interruption. Or look at that lyric of his, beginning "Take, O take those lips away",¹ the whole of it has come down from above.

At this point of the conversation Dr. Manilal entered the room. Dr. Manilal asked Sri Aurobindo about his health. After some time the Mother came in and sat on the spare cot.

DR. MANILAL (*addressing the Mother*): Is it a sin to kill scorpions, bugs and mosquitoes? Somehow I can't kill bugs but I kill mosquitoes.

THE MOTHER: Why? Because of the smell of bugs?

DR. MANILAL: Probably.

THE MOTHER: Put your question to Sri Aurobindo. (*Smiling to Sri Aurobindo*) When I first came here, I used to drive away mosquitoes by Yogic Force. Sri Aurobindo didn't approve of it.

SRI AUROBINDO: Because you were making a friendship with them.

DR. MANILAL: Sir, is it a sin to kill them?

SRI AUROBINDO: What is sin? If you don't kill them, they will go and bite some other people and won't that be a sin to you?

DR. MANILAL: But they have life, Sir.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, they have —

¹Take, O take those lips away,
That so sweetly were foresworn;
And those eyes, the break of day,
Lights that do mislead the morn:
But my kisses bring again,

Bring again,

Seals of love, but sealed in vain,

Sealed in vain.

Measure for Measure, IV

DR. MANILAL: And if one kills them—

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, what happens?

DR. MANILAL: One will be liable to sin.

THE MOTHER: Plants also have life. You don't mean to say that a mosquito is more precious than a rose? You don't know perhaps how the plants feel.

DR. MANILAL: I don't mean that we otherwise don't kill, say, when we breathe micro-organisms.

THE MOTHER (*smiling*): Don't doctors kill?

DR. MANILAL: Yes, Mother, but our killing isn't intentional.

NIRODBARAN: It is said that the Jains hire people to feed bugs.

DR. MANILAL: No, that's just a story.

SRI AUROBINDO: At any rate I know a story that is historically true, in connection with the Jains. When Mahmud of Ghazni invaded India, he defeated a Jain king through the help of that king's brother. He imprisoned the king and put the brother on the throne and left the dethroned king in his charge. The brother didn't know what to do with the prisoner. Being a Jain, he couldn't kill him. So he got a pit dug below his throne and threw his prisoner there and covered up the pit with mud. As a result, the dethroned king died—but the brother didn't kill him! (*Laughter*)

THE MOTHER: In order to be a true non-killing Jain, one must be a Yogi. Then one can deal rightly with these animals and insects.

DR. MANILAL: Yes, Mother. But is one justified in killing scorpions and snakes?

SRI AUROBINDO: Why not? One must kill in self-defence. I don't mean that you must hunt them out and kill them. But when you see that they are endangering your life or those of others, you have every right to kill them.

NIRODBARAN: People say that killing a dog or a cat is not so harmful as taking the life of a human being. Do you agree?

The question was lost in a volley of other questions fired by some of the attendants.

SRI AUROBINDO: Did you say that killing a dog or a cat is not so harmful as taking the life of a human being?

THE MOTHER: Nirodbaran seems to be a humanitarian.

SRI AUROBINDO: Life is life, whether in a cat or a dog or a man. There is no difference as regards that. The difference is a conception of human beings—for their own advantage perhaps.

The Mother now departed. Then the talk shifted to homoeopathy, and everyone, including Dr. Savoor who happened to be present, started citing instances in favour of homoeopathy and mentioning its miraculous cures. It was said even to cure religious depression, anger, etc.

SRI AUROBINDO: Anger, the scientists say, is due to secretions of the glands. Even love, according to them, is merely due to a secretion. (*Half smiling*) But can homoeopathy cure egoism?

DR. SAVOOR: If it did, I should be the first to apply for the medicine.

DR. MANILAL: The fact that you are conscious of egoism makes half the cure. Isn't that so, Sir?

SRI AUROBINDO: Not necessarily. But it is the first step.

NIRODBARAN: And what's the second?

SRI AUROBINDO: To detach oneself from all these things. To think as if they belonged to the outer being or to someone else. As one goes on doing that, the Purusha or Soul gradually withdraws its sanction from the Prakriti or Nature, and the Prakriti loses its hold until finally a spiritual control takes place. But if one associates oneself with the Prakriti, then the Purusha becomes a slave to it, Anish. Rejection, of course, is a stronger means. One has to reject these things before they enter into one, as I did with the thoughts when I was at Baroda. This method is more powerful and the results too are quicker. There is also a mental control, but there it is the mind trying to control the vital being. The control is only partial and temporary. The thing is rather suppressed within and can come out on any opportunity.

I have heard of a Yogi in Benares who was bathing in one of the ghats. In the next ghat a beautiful Kashmiri woman came to bathe. As soon as he saw her, he fell upon her and tried to outrage her. His was evidently a case of mental control.

But sometimes, by Yoga, things which were not felt before come up. I have heard about it from many persons. In my own case, I saw anger coming up and possessing me. It was absolutely

uncontrollable when it came. I was very much surprised as to my own nature. Anger has always been foreign to it. At another time, while I was an undertrial prisoner in Alipore, my anger would have led to a terrible catastrophe which luckily was avoided. Prisoners there had to wait outside for some time before entering the cells. As we were doing so the Scotch warder came and gave me a push. The young men around me became very excited and I did nothing, but I gave him such a look that he immediately fled and called the jailor. It was a communicative anger and all the young men rallied round to attack him. When the jailor who was rather a religious man arrived, the warder said I had given him an insubordinate look. The jailor asked me and I told him I had never been used to such treatment. He pacified the whole group and said while going, "We have each to bear our cross." But by this anger I don't mean the Rudrabhava which I have experienced a few times.

NIRODBARAN: Is Rudrabhava something like Ramakrishna's snake story?

SRI AUROBINDO: Not at all. It is not at all a show of anger. It is something genuine—a violent severity against something very wrong. Anger one knows by its feeling and sensation. It rises from below, while Rudrabhava rises from the heart. I shall give you an instance. Once X became very violent, shouting at the Mother and shaking his fists at her. When I heard the shouting, a violent severity came down that was absolutely uncontrollable. I went out and said, "Who is shouting at the Mother? Who is shouting there?" As soon as X heard me, he became quiet.

NIRODBARAN: X, I have been told, had a very violent temper.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. He was otherwise an earnest sadhak, became conscious of many things and did make some progress. But these fits used to come to him now and then. Some Asuric forces used to catch hold of him and he couldn't control himself. It is these forces that have made him fail in Yoga, for I hear that he doesn't have the attacks now outside. When he was in their grip, he couldn't see that he was in the wrong. He blamed me and the Mother, though we had been very lenient and considerate to him. After some time, he was able to recognise his fault and admit it and promise that he would never do it again. But again he would be swept away by the forces. Sometimes his vanity and self-esteem would come in the way of admitting his faults immediately.

That's the mistake. One must not justify one's wrong-doing. If one does that, it comes again and makes it difficult for one to get rid of it.

NIRODBARAN: Purushottam, after doing so much Tapasya, is speaking of going away. He has been here twelve years!

SRI AUROBINDO: What Tapasya? If we give him complete freedom and control over things, he will perhaps stay.

NIRODBARAN: He says he is helping the Mother in the work.

SRI AUROBINDO: Helping only? I thought he was conducting the Ashram!

NIRODBARAN: But won't these people one day realise the Divine?

SRI AUROBINDO: Everyone will arrive at the Divine. Amal once asked the Mother if he would realise God. The Mother replied that he would, unless he did something idiotic and cut short his life. And that is just what he almost did!

18 DECEMBER 1938

8.30 p.m. Nirodbaran read an article in Asia, an American paper, to Sri Aurobindo on himself and his Yoga. It was written by Swami Nikhilananda.

NIRODBARAN: It is surprising that a Ramakrishna Mission Yogi should write on you.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is Nishtha (Miss Margaret Wilson) who arranged for its publication. He was a friend of hers before she came here. It is peculiar how they give an American turn to everything.

NIRODBARAN: The Americans seem to be more open than the Europeans. Why?

SRI AUROBINDO: They are a new nation and have no past tradition to bind them. France and Czechoslovakia are also open. Many from there are writing that they want to do Yoga.

NIRODBARAN: Was Nishtha in communication with you for some time?

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh yes. She was in touch with us for three or four years. She has very clear ideas about Yoga and she was practising it there.

At this point Dr. Manilal arrived. He heard the reference to Woodrow Wilson's daughter.

DR. MANILAL: She must be disappointed because there was no Darshan in November.

SRI AUROBINDO: No. She has taken it with the right Yogic attitude – unlike many.

DR. MANILAL: How is it there are no Maharashtrian sadhaks here, in spite of your contact with Tilak and your long stay in Baroda?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, it is strange. The cause may be that they are more vital in their nature.

The talk then changed to the Supermind.

DR. MANILAL: I hope we shall live to see the glorious day of the Supermind. When will it descend, Sir?

SRI AUROBINDO (*after a little silence*): How can it descend? The nearer it comes, the greater becomes the resistance to it.

DR. MANILAL: On the contrary, the Law of Gravitation should pull it down.

SRI AUROBINDO: That Law does not apply to it, because of its tendency to levitation! And it is coming down against tremendous resistance.

DR. MANILAL: Have you realised the Supermind?

SRI AUROBINDO: You know, I was talking to Nirodbaran about the tail of the Supermind. I know what the Supermind is. And the physical being has flashes and glimpses of it. I have been trying to supramentalise the descended Overmind. Not that the Supermind is not acting. It is doing so – through the Overmind; and the Intuition and the other intermediate powers have come down. The Supermind is above the Overmind. (*Sri Aurobindo put one hand over the other.*) So one may mistake the latter for the former. I remember the day when people here claimed to have got the Supermind. I myself had made mistakes about it. I didn't know then about the planes. It was Vivekananda who, when he used to come to me during meditation in Alipore Jail, showed me the intuitive plane. For a month or so he gave instructions about intuition. Then afterwards I began to see the still higher planes. I am not satisfied with only a part of the Supermind in the

physical consciousness. I want to bring down the whole mass of it, pure, and that is an extremely difficult business.

DR. MANILAL: We hear that there will be a selected number of people who will first receive the Supermind.

SRI AUROBINDO (*making a peculiar expression with his eyes*): Selected by whom?

DR. MANILAL: By the Supermind, Sir.

SRI AUROBINDO (*laughing*): Oh, then that's for the Supermind to decide. Whatever is the truth will be done by it, for it is the Truth-Consciousness—and if things are established by it in the consciousness, your complaint about the disappearance of calm etc. will itself disappear, for they will be established by the Supermind.

NIRODBARAN: Won't the descent of the Supermind make things easier for us?

SRI AUROBINDO: It will do so for those who receive the Supermind, who are open to it. But its descent itself needs certain conditions. For example, if there were thirty or forty people ready, it would descend.

NIRODBARAN: We hear you said that in 1934 the Supermind was ready to descend but not a single sadhak was found prepared, so it withdrew. And yet didn't you tell me once that the descent of the Supermind doesn't depend on the readiness of the sadhaks?

SRI AUROBINDO: If none is ready to receive it, how will it manifest? But instead of thinking of Supermind, one should first open oneself to intuition.

At this moment the Mother came and asked what we were talking about.

SRI AUROBINDO: About intuition and other things.

The Mother fell into meditation. We all joined in. At about 7.00 p.m. she left us.

SRI AUROBINDO: Does anyone know about S? I am curious to know how, as he puts it, his blood comes out drop by drop from his body. He seems to have an Elizabethan turn of expression!

Then, apropos of S and N, the topic of fear of death came up. They were known to cover up their bodies for fear of catching cold.

SRI AUROBINDO: At Cambridge we were once discussing physical development. Then one fellow, in order to show how splendid his health was, began to take off his shirt and underwear, one after another. We found that there were ten or twelve pieces of clothing on his body!

NIRODBARAN: We must develop our consciousness in order to conquer death, mustn't we? People think that as soon as they have entered the Ashram they have become immortal!

SRI AUROBINDO: People think so because for a long time no death took place in the Ashram. Those who had died were either visitors or sadhaks who had gone away from here. At the beginning, people had a very strong faith, but as the numbers increased, the faith began to diminish. However, why should one fear death? The soul is immortal and passes from one life and body to another. Besides, fear has no place in Yoga.

NIRODBARAN: We fear because of our attachments.

SRI AUROBINDO: One must have no attachments in Yoga.

DR. MANILAL: How is fear to be conquered?

SRI AUROBINDO: By mental strength, will and spiritual power. In my own case, whenever there was any fear, I used to do the very thing I was afraid of, even if it brought the risk of a sudden death. Barin also had a lot of fear while he was carrying on terrorist activities. But he too would compel himself to go on. When the death sentence was passed on him, he took it very cheerfully. Henry IV of France had great physical fear, but by his will-power he would force himself to rush into the thick of the battle and he became known as a great warrior. Napoleon and Caesar had no fear. Once when Caesar was fighting the forces of Pompey in Albania, his army was faring badly. He was at that time in Italy. He jumped into the sea, took a fisherman's boat and asked him to carry him to Albania. On the way a storm arose and the fisherman was mortally afraid. Then Caesar said, "Why do you fear? You are carrying the fortunes of Caesar."

I remember a sadhak saying, under an attack of hiccoughing, "I shall die if it goes on." I told him, "What does it matter if you die?" At once the hiccoughs stopped. Very often these fears and suggestions bring in the adverse forces which then catch hold of the person. By my blunt statement the sadhak realised his folly and perhaps didn't allow any more suggestions.

DR. MANILAL: Is Barin still doing Yoga?

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't know. He used to do some sort of Yoga even before I began. He took up my Yoga only after coming to Pondicherry. In the Andamans also he was practising it. You know he was Lele's disciple. Once he took Lele to Calcutta to be among the young people of the Secret Society. Lele didn't know that they were revolutionaries. One day Barin took him into a garden where they were practising shooting. As soon as Lele saw it he understood the nature of the movement and asked Barin to give it up. Lele said that if Barin did not listen to him Barin would fall into a ditch—and he did.

NIRODBARAN: Barin, I heard, had a lot of experiences.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, but mostly they were rather mental experiences. He gathered a lot of information from them. I heard that when he had begun Yoga he had an experience of Kamananda. Lele was surprised to hear about it, for he said that this experience comes usually at the end. It is a descent, like any other experience, but unless one's sex centre is sufficiently controlled it may have bad results due to the excitement produced.

NIRODBARAN: Barin had great energy and capacity.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, he had brilliance, but he was always narrow and limited. He wouldn't widen himself. (*Sri Aurobindo showed the widening by a movement of his hands above his head.*) That's why his things won't last. For instance, he was a brilliant writer and he also composed devotional poetry, but, because of his limitedness, nothing of that will endure. He was an amusing conversationalist, he had some musical ability, he was good at revolutionary activity. He did well in all these matters, but nothing more. He was also a painter, but it did not come to much in spite of his exhibitions.

NIRODBARAN: In his paper *Dawn* he began to write a biography of you.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't know about it. Did he publish a paper? I would be interested to see what he has written about me.

DR. MANILAL: His paper stopped after a short time.

NIRODBARAN: It was in this paper that he said you were the leader of the revolutionary movement. I once asked you whether it was true.

SRI AUROBINDO: And what did I say?

NIRODBARAN: You wrote back, showing great surprise, that I didn't know what everyone knew.

SRI AUROBINDO: In fact it is not true. Barin does not give the correct account of things. I was neither the founder nor the leader. It was P. Mitra and Miss Ghosal who started it on the inspiration of Baron Okakura. They had already started it before I went to Bengal and when I was there I came to hear of it. I simply kept myself informed of their work. My idea was for an open armed revolution in the whole of India. What they did at that time was very childish—things like beating magistrates and so on. Later it turned into terrorism and dacoities, which were not at all my idea or intention. Bengalis are too emotional, want quick results, can't prepare through a long course of years. We wanted to give battle after awakening the spirit of the race through guerilla warfare, as in the Irish Sinn Fein. But at the present stage of military conditions such things are impossible and bound to fail.

NIRODBARAN: Why did you not check the terrorist movement?

SRI AUROBINDO: It is not wise to check things when they have taken a strong shape, for something good may come out of them.

DR. MANILAL: Is it true that you did not appear for the riding test in your I.C.S.?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, but they gave me another chance, and again I didn't appear. Then they rejected me.

DR. MANILAL: Why did you appear at all for the I.C.S.? Was it on account of some intuition that you didn't come for the riding test?

SRI AUROBINDO: Not at all. I knew nothing of Yoga at that time. I appeared for the I.C.S. because my father wanted it and I was too young to understand. Later I found out what sort of work it was and I had no interest in the administrative life. My interest was in poetry and literature and the study of languages and patriotic action.

NIRODBARAN: We have heard that you and C. R. Das used to make plans, while in England, for a revolution in Indja.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not only C. R. Das but many others. Deshpande was one. When I went to Baroda from England I found out what the Congress was like at that time and I formed a strong contempt for it. Then I came into touch with Deshpande, Tilak, Madhavrao and others. Deshpande requested me to write something in the *Indu Prakash*. There I severely criticised the

Congress for its moderate policy. The articles were so fiery that M. G. Ranade, the great Maratha leader, asked the proprietor of the paper not to allow such seditious things to appear in his columns; otherwise he might be arrested and imprisoned. Deshpande approached me with this news and requested me to write something less violent. I then began to write about the philosophy of politics, leaving aside the practical part of politics. But I soon got disgusted with it. Later when I heard that Bipin Pal had started a paper, the *Bande Mataram*, I thought of the chance to work through it.

NIRODBARAN: We hear that once the Maharaja of Baroda asked you to write a memorandum to the Resident about some financial trouble. But you refused to do it unless the Maharaja himself would hand it over to the Resident: the Dewan was a timid man and suppressed the memoranda written by you.

SRI AUROBINDO: That's a legend. Of course, I wrote many memoranda for the Maharaja but along the lines he gave me. As I said, I was not interested in administrative work and soon I got the Maharaja to transfer me to the College.

Along with Tilak, Madhavrao, Deshpande and Joshi, who became a Moderate later, I was planning to work on more extremist lines than the Congress. We brought Jatin Banerji from Bengal and got him admitted into the Baroda army. Our idea was to drive out the Moderates from the Congress and capture it.

As soon as I heard that a National College had been started in Bengal I found my opportunity and threw up the Baroda job and went to Calcutta as Principal. There I came into contact with Bipin Pal, who was editing the *Bande Mataram*. But its financial condition was precarious. When Pal was going on a tour he asked me to take up the paper. I asked Subodh Mullick and others to finance it. Then some people wanted to oust Pal and, when I was lying ill, they did it. They connected my name also with it. I called the sub-editor and gave him a severe thrashing—metaphorically, of course. Pal was a great orator and at that time his speeches were highly inspired, a sort of descent from above. Later on, his oratorical powers diminished. I remember he never used the word “independence” but always said “autonomy without British control”! When after the Barisal Conference we brought the peasants into the Movement, forty or fifty thousand of them used to gather to hear Pal. Suren Banerji cannot be compared to Pal. He has never

done anything like what Pal did. But Pal was more an orator than a leader. He had not the practical qualities of a leader.

Then Shyam Sundar and some other people came in to help the *Bande Mataram*. Soon it drew the attention of a large number of people and became an all-India paper. The Punjab and Maharashtra joined the Movement.

One day I called the Bengal leaders and said, "It is no use simply going on like this. We must capture the Congress and throw out the Moderate leaders from it." Then I proposed that we should follow Tilak as the all-India leader. They at once jumped at the idea. Tilak, who was not well known in the northern parts of India, accepted the leadership. He was a really great man and a rare disinterested one.

DR. MANILAL: What do you think of his book on the Gita? Was it inspired?

SRI AUROBINDO: I must say I haven't read it.

DR. MANILAL: But you have reviewed it.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then I must have reviewed it without reading it. (*Loud laughter*) Of course, I might have glanced through it, and I don't think it is inspired. It must be more a mental interpretation. Tilak had a brilliant mind.

DR. MANILAL: When someone asked Tilak what he would do when India got Swaraj, he replied that he would again be a professor of mathematics.

NIRODBARAN: We heard about one paper, *Sandhya*.

SRI AUROBINDO: At that time three extremist papers were running in Bengal, the *Jugantar*, *Sandhya* and *Bande Mataram*. Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya, editor of the *Sandhya*, was another great man. He used to write so cleverly that the Government couldn't charge anything against him. As for the *Bande Mataram*, its financial condition was very bad and yet we carried on for two years.

NIRODBARAN: Didn't the Government try to arrest you and the others?

SRI AUROBINDO: It couldn't; there was no law for doing it, and the press had more liberty than afterwards. Besides, there was nothing in the various papers that could be directly charged against us. The *Statesman* used to complain that the *Bande Mataram* was reeking with sedition and yet was so cleverly written that one couldn't arrest the editor. Moreover, the names of the editors

were never published. So they could arrest only the printers. But as soon as one was arrested, another came to take his place.

Later on, Upen Banerji, the sub-editor, published some correspondence for which I was arrested on a sedition charge. But as nothing could be proved I was acquitted. When I was arrested a second time and detained in Alipore Jail, the *Bande Mataram* was up against disastrous financial difficulties. Hence the editors wrote something very strong and the paper got suppressed.

I started the *Karmayogin* some time after my second acquittal. Once I heard from Sister Nivedita that the Government wanted to prosecute and deport me. I wrote an article, "An Open Letter to My Countrymen". It prevented the prosecution. Soon after, I went away to Chandernagore. There some friends were thinking of sending me to France. I was wondering what to do next. Then I heard the Adesh, "Go to Pondicherry."

DR. MANILAL: Why to Pondichery?

SRI AUROBINDO: I could not question. It was Sri Krishna's Adesh. I had to obey. Later I found it was for the Ashram, for the Yogic work.

I had to apply for a passport under a false name. The District Commissioner required a medical certificate by an English doctor. After a great deal of trouble I found one and went to his house. He told me that I spoke English remarkably well. I replied that I had been to England.

NIRODBARAN: How could you agree to take a false name for the certificate?

SRI AUROBINDO: If I had given my real name I would have been arrested at once. With due respect to Gandhi's truth, I could not be so very precise here. You can't be a revolutionary otherwise.

Accompanied by Bejoy, Moni and my brother-in-law, I arrived in Pondicherry but we had to assume false names for some time.

20 DECEMBER 1938

After Sri Aurobindo's lunch at about 4.30 p.m. Nirodbaran was reading to him the memorial orations on a prominent figure in local politics and business. One person after another, beginning with the Governor, had praised him in superlative terms: "upright", "generous", "great friend of

the poor” etc. Hearing this, Sri Aurobindo exclaimed, “Good Lord!”, burst into laughter and remarked, “He ought to be canonised—Saint X! Such is public life! When Y died, all his life-long political enemies did the same thing.”

At about 7.00 the talk started again. It turned on homoeopathy and its difference from allopathy in regard to dosage and other matters.

SRI AUROBINDO: Homoeopathy is nearer to Yoga. Allopathy is more mechanical. Homoeopathy deals with the physical personality—all the symptoms put together and making up this personality. Allopathy goes by diagnosis which does not consider the personality. The action of homoeopathy is more subtle and dynamic.

SAVOOR: Some Yogis go into Samadhi as a release from bodily pain and suffering. But there are others who don't do that and bear the pain.

NIRODBARAN: Ramakrishna was one such.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, Yogis can go into Samadhi and put an end to the Samskara. But I don't see the utility of going into Samadhi to escape from pain. On the other hand, when one decides to bear a disease, it seems to me in a way an acceptance of it.

Ramakrishna once, when he was seriously ill, said to Keshab Sen that his body was breaking up under the stress of his spiritual development. But spiritual development need not always lead to disease.

NIRODBARAN: If Ramakrishna had so willed it, he could have prevented the disease.

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh yes, but he didn't believe in using his will to cure his disease or in praying to the Divine for a cure.

NIRODBARAN: It is said that he got his cancer because of the sins of his disciples.

SRI AUROBINDO: He said that himself and, if he did, it must be true. The Guru has to take up many things of the disciples. The Mother does that because she unites herself with the sadhaks and takes them up into herself. Of course, at the same time she also stops many things from happening in herself. A famous Yogi told a disciple, when the latter was becoming a Guru, “In addition to your own difficulties you will now take up those of others.” No doubt, if one cuts the connection with the disciples, this can't

happen, but that means no work, and the sadhaks are left to themselves without support.

Interchange of forces between persons is very common. Whenever two people meet, the interchange goes on. In that way one contracts a disease from another without any infection by germs. A disciple here was very conscious of what he was receiving from others, but he didn't care to think about what he was passing on to them!

Even without meeting, there can be mutual effects. Even thought has power for good and evil. Bad thoughts may affect others. That's why Buddha used to emphasise right thinking.

The need of company which people feel is really their need to interchange forces. What after all is the passion of man and woman for each other? Nothing but a vital interchange, a drawing in of forces from each other. Of course, the interchange or drawing in of forces takes place unconsciously and sometimes in spite of oneself. Thus when a person doesn't like another, he doesn't always know the reason, but it means that the vital beings of the two don't agree; the interchanges are unpleasant. You know Sheridan's lines:

I do not like thee, Doctor Fell.

The reason why I cannot tell.

But at times, even when there is incompatibility, people come together. You see men and women quarrelling violently and yet unable to do without each other. That is because each has a need of the other's vital force. Woman has almost always such a need and that is what is called "being in love". Surely the need has been imposed on her by man. But Indian society established the relation between the husband and the wife in such a way that an equation might result.

NIRODBARAN: But if one draws more than the other, there is a risk.

SRI AUROBINDO: Certainly. If one receives more than one gives, bad consequences may be there for the one who gives more. Hindu astrology speaks of Rakshasa Yoga: a husband losing many wives one after another means an incompatibility so that instead of supporting them he is eating them up.

NIRODBARAN: What are vampires?

SRI AUROBINDO: Those who constantly draw from other people's vital beings without giving anything in return.

NIRODBARAN: Are they so by nature or through possession?

SRI AUROBINDO: They may be so either way. And there are men vampires as there are women vampires.

There is also another kind of vital nature: an expansive one. And in that case one has the need to pour out. Still another kind, again expansive, is the Hitlerian vital, catching hold of other people in its grip.

NIRODBARAN: Does psychic love ever catch hold like that?

SRI AUROBINDO: Of course not! The law of psychic love is to give without making any demand.

21 DECEMBER 1938

After Dr. Rao had gone we gathered round Sri Aurobindo and began talking again about medicine—homoeopathy, allopathy, ayurveda, etc. Somebody remarked how barbers came to occupy a place in the history of healing in India.

SRI AUROBINDO: In Europe also during the Middle Ages, most of the surgeons were barbers.

I understand there are Kavirajas who can, by examining the pulse, state the condition and disease of the patient.

Then some of us referred to reports about remarkable pulse-specialists who could even say what one had eaten a few days back.

SATYENDRA: They are not always correct. One can't accept the reports.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why not? How do you know the reports are not correct? Many sciences are built up by experience and intuition and handed down by tradition: for example, the Chinese method of treatment by finding nerve centres and puncturing them with pins.

PURANI: It is said of Dhanwantari that whenever he used to stand before a plant, the plant used to reveal its properties to him.

SRI AUROBINDO (*smiling*): He was the physician of the Gods; so that is nothing unnatural for him.

Ayurveda was the first system of medicine. It was from India that this science went to Greece and then to Arabia. Indian physicians used to go to Arabia. What Hippocrates and Galen speak of as the

three humours is an Indian idea. India also discovered the use of the zero with mathematical notations. Astrology too went from India to Arabia.

NIRODBARAN: At Calcutta, people are trying to found Ayurvedic schools. That will be better, for it will be a combination of Eastern and Western systems, especially in anatomy and surgery.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why? Anatomy and surgery were known to Indians. There were many surgical instruments in ancient India. Besides, for ancient things like Ayurveda I don't believe in this modern system of schools and colleges. They make the whole thing mental and intellectual, while the ancient systems were more intuitive. In India they used to hand down such things from Guru to disciple. It is the same with Yoga. One can't think of Yogic schools and classes. They are an American idea. The Guru of Vaun Macpheeters used to hold classes and give lectures and readings in Yoga.

NIRODBARAN: Perhaps all this can be done with Hatha Yoga?

SRI AUROBINDO: Even that would be only the outer part.

22 DECEMBER 1938

All of us assembled in the hope of hearing something from Sri Aurobindo. But he did not seem to be in a talkative mood. So we were forced to keep quiet, thinking how to draw him into conversation. Suddenly we found Dr. Becharlal beaming with a smile and looking at him. Then he took a few steps nearer to Sri Aurobindo and we followed him. When he drew still closer he burst into a question.

DR. BECHARLAL: To attain the right attitude, what principles should we follow in our dealing and behaviour with others?

SRI AUROBINDO: It seems to me that one should go about it the other way round. If we have the right attitude other things come by themselves. But the right attitude is itself secondary. What is important is the inner state. Spiritual and ethical principles are quite different, for everything depends on whether it is done for the sake of the Spirit or for ethical reasons. One may observe mental control in his dealings, but his inner state may be quite different. For example, he may not show anger, but within he may be ruffled. In the true inner control the inner peace is not disturbed

and goodwill towards others is retained. It is the psychic control that is required and when that is there the right attitude follows in one's external behaviour. Conduct must flow from within outwards and the more one opens to the psychic influence, the more it gains over the outer nature. Mental control may or may not lead to the psychic control. In people of a sattwic type it may be the first step towards it.

NIRODBARAN: How is the psychic control to be got?

SRI AUROBINDO: By constant remembrance, consecration of oneself to the Divine, rejection of all that stands in the way of the psychic influence. Generally it is the vital being that stands in the way with its desires and demands. But once the psychic opens, it shows at every step what is to be done.

Soon after the Mother came in and all of us sat in meditation with her. On her departure about 7.00 p.m. Sri Aurobindo started the talk again.

SRI AUROBINDO: What's the idea behind your question? Is it something personal or general?

DR. BECHARLAL: I meant, for instance, how to see God in everybody, how to love all and have a goodwill for all?

SRI AUROBINDO: One has to start with the idea of goodwill for all, to consecrate oneself to the Divine, try to see God in others, acquire a psychic control and reject in oneself all vital and mental impulses. On this basis one must proceed towards realisation. The idea must pass into experience. Once the realisation is there, everything becomes easy. But even then, it is easy in the static aspect. When it comes to the dynamic expression it becomes difficult. Thus, when one finds a man behaving like a brute, it is very difficult to see God in him, unless one separates him from his outer nature and sees the Divine behind.

One can also repeat the name of the Divine and come to a divine consciousness.

NIRODBARAN: How does repeating the name help one?

SRI AUROBINDO: The name is a power, like a Mantra. Everything in the world is a power. There are some who do Pranayama together with repeating the name. After a while, the repetition and Pranayama become automatic and one feels the Divine Presence.

There are no limits to the ways of God. In the Ashram here, once people began to feel a tremendous force in their work. They could work without fatigue for hours and hours. But they overdid it. One has to be reasonable even in spirituality. That tremendous force was felt when the sadhana was in the vital being. When the sadhana started in the physical, things were different. The physical is like a stone, full of Aprakasha and Apravritti, darkness and inertia.

NIRODBARAN: Sometimes one feels a sort of love for everybody; though the feeling lasts only for a few seconds, it gives a great joy.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is a wave from the psychic. But what is your attitude towards it? Do you take it as a passing mood or does it stimulate you to further experience of that sort?

NIRODBARAN: It stimulates, but often the vital mixture tries to come in. Fortunately I could drive it out recently.

SRI AUROBINDO: The mixture is the risk. The fact that the mixture tried to come shows that the wave came through the inner vital and thus took something from the vital. In the vital, one has to be careful to avoid sex impurities. There was a sadhak who, in spite of his occasional outburst of violence, was a very nice and affectionate man. But he used to get his psychic experiences mixed up with the sex impulse, and the experiences were spoiled. The spoiling happens because at times one gives a semi-justification to the sex impulse, saying that after all it does not matter very much. But sex is absolutely out of place in Yoga. In the ordinary life it has a certain place for certain purposes.

When I was in jail I knew a man who had a power of concentration by which he tried to make everyone love him, and he succeeded. The warders and all the others were drawn to him. Of course one must know the process of concentrating.

NIRODBARAN: That's just what we don't know. (*Laughter*)

SRI AUROBINDO: The mind must be made quiet and the consciousness turned—not the mind alone—towards the aim. It no doubt takes time but that is the way. There are no devices for these things.

SATYENDRA: What is the difference between modification of nature and transformation of it?

SRI AUROBINDO: Transformation is the casting of the whole nature into the mould of your inner realisation. What you realise you project outwards into your nature.

I speak of three transformations—the psychic, the spiritual and the supramental. Many have had the psychic: there were the Christian saints who spoke of God's presence in their hearts. The spiritual transformation implies the realisation of the Self, the Infinite above, with the dynamic no less than the static side of its peace, knowledge, Ananda, etc. This transformation is difficult. Beyond that is the supramental transformation, the Truth-Consciousness working for the Divine aim and purpose.

NIRODBARAN. If one has inner realisation, transformation should follow in the light of it.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not necessarily. There may be some modification in the nature, but entire transformation is not automatic. It is not so easy as all that. The experience of peace and calm after my first contact with Lele never left me, but in my outer nature there were many agitations and again and again I had to make an effort to establish peace and calm there. Ever since that early experience the whole object of my Yoga has been to change the nature into the mould of the inner realisation. That is what I have done in my sadhana.

NIRODBARAN: Could a man with true realisation have grave defects left in his nature—defects like the sex impulse?

SRI AUROBINDO: Why not? There can be the movement of anger as well as the sex impulse. Have you not heard of Durvasa's anger or the fall of the Rishis through sex? But all Yogis may not care about these defects. Yogis pass beyond the stage of good and evil: ordinary questions of morality don't arise then. So some of them may look upon the outer nature as a child behaving as it wants, and not bother to harmonise it with the inner being. There is also the danger of self-deception. A Yogi may go into the Higher Mind, perhaps even touch the Overmind, and yet have a sexual fall. He may think he is guided by an inner divine voice and attempt to justify his erratic behaviour by saying he is only obeying that voice. I have heard of a certain Yogi who went abroad and was arrested for making advances to girls in a public place. These things are possible because man's psychology is complex.

Once after the Barisal Conference I went to see Mahendranath Nandi who was called the Tolstoy of Brahmanbaria. His grandfather was a Tantric and could meditate sitting upon the waters of a river. From him perhaps Nandi got his spiritual capacities. Nandi used to be guided by an inner voice. When Bipin Pal asked him

whether he would do anything whatsoever, good or bad, if prompted by this voice, he replied that if it was from God he would follow it to any length.

But, of course, merely unconventional conduct by a Yogi is not a fall. Once a disciple got shocked because he saw me eating meat. He complained to Ramana Maharshi. Maharshi replied that it is a question of habit and, when the man had departed, Maharshi said to his followers, "What an imbecile!"

In spiritual realisations there are any number of passages, cross-ways and truths. And when I say that something is to be done or not done in Yoga, I mean in our Yoga. It does not apply to Yogas with other aims. In our Yoga we insist on the transformation of the outer nature.

There was a lull for some time after this. Then Sri Aurobindo spoke again.

SRI AUROBINDO: Do you know anything about Z?

SATYENDRA: I am not personally attracted to him.

SRI AUROBINDO: When I saw his photo I had the impression that he is a man with a strong vital power. His sadhana seems to be on the vital plane and it is in such sadhana that one brings about a great influx of Power and unfortunately people are attracted to it. In the spiritual, psychic and even mental sadhana, Power can come but it comes automatically, without one's asking for it.

Barin was another Z, with a powerful vital. At one time I had high hopes for him, but people whose sadhana is on the vital basis pass into what I have called the Intermediate Zone, and they don't want to go beyond. The vital is like a jungle and it is extremely difficult to rescue one with such a vital power. It is comparatively much easier to help those who are weak and lacking in such power. Barin used to think that he had put himself in the Divine's hands and the Divine was in him. We had to be severe with him to disillusion him of his idea. That's why he could not remain here. He went back and became a Guru with about thirty or forty disciples around him. Gurugiri comes very often to this kind of people. He did everything he wanted in my name – a turn I heartily dislike. Unfortunately his mind was not as equally developed in power as his vital. He had the fighter's mind, not the

thinker's. We often put a strong Force on him and as a result his mind used to become quite lucid for a while and he could see his wrong movements. But his vital rushed back, took control of his mind and wiped all out. If his mind had been as developed, he would perhaps have been able to retain the clarity. The intellect helps one to separate oneself from the vital and look at it dispassionately. The mind also can deceive, but not much.

23 DECEMBER 1938

We assembled again as usual and were eager to start the talk, but nobody dared to begin without any hint or gesture from Sri Aurobindo. He was lying calmly on the bed.

Champaklal slowly approached him, looking by turns at him and at us. We saw a ray of hope in this attempt, but looking at Champaklal's combination of eagerness and hesitation Nirodbaran could not check his amusement. So he moved away from Sri Aurobindo's presence and, lying down on the floor, shook and rolled with suppressed laughter. Sri Aurobindo at once noticed that something was going on.

SRI AUROBINDO: What's the matter?

PURANI: Nirodbaran is rolling with laughter!

SRI AUROBINDO: Descent of Ananda?

NIRODBARAN: It is Champaklal.

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh, descent of Champaklal?

At this the whole atmosphere changed and Purani, catching the opportunity, shot a question with a beaming face.

PURANI: Because hostile forces offer resistance to the divine manifestation in the world and some are even victorious, can it be said with any logic that the Divine lacks omnipotence? It is not my question. I am asking somebody else's. Personally I don't think so.

SRI AUROBINDO (*turning his head towards Purani*): It depends on what you mean by omnipotence. If the idea is that God must always succeed, then when He does not we should conclude that He is not omnipotent. But do you mean to say that in spite of resistance He must invariably succeed? People have very queer

ideas of omnipotence. Resistance is the very law of evolution. Resistance comes from Ignorance and Ignorance is a part of Inconscience. From the very beginning the opposition between Knowledge and Ignorance existed. The whole thing starts from Inconscience. It is the complete denial of the Divine. His Lila or Play is precisely the manifestation proceeding through resistance and struggle. What sort of Lila would it be in which one side went on winning every time? Divine omnipotence works through the universal law. There are forces of Light and forces of Darkness. To say that the forces of Light shall always succeed is the same as saying that truth and good shall always succeed, though there is no such thing as unmixed truth and good. Divine omnipotence intervenes only at critical or decisive moments.

Every time the Light has tried to descend, it has met with resistance and opposition. Christ was crucified. You may ask why it should be like that when he was innocent. Yet his very crucifixion was the divine dispensation. Buddha was denied. Sons of Light come, the earth denies them, rejects them and afterwards accepts them in name in order to reject them in substance. Only a small minority grows towards a spiritual birth and it is through them that the divine manifestation takes place.

What remains of Buddhism today except a few edicts of Asoka and a few hundred thousand Buddhists?

NIRODBARAN: Asoka helped in propagating Buddhism.

SRI AUROBINDO: Anybody could have done that.

NIRODBARAN: But didn't it become all-powerful through his aid?

SRI AUROBINDO: If kings and emperors had left Buddhism to those people who were really spiritual, it would have been much better for real Buddhism. That is always the case with spiritual things. It was after Constantine embraced Christianity that it began to decline in its substance. The King of Norway, about whom Longfellow wrote a poem, killed all the people who were not Christians and thus succeeded in establishing Christianity! The same happened to Mohammedanism where it succeeded and the followers of the Prophet became Caliphs. Not kings and emperors but those who are truly spiritual keep spirituality alive.

NIRODBARAN: Asoka sacrificed everything for Buddhism.

SRI AUROBINDO: But he remained an emperor till the end. When kings and emperors try to spread a religion, they make the

whole thing mental and moral and the inner truth is lost. Asoka succeeded in being Asoka: that's all.

NIRODBARAN: Ramana Maharshi was hardly known. It was Brunton who spread his name.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is a strange measure of success people adopt in judging a spiritual man by the number of disciples. Who was a greater success—Ramana Maharshi surrounded by all sorts of disciples or Ramana Maharshi doing his sadhana in seclusion for years? Success to be real must be spiritual.

Then the talk turned on Ashrams in general and the mismanagement of some while the Guru remains indifferent. The difficulties of staying in some Ashrams were also cited.

SRI AUROBINDO: One Mrs. Kelly went to see Maharshi and was seen fidgetting about due to mosquitoes during meditation. Afterwards she complained to him of mosquito bites. Maharshi told her that if she couldn't bear mosquito bites she couldn't do Yoga. Mrs. Kelly couldn't understand the significance of this statement. She wanted spirituality without mosquitoes.

Trouble also arises because of quarrelling among disciples.

PURANI: A certain disciple of Maharshi criticised Brunton, saying he was using Maharshi's name and making money. He said too that Brunton was taking notes during meditation and that after jotting down what came into his head he would declare it was from Maharshi.

SRI AUROBINDO: And yet Brunton is a seeker of the Truth, though he has serious difficulties.

Perhaps you know the famous story about Maharshi. Once, getting disgusted with the Ashram and the disciples, he started to go away to the mountains. He passed along a narrow path flanked by hills. He came upon an old woman sitting with her legs stretched across the path. He requested her to draw aside her legs but she wouldn't. Then he walked across them. She became very angry and said, "Why are you so restless? Why can't you sit in one place at Arunachala instead of moving about? Go back to your place and worship Shiva there." Her remarks struck him and he retraced his steps. After going some distance he looked back. He found that nobody was there. It flashed on him that the Divine Mother herself had spoken and had wanted him to remain at Arunachala.

Of course it was the Divine Mother who had asked him to go back. Maharshi is intended to live that sort of life. He has nothing to do with what happens around him. He remains calm and detached. The man is still what he always was.

By the way, I am glad to hear of Maharshi shouting at some Indian Christians. It means he also can become dynamic.

The only Ashram I have heard of in which there was great unity was Thakur Dayanand's. Once I wrote an article on the Avatar in the *Karmayogin*. Mahendra Day, one of Dayanand's disciples, seeing the article wrote to me: "Here is the Avatar." He was very enthusiastic about it.

NIRODBARAN: Why are Gurus obliged to work with imperfect and defective people like us? In our Ashram the difficulty seems to be more keen.

SRI AUROBINDO: What you say about Gurus has been a puzzle to me also. But it is like that. Our case is a little different. Our aim is to change the world, though not universally, of course. Hence everyone here represents human nature with all its difficulties as well as capacities. (*Looking at Nirodbaran*) That's how your difficulties are explained!

25 DECEMBER 1938

Dr. Rao arrived and, as before, was insisting that the splints could safely be removed from Sri Aurobindo's leg on New Year's day. We couldn't assent to this.

DR. RAO: I discussed the point with the specialist. But we begged to differ. The specialist's opinion is that the splints should be kept for ten weeks more.

THE MOTHER: Do doctors change their opinions?

DR. RAO: This specialist has changed his. But the question is to be decided by Sri Aurobindo.

When Dr. Rao had gone, the Mother asked Sri Aurobindo what he thought.

SRI AUROBINDO: I can't take the risk. I have to be very careful as I am not sure that violent movements won't take place

in sleep. Besides, the adverse forces have to be considered. The specialist said, "Ten weeks more." Dr. Rao says, "Six weeks in all." We will take the *via media*. That will satisfy both.

NIRODBARAN: Dr. Rao always emphasises that you are an extraordinary patient who can be trusted to follow directions.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then I have to take extraordinary care.
(Laughter)

After a few minutes the Mother departed for the general meditation and there was a spell of silence. We were wakened from it by a remark of Sri Aurobindo's.

SRI AUROBINDO: Doctors are born to differ. It seems to me that medical science has developed much knowledge but in application it is either an art or a fluke.

Satyendra and Purani agreed with the remark and said that as regards application medical science was not exact as yet. Nirodbaran observed that this was so because of individual variation.

SRI AUROBINDO: They have not found any drug that can cure a particular disease in all cases. I am talking of allopathy, not homoeopathy, about which I know nothing. Even in theory, which they have developed remarkably, there is always a change of opinion. What they hold as true today is discarded after ten years. Now TB has been proved by a French doctor with statistics not to be a contagious disease. He says it is hereditary. What a great relief this will be! I myself haven't found it contagious. Take also the question of diet. They are changing their ideas constantly. Some day medical science will become exact.

Then Satyendra brought in the question of the unscrupulousness and incapacity of private practitioners and held that medical practice should be under State control.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't believe in that. I like State control less than medical control.

NIRODBARAN: It will be a better arrangement. Take the example of country councils which particularly enjoin the regular examination of people by medical attendants.

SRI AUROBINDO: What about poor Yogis then, who may not like being examined?

NIRODBARAN: The patients of a particular area under the charge of one doctor can't change to another doctor without sufficient reason.

SRI AUROBINDO: What if one doesn't believe in a doctor or doesn't like him?

NIRODBARAN: That isn't a sufficient reason, for the council sees that all doctors are well trained.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why isn't it a sufficient reason? It is an excellent reason. Why should there be no choice? You may as well force a patient here to be under Ramachandra and not go to Savor. I have no faith in such Government controls, because I believe in a certain amount of freedom, freedom to find out things for oneself in one's own way, freedom to commit blunders even. Nature leads us through various errors and eccentricities. When Nature created the human being with all his possibilities for good or ill, she knew very well what she was about. Freedom for experiment in human life is a great thing. Without freedom to take risks and commit mistakes, there can be no progress.

NIRODBARAN: But without a sufficient growth of consciousness one may abuse the freedom.

SRI AUROBINDO: One must take the risk. Growth of consciousness can't come without freedom. You can of course have certain elementary laws and develop sanitation and spread the knowledge of health and hygiene among the people. The State can certainly provide efficient medical service, but when one exceeds one's province the error comes in. To say that one can't change one's doctor even if one does not believe in him or like him is, it seems to me, a little too much.

It all began from the pressure of the development of the physical sciences in Europe. In these sciences one can be exact and precise and everything is mechanical and fixed. This is all right as far as physical things are concerned because there if you make a mistake Nature hits you on the nose and you are made to see it. But the moment you try to apply the same rules in dealing with life and mind, you may go on committing errors and never know it. You will refuse to see them because of a fixed mental idea which tries to fit everything to its own view.

Everything is moving towards that in Europe. The totalitarian States do not believe in the existence of any individual variation, and even non-totalitarian States are obliged to follow them. Yes, they do it for the sake of efficiency. But whose efficiency? It is the efficiency of the State, the organised machine, not that of the individual. The individual has no freedom, he doesn't grow. Organise by all means, but there must be scope for freedom and plasticity.

In India, even in spirituality they allowed all sorts of experiments, including the Vama Marga, the left-hand path of the Tantra, and you see how wonderfully Indian spirituality has developed.

NIRODBARAN: Sometimes people justify both totalitarianism and imperialism. Shaw, for instance, justifies Italy's conquest of Abyssinia. To show up Abyssinia's inefficiency he says that when one passes through the Denakal desert, one runs the risk of losing one's life.

SRI AUROBINDO: In that case let Shaw keep out of the desert. What business has he to pass through it?

NIRODBARAN: But surely Italy's conquest will bring in culture, aesthetics, roads, buildings, etc., into Abyssinia, a country which is said to be without a civilisation at all?

SRI AUROBINDO: Aesthetics? The Negroes have no art? And what culture will be brought in? Of course, if you walk into a Negro den, you may get killed, but the same thing may happen among the present-day Germans. How many people are aesthetic in England? And as regards roads and buildings, could anyone, looking at life in Port Said, say that the people there are more civilised than the Negroes? Have you read Phanindra Bose's book on the Santals? He says that the Santals are not at all inferior to other classes of people in the matter of ethics. So also with the Arabian races. Wilfred Scawen Blunt praised them highly as a very sympathetic and honest people. Do you think the average man today is better than a Greek of 2500 years ago – or than an Indian of that time? Look at the condition in Germany today. You have seen the Kaiser's remark on Hitler. (*Smiling*) You can't say Germany is progressing.

I have come in contact with the Indian masses and I have found them better than the Europeans of the same class. So too the working classes here – they are superior to the European ones: the latter may be more efficient but that is due to external reasons. The

French Governor Solomiac said during the riots that the labourers were really so docile, meek and humble and only when they took to drink did they turn to violence. The Irish doctor in Alipore Jail could not understand how the young anarchists who were so gentle and attractive could be revolutionary. Even the ordinary criminals I found very human; they were better than European criminals.

There will always be different states of development of humanity. It is a fallacy to say that education will do everything, and your so-called civilisation is not an unmixed good. You have only to look at the "civilised" countries. Take the condition of affairs under Nazism. It is terrible. It is extremely difficult for the individual to assert himself. Everyone is living in a state of tension. Under that tension either the whole thing will break up with a crash or all life will be crushed out of the people. In both cases the result will be a disaster.

Society is after all reverting to the old system—only in another form. It is the revival of monarchy, with an aristocracy and the masses. There is the Führer or leading or sovereign man, like a king; then there is his party, which is the aristocracy, the elite, and there is the general herd of common people. The same arrangement holds with Fascism and Communism, except that the Brahmin classes, the intellectuals, have no place.

After this, a few remarks were exchanged on democracy.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is curious how a thing gets spoiled when it is given recognition. Democracy was a far better thing when it was not called democracy. When it was given a name, much of the truth went out of it.

NIRODBARAN: He used to be a great admirer of Socialism. He would say it is a heaven without God.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why didn't he go and settle in Russia then? If he had done so, he would have been at once suppressed. I foresaw that Socialism would destroy all freedom of the individual.

NIRODBARAN: Is there any difference between Communism and Nazism?

SRI AUROBINDO: Practically none. The Nazis call themselves National Socialists; the others are simply Socialists. In Communism it is a proletariat government where there are no separate classes: they have abolished the classes and they say that the govern-

ment is a transitional stage. The Nazis have kept the classes: only, the classes are all bound to the State, everything being under State control just as in Communism.

NIRODBARAN: But Communism began with a high ideal and it is certainly better than Fascism or Nazism. The masses have their own government.

SRI AUROBINDO: In what way is it better? Formerly the masses were unconscious slaves. Before they could strike when they were dissatisfied; now they can't. The main question is whether the people have freedom or not. They are all bound to the State, the Dictator and the Party. They can't even choose the Dictator. And whoever differs from him is mercilessly suppressed. You know about the way they are doing it.

NIRODBARAN: But with the abolition of class distinctions there is now a sense of equality: nobody feels superior or inferior.

SRI AUROBINDO: How? At first, all the generals and soldiers went to run the machines and industrial organisations. But they found that they could not do it. Then they brought in the specialists with high pay and other advantages. The condition of the working classes is no better than in England or France. Some good things have been done in regard to women and children, medical attendance, etc. But they are being done in France also. You must know that a famous fashionable aristocratic resort has now been given over to the working people in France.

NIRODBARAN: Why then are Romain Rolland and others so enthusiastic about Russia?

SRI AUROBINDO: That is because they are Socialists. But even they are getting disillusioned now. Plenty of French workers went to Russia but came back disappointed. The same thing happened when democracy came in. People thought there would be a lot of liberty but found that it was a delusion.

NIRODBARAN: But formerly they were serving the Emperor and now they serve their own people.

SRI AUROBINDO: Certainly not. Where did you get that idea? The Emperor had nothing to do with the government. It was the capitalist class that ruled the country, and the same thing happens today, whatever the name you may give it. The whole thing is a fraud. It is impossible to change humanity by political machinery. It can't be done!

26 DECEMBER 1938

At about 5.30 p.m., four of our group—Champaklal, Satyendra, Dr. Becharlal and Nirodbaran—were seated on the carpet behind the head of Sri Aurobindo's bed and were whispering among themselves. Over some topic Champaklal broke into suppressed laughter and had to run away from the room. Satyendra and Nirodbaran controlled themselves with difficulty. Then at about 6.30 we all assembled by the side of Sri Aurobindo. Purani was still absent.

SRI AUROBINDO (*looking at us*): What Divine Descent was it?

NIRODBARAN: It was Champaklal who burst into laughter.

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh, then it was Vishnu's Ananda that descended!

As soon as he encouraged us by his voluntary question we flocked near his bed.

CHAMPAKLAL: It is peculiar how I break into laughter so easily. Formerly I used to weep also at the slightest provocation. It seems to me that because I live more outwardly I laugh like that.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is a reaction of the superficial vital which is touched easily by simple outward things: there is a child in the nature that bursts out like that. It is the same as the Balabhava of the Yogis, responding without thought to the slightest touches. The deeper vital does not so easily get touched.

By this time Dr. Becharlal was preparing to ask a question. We noticed the peculiar change of his whole face, particularly the parting of his lips, and we knew that he was about to come out with some problem.

DR. BECHARLAL: What is meant by self-offering? How is one to do it?

SRI AUROBINDO (*with a surprised humorous frown*): How? I don't know how. One simply does it!

CHAMPAKLAL: (*interrupting the talk*): My eyes always remain watery.

SRI AUROBINDO: Virgil had eyes like that, while Horace used to breathe hard. Once Mycaenas, the great patron of literature in

the reign of Augustus Caesar, was sitting between the two poets and said, "I am sitting between sighs and tears." (*Laughter*)

To get back to Becharlal's question: one offers one's vital being, one's heart and one's mind to the Divine, rejecting all desires, attachments, passions, and grows into the Divine's consciousness.

DR. BECHARLAL: Are day-hours better than night-hours for meditation? I seem to get more concentrated at night.

SRI AUROBINDO: That may be due to the calm and quiet atmosphere at night and also to your being accustomed to meditate at that time. It is because of the quietude of night and of early morning that these periods are supposed to be the best for meditation.

Whether at night or during the day it is good to be regular. We ask people to have a fixed time for meditation; for if they make a habit, from the *Abhyasa* (habit) the response comes more readily: the response too gets into a habit of fixed time!

But, of course, there are variations with different cases. Lele asked me to meditate twice a day, and when he heard that I didn't do it he gave me no chance to explain that my meditation was going on all the time. He said I was caught by the Devil.

NIRODBARAN: Sometimes meditation is automatic.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, at that time you just have to sit down. Otherwise you feel uneasy. It was like that with Dr. Manilal, as you know.

DR. BECHARLAL: The other day I was having a lot of peace and Ananda. I got a vision of you, with a vision of the Sincerity flower following it. But I had to stop the meditation in order to sleep, for I thought that if I kept awake at night I might fall ill. Is there any significance in the vision of that particular flower and no other?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. There was a special purpose in it. It was a call to you to aspire for sincerity. By sincerity is meant the lifting of all our movements towards the Divine.

NIRODBARAN: Wasn't Dr. Becharlal's fear of illness merely a mental notion? How can one fall ill by sitting a long time in meditation?

SRI AUROBINDO: Not just by sitting like that; but if one keeps awake too much at night, there is the chance of a physical disturbance. The physical has its limits. The vital being can go on feeling energy or peace or any other thing, but the physical can't be

taxed beyond its capacity. The overtaxing happened to many sadhaks here. Dr. Manilal once felt such a flow of energy that he thought he could clean the whole Ashram and went on increasing his work till a reaction set in. The Force comes for the work allotted to you, so that it may be done better. It is not meant for increasing the work or for other purposes. If you go on overdoing things, then the natural reaction is bound to come. A certain amount of common sense, of reasonableness, is required even in spirituality.

CHAMPAKLAL: At one time I also used to feel a lot of energy while working with the Mother and I was never fatigued even when working day and night. Only one or two hours' sleep were sufficient and I would feel as fresh as ever.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is because you opened yourself to the Energy. As for sleep, even ten minutes' sleep may be sufficient, but then it is not ordinary sleep but a going deep within. If one can draw the Force with equanimity and conserve it, wonderful things can be done. As I said, many sadhaks felt extraordinary energy when we were dealing with the vital being. But afterwards the sadhana came down into the physical, there was not that push any more and people began to get easily fatigued, feel lazy and unwilling to work. They began to complain of ill-health due to overwork, and the doctors encouraged them in their feeling. Do you know H's idea? He says people have come here not for work but for meditation.

NIRODBARAN: He says also that you are increasing his work and Pavitra's by increasing the number of disciples. He is helping you –

SRI AUROBINDO: Only helping? I thought he was doing everything!

I dare say that if we had not come down into the physical but remained in the vital and mental like other Yogis, without trying to transform earth-nature, things would have been rather different.

At this time the Mother came in and we meditated for a while. After she had gone, the talk was resumed. Someone remarked: "Nirodbaran had a good meditation. He didn't know the Mother had gone."

NIRODBARAN: Good meditation? How do you know?

SRI AUROBINDO: By the inclination of your head perhaps.

NIRODBARAN: I can't say. All I can say is that I was having many incoherent dreams and visions – perhaps in the surface consciousness.

SRI AUROBINDO: The surface consciousness of the inner vital being. Such experiences are common. Of course, when one goes still deeper, one doesn't see incoherent dreams and visions. There is a point between the surface consciousness and the deeper vital which is full of these fantasies. They are apparently incoherent, but when one gets the clue one finds that everything is a linked whole. This I have seen many times in my own case. In the physical a mouse turning into an elephant may have no meaning, but it is not so in the vital. These fantasies don't have the coherence that is found in the physical, but they have their own coherence – that of the vital plane. It is this world from which X's paintings come – what the Europeans call the goblin world. Anybody who has the least experience of the subtle planes can at once say where his paintings originate.

NIRODBARAN: Does X see them before producing them?

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't think so. Some people see these fantasies but don't paint them.

NIRODBARAN: How is it that some people and he himself call his work great?

SRI AUROBINDO: Everybody calls it great and wonderful; so he himself begins to think it so!

Then the talk turned to various experiences.

NIRODBARAN: I once felt as if my head were suspended in the air and the other parts of the body did not exist.

SRI AUROBINDO: That's the mental consciousness separating from the rest.

NIRODBARAN: Are you able to know what experiences the sadhaks are having – I mean any experiences and not only the decisive ones?

SRI AUROBINDO: No, for I am not in contact with the sadhaks. But the Mother knows whenever it is a question of consciousness. She can see in the sadhaks whatever changes are taking place. When she meditates, she can know what line a sadhak is following – the line indicated by her or the sadhak's own – and afterwards what changes in the consciousness have been brought about.

NIRODBARAN: And when the experiences happen, are they all given by you and the Mother?

SRI AUROBINDO: What's the use of giving our own things to the sadhaks? Let them follow their own lines of growth. I may put out a Force for people who are in a habitual bad condition, people who are always going in the wrong direction. And I try to work out the results of the Force so that the condition may improve. If a sadhak cooperates, then it is comparatively easy. Otherwise, if the sadhak is passive, the result may take a long time: it comes, goes, again comes – and ultimately the Force prevails. A case like B's, for instance. When we put in a strong Force, he became lucid but soon the whole vital being used to rush up and catch hold of him. On the other hand, if a sadhak actively cooperates, the time taken is only one-tenth.

27 DECEMBER 1938

Sri Aurobindo himself opened the talk by addressing Purani: "I hear X is going about in his car with a guard by his side and two policemen on cycles front and back." The talk continued regarding Pondicherry politics, most of it being by us. Then Sri Aurobindo remarked:

SRI AUROBINDO: When I see Pondicherry and the Calcutta Corporation I begin to wonder why I was so eager for Swaraj. They are the two object lessons against self-government and one's enthusiasm for it goes away.

NIRODBARAN: Was the Calcutta Corporation so bad before the Congress came there?

SRI AUROBINDO: No, there was not so much scope for corruption; at least we didn't know of such scandals. It is the same with other municipal governments. In New York and Chicago the whole machinery is corrupt. Sometimes the head of the institution is like that. Sometimes one or another mayor comes up with the intention of cleaning out the whole institution but one doesn't know after the cleansing which state was better. The gangster Al Capone of Chicago was a great criminal, but all the judges and police officers were in his pay.

In France also it is the same thing. It is not surprising that people get disgusted with democracy. England is comparatively less cor-

rupt. The English are the only people who know how to work out the parliamentary system. Parliamentary government is in their blood.

PURANI: It seems then our Indian system was the best. How did it succeed so well?

SRI AUROBINDO: The Indian system grew out of life. It had room for everything and every interest. There were monarchy, aristocracy, democracy. Every interest was represented in the Government, while the Western system grew out of mind. In Europe they are led by reason and want to make everything cut-and-dried without any chance of freedom or variation. If it is democracy, then democracy only and no room for anything else. They can't be plastic.

India is now trying to imitate the West. Parliamentary government is not suited to India. Sir Akbar Hydari wanted to try a new sort of government with an impartial authority at the head. In Hyderabad the Hindu majority complains that though the Mohamedans are in a minority they occupy most of the offices in the State. By Sir Akbar's method almost every interest would have been represented in the Government and automatically the Hindu would have come in but because of their cry of responsible government the scheme failed. They have a fixed idea in the mind and want to fit everything to it. They don't think. And we take up what the West is throwing off.

SAVOOR: It is possible in Hyderabad which has a Nizam, but how to do the same in an all-India constitution? What then is your idea of an ideal government for India?

SRI AUROBINDO: Sir Akbar's is as good as any. My idea is like what Tagore once wrote. There may be one Rashtrapati at the top with considerable powers so as to secure a continuity of policy and an assembly representative of the nation. The provinces will combine into a federation, united at the top, leaving ample scope to local bodies to make laws according to their local problems. Mussolini started with the fundamentals of the Indian system but afterwards began bullying and bluffing other nations for imperialistic reasons. If he had persisted in his original idea, he would have been a great creator.

PURANI: Dr. Bhagawan Das suggested that legislators should be above the age of forty and completely disinterested like the Rishis.

SRI AUROBINDO: A chamber of Rishis? That would not be very promising, for they would at once begin to quarrel—"Nana munir nana mat,"¹ as they say. The Rishis in ancient times could guide the kings because they lived in various places.

PURANI: His idea is like R's idea of gathering all great men together.

SRI AUROBINDO (*laughing*): And let them quarrel like Kilkenny cats, I suppose. The Congress at the present stage—has it not the look of a Fascist dictatorial organisation? There is no opportunity for any difference of opinion except for the Socialist members who are allowed to differ provided they don't seriously differ. Whatever resolutions the Congress passes are obligatory on all the provinces, whether the laws suit the provinces or not. There is no room for any other independent opinion. Everything is fixed beforehand and the people are only allowed to talk it over—like Stalin's parliament. When we started the movement, we began with the idea of throwing out the Congress oligarchy and opening the whole organisation to the general mass.

PURANI: Srinivas Iyengar retired from Congress because of his differences with Gandhi. He objected to Gandhi's giving the movement a religious turn and bringing religion into politics.

SRI AUROBINDO: He made the Charka a religious article of faith and excluded all people from the Congress membership who could not spin. How many even among his own followers believe in his gospel of Charka? Such a tremendous waste of energy just for the sake of a few annas is most unreasonable.

PURANI: He made that rule perhaps to enforce discipline.

SRI AUROBINDO: Discipline is all right but once you begin to concentrate on a particular thing you tend to go on concentrating on it.

PURANI: The Charka failed in agricultural provinces but seems to have succeeded in other places, especially where people had no occupation.

NIRODBARAN: In Bengal it didn't succeed.

SRI AUROBINDO: In Bengal it didn't. It may be all right as a famine palliative but when it takes the form of an all-India programme it looks absurd. If you form a programme that is suited to the condition of agricultural people, it sounds reasonable. Give

¹ "Many sages, many views."

them education, technical training, and give them the fundamental organic principles of organisation, not on political but on business lines. But Gandhi doesn't want any such industrial organisation, he is for going back to the old system of civilisation and so comes in with his magical formula, "Spin, spin, spin." C. R. Das and a few others could act as a counterbalance. It is all a fetish. I don't believe in that sort of autarchy, for that is against the principle of life. It is not possible for nations to be like that.

In what a well-ordered way have Denmark and Ireland organised their agriculture! Only now they are beginning to suffer because other nations are trying to be self-sufficient.

PURANI: What do you think of Hindi being the common language? It seems to me English has occupied so prominent a place that it will be unwise and difficult to displace it.

SRI AUROBINDO: English will be all right and even necessary if India is an international State. In that case English has to be the medium of expression, especially as English is now replacing French as the world-language. But the national spirit won't allow it as it is a foreign language. At the same time Hindi can't replace English in the universities, nor the provincial language. When the national spirit grows it is difficult to say what will happen. In Ireland after the revolution they wanted to abolish English and adopt Gaelic, but as time went on and things settled themselves their enthusiasm waned and English came back.

The discussion then drifted to the question of the Jews. Purani said that he didn't understand why the Jews were being persecuted so much by Hitler.

NIRODBARAN: I understand that the Jews betrayed Germany during the First World War.

SRI AUROBINDO: Nonsense! On the contrary they helped Germany a great deal. It is because they are a clever race that others are jealous of them. Or for anything that is wrong you point to the Jews—it is so much easier than finding the real cause. People want something to strike at. So the popular cry, "The Jews, the Jews." Do you remember my telling you about the prophecy regarding the Jews—that when they will be persecuted and driven to Jerusalem the Golden Age shall come?

It is the Jews that have built Germany's commercial fleet and her navy. And the contribution of the Jews towards the world's progress in every branch is remarkable.

But this sort of dislike exists among other nations also: for example, the English don't like the Scotch, because the Scotch have beaten the English in commercial affairs. There was a famous story in *Punch*. Two people were talking. One said, "Bill, who is that man?" And Bill answered, "Let us strike at him, he is a foreigner."

And then in Bengal the West Bengal people used to call the East Bengal people "*Bangal*" and composed a satire, "*Bangal manush noy, oi ek jantu.*"¹

Once I used to wear socks at all times of the year. The West Bengalis used to sneer that I was a Bangal. They thought that they were the most civilised people on earth. It is a legacy from the animals, just as dogs of one quarter don't like dogs of another.

SATYENDRA: But things will improve, I hope.

SRI AUROBINDO: If these things go, we may be sure the Golden Age is coming. All my opinions are naturally on the basis of the present conditions. But, of course, the conditions would be quite different if the Supermind came down.

NIRODBARAN: You are tempting us too much with your Supermind. Will it really benefit the whole of mankind?

SRI AUROBINDO: It will exert a certain upward pull but in order that it may bring a considerable change, that it may be effective, two hundred sadhaks of the Ashram can't be enough. There must be thousands whose influence can spread all over the world, who by actual example can prove that the Supermind is something superior to the means hitherto employed.

PURANI: Will it have a power over humanity?

SRI AUROBINDO: Let us leave it to the Supermind to decide.

NIRODBARAN: The materialists and scientists say that Yogis have done nothing for human happiness. Buddhas and Avatars have come and gone, but the sufferings of humanity are just the same.

SRI AUROBINDO: Did Avatars come to relieve the sufferings of humanity? It was only Buddha who showed the way to a release from suffering. But his path was to get away from this world

¹ "These Bengalis are not men, they are beasts."

and enter into Nirvana. Does mankind follow him? And if they don't and can't get rid of their sufferings, it is not Buddha's fault!

NIRODBARAN: People say that scientific inventions and medical discoveries have been able to improve the conditions of the world: for instance, by cholera injections and small-pox vaccinations, the death rate has been reduced.

SRI AUROBINDO: And are people happy? Vaccination? Intellectual people say that vaccination has done more harm than good.

NIRODBARAN: But that is the opinion of intellectuals, not of doctors.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why, the intellectuals have surely studied the subject before giving their opinion. Doctors may have reduced cholera, etc., but what about other things that they have brought in? As for suffering, it cannot go so long as ignorance remains. Even after the Supermind's descent, suffering will remain. If you choose to remain in suffering, how can it go?

NIRODBARAN: Doctors can compel people to take injections even against their will and thus benefit them. Can spiritual Force give such benefits? The Yogis have been busy with their own salvation while the world has remained just the same.

SRI AUROBINDO: Evolution has proceeded from matter through animal to physical man, vital man, mental man and spiritual man. When mental man or spiritual man appears, the others don't disappear. The tigers and serpents don't become men. In this upward growth of the human consciousness you can't say that Buddha, Christ and others have played no part.

I consider the Supramental the culmination of the spiritual man. In the supramental evolution one is not required to flee from life. It is something dynamic that changes life and nature. It will open the mental, the vital, even the physical to the intuitive and overmental planes.

You want comfort and happiness. In that case Truth and Knowledge are of no value.

The discoveries of modern science have outrun the human capacity to use them. The scientists don't know what to do with them and the discoveries have been used for the purpose of destruction. Now they are trying to kill by throwing germs from aeroplanes. At least cholera and small-pox end suffering by death, but by bombing you mutilate for life.

Politics, science, even socialism have not succeeded in finding a way out of suffering. They have rallied people to kill one another and thus they have imperilled the State. Is that an improvement, unless you say that murders and massacres are necessary? From this condition of chaos and suffering, there have been shown ways of escape, but about the people who have shown the way out you say they are not useful. Of course I am assuming you are arguing that everybody has to be useful.

No, no, all that is a superficial view of things. One has to consider the whole civilisation before one can pass an opinion.

It is because Western civilisation is failing that people like Aldous Huxley are drawn to Yoga.

28 DECEMBER 1938

About 5.30 p.m. Champaklal had another fit of laughter. Sri Aurobindo reacted to it by asking, "What's the dynamite explosion?" Then we had to check our merriment. But later on, about 6.30, the joke was repeated and Champaklal complained to Sri Aurobindo that Nirodbaran was making him laugh. Sri Aurobindo replied, "See that he does not make you go off like a firework!" We then assembled by the bedside. The atmosphere grew quiet and in consequence Nirodbaran began to yawn. Champaklal started mocking him. The result was again laughter, but a subdued gurgle of it.

SRI AUROBINDO: What's the joke?

BECHARLAL: Champaklal is mocking at my yawns.

SRI AUROBINDO: Doesn't he know that just as, according to X, yawning is a fatal symptom, mocking at it may also be a symptom that is fatal?

As X came into the talk, questions went round about his condition. Someone asked what medicines had been given to him that day.

SATYENDRA: That is a professional secret.

SRI AUROBINDO: This reminds me of the science of augury in Rome. There used to be government augurs who would be called in to interpret signs and omens, and from that a college of augury came into existence. There the professors delivered lectures with

grave and important faces but when afterwards they met together they would laugh among themselves.

By the way, we have got mutilated news on the radio today. They have dropped two important words. Instead of saying that the Italians are planning to march into Djibouti, they have said that the Italians are marching into it. If the Italians actually do so, the French can march into Tripoli as a counter-measure.

PURANI: The French can also organise the Abyssinians against Italy.

SRI AUROBINDO: There won't be time for that.

BECHARLAL: The Italians don't seem to be good soldiers.

SRI AUROBINDO: No. I would be greatly surprised if they could defeat the French — unless Mussolini has changed the Italian character tremendously!

BECHARLAL: They had a hard time in Abyssinia.

SRI AUROBINDO: It was by their superior equipment, air-bombing, mustard gas, etc. that they succeeded.

BECHARLAL: But they will be backed up by the Germans.

SRI AUROBINDO: Italy can't do without Germany.

PURANI: Fischer says that the German army in the last war was the greatest army ever organised in the world.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, they were the most organised and the ablest soldiers in the world, except for the Japanese. But the Japanese are numerically fewer and financially poorer. The Germans, even with their great soldierly qualities, could not throw up any remarkable military genius like Foch. If Foch had been placed in command sooner, the war would have ended much earlier.

The Balkan peoples and the Turks are also good fighters. The Austrians are not.

BECHARLAL: What about the Sikhs and the Gurkhas?

SRI AUROBINDO: They are unsurpassed. But a war does not depend only on soldiers: it depends more on generals.

PURANI: Schomberg says that the Chinese are no good as soldiers and the Russians are good only at defensive warfare. The Germans at present are trying to expand in the Ukraine. After that, Hitler will come to Central Europe.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, but that will at once combine Russia, Poland, Roumania and Yugoslavia. The small countries will be afraid about their own safety.

PURANI: But I don't understand why Germany should join with Italy in attacking France.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why? Hitler himself has said in his *Mein Kampf* that Germany is not safe without the destruction of France. And France says the same thing about Germany.

BECHARLAL: The way these people are preparing, war seems inevitable.

SRI AUROBINDO: The Mother thinks they will not do anything till early next year. Perhaps they are trying to hit now because they think France has been divided by the general strike. But they lose sight of the fact that an attack will at once bring the whole nation together. In any case, we find the Germans are at present busy enjoying their Christmas.

BECHARLAL: England most probably will have to ally herself with France.

SRI AUROBINDO: You have seen what Chamberlain has said? According to him, England is not obliged to help France in case of war with Italy. But if Italy combines with Germany, one can't say what England will do.

BECHARLAL: In case of a general war, India will have her opportunity for independence.

SRI AUROBINDO: How?

BECHARLAL: She will refuse to cooperate. I think these Congress Ministries were allowed because of the threat of war in Europe.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, in order to conciliate the Indians.

29 DECEMBER 1938

Satyendra opened the conversation by asking a question on behalf of Dr. Savor: "What is the connection between the causal body and the psychic being?" We do not quite remember exactly what Sri Aurobindo answered, but he said something like: "The psychic being is what is called the Chaitya Purusha in the heart; the causal body is part of the Superconscious." Then the talk turned on the Atman or Self and the psychic being. Sri Aurobindo said they are not the same. Ramana Maharshi was brought in by Satyendra who said that the Maharshi had realised the Self and that Brunton had written of the Maharshi's hearing of the Voice in the heart. Sri Aurobindo remarked that the Voice in the heart

would refer to the psychic being and then it would decidedly not be the Atman realisation. At this point the Mother came in and asked Sri Aurobindo: "What are you speaking about?"

SRI AUROBINDO: Satyendra has asked a question which does not hang together.

PURANI: Kapali Shastri has given a version of the Maharshi's experience, which he heard from the Maharshi himself: "One day something opened in the heart and I began to hear 'I, I, I' and everywhere I started seeing the 'I'."

SATYENDRA: Different people say different things about spiritual realisation. How are we to know which is the highest? Our own choice is not necessarily the highest.

THE MOTHER: Each goes to the limit of his own consciousness. I have met any number of people in Europe, India and Japan practising Yoga under different masters. Each claimed that his realisation was the highest. He was quite sure about it and quite satisfied with his condition and yet each was standing at a different place in consciousness and saying that he had attained the highest.

SATYENDRA: But are there no criteria by which to know the truth?

THE MOTHER: What criteria? If you ask them, they say their experience is something wonderful but can't be described by the mind. I met Tagore in Japan. He claimed to have reached the peace of Nirvana and he was beaming with joy about it. I thought, "Here is a man who claims to have found peace and reached Nirvana. Let us see." I asked him to meditate with me. I followed him in meditation and saw that he had reached just behind the mind into a sort of voidness. I waited and waited to follow him elsewhere, but he would not go further. I found that he was supremely satisfied, imagining that he had entered Nirvana!

SATYENDRA: But there must be some fundamental realisation, an ultimate of some kind?

SRI AUROBINDO: That is to say, there is a fundamental truth of consciousness. But that is not so easy to reach.

SATYENDRA: How then should we choose a master? When we choose, we must know.

PURANI: How are you going to know with the mind where he has reached?

SATYENDRA: Our choice is not psychic.

THE MOTHER: That is another question. First you must realise the limits of different states of consciousness and the difference in the places where people stand.

The choice is mostly in answer to your own need; it is governed by your inner necessity. Sometimes it is made by instinct. It is that instinct by which the animals find the right place for food. Only, in human beings it is from within (*gesture pointing within*). If you allow your mind to discuss and argue, then the instinct will be veiled. When you have chosen a thing, the mind naturally wants to believe that it is the highest you have chosen. But this is subjective.

SATYENDRA: If the choice is right, one feels happiness and satisfaction.

THE MOTHER: One can't depend on feelings and sensations, for very often they misguide. But satisfaction is quite a different thing. There are people who are not satisfied in the best of conditions, while in the worst of conditions some are quite satisfied. Look at the people in the world around. Some are very happy with their conditions. And again there are some whose satisfaction depends on their livers—a brutally materialistic state. And also there are people who suffer extremely and yet their inmost being knows that that is the truth for them.

SATYENDRA: But there are certain signs, *lakshanas*, in the Shastras by which we can judge.

SRI AUROBINDO: What Shastras? One can't believe all that is said in them.

THE MOTHER: Besides, that may be all right for Indians. What about Europeans? You can't say they have not realised any Truth. (*Turning to Sri Aurobindo*) Isn't that so?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes.

Then the Mother took her leave for the general meditation and there was a pause for some time.

SRI AUROBINDO: (*addressing Satyendra*): What are these *lakshanas* you spoke of?

SATYENDRA: They are common, Sir, everywhere. They are given in the Gita: for example, equal love for others, equal-mindedness in all circumstances, etc.

SRI AUROBINDO: They are rather the conditions for realisation. As for realisation itself, all experiences are true and each has its

place. Just because one is true, another is not false. The Truth is infinite. There are so many different ways to come to the Truth. The wider you become, the higher you go, the more you find that there is still more and more. For instance, the Maharshi had his experience of "I"-ness, but when I had the Nirvana experience I couldn't think of any "I". However I might try, I could not find it. The word simply got erased. One can't speak of that experience of mine as "I". It was either "He" or "That". I would call it Laya. Realisation of Self is all right—Laya is a part of a realisation much more comprehensive.

When I don't accept the Self as final, it is not that I have not realised its Truth or that I don't know the One in All and All in the One. But I have other realisations which are equally strong and which cannot be shut out. The Maharshi is right and everybody else is also right.

When the mind tries to understand these things, it takes up fragments and treats them as the whole and makes unreal distinctions. People speak of Nirguna (Qualitiless) as fundamental and Saguna (Qualified) as a derivation, a secondary reality. But what did the Upanishad mean by Nirguno Guni and Ananta Saguna? They can't be thought of as different. When you speak of impersonality as the fundamental truth and of personality as something imposed upon it and therefore unreal, you cut across with your mind something which is beyond both. It is not that personality is the chief thing and the impersonal is only one side or one condition of personality. No! Both personality and impersonality are aspects of one thing which is indivisible.

Shankara is right and so also are Madhwa and Nimbarka. Only, when they state their truths in mental terms there is a tremendous confusion. Shankara says, "Duality does not exist and all is one." Madhwa says, "There is duality." Nimbarka says, "There is Bheda-bheda, there is duality and division as well as no division." The Upanishad speaks of Him by knowing whom all is known. What does that mean? This knowledge, this Vijnana, does not mean merely the fundamental realisation of the One. It means the knowledge of the principle of the Divine Being, what Krishna speaks of as Janati tattwata. One cannot know the complete Divine except in what I have called the Supermind. That's why Krishna said of himself that one who knows him in the true principles of his being is rare. The Upanishads also speak of the Brahman as

Chatushpada, having four feet or aspects. They don't just state that all is Brahman and end there. The realisation of the Self is not all. There are many things beyond that. The Divine Guide within urged me to proceed, adding experience after experience, reaching higher and higher, stopping at none as the final, till I arrived at the Supermind. There I found the Truth indivisible and there everything takes its proper place. There Nirguna and Saguna, impersonality and personality, don't exist. They are all aspects of one Truth which cannot be divided.

At the Overmind stage, knowledge begins to rush in upon you from all sides and you see objects from all points of view and each thing from every viewpoint. All sides of knowledge tend to get related and there the cosmic consciousness is not merely static but also dynamic. It is the expression of something still higher, the Supermind above.

When you become cosmic, even though you speak of yourself as "I", it is not "I". The ordinary "I"-ness disappears, and the mental, vital and physical look like representatives of that new consciousness. Ramakrishna speaks of this state as "the form of ego left for action". When you reach the Supermind, you become not only cosmic but also what is beyond the universe—the transcendental—and there you have indivisibility and unity, and this transcendental coexists with the universal and the individual.

The same principle works out in science. The scientists at one time reduced all the multiplicity of elements to the ether and described the ether in the most contradictory terms. Now they have found the electron as the basis of Matter. By the difference in position and number of electrons you get the whole multiplicity of objects. Here too you find the one that is the many, and that the one and the many are not two different things. Both are true and through both you have to go to the Truth.

When you come to politics, the truth again is various. Democracy, plutocracy, monarchy, etc.—all have their truth. Even Mussolini and Hitler stand for some truth.

Ours is a very big Yoga. One has to crawl all over (*gesture with a movement of the hands.*) I think Nirodbaran is not prepared to take all that trouble!

DR. BECHARLAL: Never, Sir! I have come here because I wanted to avoid trouble.

SRI AUROBINDO: You as such are not called upon to take all that trouble. Even for me it would have been impossible if I had to do it all myself. At a certain stage the heavens opened and the thing was done for me.

The topic seemed to end here, but then Purani prolonged it.

PURANI: Kapali Shastri asked the Maharshi whether immortality was possible. The Maharshi would not say anything, but as Shastri persisted he said that it was possible by Divine Grace.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is hardly an answer. Everything is possible by Grace. There are two things about immortality. One is conquest of death. This doesn't mean that one would never die. It means the power to leave the body at will. The other thing is change or renewal of the body. There is no sense in keeping the same body for years. That is why death is necessary. Death has its reason in that one can take by it another body and have a fresh growth. You know Dasaratha is said to have lived for sixty thousand years. I don't know what he did with such a long life – except that at the end he began producing children.

Have you read Shaw's *Back to Methuselah*? It shows how silly intellectuals can be. And what a ridiculous farce he has made of Joan of Arc! He speaks of her visions as projections of her own mental ideas and decisions. Shaw is all right when he speaks of England, Ireland and society, but elsewhere he can't do anything constructive; he fails there miserably.

These intellectuals, when they talk of something beyond their scope, make fools of themselves. See what Russell writes about the "introvert". Thinkers like him can't tolerate emptiness or cessation of thought and breaking away from outside interests. You ask them to stop their thoughts; they refuse to accept the result of stopping them and at once come back from the emptiness, and yet it is through emptiness one has to pass to reach the true Fullness.

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30 DECEMBER 1938

During the sponging of Sri Aurobindo there was a little talk on homoeopathy. Somebody said he was puzzled how an infinitesimal quantity could act.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is no puzzle to me. Sometimes the infinitesimal is more powerful than the mass. It approaches more and more the subtle state and from the physical goes into the vital or dynamic and acts vitally.

In the evening the talk began with a reading of S's letter describing vividly his sense of persecution by people.

PURANI: These people get possessed by the idea of persecution.

BECHARLAL: Is it a possession?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, a possession of the nervous system and the vital mind, though it is not like insanity. It is, however, very difficult to convince these people that their ideas of persecution are false. There are two types: one imagines all sorts of things – eighty per cent of cases are of this type – and the other twists everything.

My brother had this persecution mania. He was always in fear of something terrible happening to him. For instance, he used to think that the British Government was going to arrest him.

BECHARLAL: He was a very successful professor, I hear. People used to listen to his lectures with rapt attention.

SRI AUROBINDO: He was very painstaking. Most of the professors don't work so hard. I saw his books interleaved and marked and full of notes. (*Then looking at Purani*) I was not so conscientious as a professor.

PURANI: People who heard you – even those who politically differed from you – speak very highly of your lectures.

SRI AUROBINDO: I never used to look at the notes and sometimes my explanation didn't agree with them. I was professor of English and for some time of French. What was surprising to me was that students used to take down everything verbatim and mug it up. This sort of thing could never have happened in England.

BECHARLAL: But we did it in England.

SRI AUROBINDO: Did what?

BECHARLAL: Take notes.

SRI AUROBINDO: That's different. You can take notes and utilise them in your own way.

BECHARLAL: No, we used to take everything down verbatim. The professors brought in many theories, a lot of recent discoveries. Besides, each professor had his own fad. So we had to do it.

SRI AUROBINDO: In medicine it may have been so, for there is not much scope for original thinking there. But in the arts it was different. You listened to the lectures, noted down what you liked and then made what you wanted of it. There was always a demand for the student's point of view. In India the students, besides taking down my notes, used to get notes of professors from Bombay, especially if they happened to be examiners.

Once I was giving a lecture on Southey's *Life of Nelson*. And my lecture was not in agreement with the notes in the book. So the students remarked that it was not at all like what was in the notes. I replied that I hadn't read them. In any case, they are mostly rubbish. I could never go into the minute details. I read and left it to my mind to absorb what it could. That's why I could never become a scholar.

Up to the age of fifteen I was known as a very promising scholar at St. Paul's. After fifteen I lost this reputation. The teachers used to say that I had become lazy and was deteriorating.

DR. BECHARLAL: How was that?

SRI AUROBINDO: Because I was reading novels and poetry. Only at the examination time I used to prepare a little. But when now and then I wrote Greek and Latin verse my teachers would lament that I was not utilising my remarkable gifts because of laziness.

When I went up with a scholarship to King's College, Cambridge, Oscar Browning commented that he had not seen such remarkable papers. As you see, in spite of my laziness I was not deteriorating!

DR. BECHARLAL: Was there any prejudice against Indians at that time?

SRI AUROBINDO: No. There was no distinction between an Englishman and an Indian. Only the lower classes in England used to shout "Blackie, Blackie." But the prejudice was just beginning. It was brought by Anglo-Indians and Englishmen returning from the colonies. It is a result of democracy, I suppose. But among the cultured Englishmen it was unknown and they treated us as equals.

In France one never heard of such prejudices. I don't know if you have read in the papers the story about a Paris hotel. Pressed by a number of Americans, this hotel asked some Negroes to leave. As soon as the news reached the President's ear, he sent an order that if the hotel proprietor did this his licence would be cancelled. The

French have Negro Governors and other Negro officers, not to speak of taxi-drivers. There was even a Senegalese Deputy who used to dominate over the Governors. But I wonder why they have never appointed an Indian Deputy in Pondicherry. The English people, on their side, have a certain liberality and common sense.

DR. BECHARLAL: Liberality?

SRI AUROBINDO: By liberality I don't mean generosity but a freedom of consciousness and a certain fairness. Because of this, along with their public spirit, there is not such corruption in public life as in France or America. They can vehemently criticise one another in the press, even personally, but that does not affect their private relations. You have seen how Brailsford has attacked Chamberlain, but their friendship and private relations won't be affected.

DR. BECHARLAL: That will only be appearances.

SRI AUROBINDO: No, no. It is quite genuine. And there is a great freedom of speech in England.

DR. BECHARLAL: Vivekananda said that it is difficult to make friends with Englishmen but once it is done it lasts a lifetime.

SRI AUROBINDO: Quite true.

PURANI: The Japanese, Jean Herbert says, are also like that. Generally they are only polite and formal, but once you can make a friendship they are very good friends.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, they are very polite in their manner and conduct. But they don't admit you into their private life. They have a wonderful power of self-control. They don't lose their temper or quarrel with you, but if their honour is violated they may kill you afterwards. They can be bitter enemies. They have a sense of honour as well as of dishonour, unfortunately, and in one case they may kill you and in the other kill themselves at your door. If a Japanese killed himself at an Englishman's door, it would be impossible for the Englishman to live there any more. If a robber entered a Japanese house and the householder told him that he required some money, the robber would part with some of his loot; but if the householder said that he had a debt of honour to pay, then the robber would leave the whole sum behind and go away. Imagine such a housebreaker in England or America!

The Japanese have a high sense of chivalry too. In the Russo-Japanese War, when the Russians were defeated the Mikado

almost shed tears thinking of the Czar. That was a true sense of chivalry.

When a congregation of fifty or sixty thousand were caught in a fire due to an earthquake, there was not a single cry, not a flutter. All were standing up and chanting Buddhist hymns. That's a heroic people with wonderful self-control.

DR. BECHARLAL: If they have such self-control they would be very good for Yoga.

SRI AUROBINDO: Ah, self-control is not enough for Yoga. The Japanese are more an ethical than a spiritual race. Their ethical rules are extremely difficult to follow.

But these things perhaps belong to the past. It is a great pity that people who have carried such ideals into practice are losing them through contact with European civilisation. That is the great harm which European vulgarisation has done to Japan. Now you find most people mercantile in their outlook: they will do anything for the sake of money.

Naka's mother, when she returned from America to Japan, as is the custom with the Japanese, was so horrified to see the present-day Japan that she at once went back.

That the Japanese are not a distinctly spiritual race can be shown from an example. Hirasawa, a friend of Richard's and the Mother's, was a great patriot but he did not like the modern tendencies of Japan; so he used to say, "My soul has become a traitor."

PURANI: Have you read Noguchi's letters to Tagore defending Japan's aggression?

SRI AUROBINDO: No; but there are always two sides to a question. I don't believe in fanatical shouts against imperialism. Conquests of that sort were at one time regarded as the normal activity of political life; now you do it under pretexts and excuses. Almost every nation has been doing it. What about China herself? She took Kashgar in the same way. The very name "Kashgar" shows that China had no business to be there. There is also the question of war. Apart from new fashions of killing, there is nothing wrong in war as such. All depends on circumstances. It is the Anglo-Saxon hypocrisy that cries out against it. The French people don't.

PURANI: It is said the French people don't usually lose their head, but when they lose it, they lose it well.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes; India also was considered docile and mild, like an elephant, but once the elephant is off the line you had better keep out of his way!

Now there is a new morality in the air. They talk of pacifism, anti-nationalism, anti-militarism. But the talking is done by those who can't do things. In any case it has to stand the test of time.

PURANI: Jwalanti (Madame Monod-Herzen) used to be wild when England began to shout against Italy's war on Abyssinia. Of course, she does not defend Italy, but England should be the last nation to raise a cry.

SRI AUROBINDO: Quite so. England was the only country that defended air-bombing because she wanted to kill the Pathans!

DR. BECHARLAL: Has European civilisation today nothing good in it?

SRI AUROBINDO: It has lowered the moral tone of humanity. No doubt, it has brought in hygiene, sanitation, etc. But even the nineteenth century civilisation with its defects was better than what we have now. Europe could not stand the test of the last world war. The ancient peoples tried to keep to their ideals and to raise them still higher while Europe lost all her ideals after the war. People have become cynical, selfish. What you hear of post-war England or post-war Germany is not all wrong. Have you not heard Arjava (J. Chadwick) inveighing against post-war England? I suppose it is all due to commercialism.

31 DECEMBER 1938

We were thinking how to begin the talk. Time was passing and yet none could find any question. Then Purani came forward with a few paintings of Picasso. There were four or five pictures. One was that of a man and woman, another of a human figure with a birdlike face, and the third of a figure with three eyes.

SRI AUROBINDO: There is some power of expression in the picture of a man and woman. The other one looks like a Brahmin pandit with a *tiki* (tuft of hair) on the head. The face represents the animal origin still left in him and one of the eyes seems the Prajna-chakra, another the throat-centre and so on. When these modern artists want to convey something, the spectators find it difficult to

understand. How on earth is one to make out what the artist means—even if he does mean to convey something? It is all right if you don't want to convey anything but merely express yourself and leave people to feel about it as they like. In that case one gets an impression and even though one can't put it in terms of the mind one can feel the thing, as in the case of the two figures here. But, instead, if you convey something and say like the Surrealist poets, "Why should art mean anything? Why do you want to understand?", then it becomes difficult to accept. Take the picture of the Brahmin pandit. It would have been all right without those eyes. But the eyes, or what seem to be eyes, challenge at once the mind to think what it all means.

(*Addressing Purani*) Have you seen a certain Futurist painting representing a man in different positions? The artist wanted to convey movement in painting—most absurd! You may just as well draw our guest-house "Golconde" walking about.

Each art has its own conditions and limitations and you have to work under those conditions and with those limitations.

PURANI: I hope the aspiration for purification will purify the field of art also. Élie Faure has an idea that France sacrificed her architectural continuity of five hundred years for securing the first place in painting in Europe. There is no all-Europe name in painting in any other country.

SRI AUROBINDO: Of course. France leads in art. What she begins, others follow. But architecture has stopped everywhere.

PURANI: Élie Faure says the machine is also a piece of architecture.

SRI AUROBINDO: How?

PURANI: Because it is made of parts and fulfils certain functions.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then you also are a piece of architecture. Everything is made of parts. The motor-car too is architecture then.

PURANI: X finds these paintings of Picasso very remarkable.

SRI AUROBINDO: Does he understand anything about them?

PURANI: I suppose the more mysterious a thing, the more remarkable it must be!

SRI AUROBINDO: People are getting to be mystic without their knowing it. You know, Hitler is a sort of mystic. He says he is guided by an inner voice. He goes into silence in his palace

and waits for the voice. Whatever the voice says he will carry out. Jwalanti's son's friend writes that he is absolutely undependable. His generals, financiers etc. don't know what his next step will be. Today he may say one thing and tomorrow he may say quite the contrary and upset everything. Most unreliable and inconsistent. He is possessed by some supernormal Power and it is from this Power that the voice, as he calls it, comes. Have you noted that people who at one time were inimical to him come into contact with him and leave as his admirers? It is a sign of that Power. It is from this Power that he has constantly received suggestions and the constant repetition of the suggestions has taken hold of the German people. You will also mark that in his speeches he goes on stressing the same ideas – this is evidently a sign of that vital possession. But he is not insane. What he says on the whole hangs perfectly together.

I think it is in a photograph in *L'Illustration*, where Hitler, Goebbels and Goering are together, that the characters of the three come out very well. In other photos the disclosure is not so striking: the expressions get hidden. But here Hitler gives the impression of having the face of a Paris street-criminal. Goebbels shows a narrow sharp-cut face with cunning eyes. Goering is marked by disequilibrium: he was actually in a mental hospital for some time. The three are possessed by forces of the Life plane.

In Hitler's case it is successful ruffianism with a diabolical cunning and, behind it, the psychic of a London cabman – crude and undeveloped. That is to say, the psychic character in the man consists of some futile and silly sentimentalism. It is that silly sentimentalism that finds expression in his paintings, I suppose.

In a photograph of the Munich Pact I saw Hitler with Chamberlain. This man with a great diabolical cunning in his eyes was looking at Chamberlain, who looked like a fly before a spider on the point of being caught – and he actually was caught.

Mussolini had a great power. But when I saw the photograph of the two dictators together after Munich, strangely enough I found Mussolini almost weak by contrast, as if Hitler could put him in his pocket. Daladier claims to be the strong man of France but he also is nothing beside Hitler.

NIRODBARAN: What about Stalin?

SRI AUROBINDO: Stalin has the face of an astute and confident ruffian.

No one thought of Hitler as having anything in him. Then came the vital development, the vital Power holding him in its clutch. Mussolini is at least human, with a human character. Hitler is terribly cruel – another trait that comes out very clearly in his photograph. It is strange to see this outburst of cruelty after the humanitarianism of the nineteenth century – it exceeds even the Christian religious tyranny. In ancient times there was at least pride, a sense of honour for which people died. We say that the Romans were cruel, but even they were human if not humanitarian in comparison and they would have been shocked by what is done in Hitler's Germany, like the deliberate cold-blooded murder of the Jews.

PURANI: I was extremely shocked to hear of Von Schleicher being murdered in a new purge.

SRI AUROBINDO: Hitler killed the lieutenant who had raised him to power on a charge of immorality, and that again is the London cabman mentality. But it is an instance of his diabolical cunning. He had known all the time of that man's homosexuality.

PURANI: Schomberg was telling me, "Mr. Purani, we say but we can't act."

SRI AUROBINDO: Because it is only a mental idea. That is what humanitarianism comes to. It can't act.

It seems strange that the destiny of the whole world should depend on one man and yet it is so – for everybody looks up to him. From one point of view there never was a time when humanity had come down so low as it has now. It looks as if a small number of violent men are the arbiters of humanity and the rest of the world is ready to bow down before one man.

PURANI: It is the lowest depth of Kaliyuga, I suppose.

1 JANUARY 1939

Evening, 5.30. The conversation was begun by Dr. Becharlal. We knew from the peculiar signs on his face that he was preparing and, he soon burst forth.

DR. BECHARLAL: What is the effect of fasting?

SRI AUROBINDO (*knitting his brows as usual at Dr. Becharlal's question*): What about it?

DR. BECHARLAL: The effect of fasting on Yoga?

SRI AUROBINDO (*as if the question now were not so perplexing after all*): It gives a sort of excitement to the vital being, but the effect does not seem to be very sound. I fasted twice – once in Alipore Jail for ten days and the other time in Pondicherry for twenty-three days. At Alipore I was in full yogic activity. I was not taking any food. I was throwing away all of it into the bucket. Of course, the superintendent didn't know. Only the warder knew and he said to the others, "The gentleman must be ill. He won't live long." Although I lost considerable weight, I could lift a pail of water above my head, which I couldn't do ordinarily.

Then at Pondicherry, while I was fasting, I kept up full mental and vital and yogic activity. I was walking eight hours a day and yet not feeling tired in the least. When I broke my fast, I did it straightaway with normal food.

NIRODBARAN: How is it possible to be active like this without food?

SRI AUROBINDO: One draws energy from the vital plane instead of depending on physical sustenance.

Once in Calcutta I lived for a long time on rice and bananas only. It was a very good food.

SATYENDRA: The trouble is that one can't draw conclusions from your case.

SRI AUROBINDO (*laughing*): At least this conclusion can be drawn, that it can be done.

Now let me tell you about the invitation to dinner by R. C. Dutt. He was surprised that I was taking only vegetarian food whereas he could not live without meat. With vegetarian food I was feeling light and pure. It is just a belief that one can't live without meat, and that creates a habit.

As regards fasting, I know of a European who fasted for forty days and became ecstatic over the effect of fasting, but after the fast he had a breakdown.

There are many stories about Jains fasting. What is the idea behind their fasts?

SATYENDRA: I suppose they believe in the mortification of the flesh for the release of the spirit.

NIRODBARAN: Can fasting cure diseases too?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, if you know the process. That's why Europeans fast. Sometimes it is the mental idea that works. You start with the idea of being well or ill and it happens accordingly.

A disease comes from outside. It pierces what the Mother calls the nervous sheath and enters the body. If one is conscious of this subtle nervous sheath, then the disease can be thrown away, as I did at Baroda with the thoughts, before it can enter. In neurasthenic people this nervous envelope becomes damaged.

DR. BECHARLAL: Does neuralgia also come in the same way?

SRI AUROBINDO (*laughing*): Yes, I suppose you are thinking of your own case?

DR. BECHARLAL: How then is one to get rid of it?

SRI AUROBINDO: As I said, you have first to be conscious of the subtle body before you can do it.

CHAMPAKLAL: X told me once how she used to have a headache which remained just above the head and it was very severe. We used to laugh at her because we couldn't believe in a headache of that nature.

SRI AUROBINDO: How do you know there can't be such a headache? If the consciousness can be lifted above the head and remain there, why not a headache? The body is a mere means of responsive vibrations. Everything coming from outside finds a response in it and we get all these things.

SATYENDRA: If everything comes from outside, then what are we? What belongs to us?

SRI AUROBINDO: In one sense nothing belongs to us. The physical is made up, you may say, of various predispositions: certain energies due to heredity, your past lives (the sum of energies of the past) and what you have acquired in this life. These are ready to act under favourable conditions, under the pressure of Nature – universal Nature which gives the sense of “I”, “I am doing everything.” This “I” and “mine” have no truth in the ordinary sense.

SATYENDRA: The other day you spoke of the fundamental personality. I couldn't quite understand you.

SRI AUROBINDO: There are two things here – the personality and the Person – which are not the same. The Person is the eternal Divine Purusha assuming many personalities and thrown out into Time as the Cosmic and as the Individual for a particular purpose, use or work. Even as the Individual, this Purusha is all the time conscious of identity with the Cosmic. That is why liberation of the Individual is possible.

SATYENDRA: Is the cosmic liberation static or dynamic?

SRI AUROBINDO: It is both. In the static aspect, it is the Self, infinite, one, without movement, action, duality. In the dynamic, it depends on where your experience feels the unity. If in the mental, your mind feels one with the cosmic mind; if in the vital, your vital becomes part of the cosmic vital; if in the physical, the body is felt as a speck of universal Matter.

Just as there is a wall that separates the outer nature from the soul, the psychic being, so also there is a wall above the head. You break that wall or what is called the lid and you feel your individual self in the Infinite or you feel you are the Infinite. The opening can be vertical or horizontal—at various levels, the vital being, the heart, etc.

CHAMPAKLAL: Is it true that illness comes from sadhana?

SRI AUROBINDO: From sadhana?

NIRODBARAN: I think he means that illness may come in the course of sadhana for purification.

SRI AUROBINDO: That's a different thing. It can be a circumstance in sadhana.

CHAMPAKLAL: When I was still a newcomer and having some physical troubles now and then, people used to say it was due to sadhana. So I used to keep my troubles secret from you lest you should stop your Force when you found out about them.

SATYENDRA: Some Sufis and Bhaktas take illness and other such things as coming from the Divine.

SRI AUROBINDO: They are right. They take everything as coming from the Divine, and it is a very good attitude if one can truly take it. If you neglect the chain of intermediate causes, whatever happens has the sanction of the Supreme. This is a Cause superior to everything.

DR. BECHARLAL: If anything happens due to our negligence, can we call it sanctioned by the Divine?

SRI AUROBINDO: I said, "If you neglect the chain of intermediate causes."

DR. BECHARLAL: Could there not be some danger in that attitude? We may shirk our responsibility and lay it on the Divine.

SRI AUROBINDO: I was speaking about the Bhakta. For the Bhakta whatever happens is for the best and he takes everything in that light. For the Yogi who has to conquer these things, they must come; otherwise what is there to be conquered? In Yoga, difficulties are opportunities. No doubt, hostile forces are recog-

nised as hostile, but from a special standpoint. Ultimately all powers are from the Divine, assisting in the work. They throw difficulties at us in order to test the strength.

It is the Divine that has created the opposition and sends you a defeat so that you may conquer hereafter. This is necessary in order to go beyond the ego's sense of its own responsibility.

At one time I experienced the hostile forces as gods trying to test my strength in sadhana.

You act not for success but for the Divine, though that does not mean that you must not work for success. Is this confusing? That was what Arjuna complained to Krishna—that Krishna spoke in double words. He told Arjuna not to be eager for results but at the same time he said, "Fight and conquer."

2 JANUARY 1939

Dr. Savor came to see Sri Aurobindo. After pranam he sat on the carpet with us and talked about homoeopathy and how by Providence he had taken it up, a thing he never thought of. Touching on the mentality of patients he remarked, "It is better not to tell the price of a medicine. For if a patient is told that a medicine is very cheap, as homoeopathic drugs usually are, he loses all faith and respect for it. So I always keep the price a secret." Then he said something about the Mother testing him. The Mother had come into the room meanwhile and had been listening to him.

THE MOTHER: Testing is not the practice here. It is the play of forces or at times the adverse forces that do the testing in order to measure your strength. If you refuse to listen to them and remain firm, they withdraw.

People have enough difficulties already; why should we add any more? To say that we purposely test is not true. We never do it—never!

DR. SAVOOR: I am very glad to get this answer from you. I feel perfectly assured now.

THE MOTHER: Are there any highly priced drugs in homoeopathy?

DR. SAVOOR: No, Mother. The highest price that we pay for one drachm of medicine is about five rupees. And with

that one drachm we can by trituration treat a huge number of patients.

SRI AUROBINDO: Are there no exceedingly rare drugs for which you have to pay a big sum?

DR. SAVOOR: It is only drugs of very high potencies that are rare in India. One has to get them from America. Otherwise almost all drugs are available in Calcutta and other places and most homoeopaths get them from there.

After this, the Mother went out to get ready for the general meditation. All of us fell silent, though some were anxious to start a conversation. Purani had been preparing something but waited for the Mother's departure.

PURANI: How far is it desirable for the Ashram to be self-sufficient?

SRI AUROBINDO: Self-sufficient in what way?

PURANI: In meeting the needs of daily life: say, the clothes here. Virji who has come from Bombay wants us to introduce the spinning loom to make our own clothes. How far is such self-sufficiency desirable in an Ashram like ours?

SRI AUROBINDO: The question is not whether it is desirable but whether it is practicable. No objection to spinning or weaving. *(Suddenly looking at Nirodbaran and smiling)* Will you set Nirodbaran spinning, to begin with?

NIRODBARAN: I have been spinning all the time, Sir! *(Laughter)*

SRI AUROBINDO: There are all sorts of mental formations that can be carried out. But here it is by the Mother's intuition that things are taken up and done.

PURANI: They have done many things for self-sufficiency successfully at Dayalbagh.

SRI AUROBINDO *(smiling)*: First of all, the spinners and weavers will at once start quarrelling with one another, and that is one way in which the Ashram is not the fit place. In other organisations they impose a discipline and ensure obedience by force, and people are obliged to take their orders from the one at the head. But here we don't impose such discipline from outside. People are left free.

Even if you want to do that kind of work, there are difficulties on the way that have to be guarded against. First, the tendency to degenerate into mere mechanical and commercial activity.

Secondly, ambition: there is a great desire among the sadhaks to make the Ashram figure before the world. That must go.

And then the whole thing won't be possible unless Dr. Savoro promises to homoeopathise all into health!

It is not that we don't want to do that sort of work; we have many ideas but we can't take them up unless the foundation is ready. Even now, in the Gardens, the Building Service and the Dining Room, two or three people can't work together. Their egos come to the front and they want a mental independence.

Work as a part of sadhana or work for the Divine is all right. But work must primarily be spiritual and not merely creative in a personal way. Work as part of spiritual creation is, of course, right, but we can't take this up unless the inner difficulties are overcome. Neither can it be according to mental constructions; it must only be according to the Mother's intuition. Even then there are so many difficulties. Not that we have no workers; there are people here with considerable capacity.

Then the talk was diverted to a totally different subject by Sri Aurobindo asking Dr. Savoro: "Is there any cure for baldness in homoeopathy? I was looking at Nolini's head when he came to dust my books and I was thinking if homoeopathy could do anything for him." A long discussion on baldness followed, with a mention of its various treatments. The example of King Edward VII came in.

SRI AUROBINDO: At Baroda there came a Kaviraj who claimed to have cured his own baldness. He showed some patches which had been bald and where hair was now growing. But unkind critics said that he used to shave his head in patches and call them bald. He treated one of my cousins for baldness, but with no result.

In this connection came in the topic of Dr. Ramchandra and we discussed him.

SRI AUROBINDO: He is a man with an abundant vitality. With that vitality there is nothing that he could not have done. But at the same time there is no discipline, order and control in the vital being. He has written some very fine poems in English. He had made a name here as a doctor and, as soon as he entered the

Ashram, people wanted to crowd in to be treated by him. He was successful with outside people because he could enforce his will and the patients were obliged to follow all his instructions.

After this Dr. Becharlal came out suddenly with a question.

DR. BECHARLAL: What is the difference between peace and silence?

SRI AUROBINDO: How do you mean?

DR. BECHARLAL: Is peace included in silence, or vice versa?

SRI AUROBINDO: If you have the silence, then there is naturally peace with it; but the opposite may not be true. One can do a lot of work with the peace within.

NIRODBARAN: Can one do work with the silence intact? Does not the silence get disturbed?

SRI AUROBINDO: Certainly one can do work. By silence I mean inner silence. It is perfectly possible to carry on any amount of activity in that state. I told you about my experience, which is still with me. It has not been disturbed by any activity.

DR. BECHARLAL: Is silence dynamic or static?

SRI AUROBINDO: It is not the silence that is dynamic but you can have full dynamic activity out of the inner silence. Also you can remain without doing anything. People who are kinetic in a vital or mental way cannot remain like that.

Some Marathas came to see me here and inquired what I was doing. I replied, "Nothing." One of them remarked that it was a great thing to do nothing. This is true.

NIRODBARAN: Isn't the silence associated with some sort of emptiness?

SRI AUROBINDO: It depends on what you mean by emptiness. There is an emptiness which is full of the divine Presence and can hardly be called empty. There is another emptiness of silence which is neutral and still another in which one empties oneself, waiting for something higher to come and fill it.

NIRODBARAN: In that emptiness one feels somewhat dry, doesn't one?

SRI AUROBINDO: No. On the contrary it is a very pleasant state, with a sense of great release. The neutral silence may be associated with some dryness and dullness—to the ordinary mind.

NIRODBARAN: It seems you said once to Barin, when he was having such emptiness and dryness, that it comes to everybody and he had to pass through that phase or stage.

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, it need not come to everybody, but when it does come to somebody he has to pass through it. People like Bertrand Russell can't bear this emptiness. He says that as soon as he tries to go within he begins to feel empty and wants to come back. It is foolish on his part to want to come back, for if he is able to feel this emptiness it is something good, the sign of a valuable capacity. These Europeans can't do without thought and the external interests of life. They think that nothing of value can come into the consciousness except from outside.

SATYENDRA: We know of Bansali who stitched his lips for a long time to maintain silence. It was only after persuasion by Gandhi that he gave it up.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is what the Gita calls Asuric Tapasya.

NIRODBARAN: Can one gain anything and advance by that?

SRI AUROBINDO: Why not? But there is the question: what and how far? Physical and vital Tapasya can give some control over the body and the vital being. But it looks more like *Nigraha*, forceful suppression.

NIRODBARAN: It doesn't seem to have anything to do with divine realisation.

SRI AUROBINDO: What do you mean by divine realisation?

NIRODBARAN: I mean Peace, Bliss, Presence.

SRI AUROBINDO: There is a divine realisation and there is a realisation of the Divine—that is to say, spiritual realisation. If one gains control over the vital nature by the influence of the Atman, the Self, that is a divine realisation.

NIRODBARAN: Control by an influence, I suppose, comes and goes. It is not permanent and stable. One can gain control also by a constant exercise of the mind.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, and I think that is a better way. These things, again, may be steps towards the Divine, just as from Hathayoga one goes to Rajayoga. Naturally there are shortcomings in the onward process. You may remember, D used to write plenty of letters complaining of the defects of Yogis. One does not look for defects in the Yogis, for it is not the defects that are important. Whatever leads to the upward growth, adding something to one's stature, is a gain to human progress. No upward progress is to be despised.

Has Bansali gained anything by his silence?

SATYENDRA: He seems to have.

SRI AUROBINDO: Although I don't approve of the method, it is all right if he gained something.

SATYENDRA: Bansali used to go wandering from place to place, not asking for food from anybody.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is an old recognised practice among Yogis. It is a great discipline and gives a control over the desires. At one time I also did that. I never asked anything from anyone. Dayanand Thakur is said to store nothing for the future. Whenever anything came to his Ashram they used to spend it away, not thinking about what would happen the next day.

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NIRODBARAN: It is assumed here that illness brings some progress in sadhana after it has been cured. Is that true?

SRI AUROBINDO: Not necessarily. Do you mean that your cold will give you some progress? (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: Cold is hardly a disease!

SRI AUROBINDO: It is said that for every disease there is a psychological reason.

NIRODBARAN: Said by whom?

SRI AUROBINDO: By the Yogis. If that reason can be found and remedied, then there may be a progress.

NIRODBARAN: What about children then?

SRI AUROBINDO: What about them? They have no psychology? Do you mean to say that when they are born they come with a blank page to be filled up only later on in life? They are full of psychology, each one differing from the others.

The body is an expression of one's nature, and if one could detect the exact psychological factor behind, which is not easy to do, then many helpful things can be done.

Here the Mother came in and silence followed. After she had gone, the talk began about homoeopathy.

SRI AUROBINDO: Lila was cured by Ramchandra. She found fault with him and discontinued the treatment, saying that she

would rely on the Mother's Force since it was the Mother who had cured her.

SATYENDRA: That is the difficulty here, Sir! The patients come to oblige us and when they are cured it is done by the Mother. Then why come to us? They say they come to give us work; otherwise, how will our sadhana go on?

Here Nirodbaran gave an instance of a homoeopathic cure. Dilip's cousin had a tumour which was cured by homoeopathy. There was no question of faith in this case. Then the topic arose of long life achieved by Yoga or other means. Someone mentioned Tibeti Baba.

SRI AUROBINDO: But he says that it was not due to Yoga but to some medicine that his body has changed and he has attained longevity. Brahmananda also lived very long—some say two or three hundred years. None knew how old he was and he never told his age. Once when he had a toothache, Sardar Majumdar took some medicine to him. Brahmananda said, "This toothache has been with me since the Battle of Panipat." That gave the clue to his age. He had the most remarkable eyes. Usually they were either closed or half shut. When I went to see him and took leave, he opened them fully and looked at me. It seemed as if he could penetrate me and see everything clearly.

That reminds me of a compliment given to my eyes by Sir Edward Baker, Governor of Bengal. He visited me in Alipore Jail and told Charu Dutt, "Have you seen Aurobindo Ghose's eyes?"

"Yes, what about them?" asked Charu.

"He has the eyes of a madman!"

Charu took great pains to convince him that I was not at all mad but a Karmayogi!

PURANI: Nevinson, the correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian*, said that you never laughed.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. I met him twice, once in Bengal at Subodh Mullick's place. I was very serious at that time. The next occasion was when I was president of the National Conference at Surat. Then also I couldn't laugh, being the President. So he called me "the man who never laughs". (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: Taggart regarded you as the most dangerous man in the British Empire. He was dead against lifting the ban on

your entry into British India, when it was discussed in England, if I remember rightly.

SRI AUROBINDO: How could that be? I never knew that there was such a ban. The last prosecution against me was for two signed letters in the *Karmayogin*, and they were declared to be non-seditious. That ban seems to be just a legend.

NIRODBARAN: All over India there was the impression that a ban had been put and everybody thought you were the head of the revolutionary movement.

SRI AUROBINDO: That was the idea of all Englishmen. You know Olive Maitland. She was friendly with some members of the royal family. When she went back to England from here she tried to persuade them that I was rather an innocent person and the Ashram was a nice place. She found that instead of converting them to her view they began to look askance at her.

Lord Minto said that he could not rest his head on his pillow until he had crushed Aurobindo Ghose. He feared that I would start the revolutionary movement again, and assassinations were going on at that time.

But there was no ban. On the contrary, Lord Carmichael sent somebody to persuade me to return and settle somewhere in Darjeeling and discuss philosophy with him. I refused the offer.

The Government was absolutely taken by surprise when our movement was launched. It never expected that Indians could start revolutionary activities.

NIRODBARAN: I hear Charu Dutt also joined the movement.

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh, yes. Everybody knew of it and so he was called by the Europeans "the disloyal judge". He was very courageous, spirited, powerful and frank. That's the kind of man I like. He used to talk openly and frankly about his revolutionary ideas to Englishmen.

NIRODBARAN: They – at least of some of them – also liked him.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, they like such people. There was another man, D'Souza, whom I knew very well. He is working in Mysore State now. He is one of the cleverest brains I have ever met. He is an Indian Christian. Not that much of Christianity is left in him. He has an independent mind.

NIRODBARAN: Taggart was mainly responsible for crushing the movement, we hear. He narrowly escaped being killed in Palestine the other day.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, it is surprising how some of the greatest scoundrels have so much protection.

NIRODBARAN: Dutt has mentioned in his reminiscences two incidents about you—bridge-playing and shooting with a gun.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is true that I didn't know how to play cards and bridge is a difficult game, but I kept winning. So he thought I knew everybody's hand. As for shooting with a gun, it is quite easy. I could have shot even small birds high in the air.

NIRODBARAN: Dutt is afraid to come here lest he shouldn't be able to go back.

SRI AUROBINDO: It would be his last journey?

NIRODBARAN: Was he a great friend of yours?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. Beachcroft, who was my schoolmate, somehow couldn't believe that I was a revolutionary.

Another intimate English friend of mine, Ferrer, came to see me in the court when the trial was going on. We, the accused, were put into a cage for fear we should jump out and murder the judge. Ferrer was a barrister practising in Sumatra or Singapore. He saw me in the cage and was much concerned and couldn't conceive how to get me out. It was he who had given me the clue to the real hexameter in English. He read out a line which he thought was the best hexametrical line, and that gave me the swing of the metre as it should be in English. English has no really successful poetry in hexametres and all the best critics have declared it to be impossible. Matthew Arnold's professor friend and others tried it but failed.

NIRODBARAN: I thought Yeats also has written hexameters.

SRI AUROBINDO: Where? I don't know about it. I think you mean alexandrines.

NIRODBARAN: Yes, yes.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is different. Plenty of people have written alexandrines. But this is the dactylic six-foot line, the metre in which the epics of Homer and Virgil are written. It has a very fine movement which is most suitable for Epic. I wrote most of my hexametres—the poem *Iliou*—in Pondicherry. Amal and Arjava saw them and considered them a success. I may cite a few lines:

One and unarmed in the car was the driver; grey was he,
 shrunken,
 Worn with his decades. To Pergama cinctured with strength
 Cyclopean
 Old and alone he arrived, insignificant, feeblest of mortals,
 Carrying Fate in his helpless hands and the doom of an empire.

NIRODBARAN: When did you begin to write poetry?

SRI AUROBINDO: When my two brothers and I were staying at Manchester. I wrote for the Fox family magazine. It was an awful imitation of somebody I don't remember. Then I went to London where I began really to write; some of the verses are published in *Songs to Myrtilla*.

NIRODBARAN: Where did you learn metre? At school?

SRI AUROBINDO: No. They don't teach metre at school. I began to read and read and I wrote by a sense of the sound. I am not a prosodist like X.

NIRODBARAN: Had your brother Manmohan already become a poet when you started writing?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. He, Laurence Binyon, Stephen Phillips and Arthur Cripps, who did not come to much in poetry afterwards, brought out a book in conjunction. It was well spoken of. I dare say my brother stimulated me greatly to write poetry.

NIRODBARAN: Was Oscar Wilde a friend of your brother?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. He used to visit him every evening and Wilde described him in his Wildish way as "a young Indian panther in evening brown". Wilde was as brilliant in conversation as in writing. Once some of his friends came to see him and asked how he had passed the morning. He said he had been to the zoo and gave a wonderful description of it, making a striking word-picture of every animal. Mrs. Wilde, who was all the time sitting in a corner, put in a small voice, "But, Oscar, how could you say that? You were with me all morning." Wilde replied, "But, my dear, one has to be imaginative sometimes." (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: I have heard a Wilde story. Once when he was correcting the proofs of a book of his, some friends visited him and asked him what he was busy with. He said, "I have to decide whether to put a comma in one place or not." They returned after a time and found him still busy. He said, "I have put a comma in, but now I don't know whether it should be there. I have to

decide." The friends went away and came back a little later. Wilde said, "I have decided to take the comma out."

SRI AUROBINDO: The story is very characteristic of Wilde.

Here Purani brought in the subject of Epic and the experiments that were being made in Gujarat to search for a proper medium for it. He regretted that no Indian vernacular had any genuine and successful epic poetry.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why do you say that? Madhusudan has succeeded in Epic. He has excellent movement, form and swing, but the substance is poor. It is surprising that he could write an epic, for Bengalis haven't got an epic mind. The Bengali Ramayana and Mahabharata are not worth much. But I believe he got his inspiration from Homer and Virgil whom he read a lot.

NIRODBARAN: What exactly do you mean by "an epic mind"?

SRI AUROBINDO: The epic mind is something high, vast and powerful. The Bengali mind is more delicate and graceful. Compare Bengal's painting with the epic statues of the Pallavas in South India. For the same reason the French couldn't write an epic. Their language is too lucid and orderly and graceful for it.

NIRODBARAN: Why do you call Madhusudan's epic poor in substance?

SRI AUROBINDO: For a high substance one must have a noble and elevated mind, a capacity for sympathy with great thoughts, a heart that is large and deep. And, as you know, Madhusudan was nothing in that respect.

NIRODBARAN: And yet he was by his genius able to create sympathy in us for Ravana and not Rama. Isn't this striking?

SRI AUROBINDO: But even then his Ravana is insignificant as compared to the tremendous personality in Valmiki's Ramayana. Or see the character of Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. And Rama's character too has been much degraded in Madhusudan,

(Turning to Purani) Is there any epic in the Marathi language?

PURANI: I don't know. I have heard about Moropant.

SRI AUROBINDO: I believe there was somebody—Sridhar—who has written something like an epic. I hear Jnanadev wrote brilliantly but he died at an early age: twenty-one. And Jnaneshwar wrote his Gita at fifteen.

PURANI: They say Tulsidas's *Manas* is a recognised epic in Hindi.

SRI AUROBINDO: The South Indians say that Kamban's is a great epic. I remember somebody trying to prove that Kamban is the world's greatest poet.

(*Looking at Nirodbaran*) Nishikanto also aspires to write an epic.

NIRODBARAN: He may be able to do it. For he seems to have the necessary gift.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, he may come to it.

NIRODBARAN: He combines power and delicacy wonderfully well.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, and when he writes lyrics he is superb.

NIRODBARAN: Have you seen Iqbal's poems? Some hold he is greater than Tagore.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't know what his poems are like in Persian or Urdu. But the translations give me the impression that they haven't got as great and original a substance as Tagore's poetry.

PURANI: Do present conditions permit the writing of an epic? It is said that epic subjects may be there but there is not the epic poet to write of them.

SRI AUROBINDO: I can't say. It is believed that the epic poet comes only once in centuries. Look at the world's epic poets. How many are they? As for subject, what subject could be more suitable to an epic than the career of Napoleon?

It is surprising—the large number of epic poets in Sanskrit. The very language is epic. Valmiki, Vyasa, even classical poets like Kalidasa, Bharavi and others have all achieved epic heights.

NIRODBARAN: Has your own epic *Savitri* anything to do with the Mahabharata story?

SRI AUROBINDO: Not really. Only the clue is taken from the Mahabharata. My story is symbolic. I believe that originally the Mahabharata story was also symbolic, but it has been made into a tale of conjugal fidelity.

NIRODBARAN: What is your symbolism?

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, Satyavan, whom Savitri marries, is the symbol of the soul descended into the Kingdom of Death; and Savitri, who is, as you know, the Goddess of Divine Light and Knowledge, comes down to redeem Satyavan from Death's grasp. Aswapati, the father of Savitri, is the Lord of Energy. Dyumatsena

is "the one who has the shining hosts". It is all inner movement, nothing much as regards outward action.

The poem opens with the Dawn. Savitri awakes on the day of destiny, the day when Satyavan has to die. The birth of Savitri is a boon of the Supreme Goddess given to Aswapati. Aswapati is the Yogi who seeks the means to deliver the world out of Ignorance.

NIRODBARAN: But how far are you with it? Have you finished the first draft?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, I have finished the first draft, but I have to revise it. I have revised this poem, as I once told you, twelve times and I have finished only the first part of the first book.

NIRODBARAN: In what form have you cast it?

SRI AUROBINDO: I have gone back to Shakespeare and Marlowe. Each line stands by itself and each sentence consists at most of five or six lines. The blank verse differs from Milton's. There are practically no pauses or enjambments like those in *Paradise Lost*. Blank verse after Milton has not been very great. So if you write the kind that is in *Paradise Lost*, you imitate Milton's style — and there can be only one Milton.

Yeats has written some successful blank verse in the Tennysonian form on Irish Celtic subjects. There is one long piece about a king, a queen and a divine lover: I forget the name. He has given his blank verse a greater beauty than Tennyson was capable of.

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Sri Aurobindo himself started the talk. After inquiring about X's health from Satyendra, he related what Amal had written about his health. When, after his heart-trouble, Amal had got back on his feet, he went to watch the international wrestling tournaments going on at that time in Bombay. He got so caught up in the bouts that his heart began beating faster and faster and when the foreign wrestlers started playing foul his excitement was at such a pitch that he felt as if his heart would give way and he would faint. He realised that this kind of excitement was very harmful, but he would not give up going to see the tournaments. He decided that what was to be got rid of was his taking sides and wanting the Indian wrestlers to win. By refraining from any partisanship he felt he would cut out the extreme excitement.

This interesting report set us off on the subject of fainting. Nirodbaran enumerated a few instances of fainting even while slight finger-cuts were being dressed. He said that Dilip too had fainted.

SRI AUROBINDO: Even Dilip did it?

NIRODBARAN: Yes. He came in boldly, but as soon as we started he went off! Curious!

SRI AUROBINDO: Perhaps these people are being Yogicised! Or is it a reaction of the subconscious? Or maybe they are trying to go into the Nirvikalpa Samadhi! It is said that in such Samadhi one is not conscious even of a burning red-hot iron. Well, I remember a Yogi who was tested with a red-hot iron; and when he had no sensation of it the experimenters thought he had really got into the Nirvikalpa Samadhi. But I think that a deep trance is quite sufficient for this kind of unawareness.

NIRODBARAN: In hypnotism too one doesn't feel anything when, for instance, a pin is stuck into the flesh.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. I saw a case of hypnotism in which the raised arm of a patient could not be pulled down even by four or five men.

NIRODBARAN: How can this be explained?

SRI AUROBINDO: These are things of a supraphysical state, and the ordinary physical laws bringing about the ordinary reactions are not valid then. There are cases in which people under the influence of hypnotism find sugar tasting bitter. Now the question is whether sugar itself is bitter or the subject feels it to be so. In other words, does the quality of a thing depend on the object or on the subject? Take, for instance, beauty. When we call someone or something beautiful, is it because the object itself is beautiful or the subject sees it as such—that is, does beauty depend only on the psychological state of the subject and have nothing to do with the object?

NIRODBARAN: In the case of beauty one can say that tastes differ. What one calls beautiful another may not. But sugar is sweet to everybody under normal conditions. Since the sensation of sweetness is a common human reaction, there must be something in the object.

SRI AUROBINDO: But is this reaction confined to humanity or is it a common reaction of all living beings?

SATYENDRA: What is your conclusion, Sir?

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't know.

At this point the Mother came in and asked, "What is the subject of your talk today?" Satyendra reported the conversation and said, "Sri Aurobindo has no opinion. Have you any, Mother?"

THE MOTHER: I don't approve of hypnotism. I have seen many cases of so-called hypnotism in which the forces remain behind and the subjects lend themselves to be used by the forces. What is hypnotism? Doesn't it mean that the subject's will-power is replaced by somebody else's? I know a case of exteriorisation where the operator was able to exteriorise the vital being of the subject in an almost material form and replace it by another's and not by the operator's own. If one replaced it by one's own, there could be no operation. But these operations are extremely dangerous, for there are so many forces around that may easily take possession of the body, or else death may follow. One shouldn't do these things except under guidance or in the presence of a Master.

After some more talk the Mother departed for the general meditation.

SRI AUROBINDO (*resuming*): When the subtle body goes out, there is a thin thread that maintains the connection with the physical body. If that thread is snapped somehow, the man dies.

NIRODBARAN: I have heard that the Mother had such an accident in Algeria.

SRI AUROBINDO (*surprised*): How do you know that? She went to Algeria to study with Theon who was a great occultist; his wife was still more so. From there once the Mother visited Paris and was among her friends and wrote something on a paper with a pencil. That paper was here even the other day.

Then there began a talk about miracles.

SRI AUROBINDO: Bejoy Goswami's life, written by one of his disciples, is full of miracles. When P. Mitter was asked how Goswami could fly, he said, "He could glide like that!" (*Sri Aurobindo showed this by a movement of his hand.*) Of course all those things were done in the subtle body.

SATYENDRA: What about the miracles in the life of Haranath? Once on his way back from Kashmir, it is said, he fell seriously ill

and was unconscious for two or three hours. When he regained consciousness, it was found that his body had changed to a golden colour. Is such a change possible, Sir?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. If he was unconscious, something must have come down. I know of a case where the stature of a man increased!

NIRODBARAN: Your colour also has changed, they say.

SRI AUROBINDO (*after some silence*): He said that the change was due to my remaining in the shade. But even an ordinary man, not a Yogi, can have a change of colour. I know a dark lower-middle-class Bengali named Hesh who returned from Europe after some years. He looked almost like a European. He came to see me at Baroda but I couldn't recognise him. Then he said, "Don't you recognise me?"

When I was doing Pranayama I used to feel the breath concentrated in the head. My skin began to be smooth and fair. The women of our family noticed it first, as they have a sharp eye for such things. And it was at that time I began to put on flesh. Formerly I was frail and thin. Then I noticed something unusual in the flow of my saliva. It was that substance perhaps that gave the change of colour and the other things. The Yogis say some sort of Amrita, that is, nectar, flows down from the top of the brain that can make one immortal.

An American at darshan time looked very closely and minutely at me, for he saw some light around me. He wanted to make sure it was not a physical light. When he found that it was not, he began to think I was some kind of Mahatma.

PURANI: I know of a Sadhu cutting again and again the membrane under his tongue to enable the tongue to reach inside and get that flow of Amrita. He turned insane afterwards.

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh, that is Khechari Mudra. He perhaps got the wrong flow. Barin was approached by some of these Sadhus who promised all sorts of things if he performed that practice of cutting the membrane under the tongue. He said, "I am not going to do it." They coaxed and coaxed him but failed to persuade him. Then they sneered at him, "Bengali coward!" He replied, "Bengali or no Bengali, I am not going to do it!" (*Laughter*)

Then the conversation turned to Tibetan occultism and how Europeans are taken up by such things and not by spirituality.

SRI AUROBINDO: These Europeans either believe everything or nothing. If you tell them there are Yogis in Tibet and Mahabhuman who are two thousand years old and that crores of Mahatmas are living there, they may go to visit the place. You must have heard of wonderful yogic novels written by someone dealing with Tibet and its occult things. I read one of them but found nothing of Yoga there.

NIRODBARAN: Yes, I have read two by A. Beck.

SRI AUROBINDO: Is that a woman?

NIRODBARAN: Yes. She has written a novel about Japan also, where she attributes to Japanese Jiu-jitsu some mystic power and makes it a symbol of it.

SRI AUROBINDO: I thought that Japanese spirituality is in the Japanese religion which is called Zen Buddhism. There the disciples have to bear blows from the Guru as a test of discipleship. (*Smiling*) I suppose many would find that inconvenient here.

NIRODBARAN: Have you written any stories?

SRI AUROBINDO: I have, but they are all lost. When there was the rumour that our house would be searched by the police, my trunk was sent off to David's place. After some time when they brought the trunk back, it was found that all my stories had been eaten away by white ants. So my future fame as a story-writer perished. (*Laughter*)

But it is a pity I lost two translations of poems. One of them was a translation of Kalidasa's *Meghaduta* in terza rimas. It was rather well done.

NIRODBARAN: Yes, indeed a pity.

SRI AUROBINDO: But the stories were nothing to speak of—except one. I can say something of this one because I still have two pages left of it. All my stories were occult.

Have any of you read Jules Romains? He is at once a doctor, an occultist, a novelist and a dramatist. The Mother speaks very highly of him. She says that he doesn't depict the outer circumstances as they are but goes within and writes from there. He is a Unanimist and believes that there is one soul in all.

In a novel of his, he describes a wife meeting in her subtle body her husband sitting in a chair on a ship. As soon as he saw the impressions left on the chair he got frightened and thought he was going too much against God's laws. That is the European mentality. It can't go far.

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Today again we had our usual discussion with Dr. Rao on the removal of splints, the growth of bone, its shadow in the X-ray picture, etc. After he had gone, the Mother asked Nirodbaran: "Up to what age can the skull-bone grow?" She said that she had seen cases where even at the age of fifty-five the skull had not completely ossified. "In such cases," she remarked, "the brain goes on developing." Then she departed for the general meditation.

There was very little prospect of conversation afterwards, for every time after Dr. Rao's visit we would keep revolving the same problem, the disagreement among doctors, and cut jokes about it. But a question by Satyendra, following a piece of information given by Purani, started the general ball rolling.

PURANI: X has been arrested.

SRI AUROBINDO (*surprised*): Really?

PURANI: He has been a leader from a very young age.

SATYENDRA (*addressing Sri Aurobindo*): Sir, you must have been very young too when you started the Nationalist movement.

SRI AUROBINDO: About thirty-three, though we were doing Swadeshi long before.

SATYENDRA: Did you begin your Yoga with the experience of Nirvana at Baroda?

SRI AUROBINDO: It was somewhere about 1905. But I did have some other experiences before it. I felt an immense calm as soon as I landed in Bombay. Then there was the experience of the Self, the Purusha. I had these experiences when I had not yet begun Yoga and knew nothing about it. I was more or less an agnostic. Then I had two experiences of contact with the Infinite—one at Poona on the Parvati hills and the other on the Shankaracharya hill in Kashmir. Again, at Karnali, where there are many temples, I went to one of them and saw in an image of Kali the living Presence. After that, I came to believe in God.

NIRODBARAN: What led you to Yoga?

SRI AUROBINDO: What led me to Yoga? God knows what. It was while at Baroda that Deshpande and others tried to convert me to Yoga. My idea about Yoga was that one had to retire into mountains and caves. I was not prepared to do that, for I was interested in working for the freedom of my country.

Then I began to practise Pranayama—in 1905. A Baroda engineer who was a disciple of Brahmananda showed me how to do it and I started on my own. Some remarkable results came with it. First, I felt a sort of electricity all around me. Second, there were some visions of a minor kind. Third, I began to have a very rapid flow of poetry. Formerly I used to write with difficulty. For a time the flow would increase; then again it would dry up. Now it revived with astonishing vigour and I could write both prose and poetry at tremendous speed. This flow has never ceased. If I have not written much afterwards, it is because I had something else to do. But the moment I want to write, it is there. Fourth, it was at the time of the Pranayama practice that I began to put on flesh. Earlier I was very thin. My skin also began to be smooth and fair and there was a peculiar new substance in the saliva, owing to which these changes were probably taking place. Another curious thing I noticed was that whenever I used to sit for Pranayama, not a single mosquito would bite me, though plenty of mosquitoes were humming around. I took more and more to Pranayama; but there were no further results.

It was during this time that I adopted a vegetarian diet. That gave lightness and some purification.

NIRODBARAN: What about meat diet? Vivekananda advocated it.

SRI AUROBINDO: Meat is rajasic and gives a certain force and energy to the physical. That's why the Kshatriyas did not give up meat. Vivekananda advocated it to lift our people from Tamas (inertia) to Rajas (dynamism). He was not quite wrong.

Then I came into contact with a Naga Sannyasi. I told him I wanted to get power for revolutionary activities. He gave me a violent Mantra of Kali, with "Jahi, Jahi". to repeat. I did so, but, as I had expected, it came to nothing.

Barin at that time was trying some automatic writing. Once a spirit purporting to be that of my father came and made some prophecies. He said that he had once given a golden watch to Barin. Barin tried hard to remember and at last found that it was true. The spirit prophesied that Lord Curzon would shortly leave India: he saw him looking across a blue sea. At that time there was no chance at all of Curzon's going back. But the prophecy came true. Curzon had a row with Lord Kitchener and had to leave India very shortly afterwards. The spirit also said that there was a

picture of Hanuman on the wall of the house of Deodhar, who was present at the sitting. Deodhar tried to remember and said there was no such picture. When he went back, he asked his mother about it. She replied that the picture used to be there, but it had been plastered over. Lastly the spirit prophesied that when everybody had deserted us a man who was present there—meaning Tilak—would stand by us. This also came true.

On another occasion a spirit purporting to be that of Ramakrishna came and simply said, "Build a temple." At that time we were planning to build a temple for political Sannyasis and call it Bhawani Mandir. We thought he meant that, but later I understood it as "Make a temple within."

This gave me the final push to Yoga. I thought: great men could not have been after a chimera, and if there was such a more-than-human power why not get it and use it for action?

I had been to Bengal twice or thrice for political work. I found the workers quarrelling among themselves and got a little disappointed.

While I was residing at Baroda a Bengali Sannyasi came to see me and asked me to help him financially. I did so. But I found that the man was extremely rajasic, jealous and boastful and could not tolerate anyone greater than himself. He used to curse everybody who was greater than him. Once he went to see Brahmananda. He began to curse him because he was so great. Shortly after, Brahmananda died of the prick of a nail. The Sannyasi took all the credit himself! What might have happened was that Brahmananda's death was near and this man got the suggestion of it from the subtle planes.

When I went to Bengal for political work, my Pranayama became very irregular. As a result I had a serious illness which nearly carried me off. Now I was at my wits' end. I did not know how to proceed further and was searching for some guidance. Then I met Lele in the top room of Sardar Majumdar's house.

After my separation from Lele, I had to rely on my inner guide. The inner guide led me through many mistakes. For days and days together I would follow wrong lines and come to know only at the end that it was all a mistake. At that time, I was making all sorts of experiments in order to see what truth there was in various methods.

I fasted twice—once in Alipore Jail and once here. The Alipore fasting gave more results than the second one. Though the fast lasted only ten days I lost ten pounds, whereas here the fast lasted twenty-three days but the loss of weight was less. At Alipore I was having tremendous visions which were all experiences on the vital plane. But as a part of my mind was critical I took them all with reservations. At Pondicherry I was walking eight hours a day while fasting.

DR. BECHARLAL: We have seen in the Guest House the floor marked by your walking at that time.

SRI AUROBINDO: The Guest House? Which room?

DR. BECHARLAL: Amal's room.

SRI AUROBINDO: No, no, no! I fasted in Shankar Chetty's house. Experiences on the vital plane are most exalting and exhilarating at the same time that they are most dangerous and terrible. There are many pitfalls and no reality.

Yogis living in the vital plane can't bring down those experiences into the physical. One can have some power, of course. But the forces of the vital plane take up a man like Hitler and make him do things. The man opens himself to the constant suggestions of these forces and believes they are the Truth. NB used to hear such suggestions which he called intuitions coming from the Mother. And when the Mother told him that it was not true he got angry and would not believe her. At last he had to leave the Ashram.

B was another case. He used to say that the Mother and I were there deep in his psychic being and these were the true Sri Aurobindo and the true Mother, while the physical Mother and Sri Aurobindo were false! The Mother repeatedly warned him about these illusions but he was so headstrong that he would not listen and had to go. We heard that he was making disciples in our name outside.

DR. BECHARLAL: How did he die so suddenly?

SRI AUROBINDO: Why suddenly? He was suffering from stomach-ache here, in spite of which he used to stuff himself with food. As long as he was here, somehow the protection kept him up. The Mother told him many times that if he left Pondy he would die. So when he went he passed the death-sentence on himself.

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Today till 7.00 p.m. there was complete silence. Nobody was in a mood to talk or at least to begin the talk. Seeing this, Sri Aurobindo remarked, "You seem disposed to meditative silence." Purani had gone out and, on returning, heard the remark. Sri Aurobindo, addressing him, said, "I was wondering where you had suddenly vanished." Purani replied "I went to see the Mother. I asked her if liquorice root could be tried for your cough. It is very good for it." After one or two questions from Sri Aurobindo about liquorice the talk got really started with a question by Purani.

PURANI: Is there any difference between the two methods of effacement of ego: realisation of the Spirit above and its nature of purity, knowledge, etc., and realisation of humility in the heart? Isn't it possible to get rid of egoism by the second method too?

SRI AUROBINDO: Egoism may go . . . (*Then after a short silence*) Yes, egoism may go . . .

We caught the significance of the unfinished sentence and said, "Oh, you mean ego may remain?"

SRI AUROBINDO: Ego remains but becomes harmless. It may help one spiritually. Complete removal of ego is possible when one identifies oneself with the Atman and realises the same Spirit in all. Also when the mental, vital and physical nature is known to be a derivation from the universal mental, vital and physical. The individual must realise also his identity with the transcendental or the cosmic Divine, whatever you may call it.

From the mental plane, when one rises and realises the Spirit, it is generally the mental sense of ego that goes, not the entire ego-sense. The dynamic nature retains ego, especially the vital ego. When the psychic attitude of humility comes in and joins with it, it helps in getting rid of the vital ego.

The complete abolition of ego is not an easy thing. Even when you think that it is entirely gone, it suddenly comes into your actions and movements. Especially important is the removal of the mental and vital ego; the others, the physical and subconscious, don't matter very much: they can be dealt with at leisure, for they are not so absorbing.

By humility it is not outward humility that is meant. There are many people who profess and show the utmost outward humility, as if they were nothing, but in their hearts they think, "I am the man." People are mostly impressed and guided by outward conduct.

Mahadev Desai complained that I had lost the old charm of modesty. I did not profess like others that I was nothing. How can I say I am nothing when I know that I am not nothing?

BECHARLAL: Were you "modest" in your early life?

SRI AUROBINDO: I used to practise what you may call voluntary self-effacement or self-denial and I liked to keep myself behind. Perhaps Desai meant that by modesty. But I can't say that I was more modest within than others.

PURANI: Gandhi also seems to express modesty. When he differs from Malaviya or somebody else, he says, "He is my superior but I differ."

SRI AUROBINDO: But does he really believe that? When I differed in anything, I used to say very few words and remain stiff, simply saying, "I don't agree."

Once Surendranath Banerji wanted to annex the Extremist Party and invited us to the U. P. Moderate Conference to fight against Sir Pherozshah Mehta. But there was a clause that no association that was not of two or three years' standing could send delegates to the Conference. Ours was a new party. So we could not go. But Banerji said, "We will elect you as delegates." J. L. Banerji and others agreed to it, but I just said, "No." I spoke at most twenty or thirty words and the whole thing failed. How can you call a man modest when he stands against his own party?

Tilak used to do the same thing. He used to hear all the speeches and resolutions of the delegates but at the end pass his own resolutions. They said, "What a democratic leader he is! He listens to and considers all our opinions and resolutions."

Then at the Hooghly Provincial Conference we met again to consider the Morley-Minto reforms. The Moderates argued in favour of accepting the reforms. We were against them. We were in the majority in the Subjects Committee, while in the Conference they were in the majority. Surendranath Banerji was very angry with us and threatened that he and his party would break away from the Conference if their resolution was not

accepted. I didn't want them to break away at that time, for our party was still weak. So I said to him, "We will agree to your proposal on condition I am allowed to speak in the Conference." In the Conference there was a great row and confusion. In the midst of it Aswini Dutt began jumping up and saying, "This is life, this is life!" Banerji tried hard to control the people but failed and became furious. Then I stood up and told them to be silent and to walk out silently. I said that whatever agreement we came to, we would inform them. Everybody became silent at once and walked out. This made Banerji still more furious. He said, "While we old leaders can't control them, this young man of hardly thirty commands them just by lifting a finger!"

He could not understand the power of a man standing for some principles and the people following the leader in obedience to those principles. The influence of the Moderates was mainly on the upper middle class, the moneyed people.

It was at that time that people began to get the sense of discipline and order and of obeying the leader. They were violent but at the command of the leader they obeyed. That paved the way for Gandhi.

The Conference at that time was a very tame affair. There was nothing to do but pass already framed resolutions. Nobody put in even an amendment.

Banerji had personal magnetism, was sweet-spoken and could get round anybody. He also tried to get round me by flattering, patting and caressing. His idea was to use the Extremists as the sword and use the Moderates for the public face. In private he would go as far as revolution. He wanted a provincial board of control of revolution. Barin once took a bomb to him. The name of Surendranath Banerji was found in the bomb case. But as soon as Norton pronounced the name there was a "Hush, hush" and he shut up.

Barin was preparing bombs at my place at Baroda, but I didn't know it. He got the formula from N. Dutt who was a very good chemist. He, Upen and Debabrata were very good writers too. They wrote in the *Jugantar*.

Here Purani brought in the topic of Oundh State and described the reforms the chief of the State was introducing. They seemed to be something like Sri Aurobindo's own ideas.

SRI AUROBINDO: What provision is there for autonomous government in villages?

PURANI: The village panchayats have considerable power.

SRI AUROBINDO: But suppose the people want socialism or communism?

PURANI: The chief is introducing co-operative farming.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is an excellent thing. But dictatorship of the proletariat is different. On paper, of course, it sounds nice but it is quite a different matter in practice. Everyone is made to think alike. That is all very good in a church or religion, but a church or religion is voluntary: you can choose there but you can't choose your country. If you think alike, there can't be any progress. If you dare to differ from Stalin, you are liquidated. I don't understand how humanity can progress under such conditions.

Look at Hitler. After all, what do all his ideas come to except that the Germans are the best nation in the whole world and Hitler should be their leader; all Jews are wicked persons; all people on earth should become Nazis; and France must be crushed. That's all!

There was a little further talk and then somebody spoke of certain governments acting like robbers.

SRI AUROBINDO: Are not all governments robbers? Some do the robbing with legislation and some without. In some countries you have to pay fifty percent of your income as taxes and you manage with the rest as best you can. Customs is another robbery. What an amount of money they collect in this way and yet I don't understand what they do with such a huge income. France was complaining that the Government produces only two hundred fifty aeroplanes as compared to the thousand of Germany. England produces five hundred and yet England has a sufficiently honest administration. There was a question the other day in the House of Commons as to what they were doing with the money and how it was that they were still unready for war.

PURANI: I heard a story from a customs officer that even Princes join in smuggling. Recently a Prince was caught along with a jeweller.

SRI AUROBINDO: With such customs' rules smuggling seems almost a virtue! It looks like robbing a robber. You must have heard that the Maharaja of Darbhanga had to pay Rs. 50,000 as

duty on the necklace of Marie Antoinette which he had bought for one lakh.

Purani then brought in the question of the Congress ministry, saying that Nariman had been elected again as a Congress member by Vallabhai Patel. He had been punished for betrayal of Congress in the election campaign.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is not betrayal but indiscipline. Dr. Kher, the Bombay Premier, seems to be a solid man.

PURANI: The Congress ministry appears to be fairly successful everywhere except in C. P.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, that is the weak point. Yet Nagpur was a very good centre for Extremists in our time.

PURANI: They are thinking of separating C. P. Hindustani from C. P. Marathi.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, that is the obvious step to take. I wonder why they did not take it before.

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Purani told Nirodbaran to take the lead and said that if Nirodbaran had nothing to ask, he had a question ready. Nirodbaran told him he had one question to ask. So as soon as the Mother left and Sri Aurobindo was ready to talk, Nirodbaran began.

NIRODBARAN: Yesterday, did you mean, that by the psychic realisation one can't get rid of ego? I couldn't understand it.

SRI AUROBINDO: One can get rid of egoism but not of ego. For the psychic depends on the individual nature for its action. The lower nature has its hold on the individual and the psychic works through the individual. The psychic realisation is the realisation of the individual soul which feels itself as one in the many; your individuality is not lost in the realisation. The individual soul works in the mind and heart and other parts and purifies them bringing in the realisation of devotion (Bhakti) and love. But the ego remains—it is the saint ego, the Bhakta ego, the ego of the Sadhu or the virtuous man: as Ramakrishna says, "*Bhakta ami, das ami*" ("Bhakta I, servant I") and Ramprasad says, "I want to eat

sugar, not be sugar." The psychic of course opens the way to the realisation of the spiritual Self by which the ego can go. By the realisation of the Spirit, you feel one with the Divine and you see the One everywhere. The individual "I" is replaced by the Divine "I". The Spirit doesn't need the individual as the basis of action. Even so, it may be the abolition of the mental ego leaving the other parts to act in their own way. That is what is meant by allowing Prakriti to act in its own way till the death of the body takes place and when the body drops, it also drops. The psychic attitude has to come in to remove the ego from the vital and by the combination of the psychic and the spiritual realisations the ego can go.

I don't know if you have understood anything.

NIRODBARAN: Can both the realisations work together or must they be one after the other?

SRI AUROBINDO: In some, it may be the psychic that leads in the beginning, in others the spiritual. If it is the spiritual opening, then after some time it has to stop to bring the psychic element into the sadhana. Of course one can stop with the realisation in the mental plane, the psychic element not being necessary for it. But for complete transformation, both things are needed.

PURANI: In case of a weakening of the nervous envelope, can one replenish it by drawing the Force?

SRI AUROBINDO: Drawing from where? From the universal vital or from the Higher Force?

PURANI: The universal vital.

SRI AUROBINDO: Have you felt it?

PURANI: I mean drawing from the universal vital. That I felt while I was in the Guest House.

SRI AUROBINDO: You mean at the time when the sadhana was in the vital, that brilliant period?

PURANI: Yes; but now either due to lack of capacity or lack of will or some fear that drawing from that source may not be safe, I don't try.

SRI AUROBINDO: There is no harm in drawing from the universal vital. One can combine its action with that of the Higher Force.

If one is conscious of the nervous envelope and its weakening, one can put it right, replenish or increase its strength by any or both of the processes. But when you speak of lack of will, you must

guard against any inertia of the being. At the time you speak of we were in the vital, the brilliant period of the Ashram. People were having brilliant experiences, a big push, energy, etc. If our Yoga had taken that line, we could have ended by establishing a great religion and bringing about a big creation. But our real work is different, so we had to come down into the physical, and working on the physical is like digging the ground; the physical is absolutely inert, dead like stone. When the work began there, all the former energies disappeared, the experiences stopped; if they came they didn't last. The progress is exceedingly slow. One rises, falls, rises again and falls again, constantly meeting with the suggestions of the Vedic Asuras, "You can't do anything, you are bound to fail."

You have to go on working year after year, point after point, till you come to a central point in the subconscious which has to be conquered and it is the crux of the whole problem, hence exceedingly difficult. You know what Vivekananda said about the nature of man? That it is like a dog's tail. So long as you keep it straight, it is so; then as soon as you release it, it curves back. This point in the subconscious is the seed and it goes on sprouting and sprouting till you have cut out the seed.

NIRODBARAN: We must thank the Creator for this gift!

SRI AUROBINDO: It is the Ignorance and from this Ignorance the Divine is working things out. If it were not so, what would be the meaning of the play? This Yoga is like a path cut through a jungle and once the path is made, it will be easy for those who come afterwards. But before that it is a long-drawn-out battle. The more you gain in your strength, the greater becomes the resistance of the hostile forces. I myself had suggestion after suggestion that I wouldn't succeed. But I always remember the vision the Mother had. It was like this. The Mother, Richard and I were going somewhere. We saw Richard going down to a place from which rising was impossible. Then we found ourselves sitting in a carriage. The driver was taking it up and down a hill a number of times; at last he stopped on the highest peak. Its significance was quite clear to us.

SATYENDRA: Will people who are newcomers have to go slowly too?

SRI AUROBINDO: Necessarily. The work being in the subconscious and the pressure on the physical, they will have to share the atmosphere—unless they isolate themselves from the atmo-

sphere. There is a case of someone who made very good progress on the mental plane. He kept himself isolated—I mean inner isolation—from the atmosphere. But as soon as he came to the vital, he couldn't go further; all his progress stopped.

SATYENDRA: The newcomers can't make any rapid progress in that case.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why not? But rapid progress is only possible when one keeps the right attitude, keeps himself separate from all vital mixture. He must be able to fulfil the demands made on him.

NIRODBARAN: I suppose people who come after will be more lucky, for by your victory over the subconscious things will be easier.

SRI AUROBINDO: Maybe, in a way; but the demands may be more exacting. As regards Tapasya you can't deny that you had an easy time of it in the past.

SATYENDRA: But when one enters into the subconscious, does one who has had some contact with the Brahman lose that contact entirely?

SRI AUROBINDO: No, it is only apparently lost. Everything remains behind. But if he doesn't want to go further, his Yoga stops there. That's all. When this subconscious change has to come about, many will find it difficult. There may be some who will drop out because they do not fulfil the demands made on them. For instance Harin. At the beginning he was swimming in poetry and kept some old movements going. But as soon as the Mother decided that that sort of thing couldn't go on and his vital must change, he could not bear it and he dropped out. At one time, as I hinted to you, the Mother was putting great pressure for a big push, as you know it is her nature to do. But no one could stand it; we thought the whole thing would break. There was a great row in the vital. We had to withdraw. Of course we can do our work quicker, but how many will go through the ordeal?

If the sadhaks had kept the right attitude at the time when the sadhana was in the vital, there would not have been so much difficulty today even in working out the subconscious. For with the force and power gained at that time, the Mother could have come down into the physical and done the work with greater ease.

But the sadhaks resisted the attempt and continued to make demands on the Mother. Instead of allowing the Mother to raise them up, they tried to bring her down to their own level and for a time we had to consent. And that meant a delay in the work. There

are also people who have told the Mother that they understand the nature of their difficulty, see their mistakes but haven't the power to resist. There are others too who have thought that they have been able to get rid of plenty of things, that these things didn't exist in them any more, and were much surprised to see them again coming up in their nature.

That is all due to the subconscious; you reject a thing from the mind, it goes into the vital, from there to the physical; and when you drive it out from there, it lodges in the subconscious. Anger, sex, jealousy, attachment find refuge there. One has to throw them out of the subconscious—as the Yogis say, cut the seed out. That is why transformation is necessary. Without transformation of the nature, the subconscious seed of these things remains.

NIRODBARAN: But I don't understand how they can rush up or remain after realisation of the Divine or complete union with Him. If you ask me what I mean by complete union, I won't be able to define it.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is precisely what I will ask you.

NIRODBARAN: Take, for instance, Ramakrishna's case. We never heard of any sex impulse rising in him.

SRI AUROBINDO: You didn't hear of his praying to the Mother that the sex impulse must not come to him? He told Her that if it did, he would take his life.

NIRODBARAN: But that was at the beginning.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes; but the Mother or Cosmic Force didn't send the Kama any more.

NIRODBARAN: You mean it was in the subconscious.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, of course. If it had come up, he would have rejected it.

NIRODBARAN: Then if rejection is possible, why bother so much about transformation and all that?

SRI AUROBINDO: Ramakrishna is Ramakrishna. I bother because everybody is not Ramakrishna. Haven't you heard of many Yogis and Rishis falling from the path owing to these impulses?

I was suffering from some intermittent fever in the North for a long time. It continued here also. In the course of the fever someone above or something within me said, "No more fever." Something in my being accepted the suggestion and there was no fever! But not everybody can do it.

Human nature is an extremely difficult business. I told you that my experience of calm and Nirvana has never left me but I had to work and work to establish that calm and equanimity in every part of my being. You know what is equanimity? It means that nothing stirs under any condition. Till last August I was successful. This accident was perhaps the last test of my equanimity. In that way one has to go on working things out till one reaches the central point in the subconscious which is the seed one has to cut out.

It is while working in this way that I came to notice many gaps that had not been filled up. It may be due to those gaps that the accident took place. When one has conquered that subconscious seed, a force will be established in the world-action and those who embody it will be able to throw it around them like waves for the change.

NIRODBARAN: I hope you are making rapid progress now.

SRI AUROBINDO: It looked as if I was, till the moment of the accident. When one comes into contact with a large Force, the progress is very rapid; but it is extremely difficult to get. It is peculiar that in a lying position I can't draw down the maximum Force, can't exert the highest Force which never fails. That Force is sure in its action even though temporary. But lying down I can't use it, perhaps because this is a tamasic position, a position of relaxation or rest, and I am not used to it. I get the highest Force walking or sitting. With this cough, for instance, I felt too lazy to apply any Force. Only when it became annoying did I do it.

NIRODBARAN: Is there any truth in the demand for an erect position in meditation? People here assume all sorts of postures.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, the erect posture helps in the meditation. Whatever one receives in the subtle body is easy to transmit to the physical through that posture. There are so many Asanas and if one can get the right position, then the body doesn't move.

NIRODBARAN: The Mother's body also stoops down in meditation.

SRI AUROBINDO: Her body is very plastic. It changes according to the nature of the meditation. You know, formerly her appearance used to change.

NIRODBARAN: X, we hear, is obliged to get up when the light comes down into his body.

SRI AUROBINDO: That means he can't hold the power when it comes.

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Tonight we were at a loss how to begin. But we saw that Sri Aurobindo was ready; he was as if inviting us by his look. But none could break forth; we seemed to have exhausted all our questions. In that puzzled mood Nirodbaran once looked up and Sri Aurobindo looked at him. Suddenly Nirodbaran burst into laughter and the rest joined in. Finding an opening or an inspiration, Purani began.

PURANI: There is something interesting about snoring in the *Sunday Times* today. Someone says that snoring is the reaction of the subconscious against some pressure one does not like.

SRI AUROBINDO: Nonsense! Does it mean that a man snores because he is protesting against someone's presence he doesn't like? Or that one can't snore unless there is someone present whom one doesn't like?

NIRODBARAN (to Purani): Were you attracted by that question because of our snoring?

PURANI: Yes, especially yours, I believe; whenever I come, I find you snoring.

SATYENDRA: That means Nirodbaran doesn't like your presence!

CHAMPAKLAL: No, he snores even long before.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is perhaps in anticipation of Purani's arrival. (Laughter)

As the talk on snoring didn't proceed further, Purani began quoting from the Sunday Times about Middleton Murry, where it was said that he had come to believe in Gandhi's non-violence and that because of Hitler he had become a believer in God.

SRI AUROBINDO: How is that?

PURANI: I don't know; he says he finds Hitler an anti-Christ, after that murder of eighty people in one night.

SRI AUROBINDO: Wasn't Murry a mystic long before Hitler's regime? Does he mean that his faith has become stronger?

PURANI: Maybe. Gandhi writes that the non-violence tried by some people in Germany has failed because it has not been strong enough to generate sufficient heat to melt Hitler's heart.

SRI AUROBINDO: It would have to be a furnace in that case. The only way to melt his heart is to bomb it out of existence. Then his sentimental being which cries at the tomb of his mother and expresses itself in painting—

NIRODBARAN: Are you referring to his “London-cabman psychic”, as you once put it?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, that would then have a chance in his next life. It is surprising how sentimental people can be extremely cruel.

The trouble with Gandhi is that he has dealt only with Englishmen. If he had been obliged to deal with Germans or Russians his non-violence would have had much less chance. The English people like to be at ease with their conscience. They have a certain self-esteem and they prize the esteem of the world also. Not that they are not sentimental; only they don't show it. The Russians and Germans are also sentimental but at the same time more cruel. Today a Russian may knock your head through the window-pane but tomorrow he may weep and embrace you. Englishmen also can be very cruel—for a time—but they can't go on with a persistent brutality. Hitler has cruelty in his blood.

NIRODBARAN: Englishmen seem also to appreciate a man standing up to their violence.

PURANI: I know of a case where a Punjabi settled in Fiji gave a fierce beating to an Englishman. The latter used to harass him. One day when it became unbearable, he caught hold of him, knocked him down and began beating him. After some time the Englishman shouted, “That will do, that will do.” From that time on, he was all right.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is quite true. I remember once going to a station to see Deshpande off. In his carriage there were many Englishmen. He told us afterwards that as soon as he sat down, the Englishmen said, “We will beat you if you don't get out.” He replied, “Come and try.” And they didn't dare!

At one time, before the Swadeshi movement, our people were terribly afraid of these Europeans. But after that movement the fear ceased and it has not come back. It was a sudden transformation. Once in Howrah station, a young man was being bullied by an Englishman. He suddenly shouted, “Bande Mataram”; all the people in the train began to shout and the Englishman became alarmed.

You have heard of Shamakanta, the tiger-tamer. He was travelling in a compartment with some English soldiers and a Bengali with his wife. The soldiers began to molest the Bengali's wife; he was so afraid that he did not know what to do. Shamakanta got up, caught hold of the soldiers and began to knock their heads against each other. At the next station they walked out.

I remember once when we were practising shooting, there was a middle-aged Bengali in the company. When he was asked to shoot, he became very nervous, said he didn't know how to shoot, closed his eyes and then fired. After firing, he opened his eyes, smiled and said, "I didn't know it was so easy!"

When my brother Barin and I were at Baidyanath, we used to go out with guns to shoot at birds, obviously with the idea of practising. My auntie saw us and said, "These two boys will be hanged." The prophecy almost came true, for Barin got a death-sentence.

Before the Swadeshi movement started, Debabrata Bose and I went on a tour of Bengal to study the conditions of the people. We lived simply on bananas. Debabrata Bose was very persuasive and could win anybody round. We found the country pessimistic, with a black weight of darkness over it. Only four or five of us stood for independence. We had great difficulty in convincing people. At Khulna we were given a royal reception, with plenty of dishes on the table. I was not known as a political leader but as the son of my father, K. D. Ghose. My father had been the all-powerful man there. There was nobody who hadn't received some benefit from him and none had returned from his door empty-handed. He was said to have been a great friend of the poor. Previous to Khulna, my father was at Rangpur. There also he was like a king. The magistrate, who was his friend, did nothing without consulting him. It was with the friends of this magistrate – the Drewetts – that we stayed in England. The magistrate was transferred and a new magistrate came in his place. He found that he had no authority in the town, all power being in the hands of my father. He couldn't tolerate it. He asked the Government to transfer my father and that is the reason he came to Khulna. But he was hurt by this treatment and lost his previous respect for the English people and turned into a nationalist.

DR. BECHARLAL: You must have lived only a short time with your father.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes; only the early years. When I was seven we left for England and before we returned he had died. I was in a

way the cause of his death. He was suffering from heart disease. Grindlays informed him that I was to start on a particular steamer. The steamer went down off the coast of Portugal and many lives were lost. Somehow I didn't sail by that ship but Grindlays didn't know it. They telegraphed the news to my father and he died on receiving it.

He had great hopes for his sons, expected us to be civil servants, and yet he could be quite reasonable. When Manmohan wrote to him that he wanted to be a poet, my father made no objection; he said there was nothing wrong in that. Only, he didn't send any more money.

NIRODBARAN: We have heard that your father was irregular in sending your allowances.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes; we lived for one year on five shillings a week which my eldest brother was getting by helping the secretary of South Kensington Liberal Club, who was a brother of Sir Henry Cotton. We didn't have winter coats. We used to take tea, bread and ham in the morning and some sausages in the evening. Manmohan could not undergo that hardship, so he went to a boarding house where he managed to get his food, though he had no money to pay. Once when I was unable to pay the college dues, the principal called for me; I told him that my father had not sent my allowance. He sent a letter to my father. On receiving it my father sent me just the amount of the college dues and a lecture on my extravagance. It pained me to a certain extent, as we were living on such a meagre sum. Manmohan was extravagant, if you like.

When I went to Cambridge, I was introduced to a tailor who made suits for me on credit. When I returned to London, he traced me there and got introduced to Manmohan also. Manmohan got a red velvet suit made – not staring red, but aesthetic. He used to go to see Oscar Wilde in that suit. When we came back to India, that tailor wrote to the Indian Government about the arrears that Manmohan had not paid and to the Baroda Maharaja for my arrears. I paid everything except four pounds, five shillings, which I thought I was justified in not paying as he had charged double the amount for our suits. The Baroda Maharaja said I had better pay.

Manmohan used to have poetic illness at times. Once we were walking through Cumberland. We found that he had fallen half a mile behind, walking at a leisurely pace and moaning out poetry in a deep tone. There was a dangerous place in front of us, so we shouted at him to come back. But he took no heed, went on

muttering the lines and came to us with his usual leisurely steps. When he came to India, his playing the poet dropped off.

When Barin and I became politically famous, Manmohan used to say with arrogant pride, "There are only two and a half men in India. The two are my brothers and the half is Tilak."

Manmohan and I used to quarrel pretty often but I got on very well with my eldest brother. Once Manmohan said to me, "I hear you have been living with Madhavrao Jadhav year after year." "Why not?" I said. "How could you do that?" he asked, "I could not live for six months without quarrelling with him."

We all forgot ourselves rolling with laughter and forgot all about the time. In the midst of our hilarity Sri Aurobindo said, "The Mother is coming." We all stopped laughing and stood up but couldn't check our outburst. On seeing us, the Mother also began to smile.

THE MOTHER (to Sri Aurobindo): What are you laughing about so much?

SRI AUROBINDO: Nothing of importance. I was speaking about my poet-brother.

When the Mother had left, there was not much further conversation.

NIRODBARAN: What about your eldest brother?

SRI AUROBINDO: He went up for medicine but couldn't go on. He returned to India and got a job in Coochbehar. Now I hear he has come back to Calcutta. He is a very practical man, the opposite of poetic, and takes more after my father. He is a very nice man and one can easily get on with him.

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In the evening Dr. Rao came and unconsciously broke his promise not to speak about removal of splints. Then the usual discussion followed and the differences of opinion among doctors were commented on. After Dr. Rao had departed Sri Aurobindo started the conversation.

SRI AUROBINDO: Two doctors coming to quite different conclusions from the same data!

SATYENDRA: Doctors are not cutting a very brilliant figure and yet one has to take their help.

SRI AUROBINDO: According to Gandhi, doctors are agents of the devil.

NIRODBARAN: Yet he had to be operated on for appendicitis.

There followed a discussion on Gandhi, his experiments with diet, with food consisting of the five elements, with raw food and how he came to the point of death by these experiments, etc.

PURANI: Formerly he was not taking garlic. Dr. Ansari prescribed garlic for his blood-pressure and he had good results. Then Gandhi began to advise everyone to take garlic.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes; in whatever he takes up, he goes the whole hog. If it is celibacy, all must observe celibacy. When somebody asked him how the world was to go on in that case, he said that it was none of his business.

Here came in talk about the researches of science to create life by artificial means and to find a suitable medium for keeping sperm for a long period.

SRI AUROBINDO: You mean that a man of the present time could have a child from a woman, say, five hundred years later? (Laughter)

SATYENDRA: Talking of procreation, what will be the place of it when the Supermind comes?

SRI AUROBINDO: Let us leave it to the Supermind to decide when it comes down.

But is procreation necessary in the supramental creation? The whole of mankind is not going to be supramentalised; so there will be plenty of people left for that purpose.

NIRODBARAN: Is it possible to create Manasaputra ("mind-child") by will-power?

SRI AUROBINDO: Anything is possible under proper conditions.

NIRODBARAN: I am afraid that is like the Maharshi's reply: "The Divine Grace can do everything." (Laughter)

SRI AUROBINDO: But it is true in principle.

NIRODBARAN: The question is whether proper conditions would be possible.

SRI AUROBINDO: It depends. If man, instead of living on the basis of his animality and outward nature, lived in his inner being and acquired its powers, then things like this would be possible. Such things are now mystical or magical or extraordinary because man has been looking at them from his present poise. They are mysterious because they are exceptional. But if, just as people are advancing in physical science and trying to explore every possible secret of Nature, they also went into the inner being and tapped the powers of the unusual ranges of Nature, there would be no limit to the possibilities. Things like telegraphy, wireless, etc., would not be necessary; one could dispense with the whole machinery because it would be quite possible to communicate telepathically with a person in America through a subtle medium. Even one's death would no longer be like that of an ordinary man. One could go whenever one wanted.

NIRODBARAN: They say that after the Supermind's descent there won't be any death.

SRI AUROBINDO: Do you mean to say that one will have to remain till Doomsday and then walk into the presence of the Creator? Perhaps one may choose not to go away till one finds another to take one's place.

SATYENDRA: They say Ashwatthama is still alive.

SRI AUROBINDO: What is he doing? Wandering about in jungles?

SATYENDRA: There are five immortals, they say. Hanuman is one.

SRI AUROBINDO: That may be possible considering the length of his tail which even Bhima could not raise!

Here Purani brought in the topic of the Mahabharata, mentioning G. Ram's interpretation of that poem as symbolic, Bhima symbolising military genius and Draupadi . . .

SRI AUROBINDO: Nonsense! It is something like Byron's joke on Dante's *Divine Comedy*, that Beatrice was a mathematical figure.

PURANI: Critics say that in the future the epic will be more and more subjective.

SRI AUROBINDO: It looks like that. The idea has always been that an epic requires a story. But now it seems to have been

exhausted. Besides, there is the demand of the present time for subjectivity and the epic too will have to answer it.

PURANI: Some maintain that as there is no story in the *Divine Comedy*, it is not an epic.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is certainly an epic. *Paradise Lost* has very little story in it and very few incidents. Yet it is an epic.

PURANI: Some think that Keats' *Hyperion* would have been as great as Milton's poem if he had finished it.

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, if the whole had been as great as the first part, then it would have been equal to Milton's work. But I doubt if Keats could have kept up that sustained height, for I find that he already declined in the second part. As soon as he began to put in his subjective ideas at the end of the first part, he could not keep up that height.

PURANI: There is an idea that the new form may be a combination of epic and drama or like the odes of Meredith on the French Revolution. They give some clue to a possible epic form in the future.

SRI AUROBINDO: There has been such an effort by Victor Hugo. His *Legendes des siecles* is an epic in conception, thought, tone and movement. It is the only epic in French. But as yet, I think, it has not been given its proper place. It does not deal with a story but with episodes.

PURANI: It is a pity Tagore has not written an epic.

SRI AUROBINDO: Tagore? He has not the epic mind. But he has written some very fine narrative poems.

A few of William Morris' narratives are also very fine – his *Sigurd the Volsung* and *Earthly Paradise*, especially the latter. I read them a number of times in my early days. There is a tendency to belittle him, because he wrote about the Middle Ages and Romanticism, I suppose.

NIRODBARAN: You said the other day there has not been any successful blank verse in England after Shakespeare and Milton. What about Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*?

SRI AUROBINDO: I didn't say there is no successful blank verse. Plenty of people have written successfully, such as Byron, Matthew Arnold in *Sohrab and Rustom* and some others. But there are only three who have written *great* blank verse: Milton, Shakespeare and Keats.

NIRODBARAN: What about Harin?

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't think he has written anything wonderful in blank verse.

NIRODBARAN: And Amal?

SRI AUROBINDO: The trouble with him is that he has a strain of what may be called post-Victorian. I had great difficulty in knocking it out. I had to screw and screw him up to get the right form. I had to send back his poems many times, suggesting corrections and alterations here and there till he got the right thing. Now he has fallen back to his post-Victorian in Bombay. He sent me a poem from there the other day.

The trouble in general with Indian poets writing in English is that they may be successful poets but it is not as if the very man spoke. Their work gives the impression of one who has studied English literature and spun out something. I read Jehangir Vakil's poem. The same difficulty. Mrs. Naidu wrote something fine at times and she had a power of expression but her range was small.

Harin and Amal have been thinking and speaking in English since childhood. So for them writing in it is comparatively easy. Harin has from the very beginning always been original. There are several reasons why he is not appreciated in England. Firstly, he is an Indian. If he published anonymously, say, under the name "John Turner", he would have a better chance. Even so, he got high appreciation from critics like Binyon.

Secondly, his poetry can be appreciated by those who have not lost the thread of English poetry since the Victorian period. Poetry is not read in England nowadays, I hear.

One can also gather this from what was said about my poetry. Some of my recent poems were sent to the editor of an English publishing firm. He said, "They are remarkable and there is something new in them. But I would not advise him to publish them. For poetry is not read nowadays. If he has written anything in prose, it is better to publish it first and then the poems may go down with the public."

It is no wonder that people don't read poetry these days: the Modernists are responsible for it, I suppose.

NIRODBARAN: Harin's poems were sent to Masfield.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why to Masfield?

NIRODBARAN: Perhaps because he is the poet-laureate.

SRI AUROBINDO: Poet-laureate! Anybody can be a poet-laureate. The only people of real worth to whom the title was

given were Tennyson and Wordsworth. Masefield's poems are Georgian, full of rhetoric.

PURANI: Thompson asked me to read the poems of Eliot. He was in ecstasy over them. I read them. I couldn't find anything there. Neither in Ezra Pound. I asked Amal's opinion.

SRI AUROBINDO: What did he say?

PURANI: He is of the same view. He cut a fine joke on Ezra Pound: "His name is Pound but he is not worth a penny." (Laughter).

SRI AUROBINDO: Eliot is the pioneer of modern poetry. I have not read much of him. Do you know the definition of a modern poet?: "A modern poet is one who understands his own poems and is understood by a few of his admirers."

NIRODBARAN: Eliot has written a poem "Hippopotamus," which is supposed to be very fine.

PURANI: Hippopotamus the animal?

SRI AUROBINDO: I thought he had written about himself. (Laughter)

NIRODBARAN: The modern young poets of Bengal seem to like him very much.

SRI AUROBINDO: Because he is the fashion, I suppose.

NIRODBARAN: You have written an epic called *Aeneid*?

SRI AUROBINDO: No, *Iliad*: it is in hexameter and about the end of the siege of Troy.

NIRODBARAN: What about Radhanand's poetry? He writes in French also.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, his French poetry is very good. The Mother likes it; there is imagination and beauty. Of course, she corrects the poems. He is a stupendous writer with great energy. He has written two hundred books in six months. He has written about my life also. I had a great tussle with him not to have it published. He is very popular with the Tamils. He is supposed to be as great a poet as Bharati. His prose is rather rhetorical.

NIRODBARAN: Toru Dutt is said to have had great genius. They say that if she had lived she would have been a very great poet.

SRI AUROBINDO: Nobody in England thinks of her as a great poet. Perhaps the only vigorous poetry she wrote was about the German invasion of France in 1870. That was because she had a

deep sympathy for that country. I remember just a few lines from it. She addresses France as the "Head of the human column" and she calls the invaders "Attila's own exultant horde". These two lines at once strike one as if they were spoken by the poet and were not an imitation. If one can write like that, it cannot but be recognised.

NIRODBARAN: What about Madhusudhan?

SRI AUROBINDO: I read only one poem of his and that was an imitation of Byron.

APPENDIX TORU DUTT'S POEM

FRANCE—1870

Not dead, — oh no, — she cannot die!
 Only a swoon from loss of blood!
 Levite, England passes her by,
 Help, Samaritan! none is nigh;
 Who shall stanch me this sanguine flood?
 Range the brown hair, it blinds her eyne,
 Dash cold water over her face!
 Drowned in her blood, she makes no sign,
 Give her a draught of generous wine.
 None heed, none hear, to do this grace.
 Head of the human column, thus
 Ever in swoon wilt thou remain?
 Thought, Freedom, Truth, quenched ominous,
 Whence then shall Hope arise for us,
 Plunged in the darkness all again?
 No, she stirs! — There's fire in her glance,
 Ware, oh ware of that broken sword!
 What, dare ye for an hour's mischance,
 Gather around her, jeering France,
 Attila's own exultant horde?
 Lo, she stands up, — stands up e'en now,
 Strong once more for the battle-fray,
 Gleams bright the star, that from her brow
 Lightens the world. Bow, nations, bow,
 Let her again lead on the way!

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Today Sri Aurobindo opened the talk by inquiring from Satyendra about X's health. Then the talk proceeded to homoeopathy. The Mother came and took some part in it. After she had gone, the talk on medicine continued.

SRI AUROBINDO: Once in Baroda I had a nasty abscess on the knee. All treatment failed. Then Madhavrao Jadhav called in a Mohammedan who pricked the knee at a particular point and brought out a big drop of black blood and the abscess was cured soon afterwards! He must have known the spot to prick.

I also remember Jatin Banerji curing many cases of sterility by a Sannyasi's medicine given to him. Cases of ten or fifteen years' sterility were cured by it and people got children within ten months. There were some peculiar rules to be observed before taking the medicine: for example, the woman had to take a bath, the hair had to be down, etc., etc.

Many such things known to India are being lost now.

SATYENDRA: I don't think medicines will succeed in curing disease. I believe only the Yogic power can do it.

NIRODBARAN: Quite so; but, even there, one has to fulfil certain conditions. (*Laughter*)

SRI AUROBINDO: He expects that the Yogic power will simply say, "Let the disease be cured" or "Let there be no disease for life" and the thing will be done!

SATYENDRA: Not that way, Sir! But we have even seen cases that have been cured miraculously.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is another matter. But otherwise the Yogi has to get up every morning and say, "Let everybody in the world be all right" and there will no more be disease in the world!

There are many miracles of Christ of that sort: he spat on some earth and put it on a blind man's eyes and the man was made to see.

CHAMPAKLAL: Satyen's Guru also cured a case of leprosy and the man became a painter afterwards!

SRI AUROBINDO: In the Bible there is also the multiplication of fish and the descent of the Holy Ghost and the disciples getting the gift of tongues—speaking many languages perhaps? I don't understand what they mean by it.

SATYENDRA: What is the significance of the Son, the Father and the Holy Ghost?

SRI AUROBINDO: The Son, I suppose, could be the individual Divine, the Divine in man—they speak of the Christ in man; the Father is the personal Divine, the ruler of the world; and perhaps the Holy Ghost is the Impersonal.

But I don't understand what they mean by saying, "A sin against Christ and the Father is pardonable but that against the Holy Ghost is unpardonable." It would seem to mean that if you destroy your soul you can't be redeemed.

DR. BECHARLAL: The soul can be destroyed?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, in the sense that if you go against the essential Divine in you and drive out the psychic being, the nature is left without any divine support.

Then Dr. Becharlal and others cited some cases of miracles.

DR. BECHARLAL: Brahmananda on several occasions fed many people out of a small quantity of food. Also, when the ghee ran short, he used to take water from the Narmada and have things fried in it. And when the occasion was over and a fresh supply of ghee came along he would throw into the river a quantity equivalent to the water taken.

NIRODBARAN: Are such things possible?

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, they have happened. You can't say Brahmananda played a trick.

DR. BECHARLAL: No, no, it was not magic.

SRI AUROBINDO: Magic is different. There you use a medium to bring or carry things to a distance, like the stone-throwing in the Guest House. I heard of a Yogi who used to put his feet in one corner of the room and his hands in another—perhaps to give them proper rest! (*Laughter*)

PURANI: Is there any sign or test—not necessarily outward—by which one can know that a certain element is removed from the subconscious, apart from the fact that it would not repeat itself?

SRI AUROBINDO: No test; but you can become aware that it has gone. After that, it may come up like a habit. It goes from the mind, the vital and yet it comes up like something physical.

In that case, it comes from what I call the environmental nature and you feel it as a concrete suggestion or as a pain (if it is physical)

or as a sex-impulse. It comes and passes transversely. If it comes as a sex-impulse, there is no question of love in it; it is purely physical. It tries to enter in. If you consent, it creates a disturbance. But as soon as you feel it is coming, you can throw it away like a thought and you can see it actually passing away like that.

NIRODBARAN: Is it very difficult to be conscious of these things?

SRI AUROBINDO: In some cases, it is very easy. Naik was very conscious, for he was high-strung, with nerves very sensitive. With people whose constitutional make-up is of that sort, people who have a natural power of vision, it is easy.

But for those who have a thick physical layer and are fond of good food and have a hold on matter, it is difficult and takes time. Also people who are mentally active, intellectual, find it difficult. On the other hand, if one has subtle intelligence, instead of external intellectuality, one may be greatly helped. A. E., for example, was very intellectual; but he was very developed in many other things also and had a remarkable power of vision. At one time I had great difficulty myself because of my mind, especially as regards visions.

The faculty can also come if one lives in his inner being. As you can feel these things, you can see them also. But it is very difficult sometimes to bring down into oneself the thing which the vision symbolises, because people are so preoccupied with the vision that we find it difficult to make them feel and embody the consciousness.

Sometimes for years and years this faculty stops. Mental people also give a mental form to things by their ideas and thoughts and so the true vision-form does not appear to them. But even if one is not able to see, one can feel or perceive these forces or presences. And feeling is a step towards realisation.

There are, in the inner vision, symbols which are as old as the Vedas.

NIRODBARAN: The cross is a significant one.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, it is ancient and very well known. It marks the meeting-point of the Individual, the Universal and the Transcendent. These symbols are seen even when you don't know anything about them. There are some symbols which have not been fixed but which accompany the opening to the Brahman. Thus, I used to hear sounds of crickets and bells. The sounds of

crickets were so noisy that I wondered whether there were many crickets outside!

Here a discussion followed about schools of Yoga and sound (Nada). At the end someone said, "The swastika is an old sacred symbol and now it has become Hitler's symbol."

SRI AUROBINDO: It was a sign of the spiritual consciousness and now it is a danger signal. (*Addressing Purani*) Have you heard Jean Herbert's opinion of Hitler?

PURANI: No.

SRI AUROBINDO: Someone told him that the Mother had described Hitler as possessed by a demon. He was greatly shocked and replied that the Mother could not have said so. Of course, the Mother had simply said that he was "possessed".

PURANI: That Russian S also took Hitler to be a great man; he was full of admiration for him. He said that the Germans of today are the most cultured nation.

SRI AUROBINDO: What culture do they have? I should think on the contrary that Germany before Hitler was more cultured than the present Germany. That reported interview with the Kaiser expressed the contrast very well.

PURANI: Yes, he said the Nazis were a gang of ruffians and blackguards, without God, tradition and dynasty.

SRI AUROBINDO: That's the disadvantage for the country. When Hitler and Mussolini go they won't leave any tradition behind. They have no families of cultural distinction such as there used to be in the old times. In India there was also the traditional line of culture handed down from Gurus to disciples.

Then the talk took a sudden turn. Someone began to speak about Ramatirtha who could recite "Om" in such a wonderful way in meetings that people were entranced by it. But after staying some months in the plains, he used to run away to the mountains saying that he was losing his consciousness and people were dragging him into active life.

SRI AUROBINDO: I am not surprised to hear that, for they can drag a Yogi down from spiritual heights. But that shows he had the realisation in his mental being only.

SATYENDRA: No, sir, he was a Bhakta also.

PURANI: He had two strains: intellectual and emotional.

SRI AUROBINDO: In that case it means that his experience of the Brahmic consciousness was in the mental and emotional parts and had not been brought down to the vital and physical. One loses the experience in such cases when the vital becomes active.

But it is not necessary that it should be so. In my Nirvana experience the peace I had never left me and that peace remained unbroken even in the midst of crowded meetings. I had not to make any effort to keep it. It was always there. Even here when I used to go to marriage parties like David's, I used to feel the people rather tiring but at the same time this consciousness and peace were there overhanging all and enveloping all.

NIRODBARAN: Does it mean in Ramatirtha's case that the experience was not worked upon in the vital and physical planes?

SRI AUROBINDO: Certainly. Usually you find these experiences worked upon in the mental and emotional planes, in the vital less while in the physical almost not at all.

NIRODBARAN: Where is the difference? In the nature of the conquest or the extent?

SRI AUROBINDO: It is in the extent of the achievement. From the time of the Upanishads the cleavage began.

SATYENDRA: What about the Vedic Rishis?

SRI AUROBINDO: They accepted life. But the other paths made a sharp cleavage between life and the Brahmic consciousness. It was more markedly so under the influence of Buddhism and lastly Shankara made a sharp cut between the two.

SATYENDRA: Why should this cleavage be necessary?

SRI AUROBINDO: If you hold that life has no divine purpose, then it is not necessary to go beyond the escape into Laya. Then you are perfectly right in leaving life and, from the point of view of the Brahman, life and body are a bother.

The "why" of life and body has not been satisfactorily answered by those who have advocated the escape. They have either said about their existence, "It is Maya", which means there is no explanation for it, or "It is Lila", which means God has been merely playing about and you can't expect any purpose in play. But I should think that God had a purpose when he created this world.

NIRODBARAN: What purpose?

SATYENDRA: Progressive manifestation of the Divine perhaps. (*To Sri Aurobindo*) But what you call "Supramental", is it your own idea—something thought out by you—or was it given to you from above?

SRI AUROBINDO: It is not my thought or idea. I have told you before that after the Nirvana experience I had no thoughts of my own. Thoughts used to come from above. From the beginning I didn't feel Nirvana to be the highest spiritual achievement. Something in me always wanted to go on farther. But even then I didn't ask for this new experience. In fact, in Nirvana, with that peace one does not ask for anything. But the truth of the Supermind was put into me. I had no idea of the Supermind when I started and for long it was not clear to me. It was the spirit of Vivekananda who first gave me a clue in the direction of the Supermind. This clue led me to see how the Truth-Consciousness works in everything.

NIRODBARAN: Did he know about the Supermind?

SRI AUROBINDO: He didn't say "Supermind". "Supermind" is my own word. He just said to me, "This is this, this is that" and so on. That was how he proceeded—by pointing and indicating. He visited me for fifteen days in Alipore Jail and, until I could grasp the whole thing, he went on teaching me and impressed upon my mind the working of the higher consciousness—the Truth-Consciousness in general—which leads towards the Supermind. He would not leave until he had put it all into my head.

NIRODBARAN: Do Gurus come in that way and give teachings?

SRI AUROBINDO: Why not? That is the traditional experience from ancient times. Any number of Gurus give initiation after their death.

NIRODBARAN: You once spoke about Ramakrishna's and Vivekananda's influence in your life. Was it this you meant?

SRI AUROBINDO: No. I referred to the influence of their words and books when I returned from England to Baroda. Their influence was very strong all over India. But I had another direct experience of Vivekananda's presence when I was practising Hathayoga. I felt this presence standing behind and watching over me. That exerted a great influence afterwards in my life.

In regard to the sounds, I am reminded of another experience. It was when Annie Besant invited me to see her. I heard, during the whole time of the meeting, the noise of thunder in my ears. I believe she was trying to throw an influence on me and my being was violently throwing it back.

Then came some talk about Haranath. It was said that many people saw him after his death. Someone even saw him at Madras. His miracles and his initiation were mentioned.

SRI AUROBINDO: There are two kinds of experiences: some people see visions with open eyes, others with closed eyes. Those who see with open eyes can easily mistake their visions for material forms and feel as if the individual seen was physically present.

NIRODBARAN: But is materialisation possible?

SRI AUROBINDO: There is a well-known case of such materialisation. It relates to the mother or the grandmother of the present Queen of England, — Lady Strathmore or some such name. The husband and wife always used to discuss religious things, the reality of after-life. They made a pact that whoever died first would come back and tell the other about the reality of after-life, if anything existed beyond. The husband died first. Several years later, he returned and spoke about the truth of their religion. Then the wife said, "Can you give me some proof that you physically came here, a proof that would always last with me?" He said "Yes", and then he took her hand and pressed it very hard. She felt a very acute burning sensation at the place. That burning left a permanent mark on her hand which she had to cover in order to conceal the mark from others.

That was materialisation, if you please!

APPENDIX

VIVEKANANDA'S VISITATIONS IN ALIPORE JAIL

The following note throws further light on the subject of Vivekananda's visitations to Sri Aurobindo in Alipore Jail: It was written by the editor of Mother India, the journal in which these talks first appeared. See also the talk of 25 January 1939.

Nirodbaran's report of Sri Aurobindo's statement about his own discovery of the Supermind after the pointer, given in Alipore Jail by Vivekananda's "spirit", to the Higher Consciousness—the planes of divine dynamism above the mind—provides some body of detail to the general indications found in the published writing of Sri Aurobindo on this subject. Thus we read in *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother*:

"It is a fact that I was hearing constantly the voice of Vivekananda speaking to me for a fortnight in the jail in my solitary meditation and felt his presence The voice spoke only on a special and limited but very important field of spiritual experience and it ceased as soon as it had finished saying all that it had to say on the subject." (p. 115)

"[Before coming to Pondicherry] Sri Aurobindo had already realised in full two of the four great realisations on which his Yoga . . . is founded. The first he had gained while meditating with the Maharashtrian Yogi Vishnu Bhaskar Lele at Baroda in January 1908; it was the realisation of the silent, spaceless and timeless Brahman His second realisation which was that of the cosmic consciousness and of the Divine as all beings and all that is, . . . happened in the Alipore Jail To the other two realisations, that of the supreme Reality with the static and dynamic Brahman as its two aspects and that of the higher planes of consciousness leading to the Supermind he was already on his way in his meditations in Alipore Jail." (pp. 107-108)

Further light on Vivekananda's coming to Sri Aurobindo is shed by the report found in the notes kept by Anilbaran of a talk with Sri Aurobindo in July 1926. Like Nirodbaran's report, it also brings us some significant particulars. It runs:

SRI AUROBINDO: Then there is the incident of the personality of Vivekananda visiting me in jail. He explained to me in detail the work of the Supramental—not exactly of the Supramental, but of the intuitivised mind, the mind as it is organised by the Supramental. He did not use the word "Supermind", I gave this name afterwards. That experience lasted for about two weeks.

Q: Was that a vision?

SRI AUROBINDO: No, it was not a vision. I would not have trusted a vision.

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Nirodbaran narrated to Sri Aurobindo an incident that had taken place in Calcutta. The Mother was present during the narration. The incident concerned a girl of about ten or twelve. She belonged to a very well-known family and had visited the Ashram with her parents more than once. Now there was a tea-party in their sumptuous house. Many high-ranking people had been invited. The topic of the Ashram came up. Comments and criticisms started flying freely. Even the Mother and Sri Aurobindo were not spared. The child listened quietly. But when somebody seemed to overstep the limit of decency, she could stand it no longer. In a firm tone she said, "Look here, if you speak one more word about my Gurus, I'll give you such a slap that you'll tumble down." Everybody was stunned. The child's mamma left the room in shame and anger at the insult to her guests. Her uncle started looking at the ceiling in embarrassment, and to change the subject he started calling to the servants, "Hari, Ram, what a lot of dust is here!" Nirodbaran's story was enjoyed by all immensely. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo looked happy. Then the Mother left.

SRI AUROBINDO: What this girl does is remarkable for her age. Along with strength of character she has developed an extraordinary intelligence. When she used to write to us, she would make reflections about people and the world in general, which were beyond even a woman of fifty.

NIRODBARAN: I'll tell you of some rare traits in her, her powers of judgment as well as of detachment. She had a dancing master. Her parents wanted to dismiss him because he was said to have a bad character. She wouldn't agree at all. Her argument was that character had nothing to do with teaching. But for all her opposition the parents did send the fellow away. And when he left she acted quite contrary to expectation. Although she had fought so much for him, she seemed not the least put out by his dismissal. Then there is the incident of the death of her pet dog. When this animal, which she had loved intensely, died she remained perfectly calm. This set her mamma thinking that she didn't love the dog and also that she might not be loving her even and would one day leave her for the Ashram.

SRI AUROBINDO: Her parents have found out it would be difficult to bend her to their will. She on her side has found out that they keep lying to her.

NIRODBARAN: People say she is quite happy where she is at present.

SRI AUROBINDO: How do they make that out? She wrote to us she was very unhappy outside.

The talk then turned on the purge-trials in Russia by Stalin.

SRI AUROBINDO: What Stalin wants is power—nothing else.

NIRODBARAN: Is there nothing in his allegations against Trotsky?

SRI AUROBINDO: All that is not credible. Most probably Trotsky's followers wanted to get rid of Stalin by killing him but set about it in a clumsy way and so were killed by Stalin. Stalin has been able to get rid of almost everybody who had worked with Lenin. Litvinoff has managed to escape. I don't know what has happened to his wife. She was very anti-Stalin and could not be checked. One has heard of General Blucher and his trial but nothing afterwards. Stalin's parliament meets and talks and disperses. Whatever he and his party say is obeyed.

PURANI: The confessions of the generals and others were so dramatic.

SRI AUROBINDO: They made them to save their relatives probably.

NIRODBARAN: Was Trotsky a better man than Stalin?

SRI AUROBINDO: He was an idealist, at any rate.

Then there was talk about Japan. Purani referred to the resignation of all the Japanese Ministers and related some general's declaration about a hundred years' war.

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh, yes—to make the world civilised and to drive all the Europeans out of Asia! But it is very unusual for the Japanese to talk as this general has done. They never speak of anything beforehand. They get everything ready and act.

SATYENDRA: What about India's freedom? It seems it will take very long for her to be free from European rule.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not necessarily. It seems to me she will not have to fight to get her freedom. She will get it without any fight.

NIRODBARAN: How's that?

SRI AUROBINDO: That is the prophecy among the Sannyasis.

NIRODBARAN: I remember Lele also spoke like that.

SRI AUROBINDO: If India has to fight, she has no chance. But if some new power—Italy, for instance—were able to crush England effectively, as is very unlikely, India would have a chance. For then England wouldn't be able to hold India any more.

NIRODBARAN: But that power itself or else some other like Japan can come and capture her again.

SRI AUROBINDO: It can't be so easy. These powers are far away from India. For them it would be a great venture. Besides, one can't conquer a country only with a navy. The navy has to be supported by an army. If India has an army of her own, it will be difficult for any country to conquer her.

But it wouldn't be safe at present to depend on outside help. When the Mother once asked a Japanese friend of hers whether Japan's navy would help India in case of war, he replied, "Don't trust Japan. If she once gets in, it will be hard to get her out."

NIRODBARAN: India has no navy.

SRI AUROBINDO: It can be built up after independence, though it may take time.

PURANI: Even the Congress Ministers are not keeping to the policy of non-violence. They are planning and enforcing military training in the United Provinces, the Central Provinces, Bombay and Madras.

PURANI: Sir Sikandar Hussain has tried to make a division of India into martial races, like those of the Punjab, and non-martial races.

SRI AUROBINDO: That division was made by the British Government purposely to conquer and keep India down. They got the Pathans, Gurkhas and Punjabis to enter the army and make up the bulk of it. But every part of India had its empire in the past. All India can have military training and equipment in a short time.

NIRODBARAN: But what about the Muslims?

SRI AUROBINDO: The Muslims also don't want foreign rule. There is no doubt that the majority of prominent Muslims want independence.

NIRODBARAN: The majority?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. But they want Mohammedan independence. Even Jinnah wants independence. He has said it many

times. I don't think the Muslims would prefer foreign domination to independence.

If India had the proper equipment, it would be quite a job for other nations to conquer her. Look at Spain. The Spanish Government has no proper equipment and yet the civil war there is dragging on for years. It was different with the Abyssinians when the Italians attacked them. They were unorganised as well as poor in equipment.

NIRODBARAN: If Franco gets Spain, it will be bad for England.

SRI AUROBINDO: But worse for France. She could easily be cut off from her African colonies and surrounded on all sides. For England also it will be bad, as the Spanish may block the present passage to the East and she may have to go round the other way.

By this spring the intention of the Axis powers will be known. In the meantime Italy is trying to manoeuvre Chamberlain to her side.

NIRODBARAN: France depends too much on England.

SRI AUROBINDO: She has to. She can't fight single-handedly with Germany and Italy. Everybody knows that in case war breaks out Germany will side with Italy.

NIRODBARAN: France can have Russia's help.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not likely. First, she does not trust Russia. Secondly, Russia is divided from France by almost the whole of Europe. Thirdly, the Russian navy is not strong.

NIRODBARAN: Germany is taking revenge for the unjust peace-terms after the last war.

SRI AUROBINDO: It's not exactly that. It was England who thrust Germany into power. She saw that France was getting powerful in Europe after the war. As is her usual self-interested policy, she raised Germany in order to create a balance of power. She didn't expect that Hitler would aim his gun at her. At one time France and England came almost to a point of rivalry. France tried to create a friendships with Italy by placating her and England made Mussolini an enemy by applying sanctions against Italy in Abyssinia. But she could not stop Italy from conquering Abyssinia.

I have never seen such bankruptcy of English diplomacy before. Since the war she has been following a most imbecile and weak policy.

NIRODBARAN: The papers say that Italy raised this Tunis-Corsica cry to divert the attention of England and France from Spain.

SRI AUROBINDO: What attention? What have they been doing for Spain? Nothing! Even Blum who is a socialist applied this policy of non-intervention in Spain during his premiership.

Of course it is quite foolish for Italy to ask for Tunis or Corsica. No French politician can give them away against the wish of the people. The Italians have no chance here. One may as well ask for Wales and the Isle of Wight from England. Italy by this cry has, on the contrary, given a fright to the nationalists in Tunis and united them in favour of France.

NIRODBARAN: America is also preparing enormously.

SATYENDRA: She is not obliged to take part in European politics.

SRI AUROBINDO: Perhaps Roosevelt has got secret information about hostile designs. It is not a question of meddling in European politics but of guarding against being eaten up. Those who remain behind will be eaten up at last. Some people in America understand this. All are not like Chamberlain.

NIRODBARAN: The English fleet seems to be the strongest.

SRI AUROBINDO: I can't say, but it is the most experienced. The Italian fleet is very well equipped, but it is difficult to predict how it will fare in actual war. It has not been tried and tested.

NIRODBARAN: In a war, the future is likely to be decided in the air rather than on the sea.

SRI AUROBINDO: No; the air can't decide a war. Aeroplanes can only be an aid, but the fate of a war will be decided on the sea. If the navy can be smashed, then you can blockade a nation and starve it out or throw it on its own limited resources while you can obtain resources everywhere. It is sea-power on which will depend the mastery over other nations. It is because of sea-power that England has been the ruler of the world for three centuries.

France at one time had the lead in airpower, but she has lagged behind now because she foolishly stopped building aeroplanes.

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Sri Aurobindo began the talk, suddenly breaking his silence.

SRI AUROBINDO: There is something nice for you, Purani.

PURANI: For me?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. A letter has come from America. It is addressed to Sri Aurobindo Ashram. The writer thinks the Ashram is a person. He writes, "I have heard that you are a great Yoga. I am also a Yoga. I have started to predict sporting events. I can go into trance and know everything. If you agree to work in collaboration with me, we will share the profits. Let me know your terms. If you don't want to take the money yourself, you can give it to the poor. Our collaboration will be a service to yourself, to me and to the poor." (*Laughter*)

What do you say, Purani? You too can go into trance or send Nirodbaran into trance.

NIRODBARAN: He will find me a hard nut!

PURANI: If he goes into trance, I fear he may not come out looking at the heap of dollars.

NIRODBARAN: And Purani will perhaps come out looking at it?

PURANI: No objection to sharing the profits—but no sharing of the losses!

SRI AUROBINDO: All kinds of half-crazy people write from everywhere. I wonder how they get our address.

SATYENDRA: It must be from the magazine in which Anilbaran wrote an article.

SRI AUROBINDO: It may be the article, and perhaps Anilbaran wrote "Sri Aurobindo Ashram" under it, and people thought the Ashram a person.

SATYENDRA: The magazine in which he wrote is published by the Institute. Its founder has made good business in America. His work is a combination of business and Yoga.

PURANI: Is it possible to predict sporting events?

SATYENDRA: I know of an astrologer who made a lot of predictions about a cousin of mine, but most of them didn't come true.

SRI AUROBINDO: I had a remarkable experience at Baroda. It was not of astrology, but of thought-reading. My house-manager

Chhotalal took me to an astrologer. The man asked me to prepare four questions in my mind. One of the questions came and passed very swiftly through my mind and I hardly formulated it. But he not only read the other three questions but even this which had as good as escaped me. On the other hand, his astrological predictions were not correct.

PURANI: Is anything being tried in America to get your works published? Did Vaun do anything?

SRI AUROBINDO: No. The Americans are not easily attracted to profound things. The article an American wrote some time back on me was very superficial. But Nishtha (Miss Wilson) said that it was originally quite deep; the editor of the paper said it wouldn't do. He thought the Americans wouldn't be interested in such deep things. So he made it what it is.

NIRODBARAN: Aren't the Americans open to new ideas?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, but what they want is sensation and novelty. All I can say is that there are more people in America interested in these things than in Europe. In Europe also their numbers are increasing now.

NIRODBARAN: But America is much taken up by the Ramakrishna Mission. One Bengali too has been a success. Somebody else from near Bombay made at one time a great name in Europe by his prophecies, but afterwards plenty of people started calling him a swindler.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why swindler? Did he take money for his prophecies? Swindling is when one takes money for things one promises to do but doesn't do. If prophecies don't come true, that is not swindling.

By the way, who is Purohit Swami?

PURANI: I don't know. It is he who has translated the Upanishads with Yeats in the Belearic Islands and written some commentaries. In his writings he mentions some cases of levitation he has seen.

SRI AUROBINDO: The only levitation I have heard of was of B, who insisted that his whole body had been raised. Another instance was that of a German who levitated by about six inches and then fell down with a thud.

SATYENDRA: Some air-cushions should have been placed below. (*Laughter*)

Here the topic arose: "Can a sadhak or a Yogi have his life insured? Is it in consonance with the spirit of Yoga?"

SRI AUROBINDO: Thakur Dayanand would have said "No." As I told you, he was always depending on God and didn't believe in storing things. Whatever he used to get he spent. If there was nothing, it meant that God wanted him to starve that day. His followers used to sing and dance – an excited expression of devotion, an emotional demonstration. Later on, he began to complain that his vital forces were being drawn out, and he turned gradually towards Knowledge. All his group had the faith that nothing bad could happen to them. In the shooting affairs, the police came when they were dancing and singing, and seeing them in such exaltation they went back. The disciples thought themselves invulnerable and invincible. Then the Government sent soldiers who broke down their demonstrations and arrested the people. Then their faith got shaken.

SATYENDRA: How can the vital forces be drawn out when one is in contact with the Divine Consciousness?

SRI AUROBINDO: The forces that support the work around one are quite different from the Divine Consciousness.

I had an experience in the Guest House with a man of what may be called an intense type. He was a Maratha. He came to see me. When I came down I felt all around me forces of confusion and death. At once I gathered myself. He was surrounded by forces of disintegration and chaos. Such contacts are dangerous for those who are conscious but weak; their vital forces are drawn out by such people. If one is not conscious, such contacts are harmless.

PURANI: I remember the telling phrase in which you described him: "a wild intensity of weakness".

SRI AUROBINDO: These are the type of people who have great intensity but no solidity.

After this, there was some talk about several examples of that type. From Sri Aurobindo's remarks the following characterisation of them in some detail may be made:

SRI AUROBINDO: At times these people may do brilliant things, but what they do is still slight and has, as it were, no

body. They have a high opinion of themselves, but they are good only as lieutenants; by themselves they are nothing much. They always have to depend on someone, a group or a movement. And they can't contain themselves, either, and keep quiet: to keep quiet requires solidity. They are never steady. As soon as they achieve something, they give it up and pursue another line. This applies to their Yoga also. As a result, they have brilliant visions and experiences but no realisation. If the Mother puts her Force into them, they become ambitious, believe they can revolutionise the world and may even think of becoming Sri Aurobindo's right hand, replacing the Mother! There is in them a curious mixture of opposites: agnosticism and faith, for instance. And when they happen to be writers, such mixture makes their writings attractive. All in all, they are an interesting lot, even if not fit for Yoga or any substantial work. At least one can't feel dull in their company.

There the talk ended. After an interval Nirodbaran asked a question about Sri Aurobindo's leg, which had still some defect after the accident of 24 November 1938.

NIRODBARAN: Can yogic power remove this defect?

SRI AUROBINDO: It ought to, but I haven't tried that sort of thing before.

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Dr. Rao had come and, as usual, he commented on the usefulness of slings, splints, etc. Then he remarked: "Medicines are after all not the main thing. It is Nature that cures and medicines merely help Nature." We had a small debate on the point. The Mother also was present. After Dr. Rao had left, Sri Aurobindo started speaking.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is curious that doctors after long practice come to such conclusions as Dr. Rao has stated. A medical friend of the Mother's used to say that it is the doctor who heals and not his medicines. This is quite true. One must have an element of healing power. Medicines lend their properties to this power.

Without this power which is the main thing in a cure, medicines are of very little use.

SATYENDRA: The ancient system in India recognised it as vital force.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. Even now in some universities in the south of France—for example, Montpellier which is a famous university there—they admit this vital force. This is because the south of France as well as Spain came much under Arab influence. The vital force theory may come back everywhere.

At one time physical science claimed to explain everything according to its laws. Now they admit they can explain nothing.

PURANI: The law of causality which once allowed no exception is now said to be not absolute. The physicists can't determine the causes of phenomena in every case because in trying to observe the phenomena they interfere with the process and thus vitiate it. This they now call indeterminacy.

SRI AUROBINDO: The attempts of scientists like Jeans and Eddington to find Reality by science are futile. You can't found metaphysics on physical science; for, when you have built your philosophy, after some thirty years or so science will change and your building will tumble down. All you can say is that certain conclusions of science agree with and correspond to certain conclusions of metaphysics. You can't make metaphysics depend on physics.

PURANI: The Continental scientists have now refused to build philosophy on science. They say it is not their business to explain but only to lay bare the process. Eddington says in his Gifford Lectures that the human mind, the subject, ultimately accepts one conclusion out of a number of conclusions not because of the nature of objective reality but because of the nature of the observing subject. That $8+8=16$ and not 61 points to some correspondence in the material world to the movement of the thinking mind.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is the accumulated experience—the invariable experience—that gives that sense. Man has found by putting 8 and 8 together that it makes 16.

PURANI: Again, in regard to the rainbow, the scientists study the wave-lengths of light while the poets make a play of the imagination over it. We have no means of saying that the real rainbow exists for the scientist and not for the poet.

SRI AUROBINDO: I should say it exists for neither. Only the scientists get excited over the process and the poets over the result.

PURANI: Eddington also admits that we have no ground to say that non-scientific knowledge and experience are less real than physical science.

SRI AUROBINDO: Of course not.

PURANI: Did you read Spengler's *Decline of the West*? It is a huge volume and deals with many things.

SRI AUROBINDO: No, I haven't read it. What is the upshot of its argument?

PURANI: The upshot is that time is not a mental entity. It has a direction, a tendency. It tends to produce certain events. It points to destiny, a recurring pattern which the sum of forces inevitably leads to. On the data of human history Spengler believes that there have been cycles in the life of the human race when cultures have arisen, reached a zenith and then declined. From a study of these cultures it is possible to predict the decline of every human culture. European culture at present is full of symptoms of decline and therefore it is bound to decline. The signs of decline are the rise of big cities, impoverishment of the countryside, capitalism, etc. He says that to classify history as Primitive, Mediaeval and Modern is not correct. We must study universal history and that, too, impersonally.

Again, within the recurring pattern, a culture has its own characteristic aspects. The mathematical discoveries, for instance, that are seen in a particular culture are organically connected with that culture. The Greeks could never have arrived at the conception of the series—regularly increasing or decreasing numbers leading to infinite number. The series-idea is only possible in modern culture.

He goes so far as to maintain that even if you grant that Napoleon's rise could have been prevented by some causes, still the events that came as a consequence of his career would have followed inevitably because they were destined.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't quite understand. Even granting that there is destiny, why can't it be changed? How can Spengler say that even if Napoleon had not existed the results of his rise would inevitably have followed? It is a very debatable proposition. I believe the results would have naturally varied.

If he had not risen at the time, the European powers would have crushed French democracy. What he did was to stabilise the French Revolution so that the world got the idea of democracy. Otherwise it would have been delayed by two or three centuries.

Again, as to destiny, what is meant by it? It is a word that can have several meanings. Is destiny a working of inert blind material forces? In that case there is no room for choice. You have to end up by accepting Shankara's Mayavada or rank materialism. But if you mean by destiny that there is a Will at work in the universe, then a choice in action becomes possible.

Once more, when Spengler speaks of cycles, there is some truth in the idea but it is not possible to make a rigid rule about the recurrence of the cycles. These cycles are plastic and need not be all of the same duration. In the recent *Aryan Path* a Mr. Morris has written an interesting article, full of facts and based on a study of historical data. In it he tries to show that human destiny has always a cycle of five hundred years. And do you know his conclusion? He believes that there are Mahatmas who manage the world!

Besides, the extension of mathematical numbers to infinity was well known in India long ago; and I don't understand why the classification of historical epochs into Primitive, Mediaeval and Modern is incorrect. Does he mean that there are no differences or that the differences of epochs are to be overlooked?

(After some time) In a philosopher it is not the process of reasoning that is important, for he blinds himself to everything else in order to arrive at his conclusion. Therefore what you have to do is to take his conclusions and even in taking the conclusions you have to accept the essentials and not the words or the inessentials. For instance, there is some truth, as I said, in Spengler's idea of destiny—also in his idea of cycles. All the rest is not material to us.

What is destiny? It can't be the work of the individual. Then you have to accept that it is the working out of a Cosmic Will. And then the question is whether the Cosmic Will is free or bound. If it is free, it is no longer a blind determinism and even when you find there is "no progress", yet that Will is working itself out in evolution.

If, on the other hand, you accept that the Cosmic Will is bound, the question is: "Bound by whom or by what?"

There is something like a cycle. This means there is a curve in the movement of Nature that seems to repeat itself. But that too is not to be taken rigidly. It is something that answers the need of evolution and can vary.

PURANI: Probably something in a man's mind has already accepted the conclusions, unknown to the man himself, and it is by his reasoning that he seems to arrive at them.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, it is something unknown to the surface consciousness of course!

Then, again, the human ego comes in. It is so limited that it thinks the contribution it brings to human thought is the only truth and all who differ or conflict with it are wrong.

We can turn round and say that a man was destined to think as he thought and thus to bring his contribution to the process of evolution. But it is easy to see that the process of evolution is universal and human evolution cannot be bound down to a set of philosophical ideas or rules of practice. No epoch, no individual, no group has the monopoly of truth. It is the same with religion—Christian, Mohammedan, etc.

PURANI: I don't think such a wide view is possible unless one reaches the Universal Mind.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not necessarily. One can see this much while remaining human.

PURANI: Wells perhaps speaks something similar when he says that all knowledge must now become "human".

SRI AUROBINDO: That is another matter. He means "internationalism". All science is already international and much of literature and other realms of ideas are so too.

What does Spengler say about the future—after the decline of the West?

PURANI: He dismisses China and India as countries whose cultures are useless now.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then we have the Arabs.

PURANI: Not even the Arabs. They are also effete.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then the Africans remain, and the Abyssinians.

PURANI: I think his hope is in the Americans and the Africans.

SATYENDRA: But America goes with the West. So we are left only with the Africans. (*Laughter*)

PURANI: It is very curious that Spengler misses the fact that there can be resurgence and reawakening.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. Take China, for instance. There were always cities in China—from the most ancient times. The Chinese are a peculiar race—always disturbed and always the same. If you study their history two thousand years back you will find they were in disturbance and yet they had their culture. The Tartar king who tried to destroy their culture by burning their books didn't succeed. And I wouldn't be surprised if after the present turmoil you find them two thousand years hence what they are today. That is the character of the race.

When you follow the course of history you may find there is a certain destiny which represents the sum of physical forces. That is one destiny. And when that tends to go round and round in an infinite circuit you find that there is a tendency which seems inevitable in the movement.

But the question is: Are physical forces the only determinants of destiny? Or is there anything else—something more than physical that can intervene and influence the course of the movement?

We find that there have been such inrushes of forces in history and the action of these inrushes has been to change the destiny indicated by the physical forces; it has changed in fact the course of human history. Take for an example the rise of the Arabs. A small uncivilised race living in arid deserts suddenly rises up and changes completely the course of history. That is an inrush of forces.

PURANI: Thinkers like Emerson and Shaw believe that human beings have not made any substantial progress in their powers of reasoning since the Greeks.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is quite true. Of course, you have today a vaster field and more ample material than the Greeks had, but in the handling of them the present-day mind is not superior to the Greek mind with its more limited field and material.

PURANI: Emerson writing about Plato, says that he has been the epitome of the European mind for the last two thousand years or more.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, the European mind got everything from the Greeks and owes everything to them. Every branch of knowledge in which human curiosity could be interested has been

given to Europe by the Greeks—even archaeology. The Romans could legislate and fight, they could keep the state together, but they made the Greeks think for them. Of course the Greeks could fight also but not always so well. Take the Roman thinkers—Lucretius, Cicero, Seneca, all owe their philosophy to the Greeks.

That, again, is an illustration of what I was saying about the inrush of forces. Consider a small race like the Greeks, living on a small projecting tongue of land. It was able to build up a culture that has given everything essential to your modern European culture and that in a span of two or three hundred years only! Of course, the Greeks didn't create everything. They got much from Egypt, Crete and Asia.

PURANI: The number of artists they produced was remarkable.

SRI AUROBINDO: They had a sense of beauty. Their life was beautiful. The one thing that modern Europe has not taken from the Greeks is beauty. You can't say modern Europe is beautiful. In fact, it is ugly. What can be said of ancient Greece can be said also of ancient India. She had beauty, which she has since lost. The Japanese are the only race that can be said to have preserved beauty in their life. But now even they are fast losing it under European influence.

The setback to the human mind in Europe is amazing. As I said, no one set of ideas can monopolise Truth and from that point of view all these efforts of Hitler and Mussolini and Stalin to bottle up the human soul in a narrow mould of ideas is absurd. We had thought during the last years of the nineteenth century that the human mind had attained a certain level of intelligence and that it would have to be satisfied before any new idea could find acceptance. But it seems one can't rely on common sense to stand the strain. We find Nazi ideas being accepted; fifty years back it would have been impossible to predict their acceptance. Then, again, the way the intellectuals accept psychoanalysis is surprising.

Krishna Prem (Ronald Nixon) is afraid that psychoanalysis will drive out or kill spirituality because it claims to explain away many spiritual things.

SATYENDRA: People believe anything that is uncommon.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, it is as in the old dictum: "I believe because it is absurd."

These Nazi ideas are infra-rational. It is because they are not at all rational that they are considered as inspiration. They are even called mystical. They are really nothing but narrow-pointed impulses rising from the lower being. But perhaps this rise of the infra-rational has been necessary in order that the supra-rational may be accepted and that reason may not be able to offer any obstruction to it.

The infra-rational also has a truth; it is necessary for the proper understanding of things. You can't know the world unless you know the part which the infra-rational plays.

NIRODBARAN: Do you mean by the infra-rational all that man has inherited from the animal?

SRI AUROBINDO: Not only that. Man has accused the animal for nothing. In the infrarational are also included the Rakshasa and the Asura. Man has always been speaking of the animal, the Pashu, in a superior way. But take the dog's faithfulness and affection. These qualities are universal among dogs. But even when they are found among men, you can't say the same.

PURANI: Mrs. Pinto, the English wife of a friend, told me that she was surprised to find that the cow in India is so mild and docile. In England, it seems, it may attack men.

SRI AUROBINDO: Most animals kill only for food; there are very few that are inherently ferocious. Even snakes don't attack unless they are frightened.

There was a variety of maneless lion in America—the Puma—that would have been friendly to man. Of course it had to live and so killed animals. But the Americans have been killing it—nearly exterminating it. Most of the wild animals don't kill man unless they find that he is dangerous. That's what happens in Africa. Man begins to shoot them down and they turn against him. In Africa the State had to legislate to prevent the extermination of certain animals. Otherwise people would have killed them off for sport. You can't say man kills only when he is compelled.

And yet we cannot declare man has made no progress. True, the philosopher today is not superior to Plato, but there are many who can philosophise today, also many more who can understand philosophy than in Plato's time. And throughout the course of history a small minority has been carrying the torch to save humanity in spite of itself.

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NIRODBARAN: In the Hindustan Standard there is a remarkable story about some Somesh Bose. His wife, dead for twenty years, has been brought back bodily to him, alive again, and is doing sadhana with him. The man who performed the miracle is a Yogi named Bhola Giri. This Yogi also comes every evening to bless the pair. The paper asks: "What will Western materialists say to this?"

SRI AUROBINDO: They will say it is all humbug.

SATYENDRA: What does Yoga have to say?

SRI AUROBINDO: There are many possibilities.

NIRODBARAN: But is it at all possible to create like this in new flesh and blood?

SRI AUROBINDO: What is meant by flesh and blood? Does Somesh Bose's wife live all the time with him or does she come only for a few hours and then go away? If the latter, it looks like a temporary materialisation, and that is quite possible. Bhola Giri obviously knows how to do it and has done it for his disciple. As to permanent materialisation, theoretically it is not impossible, but I haven't heard of any case. Well, if stones can be materialised, as in the famous incident of our Guest House, I don't see why human beings cannot.

When materialisation takes place, it is most often immediately before death or after. The man in question visits some friend or relative, and if the dying condition or the death is not known to them or the man is not known to be living far away, people mistake his appearance for actual physical presence. There are many such well-attested cases.

My brother Manmohan used to say he had heard from Stephen Phillips that the latter's mother visited him when she was on her death-bed at a distant place. But my brother was a poet, you must remember—very imaginative. And, moreover, he was a friend of Oscar Wilde. (*Laughter*)

People say that one telepathises a mental idea and this makes the person appear. It can't be a mere projection of form by the mind only. There is also the vital-physical part that materialises.

PURANI: Paul Brunton writes that when he was in Egypt he met near a hill an ancient Egyptian who had died thousands of years ago and had been mummified. Brunton talked with him.

SRI AUROBINDO: What happened afterwards to the Egyptian?

PURANI: I believe he went back to the hill.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then one can't say what exactly happened. The Egyptians held that at the time of death the Ka or vital being goes out of the body and after many years can return to it if it is preserved. That is the tradition behind mummification. Perhaps Brunton materialised the tradition? (*Laughter*)

PURANI: Brunton cites the instance of a dead sparrow being revived by an Egyptian.

NIRODBARAN: He says that of Vishuddhananda also. The sparrow was killed in his presence and it was revived. Is that possible?

SRI AUROBINDO: Quite possible. Can't you revive a drowned man up to a certain time by physical devices? So, if one knows how, one can restore life in other cases too. One reintroduces the power and sets the organs to action. There are two ways: the first is to bring back the same spirit which is still not far away, and the second is to bring another spirit which wants to enter earth-life.

At this point the Mother came in with a telegram requesting Sri Aurobindo to send "ashes" for the marriage of somebody's daughter. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo could not make out what was meant.

PURANI: It may be the Indian word "ashis", meaning "blessing".

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh, I see. I was wondering how I was supposed to carry ashes about with me—perhaps on my head. Of course I can give them some from Champaklal's mosquito coils. If I had not given up smoking, I could have given some cigar ash.

Telegraphic misrepresentations are common. There is Chand's recent wire.

NIRODBARAN: Yes, the telegram read "Nirodasram" instead of "Nirodbaran".

CHAMPAKLAL: When is Chand coming here?

NIRODBARAN: Soon after "arranging his affairs".

SRI AUROBINDO: Is he still "arranging"?

CHAMPAKLAL: Has he much property?

NIRODBARAN: He has lost everything.

SRI AUROBINDO: And yet he is "arranging" it? He is a phenomenon.

Now the Mother left for the general meditation.

SRI AUROBINDO: Nirodbaran, do you know the name of the man who apologised to us for having written a book against us?

NIRODBARAN: Apologised? Who's that?

SRI AUROBINDO: Some relative of X, I think.

NIRODBARAN: Oh, yes, I remember. The father. He criticised the Ashram in that book.

SRI AUROBINDO: Merely criticised? Didn't he attack my character and say that I was taking money from people? That charge, at any rate, won't do with people, for they know I gave up everything for the country and I couldn't have fallen so low now. The writer seems to have gathered all sorts of false information.

This sort of public attack doesn't have any effect, for nobody knows the writer. But if someone well-known, say, Radhakrishnan, attacked my philosophy, it may attract some attention. Talking back may be effective for a time, but the best thing is to leave the attackers alone. They soon get forgotten. Anilbaran has criticised the book we are speaking of.

NIRODBARAN: Have you read the book?

SRI AUROBINDO: I glanced through it. The author had sent a typed copy. I don't think more than half a dozen copies of the book could have been sold. He seems to have lost all his money.

PURANI: Some Gujaratis are also attacking the Ashram.

SRI AUROBINDO: But why? What is their grievance?

PURANI: They say we are not doing anything for the country or for humanity.

SRI AUROBINDO: Since when has the Ashram been expected to do such things?

NIRODBARAN: The Ramakrishna Mission and Gandhi's Ashram are doing social or political work.

SRI AUROBINDO: Gandhi's Ashram is not an Ashram for spirituality. It is a group of people gathered to be trained in some work or other. But are we attacked because we are not doing anything for the country and humanity or because I who did national work once have left it now?

PURANI: Perhaps more because of the latter reason.

NIRODBARAN: Subhas Bose also attacked the Ashram on the same plea. He said to Dilip that some of the best people were going away to the Ashram

SRI AUROBINDO: Did he include Dilip among the best people?

NIRODBARAN: I don't remember whether he said "best people" or just "good people". But he was much grieved at losing them.

SRI AUROBINDO: But Dilip was not doing political work. He was doing music.

NIRODBARAN: Subhas said he could go on with music for a certain time, but when the hour strikes he must be prepared to give up everything.

SRI AUROBINDO: I see – and one can't give up everything for God, I suppose?

PURANI: He must have meant "give up everything and go to jail".

SRI AUROBINDO (*shaking his head and looking at the ceiling*): Jail? I can't picture Dilip in jail. (*Laughter*)

PURANI: The two don't go well together.

SATYENDRA: Perhaps he would have written some novels about jail afterwards.

SRI AUROBINDO: Many things don't go well together and yet they do happen. One could hardly think of Oscar Wilde in jail and yet he went there. The only thing such people do is to write immortal books in jail. There is Wilde's *De Profundis*, for instance. When the French heard of Wilde's imprisonment, they said about the English people: "*Comme ils sont betes!*" ("How stupid they are!")

At the time of the Gandhi movement, someone asked Abanindranath Tagore to give up painting and take to politics. He answered, "I am serving the country through my art. Painting is at least something I know well, but I would be a very bad politician."

Now Purani brought in the topic of new buildings going up at Baroda near the railway station, etc.

SRI AUROBINDO: The thought of Baroda (*pause for a time*) brings to my mind my first connection with the Gaekwar. It is strange how things arrange themselves at times. When I failed in the I.C.S. riding test and was looking for a job, the Gaekwar happened to be in London. I don't remember whether he called us or we met him. We consulted an authority about the pay we should propose. We had no idea about these things. He said we could propose Rs. 200, but should accept even 130, for that was

quite a good sum. He was calculating according to the pound which was equivalent to Rs. 13; so he took ten pounds as a quite good sum. I left the negotiations to my eldest brother and James Cotton. The Gaekwar went about telling people that he had got a Civil Service man for Rs. 200. (*Laughter*) But Cotton ought to have known better.

NIRODBARAN: How much were your monthly expenses?

SRI AUROBINDO: Five pounds. It was quite sufficient at that time. What is the expense now?

NIRODBARAN: Ten pounds is the bare minimum in Edinburgh.

SRI AUROBINDO: Our landlady was an angel. She was long-suffering and never asked for money. For months and months we didn't pay. I wonder how she managed. It was from the I.C.S. stipend that I paid her afterwards. She came from Somerset and settled in London as a landlady.

My failure in the I.C.S. riding test was a disappointment to my father, for he had arranged everything for me through Sir Henry Cotton. He had arranged to get me posted at Arrah which was regarded as a very fine place and near Sir Henry. He had requested him to look after me.

I wonder what would have happened if I had joined the Civil Service. I think they would have chucked me out for laziness and arrears of work.

Here the topic changed to Gandhism.

SRI AUROBINDO: Gandhi's demilitarisation doesn't seem to meet with much success.

PURANI: Exactly. Nana Sahib also spoke against non-violence the other day while presiding over a conference of young men at Baroda. Do you know him?

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh, yes, I know him very well. He Madhavrao and I were the first revolutionary group and wanted to drive out the English.

PURANI: It's good he protested against demilitarisation.

SRI AUROBINDO: Has Gandhi succeeded in disarming the Frontier Pathans?

PURANI: When he went there, he objected to armed volunteers keeping guard over him.

SRI AUROBINDO: But what should they do in case of attack? Simply stand by?

PURANI: No, they have to die resisting non-violently.

SRI AUROBINDO: This idea of passive resistance I have never been able to fathom. I can understand an absolute non-resistance to evil, what the Christians mean when they say, "Resist not evil." You may die without resisting and accept the consequences as sent by God. But to change the opponent's heart by passive resistance is something I don't understand.

PURANI: I agree with the *Modern Review* that by this method one allows evil to triumph. It seems foolish to expect that a goonda's heart will melt in that way.

SRI AUROBINDO: Precisely. Gandhi has been trying to apply to ordinary life what belongs to spirituality. Non-violence or Ahimsa as a spiritual attitude and practice is perfectly intelligible and has a standing of its own. You may not accept it *in toto* but it has a basis in reality. To apply it to ordinary life is absurd. One then ignores—as the Europeans do in several things—the principle of Adhikarbheda and the difference of situation.

PURANI: Gandhi's point is that in either case you die. If you die with arms you encourage and perpetuate the killing method.

SRI AUROBINDO: And if you die without arms you encourage and perpetuate passive resistance. (*Laughter*)

It is certainly a principle which can be applied successfully if practised on a mass scale, especially by unarmed people like Indians. I understand this principle, because you, being unarmed are left with no other choice. But even if it succeeds, it is not because you have changed the heart of the enemy but because you have made it impossible for him to rule. That is what happened in Ireland. Of course, there was armed resistance also, but it would not have succeeded without passive resistance side by side.

What a tremendous generaliser Gandhi is! Passive resistance, Charkha and celibacy for all! One can't be a member of the Congress without oneself spinning! I wonder how many of Gandhi's followers do it.

PURANI: Now they have removed the demand. Nobody took spinning seriously.

SRI AUROBINDO: How do you expect anyone to take it seriously? If I were asked to spin, I would offer passive resistance

myself—complete Satyagraha. (*Laughter*) I wonder what Abanindra Tagore and D would have done.

NIRODBARAN: It seems Nandalal Bose did spinning.

SRI AUROBINDO: Isn't he a man of an ascetic temperament? There was somebody who even wrote that the Chakra referred to in the Gita is really the Charkha!

PURANI: There are many ascetically—minded enthusiasts whom people look up to as Gurus. About one of them a friend told me, "He can attain the Supermind." I replied, "No objection. Let him try."

SRI AUROBINDO: These people will stumble at the very first step to the Supermind. They have to give up all their fixed ideas.

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Satyendra showed Sri Aurobindo some photographs of Pagal Haranath, the Bengali saint, and his wife. Below one of the photos of his wife was written that she was the Supreme Power and he was one of her forces.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is the Tantric doctrine.

SATYENDRA: He was a Vaishnava.

SRI AUROBINDO: Maybe, but the doctrine is not a Vaishnava one. It is Tantric.

In principle the doctrine is true, for the Supreme Shakti is the Divine Consciousness and all the Gods come from her. It is said that even Shiva cannot act unless She gives him the power.

SATYENDRA: Haranath had an interesting life. He underwent a complete change of colour at Kashmir. It is said that Gauranga came to him in a vision and gave him his mission. But his later disciples consider him equal to Gauranga.

SRI AUROBINDO: Where is the contradiction? If the consciousness is ultimately and essentially divine, why should not both be one in consciousness?

SATYENDRA: They want to prove him an Avatar as great as Gauranga.

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh, competition for Avatarhood? But did he proclaim himself an Avatar?

SATYENDRA: No, Sir; but he behaved like one.

SRI AUROBINDO: Gauranga is regarded as an Avatar of Krishna, and if Haranath is an Avatar of Gauranga, naturally both are Avatars of Krishna. Then why quarrel?

SATYENDRA: There are cases of very rapid progress among people who have met Haranath.

SRI AUROBINDO: I have found that Vaishnava Bhakti leads to very intense and rapid progress.

SATYENDRA: There is a line of Sadhus in Gujarat who have Bhakti for the impersonal God.

SRI AUROBINDO: Bhakti for the impersonal God?

SATYENDRA: They don't have devotion for any personal God but for the One who is everywhere and beyond all personalities. Kabir and some other saints believe like that. Even when they take a particular name, they mean by it something more than the name. They will say "Rama" but believe in various aspects of Rama: for example, one Rama in Dasaratha's house, one in each heart, one pervading all and another beyond all.

PURANI: That is one who is the Transcendent.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, the Supreme Absolute. That is the same thing as the Gita's idea of Vasudeva who is in all and Vasudeva who is the Supreme Absolute. Both are the same.

Bhakti for the impersonal Divine may not be so powerful for the change of nature; it tends to be more etherealised. Nor does it seem to be very powerful as regards Knowledge. Here Bhakti predominates over Knowledge.

SATYENDRA: I have seen many instances of Bhakti and Knowledge combined.

SRI AUROBINDO: I am not speaking of exceptions.

SATYENDRA: We have heard that you had guidance from Sri Krishna. Was it the Brindavan Krishna or the Kurukshetra Krishna?

SRI AUROBINDO: I should think it was the Kurukshetra Krishna. I had an experience of Krishna-Kali in Alipore Jail. It was a very powerful vision.

PURANI: These distinctions between the personalities of Krishna seem to be of later growth: I mean, later Vaishnavism.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, they regard Balagopal as the delight-aspect or delight-consciousness, but there were other older schools, who regarded Krishna as an Avatar of Vishnu, and they were also Vaishnavas.

SATYENDRA: It is the Kurukshetra Krishna who spoke the Gita.

SRI AUROBINDO: The one who spoke the Gita is the Vishnu aspect. In the Vishnu Purana all these aspects are very finely described. The Vishnu Purana is the only Purana I have carefully read through. I wonder how it has escaped general notice that it is also magnificent poetry.

There are also some very humorous passages. In one a disciple asks his Guru whether the king is on the elephant or the elephant on the king.

PURANI: The king must be a Ramamurti if the elephant were to be on him.

SRI AUROBINDO: The Guru jumps upon the shoulders of the disciple and asks, "Am I on you or you on me?" (*Laughter*)

SATYENDRA: The description of Jadabharata is also fine. Was there such a person as Jadabharata?

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't know. But he sounds very real in the Purana. This Purana is most anti-Buddhist.

SATYENDRA: Then it must have been very late.

PURANI: Buddha was born 550 B.C.

SRI AUROBINDO: This Purana is not so early as that. All the Puranas in fact are posterior to Buddhism. They are a part of the Brahmanical revival which came in the Gupta period as a reaction to Buddhism.

PURANI: They are supposed to have been written about the third or fourth century A.D.

SRI AUROBINDO: Probably. In the Vishnu Purana Buddha is regarded as an Avatar of Vishnu who came to deceive the Asuras. He is not referred to by his own name but called Mayamoha. The Purana says, "Buddhasya, Buddhasya", which evidently refers to Buddha.

SATYENDRA: It is said that the Tantras are as old as the Vedas.

SRI AUROBINDO: The principle of Tantra may be as old as the Vedas, but the known Tantras are a later development.

PURANI: The Vedas are regarded as the highest authority in India. So everything wants to peg itself on to the Vedas.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why is there this passion for antiquity? Truth is Truth whenever it may be found.

SATYENDRA: The Vedas are considered eternal.

SRI AUROBINDO: Because the source of their inspiration is eternal.

SATYENDRA: Somebody has said that the eternal Veda is in everybody's heart.

PURANI: You are quoting Sri Aurobindo to himself. (*Laughter*)

SRI AUROBINDO: The Upanishads came after the Vedas and they put in more plain language the same truth that was in the Veda. In the Veda it is in symbolic language. But the Upanishads, of course, are equally great. Even in the Veda there are passages which clearly show that the Vedantic or Upanishadic truth was contained in it. It is surprising that scholars miss the meaning. For instance, the Veda says, "Hidden by your truth is the Truth that is constant for ever where they unyoke the horses of the Sun. There the ten thousands stand together. That is the One: I have seen the Supreme Godhead of the embodied gods." It is clear that this refers to the Vedantic truth. Similarly the Upanishads speak of the Sun, Surya, and Fire, Agni, which are Vedic symbols, and the significance of these expressions in the Upanishads is the same as in the Veda.¹

SATYENDRA: The Europeans can't imagine that the Vedic Rishis were so advanced in those primitive times.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, they are so satisfied when they find a historical interpretation that they ignore many obvious indications of the true meaning. In dealing with these deeper things they make an awful muddle. But some of our Indians are not far behind. You must admire one Indian writer's interpretation of the Gods as Gases – magnificently ingenious!

PURANI: Many Riks of Dirghatamas are untranslated even today by European commentators.

SRI AUROBINDO: You can't understand or translate them unless you have the key to their symbolism.

PURANI: In several Riks he speaks of the largest or highest step of the cow.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is certainly symbolic. Everyone knows that the cow is a symbol of divine light and consciousness, and its highest step is their highest level.

¹ Sri Aurobindo has often emphasised the Isha Upanishad's parallel passage: "The face of the Truth is covered with a brilliant golden lid: O fostering Sun, that uncover for the law of the truth, for sight. O Fosterer, O sole Rishi, O controlling Yama, O Surya, O son of the Father of creatures, marshal and mass the rays: the Lustre that is thy most blessed form of all, that I see, He who is this, this Purusha, He am I."

PURANI: Dirghatamas is to me a great stumbling-block on the whole, though some of his Riks are clear in their symbolism.

SRI AUROBINDO: He has justified his name which means "Long in the darkness".

PURANI: There was an article about Saraswati in a magazine, saying that it was a river that flowed both into the Bay of Bengal and the Bay of Cambay.

SRI AUROBINDO: What? Saraswati going through both Bengal and Cambay? That would be possible only if the inspiration ran riot.

PURANI: I have tried to show that Saraswati of the Veda may after all be the flood of inspiration. Dirghatamas requests the rivers to become shallow and they comply with his request.

SRI AUROBINDO: They would be funny rivers if they were material ones. And remember what they carried in them – all sorts of things, the rays, the sun, the Soma-wine, wisdom, wealth.

PURANI: Do you remember a Madrasi departmental commissioner of police trying to prove that Christ was a Tamilian?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, and also that the Tamilians were Jews! Do you know that now the Germans claim Christ as a German?

PURANI: But I thought Hitler and Ludendorf were trying to give up Christianity and go back to the old Norse religion.

SRI AUROBINDO: That's because they found Christ inconvenient in many ways. The Turks also tried, when they became free, to go back to everything of old Turkey. It was Mustapha Kemal who modernised Mohammedanism.

NIRODBARAN: Poor Amanullah of Afghanistan attempted to follow him and got kicked out.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is the case of a weak man imitating a strong one. Kemal was a liberator of Turkey with an army to back him up.

PURANI: Indian Muslims praise Kemal but don't learn anything from his life and the reforms he introduced.

SRI AUROBINDO: In Turkey now they enter the mosques with shoes on and the Muezzin has been abolished.

PURANI: Coming to Europe, I want to ask you if it can be said that there was an inrush of forces from the subtle worlds at the time of the French Revolution and in Napoleon's time, changing the course of history.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, there was. It changed the course of European history and gave the world new political and social ideas.

NIRODBARAN: Aldous Huxley says Napoleon and Caesar were bandits.

SRI AUROBINDO: Nonsense.

NIRODBARAN: He also says all evils, economic and otherwise, of the modern age are due to Napoleon.

PURANI: That is going too far.

SRI AUROBINDO: If he does say so, it shows a mind that is pedantic and without plasticity.

PURANI: Anatole France, though not an imperialist, says Napoleon gave glory to France.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not only glory. He gave peace and order, stable government and security to France. He was not only one of the greatest conquerors but also one of the greatest administrators and organisers the world has seen. If it had not been for him, the whole ideal of the French Revolution would have been crushed by the European Powers. It was he who stabilised the ideals of the Revolution.

The only trouble was that he was not bold enough. If he had pushed on with the idea of unification of all Europe, which he had at the back of his mind, then the present Spanish struggle would not have been necessary. Italy would have been united much earlier and Germany would have been more civilised. If instead of proclaiming himself Emperor he had remained the First Consul, he would have met with better success. But he was not like Hitler, he could not carry out things in a ruthless fashion. Even after his overthrow, the Germans on the Rhine were unwilling to give up the Code Napoleon and the institutions he had brought into existence.

SATYENDRA: They say his Russian campaign was a proof that he was not a military genius. It is Tolstoy who belittles him in his *War and Peace*.

SRI AUROBINDO: *War and Peace* is a novel after all.

SATYENDRA: There Tolstoy says that Napoleon blundered by burning Moscow.

SRI AUROBINDO: But history says that the Russians themselves burnt Moscow to deprive Napoleon of the gains of his victory. He conquered Moscow though he couldn't conquer Russia. Even his retreat at Leipzig is regarded as a feat of military genius. But there is now a tendency to belittle even his military genius. They say it was his generals who were the military genius of his campaigns and not he. In the same way they belittle Genghis Khan and call him a cut-

throat. He organised the whole of Asia and part of Europe and made commerce safe. He was successful because he was supported by all the trading agencies who badly wanted safe commercial highways along the banks of rivers.

It is true about Napoleon that his physical capacity failed towards the end owing to his disease.

NIRODBARAN: Napoleon had a pituitary tumour, as a result of which his mental powers declined.

SRI AUROBINDO: History says it was cancer of the stomach. But who says he lost his mental powers? It is an historical fact that his mind remained clear and powerful up to the last. All talk of his mental decline is nonsense.

NIRODBARAN: Yesterday we spoke about materialisation. But is it possible to materialise even ten years after death?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, if the spirit has not gone far away from the earth. Generally up to three years it remains near the earth, they say. The Guru's power can materialise the subtle body more easily. Sometimes another force can take up a vital form.

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Nirodbaran read out to Sri Aurobindo some passages from Aldous Huxley's Ends and Means. They were on war, passive resistance, non-attachment, the Jacobins, Caesar, Napoleon and dictators in general. The last was: "More books have been written about Napoleon than about any other human being. The fact is deeply and alarmingly significant. . . . Duces and Fuhrers will cease to plague the world only when the majority of its inhabitants regard such adventurers with the same disgust as they now bestow on swindlers and pimps. So long as men worship Caesars and Napoleons, Caesars and Napoleons will duly rise and make them miserable."

SRI AUROBINDO: All that is shallow, it is mere moralising. If Caesar and Napoleon are not to be admired, then it means that human capacity and attainment are not to be admired. Caesar and Napoleon have been admired not merely because they were successful: plenty of successful people are not admired. Caesar has won admiration because it was he who founded the greatness of Imperial Rome which gave us one of the greatest periods of human civilisation. And we admire Napoleon because he was a

great organiser and he stabilised the French Revolution. He organised France and, through France, the whole of Europe. His immense powers and abilities—are these things not great?

PURANI: I suppose men admire them because they find in them the realisation of their own potential greatness.

SRI AUROBINDO: Of course. But Huxley speaks of Caesar and Napoleon as if they were the first dictators the world had seen. There have been dictators since the beginning of the world. And they are of various kinds. Kemal, Pilsudski, all the kings of Balkan states, as well as Stalin and Hitler, are all dictators. Even Gandhi, if he were put at the head of a free India, could be a dictator. My own father can be called the dictator of Rangpur or Khulna! The dictators come in answer to the necessity of the hour. When men and nations are in conflict with their surrounding conditions, when there is confusion all about, the dictators come, set things right and pull the race out of its difficulties.

As for the Jacobins, with whom Huxley finds fault, I have been thinking of Laski's view. Laski is perfectly right in saying that the Jacobins saved the Republic. If they had not concentrated power in their hands, the Germans would have marched on Paris and crushed the new Republic at the very start and restored the old monarchy. It was because of the Jacobins that the Bourbons, even when they returned, had to accept constitutional monarchy. Louis XVIII and all the kings in Europe were obliged, more or less, to accept the principles of democracy.

It is true that in Napoleon's time the Assembly was only a shadow, but the full Republic, although delayed for some time, was in fact already established. Politics is only a shadow at the top: the real changes that matter are those that come in society. The social laws introduced by Napoleon have continued till this day. It was he who made for the first time all men equal before the Law. The Code Napoleon bridged the gulf between the rich and the poor. This kind of equality seems very natural now, but when he introduced it, it was something revolutionary. The laws he laid down still hold. What he established may not have been democracy in the sense of government by the masses, but it was democracy in the sense of government by the middle class, the bourgeoisie.

On the topic of war, Huxley speaks as if there were always an alternative between military violence and non-violent peaceful development. But things are never like that: they don't move in

a perfect way. If Napoleon had not come, the Republic would have been smothered in its infancy and democracy would have suffered a setback. No, the Cosmic Spirit is not so foolish as to allow that. Carlyle puts the situation more realistically when he says that the condition was, "I kill you or you kill me. So it is better that I kill you than get killed by you."

PURANI: Huxley says war is always avoidable.

SRI AUROBINDO: When intellectuals talk of these things, they get into a muddle. How is war avoidable? How can you prevent war so long as the other fellow wants to fight? You can prevent it only by becoming stronger than he or (*smiling*), as Gandhi says, by changing his heart by passive resistance. And even there Gandhi has been forced to admit that none has understood his passive resistance except himself. It is not very promising for Satyagraha; in fact, it is a condemnation of it, considering that it is intended to be a general solution for all men. What some did in several places in India is not Satyagraha but Duragraha (obstinacy).

NIRODBARAN: Huxley speaks of spirituality.

SRI AUROBINDO: Spirituality is all right, but in what way is it to be got?

PURANI: He speaks of the ideal non-attached men who must practise virtue disinterestedly.

SRI AUROBINDO: No doubt, no doubt! But how are you to get them? And when you have got them how are the attached people to accept the non-attached? And how will the non-attached men get their decisions accepted and carried out by the attached?

It is all a solution by the mind. The mind has not been able to change human nature fundamentally. It cannot succeed so long as it works on its own principles. It accepts an ideal and tries to work it out but it is not a sovereign consciousness. You can go on changing human institutions and yet the imperfection will break through all your institutions.

PURANI: The other day you spoke of the inrush of Forces during certain periods of history—the Greek and the Arab periods, for example. Can we speak similarly not of an inrush but of a descent of some Higher Force in the cases of men like Buddha and Christ?

SRI AUROBINDO: Of course. It is a descent of a Higher Force, which works at first in one man, then in a group and then extends its influence to mankind. In the case of Mohammed—and here is another dictator for you!—the descent corresponded with the

extension, the expansion, in life. But the descent may be just an inner one in the beginning and only gradually spread to other men and later extend outwards.

SATYENDRA: Many spiritual figures have come and tried to make our life spiritual. But the world remains the same.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. Here also what happens is that the new Force gets mixed up with the powers that are already there. What happens is that the powers of Falsehood try at first to resist the spiritual descent. When they fail, they accept it in order to break it. Look, for instance, at Christianity. When it came, it was much oppressed, and afterwards it in its turn became oppressive. Never has there been so much oppression and persecution. I dare say many of the Christian martyrs who died for the cause had a spirit of revenge—the feeling that if they got a chance they would take revenge for what they were made to suffer. And the Christians did take revenge when they got the power. So the passive resistance of Christianity became in the end a movement of persecution. It is the vital mixture—the mixture of the life-forces—that comes in and corrupts the whole spiritual movement.

Even Lenin had an idea of this truth. He said, “We must keep our ideal absolutely pure. So long as we with our 150,000-strong Communist Party remain pure and are faithful to our ideal, nothing can resist us.” And it was quite true; for as long as they were able to do that, Communism was really successful.

Hitler too had a glimpse of the same truth. When he killed one of his prominent followers for immorality, he was not quite hypocritical even though he had known about it before. In some vague way he felt that the Nazi Party must be kept pure if it were to succeed.

It is because of the vital mixture that I want to bring down a Power which I call the Truth-Consciousness, which will admit none of it, no compromise with the lower forces, the powers of Falsehood. By the Truth-Consciousness I mean a dynamic divine Consciousness. This Power must govern even the minutest detail of the life and action of man. The question is to bring it down and establish it on earth and keep it pure. For there is always a gravitational pull downwards. So the spiritual power must be such that it can not only resist but overcome that pull.

This is the solution that I propose. It is a spiritual solution that aims at changing the whole basis of human nature. But it is not a

question of a moment or a few years. There can be no real solution unless you establish spirituality as the whole basis of life.

SATYENDRA: So the Truth-Consciousness will take a long time to act upon the whole world?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. But there must be a few – a race of Gods on earth – who will at first embody the new Power and then radiate it throughout the world like waves. When this force of action is established in the world, humanity will gradually turn towards it.

It was because of the difficulty of changing human nature – the crooked human nature which Vivekananda called “the dog’s curled tail” – that the ascetic path advocated flying from the world as the only remedy. No one thought it possible to change human nature and so everybody said, “Drop it.”

SATYENDRA: There is an idea among some people here that even those who have gone into Laya (dissolution) will have to come back to change their nature.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why should they come back?

PURANI: I believe what is meant is that Buddha, Shankara and others who went into Laya and accepted escape from Nature have not really got liberation.

SRI AUROBINDO: They got the liberation of the spirit and that is what they wanted.

PURANI: The question may be put like this: Could their escape be considered to be against the fiat of the Divine?

SRI AUROBINDO: But why should it be so considered? If the Divine in them chose that path the question settles itself.

PURANI: Could they really drop their nature? What becomes of the mind, the vital being and the physical?

SRI AUROBINDO: What do you mean by “their nature”? They no longer have any nature when they enter into Laya; they drop it.

SATYENDRA: Cannot the human soul, the psychic being, escape?

SRI AUROBINDO: As I say, if you want to escape, you may. To accept the transformation or to escape is your own affair, but if you accept my idea of the world the truth of evolution stands.

SATYENDRA: But the solution is very difficult, Sir – at least to me.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is not at all easy. One way of looking at transformation is as the Tamil saint Nammalwar puts it: Vishnu

comes down with all the Gods and takes possession of the earth. My way is the other: to change the human being by some sort of evolution into what I call a race of Gods. The Hindu vision of the last Avatar Kalki destroying everybody is an easy but rather drastic solution.

The Divine Consciousness has entered into the Inconscient by a process of involution. It is only apparently inconscient. It is also superconscient. From the Inconscience it is trying to evolve and that process thus becomes a process of manifestation. But if one does not want to manifest the Divine, it is his own affair. Someone asked the Mother about Ramana Maharshi. The Mother said, "If the Divine in him does not want to undertake the transformation, it is not necessary for him."

SATYENDRA: When S. D. asked Maharshi, he said, "There is no Sankalpa (will) in me." The Spirit can't be compelled to choose a fixed path. Each one must follow the Divine within.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is not necessary for all to do this Yoga. It is a mistaken idea that I want everybody to do this Yoga.

SATYENDRA: They believe that Buddha or Shankara will have to be born again to do it.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't say that they won't be reborn, but there is no compulsion. As Ramakrishna said, the Ishwarakoti can go up and down as he chooses. It is therefore wrong to suppose that this Yoga is for everybody.

SATYENDRA: Your effort may also end in becoming a religion wanting to convert all. Already there are signs.

SRI AUROBINDO: But I have never wanted to start a religion. I have said nothing new in philosophy. In fact, I am not a philosopher by temperament. Richard came and said, "Let us have a synthesis of knowledge." I said, "All right. Let us synthesise." I have written everything not from thought but from experience as it developed in my practice of Yoga. I have not cared even to be consistent or to see whether all my thoughts hung together.

Somebody has said that I have a great similarity to Hegel because I used the word "synthesis" and he speaks of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. But I must confess I have no idea of what Hegel says.

Western philosophies are so mental and dry. They seem to lead to nothing, only mental gymnastics trying to find out things like, "What is judgment?" and "What is not judgment?" They appear to

be written for the purpose of using the mind, not for finding or arriving at the Truth.

People speak of Platonism as a philosophy. Plato simply expresses what he thought and knew about life and men. You hear of Neoplatonism, etc., etc. I must say I got a shock when I read Adhar Das describing my philosophy as "Aurobindoism"!

NIRODBARAN: It can't be helped. It is a convenient simplification.

SATYENDRA: They are entitled to call you a philosopher, for you have followed the tradition of the Acharyas and written about the Veda, the Upanishads and the Gita.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, that is true.

SATYENDRA: Besides, each one thinks you support his own school.

SRI AUROBINDO: The other day a follower of Nimbarka wrote to me that what I have said agrees very well with Nimbarka's philosophy. Even the followers of Madhwa say that I belong to them.

SATYENDRA: But if they knew your philosophy properly, perhaps all of them would attack you.

SRI AUROBINDO: I have said nothing new in my philosophy. I have not put my philosophy into the Gita. I have only tried to explain what seems to be the sense of the Gita in the light of my own experience. But I do admit to a new way of Yoga.

I can't say that I like Indian commentaries on philosophies. They are very academic and pedantic, an abstract rigmarole, a maze of words, the authors trying to get rid of whatever spiritual experiences they don't recognise. For example, Ramanuja says at one place that no such thing as consciousness exists and that nobody can experience pure consciousness! It is staggering.

SATYENDRA: You have made a translation of the Katha Upanishad. It is very fine. Why haven't you republished it since it first came out?

SRI AUROBINDO: It was translated when I was very young. I wanted to convey the literary merit of the original in the translation. But now a revision and many changes would be necessary.

SATYENDRA: This Upanishad speaks of three Nachiketa fires. What are they?

SRI AUROBINDO: One is the fire in the heart. Another is above, and the two ends of the third are not known but only the middle term. This middle term is the physical, vital and mental—Bhur, Bhuvar and Swar—including the highest mind regions. I wanted to explain other things also but at present the whole matter remains pending.

SATYENDRA: Why did you take up the Isha Upanishad?

SRI AUROBINDO: Because it agreed with my line of sadhana and experience.

SATYENDRA: So many paths have been tried and I believe the other Yogas also have some truth.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why not? All are parts of the same Truth.

SATYENDRA: But several sadhaks here tend to be so exclusive.

NIRODBARAN: That is because we have not got the Truth-Consciousness yet.

SRI AUROBINDO: Quite so.

19 JANUARY 1939

It was again the day of Dr. Rao's visit. Whenever he came, we had some fun, as he never forgot to bring up his pet subject: the removal of Sri Aurobindo's splints. In the course of the talk he remarked, in connection with the swollen knee, that all disease or illness is an inflammation. After he had gone, Sri Aurobindo asked, "In what sense is all illness an inflammation?" Nirodbaran explained as well as he could.

After this, Purani continued yesterday's topic: Aldous Huxley's ideas. He quoted from his book Ends and Means. Huxley suggests two ways of change. One is to change existing institutions of education, industry, etc., and thus bring about a change in the individual. For industries he suggests small industrial units federated in a central organisation, so as to do away with large-scale productions which are the root of all trouble. The other way is to change the individual and make him, as he puts it, a non-attached ideal man. Purani also mentioned a French author who advocated small industrial institutions.

SRI AUROBINDO: That was my idea too, which I proposed to Motilal: namely, a spiritual commune. I did not call it a commune but a Sangha, based on spirituality and living its own economic life. It would develop its small-scale industries, agriculture, etc., and have an interchange of products with other communes.

NIRODBARAN: Did you also give X the idea of the paper he is bringing out?

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't remember. I asked him to start handlooms and weaving.

NIRODBARAN: But now he is producing Khaddar.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is because of Gandhism, and he took it up after he had been cut off from us. We used to call our cloth Swadeshi; now they call it Khaddar.

SATYENDRA: Was the commune something like the Dayalbagh Centre? But there they don't seem to have much spirituality.

SRI AUROBINDO: That may be due to their large-scale productivity. I have heard also that Anukul Thakur has started to work out the same idea.

NIRODBARAN: Doesn't he belong to the Dayalbagh Centre?

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh no! He may be of what they call the Radhaswami School.

SATYENDRA: But to start that sort of commune, one must have some spiritual realisation first, and hence it will take a long time.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not necessarily. Obviously if one has to wait for spiritual realisation, especially the highest or supramental realisation, it will take time. Spiritual experience is enough for the purpose and that is not difficult to have. I told Motilal, "Spirituality must be the basis; otherwise your success will be your failure."

There were religious communes of this sort before. The Dukhobor commune in Russia was very powerful and very well-organised and very strong in its faith. Its members held together in spite of all persecution. At last they had to migrate to Canada. One of their tenets was nudism, which the Canadian Government didn't like and so they got into trouble with it.

Then there were the Mormons, who became famous in the United States. The name of their founder was Joseph Smith—a prosaic name for a prophet! But it was Brigham Young, a most remarkable man, who really made this commune. Curiously enough, one of their tenets was again unacceptable; it was polygamy. Their religion was based on the Old Testament. But when they were made to give up polygamy, they became quite like ordinary men. They lost their special characteristics. Mark Twain

said that when the chief was interrogated, he used to reply that he knew his children by numbers and not by their names!

There was yet another commune in America which didn't allow any marriage.

SATYENDRA: Do you know of any such commune in India?

SRI AUROBINDO: India? The Sikhs are the only community here organised on a religious basis.

Thakur Dayanand established or tried to establish an order of married Sannyasins. I don't know if sexual union was advocated too.

NIRODBARAN: I have heard that Anukul Thakur also adopted it for his disciples.

SRI AUROBINDO: Disciples are another matter.

SATYENDRA: I think it was for his Sannyasins as well, if I remember rightly.

SRI AUROBINDO: There is the same principle among the Vaishnavas too: they accept a Vaishnavi.

SATYENDRA: All sorts of attempts seem to have been made and one is driven to despair like the man who looking at Edward VII's bald head said, "I give it up! I give it up!" (*Laughter*) No hope now except your Supermind. Have you any idea how the Supermind will proceed?

SRI AUROBINDO: No idea. If one has an idea the result will be what has been in the past. We must leave the Supermind to work everything out.

SATYENDRA: But that sort of work has to be based on love; one must have love for everyone.

SRI AUROBINDO: Love is not enough. What is more important is the unity of consciousness.

SATYENDRA: The trouble is that as soon as one begins something one tends to become egocentric: quarrels start, like the "aggravations" in homoeopathy.

SRI AUROBINDO: And love also leads to quarrels. Nobody quarrels more than lovers do! (*Then looking at Purani*) You know the Latin proverb that each quarrel is a renewal of love? (*Laughter*) Love is a fine flower, but unity of consciousness is the root.

People become egocentric because, when they receive something of the higher power, they gather it into their vital being and turn it over to their lower nature. They think the power is their own.

When we were only a few people and the Ashram had not grown much, A and B tried to convert all sorts of people to spirituality. They were great propagandists. C and D were quiet. B caught anyone he could and made him do yoga and didn't consider such a thing as Adhikara. He once caught hold of a young sheepish Tamilian. After a few months of contact with us, we found that he was no longer a sheep. He became a lion—quarrelsome, violent—a great transformation had taken place in him! (*Laughter*) It was A who got hold of a politician here and made him what he is now. One thing he did, at any rate, was to make him get rid of all scruples about right and wrong, good and evil! This politician once said to Dr. LM, "It is impossible for me to fail. I am Sri Aurobindo's disciple." All say that he has power and that he is the one man who can do something if he wants to. It was from the Mother he got his power. He considers himself a Godman—to use an American phrase.

Even people staying here for some time get that egocentric outlook. Mrs. R writes, "What has Nakas come to? He is writing to us, 'Do this, do that' and keeps finding fault with us in our work." Of course, they were quarrelling in Japan too.

PURANI: We had a hard tussle with Gandhi's followers over the question of morality, etc. They think that going beyond the dualities of the world is immoral. All that does not correspond to their moral code is immoral.

SATYENDRA: That is the usual ethical standpoint.

SRI AUROBINDO: Of course all can't go beyond the dualities. The ethical standpoint is true in its own field. It follows a mental rule and so long as one cannot come into contact with the dynamic divine source of action in oneself, one has to be guided by a mental law of conduct. Otherwise one may take up the attitude, "There is no virtue, no sin. So let us indulge ourselves merrily!" What Krishna says in the Gita—"Abandon all dharmas"—is at the end of the Gita, not the beginning. And he does not say this only; he also says, "Take refuge in me." The stage at which the ethicists are is the sattwic. Most people have to pass through it. Only a very few can start from the beginning without the dualities.

SATYENDRA: Does the psychic being always want transformation? It is Doraiswamy's question. He says, "Yes, because the

psychic being is in the evolution, while the spirit can merge in Laya."

SRI AUROBINDO: The psychic being wants transformation if it is developed and in front. But it can also take any spiritual turn and not necessarily that towards transformation.

NIRODBARAN: What sort of transformation? Transformation of the psychic being itself or of the lower nature in general?

SATYENDRA: Of the psychic being itself.

SRI AUROBINDO: Many Yogis have had that. All saints had the psychic transformation: they have the pure Bhakta nature. But many spiritual men have not had such transformation. All spiritual men are not saints. Of course one can be both spiritual and saintly.

NIRODBARAN: You make a distinction between saints and spiritual men?

SRI AUROBINDO: Certainly. Saints are limited by their psychic realisation. The spiritual men remain above in the higher spiritual consciousness. The saints are Bhaktas.

SATYENDRA: It is not very clear to me, Sir.

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, the psychic being means the Purusha in the heart, not in the spirit. I never feel like a saint myself, though Maurice Magre calls me a saint and a philosopher. Krishna was not called a saint, and spiritual men may not behave like saints—say, for example, Durvasa. He may have many other things in him.

SATYENDRA: Saints are, I suppose, nearer to earth and are at the top of the human ladder. In our Yoga it seems one has to face a Kurukshetra, I mean an inner Kurukshetra, and everyone has to be a fighter like Arjuna.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not necessarily; it depends on the nature of the being. For instance, some people in their vital beings or during dreams fight with the attacking forces, while others call for protection. Those who have the psychic attitude need not fight. It is the vital and mental types that make the fighter: the mental type of course fights against ideas.

NIRODBARAN: Some people regard quarrelling with the Divine for the fulfilment of their aspiration as the psychic way.

SRI AUROBINDO: In that case all people here are psychic!

PURANI: I remember Dilip writing a long letter to you in which he refers to Ramprasad's song claiming that the Divine

should satisfy his demands because he has sacrificed everything for the Divine.

SRI AUROBINDO: Claim! – claim by what rights? His argument seemed to be, “You must give me the thing because I badly want it.”

NIRODBARAN: What did you reply to him?

SRI AUROBINDO: It was not addressed to me. It was addressed to Krishna.

NIRODBARAN: I see. Then I will ask him to write to you now.

SRI AUROBINDO: No, no, don't do that. In that case I shall have to be as hard as Krishna.

NIRODBARAN: They say Shiva is a very kind and generous god and very easily gives boons. Is it true?

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't know. Very inconveniently he gives boons to the demons also and then has somehow to wriggle out. He is a god who doesn't seem to care for consequences; Vishnu has to come afterwards to save the situation.

SATYENDRA: Krishna is hard to please, they say.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes.

PURANI: Talking of Krishna reminds me of X. They say he has turned a Buddhist now.

SRI AUROBINDO: Good Lord!

PURANI: He had such a fervour and devotion for Krishna.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't understand why he should have become a Buddhist. Living with one's realisations as in a fortress, one can gather and add whatever knowledge one wants to one's original line of sadhana. It is not at all necessary to give up Bhakti for Knowledge. After all that ground gained, one can add more and more.

The European mind is much taken up with Buddhism. Magre was first a Buddhist. Blavatsky was much influenced by it. Next, when the Europeans understood Shankara they considered that there was nothing more in India than Shankara's Vedanta. Buddhism is most severe and exacting. It is one of the most difficult paths, a path of hard Tapasya.

NIRODBARAN: By the way, somebody said that woman is no problem to him. That seems to me an overconfidence. Is there any sex-danger even after a true realisation?

SRI AUROBINDO: What is true realisation? You have not heard of Yogabhrasta (a fall from Yoga)?

20 JANUARY 1939

NIRODBARAN: Dilip says, about the subject of X's becoming a Buddhist from a Vaishnava, that it is not like that. He does not want to belong to any group or sect.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is understandable.

PURANI: Nothing seems to be given out in the papers about the interview between Chamberlain and Mussolini. Both parties say they are satisfied with the results.

SRI AUROBINDO: I can't understand the present English policy. I don't know what England is after. France is being led by England—she is stuck to her like a tail. They say Mussolini is waiting for Franco's victory in Spain and then he will present his terms to France. Franco's victory will be dangerous for France. But it is very difficult to see how England profits by this. For as soon as Italy and Germany have crushed France, the next victim will be England. England knows very well Mussolini's ambition to create an Italian Empire, and that means he will try to regain all that once belonged to Italy. She is deliberately raising Hitler and Mussolini against France and letting her down. I don't know why, unless the three are going to share the empire of France and then England may try to set Hitler and Mussolini against each other. That will be in line with her traditional self-centred policy of balance of power. But it is a very risky game.

NIRODBARAN: But is it possible? Can England remain aloof when France breaks with the other powers?

SRI AUROBINDO: Why not? Chamberlain has said that so long as England's interests are not involved she is not obliged to fight. She will say that Italy's demands have not been satisfied and so she has gone to war and Germany has joined her: there was no aggression on Italy's part. Hence England is not obliged to come to the aid of France. Any number of excuses can be given. Daladier told Suryakumari's friend, who is also a friend of Daladier's, that he had to betray Czechoslovakia because Chamberlain told him he would support him so long as it was diplomatically possible but in case of war France should not count on England. This piece of information must be authentic, coming as it does from Daladier's own friend.

PURANI: I wonder why Flandin wants to support Franco when Blum is against him. You know Flandin even telegraphed to

Mussolini his congratulations, etc. Hitler counts on him as a friend. Does Flandin want to join the Rome-Berlin Axis and thus keep England out?

SRI AUROBINDO: How is that possible unless France satisfies Italy's demands? After the Spanish question is settled, Italy is almost sure to claim Tunis, Nice and Djibouti. Is Flandin prepared to give them? Italy wants her empire in Africa. So Tunis and Djibouti are essential points for her and she also wants to be master of the Mediterranean.

Blum is a useless fellow. It was he who as Premier applied non-intervention in Spain.

No, no, it is sheer imbecility to expect that sort of thing.

At present it seems that two people are brandishing their arms against everybody and the rest are somehow trying to save themselves. The one man who has seen through the whole thing is Roosevelt, but he is too far off and he is not sure of the support of the American people.

NIRODBARAN: What about Russia?

SRI AUROBINDO: Russia is unreliable. One doesn't know its military strength. At one time it was supposed to have the biggest air-force. But according to Lindbergh, it doesn't appear to be so. The inner state of Germany also is not known. They are trying to conceal everything as far as possible.

PURANI: Jawaharlal says that Hitler and his generals didn't expect non-resistance from Austria. They were all very much surprised.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, the generals were opposed to Hitler's plan, for they were not prepared to fight. Now Hitler will say, "Have you seen that I am right? Things have happened just as I told you."

PURANI: Jawaharlal also said that their threatened attack against Czechoslovakia was mainly bluff. All the tanks and machine-guns were only a show.

SRI AUROBINDO: This can't be reliable news. The Germans are too disciplined for such a thing.

PURANI: There is some trouble in Holland. Germany is threatening Holland with cutting off the trade, etc., and establishing a trade-route through Antwerp instead of Amsterdam.

SRI AUROBINDO: If that takes place, it will make Chamberlain fight in spite of himself and stop talking of peace. England doesn't

want any German navy in the North Sea. But Germany won't put it there unless she wants war with England.

Then Purani spoke of Russia's canal scheme to connect herself with Asia and also with the Arctic Sea. After that came a mention of some American lady visiting the Ashram in the company of Miss Margaret Wilson and finally some talk in a lighter vein.

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." (*Laughter*)

SRI AUROBINDO: This instance of two reminds me of a joke about Hugo. 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 repeated to Hugo, he said, "But why Balzac?"

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."

21 JANUARY 1939

Again Dr. Rao's visit day. As usual he began the massage and asked Sri Aurobindo about the pain in his knee-joint.

SRI AUROBINDO: The pain is still there.

DR. RAO: That is because you are moving the leg after a long time. It will disappear when you are accustomed to it.

SRI AUROBINDO: Accustomed to the pain? (*Laughter*)

Dr. Rao could not catch the joke and was a little embarrassed by our hearty laughter. After the massage was over, the Mother came in and we sat down to meditate for about ten minutes. After a while

Dr. Rao asked Satyendra if he could stay longer. Satyendra told him he could ask the Mother. Then Satyendra himself conveyed the question to her. She smiled. Then, as it was about 7.00 p.m. and she got up to go for the general meditation, she said to Rao, "Are you coming? I am going to the meditation." Rao jumped up and followed the Mother.

The talk turned to local politics and afterwards Indian politics and Gandhi and non-violence and Hitlerism.

SRI AUROBINDO: If Gandhi met Hitler, Hitler would probably say to him, "You follow your inner voice, Mr. Gandhi, and I my own." And there is no reason to say he would be wrong, for inner voices may differ and one kind of voice may be good and necessary for one person while the very opposite may be the same for another. The Cosmic Spirit may have a certain thing for Hitler and lead him in the way he is going, whereas it may decide differently in another case.

NIRODBARAN: That may end in a clash between the two and the breaking of the vessels.

SATYENDRA: What of that? Something good may come out of it.

PURANI: I am afraid this would lead to fatalism or belief in destiny.

SRI AUROBINDO: It may. There have been people who have believed in fate, destiny or whatever else you may call it. Napoleon III used to say, "So long as something is necessary to be done by me, it will be done in any case and when that necessity ceases I shall be thrown by the wayside like an outworn vessel." And that is exactly what happened to him. Napoleon Bonaparte also believed in fate.

SATYENDRA: Yes. When somebody questioned him why, if he believed in fate, he went on planning, he replied, "It is fated that I should plan."

SRI AUROBINDO: All men who are great and strong and powerful believe in some higher force greater than themselves moving them. Socrates used to call this force his Daemon. Daemon means divine being. It is curious how sometimes even in small things one depends on the voice. Once Socrates was walking with a disciple. When they were about to take a turn, the disciple said, "Let us go along this route." Socrates replied,

“No, my Daemon asks me to take that other.” The disciple didn’t agree and pursued his own way. After he had gone a little distance he was attacked by a herd of pigs and trodden down by them.

There are some people who don’t follow the inner voice but the inner light. The Quakers believe in that.

NIRODBARAN: Do they see the light?

SRI AUROBINDO: I don’t know; but someone has said, “See that your light is not darkness.”

The strange thing is that this inner voice doesn’t give any reason; it only says, “Do this” or “Do that” and “If you don’t do it, bad results will follow.” Strangely enough, when you don’t listen to it, bad results do follow. Lele used to say that whenever he didn’t listen to his inner voice he met with pain and suffering.

PURANI: But there are many kinds of voices owing to the forces on different planes and it is extremely difficult to distinguish which is right, the true inner voice. There may be voices from mental, vital and subtle-physical planes. Moreover, in the same man the voices may differ.

SRI AUROBINDO: Quite true. A friend of Hitler’s said about him that what Hitler said today he contradicted the next day. I also heard a voice asking me to come to Pondicherry. But it was not an inner voice: it came from above.

SATYENDRA: Cannot one be mistaken in obeying these voices?

SRI AUROBINDO: It was impossible to make a mistake or to think of disobeying that voice which came to me. There are some voices about which there is no possibility of any doubt or mistake. Charu wanted me to go to France so that he might have no further trouble, I suppose. When I arrived at Chandernagore, he refused to receive me and threw me on to Motilal.

NIRODBARAN: But why should he receive you?

SRI AUROBINDO: Because as a revolutionary he was obliged to do so.

NIRODBARAN: Was he a revolutionary also?

SRI AUROBINDO: Good Lord, we were together in jail. But perhaps his jail experience frightened him. He was at the beginning a very ardent revolutionary.

PURANI: Nolini says he was weeping and weeping in jail. The jail authorities thought that he couldn’t be a revolu-

tionary when he wept so much, and so they let him off.
(Laughter)

SRI AUROBINDO: No, that was not the reason. It was by the intervention of the French Government, I think, that he got his release. At the beginning he was not only himself an ardent revolutionary but also egging others on to revolution. Barin once walked into his house, gave him a long lecture on revolution and converted him in one day!

PURANI: Yes, Barin had intensity and fire at that time. Once I saw him at Baroda with my brother. They were discussing revolutionary plans. I saw that fire in his eyes. I have heard that Nivedita also was some sort of a revolutionary.

SRI AUROBINDO: What do you mean by "some sort"? She was one of the revolutionary leaders. She went about visiting various places to come into contact with the people. She was open, frank and talked freely of her revolutionary plans to everybody. There was no concealment about her. Whenever she used to speak on revolution, it was her very soul, her true personality that came out. Her whole mind and life expressed itself thus. Yoga was Yoga, but it was revolutionary work that seemed intended for her. That is fire! Her book, *Kali the Mother*, is very inspiring but revolutionary and not at all non-violent.

She went about among the Thakurs of Rajputana trying to preach to them revolution. At that time everybody wanted some kind of revolution. I myself met several Rajput Thakurs who, unsuspected by the Government, had revolutionary ideas and tendencies. One Thakur, Ram Singh, who joined our movement, was afterwards caught and put in jail. He suddenly died there in a short time. Moropant said, "He died out of fright." But he was not a man to be frightened. They may have poisoned him. Moropant, you know, turned afterwards a Moderate. More than one Indian batallion were ready to help us. I knew a Punjabi sentry at Alipore who spoke to me about the revolution. (Turning to Purani) Do you know one Mandale?

PURANI: With spectacles?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes.

PURANI: I knew him. He became a quiet man later and settled down in life.

SRI AUROBINDO: It was he who introduced me through someone else to the Secret Society where I came into contact with Tilak and others.

NIRODBARAN: Gandhi once criticised Nivedita as being volatile and mercurial. *The Modern Review* violently protested and he had to recant.

SRI AUROBINDO: Nivedita volatile? What nonsense! She was a solid worker.

Once she came to the Gaekwar and told him to join the revolution and said, "If you have anything more to ask, you can ask Mr. Ghose." But the Gaekwar never talked politics with me. By the way, he said about me, between my Swadeshi and early Pondicherry periods, "Mr. Ghose is an extinct volcano now. He has become a Yogi."

One thing only about Nivedita I couldn't understand. She had an admiration for Gokhale. I don't understand how a revolutionary could admire him. On one occasion she was much exercised over a threat to his life. She came to me and said, "Mr. Ghose, is it one of your men who is doing this?" I said, "No." She was much relieved and said, "Then it must be a free-lance."

The first time she came to me she said, "I hear, Mr. Ghose, you are a worshipper of Shakti, Force." There was no non-violence about her. She had an artistic side too. Khaserao Jadhav and I went to receive her at the station. Seeing the Dharamsala near the station she exclaimed, "How beautiful!" While looking at the College building she cried, "How horrible!" Khaserao said later, "She must be a little mad."

PURANI: That College building is an imitation of Eton.

SRI AUROBINDO: But Eton has no dome.

PURANI: It is a combination of modern with ancient architecture.

SRI AUROBINDO: At any rate it is the ugliest dome possible.

The Ramakrishna Mission was a little afraid of Nivedita's political activities and asked her to keep them separate from its work.

PURANI: What about her yogic achievements?

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't know. Whenever we met we spoke about politics and revolution. But her eyes showed a power of concentration and revealed a capacity for going into trance.

NIRODBARAN: She came to India with the idea of doing Yoga.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, but she took up politics as a part of Vivekananda's work. Her book is one of the best on Vivekananda. Vivekananda himself had ideas about political work and had spells of revolutionary fervour. Once he had a vision which corresponded to something like the Maniktola Garden.

It is curious how many Sannyasins have thought of India's freedom. Maharshi's young disciples were revolutionaries; our Yogananda's Guru also had revolutionary ideas; Thakur Dayanand was a revolutionary, I think, and the Sannyasin who spoke about the Uttara Yogi, the Yogi from the North, was another.

PURANI: Brahmananda of Chandod spoke of driving away the British.

SRI AUROBINDO: Is that so? I didn't know it.

PURANI: It is said that Nivedita wept bitterly because she found that everything the revolutionaries had done to awake the people had quieted down after the arrest of Tilak.

22 JANUARY 1939

Sri Aurobindo surprised Nirodbaran by asking him, "What about Dilip's fast?" The day before, Nirodbaran had told Sri Aurobindo that Dilip would fast on the following day which was his birthday. But Nirodbaran had forgotten all about it.

NIRODbaran: In the morning Dilip took bread, butter, tea, etc., and at noon I hear he went in for a light meal.

SRI AUROBINDO: Fasting with bread and milk?

CHAMPAKLAL: People in Gujarat consider that they can take bread and milk on a fast.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is also the custom in Bengal, isn't it? It reminds me of a story. Nevinson went to see Tilak and said, "Mr. Tilak received me naked in his loincloth." (*Laughter*)

At the end of this talk, Purani entered.

NIRODbaran: Purani seems to be bubbling with news.

SRI AUROBINDO: What is the news?

PURANI: No news today. I read two fine jokes on Soviet Russia in a book called *Inside Europe*. I looked up also what

Lindbergh has said on the Soviet air-fleet. He says, "The Soviet air-fleet is not so powerful as is thought."

SRI AUROBINDO: In what way is it not powerful?

PURANI: He doesn't say anything more.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is very vague. Does he mean that the aeroplanes are not made of sound material or that the pilots are not well trained? If that is all he says, he doesn't give any information.

In the war between Russia and Japan, the Japanese admitted that the Russian artillery was remarkable: it didn't miss the mark; but the infantry was not so good, for when they got a good opportunity they failed to take advantage of it. On the other hand, the Japanese army is perhaps the best in the world. In spite of overwhelming numbers against them in China, they have been able to conquer. Chiang Kai-shek had trumpeted that he would defeat the Japanese in a very short time. They didn't give any reply, but at the end of each such defeat we find them farther advanced in China than before.

PURANI: They say the Japanese are not good in the air. They missed their targets many times.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't know about that. The Japanese are good at concentrating on one thing at a time, but aeronautics requires concentration on many points at once.

PURANI: Mussolini is asking all Italians to close down their firms in Djibouti and he does not want to send anything by railway: thus he wants to starve the people. He is also trying to cut off the railway that connects Djibouti with Abyssinia and use another road through Eritrea to Asmara.

SRI AUROBINDO: That would not make France give up Djibouti. Djibouti is a sea-port and a connecting link between France and her eastern colonies. Even if the Premier and Flandin want to give it up, the French people won't.

After this there was a change in the talk. An American lady's visit to the Ashram was mentioned. Sri Aurobindo said, "She was much impressed by our gardens and other things. She considered the Ashram to be the work of a genius and probably thought that genius doesn't need any finance." A few other remarks were made and then a new subject came up.

NIRODBARAN: We spoke of inner voices yesterday. Is there any standard by which one can judge that a voice is the right one?

SRI AUROBINDO: What standard? There is no such standard. How can you judge whether a voice is right or wrong?

NIRODBARAN: Then is Hitler right when he hears a voice and follows it?

SRI AUROBINDO: Right in what sense? Morally?

PURANI: Perhaps Nirodbaran means spiritually right.

SRI AUROBINDO: How can one say that Hitler's voice is not right? He has seen that by following it he has been able to get Austria and Czechoslovakia and has been successful in many other things. As I said, the Cosmic Spirit may want him to go that way. Even from the standpoint of ethics, one can't say Hitler is immoral. He is very restricted as regards food, is supposed to have no wife or mistress and leads a very controlled life in all respects. He shows qualities which are considered moral. Robespierre was also a moral man and yet he killed many people.

NIRODBARAN: Then what did you mean when you spoke of a true voice?

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh, that is the psychic voice. But there can be many other voices from many planes. And how will you say which is right? What would you say of Lord Curzon's decision?

NIRODBARAN: For the Bengal Partition?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. Was he right? He thought he had the right inspiration in what he was doing, while others thought he was quite wrong and yet but for his decision India would not be half as free as she is today. So the Cosmic Spirit may after all have led him to do this in order to bring about that result.

There is a Cabbalist prophecy: the Golden Age will come when the Jews will be driven out and persecuted everywhere. So Hitler by his mass persecution of the Jews may be bringing about the Golden Age!

NIRODBARAN: Then has one no responsibility? Can one do as one likes? In that case one becomes a fatalist.

SRI AUROBINDO: No, one can't do as one likes. Everyone is not Hitler and can't do what Hitler does. One acts according to one's nature. Your question reminds me of the story of my grandmother. She said, "God has made such a bad world. If I could meet Him I would teach Him what good laws are." At this my grandfather said, "Yes, that is true. But God has so made His laws that if you intend to meet Him with this attitude you won't get near Him." (*Laughter*)

When we say that Hitler is possessed by a vital power, it is a statement of fact, not a moral judgment. His being possessed is clear from what he does and the way he does it.

But the spiritual point of view is quite different from the moral. There is no question of right or wrong there. One goes above all standards and looks from a higher plane. But then it is essential to have the perception and feeling of the Divine in all. One can see the Divine in all behind the veil of the Gunas, the Nature qualities. From the spiritual plane one finds that the Gita is right about the Gunas and that man is made to do one thing or another by the action of the Gunas. That is why Ramakrishna said about a visiting Sannyasi that he was tamasic Narayana, God inert. But when another Vedantin came along and brought a concubine with him, Ramakrishna could not keep to the same viewpoint. He asked the Vedantin, "Why do you keep a concubine?" The Vedantin replied, "Everything is Maya. So what does it matter what I do?" Ramakrishna said, "Then I spit on your Vedanta." But logically the Vedantin was right. So long as you believe everything is Maya, you can do as you like.

PURANI: What is the truth in the Vama Marga, the left-hand path of Tantra?

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't know. It must have been prescribed with the idea of taking up the lower forces and pulling them high up.

But to go back to our original point about the law of Nature. I remember a young Sannyasi who came to Baroda. He had long nails and used to sit under the trees. Deshpande and I went to see him. I asked him, "What is the standard of action?" He replied, "There is no standard. The thief may be right in stealing because it is his dharma." Deshpande was very angry to hear that. I said, "It is only a point of view."

But all this doesn't mean that there is no consequence for one's action. As Christ said, offences come, but woe unto him by whom the offence cometh. There is a law of being which throws back upon you the murder, the persecution you carry out. When you inflict suffering on others out of self-will, the suffering will come back to you. That is the law of Karma.

PURANI: Somnath Maitra used to quote to me that sloka of Duryodhana: "I know what is dharma, I know what is not dharma, but I cannot gather force to do what I should."

SRI AUROBINDO: The whole question arises when you want to change yourself or change others. Then you say, "This should not be; that should go" and so on. You introduce a rule of the mind into the vital world; but when you go above the mind, you come in contact with your Spirit and the nature of that Spirit is Light, Truth, Purity. When you observe discipline, it is for the Spirit, not for the sake of a mental rule. If you want to attain the standard of Purity, you have to reject what comes in the way. So also about lying. You have to stop lying if you want the Spirit's Truth; you stop not because of the mental principle of right and wrong but for the sake of the Spirit. There are many parts in one's nature. One part may try to reject things that contradict one another and that are contrary to the change desired but another part may prevent it. As the Roman poet said, "I see the better and approve of it, but I follow the worse."¹

PURANI: The Vedanta says, "There are two sets of teeth in an elephant—one for showing, the other for chewing."

SRI AUROBINDO: All this doesn't mean that there should be no moral standard. Humanity requires a certain standard. It helps its progress. But from the spiritual point of view, that may also be necessary. Even the Asuras have a place. Ravana had one. As they say, it takes all sorts to make a world.

But again, all this does not mean that one should not recognise other planes. There is the vital plane whose law is force and success. If you have force you win; if you have speed you outrun others. The laws of the mind come in to act as a means of balance. They balance diverse things to make a mental-vital standard.

If you go above the vital and mental planes, you come to a point where the Gita's "*Sarvadharmam parityajya*", "Abandon all dharmas", becomes the principle. But there if you leave out the last portion of the sloka—"Mamekam saranam vraja", "Take refuge in me"—then you follow your ego and you fall; you become either an Asura or a lunatic or an animal. Even the animals have some sense of right and wrong. That is very well shown in Kipling's *Jungle Book*. Have you read it?

NIRODBARAN: No.

SRI AUROBINDO: Kipling shows how the pack falls on the one that fails to keep up the general standard. By human contact the animals develop their sense of right and wrong more and more.

¹ "*Videō meliora proboque, deteriora sequor.*"

At this point the Mother came in with Sri Aurobindo's dinner. So we stopped.

23 JANUARY 1939

The previous day's discussion about destiny, fate and the Cosmic Spirit had bewildered Nirodbaran. He wanted to get out of his bewilderment by asking a few more questions. But he was hesitant and expressed his feeling to Purani.

PURANI: Nirodbaran intends to ask you a question but he hesitates. It is the contradiction in what you said yesterday that he is unable to understand.

NIRODBARAN: Once you said that the Cosmic Spirit might be leading Hitler on the way he is going and then you said that the Cosmic Spirit is not responsible for Hitler's actions. These two statements seem contradictory to me.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is generally the case when one states some truth: one has to express it in contradictory terms.

PURANI: Nirodbaran expected intellectual consistency in your views.

SRI AUROBINDO: Truth is not always consistent. But contradiction here does not mean that there is no responsibility or no morality, no right and wrong. The individual is responsible because he accepts the action of the Gunas, the qualities of Nature.

NIRODBARAN: But is it not the Cosmic Spirit that makes him accept them?

SRI AUROBINDO: No, the Cosmic Spirit doesn't act directly. It acts through the individual, not the true individual but the individual in Nature, what may be called the individual personality. The personality, of course, is not the Person: it is something formed in the mental, vital and physical nature.

NIRODBARAN: Well, if the Cosmic Spirit doesn't act through the Person, it acts through the personality or nature. If it is acting through my nature, where is my responsibility?

SRI AUROBINDO: But the individual in Nature has the freedom to accept Nature or to refuse. Arjuna refused to fight and eighteen chapters of the Gita followed to make him fight. It is the Purusha in the individual that can withdraw its sanction from

Prakriti and then Prakriti cannot act according to its own movement. Real liberation comes when the Purusha awakes and feels itself free and lord.

NIRODBARAN: But generally the Purusha is bound.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, usually the Purusha consents to Prakriti. But it can refuse consent and stand apart. It can be free only by getting out of the evolution—that is, by being free from the working of the ego and nature-personality.

The Cosmic Spirit is not in the evolution whereas the individual is. It contains in itself both good and evil.

NIRODBARAN: Then it is responsible for evil.

SRI AUROBINDO: First of all, it does not have a human standard of good and evil. You can't say that it is responsible for the one and not the other. Through good and evil, light and darkness, the Cosmic Spirit works out its purpose.

NIRODBARAN: Why is Hitler made to pursue this path of violence, repression, etc.?

SRI AUROBINDO: Because he has to evolve through his own nature.

PURANI: When the freedom of the Purusha is won, then does it become possible for the individual to look beyond the Cosmic Spirit to the Transcendent?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes; that is to say, instead of being an instrument of ignorant Nature, you become the instrument of the Divine.

PURANI: Do you mean by the Cosmic Spirit the Impersonal Consciousness?

SRI AUROBINDO: No, the Cosmic Spirit is a personality but not in our narrow sense. It is both dynamic and static, Saguna and Nirguna, the Nirguna supporting the Saguna.

PURANI: You have said that the psychic being is also a personality.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, there is the psychic Purusha.

PURANI: Does the psychic being develop from birth to birth?

SRI AUROBINDO: It is not the psychic being itself that develops. But it guides the evolution of the individual by increasing the psychic element in the nature of the individual.

PURANI: If the psychic being is a spark of the Divine, then its function is the same as that of the Vedic Agni as "the leader of the journey".

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, Agni is the god of the psychic and leads the journey upward.

PURANI: How does the psychic carry the personality formed in this life into another?

SRI AUROBINDO: After death it gathers its elements and carries them onwards to another birth. But it is not the same personality that is born. People easily misunderstand these things, especially when put in terms of the mind, because the process is very subtle. The past personality is taken only as the basis and a new personality is formed according to its own requirements in future evolution. If it were the same personality, then it would act exactly in the same manner and there would be no meaning in that.

PURANI: Does the experience of the Cosmic Spirit correspond to the experience of the Overmind?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes; but you can have the experience of the Cosmic Consciousness on any level. Generally you have it on the level of the Higher Mind where you feel the two aspects—the dynamic and the static—as separate. But as you go above, you find the Overmind arching over all other levels and the two aspects are gathered together in it and combined in the same consciousness.

(*Turning to Nirodbaran*) To come back to Hitler: Hitler is responsible so long as he feels he is Hitler. In his youth, he was considered an amusing crank and nobody took any notice of him. It is the vital possession that gives him his size and greatness. Without this vital power he would be a crudely amiable fellow with some hobbies and eccentricities. It is in this kind of person whose psychic is undeveloped and weak that a possession is possible. There is nothing in the being that can resist the Power. In his latest photographs I find he is becoming more and more criminal and going down very fast. In two photographs there was the psychic element a little in front. One showed him weeping before his mother's grave—but that was more fictitious than real. The other showing his visit to his old village was genuine; he felt something there.

NIRODBARAN: Has he what you once called the "London-cabman's psychic"?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. Mussolini has comparatively a better developed psychic and a strong vital. In his latest photograph he seems to have weakened. Either he is unwell or he is aging or perhaps he has misused his powers and hence the change.

NIRODBARAN: Does Hitler feel responsible for his actions?

SRI AUROBINDO: He feels responsible not only for himself but for the whole of Germany!

PURANI: And for all the "Aryans"!

SRI AUROBINDO: Of course, all Aryans are Germans.

To get rid of responsibility you must get rid of ego, that is to say, of the mental, vital and other personalities.

NIRODBARAN: If one could act without responsibility one would be free.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is not easy. You can try and see. You may say you are not responsible but internally you will feel that you are.

In order to be free from this responsibility you must become free first in consciousness. There are three ways of attaining that freedom: first, by separating the Purusha from Prakriti and realising its freedom from it; second, by realising the Self, Atman or Spirit free from the universe, the cosmic nature; third, by identifying with the Transcendent above—realising the Paramatman. You can also have freedom by merging with the Shunyam, the Void, of the Buddhists.

SATYENDRA: In the second and third ways, does the Purusha remain the witness?

SRI AUROBINDO: Not necessarily. It may in the first realisation because the Purusha separates itself from Prakriti and is then the witness. In the second realisation, that of the Self, you need not be the witness of the universe or its movement. The Self may remain ingathered without witnessing anything. There are many conditions into which the Spirit may pass.

A certain kind of Nirvana experience is necessary even for this Yoga. That is, the world must become in a way nothing to you because, as it is constituted, it is a work of ignorance. Then only can you enter the true creation and bring into existence here the world of Truth and Light.

SATYENDRA: When Krishna in the Gita says, "You will find the Self in all and all in the Self and then in me", what Self is meant?

SRI AUROBINDO: It is the Brahmic Consciousness. You see the one Consciousness in all and you see all contained in the one Self and then you rise above to the realisation of the One that is both personal and impersonal and beyond either.

DR. BECHARLAL: Is it true that men with a spiritual bent are born with Adhikara, fitness?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes.

DR. BECHARLAL: Can one acquire Adhikara?

SRI AUROBINDO: Certainly. When we say a man is not ready, we mean he has not got the Adhikara but he can acquire it by preparing himself.

SATYENDRA: When one thinks of this problem of manifestation, one gets tired of it.

SRI AUROBINDO: Being tired is not enough. One must have the power to be free either by moving out of the evolution or by attaining to something that would not bind one to the evolution. Many Yogis, when they go beyond into the Spirit of cosmic consciousness, allow the cosmic nature to act through them without any sense of individual responsibility. They remain concentrated in or identified with the higher consciousness and their nature sometimes moves in an uncontrolled way; then you find them using the foul language of which Dilip complains. The Yogis are not bound by manners or the rules of decency. They act like Jada, Bala, Unmatta or Pishacha, because their consciousness is linked up with something above while their nature is allowed to act freely.¹ When one attains that higher consciousness, one doesn't regret, saying, "I didn't do that which was good, I did that which was evil."

Another difficulty—most of the Yogis are very bad philosophers and can't put their experience into mental terms. But that doesn't mean they have no real experience. They get what they want and are satisfied with it and don't care for intellectual developments. When you look for things in a Yogi which he never cared to have, you get disappointed like Lady Batesman who objects to Maharshi's spitting on the floor. Such actions have no bearing on one's spirituality.

SATYENDRA: Can you say that in the aspect of Sat (Pure Being) Chit (Consciousness) is absent?

¹ "...the outer nature may become the field of an apparent incoherence, although all within is luminous with the Self. Thus we become outwardly inert and inactive, moved by circumstance or forces but not self-mobile (*jadavat*), even though the consciousness is enlightened within, or as a child (*balavat*) though within is a plenary self-knowledge, or as one inconsequent in thought and impulse (*unmattavat*) though within is an utter calm and serenity, or as the wild and disordered soul (*pishachavat*) though inwardly there is the purity and poise of the Spirit. — Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*.

SRI AUROBINDO: No—even in what you call Pure Being, Consciousness is there: only, it is held back or inactive, so to speak, while the Sat aspect is in front.

PURANI: You have so often said that Sachchidananda is a triune reality and no part of it can be thought of as separate.

SATYENDRA: The difficulty arises when one has seen many experiments of different systems. One finds great difficulty in choosing among them.

PURANI: Does one always choose by the mind?

SATYENDRA: There is no other go. Cannot the study of different systems lead one to knowledge?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, it can help in making an approach to the path of knowledge. Philosophy is an attempt to explain to the human mind what is really beyond it. But to the Western mind thought is the highest thing. If you can think out an explanation of the universe, you have reached the goal of mental activity. The Westerners use the mind for the sake of using the mind. That leads nowhere. (*To Nirodbaran*) So you see, the universe is not a question of logic but of consciousness.

NIRODBARAN: But is the study of philosophy indispensable? One can know only by experience.

SRI AUROBINDO: You can know by experience all that philosophy has to teach and something more which it cannot give.

SATYENDRA: The Sankhya division between Purusha and Prakriti is in one sense sharp and helps one to get away from bondage to Prakriti.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, it is categorical. They believe in two realities, Purusha and Prakriti, as the final elements. Sankhya and Buddhism were first appreciated by Europe because of their sharp distinction between Purusha, who is consciousness, and Prakriti, which they believe to be Jada, inscient. According to Sankhya, Prakriti is Jada and it is the light of the consciousness of the Purusha that makes it appear conscious; they believe that even Buddhi, intellect, is Jada. We in this Yoga need not accept it. The Westerners liked Buddhism for its strong rationalism. Its logic led up to Shunyam, the void: the non-being state is the aim and there is a strong note of agnosticism in Buddhism, which appeals to the Europeans. In Buddhism, the universe is something that hangs in the air, so to speak. You don't know on what basis it stands.

There is a certain similarity also between Sankhya and Science, for in Science they believe that evolution begins with the Jada, the Inconscient, and goes up the scale of consciousness.

SATYENDRA: We have so much darkness in us that we can't empty it out by our little efforts. It seems even a little light will do.

SRI AUROBINDO: No, a little light, a mere candle-light like mental illumination will not do. There must be the full sunlight. It is a slow process. If you have an opening, more and more light can come.

NIRODBARAN: How shall one accept the light if one doesn't know what it is?

SRI AUROBINDO: That means something in you doesn't want it. Otherwise there is hardly any difficulty. So far as the world is concerned, it has always refused to accept the light when it came. The test for knowing whether the world is ready or not for the Divine is its acceptance or refusal of the light. For example, when Christ was sentenced, Pilate had the right to pardon one of the four condemned. He asked the Jews whom they wanted to be freed. They wanted the robber Barabbas to be released and not Christ. Nowadays scholars say that Barabbas was not a robber but a national hero, or, if a robber, one like Robin Hood, I suppose, or else a political opponent. At any rate, a romantic robber was preferred to the Son of God, or a political opponent to the teacher of Truth.

NIRODBARAN: You said experience brings knowledge. But sometimes when I feel a pressure in the head I don't know if it is a working of the higher consciousness.

SRI AUROBINDO: You will know it slowly. Till then you have to accept it from the Guru. First Shravana (hearing) and then Manana (remembering), as they say.

24 JANUARY 1939

There was some discussion of local politics and a reference to a turn in the fortunes of a political leader. Then we came to general topics.

SRI AUROBINDO: There is a Greek saying that when one becomes too fortunate and powerful, he becomes insolent and commits excesses and that strikes against the throne of God and then retribution begins. X ought to have known that. Y was never

like this. He was never insolent, never pushed things too far. When somebody asked him to arrest one of his opponents, he replied, "*Ca, c'est une mauvaise politique.*" ("That's bad politics.")

Hitler also is pushing things too far. That is why he cannot last long.

There is a famous Greek story about Polycrates, a tyrant of Samos. Do you know it? This tyrant wanted to make friends with another tyrant. The latter replied, "You are too fortunate. You must sacrifice something or have some little misfortune to compensate for your good luck. Otherwise I can't ally myself with you." Polycrates threw his most precious ring into a river as a sacrifice. The ring was swallowed by a fish. That fish was caught by a fisherman and brought with the ring inside it to Polycrates. When the other tyrant heard about it, he said, "You are too lucky. I will never ally myself with you." Polycrates was later killed by his people who had risen in revolt. "The ring of Polycrates" is a proverbial expression in English.

A Roman poet says something like, "The giants fall by their own mass." There is a similar idea in India: "The Asuras are too heavy for the earth to bear." But I must say some Asuras are clever enough to escape and flourish in spite of proverbs!

PURANI: Can it be affirmed that the Asuras by their action meddle too much in the law of evolution or that they contradict the very fundamental urge of humanity?

SRI AUROBINDO (*after keeping silent for a time*): There is no such general law. The thing is that the Asuras can't keep a balance. The law that demands balance then strikes.

A long silence followed. Nirodbaran, after some hesitation, blurted out a question that had been revolving in his mind.

NIRODBARAN: Somebody has asked: Did Vivekananda bring into Ramakrishna's work a spirit not intended by Ramakrishna?

SRI AUROBINDO: In what way?

NIRODBARAN: He spoke of service to humanity.

SRI AUROBINDO: But was that Ramakrishna's idea which Vivekananda followed? Did Ramakrishna ask him to do service to humanity and did Vivekananda bring into this work what was not intended by his Master?

NIRODBARAN: As far as I remember, Ramakrishna spoke of *loka hita*, "the good of the world".

SRI AUROBINDO: But that is not the same as service of humanity. The Gita also asks us to work for the good of the world. *Loka hita* can be done in many ways.

PURANI: So far as I know, Ramakrishna didn't say anything about service of humanity. The phrase *daridra narayana*—"God the poor"—was Vivekananda's. It seems not all the disciples of Ramakrishna were agreeable to the idea. But some submitted, saying, "Vivekananda should know best."

SATYENDRA: Even from those who didn't object, all didn't take active part in the service. Brahmananda,¹ for example. We have heard that his spiritual realisation was higher than Vivekananda's.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, I think he was spiritually higher. I once met him when I went to see Belur Math. He asked me about some letter he had received from the Government. I don't remember what it was about. I advised him to keep silent and not give any reply.

PURANI: Nowadays in many places people feed the poor. On the birthdays of saints and Yogis, there is what Vivekananda called *seva of daridra narayana*.

SRI AUROBINDO: What is the use of feeding people one day when they have to go without sufficient food all the year round? Those who feed them satisfy their own conscience, I suppose. If you could find out the cause of poverty and try to remove it, that would do some real work.

SATYENDRA: But that is not easy, Sir; there are so many difficulties, political, economic, etc.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't think it is so insoluble a problem as all that. If you give people education—I mean proper education, not the current type—then the problem can be solved. People in England or France don't have the kind of poverty we have in India. That is because of their education; they are not so helpless.

CHAMPAKLAL: About six thousand people were fed during the last birthday of Ramana Maharshi. But they say nobody is allowed to touch him; they have to stand at a distance, make

¹ This Brahmananda should be distinguished from Brahmananda of Chandod.

pranam, have darshan and go away. Special consideration is shown in a few cases.

SRI AUROBINDO: If all were allowed to touch him, he might feel like the President of America who recently had to shake hands with thousands of people and got an ache in the hand! I have heard that Maharshi complained of stomach trouble from eating the prasad of various people and that the pile of prasad was one of the causes of his trying to fly away from the world!

SATYENDRA: But destiny brought him back. People give a lot of money to Maharshi but, curiously enough, we don't get any. A man actually told me we don't require money, since we have so many buildings.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, that is the impression. They think like Lady Batesman that the Ashram is the work of a genius and genius can do without money! Actually, it is only the rich minority and the poor who give money. G, for example, earns hardly enough to maintain her family, but whenever she finds an opportunity, the first thing she does is to send some amount here. There is a rumour in Pondicherry that we have a lot of money stored away under Pavitra's cellar!

PURANI: The question of the Ashram's wealth reminds me of X. I wanted some printing-blocks from him and he charged me so heavily that I had to write to Y to explain to X my financial position.

SRI AUROBINDO: You should have written about the pocket expense you get, and said that your monthly income is two rupees.

PURANI: Yes, I was just thinking of that. Anyhow, he gave me some blocks free but advised me that it is futile in India to bring out art books. One is sure to run into debt. People don't understand art.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, people look at art as Nirodbaran looks at philosophy. (*Laughter*)

PURANI: Elie Faure says that Greek art is an expression of unrestrained passion and has no mystery about it.

SRI AUROBINDO: What is he talking about? He seems to have a queer mind. Where is the expression of passion in the art of the Greeks? On the contrary it is precisely their restraint that is so very evident everywhere in their art. The Greeks are well-known for restraint and control. Compared to the art of other peoples, theirs is almost cold. It is its remarkable beauty that saves it from real coldness. This applies to the whole period from Phidias down to that in which the Laocoon was sculptured. It is only when you

come to the Laocoon that you find the expression of strong feeling or passion.

PURANI: Perhaps Elie Faure makes that remark because of the satyrs.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is quite another matter. The satyrs are symbolic.

PURANI: He also argues, rather queerly, that the poisoning of Socrates, the banishment of Themistocles and the killing of other great men, were an expression of unrestrained passion.

SRI AUROBINDO: What has that to do with art?

PURANI: He means that the Greek mind being such must have found the same expression in art also.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is rather the opposite. It is a sign of the Greek's sense of control that they checked their leaders from committing what they considered excesses. When two leaders became powerful and combined, the Greeks ostracised one.

Then there was a pause. Sri Aurobindo seemed to have gone into a reverie. We were expecting him to come out of it with something for us. He started speaking on his own.

SRI AUROBINDO: I was thinking how some races have the sense of beauty in their very bones. Judging from what is left to us, it seems that all people had once a keen perception of beauty. For example, take pottery or Indian wood-carving which, I am afraid, is dying out now. Greece and ancient Italy had a wonderful sense of beauty. Japan, you know, is remarkable. Even the poorest people have that sense. If the Japanese produce anything ugly, they export it to other countries! But I am afraid they are losing their aesthetic sense because of the general vulgarisation. By the way, the Chinese and the Japanese originally got their artistic impulse from India. Their Buddhist images have Indian inspiration: it is only later that they developed their own lines.

Modern artists are putting an end to art. Vulgarisation everywhere!

NIRODBARAN: Indian painting is not yet so bad as European. People are not following the leaders of modernism here. Rabindranath Tagore as a painter is not much imitated. Perhaps because of Abanindranath Tagore and Nandalal Bose.

SRI AUROBINDO: They, I suppose, praise Rabindranath but don't encourage others to follow him. (*Laughter*)

In Europe, apart from vulgarisation, there is dictatorship acting against art. In Germany Hitler must have crushed everything fine out of existence—music, philosophy, etc. How can anything develop where there is no freedom? People in Germany have to admire only one thing: Nazism! I hope Mussolini has still kept some freedom for art.

PURANI: Mussolini speaks of “our art, our poets”. He seems to be proud of Italians as a nation of artists and has tried to preserve the old tradition. A friend of mine recently visited Italy and found that the Italians still have a great sense of painting and sculpture.

SRI AUROBINDO: And of music also. Painting and music are their passion. The Mother had a striking experience of their love of music. She stayed in North Italy for some time and was once playing on the organ all alone in a church. After she had finished, there was a big applause. She found that a crowd had gathered behind her and was enthusiastic in appreciation.

PURANI: Indian music, especially South Indian, has been preserved by the temples; expert musicians come there on occasions and play and sing.

Nishtha (Miss Wilson) is all praise for many Indian things she sees here. For example, she finds great beauty in the way Indian women walk. She said to me, “You won’t understand it, but I can because I have seen our European women walking. Your women walk as if they were born dancers. They have a beautiful rhythm in their movements.”

SRI AUROBINDO: That is true. It is, I suppose, due to their having to carry pots on their heads. This practice requires balance of the whole body.

PURANI: Nishtha praises the Indian saris and says that our women have a keen sense of colour.

SRI AUROBINDO: She is right. I hope our women are not going to give up their saris under Western influence.

NIRODBARAN: But saris, though graceful, don’t seem to be good for active work; they are inconvenient.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why? The Romans conquered the world in their togas! Plenty of Indian women do their work with their saris on. When this craze for utility comes, beauty goes to the dogs. This is the modern tendency. The moderns look at everything from the point of view of utility, as if beauty were nothing.

NIRODBARAN: But beauty and utility can be combined.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, but in the end utility gets the upper hand.

NIRODBARAN: I at any rate have found that the European male dress gives a push for work and activity, while the Indian dhoti produces lethargy, sense of ease, etc.

SRI AUROBINDO: That doesn't prevent the European dress from being the ugliest in the world. I have seen plenty of people leading active lives with the dhoti on. The Europeans are now putting on just shorts and a shirt—most utilitarian, I think.

PURANI: Some Indian women also put on the European dress.

SRI AUROBINDO: Indian women's putting on the European dress is horrible.

PURANI: Nowadays European women also go about in shorts.

SRI AUROBINDO: Is that so? I understand they are giving up stockings too. Yet at one time their whole body used to be covered up excepting the hands and the face. I remember an experience of Bapubhai Majumdar's in London. He was coming down from the bathroom in his hotel with bare feet. Suddenly a lady who came out of a room saw him. She ran away at once and complained to the manager that a man was going about half naked in the house. The manager called Bapubhai and asked him not to do so again. Do you know Bapubhai?

PURANI: I think I do. Once I saw him being stopped in the street by the police for breaking a traffic rule. He gave the policeman a long lecture in English, leaving the fellow flabbergasted.

SRI AUROBINDO (*laughing*): That must be him. It is very characteristic of him. He was my first friend in Baroda. He took me to his house and I stayed there for some time. He was a nice man, but what people call volatile and mercurial.

25 JANUARY 1939

There was no talk till after 7.00 p.m., when the Mother went for the general meditation.

PURANI: After our talk yesterday I suddenly remembered Ramakrishna's phrase, "*Lok na pok?*" "Men or insects?". So he could not have commanded Vivekananda to do humanitarian work.

NIRODBARAN: Anilbaran says the idea of service of humanity is Christian and was brought in by Vivekananda on his own. I am told Ramakrishna asked him to do more Tapasya, achieve greater Yogic realisation.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't know exactly what Yogic realisation he had. I have read many books about him but couldn't gather a precise idea of it. Even the official biography of him doesn't give any definite information.

PURANI: People say he did a lot of Tapasya at the time he was a *parivrajaka*, a wandering Yogi.

SRI AUROBINDO: Was it this kind of Tapasya Ramakrishna meant?

SATYENDRA: Vivekananda had a sort of Nirvanic experience. He has himself mentioned something about it.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, that experience is the only one definitely known.

PURANI: He also had a vision at Amarnath. But he seemed always torn between two tendencies—world-work and direct sadhana.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. And he used to put more intuitive flashes into his conversations than into his writings. That's what I found on reading Nivedita's book, *The Master As I Saw Him*. As a rule, it is in talk that such flashes come—at least in his case it was so.

NIRODBARAN: You said the other day that his spirit visited you in Alipore Jail and told you about the higher consciousness from which, I suppose, these intuitive flashes come.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, he did tell me. I had no idea about things of the higher consciousness. I never expected him and yet he came to teach me. And he was exact and precise even in the minutest details.

NIRODBARAN: That is very interesting. He has nowhere in his books or conversations spoken of these things. Could his spirit know after death what he didn't know in life?

SRI AUROBINDO: Why not? He may have got it afterwards.

SATYENDRA: Can the spirit evolve after death?

SRI AUROBINDO: Of course. But either he may not have known in life or else he may have known and kept silent. A Yogi doesn't say all that he knows. He says only what is necessary. If I wrote all that I know, then it would be ten times the amount I have written.

SATYENDRA: People will judge you by what you have written.

SRI AUROBINDO (*Laughing*): That doesn't matter.

PURANI: *Lok na Pok!*

NIRODBARAN: Then we shan't know all that you know?

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, realise first what I have written.

NIRODBARAN: Isn't it possible for those who live in a spiritual consciousness to know about the realisations of other Yogis?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. If one establishes a special contact, it is possible.

PURANI: Vivekananda, in his writings, stresses the realisation of the Brahman in all and says in particular, "I worship my God the poor, the down-trodden, the pariah."

SRI AUROBINDO: Are we to understand that the Brahman is more in the poor and the down-trodden than in others?

PURANI: If the Brahman is at all present, it is *samam brahma*, Equal Brahman.

SRI AUROBINDO: Anilbaran is right. Vivekananda brought in the idea of service of humanity from Christianity – and also from Buddhism. Both Vivekananda and Gandhi derive it from them. But I don't understand why they speak of serving humanity only. Buddhism, as well as Jainism, includes animals also in its idea of service. Even then the chief idea in Buddhism is Karuna, compassion.

The ancient sages too were less exclusive. They said, *sarva bhuteshu*, meaning all creatures, not men alone.

SATYENDRA: But how is one to make a practical application of it?

SRI AUROBINDO: That depends upon the individual and his temperament.

SATYENDRA: Buddha wanted liberation not only for himself but for the whole of mankind.

SRI AUROBINDO: It was not liberation he wanted; what he wanted was to be beyond the suffering of existence.

SATYENDRA: Still, that was not only for himself but for all.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, yet he had to do it for himself first before he could do it for others.

SATYENDRA: Tibetan Buddhists say, "Nirvana is only a stage."

SRI AUROBINDO (*surprised*): Is that so?

PURANI: In Buddhism they have two paths: knowledge and devotion. They consider Buddha an Avatar.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is the Mahayana path that goes through devotion. But isn't it a fact that all Buddhists utter: *Buddham saranam gacchami, dharmam saranam gacchami, sangham saranam gacchami*?¹ Buddha himself couldn't have said it, for he said that one has to do everything by one's own effort.¹

SATYENDRA: It is said that Buddha turned back from the gate of Nirvana.

SRI AUROBINDO: I thought it was Amitabha Buddha who refused to enter Nirvana. He is venerated very deeply in Japan.

Modern European scholars are now trying to prove that Buddha's life-story was a later invention.

PURANI: The Tibetan Lamas are believed to be in a direct line from Buddha. But to find the true Dalai Lama is not easy at all. You know about the various signs by which he has to be recognised?

SATYENDRA: Is Zen Buddhism alive in Japan?

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh yes. Lady Batesman is going there to study it. The Zen Buddhists have a very severe discipline.

PURANI: I am told that in Lhasa the meditation is very rigorous and the monks are thrashed for breaking the discipline.

SRI AUROBINDO: We might also begin that here! Purani could be deputed as one of the thrashers.

PURANI: Madame David-Neel divides the Lamas into three classes: the low and ordinary, who are the commonest and care only for food and comfort; the intellectual and artistic; the mystic or Yogi.

SRI AUROBINDO: But that applies to all monastic orders. I remember the description of a feast in which the Sannyasins got drunk and began to dance. Also the Sannyasin who is a Pundit is a well-known type. In the Christian orders too, you have the professional monks who practise professional piety; the second type of monks are those who study religion and philosophy; only a very few are dedicated to spiritual practice.

The Carmelite Order has given and is still giving many saints to Roman Catholic Christianity. The latest is St. Theresa of Lisieux.

SATYENDRA: There are two Saint Theresas. One is the great and famous saint, she was Spanish. The recent Theresa is French.

¹ "I take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in the Dharma, I take refuge in the Sangha."

The Spanish Theresa's life was very quiet but intense. She said, "I will spend my heaven for mankind." Many miracles happened after her death.

SRI AUROBINDO: The Spanish have produced many remarkable saints. Some of them had very powerful experiences. The German mystics show more the knowledge aspect of mysticism because they are more philosophic-minded. Boehme and Eckhart are examples. Among the French saints you find more love and charity and a flaming intensity. But the English saints are tremendous politicians. I don't know how they manage to become saints at all. They either kill or get killed. St. Thomas Beckett was murdered. St. Duncan was a minister to a king but was in fact the real ruler.

The Irish or Celtic saints and preachers converted the greatest part of the European continent to Christianity. They have also given the greatest Christian philosopher. They were like the Vedantins. They followed a discipline very similar to the Indian. They were first suppressed by the Roman emperors who suspected they would help resistance to Roman rule, and afterwards by the Christian authorities themselves.

The Jews have many mystic symbols in their Cabbala. Originally they had no mysticism and didn't believe in the immortality of the soul. They believed that God breathes life into you at birth and takes it away at death. There is no future life or reincarnation. You are rewarded or punished in this single life on earth. The Jews got their mysticism from the Chaldeans and from the Persians. They were captives in Babylon and the Persians freed them. They got their mysticism from contact with these peoples.

There is a similarity between Chaldean occultism and Egyptian.

26 JANUARY 1939

PURANI: Barcelona is going! The French people are waking up at the eleventh hour.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. The democracies are not showing much courage at present at any rate.

SATYENDRA: It seems political ideas are not worth fighting for. Today one fights for democracy, tomorrow for monarchy or dictatorship.

SRI AUROBINDO: Quite so. All human values are half-values. They are relative. They have no permanence or durability in them.

SATYENDRA: Perhaps if men became more mentalised they would understand better.

SRI AUROBINDO: Mentalised? No! The difficulty is that they don't follow the principles of life.

SATYENDRA: How is that?

SRI AUROBINDO: Life compromises between elements but mind acting on its own doesn't. Mind takes up one thing and makes it absolute, considers it as apart from and opposed to all other things and sets it above all. Hegel boasted that in Europe they had succeeded in separating reason from life – and you see what their philosophy has become. It has nothing to do with life; it is all intellectual gymnastics without forming a part of living reality. On the contrary, in India philosophy has always been a part of life; it had an aim to realise everything. So in the political philosophy of the West you find that if they accept democracy, it is democracy alone; all the rest is set against it. If they take to monarchy, then monarchy is all in all. The same thing happened in ancient Greece. They fought for democracy, aristocracy, monarchy – and in the end they were conquered by the Romans.

SATYENDRA: Then what is the truth in all these attempts at political organisation?

SRI AUROBINDO: If you want to arrive at something true and lasting, you have to look at life and learn from it: that is to say, learn the nature of the oppositions and contradictions and then reconcile them. As regards government, life shows that there is a truth in monarchy whether hereditary or elective. In other words, there is a man at the top who governs. Life also shows that there is a truth in aristocracy whether of strong men or rich men or intellectuals. The fiction is that it is the majority that rules, but the fact is that it is the minority, the aristocracy. Life shows again that the rule of the monarch or the aristocrats should be with the consent, silent or vocal, of the people. In addition, life shows that there is a Vaishya class (the merchants and industrialists). This class too has a play in government.

In ancient India the truth of these things was recognised. That is why India has lasted through millenniums – and China also.

English politics is successful because the English have always found one or two men who had the power to lead the minority

ruling class. During the Victorian period, it was either Gladstone or Disraeli. And even when one party changes, the one that comes into power does not follow a radically changed policy. It continues the same policy with a slight modification.

In France no government lasts. Sometimes it changes within a few days. The new government becomes a repetition of the one it replaces. Blum is the only man who wanted to do something radical and he was knocked out.

PURANI: Have you seen X's (an Indian political leader) statement?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. He seems to have a queer logic. Because the rightists have a majority, he says that the president should be elected from the leftists! And there is also no sense in his saying, "We will fight the government to the end." When there is a revolution, there can be no compromise. But once you have accepted a compromise, what meaning is there in such a statement? One has to work out things on the basis of what one has gained. Satyamurti's idea of Federation seems all right to me. If the States people are given seats in the Centre and if the Government exercises no veto in the provinces, then it is practically Home Rule.

PURANI: The Viceroy's long stay at Bombay seems significant. I think there is something behind it. He perhaps wants to make Dr. Kher or Rajagopalachari head of the Central Assembly in a Federation.

SRI AUROBINDO: Is that so? Dr. Kher seems to be a very able man. He appears to have escaped the Socialist trap.

PURANI: Vallabhbhai Patel is terribly anti-Socialist. He crushed the Socialists at Baroda.

SRI AUROBINDO: These Socialists don't know what Socialism is.

PURANI: There were very humorous speeches in the Sind Assembly. The Muslim League has been exposed.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. The Sind Premier—I always forget his name—strikes me as a strong man. He stands up for his ideas at the risk of unpopularity. That means some strength. The Sind Muslims were anxious to join the Congress. The Congress should try to do something to make a coalition there. The Congress Ministry is successful almost everywhere. That shows the capacity to govern if the powers are given.

NIRODBARAN: Only Bengal and the Punjab remain now under the Muslim League.

SRI AUROBINDO: The Muslim League is not so strong in Bengal, for there is the Praja Party. And in the Punjab, Sikander Hyat Khan looks like an able man. Only in the United Provinces does the Muslim League seem strong. If the Congress could win in Sind, then the Bengal and Punjab Premiers will stand on two sides of India and make faces at each other.

NIRODBARAN: I wonder how Fazlul Huq could become a Premier. Nazimuddin appears to be more capable.

SRI AUROBINDO: Nazimuddin can't make a popular figure.

PURANI: Gandhi has definitely said that any compromise with the Muslim League is impossible now.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't understand why the Congress opened negotiations with the League. The League has been given undue importance. How is it that the Congress is so weak in the Punjab?

PURANI: Because of the Socialists and the Old Group.

The Jaipur affair is starting again. Bajaj is going to offer Satyagraha and Gandhi is giving his approval.

SRI AUROBINDO: Since he is a Congressman I suppose the Congress will have to back him. If the States people get power, the Princes will have no work except to sign papers and shoot animals. The Gaekwar will have to stop making buildings.

NIRODBARAN: Where will they shoot animals? The forests are being destroyed nowadays.

SRI AUROBINDO: Forests have to be preserved. Otherwise animals will become extinct. China has lost her forests and there is a flood every year.

NIRODBARAN: There are so many Maharajas, Chiefs, Nawabs and other rulers dotting India everywhere.

SRI AUROBINDO: Germany was like that at one time. Napoleon swept away one half and Hitler the other half—not Hitler exactly but the post-war period. Japan also had the same thing, but the princes voluntarily abdicated their powers and titles for the sake of duty—duty to their country.

NIRODBARAN: How far back in history do the Japanese rulers go?

SRI AUROBINDO: The Mikado claims to be a descendant of the Goddess of the sun. The Mikado named Magi used to

believe that and feel that the inspiration above was doing whatever was necessary.

There are two types of men in Japan. One is tall, with a long nose and finely cut aristocratic face. It was they who gave the Samurai culture to Japan. I met at Tagore's place one of this type: he had magnificent features. The second type is the usual Mongol type. They haven't a particularly handsome face.

Purani now brought in the question of the dictator and traced Hitler's genealogy, as it were.

PURANI: The dictator's psychology is centred in the authority-complex. People feel that they are great and Hitler is fighting for them, not that they are fighting for Hitler. The dictators also find a competitor in God and religion.

SRI AUROBINDO: But Mussolini didn't, though Mustafa Kamil did. Mussolini has, on the contrary, given more powers to the Pope and the Vatican. He has recognised the Roman Catholic Church as the State religion.

PURANI: I read somewhere that Kamil in one of his drinking moods slapped an Egyptian because he came to the party with a fez on.

SRI AUROBINDO: You haven't heard the story of the journalist?

PURANI: No.

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, a young journalist criticised the government of Turkey, saying that Turkey was governed by a number of drunkards. Kamil came to know about it and sent him an invitation to dinner. After the dinner was over, Kamil said, "Young man, you have written that Turkey is governed by a number of drunkards. It is not a number of drunkards but just one drunkard."

PURANI: Kamil at one time tried to play off Italy against Russia.

SRI AUROBINDO: But Russia has all along helped Turkey.

PURANI: Stalin, in order to enforce collectivisation starved the Ukraine to death because the Ukrainians didn't pay their dues. He said, "Once we submit to the peasants, they will catch hold of us."

SRI AUROBINDO: That is what happens when Socialism comes. Communism—the system of communes—is quite a

different thing. If they had been successful in carrying out the original idea of the Soviet, it would have been a great success. Mussolini at the beginning tried to form a corporate State but he gave up.

PURANI: In Ahmedabad the Socialists didn't succeed in breaking the trade unions. The Indian agriculturists won't have them.

SRI AUROBINDO: Socialism has no chance with the Indian peasant. He will side with you so long as you promise him land and want to end the landlord system. But once he has got the land, no more of Socialism. Communism is another thing. In Socialism you have the State which intervenes at every step with its officials who rob you of money.

NIRODBARAN: They know the Government machinery and so manipulate it as to keep power in their own hands.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, it is the State bureaucracy that dictates its policy irrespective of the good of the commune; while in Communism the land is held as the common property of the whole unit and each one in it is entitled to labour and have his share from the produce.

In our country they had a kind of Communism in the villages. The whole country was like a big family and the lowest had his right as a member of the family. The washerman, the carpenter, the blacksmith, all got what they wanted.

Each such commune can be independent and many such communes can be scattered all over the country and combine or coordinate their activities for a common purpose.

27 JANUARY 1939

This evening a letter written by Vivekananda on April 18, 1900, from Alameda, California, to Miss Josephine Macleod was read out to Sri Aurobindo. It was a very moving letter containing the following passages:

"I am well, very well mentally. I feel the rest of the soul more than that of the body. The battles are lost and won. I have bundled my things and am waiting for the great deliverer.

"Siva, O Siva, carry my boat to the other shore.'

“After all, Joe, I am only the boy who used to listen with rapt wonderment to the wonderful words of Ramakrishna under the Banyan at Dakshineswar. That is my true nature; works and activities, doing good and so forth are all superimpositions. Now I again hear his voice; the same old voice thrilling my soul. Bonds are breaking—love dying, work becoming tasteless—the glamour is off life. Now only the voice of the master calling. ‘I come, Lord, I come.’—‘Let the dead bury the dead, follow thou Me.’ ‘I come, my beloved Lord, I come.’

“Yes, I come. Nirvana is before me. I feel it at times, the same infinite ocean of peace, without a ripple, a breath.”

“I am glad I was born, glad I suffered so, glad I did make big blunders, glad to enter peace. I leave none bound, I take no bonds. Whether this body will fall and release me or I enter into freedom in the body, the old man is gone, gone for ever, never to come back again!

“The guide, the Guru, the leader, the teacher, has passed away; the boy, the student, the servant, is left behind.

“... Who am I to meddle with any, Joe? I have long given up my place as a leader,—I have no right to raise my voice. Since the beginning of this year I have not dictated anything in India. You know that... The sweetest memories of my life have been when I was drifting; I am drifting again—with the bright warm sun ahead and masses of vegetation around—and in the heat everything is so still, so calm—and I am drifting, languidly—in the warm heart of the river. I dare not make a splash with my hands or feet—for fear of breaking the wonderful stillness, stillness that makes you feel sure it is an illusion!

“Behind my work was ambition, behind my love was personality, behind my purity was fear, behind my guidance the thirst of power. Now they are vanishing and I drift. I come, Mother, I come in Thy warm bosom, floating wheresoever Thou takest me, in the voiceless, in the strange, in the wonderland, I come—a spectator, no more an actor.

“Oh, it is so calm! My thoughts seem to come from a great, great distance in the interior of my own heart. They seem like faint, distant whispers, and peace is upon everything, sweet, sweet peace—like that one feels for a few moments just before falling into sleep, when things are seen and felt like shadows—without

fear, without love, without emotion. — Peace that one feels alone, surrounded with statues and pictures”

SATYENDRA: It must have been a passing mood in Vivekananda to see ambition, personality, fear and thirst for power in himself. Besides, since he died two years later, these things could not have been there always, for by that time he must have realised some higher consciousness setting him free from them.

NIRODBARAN: It may not have been merely a passing mood. These things he must have noticed in himself, and he wrote about them because he perceived or saw them.

PURANI: Simultaneously with a higher consciousness, one can see these things in one's nature.

NIRODBARAN: He had a double strain in his being—the turn inward and the urge towards work. Moreover, he admitted that he was doing things driven blindly by some unseen Force.

SRI AUROBINDO (*after some time*): It is not easy to get rid of these things. Even when the higher consciousness comes, they can go on in the lower nature. And if Vivekananda found himself driven blindly by some unseen Force, as you say, then it is quite possible for them to remain in the nature and get mixed up in the working out of that driving Power.

SATYENDRA: It is curious that he speaks of “freedom in the body” as something in the future. How is it that he says this so late in life — only a short time before his death and long after he had had the experience of Nirvana? I thought he had become liberated much earlier.

SRI AUROBINDO: There are two kinds of liberation. The usual conception of liberation is that it comes after the death of the body. That is to say, you may have attained liberation in consciousness and yet something in the nature continues in the old bondage and this ignorance is usually supported by the body-consciousness. When the body drops off, the man becomes entirely free or liberated.

The other kind of liberation is Jivanmukti: one realises liberation while remaining in the body and in life and action, and that is supposed to be more difficult.

SATYENDRA: But I suppose there is a distinction between Videhamukti and Jivanmukti. Videhamukti answers to your definition. Janaka is called a Videhamukta and that is considered more difficult than being a Jivanmukta.

SRI AUROBINDO: I thought it is the reverse.

SATYENDRA: Then there might be a confusion of terms. Souls like Vivekananda are said to come down from a higher plane for a specific work in the world. Is that possible?

NIRODBARAN: Ramakrishna called him an Ishwarakoti.

SRI AUROBINDO: There is a plane of liberation from which beings can come down and perhaps that is what Ramakrishna meant by souls that are Ishwarakoti or Nityamukta—those that are eternally liberated and can go up and down the ladder of the planes.

SATYENDRA: Is there any evolution in these planes—I mean evolution of the sort we have on earth?

SRI AUROBINDO: No; there are only types there. If the typical beings want to evolve they have to take birth here. Even the Gods are compelled to take human birth for the purpose of evolving.

NIRODBARAN: But why should the Gods want to evolve? They are quite happy in their own state.

SRI AUROBINDO: They may get tired of their own kind of happiness and want another kind: for instance, Nirvana.

NIRODBARAN: But then one may get tired of Nirvana too!

SRI AUROBINDO: There is no “one” in Nirvana. So who will get tired? That was the difficulty I had with Amal at one time. He could not get it into his head that the personality does not exist in the experience of Nirvana. He would ask, “Who has the experience of Nirvana if there is no being in that state? The answer is, “Nobody has it; something in you drops off and Nirvana takes its place.” In fact, there is no “getting” but a “dropping off”. Amal was probably thinking that he would be sitting with his mental personality somewhere, looking at Nirvana and saying, “Ah, this is Nirvana!” But so long as “you” are there, you haven’t got Nirvana. One has to get rid of all attachments and personalities before Nirvana can come and that is extremely difficult for one who is attached to his mental personality like Amal.

SATYENDRA: If Nirvana is such a negative state, what is the difference between one who has it and one who hasn’t?

PURANI: From the point of view of Nirvana there is no difference.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. You find the difference because it is “you” who gets blotted out in Nirvana and not somebody else.

(*After a pause*) In this letter of Vivekananda, there is at least one thing precise about his spiritual experience: he speaks of the calm and stillness of Nirvana and before it everything seems an illusion.

PURANI: The division of consciousness into two parts—one being fundamentally free and the other imperfect or impure—is a very common experience.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is not only common, it is the inevitable experience unless one is able to take all action with equanimity. In order that one may be able to act without ambition, one should not be perturbed whether the action is done or not. There should be something like the Gita's "inaction in action"—and yet, as the Gita says, one must go on acting. The test is that even if the work is taken away or destroyed, it must make no difference to the condition of your consciousness.

SATYENDRA: Isn't Nirvana a fundamental spiritual experience?

SRI AUROBINDO: Nirvana, as I know it, is an experience in which the separative personality is blotted out and one acts according to what is necessary to be done. It is only a passage for reaching a state in which the true individuality can be attained. That individuality is vast, infinite, and can contain the whole world within itself. It is not the small narrow limited individual self in Nature. When you attain that true individuality you can remain in the world and yet be above it. You can act and still be not bound by your action. For getting rid of the separative personality Nirvana is a powerful experience. After Nirvana you can go on to realise yourself as both the One in all and the One who is Many—and yet that One is also He.

SATYENDRA: What you have called "multiple unity"?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes.

SATYENDRA: The trouble is that we are so much attached to our body and bound up with our ego and passions that it seems hardly possible to get out of a life filled with them. Such a life alone appears real then.

SRI AUROBINDO: You have to give it its place in Reality. And to come out of it or get beyond it there are conditions laid down: for example, rejection and surrender. You have to get rid of desires and passions to arrive at the higher consciousness.

SATYENDRA: And when in addition to our own burdens and difficulties and egoism we are asked to work for the Divine, for you and the Mother, the trouble increases!

SRI AUROBINDO: There again the same conditions are applicable. You have to work with the right attitude, without personal ambition, without ego. Necessarily, that can't be done in a day.

There are people here whose egos take a new turn – what may be called “egoism for the Divine”; thus, instead of saying “I” and “mine”, they say “our work”, “our Ashram” etc. But this form of ego too must go.

PURANI: I think Satyendra was not talking of that.

SATYENDRA: I was referring to our difficulty.

SRI AUROBINDO: And I was referring to mine. (*Laughter*) Several people here make it their main business to get hold of people and make them do Yoga. Their enthusiasm is something enormous. However much you may check them, they can't help propagandising.

PURANI: Shouldn't something be done to stop Veerabhadra doing that?

SRI AUROBINDO: Do you think you can stop him? I have threatened him with expulsion and even that seems to make no difference! (*Laughter*)

CHAMPAKLAL: I hear he is holding classes in the town and giving lectures on Yoga.

PURANI: He is explaining everything on a blackboard.

SRI AUROBINDO: What? Explaining the Brahman on a blackboard? As for his lecturing, he used to inflict letters on me of never less than thirty pages!

PURANI: That means he had some consideration for you. To Reddy, the Minister of Madras, he wrote a letter of eighty pages just to tell him to release a prisoner!

SRI AUROBINDO: I wonder how the Minister found time to go through his letter.

PURANI: The Minister wrote back regretting he had no time to read it. His secretary may have given him the gist.

SRI AUROBINDO: Poor secretary! I sympathise with him.

PURANI: One day Amrita told X that Mother had instructed all gate-keepers not to sit on the chairs or read or write when on duty.

SRI AUROBINDO: That's true. Y and others used to reply to visitors, sitting on an easy chair. There were many complaints from outsiders about the gate-keepers.

PURANI: When Amrita asked X why he was not carrying out Mother's instructions, X replied, "That is just my difficulty."

SRI AUROBINDO: I have heard that he has become a Guru. If you tell these people to go somewhere else and start an Ashram of their own they won't do it. They must remain here and become Gurus.

SATYENDRA: Some people try to impose their ideas on others.

NIRODBARAN: Not only impose but beat if you don't accept them. I heard that A gave a good beating to B for not accepting you as an Avatar.

SRI AUROBINDO: And after the beating did B feel like accepting me?

SATYENDRA: I don't understand how that sort of acceptance can help. If, without experiencing anything, one says about anybody, "He is an Avatar," it hasn't much value.

SRI AUROBINDO: Experience is not always necessary in order to believe a thing. One may have faith. But the trouble comes when you force your faith on others. You can say, "I believe so and so is an Avatar." But you can't say, "If you don't believe, I will thrash you."

As I said, some people have the habit of forcing themselves on others and propagandising.

NIRODBARAN: I am afraid Y is one of them.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. When R was here, he was going on quite well, having experiences and progressing in his own way, though he didn't know much about the nature of this Yoga. Y caught hold of him one day and gave a long lecture. R was extremely surprised and said, "What is all this now?" And everything stopped.

NIRODBARAN: This sort of thing comes in the way of your work, I fear.

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh, tremendously! If instead of allowing a man to proceed on his own lines, one forces him to accept one's viewpoints for which he is not prepared, it interferes with the work.

SATYENDRA: Most probably the man turns against you.

SRI AUROBINDO: Either he shuts himself up or he gets false ideas.

There are people who want to bring their whole families into Yoga. I don't see the logic of it. And there are husbands who get angry with their wives because they can't take to Yoga together with them. They want to make it a family affair.

SATYENDRA: They want to go to heaven with their families like Yudhisthira.

SRI AUROBINDO: That may be all right for going to heaven, but not for attaining salvation.

SATYENDRA: I suppose they have got the idea from the fact that a family follows one religion. If all follow it, the atmosphere becomes harmonious.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, but such harmony is suitable only for the religious life. As for the family, even if there are religious differences, they don't matter, as D. L. Roy shows in his song, "*Buro, budi doojanate*".¹

Then there are people like X who, when the Mother refuses admission to somebody, go on saying, "Stick on, stick on! You see, I was refused but I have got in."

PURANI: Yes, it is a case of testing the faith.

SATYENDRA: Or perhaps he has the old idea that Yogis generally test their disciples and so the rejected ones have to pass the test.

SRI AUROBINDO: In that way some people are wonderful. There are a few from outside who write and write even if we don't give any answer. If we ask them to go and seek another Guru, they won't.

SATYENDRA: Then why not accept them?

SRI AUROBINDO: Theirs is not a real call. In some it is only a surface movement, and they are just obstinate. Others are sheer eccentrics or even lunatics.

After this, there was a pause in the talk. Some left the room at 8.30 p.m.

PURANI: That letter of Vivekananda is very sincere. One can't have freedom from ambition and other weaknesses unless one has the dynamic presence of the Divine.

¹ "Old man, old woman, the two together."

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, I find that most people have difficulty in understanding this. Those weaknesses are very hard to get rid of. They may not always manifest in the surface consciousness but that doesn't mean they are not there. They can be there even if you live in a higher consciousness; the dynamic presence of the Divine is needed. Or else, if without the dynamic realisation you can establish, as I have already said, equanimity and calm right down to your body-consciousness so that nothing stirs whatever happens, then also you can be free from them.

After I had the Nirvanic experience at Baroda and came to Calcutta for work, I thought I had no ambition—I mean personal ambition. But the Voice which I used to hear within would point out to me at every step how personal ambition was there in my movements. These things can hide for a long time without being detected.

It is like the contest for the Congress Presidentship. Everyone says, "It is not out of ambition but from sense of duty, call of the country, demand of principles!" (*Laughter*)

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In the morning, during the sponging, Champaklal and Purani were engaged in killing flies. They were making a clapping sound. Champaklal burst into laughter. We reported the cause of the laughter to Sri Aurobindo.

SRI AUROBINDO: This is not Ahimsa. Champaklal should be sent to Vinoba at the Gandhi Ashram.

PURANI: Oh, he will be given severe punishment.

SRI AUROBINDO: He should be stopped from laughing for six months!

In the evening, after the Mother had left for the general meditation, we were ready to begin talking. But Sri Aurobindo seemed preoccupied with something, or was thinking, or perhaps just in a mood of silence. Nirodbaran said to Purani, "Come out with your news." But Purani kept smiling. After a few minutes Sri Aurobindo looked at us and broke into a spontaneous smile. Then Nirodbaran started speaking.

NIRODBARAN: Purani seems to have some news.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then why doesn't he blurt it out?

PURANI: No, nothing today.

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, there is a cure for your cold in the *Sunday Times*. You have to get into an aeroplane, take some rounds, get down—and you are cured.

SATYENDRA: Permanently?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, if the aeroplane comes down with a crash!

NIRODBARAN: V used to put a string up his nose for his cold.

SATYENDRA: That is a Hathayogic process.

SRI AUROBINDO: The Hathayogis also insert a long piece of cloth into the stomach, pass it through the intestine and bring it out from the anus to clean the whole system. And there have been authentic cases of their eating poisons like nitric acid, cyanide, etc., and also things like nails and bits of glass.

SATYENDRA: I wonder how the scientists will explain all this. Somewhere they were invited to a demonstration, but they refused to go.

SRI AUROBINDO: They can't go—for fear of getting their present convictions shaken.

NIRODBARAN: The Hathayogins perhaps know some process to prevent absorption of the poisons.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, they have the power to stop the action of the poisons and to eliminate them. They have to carry out some secret process immediately after their demonstration.

NIRODBARAN: Probably you have heard that Sir William Crookes invited scientists to his mediumistic seances. But they refused to have anything to do with that sort of thing.

SRI AUROBINDO: The same happened in Germany. In some German village there was a horse which could do mathematical calculations. The owner of the horse invited scientists. They not only pooh-poohed the thing and turned down the invitation but also complained to the Government, saying such matters should be stopped because they were scientifically unorthodox.

PURANI: Maurice Maeterlinck went to see the performance and said he had himself not believed before seeing it, but he tested the animal by giving his own figures and the animal answered correctly by signs.

SRI AUROBINDO: People say animals can't think or reason. It is not at all true. Their intelligence has evolved to act only within the narrow limits of life, according to their own needs. But they have latent faculties which have not been developed.

Cats have a language of their own. They utter different kinds of mews for different purposes. For instance, when the mother cat mews in a particular tone and rhythm after leaving her kittens behind a box, the little ones understand that they are not to move from that place until she comes back and repeats that mew. It is through the tone and the rhythm that cats express themselves.

Even donkeys, which are supposed to be very stupid, are sometimes unusually clever. Once some horses and donkeys were confined together, with the gate shut, to see if they could get out. While the horses were helpless, a donkey got out by lifting the latch and opening the gate.

Why go so far? Even in our Ashram the Mother's cat Chikoo was extraordinarily clever. One day she was confined in a room. It was discovered that she was trying to open the window in exactly the same way as the Mother used to do. Evidently Chikoo had watched the Mother carefully.

We had a dog, a bitch left by somebody in the first house we rented. One day she was locked out. Finding it impossible to push the door open, she just sat in front of it and began to think, "How to get in?" The way she sat and the attitude of her head and eyes showed clearly that she was thinking. Then suddenly she got up, as if saying to herself, "Ah, there is the bathroom door. Let me try it." And she went in that direction. The door was open and she got in.

It is the Europeans who make a big difference between man and animal. The only difference is that animals can't form concepts and can't read or write or philosophise.

NIRODBARAN: They can't do Yoga, either.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't know about that. Once, while the Mother and I were meditating, a cat happened to be present. We found that she was behaving oddly. She passed into a trance and was almost on the point of leaving her body and dying, when suddenly she recovered. Evidently she was trying to receive something.

SATYENDRA: Ramana Maharshi's cow Lakshmi is said to bow down to him. She is supposed to be someone connected with him in her past life who was attached to the Maharshi. This cow must

be an exceptional one in South India. One can't really love Tamil cows: one gets so disgusted with their thin starved look and blank expression. And what a horrible practice it is to set the cow's milk flowing by putting a stuffed dummy calf in front of her, which she can't recognise as a fake one.

You say animals are intelligent, but this doesn't show it.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not all men are intelligent either!

The talk about the dummy calf brought Gandhi into the discussion, as he severely condemned the practice and said, besides, that to drink cow's milk is equivalent to drinking the calf's blood, for it starves the calf. This was thought to be rather an extreme statement.

SATYENDRA: Perhaps Vallabhbhai knows that Gandhi is sometimes extremist in his principles and that is why he asked him not to come to Bardoli at all during the Satyagraha campaign there with Vallabhbhai in full command. Vallabhbhai is very shrewd.

SRI AUROBINDO: Possibly he thought Gandhi would stop the whole movement if it didn't conform strictly to his own principles.

Purani now brought in his favourite subject: Rajkot affairs. He related the substance of the letters that had passed between Patel and the Thakur and the part played by the Dewan in helping the Thakur retract from the agreed terms. He also recounted the story of the suicide of Ranjit Singh because he was insulted by the Viceroy in the Chamber of Princes. Then the subject of Federation came up.

SRI AUROBINDO: When is the Government going to inaugurate Federation?

PURANI: The early part of 1940. That is why they are trying their best to bring the Congress into a settlement.

SRI AUROBINDO: The early part of 1940 is too soon. They have hardly a little more than a year in hand. Within such a short period they have to rope in the Princes and come to terms with the Congress.

PURANI: Bhulabhai Desai went to England many times ostensibly for his health but really, it would seem, to discuss this Federation problem. He hopes to remain behind the scenes.

SRI AUROBINDO: That was my policy too. I sympathise with him. But the Nizam won't give in so easily. If the major States come in, the small ones don't matter.

PURANI: Vallabhbhai is trying to appeal to the Gaekwar.

SRI AUROBINDO: He will think for thirty years before he gives in. But who knows? He may give in. Since he is old he may take the glory and give the legacy of trouble to his successor.

29 JANUARY 1939

SRI AUROBINDO (*to Purani*): Have you read the report of Hitler's interview with Colonel Beck in the *Sunday Times*?

PURANI: No, what was it about?

SATYENDRA: Shouting at each other?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. It is said that when Hitler begins to shout and his eyes become glassy, it means some disaster. But in this interview when he began shouting and his eyes got the glassy look, Beck began to shout louder. Hitler was much surprised at this unexpected response and toned himself down.

SATYENDRA: He seems to have met his match.

SRI AUROBINDO (*turning to Purani*): You have seen X's statement, I am sure. He seems to be a mere intellectual, with no grasp of realities. Others too talk impractical nonsense.

NIRODBARAN: But X for one is very sincere and honest.

PURANI: Many leaders are like that.

SRI AUROBINDO: What is meant here by sincerity and honesty? Readiness to suffer for the cause and not accepting bribes? But that does not save everything. Even during our Swadeshi movement, although the leaders were egoistic and quarrelsome, they were honest and sincere. Our fight was over principles—for example, reform or revolution or, as somebody put it, colonial self-government or independence. We never fought for personal reasons, and yet do you know what Das said about criminals? He said that in his whole legal career he had not met worse types of criminals than in politics!

NIRODBARAN: But if one really believes that the party is going to compromise with the enemy, isn't one justified in fighting about it—especially if one knows that negotiations are going on?

SRI AUROBINDO: What is there objectionable in negotiations? Every big party and even every country has to negotiate. The Germans before and during the last war were doing it. Negotiation does not mean acceptance of the enemy's terms. There is no harm in seeing how far the other party or country will go in granting concessions, rights and privileges.

PURANI: When Nehru visited Nahash Pasha in Egypt, the latter said that his Wafd Party had become demoralised after accepting office. And now they are defeated. He wondered how Congress Ministers had remained honest after coming into power. Nehru explained to him about the Parliamentary Board which serves as a check on the Ministers.

SRI AUROBINDO: I was surprised to see the dissolution of the Wafd Party. I was wondering what it may have been due to. So this is the cause then? They ought to have turned out the king as Kemal did in Turkey. The present king is following the policy of his father. And instead of quarrelling among themselves they should have used their newly acquired power to build up their nation: first, by giving the people education and general training, second, by increasing the country's wealth and, third, by building up the military machine.

Exactly the same thing should be done in India by the Congress Ministers.

NIRODBARAN: What sort of education? Technical?

SRI AUROBINDO: Technical, agricultural, economic. Without proper knowledge, how will India develop her industries and trade? India is such a vast country; her own people can consume a lot. External trade is not necessary at the beginning. Look at what the U.S.A. did. She first developed her internal trade to meet all the necessities of her own people and, when by that means she had increased her wealth, she began to develop her external trade. Our Government should have a plan for an economic survey of the provinces to see what products are necessary for consumption in India. But, of course, one must not neglect secondary education. You can't have efficient people today without education. It serves to create a common interest and a basis of common understanding. But I don't mean the present form of education. It is not at all suitable for building up a nation. It has to be radically changed. Indian boys are more intelligent than English boys but three-fourths of their talent and energy are wasted, whereas

English boys use their gifts ten times more efficiently than Indian boys do.

PURANI: Y has approached the merchants for donations to the Government. Owing to prohibition, there is a substantial loss of revenue. He told the merchants that if they didn't donate, new taxes would have to be imposed.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is better not to destroy the capitalists as the Socialists want. They are the source of a nation's wealth. They should be encouraged to spend for the nation. Taxing is all right, but you must increase production and start new industries and raise the standard of living. Without that, if you increase the taxes, there will be a state of depression. Other nations can tax enormously because they produce on a grand scale.

PURANI: Y is opening agricultural schools in villages and small industrial schools also—that is to say, carrying out the Wardha Scheme.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is a pity to give up all that work merely to fight the idea of Federation. You can fight it even after it has been established—you can fight the Federal Government. One has first to utilise what one has obtained and on that basis work out the rest. If the British Government finds that Federation is properly worked out, it may not object to giving more. It expected a crowd of demagogues shouting together in the Assembly, not people capable of governing. But if Socialism came, it might frighten the British.

PURANI: The present British Governor of Bombay seems sympathetic to his Cabinet.

SRI AUROBINDO: The English people, except for a few autocrats like Curzon, have a constitutional temperament. They will violently oppose their being kicked out of the country but they won't object to being slowly shouldered out as in the Dominions. The Dominions are practically independent. The British Government will be quite content if it can get India's help in case of war with other nations, but these declarations of anti-imperialistic policy and "No compromise", etc., etc. will tend to stiffen its attitude. What is the use of declaring your policy from the beginning? Even as regards the States, one must not be too exacting in one's demands. The Government won't tolerate the idea of reducing them to mere figureheads from the very beginning.

31 JANUARY 1939

NIRODBARAN: There is a tempting offer by the *Calcutta Statesman*. Arthur Moore writes to Dilip that he will pay Rs. 100 per article if Sri Aurobindo writes in his paper on world events in the light of Yogic experience.

SRI AUROBINDO (*bursting into laughter*): In the light of Yogic experience! And what reply is Dilip going to give?

NIRODBARAN: He has asked me to get your reply.

SATYENDRA: S also offered good money to Dilip to write articles for his paper. It is an unscrupulous pro-Government paper, perhaps even financed by the Government.

PURANI: S came for the last Darshan.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes; and his eyes were constantly roving about. Isn't he the same chap who wanted to see me when he was a young man? I refused to see him because I had a feeling that he was a spy. Then when the police took interest in the matter and asked people why I had not seen him, my suspicion was confirmed. In fact, it was more than a feeling, it was a concrete intuition.

Later, I found he had become a notable figure in the Executive Council. I was much surprised.

Arthur Moore is also suspected by some people of being a spy — not an ordinary spy but a secret agent of the Government. But spy or not, he knows how to meditate.

PURANI: How can he be a spy when he has supported Congress ministries and given them praise.

SRI AUROBINDO: People will say he has done it to spy better — to get sympathy.

Then there was medical talk about some old patients. One had said he had no substance left in his brain! Another had complained of hernia due to Asanas.

NIRODBARAN: There is a remarkable change in L.

SRI AUROBINDO: At one time she gave up work and that made her worse. Thinking constantly of disease and harbouring fear — these two things stand in the way of cure.

NIRODBARAN: Now L eats and digests anything.

SRI AUROBINDO: She used to write to us, "I am going to eat. You please digest for me." (*Laughter*)

PURANI: The Gaekwar is still in Bombay, he seems to have been suffering for a long time.

SRI AUROBINDO: What is the disease?

DR. BECHARLAL: Thrombus in the brain.

PURANI: He is seventy-six now—rather old.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not very old for a sturdy man like him. In India they consider one old after fifty and fit to die at sixty. In England and China, one is ripe between sixty and seventy, and only after eighty is one considered old. These things depend upon the atmosphere of the place—I don't mean the external atmosphere.

SATYENDRA: In India, Government servants have to retire at fifty or fifty-five. After that, they have no energy left to do anything new, especially as they are accustomed to an easy way of living.

SRI AUROBINDO: They don't find work and therefore die. One can always do something new at fifty-five.

PURANI: Hindenburg lived actively up to eighty-seven. Chamberlain is seventy-seven and is now Premier of England.

SRI AUROBINDO: The Mother's brother, after retiring from governorship in Africa, has been doing a lot of things—president of this, member of that and so on. He was made to retire. He did a great deal in Africa, but other people got the credit. It is men like him who built up France and also made it possible for the Ashram to continue here. Otherwise I might have had to go to France, or else to America and supramentalise the Americans.

When the Mother came here and I met her, her brother got interested. These things look like accidents but they are not. There is a guidance behind these events.

PURANI: Joswant writes that he is more and more distracted and wants to know how he will be able to come back. He is the secretary of some students' federation.

SRI AUROBINDO: He will have to federate less and consolidate more.

PURANI: He complains of being wrecked.

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh, the usual old things! That is a kind of neurasthenia that makes one restless and produces a want of balance. He wants to show off, appear bigger than he is, do something startling and striking. He has capacity but it has to be organised before it can be useful.

2 FEBRUARY 1939

For two days we had no conversation. Sri Aurobindo had suddenly developed some swelling on his injured leg and we were all anxious about it. Nobody was in a mood to talk. At last Sri Aurobindo himself came out with a reference to politics and the talk started.

PURANI: X (an Indian political leader) has sent a telegram to Y, saying this is the end of Fascism and the beginning of true democracy and declaring: "You will be a true president."

SRI AUROBINDO: Does it mean that the true president will follow his followers? That is true democracy! He will choose his followers and then follow them.

SATYENDRA: Instead of Fascism of the Right, what they perhaps want is a Fascism of the Left.

PURANI: The question of the Indian Princes and the States has become a live one now.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. If the Princes could come to a settlement with the Congress, things would be much better. My opinion is that there should be, as some Princes have suggested, an Advisory Board with all the interests represented, as in the old Indian democracies. But nowadays people want the modern type of democracy—the parliamentary form of government. The parliamentary system is doomed. It has brought Europe to its present sorry pass. It has succeeded only in the North—in England and the Scandinavian countries. That is because they are practical materialistic people: they don't live on ideas and theories. In France you find about thirty parties, and if a new man comes along, he starts the thirty-first. But it is difficult to see where one party differs from another.

PURANI: A friend of mine was telling me that in Norway and Sweden the Socialists and the Agrarians have made common cause and evolved a common scheme. They find, for instance, the margin of profit of the industrialists, and then see how much the wages can be raised.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is because they are practical people. For in every other place you will find the Socialists and the Agrarians at daggers drawn. If Socialism is to succeed, it has to be on these lines. In other countries the Socialists would demand a raise in the wages without looking into the profits and if thus the

industries are killed so much the better according to them: they will be out of the way.

PURANI: Did Jean Herbert bring any news of Europe?

SRI AUROBINDO: He says that France is lost. She has no friends now. No one trusts her after the betrayal of Czechoslovakia. They didn't expect anything from England because everybody knows that she cares only for her own interests and, besides, she didn't commit herself to anything. But France has backed out of her promise. Herbert also says that France has now become a second-rate power because of the loss of her allies. She is following England's lead but in the end England may leave her in the lurch. He adds that if the dictators are clever enough they will get all they want because France cannot fight them alone.

PURANI: But cannot England and France combined meet them?

SRI AUROBINDO: No. Even the two are no match for the dictators. And, besides, one doesn't know what England will do. As I said, she may leave France in the lurch. Blum and Daladier made the worst possible blunders, the one by his non-intervention policy in Spain, the other by betraying the Czechs. Franco's victory is most dangerous for France.

PURANI: But when the two dictators stand together, why is it not possible for England and France to do the same?

SRI AUROBINDO: The dictators know their own interests. There is no one to oppose them in their own countries and they can't be separated. England and France tried the game of separating them. England wanted to placate Italy while France tried to win over Germany but both failed. It is not that Germany and Italy like each other. The Germans despise the Italians and the Italians hate the Germans. But they know on which side their bread is buttered. England is quite unreliable under her present leadership.

Another possibility is the departure of the dictators. A prophetess friend of Suryakumari says that she doesn't see any future for Mussolini: she sees his body covered with blood. And about Hitler astrological predictions are that his stars are with him up to December. After that his decline will begin. But these prophecies and predictions can't be fully relied on. If by any chance the dictators go, they won't have any successors.

PURANI: Papers report that although Germany has military power, her economic position is unsatisfactory.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, that is Germany's weak point. The question is whether the economic structure will last long enough to allow her military strength to tell. If the Germans can win a war quickly, they can go on winning.

And dictators are not people who give things up easily. They have nobody to oppose them or say "No" to their demands. Once a country is involved in war, economic factors don't count very much. For instance, Italy was badly hit by the League of Nations when they applied sanctions in the Abyssinian War. But she persisted and carried the war through.

PURANI: And what has happened to the military power of France? We used to hear so much about her preparedness.

SRI AUROBINDO: She foolishly stopped building aeroplanes and then started producing only 250 per month while Germany was producing 1000 and England about 500 per month. Now they are trying to make up the deficit, but it will take a long time to catch up with Germany. However, it is not always preparedness that wins a war. As General Gamelin said, "Though we are not prepared, we shall win." He was for intervention in Czechoslovakia because in war-time you can get things done at tremendous speed. If France goes on yielding Djibouti, Tunis, etc., there may be an internal revolution in France and perhaps a strong dictator will come and retrieve the disaster. If you want to keep your place and prestige in the world you must stand by your pledges and obligations.

The problem is to save the world from domination by the Asuric Forces. It would be awful to be ruled by the Nazis and Fascists. Their domination will let loose on mankind what are called the Four Powers of Hell – obscurantism, falsehood, suffering and death. Suffering and death mean the horrors of war.

Herbert also says that in Germany the people know absolutely nothing about world opinion. He has been to Germany, so he should be well-informed about it. The Germans know only what Goebbels allows them to know. In Italy too not a single foreign paper is allowed to enter.

PURANI: Jwalanti was saying that if one wants to discuss politics or criticise the government, one must look round carefully to see if anybody is overhearing; one must shut the doors and windows.

SRI AUROBINDO: These are the Powers of obscurantism and falsehood.

PURANI: America is alarmed after the Fascist success in Spain. She is afraid of trouble in Latin America.

SRI AUROBINDO: Have you seen Roosevelt's statement? The French paper reports that it has not appeared in the English papers. Roosevelt has said that if the dictators become too powerful in Europe and Japan in Asia it will be the end of America. She will be attacked from both the Atlantic and the Pacific. They will begin trouble first in Latin America and then in North America. There are many Germans and Italians there and they will start Nazi propaganda.

Roosevelt has foreseen the whole thing and has taken his decision to back the democracies. But it is doubtful whether he can carry the American nation with him. The Americans won't come into the war unless some Americans are killed by Hitler, and Hitler won't do that. If they remain aloof, then it will merely be a question of being eaten up last. France will come first, then England, and finally America. Do you know of the three dreams Washington had? First, a war of independence; second, civil war; third, America attacked by many nations, including the yellow races, and her cities destroyed. He dreamt that by a supreme effort she shook herself free. It seems at present as if the third dream were coming true. But if England, France and America stand together, they have a chance of success. For America has the biggest navy, enormous economic resources and huge manpower. She may not have enough military strength on land, but the economic resources and man-power will make up for it.

PURANI: Roosevelt is supplying armaments to France and that he can do even if America doesn't come into a war.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, but Americans may object to it because it may involve them in war.

PURANI: Jwalanti was praising Mussolini for what he has done for Italy. She hates his international policy but declares he has done wonderful work for his country.

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh yes, especially at the beginning he did very good work. You haven't read Brailsford's article about what he did in Libya? Very great efficiency—of course without freedom: each house of the same pattern as the other, all regimented.

(After a pause) By the way, who is this Wazir Hossain we read of?

PURANI: He is a retired High Court judge in U.P., a leader of the Shias and a Congressman. His son is a Socialist and was imprisoned by the last administration. He comes from Aligarh University.

SRI AUROBINDO: Is Aligarh University nationalist?

PURANI: Yes, but Dara says its nationalism is very unreliable, like that of the Ali brothers who remained with Gandhi as long as he was agitating for Khilafat.

SRI AUROBINDO: But now the percentage of nationalists among the Muslims is increasing. Look at U.P. and Bihar. The number of nationalists is surely greater than some years ago?

NIRODBARAN: Was Dara at Aligarh University?

PURANI: You seem to doubt it by your question.

SRI AUROBINDO: He wrote an article when he was there. He said that Newton discovered the law of gravitation when the apple fell, but he, Dara, would have been busy eating it rather than thinking out anything.

NIRODBARAN: He has written a short drama about the Cyclone and the Flowers—very amusing.

PURANI: His rhymes are most original. But he says that with “Supramental” only “dental” can rhyme.

SRI AUROBINDO: That concerns Satyendra and establishes his connection with the Supramental. But why only “dental”? There is “transcendental”.

PURANI: That is again “dental”—at the end.

SRI AUROBINDO: What about “rental”?

SATYENDRA: That will be rather prosaic.

SRI AUROBINDO: “Oriental”? Is that all right? Sometimes Dara writes clever things.

PURANI: To return to the Princes. The States are not coming forward with any progressive policy. Bikanir is trying to crush the nationalist movement. Udaipur also.

SRI AUROBINDO: Udaipur is understandable; he is old-fashioned. But Bikanir has knocked about in the world. If the Chamber of Princes gives some reforms, it will forestall Vallabhbai Patel. One should begin with the old Panchayet system in the villages and then work up to the top. The Panchayet system and the guilds are more representative and they have a living contact with people. They are part of the people’s ideas. On the contrary, the parliamentary system, with local

bodies—the municipal councils—is not workable. These councils have no living contact with the people. The councillors make only platform speeches and nobody knows what they do for three or four years. At the end they reshuffle and rearrange the whole thing, making their own pile during their period of power. The old British parliamentary system was more representative. The man chosen belonged to the country and had a more living touch with his electors.

3 FEBRUARY 1939

NIRODBARAN: A sadhika has written a letter. She relates in it her experience: losing consciousness and the mind floating about, as it were, lightningstrokes in the head, feeling some Presence. But she says that all these experiences give her a terrible fear, and she complains of bad health. The experiences have come to her at the very start of her practice of Yoga.

SRI AUROBINDO: You may tell her that what she calls losing consciousness is the going inward of consciousness, the state of Samadhi. It is extraordinary to get these experiences at the very outset. Usually one takes months and months to make the mind quiet—and she has done it at the first sitting! The lightning stroke is the action of the Higher Power of the Yoga Shakti to make the Adhara fit for Yoga. All this shows that she has capacity and can do Yoga. But she must get rid of fear. Otherwise all experiences will stop. The fear indicates that though her inner mind is ready, her vital and physical beings are not—the one is full of fear and the other is suffering from bad health, as she says. A conflict is produced in her, which is not desirable. It may be better not to take up Yoga seriously until she has restored her health. But the most important thing is to get rid of fear.

NIRODBARAN: But how is one to get rid of it?

SRI AUROBINDO: That is the difficulty many complain of. When one takes up Yoga, all sorts of experiences come which are beyond the ordinary consciousness. And if one fears, Yoga is not possible. It has to be got rid of by the mind, by a psychological training and by will-power. Any human being worth the name has a will, and this will has to be exercised or developed. She can ask for the protection of the Divine, lay herself in the hands of the

Divine. As Vivekananda very insistently said, "Abhi". The Yogi has no fear.

I don't know whether I have told you of an experience of mine. After my meeting with Lele, I was once meditating at Calcutta. I felt a tremendous calm and then it seemed as if my breath would stop. A silly fear or rather an apprehension caught hold of me and I said, "If my breath stops, how shall I live?" At once the experience ceased and never came back.

There are all sorts of experiences. What, for instance, would you do if you felt your head being drilled as if a nail were being thrust in? One feels also the splitting of the head in two or the bursting of it.

NIRODBARAN: Why can't the experiences come in quietly?

SRI AUROBINDO: They do come in quietly but then you make a row. If your physical body or head were being split, you could object; but you ought to know by now that all these Yogic experiences are in the subtle body.

NIRODBARAN: I also once or twice had such a fear as the lady speaks of—the fear of a Presence. As soon as I sat to meditate before going to bed at about midnight, I felt everything so still and as if there were some Presence. That frightened me.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why? Did you think it was the Devil that brought in the stillness? But the Devil usually makes a commotion. Two things are necessary in Yoga: one is to get rid of fear and the other to know the ordinary symbols. (*Addressing Purani*) You know W. Once in meditation he saw golden gods coming down and telling him, "We will cut up your body and make it new." He cried out, "Never! Never!" He thought his physical body was going to be cut up. But the symbolism is quite clear. It means that the old things in W's nature were to be thrown away and new things brought in.

PURANI: I was surprised to hear that later he turned to Jainism.

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, such changes often happen. In one's vital and physical nature there remains a stamp of one's ancestral religion and it comes out after some time. The Christians usually turn towards Roman Catholicism. A Frenchman—I forget his name—tried all sorts of things, European mysticism, Tibetan occultism, etc., and came into touch with Pavitra. Pavitra wrote to him, saying that these things wouldn't go with Yoga. The man broke the contact and turned towards Catholicism.

He wrote a book, stealing passages from Pavitra's letters and using them in support of Catholicism. It was this that disgusted Pavitra.

My grandfather started by being a Brahmo and ended by writing a book on Hinduism and proclaiming it the best religion. Devendranath Tagore became rather anxious and feared he might run into an excess of zeal.

After this the talk turned to politics and the work of the Leftists.

SRI AUROBINDO: The Leftists will probably pass laws abolishing the Zamindars and the capitalists and spoil all the work done by the Ministers. They will try to introduce social legislation and that will force the Governors to use their powers. Or the Leftists may keep out of the assemblies. It would be foolish to throw away the power given. I wrote before I left politics that if you get real power, take it and fight for more, like De Valera in Ireland. De Valera took what was given and grabbed for more. In the present international situation, when the Government wants to come to a compromise with the Congress you should accept what they give. Accept the Federation and fight against it afterwards.

NIRODBARAN: That is also X's opinion, but he says that now is the time to press for independence.

SRI AUROBINDO: That would be all right if the country were prepared for revolution, so that even if X and a few others were hanged, the movement would go on and ultimately the Government would yield as in Ireland. There the people fighting against the Government risked their lives. If one is not prepared for that, one has to proceed in subtler ways. At present what X demands is impossible to get. It will only set the Government against you and they will try to crush the movement.

PURANI: But if we work this provincial programme and prepare the country and at the same time press the Princely States to give rights to the people, then we might get what we want without all that revolution.

SRI AUROBINDO: Exactly. It is a very clever drive to bring in the States question and if it can be carried through, the Federation with the Princes will break down and then only the Muslim question will remain.

(After a long pause) The British people have one weakness. They can't go on with brutal methods of repression for a long time. They have their prestige to keep up before the world and they want popular support. So in the end they come to a compromise. France also comes to a compromise but takes a longer time. Some other nations won't hesitate to go to the extreme limit. In Palestine the British Government almost succeeded in crushing the terrorists. If they had persisted they could have easily put Nashishibi against the Mufti and ruled the Arabs by the Arabs. But they could not go on and have now called the Palestine Conference. If the Mufti is clever he will be able to get a good deal.

In Ireland also the British came to a compromise. Even the Conservatives turned round. France gave in in Syria but the Syrians had to fight for it after the last war. In Tunisia they have clapped the Destourians in prison, but if the nationalists keep it up, France will give in.

PURANI: Roosevelt's speech seems to have been a declaration for democracy. In that case the three powers combined may stem the tide of the dictators.

NIRODBARAN: Now Hitler will think twice before he tries to do anything.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, if he is capable of thinking. His inner voice may ask him to push on. Mussolini may think twice, unless he is too Hitlerised. But then Hitler may say to him, "I have given you a chance for colonies. If you don't take it, I will go to the Ukraine." Mussolini may not like that. But Hitler may not go to war. During the Czech crisis it was by mere bluff that he succeeded. He knew from private sources that England and France wouldn't fight.

PURANI: Roosevelt has promised France armaments and America is selling aeroplanes, etc. That means they may come to her help in case she is attacked.

SRI AUROBINDO: But it is doubtful if Roosevelt can carry the nation with him, America has increased her armaments for her own defence. But if they are exported the American people may think that it will involve them in a war. At any rate his speech has come as a great blow to both Germany and Italy. Chamberlain also may think of supporting France now. A remarkable man, this Roosevelt, very bold and ready to experiment and take risks. It is

the old Roosevelt blood. Only, the first Roosevelt was brutally Fascist. This one is more refined.

PURANI: Jean Herbert says there may not be any war after all.

SRI AUROBINDO: If the British and French leaders go on yielding to the demands of the dictators, there may not be any war. Perhaps the British may say to Germany, "We shall supply you with raw materials, you can come and settle comfortably here."

The topic of corruption in public life came up. Somebody said that in most countries the people in political power confer favours on their own supporters and are open to bribes.

SRI AUROBINDO: You will never find such corruption in England. Public life there is honest and sincere. Englishmen may tell lies and break their promises but bribery and appropriation of money hardly exist in their public or political administration. As they say, "These things are not done." If a political leader does them, he is finished for life. Thomas, you know, is wiped out. The English judges make no distinction between a rich criminal and a poor one.

4 FEBRUARY 1939

PURANI: I have here a letter of Lala Lajpat Rai to Birla, written a few days before his death. In it he lays bare his inmost thoughts about life, action, God, etc. He has lost his old standard of values of life and action and finds himself an advocate of the theory of Illusionism against which he, a prominent leader of the Arya Samaj and a monotheist, had preached all his life. His relatives and friends have all become unreal, impermanent, and he asks in effect: "What are these worldly relations based on? How can an all-powerful and all-merciful God create this world of misery, suffering and poverty? Is there any use praying to God? Are not prayers only for consoling ourselves? And do I not act because I can't remain without doing something and because mere enjoyments don't give me peace? I feel for my countrymen and I work for them – but don't I work more for myself than for them?"

SRI AUROBINDO: I see. So if God were omnipotent and all-merciful, he would not create this world!

But I wonder why people in India at the end of their lives come to the same conclusion as Lajpat Rai. Almost all come to regard life and the world as an illusion. Is it the ancestral Indian blood or is it the atmosphere of the place or something personal, a psychological change? I suppose there may be a strain running in the blood.

But the Christians also have nearly the same idea when they say, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity and vexation of the spirit."

PURANI: Lajpat Rai was a Jain by birth. That might account for his turning away from the world.

After this there was some talk about Jainism, Illusionism, liberation, multiplicity of souls and Vedantic unity.

5 FEBRUARY 1939

For two or three days there was no long conversation. Either the attendants did not have much to ask or Sri Aurobindo was not in the same mood as before. But one thing was noticed: the Mother came to meditate very early – at about 6.15 p.m. – and both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother concentrated together till 7.00 or thereabouts. So Nirodbaran was obliged to massage Sri Aurobindo's leg after 7.00 which left hardly any time for conversation. This evening Purani began telling Sri Aurobindo about Jean Herbert's wife.

PURANI: She is collecting Sister Nivedita's letters in order to publish them. In one of them it seems to be said that you gave Nivedita the charge of editing *Bande Mataram* after you left Calcutta.

SRI AUROBINDO: No. It was the *Karmayogin*. You can tell her that. There is no harm now in saying it, as it is all a long time ago. I saw Nivedita before I left Calcutta for Chandernagore, and asked her to take charge of the paper, which she did. It was from her that I had got the news of my contemplated arrest. She had many friends in Government circles. On getting that news I wrote the article "My Political Will" which stopped my arrest.

PURANI: In one of her letters Nivedita says that Vivekananda tried to dedicate her to Shiva but found her not ready.

SRI AUROBINDO: How not ready? Not ready means either unwilling or not fit to fulfil the conditions.

PURANI: Perhaps unwilling.

SRI AUROBINDO (*after a pause*): We were talking about Jainism yesterday. Well, don't the Jains do those violent Tapasyas with the idea of transcending Nature and conquering it and not from the idea of world-illusion?

PURANI: That's right.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then the aim is the same as ours in some respects: only the method is different.

PURANI: But how does that explain Lajpat Rai's sense of illusion?

SRI AUROBINDO: No, it doesn't. His sense of illusion may have been from something in his blood or perhaps from the atmosphere of the place. At London, when I was reading Max Müller's translation of Vedanta I came upon the idea of Atman, the Self, and thought that this was the true thing to be realised in life. Before that, I was an agnostic and even an atheist. How do you explain this? You can't say it was the atmosphere of the place. It was in the blood or perhaps carried over from a past life. And the curious thing is that as soon as I set my foot on Apollo Bunder in Bombay the experience of the Self began in me – it was a sense of calm and vastness pervading everywhere.

There is a contact with a place that gives you an experience and sometimes the experience is appropriate to the place. For instance, the sense of the Infinite I had on the Sankaracharya Hill in Kashmir or on the Parvati hills at Poona, and the perception of the reality of the Goddess at the Karnali temple.

PURANI (*after a pause*): To return to the Herberts: I asked Herbert why the Jews are so much repressed and persecuted in Germany. He says the same thing as you did – that they are a rich minority and so they are made a scapegoat. The same was done, he tells me, to the French aristocracy during the Revolution. In Spain also at present there is a movement against a certain class.

SRI AUROBINDO: The comparison with France and Spain cannot be made. In France it was not against the aristocracy in particular that there was a revolt: the revolt was against the whole history of the past, and in Spain it is against the past repression by the Church.

PURANI: I asked Herbert's wife about the condition of Switzerland. She is Swiss. She says Switzerland is passing through

a critical time. She fears that in case of war the Germans may pass through Switzerland. During the War of 1914–1918 the Swiss had to pass some anxious days. When the Germans chose Belgium as their route, the Swiss felt relieved.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, if the dictators decide to take a course of action, it may be through Switzerland.

It is said that Czechoslovakia's frontier was so strongly fortified that Germany would have found it difficult to pierce it.

PURANI: It is a pity the Czechoslovakians gave in without a fight. Hitler is now asking for colonies equivalent to those of other powers.

SRI AUROBINDO: But from where will he get them?

PURANI: From Belgium, Portugal or Holland.

SRI AUROBINDO: Holland has no colonies. Portugal's colonies in Africa are so small that Hitler will hardly be satisfied. The Belgian Congo is big, but England won't dare to do anything with it to placate Hitler, for that will make Belgium furious and she may side with Germany. England can't risk that, for if Germany takes possession of Antwerp it will be a pistol pointed at the heart of England. The same will hold for France.

(*Turning to Purani*) Roosevelt has backed out. I thought that in his message to the Congress he had taken up the cause of the democracies, but now he says America has nothing to do with European problems.

PURANI: It may be that the financial interests are behind this.

SRI AUROBINDO: He is not in their hands.

6 FEBRUARY 1939

PURANI: What is the basic explanation of an attitude like Lajpat Rai's?¹

SRI AUROBINDO: Generally it is Tamasic Vairagya,² if it is due to a sense of failure in life. Most people get this kind of world-repulsion when they fail to succeed in life. Failure and frustration

¹ The following comments on Lajpat Rai are based on A. B. Purani's record of this talk.

² World-repulsion arising from the Guna (quality) of Tamas (ignorance and inertia) in one's nature: the two other Gunas are Rajas (dynamism) and Sattwa (refinement and poise).

lead to what is called Smashan Vairagya – the feeling of renunciation that comes to one in a cemetery – a temporary state of world-disgust.

But in Lajpat Rai's case perhaps it is Sattwic and not Tamasic disgust. To the mind at this stage everything seems impermanent, fleeting, and the old motives of action are no longer sufficient. This may be the result of a spiritual development through one's actions in life. It is the mind turning to know things. Gautama Buddha saw human suffering and asked, "Why this suffering?" and then, "How is one to get out of it?" That is Sattwic Vairagya. Pure Sattwic Vairagya is when one gets the perception of the littleness of everything personal – actions, desires, thoughts – and when one sees the vast world, eternal time and infinite space spread out before oneself and feels all human action as if it were nought.

The same truth is behind the saying, "It will be the same a hundred years hence"; and it is true so far as the personal aspect of action is concerned.

PURANI: Can it be said that personal actions and other personal things have an importance in so far as through them an impersonal consciousness, or a divine purpose, works itself out?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, in the impersonal aspect even a small personal action may have a significance. Personal actions have an importance in the evolution of the individual. But it is difficult to persuade ordinary men to take this view.

PURANI: Lajpat Rai seems in his letter to doubt even the existence of God.

SRI AUROBINDO: That does not matter. It only means he wants to understand the way of God's working and the nature of this world.

There is a line in Dante which says that even eternal hell is a creation of the Divine Love. I wonder what Lajpat Rai would say to that. And what does Dante mean by it? I don't understand it myself. One can understand being thrown into hell in order that one may rise up to heaven from it; but how can the Divine Love create eternal hell?¹

¹ Sri Aurobindo's reference is to the sentence in Canto III of *Inferno*, occurring among the words seen by Dante written on the gate of hell. Dorothy Sayers renders the sentence:

PURANI: Your reference to Dante reminds me of Lascelles Abercrombie's book, *The Idea of Great Poetry*. There he says that poetry to be great requires vitality and intensity of experience and expression, as well as range and variety. According to him, Shelley is not equal in range to Milton.

SRI AUROBINDO: Range? What does he mean by range? If he means a certain largeness of vision, then Shelley does not have it. Homer, Shakespeare, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* have range. But neither Virgil nor Milton has range in the same measure. Their range is not so great. Dante's range too is partial.

PURANI: Abercrombie says that although Goethe has range, his hero Faust begins as a character and ends as an idea.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is not quite correct. Faust is a character throughout the first part of Goethe's poem. Only in the second part does he become an idea. And the two parts are really two separate books. Goethe wrote the second part in his old age. It is entirely different from the first, just as Milton's *Paradise Regained* is different from his *Paradise Lost*. Keats also has two versions of his *Hyperion*: in the later version Hyperion tends to become an idea.

PURANI: Abercrombie remarks about *Paradise Lost* that its Satan is a symbol of human will struggling against Fate.

SRI AUROBINDO: Human will? I always thought it was super-human will.

Justice moved my Great Maker; God Eternal
Wrought me: the Power, and the unsearchably
High Wisdom, and the Primal Love Supernal.

The attributes of the Trinity are mentioned here. Charles Williams, in *The Figure of Beatrice*, comments thus: "If there is God, if there is free-will, then man is able to choose the opposite of God. Power, Wisdom, Love, gave man free-will; therefore Power, Wisdom, Love, created the gate of hell and the possibility of hell." But Sri Aurobindo's point about the eternity of hell is not answered. That in the divine dispensation hell should be possible or actual is one thing; but it is quite another that the hell-gate in Dante should read:

Through me the road to everlasting woe,
and
Abandon hope, all ye that enter here.

How can the Supreme Power, Wisdom and Love condemn a soul to everlasting woe and an utter abandonment of hope to get out of hell?

26 OCTOBER 1939

PURANI: The seizure of the American ship *City of Flint* may create some change in America.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't think so, because it was carrying contraband. I am not quite sure, but I think that according to international law contraband goods are not allowed.

NIRODBARAN: Fazlul Huque has come out with some grievances now, one of them being the muffling of the press by Congress Ministers.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is to suppress communalism. What is he himself doing in Bengal?

NIRODBARAN: C. R.'s statement seems very fine. In a few words he has expressed the whole thing.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, but if he is going to call Jinnah into the conference the unity he speaks of seems improbable. And I don't know what he means by a "gesture". If he wants Indian leaders to be included in the War Committee, it is most unlikely that the Government will consent, as they know nothing about warfare.

PURANI: They may be able to formulate a scheme for non-violent warfare!

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, as in Poland. Gandhi calls the Polish resistance almost non-violent. By "non-violent" he means, I suppose, a heroic defensive resistance and a heroic martyrdom ending in surrender. But the Poles didn't wait till they were all shot, they surrendered long before.

How does he take to the Congress shooting, putting people into prison, etc.? They are not non-violent.

PURANI: No, once he publicly denounced these as violent means.

SRI AUROBINDO: But application of force in any form is violence. Prohibition by force is also violence. Has he ever thought how he will rule by non-violence?

PURANI: He will persuade and convince people by peaceful means, I believe.

SRI AUROBINDO: Will the Parsees come round by that? Human nature is non-violent till one gets power.

EVENING

PURANI: Sir Akbar asks if you could change “seven crores” into “thirty crores” in your translation of “Bande Mataram.”

SRI AUROBINDO: That has been done.

PURANI: And if “Durga” could also be changed?

SRI AUROBINDO: That I can’t change.

NIRODBARAN: Muslims take “Durga” as a Hindu Goddess and say that in this poem there are plenty of Sanskrit words.

SRI AUROBINDO: But here the country is spoken of as “Durga”, so a Hindu Goddess has nothing to do with it. The Christians may also object to Greek Gods and Goddesses being represented in literature. As for the other point, the Muslims have plenty of Persian words in their writings. Let these be removed also.

PURANI: Yes, they don’t see that the country is being addressed as Durga.

SRI AUROBINDO: At last I have found some fine modern poets. This anthology *Recent Poetry* is more characteristic and this woman Alida Monroe has a finer poetic sensibility than Yeats. But Auden I can’t make out. He speaks of “two black rocks, someone dying there”, “we two”, etc. Who are these “we”?

PURANI: Perhaps you will find some more good poets as you go on.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don’t know, because these are the poets they speak of. (*To Nirodbaran*) Eliot is undoubtedly a poet. Why the devil does he go in for modernism when he can write such fine stuff as “La Figlia che Piange”? When he plunges into irregularity he makes a mess by lack of rhythm.

27 OCTOBER 1939

NIRODBARAN: In an old essay in a now defunct periodical named *Orient Amal* wrote that because you were embittered and disillusioned you gave up poetry and politics.

SRI AUROBINDO: Nonsense. I gave it up and took to the spiritual life because I wanted force for my action. People make the mistake of thinking that whatever a poet writes must be from his personal experience. I can also write of universal experience. I can feel the experience in me and write about it.

NIRODBARAN: Gandhi will now have to consider the door closed, after Hoare's speech.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, not only closed but jammed and he must be prepared to expect the worst.

NIRODBARAN: When Hoare was made the Government speaker, it was—

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, it was a foregone conclusion.

NIRODBARAN: He has also indicated the line the Government should pursue, saying "with strength and justice".

SRI AUROBINDO: That is the Hitlerian euphemism for repression, almost the same tone as of Ribbentrop. The undersecretary, O'Neil, tried to cool it down but with no effect.

12 NOVEMBER 1939

SRI AUROBINDO (*apropos of an article by a devotee named Buddhadev*): I have never heard that Shakespeare was popular among the peasants. His popularity was due to his power of speech. Everything he said was said with force and energy and that appealed to the people. But he is not so successful in his sonnets. His dramas alone have that quality. Shelley has that gift only in rare places. Wordsworth also, and those are the things that become popular but not with the peasants. Shakespeare easy? And he was enjoyed by all? That is news.

It is true that *dhvani* (rhythmic suggestion) is an important element of poetry but it is not everything. There must be something that appeals to the mind, man being mental.

Poetry to be popular must be good poetry.

19 NOVEMBER 1939

NIRODBARAN: You have said in your *Synthesis of Yoga* that all love and adoration is good — it is a preparation and aspiration, even a partial realisation.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not for a Yogi.

NIRODBARAN: No, I mean in ordinary human life how can it be a preparation and aspiration?

SRI AUROBINDO: I meant true love, not vital love with desire and possessiveness, or physical love. That of course can't be—

though Blake says the physical act of love is part of divine love or its fulfilment. If it is true love with a psychic or higher element in it, then it helps to awaken the Divine in oneself or bring a high uplifting of one's nature. I said there "love and adoration". Love, adoration and desire for union are the three features of that love.

NIRODBARAN: Sometimes even when there is a true spark, that gets lost afterwards by vital mixture, sometimes with disastrous consequences to the parties concerned.

SRI AUROBINDO: In so far as there is truth in the love, it will have its reward in the evolution of the being.

NIRODBARAN: If that love helps to turn one towards the Divine, can it be said it was an unconscious seeking for the Divine?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, or it may be a seeking for love itself and its realisation or fulfilment.

NIRODBARAN: I have read a novel where the hero – an artist – has been depicted as unconsciously seeking for the Divine through human love but every fresh contact or relation seems to disillusion him because he finds jealousy, pettiness, etc. coming in. Could it be said it was really a seeking or was it merely a vital play?

SRI AUROBINDO: Can't say, it depends on the particular psychological case. Which novel was it?

NIRODBARAN: J's. There the hero has been represented in that light and turned towards the Divine at the end.

SRI AUROBINDO: That's all mental.

20 NOVEMBER 1939

NIRODBARAN: I have a few more questions on yesterday's topic. First, it seems that so long as love can be kept more or less psychic and mental it tends to remain high, noble and constant. But if it is brought down to the physical it tends to be vitiated and gets lost. So the physical relation seems to be predominantly responsible for the breaking of the union.

SRI AUROBINDO: The vital can also be responsible for it without any physical element. You can't say the physical is predominantly so. Blake and others actually say that spiritual love should be sanctified by vital and physical action. They are part of divine love.

NIRODBARAN: In woman, people say, a moment comes when she surrenders everything to the beloved. The physical being is a part of that surrender.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is the attitude of submission of the female to the male. Real surrender is a different thing, more psychic in character.

NIRODBARAN: In a psychic relation, when sex action takes place, is it only for procreation?

SRI AUROBINDO: The psychic element may be extended into the physical.

NIRODBARAN: But is there not a danger of the psychic element being lost?

SRI AUROBINDO: That depends on the strength of the psychic. The psychic relation is itself very rare, but it can get overclouded.

NIRODBARAN: If a person has been disappointed in love in the world and that element is not satisfied, and after turning to the Divine he finds somebody whom he loves and adores, can it be called a need or necessity of the being?

SRI AUROBINDO: Not need or necessity. All depends on the particular case. If there is the psychic element in it, it can help. The Vaishnavas brought even sexual relations into their Yoga in order to sublimate them. The result in their case was a failure.

NIRODBARAN: But in spite of the psychic element, there is a risk. The "thing" may be lost.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't know what this "thing" is as I don't know the case.

SATYENDRA: Nirod is speaking very guardedly!

21 NOVEMBER 1939

SATYENDRA: Nirod has a few more questions to ask: he is trying to formulate them, it seems.

PURANI: Schomburg is a great woman-hater, it appears. On every occasion he brings in the question of woman's shortcomings.

SRI AUROBINDO: Is yours also a misogynist question?

NIRODBARAN: Misogynist means woman-hater?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes.

NIRODBARAN: No, my question is not that. Someone asked me, "If love is a seeking for the Divine, why does one seek human love after taking up Yoga?"

SRI AUROBINDO: But is the man conscious of the Divine? If he is, either of two things may happen. All human relations may fall off or, keeping the divine love, he may keep human love as an appendage trying to raise it towards the Divine. I am not speaking of sex relations.

NIRODBARAN: He may have faith that here is the Divine.

SRI AUROBINDO: Faith is not consciousness. It is a preliminary element.

NIRODBARAN: And if he is unconscious?

SRI AUROBINDO: It depends on particular types. Some persons, as I said, after being conscious of the Divine don't want any other relation with anyone else; at the same time they can keep a universal love for everybody. Others may keep a special relation with some, keeping it pure and trying to centralise everything towards the Divine.

NIRODBARAN: It should be then predominantly psychic?

SRI AUROBINDO: No, it can be higher vital, free from all desires, attachments, etc.

SATYENDRA: There is the other extreme also. People here say that there should not be love for anyone else except for the Divine!

SRI AUROBINDO: As I said, it depends on the type. It does not mean that one should give up friendship with somebody for the sake of the Divine.

NIRODBARAN: But friendship with the other sex involves danger.

PURANI: There his Schomberg is coming in!

NIRODBARAN: If you mean I am a woman-hater, no! Besides, we are speaking from different viewpoints.

SRI AUROBINDO: He is speaking from the viewpoint of fear!

NIRODBARAN: A last question: When people are united by love and come to lead a divine life but then their relation breaks off and each goes his or her own way, is it because the purpose of love has been served that the separation occurs?

SRI AUROBINDO: Not necessarily. There are cases where their old lower nature has dropped away and they are going side by side. In other cases it may be that one has not entered the path. There

are also examples where one has come for the Divine and the other hasn't or has formed fresh attachments after taking up Yoga.

NIRODBARAN: Could it be said that in their united life for the Divine, there may be a mixture in such cases?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, there may be a mixture and, under cover of the Divine call, they may satisfy the vital.

22 NOVEMBER 1939

Dr. Manilal arrived in the afternoon from Baroda. After doing pranam to Sri Aurobindo, he spoke with him.

DR. MANILAL: How are you, Sir?

SRI AUROBINDO (*smiling*): Status quo.

DR. MANILAL: Is the leg better?

SRI AUROBINDO: In some ways better, in some ways not. And how are you?

DR. MANILAL: Getting on, Sir. How do you find me?

SRI AUROBINDO: You look flourishing!

EVENING

SRI AUROBINDO (*to Dr. Manilal*): What's the news? Baroda has declared war on Germany?

DR. MANILAL: Seems only in writing. Even an insolvent State has offered to help the Government!

PURANI: Why, it can help with other people's money!

DR. MANILAL: Do you think the Government will give something?

SRI AUROBINDO: Not likely so long as the Muslim League and others go on like that and don't unite.

DR. MANILAL: Jinnah gave one of the finest speeches of his life and he talks of unity now.

SRI AUROBINDO: Nonsense! You can't take politicians' words at their face value. You have to see what they do. He is going on just in his old way.

DR. MANILAL: This war doesn't even seem to have begun. It must be that some peace proposal is underway.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why? Each party may be afraid of the other and so doesn't want to attack as it would mean a tremendous loss of life. If Germany attacks London by air, Berlin may be attacked by England. So they are trying to make it an economic war.

(Addressing Purani) I have finished Selincourt's book on Blake, which he ends by saying that all art is spiritual, all art is mystical.

PURANI: What would Shakespeare say to it?

SRI AUROBINDO: No, he means only the art of painting. "Spiritual" he uses perhaps in the old foolish way, meaning something idealistic.

NIRODBARAN: You have said in *The Synthesis of Yoga* that the conscious aim of art should be to express God and His principles in everything, in objects and persons. Now how can one express God in a landscape, for instance? I thought: could it be an aspect of His beauty and vastness?

SRI AUROBINDO: In that case, all artists express God in their work.

NIRODBARAN: Yes, so I argued, but you have said "conscious aim"; some may not do it consciously.

SRI AUROBINDO: It depends on the context. But I suppose I meant a Divine Reality behind everything. Do you mean God in the religious sense?

PURANI: Perhaps.

SRI AUROBINDO: No, I did not refer to that but to the Reality behind.

NIRODBARAN: Even so, how can one express it?

SRI AUROBINDO: You have to see it first and then express it.

NIRODBARAN: Are there any examples where it has been done?

SRI AUROBINDO: In Eastern Art, something has been achieved in human figures.

NIRODBARAN: But in landscapes do you know any artist who has done it?

SRI AUROBINDO: In Japanese drawings of flowers and landscapes, there is some expression of the Reality.

23 NOVEMBER 1939

DR. MANILAL: Where can the souls of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda be? Have they taken birth again?

SRI AUROBINDO: You have to enquire at the Foreign Office of the World. (*Laughter*)

DR. MANILAL: You said Vivekananda came to you in jail.

SRI AUROBINDO: When he came he could not yet have taken birth again.

DR. MANILAL: But now?

SRI AUROBINDO: He may have or he may be in the silent Brahman unless the Brahman has sent him down. According to the Puranas he may be in Saptaloka.

DR. MANILAL: The Puranas can't be believed! Plenty of unreasonable stories!

SRI AUROBINDO: Why not? What about the Upanishads? There are also such stories.

DR. MANILAL: Then the Puranas are true?

SRI AUROBINDO: Except for the stories which are meant only to illustrate truths.

DR. MANILAL: Now I will ask a big question. People say that you can by your Power bring your injured leg to its normal condition if you wish to do it.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't wish anything. If it is meant to come, it will.

NIRODBARAN: But suppose you wanted it?

SRI AUROBINDO: You mean if it is possible to do it? Quite possible.

NIRODBARAN: Then why not do it?

SRI AUROBINDO: It can't be done in a day. It requires much concentration for which I have no time.

DR. MANILAL: But wouldn't it be profitable in the long run?

SRI AUROBINDO: But I have other things to do.

NIRODBARAN: (*after a lull*): He doesn't seem to be satisfied with the answer.

DR. MANILAL: Can it be brought back to normality?

SRI AUROBINDO: It has to be seen. But why is it a big question? It seems to be a small question to me.

NIRODBARAN: Perhaps the result will be big especially from the medical point of view. Dr. Manilal now finds that from the medical point of view there is no chance. So he wants to satisfy his conscience by knowing if Yogic Force can do it.

SRI AUROBINDO (*addressing Dr. Manilal*): Perhaps your self-interest stands in the way. If the leg becomes all right, you will ask

me to resume the daily correspondence and eight hours' Darshan again.

DR. MANILAL: Would it not be possible to cure everything in the wink of an eye by the Supramental Force? (*Laughter*)

SRI AUROBINDO: It will have to be the supreme Supramental Force. I am not a Tirthankar.

DR. MANILAL: In Jainism (*laughter by all*) a story is told of a Yogi curing his leprosy with his own saliva.

SRI AUROBINDO: Christ is also said to have cured someone's blindness with his saliva.

DR. MANILAL: But he was crucified.

SRI AUROBINDO: What of it?

DR. MANILAL: Didn't he suffer then?

SRI AUROBINDO: He didn't say no to the crucifixion.

DR. MANILAL: Why didn't he prevent it!? Wasn't it due to his past Karma?

SRI AUROBINDO: How can it be when he said he was the Son of God? He said he had come down to be crucified for your sins. He took upon himself (*with emphasis*) all your sins.

DR. MANILAL: They say Gandhi is an incarnation of Christ.

SRI AUROBINDO: Incarnation? What can be said is that there are things in his teachings which are similar to Christ's.

DR. MANILAL: What about the Congress? Will it succeed? (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: You seem to be jumping the subject.

SRI AUROBINDO (*after a while*): Not exactly. Gandhi provided the transition.

24 NOVEMBER 1939

DR. MANILAL: While meditating I had a momentary vision of a *bakul* tree with violet flowers. What meaning, Sir?

SRI AUROBINDO: May be symbolic. Does anybody know the significance of *bakul*?

CHAMPAKLAL: Patience! (*Laughter*) So it means you must have patience.

NIRODBARAN: And violet?

SRI AUROBINDO: It has many meanings. Maybe Krishna's compassion.

DR. MANILAL: Patience till eternity?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, you must think as if all eternity were before you.

SATYENDRA: Krishna is a very difficult God. Shiva would have been easy to satisfy.

PURANI: Yes, he doesn't care for consequences. Krishna has to come afterwards to save the situation.

DR. MANILAL: Shiva seems to give boons to the Asuras, sometimes to both the opposite parties in the fight, sometimes boons which are contradictory to former ones.

SRI AUROBINDO: He says, "This fellow has done some Tapasya, let me give him something." He is also Bholanath: he doesn't remember what he has given.

DR. MANILAL: In the Puranas his boons lead sometimes to destruction.

SATYENDRA: He is also the God of destruction.

DR. MANILAL: Yes, and he runs away from the destruction!

SRI AUROBINDO: He doesn't care for destruction any more than for running away.

DR. MANILAL: Why did God create this world? Was he very unhappy?

NIRODBARAN: Do you create out of unhappiness?

SRI AUROBINDO: Why unhappy? He may have created the world for fun. "Let me create Manilal to see what he does," he may have said.

NIRODBARAN (*after some time*): Dr. Amiya Sankar wants to know if and how one can get direct guidance in work.

SRI AUROBINDO: Guidance from whom? From me? I am not a doctor.

NIRODBARAN: No, inner guidance.

SRI AUROBINDO: One can get guidance by the opening of the inner being, the psychic, the inner mental or even the inner vital. Only, the psychic is more sure.

DR. MANILAL: How to open the psychic? ..r

SRI AUROBINDO: There are many ways.

DR. MANILAL: Please tell us one or two.

SRI AUROBINDO: One can get the opening by making the mind quiet or by turning one's mind towards the Divine or by separating oneself from one's movements and trying to keep them separate by mental or other control.

NIRODBARAN: Turning one's mind to the Divine would mean the rejection of desires at the same time.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not necessarily. When the mind is turned, it helps to awaken the divine element in oneself and the rejection may follow by itself.

DR. MANILAL: But the rejection is so difficult. I have been trying to control anger for such a long time but when the moment comes I am simply carried away.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is because you are still trying with the mind and you still want to have the anger.

DR. MANILAL: How? I want to reject it.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, but some part in you must want it. Otherwise it couldn't remain.

DR. MANILAL: But I am not conscious.

SRI AUROBINDO: But are you conscious of everything in yourself?

DR. MANILAL: Can the psychic, after opening, close up again?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes; if you ignore it, it can get clouded. Sometimes people mistake the inner mental opening for the psychic. Of course it doesn't matter very much from the practical point of view. The psychic is behind all these inner mental and vital planes.

26 NOVEMBER 1939

Sri Aurobindo sat up in bed before walking. Dr. Manilal opened the conversation.

DR. MANILAL: Tomorrow I am going, Sir. One request before I go. May I massage your leg?

SRI AUROBINDO (*curtly though with a slight smile*): No.

NIRODBARAN (*to Dr. Manilal who looked nonplussed*): Why do you want to massage it? From the medical point of view or for personal satisfaction?

DR. MANILAL: From the medical point of view.

SRI AUROBINDO: One day's massage won't do any good.

DR. MANILAL: No, but afterwards Nirod and others may continue.

MULSHANKAR: You want to begin first?

SRI AUROBINDO: They can as well begin.

DR. MANILAL (*again outdone and feeling perhaps a little humbler*):
All doctors agree that massage is the right thing.

SRI AUROBINDO: I know!

DR. MANILAL: If it is not objectionable, may I know, Sir, why you object?

SRI AUROBINDO: It is a secret.

The subject could not be pursued any further and the Mother came in soon after. When Sri Aurobindo's walk was over, Dr. Manilal came slowly to the front and took up another line of conversation.

DR. MANILAL: Bose is wild against the Congress resolution. He says the Government has already closed the door while Congress keeps the door open and is going to lick its shoes.

SRI AUROBINDO: How can Congress lick its shoes if the door is banged? The Government has not closed the door yet.

DR. MANILAL: What is your opinion about the resignation of ministers?

SRI AUROBINDO: I have no opinion.

DR. MANILAL: But are they right? Is it a correct step?

SRI AUROBINDO: Everything is correct if it is successful!

DR. MANILAL: Not always true, Sir.

SRI AUROBINDO: I mean, in politics.

DR. MANILAL: People say the ministers are wrong.

SRI AUROBINDO: Which people?

DR. MANILAL: Bose and the Leftists. I also think they are wrong.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why?

DR. MANILAL: Well, they were once doing so much good work, village uplift, etc. Now everything will stop and perhaps be undone.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is not the point. They accepted ministership for a greater purpose and if they find that that is not going to be fulfilled, what can they do?

DR. MANILAL: But they could have accepted and remained and tried to work for further progress.

SRI AUROBINDO: In that case the Moderates could have done the same thing and you would be right where you were.

SATYENDRA: They wanted a clarification of the war aims and when the Government is not willing to give even that, how can they remain?

DR. MANILAL: But do you think this will lead to anything?

SRI AUROBINDO: How can I say? It depends on what they do next and how they work things out. Nowadays there are no more resolutions, only speeches. Gandhi and Nehru's resolutions are speeches. I got tired of reading them and gave up half-way.

SATYENDRA: They want to put everything clearly.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, but that can be done with brevity too.

SATYENDRA: C. R. could have done it perhaps.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, he could have.

DR. MANILAL: Will the Government go against the Congress Ministry reforms? For example, prohibition?

SRI AUROBINDO: Not likely, unless India as a whole wants it to go.

DR. MANILAL: But the Parsees may agitate.

SRI AUROBINDO: They are only a small number. A government can't undo it for a tiny minority.

After this there was a lull. Dr. Manilal seemed to be thinking of some other points.

NIRODBARAN: What next, doctor?

SATYENDRA: He seems to be thinking.

SRI AUROBINDO: He wants to find the sort of questions to which I may give a less agnostic reply. He wants supramental answers while I am giving only overmental ones. (*Laughter*)

DR. MANILAL: Huque seems to be an incapable fellow; he goes on talking rabidly. Sikandar seems more able.

SRI AUROBINDO: Sikandar is a very able politician.

DR. MANILAL: Huque seems to have surrendered to Jinnah. He has no position of his own.

SRI AUROBINDO: He never had.

DR. MANILAL: And yet Bose couldn't drive him out.

SRI AUROBINDO: Bose is no better statesman than Huque.

DR. MANILAL: Is he still under his brother's influence and guided by him?

NIRODBARAN: Not quite but their programmes and opinions seem to be the same. They say the country is ready for launching civil disobedience.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, they can say anything. They don't know what it means to launch such a thing.

After this Purani asked Dr. Manilal, in an aside, about the present Gaekwar's family. One of us noted that the Gaekwar had seven children and his wife was only twenty-five.

SRI AUROBINDO: At twenty-five, seven children?

DR. MANILAL: She was married at the age of thirteen.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then they started at once. (*Laughter*) What industrious people they are!

DR. MANILAL: Four boys and two girls.

SRI AUROBINDO: And one in between? (*Laughter*) Otherwise how seven?

DR. MANILAL: No, she started labour-pains while I was coming here. The next issue of the Baroda paper will bring the tidings.

SRI AUROBINDO: Tidings of the next issue? (*Laughter*)

PURANI: When I read of the Gaekwar touring Europe, I thought: how could the Rani accompany him?

DR. MANILAL: The Gaekwar does not take her with him.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why?

DR. MANILAL: Well, Sir, she comes in his way.

Nirodbaran said that a Chinese professor had been much impressed by his interview with the Mother.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, he says he is going to conquer China for me. He also says the Chinese are a selfless people. He seems to think all people can be selfless!

EVENING

DR. MANILAL: I had a vision of snakes coming towards me but being thrown off.

SRI AUROBINDO: Snakes usually mean hostile forces. But in getting a vision you have been rewarded for your patience!

DR. MANILAL: The 26th of November is said to be Immortality Day. What is meant by it? The Mother used to give the Immortality flower on this day every year.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't know. What do you understand by it?

DR. MANILAL: Physical immortality; but why the 26th? Did you attain it on this day?

SRI AUROBINDO: It may be to remind you that you have to realise it as I can't remind you every day.

DR. MANILAL: But we have to be reminded every day just as Madalasa reminded her child.

SRI AUROBINDO: The Divine parents have much to do while Madalasa had nothing else.

DR. MANILAL: Why was that *bakul* flower violet, Sir?

SRI AUROBINDO: May be Sri Krishna's compassion for your patience or perhaps he has the compassion to wait patiently for you. (Laughter)

DR. MANILAL (*addressing Nirodbaran after a short pause*): Try Arnica oil for your hair.

NIRODBARAN: No need. I am waiting for the Supramental.

SRI AUROBINDO: To remove the rest of your hair or save it?

DR. MANILAL: We are all eagerly waiting for the Supermind.

SRI AUROBINDO: For your liver, Nirod's hair and Amal's leg?

27 NOVEMBER 1939

DR. MANILAL (*after doing pranam*): Bump on the head again, Sir, for the third time!

SRI AUROBINDO: Even if you have not got patience, you have persistence.

DR. MANILAL (*explaining to the Mother who had just come in*): The frontage is rather low. Perhaps Mahakali is smiting me?

THE MOTHER: No, no.

SRI AUROBINDO (*looking at the Mother*): It is certainly an experience. (Laughter by both)

DR. MANILAL (*after Sri Aurobindo's usual walk*): How did you find the Darshan, Sir?

SRI AUROBINDO: What do you mean?

DR. MANILAL: I mean about the general progress.

SRI AUROBINDO: What can I say about the general progress when different people are at different stages?

DR. MANILAL: Formerly you used to say things.

SRI AUROBINDO: I have given that up, as I told you.

DR. MANILAL: You used to say you were pleased, there was some peace, harmony, etc.

SRI AUROBINDO: Harmony? Peace maybe.

DR. MANILAL: Last time you said, "I can do some things more easily now."

SRI AUROBINDO: Are you asking me about my own progress?

DR. MANILAL: Your progress is our progress. We go along with you; at least with the tail end. (*Laughter*)

SRI AUROBINDO: I wish you did. Then you would be very near the head. The tail of a comet is very long!

DR. MANILAL: Then please tell us about individual progress—say, about mine.

SRI AUROBINDO: All I can say about you is: you seem to be getting on.

DR. MANILAL: I told you that myself, Sir. Some people say they felt great Ananda, great satisfaction at the Darshan, while I didn't feel anything.

SRI AUROBINDO: There you are! How can I tell about the general progress then?

DR. MANILAL: How is it I didn't feel anything, Sir?

SRI AUROBINDO: You may have been too much in the physical. To feel anything, the thickness of your body (*laughing*)—I mean the materiality of it—must be reduced.

NIRODBARAN: Does it mean that those who felt something had some opening or had made some progress?

SRI AUROBINDO: An opening at the moment at least, or they may have been in the vital. It is the physical consciousness that comes in the way.

DR. MANILAL: Formerly I used to feel something, but now I don't. Does it mean that all I had gained has been lost?

SRI AUROBINDO: No, all that remains behind while the work is going on in front. It is a very stupid stage.

NIRODBARAN: Does everybody have to go through this stupid stage?

SRI AUROBINDO: At least I had to.

DR. MANILAL: People also see visions and lights, though I don't necessarily call that a sign of progress.

SRI AUROBINDO: You don't see visions?

DR. MANILAL: No, Sir.

SRI AUROBINDO: But you had two, one after the other, and yet you say you haven't progressed? As I said, when one falls into the physical consciousness, everything seems to disappear. And after the physical consciousness, there is the subconscious. Are you aware of your subconscious?

DR. MANILAL: No, Sir. But how to get out of this physical consciousness?

SRI AUROBINDO: You have to get rid of ideas of the mind, desires of the vital and attachments of the physical.

DR. MANILAL: But it seems to take such a long time and I don't think it is possible to do it by our own effort. I believe in Grace.

PURANI: Yes, without doing anything ourselves, we want the Grace to do everything.

DR. MANILAL: Why, I have been trying.

SRI AUROBINDO: Are you sure?

DR. MANILAL: Well, Sir, not in that sense. (*Laughter*)

CHAMPAKLAL: What about you, Nirod? How did you feel at Darshan?

NIRODBARAN: Don't touch the sore.

CHAMPAKLAL: Let us hear.

NIRODBARAN: I am in the same boat with Manilal. So I think I must be in the physical consciousness.

SRI AUROBINDO: Very possibly both in the same doctoral consciousness.

DR. MANILAL (*after some time*): You don't approve of that exercise, Sir—raising the thigh and letting the leg hang?

SRI AUROBINDO: I stopped it during Darshan as I had other things to do, and after Darshan I have been feeling lazy. I will try to do it again.

PURANI (*after Dr. Manilal had left and Sri Aurobindo started resting in bed*): Champaklal wants to know if Manilal's condition of being in the physical consciousness began after his direct contact with you: that is, after your accident.

SRI AUROBINDO: No, no. It was there long before.

NIRODBARAN: It seems to be a great ordeal for those who begin with the physical consciousness, for it takes a very long time to get out of it.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, sometimes it takes many years.

NIRODBARAN: Unfortunately I have rarely had a single Darshan which could be called unusual and in this consciousness one is quite unconscious of what is happening.

SRI AUROBINDO: Because it is a very thick crust – as I said, the thickness of the body. Usually it is because of this physical consciousness that people don't take to Yoga. Some people are predominantly mental, some vital and some physical. But it doesn't mean that those who are mental or vital won't have difficulties to face. They may have experiences on those planes but difficulties will come up later on.

NIRODBARAN: Perhaps the yogic force works according to the characteristic feature of the individual.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, of course. Stability is the nature of the physical consciousness. So, when anything is gained there, it is solid and stable. Experiences may be exhilarating but they don't always solve difficulties. H had many experiences on the mental plane but his vital revolted when it was touched.

NIRODBARAN: When one is unconscious of what is happening one doesn't get the push. One swings back and forth, no steady progress can be maintained.

SRI AUROBINDO: Very few people can maintain steady progress. Ups and downs are everywhere.

NIRODBARAN: But they are more frequent here.

SRI AUROBINDO: No, they are as frequent in other Yogas. What happens is that when the Force works the difficulties rise to the surface so that they may be dealt with, and one may not feel the progress though the work still goes on behind.

NIRODBARAN: You said one has to get rid of desires and attachments in order to open the physical consciousness. If I am not deceived, it seems my desires are not as strong as before and yet I don't feel the progress or rather I am not conscious of what is happening.

SRI AUROBINDO: When I speak of the physical consciousness I mean the stuff of the consciousness, whether it is fine, coarse or thick. That stuff may get thinner and thinner and an opening may be made.

EVENING

Dr. Manilal's departure day. Sri Aurobindo was massaging his knee. Dr. Manilal sat leaning against the bed. It was unusual for Sri Aurobindo to ask

anything at this time, but as Dr. Manilal was to go he perhaps gave him a chance by asking, "Any more bumps?" Dr. Manilal replied, "No, Sir, no more of them." Taking the opportunity given, all gathered round the bed.

DR. MANILAL: By our contact with you, all our physical troubles should have gone, Sir.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why?

DR. MANILAL: The physical contact gives something directly to the physical, doesn't it?

SRI AUROBINDO: Do you mean to say that if a person is touched by a Yogi, he should be all right for the rest of his life?

DR. MANILAL: No, but if the yogi gives something, there should be an improvement in one's physical condition.

SRI AUROBINDO: It depends on the person and the contact.

DR. MANILAL (*moving his hand to connect Sri Aurobindo to himself*): Here is the person and here is the contact.

SRI AUROBINDO: In that case you don't seem to have benefited much by the contact. (*Laughter*)

28 NOVEMBER 1939

NIRODBARAN: Satuda was lamenting the plight of Bengali Hindus. He says there is a cultural conquest taking place.

SRI AUROBINDO: How? Hindus are becoming Muslims?

NIRODBARAN: No, not religious conquest but cultural; Hindu culture being replaced by Muslim. At schools and colleges, books on Muslim culture are being forced on the students.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why don't the Hindus react?

PURANI: Instead of lamenting they should also organise something.

SRI AUROBINDO: Quite so.

NIRODBARAN: They have no leaders; that's the trouble. Satuda appeals to you to do something.

SRI AUROBINDO: Bah!

NIRODBARAN: Satuda had a small cut on his finger which made him so nervous that he postponed going back to Bengal by one day.

PURANI: What will he do if war breaks out in India?

SRI AUROBINDO: Perhaps he will go to Burma!

EVENING

NIRODBARAN (*when Sri Aurobindo laid down after walking*): Dakshinapada had a vision: he saw you sitting high up radiating great power and light, as if by a slight movement of your body you could break the world and remake it. All the gods and goddesses stood around in adoration. Hitherto he has considered the Shakti greater than the Bhagavan. Now he thinks the reverse.

SRI AUROBINDO: He is going to the other extreme now.

NIRODBARAN: But he saw the Shaktis adoring you.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, but they are *Shaktis*.

NIRODBARAN: He feels some intense yearning within for something he can't reach due to some obstruction.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is the psychic yearning, and the obstruction is the vital. He has to make the vital quiet to get rid of the obstruction.

NIRODBARAN: Sisir Mitra asks if there is any difference in quality between a vegetarian diet and a meat and fish diet.

SRI AUROBINDO: A meat and fish diet is good for fighters. But it makes the body-consciousness heavy—I mean the psychological stuff of that consciousness.

NIRODBARAN: You have said before that the nature of food doesn't matter much in Yoga and that people here used to eat everything.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, but all the same it has that effect.

29 NOVEMBER 1939

NIRODBARAN: What is the significance of the experience in which the being is uplifted from the crust of the physical?

SRI AUROBINDO: It is the liberation of consciousness by its rising upwards, free from the physical crust. Ordinarily it is this physical crust that prevents the consciousness from going within or upwards. What makes you ask?

NIRODBARAN: Sahana had the experience, and she wants to know the significance. Just before Darshan she felt as if her whole being were uplifted from the physical crust which appeared like a hollow case. The experience lasted one or two days.

SRI AUROBINDO: When any descent takes place, this crust prevents one from feeling it, but when the crust is removed the ascent can take place more easily and the higher force can also be brought down. It is the physical crust that gives the most opposition. There is, of course, the vital opposition too but the physical is stronger. Did Sahana have no such experience before?

NIRODBARAN: I don't know. When such a liberation takes place, does it mean that the physical crust also becomes thinner?

SATYENDRA: What did you say? Liberation makes the body thin?

SRI AUROBINDO: Then the complete liberation will make the body ultimately disappear!

NIRODBARAN: No, I said the "crust".

SATYENDRA: Is it in continuation of your other day's question?

SRI AUROBINDO: No, somebody had an experience of liberation. (*To Nirodbaran*) You passed her experience on and kept the crust perhaps for yourself?

NIRODBARAN: Her experience came first.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then she passed on to you the crust.

NIRODBARAN: Does this experience mean a new stage in sadhana?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes.

SATYENDRA: You said to somebody that the Adya Shakti, the Primal Goddess-Power of the Supermind, brings down the Supermind.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes.

SATYENDRA: Brings from where?

SRI AUROBINDO: From the higher planes.

SATYENDRA: There is also the Unmanifest?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, from the Unmanifest comes the Manifest.

NIRODBARAN: Some people find your book *The Mother* very difficult.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't see what is the difficulty there.

NIRODBARAN: No, it is not the style but the idea that they find difficult to grasp. The Chinese professor who is here read it and couldn't follow. After reading Anilbaran's book *Songs from the Soul*, many things became clear to him.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then it must be the difficulty of the mind which is not prepared.

A small ulceration had formed during the two preceding days on Sri Aurobindo's right shin.

SRI AUROBINDO (*when his leg was being sponged*): How is the ulcer?

NIRODBARAN: Looks better.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is the physical crust going the wrong way?
(*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: I thought it was the starting-point of eczema.

SRI AUROBINDO: No, eczema starts with a vesicle.

SATYENDRA: You had eczema there?

SRI AUROBINDO: That was due to blankets and mosquito bites in jail.

EVENING

DR. BECHARLAL (*after a long preparatory silence*): How to see God in others? You say it can't be done by the mind.

SRI AUROBINDO: By increasing the consciousness and making the psychic more active.

Just at this point the Mother came in and the talk was suspended.

PURANI (*while sponging Sri Aurobindo*): There is a story, told originally by Lalji, of a Mahratta lady. In ecstatic moments of some descent from above, she can explain the Gita and other scriptures, though she herself is not educated. In those moments her face takes on a blue colour. She says the descent is that of her true Divine Self. But what is this blue colour?

SRI AUROBINDO: The Divine Self means the Atman. Does she follow the Advaita path? The Atman has no colour. Maybe the blue is of some being. She doesn't know herself?

PURANI: No. Could it be Krishna's light?

SRI AUROBINDO: Possibly — or Vishnu's.

PURANI: Krishnamurti is giving some new principles now, but they are so amorphous. He says that to realise the Reality a Guru is not necessary. One has only to get rid of preconceived notions and ideas.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is nothing new and can be easily understood. What further?

PURANI: Then one will find one's own Truth and Reality. But when someone asked, "What is this Reality?", he replied, "No one can say. One has to find it out for oneself."

SRI AUROBINDO: Then what is the necessity of his saying the rest also? He may as well say nothing. Each one will find out his own path and Truth.

SATYENDRA: Though he has relinquished Theosophy and Messiahhood, old disciples still seem to run after him.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why doesn't he close his doors against them? He can stop speaking to them.

SATYENDRA: He has started with a handicap—having been proclaimed a Messiah.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is why he is disgusted with Guruship perhaps. The Reality he speaks of seems to be like Tao. When you realise it you can't speak about it. It is simply "nothing at all".

30 NOVEMBER 1939

NIRODBARAN (*while Sri Aurobindo was waiting for the Mother to come*): Nolini Sen is practically all right. Yesterday I told you that he was feeling a vague irritation and restlessness and a sense of sadness all day long, and badly needed assistance. He didn't know the cause of the irritation but yesterday he began to think of what wrongs he had done to others in the past. Then he felt as if somebody had touched him on the shoulder, after which he felt calm. He didn't know whose hand it was!

SRI AUROBINDO (*after laughing*): He seems to be receptive.

NIRODBARAN: He doesn't understand what is meant by the mental, vital, and physical consciousness. As for his wife, she says the intensity of pain and pleasure seems to have diminished in her. But at the same time she feels disinclined to do any work.

SRI AUROBINDO: Does she feel like that after taking up Yoga?

NIRODBARAN: Yes.

SRI AUROBINDO: That often happens. When the motive that supplied the incentive to work or gave energy in the ordinary life is lost, such a condition sets in until that energy is replaced by another energy.

CHAMPAKLAL: How to know whether or not it is Tamas?

SRI AUROBINDO: There is a certain element of Tamas in it. The physical is being driven by the rajasic vital energy and when that energy is not there the physical may fall into Tamas or inactivity.

NIRODBARAN: What to do in such cases?

SRI AUROBINDO: It depends on circumstances. If one has no work to do, he can retire into silence.

NIRODBARAN: But she can't do that with so many children to look after! (*Laughter*)

SRI AUROBINDO: No, she can call in the higher energy and do whatever she has to do without being involved in the work or getting attached to it.

NIRODBARAN: I told her that she could do everything as the Mother's work.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes.

At this point the Mother came. While sponging Sri Aurobindo, Purani took up the previous day's talk about the colour blue.

PURANI: I asked Lalji about the woman. She seems to be a devotee of Sri Krishna.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then it is clear.

NIRODBARAN: But why is only the face blue?

SRI AUROBINDO: Because it is the mind that receives the light when she talks of the Gita and of other things in her ecstatic mood.

SATYENDRA: You said yesterday that the blue colour might be of Vishnu or of Krishna. What is the difference between them?

SRI AUROBINDO: Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva manifest certain powers of cosmic consciousness. Krishna manifests the Ananda. Krishna is said to be an Avatar of Vishnu, which means that he manifests the Vishnu aspect rather than the Shiva aspect.

SATYENDRA: Are Vishnu and Krishna Gods of the Overmind?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, that is, they manifest through the Overmind.

Purani then related a few more experiences of that Mahratta lady. There was no comment from Sri Aurobindo. After some time Sri Aurobindo himself started to speak.

SRI AUROBINDO: About Nolini Sen. I don't understand what the difficulty is about the vital. What is it he doesn't understand? Just as there is the mind with its ideas and perceptions, so there is the vital with its forces of action, emotions, aesthesis. Is it so difficult? Perhaps he wants to know by experience?

NIRODBARAN: Probably. He gave me one instance. He wants to know, when he hears music and gets joy, whether it is due to the song or the singer.

SRI AUROBINDO: That has nothing to do with the vital. If there were no music but only the musician, would he feel that joy? Of course it is his vital—his aesthetic vital—that feels it and the musician also may be expressing his songs through his vital.

PURANI: He told me about his difficulty with thoughts.

SRI AUROBINDO: What sort of difficulty?

PURANI: It is not a difficulty of intellectual ideas or perceptions; simply of the control of thoughts.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is the life-mind. Of course his irritation and restlessness are due to the pressure of the psychic on his vital. His brooding or thinking about the wrongs he has done and the yearning within means that.

NIRODBARAN: But the wrongs were done in the past.

SRI AUROBINDO: That doesn't matter. It means that the psychic is putting pressure on the vital to change. (*After some time*) Restlessness, irritation don't matter, but he must get some sleep.

NIRODBARAN: He says he can't understand your English; he has to translate it into Bengali first to understand.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why? Doesn't he know English well enough?

NIRODBARAN: That's what he says. He was a science student, a classmate of Satyen Bose.

SRI AUROBINDO: Which Satyen Bose?

NIRODBARAN: Dilip's friend, the scientist. I think it is your terminology that he finds difficult to grasp—mental, vital, physical.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is a demarcation which is not rigidly fixed. Each overflows into the others. In man, all are ultimately differentiated aspects or states of the mental consciousness in general.

EVENING

The Mother came in with a telegram for Sri Aurobindo, smiled and said, "Another problem to be solved." The telegram said, "Praying permission for our residence."

THE MOTHER: Permission for residence where? Shall I ask back?

SRI AUROBINDO: Don't know. Does residence mean the Ashram? (*Laughing*) It can be asked "Who are you?" (*General laughter*)

Then Purani read the radio news about Russia attacking Finland, and about the All India Sugar Conference being postponed.

SATYENDRA: Plenty of sugar has been destroyed because of a surplus.

SRI AUROBINDO: Instead of destroying it, they could have given it free to the Ashram. (*Laughter*)

While sponging Sri Aurobindo, Purani brought up the war news.

PURANI: Molotov said Russia has no territorial claims.

SRI AUROBINDO: Who? Vallabhbhai? (*Laughter*)

PURANI: No, Molotov.

SRI AUROBINDO: No territorial claims? Is it just a territorial walk then? Or is he going to deliver the Finnish people as he did the Ukrainians? I don't understand why these people don't clearly declare their objectives.

PURANI: I hope the Americans will do something.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't think so. They can only talk.

PURANI (*when some of the others had gone and Sri Aurobindo was resting*): There's a lady who used to feel your presence in her own home, just as at Darshan; but last time on her way home from here she saw Ramana Maharshi and then lost that feeling.

SRI AUROBINDO: Naturally.

PURANI: At first she couldn't detect the reason why. Then she suspected the cause and I told her the Mother didn't approve of mixing up things. Now she thinks it must have been due to that visit.

SRI AUROBINDO: That was another influence. Besides, if Maharshi had been alone, it would have been different. But there are always other people around.

NIRODBARAN: But the purpose is the same—seeking for spirituality—and it is in the same line.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is not the question. (*After some time*) Purani received something from Lele.

PURANI: Oh yes, I know to my cost. He gave me a terrible fever just when I was in the peak of health; the fever left me only after I received a letter from here. My encounter with another Yogi gave me vomiting, giddiness, etc. Otherwise I got nothing from them.

SRI AUROBINDO (*smiling*): But Lele did give you something after all.

PURANI: Yes—but I didn't go to him again. Another friend after coming here asked me if he should go to see some Yogi. I told him he should not. He replied, "What's the harm? It is the same spirituality." I explained, "Maybe, but there are different spiritual energies and one may oppose another."

SRI AUROBINDO: Quite so.

PURANI: But the man didn't believe me. And he has paid the penalty for five years. He still hasn't come here again!

1 DECEMBER 1939

Just as the sponging of Sri Aurobindo started, Nirodbaran prompted Purani to begin the talk.

NIRODBARAN: What are these newspaper cuttings you have brought?

PURANI: Cuttings from Paul Brunton.

SRI AUROBINDO: What about?

SATYENDRA: You have already seen these reports of his views on Yoga.

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh!

SATYENDRA (*after a pause*): He says he has plumbed the depths of Yoga. At the beginning he made some foolish exaggerations about the claims of Yoga.

SRI AUROBINDO: They were not foolish but deliberate exaggerations with plenty of imagination. He wrote with an eye to the reading public.

SATYENDRA: He says he has given up his search for Yoga as he has plumbed its depths.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, he wants to include Yoga in the educational curriculum. A queer affair, this European mind!

SATYENDRA: He himself has gone in for several superficial things, magic, occult phenomena, etc. His book on Egypt has a lot of that stuff. He speaks of an Egyptian he met on the top of a hill, who prophesied the destruction of Europe.

SRI AUROBINDO: That man 1200 years old, who had an Oxford accent in his speech? There was no Oxford accent 1200 years ago. It may be Paul Brunton's own Egyptian self and hence the accent. That book on Egypt is—(*Sri Aurobindo began to shake his head*). All the same, he had some sincere seeking for Yoga. It was spoiled by all sorts of people. He ought to have left everything in the hands of Maharshi.

PURANI: He speaks highly of Vivekananda. He says he would have occupied the same place as Gandhi.

SRI AUROBINDO: Which place? Wardha? (*Laughter*)

PURANI: He means he would have had the same influence.

SRI AUROBINDO: That's a different matter. He doesn't speak of Ramakrishna?

PURANI: No, he speaks of Vivekananda.

SRI AUROBINDO: What was at work was Ramakrishna's inspiration.

SATYENDRA: The idea of starting Yoga courses is rather funny.

SRI AUROBINDO: They have started a school on Rajayoga in America. But it has nothing of Rajayoga.

NIRODBARAN: In Bombay also there are schools.

SATYENDRA: They are for Hathayoga.

SRI AUROBINDO: It was in connection with Hathayoga that I was at first puzzled. A Hathayogi was going about, lecturing that all moderns, including us, were of poor physique, with hollow cheeks. The next time I heard of him he was dead. (*Laughter*) He tried to be witty also: he used to say that our cheeks were like the Bay of Bengal. (*Laughter*)

PURANI: B has started a weekly where he has written two chapters on your life.

SRI AUROBINDO: That was a long-cherished idea of his and he wrote something in English. He also wrote about the Mother. He asked Andrews to review the book. Andrews said, "I can't review

the book. I have known the lady." Then he wrote a book on the Ashram disparaging it and asked Arthur Moore to serialise it in *The Statesman*. Moore told him he knew about the Ashram, for he had been here.

EVENING

NIRODBARAN (*fomenting Sri Aurobindo's leg while he lay in bed*): Can feeling the Presence be considered being conscious of the Divine?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, certainly.

NIRODBARAN: Even feeling by the mind?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, even by the mind.

NIRODBARAN: One may feel at times the Presence without being conscious of the Divine?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, the mind can feel just like the other parts of the being and feeling is the beginning of being conscious. (*After a pause*) Why do you ask?

NIRODBARAN: Well, we were discussing what could be meant by "being conscious" and whether it was possible to express the experience in words. If a man thinks that there is a Presence around him, can it be called being conscious?

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh, thinking! Thinking is of course different from feeling. But thinking may lead to feeling.

SATYENDRA (*to Nirodbaran*): Why not thinking? One has to begin somewhere and, being human, one can start with the mind.

NIRODBARAN: I don't object to that or question it. My question is whether that could be called being conscious.

SRI AUROBINDO: As I said, thinking may lead to realisation. The Adwaitins begin with the mind and reach realisation through it. There are many ways. There are people who can't meditate but by doing work with the right attitude they can establish the contact, and feeling this contact leads to realisation.

NIRODBARAN: But being conscious of the Presence is a realisation?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes.

NIRODBARAN: I thought it is an experience because it has not yet been established.

SRI AUROBINDO: At least it is the beginning of realisation.

SATYENDRA (*to Nirodbaran*): Why not realisation? When one identifies oneself with the Divine and then comes back to the ordinary consciousness, wouldn't you call it realisation?

SRI AUROBINDO: He means that a passing experience not yet completely established is not a realisation.

SATYENDRA: In the old Yogas they have a term called Sahaj Samadhi, "easy Samadhi", by which they mean that the Samadhi has become part of one's natural life.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is the same as the Gita's Samahita, "collected". There are also people who can by will bring down the state of Samadhi whenever they want it, while at other periods they are in the ordinary consciousness. That is an intermediate stage. There are others who may have experiences at the beginning and then none at all for six or seven years.

NIRODBARAN: Yes, I belong to that group of unfortunate people. (*Sri Aurobindo began to laugh.*)

SATYENDRA: Those experiences are a promise of future things, perhaps.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes.

SATYENDRA (*to Nirodbaran*): Don't worry. If you feel you are lonely, I am with you.

NIRODBARAN: That is hardly a consolation for me. (*Sri Aurobindo laughed a lot.*)

SATYENDRA: No, but in ordinary life people forget their misery when they find others in the same state. They say, "There are others like me" and get some consolation.

NIRODBARAN: That is when they are out of their misery.

SRI AUROBINDO: No, in their miserable state itself they get relief. (*After a little pause and smiling*) Lucretius the Roman poet says somewhere, "It is sweet to sit on the shore and see people struggling in the sea." (*Laughing*) A Christian Father also says, "It is a great joy to see people in Hell being tortured."

DR. BECHARLAL (*after some time*): Somebody writes that while in jail your body lifted itself from the ground during meditation. Did anyone see that?

SRI AUROBINDO: How do I know? I didn't see it myself. (*Laughter*)

SATYENDRA: People ask this sort of question about you. Someone asked me too and I said, "He is not a magician. He is

just as natural as we are." Another person asked if you were living in a cellar and food was being dropped to you.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is like Keshavananda. He used to live in a cellar.

NIRODBARAN (*after a pause*): Due to which opening does one feel the Presence?

SRI AUROBINDO: It depends on the way one feels.

2 DECEMBER 1939

Purani brought a copy of The New Statesman and Nation in which there was a review by Joad of a book of Gerald Heard.

PURANI: Nolini says that this author seems to have got some of your ideas.

SRI AUROBINDO: What does he say? I think he contributes to *The Aryan Path* also.

PURANI: I have gone carefully through the article. What he says is that only in man is further evolution possible.

SRI AUROBINDO: But one can arrive at that conclusion by thought. Nothing special is needed to reach it. And then? -

PURANI: This evolution is to take place by a change of consciousness.

SRI AUROBINDO: What sort of change? Moral or spiritual? If it is moral, there is nothing new. Plenty of people have said that. However, you can send him a complimentary copy of *The Life Divine* when the second volume is out.

EVENING

NIRODBARAN (*while sponging Sri Aurobindo*): It seems Norway and Sweden won't join with Finland against Russia.

Sri Aurobindo began to shake his head, meaning that they would not.

NIRODBARAN: But they don't realise that their turn will come next. Is it to have a naval base that Russia has attacked Finland?

SRI AUROBINDO: That is only a pretext. She wants to make Finland a vassal state like Latvia and from there dominate Norway

and Sweden. After she has done that and also gained her position in the Balkans, she will become a major power in Europe. She tried to get hold of Turkey but Turkey was too alert, and also bold enough because of the support of the English and French. The English have about a million soldiers in Asia Minor, so Turkey could be quite bold.

NIRODBARAN: Some say that Russia is occupying these Baltic countries as a check on Germany.

SRI AUROBINDO: No, that's not the reason, though the Russians know that one day they will have to come to grips with Germany. Their object is to be a major power in Europe.

NIRODBARAN (*when Sri Aurobindo lay in bed*): Professor Mitra has asked me to tell you that his native village is the same as yours: Konnagar.

SRI AUROBINDO: I see, but I went there only once. My village is Theatre Road, Calcutta.

NIRODBARAN: Mitra spoke of a professor at Shantiniketan who tried to dissuade him from coming here as he thought the Ashram stood for some particular creed.

SRI AUROBINDO: What creed? Didn't Mitra ask him? And didn't he tell him that we have no creed?

NIRODBARAN: Yes, he did, but the man wouldn't listen. Then this professor read *Teachings of Sri Aurobindo*. He was startled to discover that we have no creed, and he was very glad. (*Sri Aurobindo began to laugh, much amused.*)

NIRODBARAN: Mitra says that Devendranath Tagore started Shantiniketan for a spiritual purpose, and he made rules, one of which was that idol-worship wouldn't be allowed there.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then that is the place where there are creeds, not here.

NIRODBARAN: Mitra has had two visions here. In one he saw a golden light coming down and condensing into the form of the Mother.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is easy enough to understand. The golden light is the symbol of the Divine Truth, and the Mother is the incarnation of this Truth.

NIRODBARAN: The other vision was of an intense blue light striking him in the eyes.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is Krishna's light.

3 DECEMBER 1939

Purani brought a letter from one Padmakanti whose income tax had been assessed wrongly and who had appealed against the Government. The case was on the next day.

SRI AUROBINDO: He ought to have written earlier. Not much time to save him. Where is the appeal?

PURANI: In the revenue court, perhaps.

SRI AUROBINDO: Are the officers just?

PURANI: At present yes, because of the Congress Ministry.

SRI AUROBINDO: There is no more Congress Ministry. The mind of a revenue collector is not an easy job to work on. A judge's mind is different.

NIRODBARAN (*after Sri Aurobindo's walk*): Did you say Theatre Road was your village?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, I was born there in the house of the lawyer Manmohan Ghose. It was No. 4, I think.

NIRODBARAN: Dilip says that that brought about his contact with you. (*Laughter*)

PURANI: Have you read that criticism by Joad of Gerald Heard?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. Joad doesn't seem to be much of a thinker. He says that he had the same ideas as the author but he changed them because of the objections of philosophical critics. If he changes his ideas because of that, his ideas are not worth much. The first business of a philosopher is to anticipate the objections and then meet them.

PURANI: He has written some good treatises on Plato and others.

SRI AUROBINDO: That means he is a good teacher, not an original thinker.

PURANI: He has reviewed a book on Indian philosophy.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, I have seen the review. He says he can't believe in Chakras because he has no experience of them! If one doesn't believe things one has no experience of, there will be few beliefs. Indian mystics have always said that only by Yoga can you have experiences, otherwise you have to take such matters on belief.

4 DECEMBER 1939

SATYENDRA: Ancient Yogis always believed that human nature couldn't be changed. They compared it to a dog's curved tail and left it alone, although they admitted the spiritual principle to be at work. Only Sri Aurobindo thinks it can be changed.

NIRODBARAN: And you don't?

SATYENDRA: No.

SRI AUROBINDO: What on earth has this spiritual principle been doing if the world has remained just the same?

SATYENDRA: Meher Baba, the well-known Yogi from Western India, also thinks there can be a change and his mission is to bring it about. But he is himself so changeable that he decides one thing today and changes it tomorrow.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then he must be on the Overmind plane!
(*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: Why Overmind?

SRI AUROBINDO: Because it is a plane of infinite possibilities.

SATYENDRA: There is something curious about Meher Baba's realisation. Once while he was returning from his college he met a Muslim woman fakir who, as soon as she saw him, embraced him. After that he lost his normal consciousness, his eyes became glassy and his speech incoherent. He behaved like an eccentric. He was in this state for a long time, till some other Yogi brought him back to the normal state. I know of another Yogi who remained in a similar strange state for a considerable number of years. What could such a state have been?

SRI AUROBINDO: It is going into a higher consciousness without being able to maintain contact with the instrumental nature.

SATYENDRA: Is it the Absolute Consciousness?

SRI AUROBINDO: If you mean the Supreme Consciousness, no. If it had been that, he would have either gone into it for good or come down and established a harmony and balance in his instrumental nature. But this must have been a higher consciousness in touch with the Absolute.

SATYENDRA: Meher Baba has been on the verge of breaking his silence so many times, but again and again he has deferred the date.

SRI AUROBINDO: Now I can fix his position and everything is clear to me about him. Formerly I couldn't understand what he was. Yes, I can see him now clearly. He must have gone into that higher

consciousness but not established a contact with the instruments, and so long as this contact is not there people behave incoherently; they have this Bala or Unmatta Bhava¹ because they allow any Force to take hold of their instrumental nature and their conduct looks like a want of balance to others. It is something like the Paramahansa Bhava², only here the higher consciousness remains in the background while they allow their nature to behave like a child or a madman. Europeans, of course, would find it difficult to understand such a phenomenon, and so I suppose Becharlal calls Meher Baba a humbug. As for trying to break his silence so many times, I suppose he thought that the contact was going to be made and he was trying to establish it before he spoke. The whole problem till now has been to express the higher consciousness through the instrumental nature.

NIRODBARAN: That means he has something genuine.

SATYENDRA: Meher Baba has an Ashram especially meant for mad people. I mean such mad people as have lost their normal consciousness by Yoga or by coming in touch with Yogis.

SRI AUROBINDO: I see. Yes, these people are trying to do the same thing by bringing down something from above while Westerners like Huxley and Heard are going about it in their own way from below.

SATYENDRA: Meher Baba's method is now to impart spirituality by touch. The recipient feels a sensation or emotion of love.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, it is the vital-physical way.

SATYENDRA: But he is waiting to break his silence and he writes that when he does speak a great miracle will take place.

SRI AUROBINDO: He wants to act by the mind, I suppose. Now he is acting through the vital being, but the mental is more effective and so he is waiting for it. Lele also used to act through the vital. Once I remember somebody wanted to weep and he thought that if he couldn't weep, he would not get any realisation. So Lele said, "Pretend to weep." The man pretended and then the emotion became real and he began to weep uncontrollably. It is a kind of auto-suggestion.

CHAMPAKLAL: Yes, Lele also made my niece weep like that. Another thing he did was to give the mantra Om Dattatreya.

¹ The disposition of a child or a madman.

² The disposition of a liberated man.

SRI AUROBINDO: He never gave me any mantra. He said the mantra would rise from within.

SATYENDRA: Meher Baba makes a lot of prophecies and they don't come true. I can't understand why they fail.

SRI AUROBINDO: Perhaps he thinks that if, say, four times out of ten he has been successful the rest of his predictions will also come true. He must have forgotten his failures. He doesn't seem to have a critical mind.

PURANI: Lele also used to prophesy, committing God in advance. Whenever he failed to cure an illness, he said it was God's defeat!

SRI AUROBINDO: But philosophically, it would mean perhaps that the higher consciousness failed to carry out his purpose.

SATYENDRA: Could these eccentricities and incoherencies be due to egoism still remaining in the being?

SRI AUROBINDO: Not necessarily. In the ordinary life the ego-construction holds things together and when that ego is removed by one's going into the higher consciousness, one behaves in this way, until a greater principle takes the place of the ego and establishes another balance. If we go by his utterances, Meher Baba seems to have a strong mixture of ego in him. What is his principle of Yoga?

SATYENDRA: He says the ego is the root of everything wrong; it must disappear.

SRI AUROBINDO: What is to replace the ego?

SATYENDRA: Something like Divine Mind – Divine Mind acting through the individual consciousness.

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh, he recognises the individual consciousness as real?

SATYENDRA: He has no systematised philosophy. One has to build it out of his utterances.

SRI AUROBINDO: No critical mind, as I have said.

SATYENDRA: At least no philosophic mind.

SRI AUROBINDO: Some might say no mind at all to speak of, leave aside the philosophic mind.

EVENING

NIRODBARAN: I was feeling very sleepy at the time of your walk. Was it mere sleep? Or was it a lucky descent of the Force?

SRI AUROBINDO: It may be either.

NIRODBARAN: I dreamt or rather saw that Norway was preparing for war.

PURANI: Then it can't be sleep. Nirodbaran must be having an inner opening.

NIRODBARAN: What sort of opening is this? What have I to do with Norway? I want the psychic opening.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why? Yoga is universal. So Norway is part of you. (*Laughter*) But was it really Norway and not Sweden?

NIRODBARAN: I think it was Norway. Was my sleep a tamasic (inert) condition?

SRI AUROBINDO: Maybe; but since you had a dream you may have gone within and not sunk into mere Tamas. In such cases either one goes within, while the surface consciousness falls into the subconscious or one goes down into the subconscious altogether.

NIRODBARAN: Champaklal was also sleeping.

SRI AUROBINDO: Champaklal can sleep anytime unless he has a toothache. (*Laughter. Champaklal was actually suffering from a toothache at this time.*)

NIRODBARAN: Are there no dreams in tamasic sleep?

SRI AUROBINDO: There are – especially when the surface consciousness goes into the subconscious. But then the dreams are incoherent.

NIRODBARAN: Doesn't tamasic sleep leave a heaviness afterwards?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes.

NIRODBARAN: But sometimes after meditation one feels a heaviness. What could that be?

SRI AUROBINDO: It may not be necessarily due to Tamas. The descent of the Force into the physical gives at times a heaviness or else in meditation one may go into the subconscious. All depends on the kind of heaviness.

NIRODBARAN: To go back to dreams; Mrs. Sen told me that once she dreamt that you were taking Khichuri¹ and Meghnad Saha and others were sitting around you.

SRI AUROBINDO (*surprised*): Meghnad Saha?

NIRODBARAN: Yes. And in the dream Nolini Sen brought Mrs. Sen before you and you said to him, "You know I can see

¹ An Indian food, a mixture of rice and pulses.

the inside of people. She has something in her." And then you said to her that the Hindu-Moslem problem was going to be settled very soon. (*Laughter*)

SRI AUROBINDO: From Khichuri to Yoga and then to politics! I hope I spoke the truth when I made that last remark.

NIRODBARAN: You also told her the way the problem was going to be settled. But she does not now remember your words.

SRI AUROBINDO: This must have been the most interesting part. A pity she has lost it.

NIRODBARAN: That brings me to what Sen told me. He asked the Mother if he should do Japa (name-repetition). The Mother said he needn't and could try to feel the Presence. The curious part is that as soon as the form comes when he tries to feel the Presence, he rejects the form. He says that in the Hindu Shastra Japa goes with form. So if Japa is not to be done, the form too has to go. "Very queer," I remarked.

SRI AUROBINDO: But why does he reject the form? The form is very good—unless, of course, he wants to feel the impersonal Presence. No doubt the Presence which the Mother spoke of is much more than the form; the form is only the expression of the Being. Not that it has no value or reality, but the Presence can be felt as impersonal as well as personal.

SATYENDRA: I suppose he has the same idea as Ramakrishna once had.

SRI AUROBINDO: What was that?

SATYENDRA: When Ramakrishna wanted to go into the Nirvikalpa Samadhi the form of Kali used to come and intervene. So he took an inner sword, as it were, and clove the form in two, and then he was able to pass into that state of featureless and undifferentiated trance.

SRI AUROBINDO: But Sen is not going into the Nirvikalpa! (*Laughter*)

5 DECEMBER 1939

PURANI: Have you seen the pictures of mad people in Meher Baba's book? They don't seem to show Yogic madness; they look like cases of possession.

SRI AUROBINDO: I haven't seen the pictures. Yogic madness is a very rare thing. It is due to some overpowering experience such as Paramahansa bhava disturbing the balance of the lower being.

NIRODBARAN: Some people come out of meditation in a mad state. Why?

SRI AUROBINDO: They open themselves, while meditating, to vital forces, forces of the occult life plane. In Yoga, madness results from some mistake. In the lower nature there may be an erotic impulse or else ambition which rises up and then one gets possessed by these forces.

NIRODBARAN: Isn't fear also responsible?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, especially when people who are not fit for Yoga do meditation, say, for instance, at a burning ghat or in a cemetery during the Tantric process.

NIRODBARAN: I couldn't quite catch the distinction you make between madness from Paramahansa bhava and the type we see in those pictures in Meher Baba's book.

SRI AUROBINDO: In the one case the realisation is there behind while the Yogi allows the external nature to play about as it likes. In the other the contact has not yet been established between the higher consciousness and the lower, though there may be some influence of the higher consciousness in the being.

NIRODBARAN: Regarding the form and the Presence, you said the Presence is greater.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not greater but much more than the form.

NIRODBARAN: In feeling the personal Presence, is it like feeling the Presence of Krishna everywhere?

SRI AUROBINDO: As I said, the Presence may be personal or impersonal. It may be the dynamic Divine with a personal appearance or the still, immutable Brahmic Consciousness which is impersonal and universal. Form is only a certain manifestation of the Presence. You can see Krishna everywhere as a Person and feel His Presence in all, while in the experience of the Impersonal you will perceive the one Self in all or the silent Brahman present everywhere.

LATE EVENING

While Sri Aurobindo was lying in bed after his walk, there was some conversation.

PURANI: Dara has written a poem on *The Life Divine* to celebrate its publication.

SRI AUROBINDO: What sort of poem? "Life Divine, full of wine?" (*Laughter*)

PURANI: Yes, you have caught it. It goes:

Life Divine
Mother's Wine –
The book is out,
Let us shout!

The subject then changed to the war.

PURANI: Everybody is indignant about Russia's attack on Finland.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, Uruguay wants to kick her out of the League. (*Laughter*)

PURANI: The Finns seem to be doing well.

SRI AUROBINDO: They are good fighters and specially good at guerilla warfare.

PURANI: In connection with what you said on Presence and form, Nirodbaran has given the analogy of flower and smell to correspond to form and Presence. It did not seem correct to me. I told him, "Smell is the result of form, while here form itself is a result."

SRI AUROBINDO: Besides, the flower is not conscious. The Presence is that of the Being and the form is the embodiment of the conscious Force of the Being for some particular purpose on a certain level. Physical form is necessary for work to be done on the physical level. And there are subtler forms for work on other planes than the physical.

PURANI: May not the Presence felt be that of the Soul in everything?

SRI AUROBINDO: The word "soul" brings in the suggestion of something individual. But we can speak also of the World-Soul which is the Cosmic Self.

PURANI: Can one perceive the Presence without the form?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes.

NIRODBARAN: In using the flower and smell analogy I meant to ask whether the Presence, when one feels it, is impersonal like smell.

SRI AUROBINDO: Personal or impersonal is not the question here. The smell belongs to the flower – that is, to the form, while the Presence may have no form. It may manifest itself as form or it may not. You may not be aware of the form of the Presence and yet feel the joy and power of it. This may be compared to smell if you like.

6 DECEMBER 1939

NIRODBARAN: Dakshina has had no sleep for three nights.

SRI AUROBINDO: What's the matter with these people? Why can't Dakshina sleep? Thinking?

NIRODBARAN: No, vital restlessness. He says everything is a chaos.

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, he has to build a cosmos out of it. He has to quiet the vital being.

NIRODBARAN: S told me of an experience. She feels a stillness coming down upon her and she becomes perfectly still, without any vibration. Then the stillness melts and the outline of her body disappears into a void, a nothingness. She becomes unconscious of even her breath. When she comes back to the body-sense, breathing slowly, she has the feeling, "I am in the heart."

SRI AUROBINDO: Is the experience frequent and is she conscious of the nothingness?

NIRODBARAN: She is conscious.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is a kind of Nirvana of the personal being, where the cessation of breath usually occurs. It is not really a cessation but only apparently one.

SATYENDRA: Is that Shunyam (void)? And is it really what we call Nirvana?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes – (*after a pause*) a temporary Nirvana of the personal self.

NIRODBARAN: And what is that feeling in the heart?

SRI AUROBINDO: That is the return of the sense of existence felt in the psychic being – what may be called the individual spiritual existence.

SATYENDRA: In exteriorisation a cessation of breath also occurs.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, but here she loses the individual existence and is conscious only of nothingness.

SATYENDRA: Does it mean liberation from desire and ego?

SRI AUROBINDO: No, unless the experience is frequent. That is why I wanted to know if she has it frequently. If the experience has become permanent – that is, if it remains all the time or can be called up any time – then one can get rid of desires or at least quiet them down.

In the Nirvanic experience you don't feel yourself as particularly anybody, nor are you exactly nobody. Either your physical being, the normal body, is felt as a point or spot in Infinity or you feel yourself as part of the Universal. The body is felt inside you and not you inside the body.

SATYENDRA: According to traditional Vedanta, the experience of Shunyam precedes the experience of Self-realisation.

SRI AUROBINDO: Can't say that. It may precede or come after.

EVENING

The talk started again about Meher Baba.

SATYENDRA: Meher Baba speaks of a latent state of consciousness which is the origin of everything. After that latent state comes the play of possibilities.

SRI AUROBINDO: If it is a play of possibilities only, how does the cosmos evolve? It would remain a chaos. What decides the actuality?

SATYENDRA: He doesn't say anything definite. He speaks of fourteen Shunyams: Intuition, Superconscious State, Lower Inspiration, Higher Inspiration, Insight, Illumination, etc.

SRI AUROBINDO: How does he classify them? Is Intuition the Intuitive Mind?

SATYENDRA: He has no classification. He doesn't have the critical mind required for that. But he doesn't believe in the Vedantic withdrawal from life. He wants to bring down the realisation into this earth and work here – a sort of heaven on earth.

SRI AUROBINDO: There he agrees with our system. This aim now seems to be followed by others also.

SATYENDRA: In Meher Baba's scheme there is no place for the individual.

SRI AUROBINDO: How?

SATYENDRA: When you realise the Divine, you act from the Cosmic Consciousness.

SRI AUROBINDO: Who is this "you"?

SATYENDRA: I am putting it in that form. He means the individual consciousness is identified with the Cosmic Consciousness.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then it is all right.

SATYENDRA: But it is the Cosmic Consciousness that acts through the individual.

NIRODBARAN: In Europe, during his travel there, he got a bad reputation. He was called a fraud and a cheat.

SATYENDRA: That is the European mentality. They can't bear anything mystic.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, Huxley and others are ridiculed for their mysticism.

SATYENDRA: One thing is queer about Meher Baba. He has never been in want of money. Money has simply flowed in.

CHAMPAKLAL: Then he has reached God?

SRI AUROBINDO (*laughing*): And he surely must be in the Cosmic Consciousness!

SATYENDRA: He is so erratic in his behaviour. Today he is going to one place, tomorrow another; he brings lady disciples here from England to go to China; then after they have made a tour of India he suddenly alters his plan and sends them back to England.

SRI AUROBINDO: That obviously is his cosmic movement. (*Laughter*)

7 DECEMBER 1939

As we were sponging Sri Aurobindo, Purani started once more the topic of Meher Baba, the Yogi of Western India, by saying that one of his disciples had sketched some diagrams of Meher Baba's world-scheme.

SATYENDRA: There he shows the arrangement of the different planes.

SRI AUROBINDO: It seems by "Intuition" he means the Intuitive Mind which throws its light on the ordinary intelligence. In that plane there are four divisions: discrimination with intuitive suggestion, inspiration which he calls "Higher Inspiration", then

revelation which is equivalent to his "Insight", and finally the gnosis which could be his "Illumination". In that way his scheme is more understandable.

SATYENDRA: In his diagram all Jivas, individual souls, are held in the Paramatman Consciousness; they are latent and the purpose of evolution is to make them conscious of their unity with the Divine.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is akin to our idea.

At this point we noticed that Champaklal was shaking his head with closed eyes, and we began to laugh.

SRI AUROBINDO: What is it?

NIRODBARAN: Champaklal is shaking his head.

SRI AUROBINDO: Because he doesn't understand us?

SATYENDRA: Probably he is shaking to the rhythm of my speech.

CHAMPAKLAL: Both. (*Laughter*)

SATYENDRA: To go back to Meher Baba: his behaviour, as I have said, is very erratic, saying one thing now, contradicting it the next moment, and prophesying so many things that don't come true.

SRI AUROBINDO: That means he is living and acting from the Cosmic Consciousness. I don't know what realisation he has reached. Perhaps it is on the vital plane. That is a plane of possibilities. If any possibility or idea or suggestion comes to him with some force, he accepts it. The nature of these vital formations is to present themselves with a force. And when another possibility comes with the same force, Meher Baba accepts that too so that his prophecies go wrong, become contradictory and his planning and behaviour erratic. This sort of thing I know by experience. But the European mind can't understand it. It calls it all a fraud.

SATYENDRA: He doesn't reject anything. He even goes to cinemas and says that one can act there more easily where people are concentrated on one purpose.

SRI AUROBINDO: That means he works through the mass, which again is a sign of working from the vital plane.

NIRODBARAN: He seems to be an interesting fellow anyhow.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, he is interesting.

SATYENDRA: He lays great stress on love.

SRI AUROBINDO: That means the heart. And that again is a sign of his action working through the vital being.

SATYENDRA: Some of the people who go to see him are not impressed. Others feel a sense of love towards him. Ramdas also acts through love; he mixes with people and serves them out of love: he has no mission, while Meher Baba claims to have a mission.

PURANI: Nirodbaran was wondering what you meant by saying yesterday that he had got into a higher consciousness.

NIRODBARAN: Isn't the higher consciousness a vast range?

SRI AUROBINDO: The higher consciousness is anything above the mind. Of course, there are different levels of higher consciousness.

NIRODBARAN: That's what I mean by a "vast range".

SRI AUROBINDO: There is no indication of the nature of Meher Baba's first realisation; but to judge from his first experience or its results, he seems to have got into the Cosmic Consciousness, but for its expression there was no instrumentation for a long time. That explains his long period of seeming madness. Since then he has been trying to establish the contact but there is still no proper organisation of the instrument.

SATYENDRA: But he is quite conscious. He makes his own plans and arrangements even as regards details.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't mean there is no contact but the contact is not sufficiently established and organised. He is trying to establish it by his silence.

SATYENDRA: He doesn't seem to be conscious of other worlds.

SRI AUROBINDO: For that one must have the visionary power and know the workings of these worlds and their influence on you. It is sometimes done by coming in contact with beings of those worlds. Otherwise one is only conscious of the planes within oneself.

SATYENDRA: People who go to him feel a great bustle and activity. One biographer has written about that.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then his life could be written of as a hustle and bustle coming out of the silence. (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: At any rate he seems to be more interesting than Ramana Maharshi.

SATYENDRA: Maharshi is another type. People say they feel great peace at his Ashram. And he himself looks like a rock of peace.

SRI AUROBINDO: At any rate Maharshi is much more firmly established in his realisation.

NIRODBARAN: Does he believe in transformation of this life?

SATYENDRA: No. He says he has no such Sankalpa (will). Dilip asked him once what he thought of your idea of ascent, descent, transformation, etc., and whether he wanted to change earth-life. He replied that there was no Sankalpa in him for it.

SRI AUROBINDO: The Mother also believes in Sankalpa, as you can see from what she said to Paul Brunton when he asked her what he should do. She said, "You have to follow whatever will arises in you. When you have realised the Self, the Self will choose for you what to do." That is another thing European minds can't understand. They think all spiritual personalities must be of the same fixed type.

SATYENDRA: Sometimes Meher Baba makes provocative statements. If asked, "Are you Christ?" he says, "Yes." "Are you God?" Again, "Yes." When a Christian comes, he says, "I can help you. Awaken the Christ within." By that he means the Christ consciousness.

PURANI: Blake and other European mystics have said the same.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is the doctrine of all esoterics.

SATYENDRA: Meher Baba wants to create a circle of twelve disciples.

SRI AUROBINDO: Like the twelve apostles? Repetition of an old performance?

NIRODBARAN: Ending in a crucifixion?

SATYENDRA: No, minus that.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then there won't be any Judas? (*Laughter*)

SATYENDRA: His system of communicating with others is by a board on which the alphabet is arranged. By swift movements he indicates what he has to say.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is like table-tapping.

SATYENDRA: Some of his disciples criticise him and say he is proud – that's because of his wrong prophecies, I think. I wish he would remain silent.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, if it is true silence. And silence would have saved him the inconvenience to which he has been put.

SATYENDRA: Some people say, "We are convinced he has no Nirvikalpa Samadhi."

SRI AUROBINDO: He doesn't believe in Samadhi. One can't act in Samadhi.

SATYENDRA: And some people are bored by him.

SRI AUROBINDO: Do they think they are in a school?

SATYENDRA: No, not that bad. (*Laughter*) He puts meditation above concentration—meditation on an idea or scheme or object.

SRI AUROBINDO: Quite correct.

SATYENDRA(*after some time*): Some people—especially Europeans—at once rush to the press to vent their impressions. The danger is that sometimes they have to contradict their previous statements and impressions, as in Y's case. He was taken up with Yoga at first, then he began to decry it. It is the same with some Europeans connected with Meher Baba. They praise him at first and then say, "He is inconsistent." In Yoga one can't always be consistent. Whitman said, "Do I contradict myself? Very well, I contradict myself. I contain multitudes." When one is growing, one can't always have consistency.

SRI AUROBINDO: Quite so. Emerson and Vivekananda said the same thing. "Consistency", said Emerson, "is the hobgoblin of little minds." There are contrary sides to a truth and their expressions may appear contradictory.

EVENING

NIRODBARAN (*as Sri Aurobindo was being massaged*): It seems that for some time here in the Ashram the response in the physical with regard to illness has been quicker than before. Yesterday J was relieved of an acute asthmatic attack as soon as the news of it reached you.

PURANI: Jwalanti got relief of acute sciatica the moment the evening meditation started.

NIRODBARAN: Is all this because the Power has increased or is it because of a greater receptivity in us?

SRI AUROBINDO: The Power has increased, and so has the receptivity but only in particular cases and not in a general sense.

(*To Nirodbaran after a while*) I am told Satyendra does meditation while working and has that experience of nothingness, but feels giddy. If she feels giddy she shouldn't allow herself to meditate during work. She may fall down.

NIRODBARAN: She didn't tell me about giddiness. When she asked me about meditating during work I told her to ask the Mother.

SRI AUROBINDO: But does she remain conscious? What is meant by being "conscious of nothingness"?

NIRODBARAN: I'll ask her to write out the experience.

SRI AUROBINDO: (*smiling to Satyendra*): What about Sh?

SATYENDRA: I was just thinking of him while reviewing in my mind my present patients. Strange coincidence! He is getting on well though he won't admit it. He has asked for his medical reports from Dr. Savor.

SRI AUROBINDO: What for? Does he want to make a book out of them and publish it? Savor may have thrown them into the W.P.B.

SATYENDRA: Purani has asked for homeopathic treatment. I advised him to go to Dr. Ramchandra. (*After some time*) I want to say something more about Meher Baba. At the start of his spiritual life *he lost consciousness through an embrace from a Yogini and recovered through a knock from a Yogi.*

SRI AUROBINDO: That is allopathic and not homeopathic treatment.

SATYENDRA: While he was rambling in a dazed condition after that embrace he came across a Yogi who as soon as he saw him threw a stone which struck his forehead. Meher Baba was startled and came back to normal consciousness.

SRI AUROBINDO: Startled back into common sense?

SATYENDRA: I have heard of Sadhus curing diseases by flinging things at people and hurting them in various other ways. In general I don't know how to view Sadhus. It is curious to see jealousy and egoism in them even more than in worldly people who are doing *sadhana*. They are egoistic even about their renunciation!

SRI AUROBINDO: How?

SATYENDRA: One tells another, "I have sacrificed a lot. How much have you sacrificed?" As for worldly people who do *sadhana*, they are busy *all day* and at the end of the day when they meet some brother disciples, they become happy.

SRI AUROBINDO: In the world there is more restraint. People know that otherwise they would get into hot water. I have seen many jealousies in Ashrams. I knew a Bengali Sadhu who fought with a fellow Sadhu for the *gadi* of an Ashram. He was quiet at first but his disciples egged him on. When his Guru came to know about the quarrel he said, "You have gained what you could in this life. You won't advance any more." In Dayanand's Ashram, however,

the disciples lived in peace and harmony because he always insisted on love among them.

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Satyendra broke the silence by saying that he had had an unexpected visit from his patient Sh. We said that it must have been the result of the previous day's talk. We were all amused by the information from Sh that his nerves and stomach, not his mind, were the seats of the trouble: the hostile forces attacked him there. Sri Aurobindo asked: "But why the stomach?" After this, the talk moved on to Meher Baba, the Yogi from Western India.

SATYENDRA: What consciousness corresponds to the Karana Sharira, the Causal Body?

SRI AUROBINDO: What I call the Superconscient. It belongs to the Vijnana or Supermind.

SATYENDRA: Meher Baba declares that one has to go beyond the Karana Sharira and he identifies it with the mental plane.

SRI AUROBINDO: What he and others mean is that it belongs to the Higher Mind or Higher Intelligence, not to the Manas or ordinary lower mental consciousness but to the Buddhi.

SATYENDRA: Meher Baba says Karana Sharira is the root of all Samskaras which are manifested on the subtle planes. He puts the human consciousness on the gross planes but he believes that it opens to the subtle ones.

SRI AUROBINDO: The human consciousness has what I call the subliminal, which is open to the subtle worlds, but of which one is not aware because the surface awareness is clouded by the ordinary human mental, vital and physical. The inner opening is to the subliminal while the higher is to the Superconscient. There are some people who are open to the latter.

SATYENDRA: Terms like Karana Sharira are of the later Vedanta.

SRI AUROBINDO: I go by the Upanishads where they mention the Pranamaya, Manomaya, Vijnanamaya Koshas, the Kosha being the root. The Upanishads define Vijnana in terms of the Vedas while later it had three senses: the Truth-Consciousness, the Higher Intelligence and even Science.

SATYENDRA: We use the terms Padartha Vijnana or Padartha Shastra for Science.

SRI AUROBINDO: Shastra is much more appropriate here than Vijnana.

SATYENDRA (*addressing Purani*): New copies of *The Life Divine* have come. They seem a little thin. Perhaps thinner paper has been used.

NIRODBARAN: Same price?

PURANI: You thought the price would also be thin? (*Laughter*) Nolini and I were wondering if they would send us copies.

SATYENDRA: Nolini and Purani get them free.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why?

PURANI: For review.

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh! (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: Premanand has found a new trick for selling copies. He promises your autograph. (*Sri Aurobindo laughs.*) In that way he is like Gandhi. But now people don't crowd round Gandhi for his autograph.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why?

NIRODBARAN: Because he charges five rupees for each autograph. (*Laughter*) So they all go to Vallabhbhai, Nehru and others.

SRI AUROBINDO: They should charge one rupee then.

SATYENDRA: Gandhi is very clever. He is never in need of money.

NIRODBARAN: Then, like Meher Baba, he must have reached God! (*Laughter*)

SATYENDRA: Meher Baba gets much more money. Besides, the two cases are different, for Gandhi keeps an account of every item.

SRI AUROBINDO: Gandhi is a trustee of God while Meher Baba is God himself! (*Laughter*)

SATYENDRA: Once as Meher Baba was passing by a jail he said, "There also I have my agents."

SRI AUROBINDO: Then everybody is his "agent".

SATYENDRA: But these are special agents. The trouble is that he is not at all dependable. The Europeans complain, as I have already said, that he changes plans so often.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, European minds can't tolerate that. They want arrangement, method, a fixed system.

NIRODBARAN: In that case Meher Baba is like Hitler. By the way, this is the fateful month for Hitler.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, but the stars don't seem to be acting—perhaps because Russia has come in. Russia now occupies the stage; Hitler has quieted down.

PURANI: Now people are hoping for something in Spring.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is due to Strauss. Hitler began too early, in November. If he had begun in December, astrology would have proven itself successful. Anyhow, now it is not only the Hitler danger but the Stalin danger.

NIRODBARAN: Hitler is in a difficult position. He has to face the Western front and also provide for Stalinist possibilities.

SATYENDRA: Why? He has nothing to fear from Stalin.

SRI AUROBINDO: If Stalin is successful in the Baltic and the Balkans, Germany will be in danger and Stalin will be all-powerful in Europe.

NIRODBARAN: Besides, there is fear of an internal revolution in Germany and then of the spread of Communism.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is what Stalin hopes for. And after that Communism may spread over the whole of Europe.

SATYENDRA: But Stalin is not making much headway in Finland.

SRI AUROBINDO: No, he's not, except that his men have made some progress at the Isthmus, which is not much, and in the North where they have reached the Finnish defence lines.

PURANI: Finland is now fortifying the Aaland Islands. She hasn't up to now because of objections.

SRI AUROBINDO: Only Russia had objected. The League had given permission.

SATYENDRA: Sweden seems willing to help Finland.

SRI AUROBINDO: Perhaps they are already helping with arms.

EVENING

There was very little talk. Nobody appeared to be in the mood.

PURANI: Have you seen Jinnah's statement? After this, Congress should have nothing to do with him.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, the more they approach him the more insolent he becomes. Is it true that the Momins, the sect to which

Jinnah belongs, constitute half the number of Muslims in India? That is what is being said.

PURANI: I don't know exactly.

When Sri Aurobindo was lying down, Purani showed him some photos of Meher Baba's "mad disciples". Sri Aurobindo commented, "They don't look like liberated souls!" (Laughter)

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PURANI (*after the sponging of Sri Aurobindo was over*): At least one member of the Muslim League Executive doesn't agree with Jinnah's statement yesterday that December 2 should be observed by all Muslims and even the other minorities as the day of liberation from the Congress regime.

SRI AUROBINDO: Who is that? What's his name?

PURANI: I have forgotten it. *The Hindu* jokes that now we understand why it is said that people should retire after sixty. Jinnah is more than sixty now.

NIRODBARAN: Congress should combine with these Momins and try to come to some agreement with them.

SATYENDRA: It can't do that now, because Congress is too moral.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, it is too moral.

PURANI: Kher has asked Jinnah to specify his charges against Congress.

SRI AUROBINDO: Jinnah won't do that; he will only make general statements.

NIRODBARAN: Abul Kalam has also objected to having a Nationalist Muslim Conference at present. He says the time is not favourable.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't see why it is not favourable. Politically the best thing to do is to combine the Nationalist Muslims—not only those belonging to Congress—and then try to carry the Muslim mass with them. That is the only way to check Jinnah. Even in the Muslim League there are some dissatisfied elements.

NIRODBARAN (*after some time*): In yesterday's paper Russia was said to be designing an attack on India. Is there any truth in it?

SRI AUROBINDO: India? I think it was Asia. I have always considered it a possibility that Stalinist Russia might attack India. It may begin with Mohammedan Asia and then come to India. If the Allies are at war with Russia, this is quite possible. Have you heard the radio news? I don't know why Daladier has made such a fiery speech today against Russia.

NIRODBARAN: It is rather inopportune because it will provoke Russia.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes; Daladier has enough trouble on his hands. But he is like that. He is a weak man, and weak men become unnecessarily violent at times.

PURANI: But France can't directly help Finland.

SRI AUROBINDO: No, she can't, unless Sweden joins in and Norway too. Then not only France but also England can help effectively.

NIRODBARAN: I wonder what Jinnah and his Indian Muslims will do when Russia attacks Mohammedan Asia.

SRI AUROBINDO: He will hold meetings and shout or he will blame Congress for it.

PURANI: He will blame Nehru perhaps because of his socialistic tendencies and say that he has invited Russia.

SRI AUROBINDO: Perhaps it will be more characteristic of him to say, "I like Nehru but he is wicked in this matter."

NIRODBARAN: He may also say that Russia has dared to invade because Congress has withdrawn support to the British Government.

SRI AUROBINDO: That won't be communal enough. He will say Congress has invited Russia in to suppress and oppress the Muslims.

PURANI (*after a lull*): Saravan has been accepted for military training. He was a reservist.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why training?

PURANI: These people are to be trained for three months and then either sent to Saigon or kept here.

SRI AUROBINDO: There are enough troops in Saigon. Besides, in France they don't give training.

PURANI: The first time he was rejected on grounds of health.

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, he can now go to Y to make him ill. (*Laughter*) But I don't understand why he should be sent to Saigon.

SATYENDRA: Perhaps he and the others are very anxious to fight.

PURANI: Yes, they themselves wrote to the Ministry that they should be called up.

SATYENDRA: They want to fight for glory.

SRI AUROBINDO: For food! (*Laughter*)

When Sri Aurobindo was preparing to sit down to write, Champaklal brought three copies of The Life Divine for his autograph. Champaklal read out the names of the buyers, which were written on a slip of paper. When his own name came, he kept silent. Then Nirodbaran said: "Champaklal." Sri Aurobindo turned and remarked, "You should have said, 'Who is this Champaklal?'" There was laughter again.

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Purani was having a discussion with Sri Aurobindo about the appropriate Sanskrit quotations for The Life Divine. At the end Satyendra and Nirodbaran laughed aloud.

SRI AUROBINDO: What is the matter?

SATYENDRA: Nirodbaran is laughing because he doesn't understand a bit of the talk. It is all Greek to him.

NIRODBARAN: Same for you.

CHAMPAKLAL: Nirodbaran was trying for some time to pick up Sanskrit and now has given up.

NIRODBARAN: I was trying to learn the letters. I studied Pali in my school, so I don't know Sanskrit.

PURANI: In Bengal they write Sanskrit in Bengali script and their pronunciation of Sanskrit is awful.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. I remember in Barin's school he engaged a Bengali to teach Sanskrit. When the teacher left, he engaged a Hindustani teacher whose pronunciation was quite different from the Bengali way. The students found fault with his pronunciation. I had to take great pains to convince Barin that it was the Bengali teacher who was wrong. (*Sri Aurobindo related the story with much relish and enjoyment.*) The Bengali language, I mean the written language, is very easy.

SATYENDRA: How?

SRI AUROBINDO: It has very little grammar, no complication about gender, number, etc., as in Sanskrit or French.

PURANI: In French, the gender is especially complex. In Sanskrit the word "Dara", meaning "wife", is masculine. I don't know why.

SRI AUROBINDO: Does it mean that several men make a woman? In German, the word for "maiden" is neuter. (*Laughter*)

At noon Nirodbaran read out a letter to Sri Aurobindo. It was written by Sisir Maitra to Anilbaran in the course of their discussion on Reason, Buddhi, Kant, Hegel, the Gita, etc. Ultimately Sri Aurobindo was referred to. In the evening Purani took up the topic.

PURANI: Anilbaran asks if Buddhi can mean the same thing as Understanding. Professor Maitra says they are the same and so he places Buddhi lower than Reason just as Kant does with Understanding.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, Kant seems to place Understanding lower than Reason while Hegel, it is said, puts Understanding and Reason on the same level. But Buddhi seems to me to be more than Understanding. What does Indian philosophy say?

PURANI: According to it, *sadasad viveka shakti* (the power of discriminating the true from the false) is called Buddhi.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is not Understanding. Can one discriminate *sadasad* by Understanding alone or does one require Intellect? It is by what Indian philosophy calls Vijnana that one can do it. And Vijnana, in Indian philosophy, is more or less equivalent to Buddhi. Hence Buddhi is Intellect. Understanding is only a part of Buddhi.

PURANI: Kant says we are free while we follow Reason, not while we follow our senses.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then Buddhi can't be the same as Kant's Understanding. If anything it should be Higher Reason.

PURANI: Anilbaran asks another question. Kant says that one can arrive at the Truth by Reason. Maitra says the Gita also affirms the same thing, while Anilbaran contends that one can't.

SRI AUROBINDO: Does the Gita say so? Or is it Maitra's own opinion? If it is, it may be all right as a constructive thought, and it may be true in a certain sense. But if the Gita is mentioned, the proper text has to be traced. I think the Gita has advocated Reason as

one of the means through which one can approach the Truth. Even Shankara, I believe, doesn't say that Reason is useless. He admits that it prepares for what is beyond – even for going beyond Sattwa, etc. It is a stepping-stone.

PURANI: Anilbaran wants to know whether Kant and Hegel had a notion of a faculty beyond mind.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't think so.

PURANI: They didn't believe in a suprarational consciousness?

SRI AUROBINDO: No, they thought Reason can arrive at the Truth.

PURANI: Kant's *Critique* begins with the statement that knowledge of a particular thing in itself is not possible with the present human instruments of knowledge. He distinguishes between phenomenon and noumenon and says that men can only know phenomenon. He disputes Berkeley's view of subjectivism – that there is no world outside the perceiving consciousness. According to Berkeley, you project the world out of yourself. Kant does not admit that. He says that the tree you perceive exists or rather something (noumenon) exists which appears to us as the tree. But our knowledge of it may not be quite correct: for instance, we see it standing on its roots. But it may be standing on something else for that matter.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is the story of the Vishnu Purana where we read that it is difficult to say whether the king is on the elephant or the elephant is on the king.

All European philosophers after the Greeks hold that Reason is the faculty by which you arrive at the Truth. The question about sense-perception and its reliability is easily met. We perceive certain things by our senses and the sensations are the same because our senses have a common organisation. Even so, different persons perceive the same thing differently in some respects. And if you had the senses differently organised, you would perceive the same thing differently.

About Reason, what I may say is that if it was sufficient for arriving at the Truth, then all men by reasoning would arrive at the same conclusion. I am not speaking of abstract Reason. If Reason could work in the abstract and be an ideal faculty, it might perceive Truth. As it is, practical Reason deals with different ideas and there it differs in different individuals and they reach different conclusions even from the same data.

What I say is that Reason can perceive that there is something beyond itself and that this something is the Truth. But each reasoner tries to assert that this Truth is what he takes it to be. He sets up his own idea as the whole Truth. But the Truth is infinite and has an infinite number of sides. Each conclusion of Reason has some truth in it but we have to find something which is fundamental behind all the particular formulations of Reason, and we can do this only by experience. That which is beyond is the Absolute, and the Absolute can't be known by Reason or Mind. What can be formulated by Reason is Sachchidananda – Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. That is to say, the Absolute presents itself to the mind as Sachchidananda. You can't go beyond this concept.

PURANI: Kant's *Critique* is very difficult to understand and very dry.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, I tried to read it and after reading two pages I gave it up. Besides, the German language itself is difficult. The subject in a German sentence comes at the top of a page and the verb at the bottom. So perhaps it is more suitable than other languages for philosophy?

PURANI: Does Western philosophy believe in Mukti?

SRI AUROBINDO: No. In the West they believe in heaven or salvation.

PURANI (*after a while*): Nirodbaran was asking: if Reason comes to different conclusions, don't spiritual experiences also do the same?

SRI AUROBINDO: That is quite another field. What Reason does is to assert one thing as true and the rest as false. For example, if the Impersonal is true, the Personal is false. But when you go above the mind you realise that the Truth, being infinite, has many sides and all of them are true. In the Overmind, all the different truths converge and are held together.

EVENING

We had great fun when we learnt that Dr. Rao had not reached Madras as expected. One of us joked that his personal assistant, who had been wanting to occupy his post, had made him disappear to get his job, and now the personal assistant himself would criticise Dr. Rao for failing to present himself for duty.

SATYENDRA: Now that the Congress Ministry has resigned, the Government officers may expect trouble. Savor was telling me the same thing.

SRI AUROBINDO: What?

SATYENDRA: That they might not be allowed to come here now.

NIRODBARAN: The Ministers should not have resigned so soon. Now they are simply doing nothing.

SATYENDRA: What else could they do? Gandhi doesn't want to embarrass the Government.

SRI AUROBINDO: Nor embarrass himself.

SATYENDRA: They couldn't remain and sit idly there.

SRI AUROBINDO: They are idle just the same now. I could understand if they had launched some campaign against the Government.

By this time Purani had arrived. He didn't yet know the news about Rao's disappearance. Sri Aurobindo said, "Have you heard the news?" We all looked at Purani with intriguing smiles.

PURANI: What news?

SRI AUROBINDO: That Rao has disappeared? One of three things may have happened: The P. A. has made him disappear, he has gone to Karikal, or he was sleeping at Villupuram.

In the end we found out that he had got into the wrong compartment and gone to Karikal. Some friend had told him at the station that he was sitting in the Karikal carriage. But he paid no heed saying, "No, no, my name is here, it is all right." When Sri Aurobindo was told about it he remarked, "Just like him!"

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SRI AUROBINDO (*hearing laughter*): What is the matter?

NIRODBARAN: Purani and Champaklal are laughing together.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is their usual business.

CHAMPAKLAL: Purani has hurt his big toe again.

PURANI: A plank fell on it.

SRI AUROBINDO: You are always knocking against something or pushing it over. (*Laughter*)

At this moment, Nirodbaran, by inattention, happened to spill some water from a bowl.

SRI AUROBINDO (*laughing*): What's the matter now? You are doing the same thing as Purani along your own line.

NIRODBARAN (*as Sri Aurobindo started reclining*): In the *New Statesman* a reviewer quotes a line of Turner's poetry as an example of "careless and lazy inversion". The line is:

When the last tune is played and void the hall.

SRI AUROBINDO: The inversion is rather deliberate. It's there for the sake of emphasis.

NIRODBARAN: I don't understand why the reviewer calls it "careless".

SRI AUROBINDO: It's certainly not careless. If he doesn't like it, he can say so, but he can't attribute it to carelessness. Who is the reviewer?

NIRODBARAN: He is another poet, Richard Church.

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh, these are all fads of different poets!

NIRODBARAN: In the review Church says that Yeats was very enthusiastic over Turner's poetry. In his adventure through modern poetry he has made a discovery, Yeats says.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, in rhymed verse Turner writes very well at times. But his prose-poetry comes to nothing.

NIRODBARAN: Turner seems to be a worshipper of "silence".

SRI AUROBINDO: Not quite, because he is a music critic!

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SATYENDRA: Meher Baba says that Sai Baba and others were moulding the events of the last war. But if so many spiritual figures work at the same job like that, I wonder what the result will be. Each will try in his own way and cut across the work of the others.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, they may make a muddle of it.

PURANI: They can't make a worse muddle than the politicians.

NIRODBARAN: But why a muddle at all if they work from intuitive insight?

SATYENDRA: Even so, up to Overmind everything is a play of possibilities. And one possibility will counteract another.

SRI AUROBINDO: Quite so. Dayanand had the idea of establishing world peace by bringing all the nations together. He could have said he established the League and some other Yogi disestablished it.

SATYENDRA: Did you meet Dayanand?

SRI AUROBINDO: No, I met one of his disciples, a scientist in Calcutta National College. When I wrote about the future Avatar, he said the Avatar was already there, meaning Dayanand.

NIRODBARAN: Weren't there two Dayanands?

SATYENDRA: Yes, the one Sri Aurobindo has written about was an Arya Samajist, while there was another, a Bengali, who used to keep nothing for the next day because he believed in never planning for the future.

SRI AUROBINDO: He is the man who started Sannyasi marriages. I don't know whether they were real marriages or spiritual ones. He had something genuine in him. Barin used to be in ecstasies over him.

SATYENDRA: Another Avatar is coming out from Poona. He will declare himself in 1941.

SRI AUROBINDO: Who is that?

SATYENDRA: He is claimed by those people who dissociated themselves from the Theosophists.

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh, one more of their romances!

SATYENDRA: Didn't Madame Blavatsky have something real in her, something mystic?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, but the romance was also there. When one deals with mysticism one has to be very careful. There is any amount of truth and there is any amount of imagination. Nivedita spoke of the Theosophists as "woolly-headed people".

SATYENDRA: The Rosicrucians too believe in the reality of mystic experiences.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, Arjava (John Chadwick) belonged to one of their groups at Cambridge, and this created a lot of difficulty for him at the beginning of his sadhana here. The Rosicrucians posit two principles in man — good and evil personas. The evil persona has to be raised up in order to be got rid of. There are already enough bad things in our nature to deal with without raising up other evil things. Europeans have no knowledge of these matters. Even the Christian mystics seem to have no clear idea.

SATYENDRA: I suppose it is because the Europeans don't want to get rid of their individuality.

SRI AUROBINDO: They mix up the Self and the ego. Even when they are identified with the Self, they think it is the ego that has become that. Even Blake who had some idea of identity with the Self appears to have made this mistake.

PURANI (*after a lull in the talk*): Anilbaran says that according to Kant if one follows Reason one is free but if one follows Sense one is bound. There is also the question: Is Buddhi or Intellect an instrument of Prakriti and can a man, so long as he follows Buddhi, be free in the Gita's sense – that is, free from Nature?

SRI AUROBINDO: Does the Gita say that he can't be free?

PURANI: Well, there is a sloka which says that Sattwa, the mental Guna, binds by happiness.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is quite a different thing. You are mixing up two different things. The question is whether Buddhi can help you to detach yourself from your nature and lead to the perception of the Purusha, the free Witness.

PURANI: The text of the Gita will support this role of Buddhi.

SRI AUROBINDO: I should think so. Otherwise what is the meaning of the Gita laying so much stress on Buddhi?

NIRODBARAN: Then does it mean that Buddhi is not an instrument of Nature?

SRI AUROBINDO: It is an instrument that helps one to rise to the higher nature. You have to use the lower instruments to rise to the higher.

PURANI: Anilbaran does not want to admit Sisir Maitra's contention that Kant's idea of following Reason is the same as the Gita's Buddhi-Yoga.

SRI AUROBINDO: He is quite a controversialist. (*Laughter*) But in a controversy one has to see whatever truth there is in others' points of view.

PURANI: Kant, it seems, changed his mind in later life and admitted the necessity of Faith, which he deals with in his *Critique of Practical Reason*.

SRI AUROBINDO: I haven't read European philosophy carefully.

PURANI: Besides, it doesn't interest us, as it has no practical bearing.

SRI AUROBINDO: That was Arjava's great complaint, that here people always want something practical. They don't want to think for the sake of thinking. (*Laughter*)

PURANI: Kant's notion of freedom is not the same as our Indian notion of Mukti.

SRI AUROBINDO: The European idea is to arrive at the Truth.

SATYENDRA: They also have some idea of applying the Truth.

PURANI: Yes, a sort of idealism but not spirituality. In his *Practical Reason* Kant maintains that Pure Reason is an abstract faculty hardly to be found unmixed in men.

SRI AUROBINDO: What is it for then?

PURANI: It is just an ideal hardly attainable. So Practical Reason is necessary. Kant's opponents say that everybody follows Reason and so everybody is free. Everybody justifies his action by some reasoning. But in that case, even a thief can justify his stealing by some reasoning.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, and a very practical reasoning too. (*Laughter*)

PURANI: Even the thief is free because he acts freely.

SRI AUROBINDO: How?

PURANI: He decides out of his own free will.

SRI AUROBINDO: But merely by reasoning he can't be free. If we apply the Gita, one is not free merely because one reasons about stealing, but if one can steal disinterestedly and with detachment one can be free.

SATYENDRA: Wouldn't it be difficult for Europeans to grasp such ideas – for instance, that of killing people with detachment?

NIRODBARAN: In the *New Statesman*, the French author Gide speaks of disinterested action, even criminal or any other kind of action.

EVENING

DR. BECHARLAL: Are trust and faith the same?

Sri Aurobindo kept silent, not giving an answer.

DR. BECHARLAL: In the *Words of the Mother*, it is said that trust in the Divine brings the Grace. So isn't trust the key to having the Grace?

SRI AUROBINDO: There is more than one key.

DR. BECHARLAL: Doesn't trust lead to surrender?

SRI AUROBINDO: Not necessarily. If you trust a friend, it does not mean that you surrender to him.

DR. BECHARLAL: But as the trust increases you surrender more and more.

SRI AUROBINDO: If you trust a friend in a particular matter, it doesn't mean that you surrender to him in everything else.

15 DECEMBER 1939

The Mother told Sri Aurobindo that the prices of things have gone up. Vegetables are getting scarce and costly. When the soldiers come, it will be still more difficult to get them. Champaklal remarked that the price of one house-paint has gone up from two rupees to a thousand.

SRI AUROBINDO: That means that it is not available for purchase. But I don't know why vegetables should be scarce. The rise in price one can understand, because of the general rise in the standard of living. But why scarce? They are neither growing less, nor are they being exported.

SATYENDRA: Luckily not. Neither is the British Army large enough in India to consume more.

Somebody said that Russia had been threatened with expulsion from the League of Nations.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, Uruguay made the threat. Now Paraguay should bring in a resolution to expel England and France. I wonder why the League exists at all.

PURANI: Herbert was very enthusiastic about the League.

SRI AUROBINDO: Naturally. He was directly affected by the League and we were indirectly affected through him because he translated our books. (*Laughter*)

PURANI: He said the League had done a lot of good work; for example it has established an International Labour Department.

SRI AUROBINDO: Labouring over nothing!

PURANI: It has gathered a good deal of information.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then it may be called, instead of the League of Nations, the League of Informations.

EVENING

As usual, Purani entered with a strong military step and took a few deep breaths, looking at Sri Aurobindo. Champaklal and Nirodbaran were stealing a smile at each other over him when suddenly Champaklal burst out laughing and Purani looked at him. Sri Aurobindo also looked and, raising his right hand, made a gesture as if to say, "Don't know what to make of it all."

PURANI: My presence seems to act as a catalytic agent without my knowledge.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is how the subliminal self acts – without one's knowledge.

Then Sri Aurobindo started taking his short walk in the room. When the walk was finished, Purani took up the thread of a past conversation.

PURANI: Between Hegel and Kant, poor Nirodbaran's question was lost.

SRI AUROBINDO: What was it?

PURANI: Nirodbaran says that, just like reasonings, experiences differ and come to different conclusions. How then can experience be a criterion any more than reason?

SRI AUROBINDO: Experience is not a criterion. It is a means of arriving at the Truth. But experience is one thing and its expression is another. You are again putting reason up as the true judge over experience which is above reason. When people differ over experience, they differ in laying stress on or having a mental preference for this or that side of the experience. It doesn't mean that the experience itself is invalid. It is only when you try to put it in mental language that the differences arise, because such language is too poor to express it. As soon as you bring in mental terms, you limit it.

Truth is infinite and there are innumerable sides to it. Each conclusion of reason expresses something of that Infinite. Only when reason claims that it contains the whole truth in a conclusion, it is wrong. If you find that experiences differ, you have to go on

adding experience after experience till you come to the reconciling experience in which all others find their place.

When you want to describe a spiritual experience, you are obliged to use mental terms which are quite inadequate. That is why the Vedantins say that mind and speech can never express the Truth. Still you can somehow manage to express something as long as you have not gone beyond the level of the Overmind. When you enter the Supermind, then (*Sri Aurobindo began to shake his head, and resumed after a pause*) it is extremely difficult. And if you go still further towards the Absolute, it is almost impossible.

Reason takes up one standpoint and declares the others to be false. For instance, if it speaks of the Truth as impersonal, the Truth for it is solely impersonal and can never be personal; or vice versa. Really, both the personal and the impersonal are true; wherever there is the personal there is also the impersonal, and this holds too the other way round. When you transcend both you arrive at the Absolute.

SATYENDRA: Of which the two are aspects.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, but it doesn't mean that they are less true for being aspects or that the Absolute excludes them. When you throw aside reason you reach the all-inclusive Absolute.

One reasoner looks at a thing in one aspect and declares that that alone is right, another in some other aspect and swears by that. Reason to be really reasonable must have various points of view. It can't be right if its accounts don't differ. As I said, there are various sides to Reality. If the descriptions of several countries of the world were the same, they wouldn't be true.

SATYENDRA: How?

PURANI: If you describe Switzerland and the U.S.A. in the same manner, how would you be correct?

SRI AUROBINDO: And yet the earth is one and mankind is one!

SATYENDRA: It is good to have all these experiences.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, but if you can't have all, it is enough to have one – because each is an approach and can lead to the Absolute.

After this, Purani brought up the subject of the quotations from the Vedas and Upanishads for Sri Aurobindo's Life Divine. He had been searching for suitable quotations for the opening of each chapter.

PURANI: About the quotation for the chapter, "Knowledge by Identity", there is a sloka which says, "One must become like an arrow piercing its mark." I wonder if that will suit.

SRI AUROBINDO: It won't quite fit, because knowledge by identity is more than that. When they speak of knowledge by identity the Upanishads mean knowledge of the Self which is all, but that is one part of such knowledge. If you can't find a quotation here, perhaps there may be something for direct knowledge or knowledge by direct awareness. You can try and see if by some luck you find any.

PURANI: In Rajayoga, they speak of direct knowledge by Samyama which perhaps means concentration.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is a different thing. That comes by putting the pressure of consciousness on an object. But direct knowledge may not require concentration on one's part. The consciousness simply comes into contact with a thing and knows about it.

PURANI: Rajayoga speaks of Siddhis, special powers, like control over Matter, knowledge of Suryaloka (the Sun-world) and Chandraloka (the Moon-world), conquest of death, etc.

SRI AUROBINDO: Knowledge of Suryaloka and Chandraloka, yes, but conquest of death is a very different matter. About Siddhis, it is said that they flow into one when one enters a certain state of consciousness.

PURANI: The Upanishad also speaks of Yogis conquering disease and death and having less stool and urine.

SRI AUROBINDO: In that case, I was going in that direction regarding urine.

17 DECEMBER 1939

Satyendra drew Nirodbaran's attention to a single thin thread hung by a spider from the ceiling. Nirodbaran was reminded of a story in the New Statesman and Nation of a spider listening to Paderewsky's music. Sri Aurobindo was asked whether he had read it.

SRI AUROBINDO: No, what is it?

NIRODBARAN: Paderewsky says that while he was playing a particular tune a spider came down from the ceiling and sat on the piano-board. But when he began playing another tune the spider at once went up to the ceiling. This struck him as rather curious and to see if the spider was really appreciating a particular tune he played

again the previous one. To his surprise, down came the spider and it listened right to the end.

SRI AUROBINDO: Did Paderewsky play the other tune again or anything else to see whether the spider climbed back up once more?

NIRODBARAN: No.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then Paderewsky is not a scientist.

SATYENDRA: In India they say snakes are attracted by the flute. But scientists say snakes have no ears.

SRI AUROBINDO: Scientists say all sorts of things.

NIRODBARAN: The Greeks also used to say that animals are attracted by music.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is a universal belief.

SATYENDRA: Snake-charmers in India have a particular kind of instrument common among them and it produces a uniform tune which seems to appeal to snakes. They catch the snakes by playing that tune.

SRI AUROBINDO: If that story of the spider is true, it means that different animals are sensitive to different kinds of music. To snakes, perhaps Beethoven's sonatas would have no appeal, while this music of the snake-charmers appeals to them, perhaps because of its being current in Nagaloka!

There was a reference to the naval battle between the German pocket-battleship Graf Spee and some British cruisers. Reinforcements to both sides had been reported.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, now the British *Ark Royal*, which has been sunk several times by the Germans according to their own reports, is going there from Cape Town. This fight shows that at sea the English are superior to the Germans. They fought with six-inch guns against the Germans' eleven-inch guns. The Germans ought to have sunk at least two cruisers.

PURANI: Especially when they say these pocket-battleships are very light, more powerful and technically perfect.

SRI AUROBINDO: It means then that the training is deficient and that the fighters couldn't make use of the superior power of their ship. The Germans were outmanoeuvred.

SATYENDRA: The English are in their element at sea.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, it is in their blood. That means that, besides training, there is something in heredity which one can't acquire by training.

NIRODBARAN: Naval warfare is very thrilling.

SATYENDRA: Yes, from a distance.

SRI AUROBINDO: Much more thrilling when one reads of it in newspapers!

Purani was busy helping Sri Aurobindo with quotations from the Veda, etc., for The Life Divine chapter-epigraphs. He came with big volumes of Sayana and others.

SRI AUROBINDO: Sayana, in spite of his many mistakes, is very useful – though it is like going to ignorance for knowledge.

NIRODBARAN: Purani, with his glasses hanging on the tip of his nose and fat volumes under his arm, looks like Sayana, doesn't he?

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh, Sayana come back to undo his misdeeds? (*Laughter*)

18 DECEMBER 1939

EVENING

NIRODBARAN: Russia seems to have given no reply to Finland's peace offer.

SRI AUROBINDO: Molotov says he has not heard it and is not going to hear it.

NIRODBARAN: The poor Finns are fighting all alone. Nobody gives military help. How long can they resist?

PURANI: Everybody is busy with his own interests and safety.

SRI AUROBINDO: Except Russia and Germany who are trying to save others! But the Russians don't seem to have advanced much. It doesn't reflect much credit on their army. Of course, in the long run, Finland doesn't have any chance. Russia will throw in its huge mass. The Finns have destroyed nearly two hundred of their tanks.

SATYENDRA: Premanand was showing me a picture of the tanks. These tanks can cross wide ditches, it seems.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, but they are not so formidable now. Many weapons have been devised to destroy them and the Germans claim that the iron of the tanks can be melted.

NIRODBARAN: How could the German pocket-battleship escape from the strong British squadron?

SATYENDRA: British cruisers were not near her. They had to keep far away.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, about three miles from the coast, which is the limit of the territorial waters. The ship was scuttled five miles from the coast.

NIRODBARAN: It is surprising that they could hit accurately from twelve miles' distance, while German hits were all wide.

SRI AUROBINDO: The German ships were outmanoeuvred. The cruisers, being light and small, could easily change direction while battleships take more time. It is a foolish thing to scuttle such a ship. It could have remained interned during the war.

Then the talk turned to democracy and war aims.

NIRODBARAN: The Bengal Home Minister says the war is not fought for democracy but for the protection of small nations.

SRI AUROBINDO: When the Muslim League thinks democracy is not suitable for India, how can he say otherwise?

NIRODBARAN: When some member asked whether it was the Government opinion or his personal one, he said it was his personal opinion. (*Laughter*)

19 DECEMBER 1939

Sisir Maitra had presented a copy of The Life Divine to Tagore and asked him to read it. Tagore told him that his eyesight was bad. But Maitra forced the issue saying, "You said you were waiting to hear his word. This book is his word." Then Tagore replied that he would try.

SRI AUROBINDO: Tan Sen¹ has written to Dilip praising him, saying, "You have put stamps upon my heart." (*Laughter*) There were some other queer phrases. He didn't tell you?

NIRODBARAN: No.

SATYENDRA: It is not that people don't understand *The Life Divine* but that they find it difficult to apply to life.

SRI AUROBINDO: Somebody has said—I don't know who—ideals are to be held but not to be applied.

¹ A Chinese professor at Viswa Bharati. His real name is Tan-un-Sang.

SATYENDRA: Tagore can make a last attempt.

NIRODBARAN: I think I too will again make an honest attempt to understand it.

SRI AUROBINDO: But it is, I think, easier than books by Kant or other philosophers.

PURANI: Oh yes!

EVENING

We learnt from the radio that N. R. Sarkar had resigned. So the talk centred on that, it being the most important news of the day. Purani suggested that he may now join the Hindu Mahasabha and do something against the Bengal Ministry. That led the talk to the Hindu-Muslim problem and the charges of the Muslims against the Congress Ministries.

NIRODBARAN: Yes, but what about the charges of the Bengal Hindus against the Muslims? But strangely enough nobody knows or talks about that.

SRI AUROBINDO: No; no Indian paper gives publicity to these things. They simply make a brief statement.

NIRODBARAN: The *New Statesman* says that there is no mishap in Bengal during this Ministry.

SRI AUROBINDO: Because there are no riots?

NIRODBARAN: Perhaps.

SATYENDRA: Huq has now given a list of charges which are not charges. They are all vague and general.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes.

SATYENDRA: I don't see how any solution can be reached. Democracy doesn't seem to fit India, yet dictatorship is also not without its dangers.

SRI AUROBINDO: Democracy is a failure. It suits only those people who are born to it like England and the Scandinavian countries. Even in America it has failed. That is a proof of its corruption.

PURANI: It is astonishing how gangsters are so powerful there.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not only are there gangsters, but intrigue and corruption even among members of the Senate.

SATYENDRA (*after a lull*): But who and what sort of dictatorship do you think will suit India?

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't know; when a dictator is there he will start it. (*Laughter*)

Later, when Purani and Nirodbaran were alone with Sri Aurobindo, Nirodbaran spoke of Sarkar again.

NIRODBARAN: Sarkar's resignation seems a little inopportune.

SRI AUROBINDO: How?

NIRODBARAN: If he had remained he could have exercised some restraint on the Muslim Ministers.

SRI AUROBINDO: Do you think so? What about the other Hindu Ministers? Will they side with him?

NIRODBARAN: I don't know. But two of them were supposed to belong to his group, though not politically.

PURANI: If he can break the Ministry—

SRI AUROBINDO: How? He may not be able to carry the other Hindu Ministers with him as he hasn't resigned due to a communal issue.

20 DECEMBER 1939

PURANI: It seems Sarkar has resigned on the minority question. He objected to the last clause of the Government resolution which says that no further political development should be made without the full consent of the minorities. Nehru and Sir Stafford Cripps say that the British Government is not trying for democracy.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then for what?

PURANI: For its own self-interest.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is ancient history.

NIRODBARAN: Cripps seems to justify Russia's claim on Finland because Finland once belonged to Russia, though he doesn't approve of the method.

SRI AUROBINDO: In that case England can claim Ireland because it was once under its rule and now establish naval bases there. The Finnish people are not Russian in origin nor were they ruled by their willing consent. These people say whatever they like.

NIRODBARAN: Rajendra Prasad has said that the communal problem must be solved in any way possible.

SRI AUROBINDO: In any way? Then it is very easy. All Hindus can turn Mohammedans. Jinnah would like nothing better.

SATYENDRA: Yes, and then they can again become Hindus by Shuddhi. Rajendra Prasad also says that if it can't be solved it must be given up once for all.

PURANI: Hasrat Mohani has turned against the Congress and become a Muslim Leaguer. I don't know why.

If these Muslims could be made to contact Muslims of other countries, they would then realise who is closer to them—the Hindus or their co-religionists in other lands. Turkey and Egypt do not care for these Indian Muslims. Azad realised from his bitter experience in Mecca that his religious brothers there were eager to exploit him.

SRI AUROBINDO (*after a lull*): Kant's idea of freedom is said to be that one is free if one's actions are determined by oneself and not by others. But then what about the laws of morality? They are made by others. And if one is supposed to act according to oneself and thus be free, one may disobey them.

PURANI: Kant speaks also of heteronomy and gives the maxim that one must follow only that rule which one can make a universal law. .

SRI AUROBINDO: His idea of freedom is like the Sanskrit sloka: "Everything under one's control is happiness, everything under another's control is sorrow." But the Gita's idea is to go beyond oneself and one's own freedom.

PURANI: Yes. Sisir Maitra concludes in his article that the Gita preaches: "Leaving all other dharmas, take refuge in Me." I don't see then why there should be any controversy between Anilbaran and him. I was wondering if this sloka, "Be my-minded, my devotee," would do for a quotation for your chapter "The Triple Transformation". Though it is more related to Bhakti, I thought it could as well be applied to psychic transformation because Bhakti may lead to it.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, but Bhakti is only one aspect of the psychic. One can go to the psychic through the mind also, not only through the heart.

NIRODBARAN: Through the mind also?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, the psychic produces the mental transformation too.

As soon as the word "psychic" was heard, Satyendra began to smile to himself. "What's the matter?" we asked him. He didn't reply but continued to smile.

PURANI: Perhaps you are thinking, "Where is this psychic gentleman hiding?"

NIRODBARAN: That would be more in Dr. Manilal's vein.

SRI AUROBINDO (*laughing*): Dr. Manilal's psychic gentleman is too apt to take medicines for coming forth.

SATYENDRA (*after a while*): The psychic or the Divine is like a dictator.

PURANI: How?

SRI AUROBINDO: It is more like a constitutional monarch who allows you to do whatever you like.

SATYENDRA: But it doesn't come out.

SRI AUROBINDO: Because it waits for the consent of all the members of the Cabinet. (*Laughter*)

SATYENDRA: God is very difficult to get.

NIRODBARAN: He is also very clever in argument!

EVENING

Purani had given Sri Aurobindo Sisir Maitra's article on Kant and the Gita. Later he asked Sri Aurobindo how he found it.

SRI AUROBINDO: He has overstressed the ethical part and left out the spiritual and explained the spiritual idea from the ethical standpoint. For instance, he has interpreted the Gita's idea of doing work as duty for duty's sake — an ethical view. Doing work from any other motive and without desire for its fruit is too subtle for the mind to understand.

In the West, they don't make much distinction between the true self and the separative ego. If the separative ego is acting, why shouldn't one desire the fruit?

SATYENDRA: The idea of doing work for duty's sake may be an influence of the Christian idea of service.

SRI AUROBINDO: But the Christian idea is quite different from that. The Christians want to do what is God's will. That is a sort of religious law to them, while here it is a moral law, seen from the standpoint of Reason.

SATYENDRA: Christians have the idea of going to heaven by doing their duty.

SRI AUROBINDO: Their idea is more than that. They want to do what bears the seal of God's will on it, as they say. A religious law is there. When Reason got the upper hand on religion it began to

question religion's foundations, and the rationalists advocated the doing of duty from the ethical, the moral point of view, as a social demand. The rationalists have very fragmentary notions of what is involved.

21 DECEMBER 1939

PURANI: This German steamer *Columbus* was suspected of supplying oil to German cruisers and submarines and that is why it has been scuttled.

SRI AUROBINDO: It has been scuttled?

PURANI: Yes. The commander of the *Graf Spee* scuttled it on his own. He has committed harakiri.

SRI AUROBINDO: I thought Hitler had asked him to do it.

PURANI: No, Hitler left the entire decision to him asking him to do what he thought best.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't understand these scuttles and suicides.

NIRODBARAN: Perhaps the German naval authorities said that the ship must not fall into British hands.

SRI AUROBINDO: But it could have been interned and then, after the war is over, could have been returned to the owner. That is the international law unless the British wanted to seize it as they did with other ships after the last war. But this time they are not likely to do the same because they prefer to be moral.

SATYENDRA: They are professing too much.

SRI AUROBINDO (*addressing Satyendra*): You have read that Hitler has proclaimed a naval victory over fishing boats and trawlers? (*Laughter*)

SATYENDRA: Yes, Hitler speaks of his victories; his losses he suppresses or denies and invents all sorts of lies. Churchill seems to try to give true news.

SRI AUROBINDO: He declares the losses correctly but about the gains he is silent because he says he doesn't want to give such news to the Germans.

SATYENDRA: An English submarine torpedoed a German cruiser and Hitler denied it.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, he said there was some explosion underwater. (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: Somebody has said Hitler is such a liar that one can accept the opposite of what he says as true. (*Laughter*) Anyway, the war is getting more lively now.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is only at sea.

NIRODBARAN: In the air too, the recent attack on the German navy at Helgoland.

SATYENDRA (*after some time*): Tomorrow is the 22nd.

NIRODBARAN: Why do you mention it?

SATYENDRA: Jinnah will heave a sigh of relief from mourning.

NIRODBARAN: Oh!

PURANI: Malaviya has asked to observe it as the Gita day also.

NIRODBARAN: Some members of the League have tried to tone down.

SRI AUROBINDO: Jinnah himself has done it.

NIRODBARAN: What struck me as inconsistent in the Bengal Government's war resolution yesterday has been noted by *The Hindu* too. The resolution calling for the immediate grant of Dominion Status says that no further political development should be made without the full consent of the minorities.

SRI AUROBINDO: It means that the Dominion Status should make provision for the protection of the rights of the minorities. There is no inconsistency. They want to insert such a clause into the Constitution. But what does the resolution mean? That nothing should be given which doesn't satisfy the Muslims and everything should be given which satisfies them? Is it that? But then there are other minorities who will come in and say the same and their demands may be granted subject to the consent of the Muslims?

PURANI: Looks like it. Some Muslim will say Urdu must be the common language and Ramaswamy will say Tamil.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, he will but he knows that it has no chance.

PURANI: Vijay Raghavacharya has asked why these communal troubles in U. P., C. P. and Bihar occur. Why not in the Punjab and Bengal? And he asserts that these troubles are engineered by the Muslims themselves.

SRI AUROBINDO: Quite so. Or the Muslims will perhaps say that their Government was very popular and there were no grievances and the Hindus fell in love with the Muslims.

NIRODBARAN: Huq has called the Congress dishonest.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, he is a judge of honesty or rather an expert!

24-25 DECEMBER 1939

PURANI: Sir Sikandar has gone to Bombay to see Jinnah, perhaps for some compromise between Congress and the League, and the Aga Khan also is starting for India. He too may try for some rapprochement.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is no use unless they can get rid of Jinnah from the League.

SATYENDRA: The Sindh Premier is trying to get Congress support for his Ministry but the Congress refuses. He is very anxious and he remarks that the Congress is throwing him to the wolves, meaning the League. But the Congress hesitates to give any support for fear of alienating the sympathy of the people by taking sides.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is a stupid folly of the Congress. By lending support they will, on the contrary, help the people.

27 DECEMBER 1939

PURANI: Some Madrasi has come to see X to learn Pranayama from him as he has written a book on the subject. X replied by signs that he has taken a vow of silence and couldn't teach. People will say that he is vowed to silence and yet has written so many books!

SRI AUROBINDO: The vow is not supposed to apply to speaking through books. Carlyle not only wrote thirty-seven volumes but also spoke profusely on the value of silence!

NIRODBARAN: Poets write poems on silence.

SRI AUROBINDO: In 1914 when the Mother came here, there also came a Dutch painter who drew a sketch of me. At the end of every meditation, he used to say, "Let us now talk of the Ineffable."

Then Purani brought in the subject of Sanskrit quotations.

SATYENDRA: Sri Aurobindo is not known by orthodox Pundits as a philosopher, but as a Yogi.

NIRODBARAN: They say he doesn't know enough Sanskrit!

SRI AUROBINDO (*smiling*): The editor of the Bengali paper made that remark. He also said that I don't know enough about sex; if I did, I wouldn't have started a mixed Ashram, because in a mixed Ashram, sex-energy interferes.

EVENING

NIRODBARAN: There is a lot of controversy going on regarding war aims. Have you seen Shaw's article? Is the declaration of war aims now going to be helpful?

SRI AUROBINDO: Nonsense! How can war aims be declared now? Who is going to agree at present to the idea of a federation of Europe which Shaw is advocating? That is all the talk of intellectuals. Besides, Russia will want a Communist federation, Italy a Fascist one, Rumania another form and some will even want a federation of autarchy. I don't know that the German people themselves are keen about federation. Of course some form of it has to be found afterwards.

31 DECEMBER 1939

We found nothing to talk about. So Purani suddenly tried to set the ball rolling by remarking, "Nirodbaran says his mind is getting dull and stupid." Nirodbaran hissed and tried to stop him.

PURANI: He is threatening me. (*Sri Aurobindo began to laugh.*)

SRI AUROBINDO: It is perhaps a Jadabhava.¹

NIRODBARAN: He has been putting all sorts of things into my mouth.

PURANI: Why? You didn't say that?

NIRODBARAN: Yes, I did, but I didn't say the other thing the other day. What I mean is that I seem to be going down to another level of stupidity. It is not Jadabhava, because here only the mind is Jada and the rest is very active.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then perhaps it is due to the effort of reading Kant and trying to understand him. (*Laughter*)

¹ A state of inertia.

NIRODBARAN (*after some time*): What does Blake mean by self-annihilation?

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't know, perhaps annihilation of the ego.

NIRODBARAN: And by "identity" does he mean perception of the One in all?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, but that identity seems to include in it all things, as held at the end of the Chhandogya Upanishad.

NIRODBARAN: Yes, Blake says that even physical love is quite justified if there is love and if one perceives identity in the other. He perceived identity in his wife but his wife didn't perceive this identity. In that case what is the solution? Their life seems to have been a tragedy because Blake loved someone else.

PURANI: I thought that they were a very happy pair.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't know why Middleton Murry says that. His wife was an ordinary Christian and it took her a long time to come to his standpoint. It was because she could not chime in with him that there was the tragedy. All the Christian mystic poets from Donne onward regard sex as permissible in the man-and-woman relation.

2 JANUARY 1940

SRI AUROBINDO (*suddenly*): Is Nolini Sen going today?

NIRODBARAN: He has already gone.

SRI AUROBINDO: His wife has sent a poem which she received in meditation. It is very good. Pavitra has seen the horoscopes of both husband and wife. He says they are complementary to each other. He has ability, the power of success.

NIRODBARAN: Nolini Sen told me about his wife. About himself he said that he had some organising ability. The Government used to send him to places that were difficult to organise. So he has acquired a bad name as being strict and disciplinary.

SRI AUROBINDO: He has a clear mind and seems to be an intellectual.

NIRODBARAN: He was one of the three most brilliant students of his year, the first being Satyen Bose. He says there are only two people who understand Einstein's relativity theory.

SRI AUROBINDO: In India or the world? I thought there were five or six in the world.

NIRODBARAN: I mean in India. One of the two is Bose and the other is Kothari. He further says that Bose pointed out some mistake in Einstein's thinking; his corrections have been accepted and scientists now speak of the Bose-Einstein statistics.

SRI AUROBINDO: I see. That is very creditable for India.

PURANI: What about Suleman?

NIRODBARAN: Sen says Suleman also pointed out some mistakes.

PURANI: No, Suleman refutes the whole theory.

NIRODBARAN: Sen says the results of the last solar eclipse have not come out yet. They should have a bearing on the relativity theory.

NIRODBARAN (*after a lull*): In the message on our New Year calendar the Mother says that this is a year of silence and expectation. We are wondering: expectation of what?

SRI AUROBINDO: Of what is to come.

NIRODBARAN: That is to say?

SRI AUROBINDO: Whatever the expectation is for.

NIRODBARAN: For individuals or in a general sense? We are all expecting the Supermind to come.

SRI AUROBINDO: How can it come unless you are all prepared to receive it?

PURANI: I thought it was more or less an individual matter.

SRI AUROBINDO: What do you mean by "expecting the Supermind?" Do you expect the Supermind to come without any preparation?

NIRODBARAN: No, I don't mean for myself. I mean that the Supermind will descend into you and the Mother and perhaps a few disciples first and we shall be benefited by it. At least that is what I understood.

SRI AUROBINDO: You want to be benefited without doing anything yourself. And do you expect the Supermind to do everything for you? That is supreme laziness.

NIRODBARAN: I don't say that. I say that if at present in spite of my efforts I don't get satisfactory results and my progress is slow and tardy, the Supramental Force, being the Highest Force, will help me to overcome my troubles in comparatively less time. That is what you wrote to me on the action of the Supermind.

SRI AUROBINDO: So you will wait for the Supermind's descent. That is like Moni's idea. He says that the Divine will do everything and one has nothing to do at all. Anyway, this used to be his idea. I don't know what he thinks now.

NIRODBARAN: That is an extreme view. I don't go so far. I believe or I have been led to believe that the Supermind will help me in every way possible.

SRI AUROBINDO: Will it?

NIRODBARAN: Won't it? As for Moni's idea, I can't say there is no truth in it if one sincerely believes in it and sticks to it.

SRI AUROBINDO: Ah, sticks to it!

NIRODBARAN: There are people who rely entirely on Divine Grace and have the faith that the Divine will do everything for them. It is not entirely wrong, is it? I think you have yourself written something like that, though, as you have said, such people are rare.

SRI AUROBINDO: Faith and ideas are quite different. Ideas are of the mind and they are abstract. If they have no dynamic power behind them, they remain ideas till the end.

SATYENDRA: I am also coming round to Moni's idea.

NIRODBARAN: But yours is from a different point of view. You have tried.

SATYENDRA: Unless the fellow within, as Y calls it, awakes, nothing can be achieved. One must have the hunger first.

NIRODBARAN: Yes, that hunger also can be created by the Supermind.

Here Sri Aurobindo smiled. Purani brought in some other topic, at the end of which both Satyendra and Nirodbaran looked at each other and broke into smiles. Purani thought it was as if Nirodbaran had thrown a jet of refreshing water on Satyendra.

PURANI: Jetting the Supermind on Satyendra?

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh, baptising him into the Supermind?

EVENING

NIRODBARAN: In *The Hindu's* editorial on the defence forces of India it is said that there is not a single Bengali unit in India's land forces. The majority are comprised of Punjab Muslims.

SRI AUROBINDO: Muslims?

NIRODBARAN: Yes.

SRI AUROBINDO: What land forces? The army?

NIRODBARAN: Perhaps.

SRI AUROBINDO: People say the Bengalis and the Madrasis are non-martial races. But it has been pointed out that the English conquered Bengal with the help of Madrasi sepoy, the United Provinces with that of Bengali sepoy and the Muslim Punjab itself with that of Hindu sepoy. And now they are all non-martial races!

3 JANUARY 1940

NIRODBARAN: I had a letter from Nolini Sen. He speaks of visions of flowers and wants to know their significance.

SRI AUROBINDO: What flowers?

NIRODBARAN: A pink lotus closed and then opened by some invisible power. He asks if it is your Force.

SRI AUROBINDO: You can write the significance.

NIRODBARAN: But he wants the implications too.

SRI AUROBINDO: The lotus would mean that the consciousness of the Divine is opening in him.

NIRODBARAN: He calls it *your* Force because we know the pink lotus to be your flower and the white to be the Mother's.

SRI AUROBINDO: Where does he see the lotus?

NIRODBARAN: I think in the heart.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then it is very good. It means his psychic being is opening.

NIRODBARAN: Maybe, but seeing visions like that is not of much importance, is it?

SRI AUROBINDO: There is more to it than that. He hears voices and gets inner guidance.

NIRODBARAN: There are other flowers he speaks of. I am thinking: if he goes on asking about such things there won't be any end to it. (*Laughter*) Sen seems to have other brilliant brothers; they make a gifted family, I hear.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes.

NIRODBARAN: One brother who is an I.C.S. is said to be the most brilliant.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then why did he go in for the I.C.S. — to waste himself?

NIRODBARAN: That is what Sen told him but his father seemed to be keen about it. The I.C.S. was an easy walk-over for him.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is quite easy to pass the I.C.S.

NIRODBARAN: He also had some interest in our direction I understand, but now—

SRI AUROBINDO: Suppressed under the burden of the I.C.S. work?

NIRODBARAN: Yes.

SRI AUROBINDO: In that official routine work all the brilliant qualities are lost. There is no scope for them.

At noon after Sri Aurobindo's writing had been finished, Nirodbaran showed him Sen's letter and Sri Aurobindo explained the significance of his visions of flowers. Then the Mother came. Nirodbaran told the Mother again about Sen's letter and said that he was much worried by thoughts and couldn't concentrate.

THE MOTHER: Yes, he told me of that. Tell him not to worry. The more he concentrates on the trouble, the worse it will be.

4 JANUARY 1940

PURANI: X has replied to the review by the *Vedanta Kesari* of his new book. The editor has also put in some footnotes.

SRI AUROBINDO: What does X say?

PURANI: He seems to say that the physical light and the inner light of the Yogi are the same light.

SRI AUROBINDO: Is he speaking from his own experience?

PURANI: He says so, and he quotes from the Veda and the Upanishads to support him in saying that God is light. The editor says that all light is from the Divine, of course, but the inner light of the Yogi is different from the physical light: it has not the same wave-length, as it were.

Then about his recent change of views, X argues that if the spiritual journey entails a change of landscape as one climbs higher, he is not ashamed to admit his change due to the light of knowledge and experience.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is also what Krishnaprem says. As one advances in consciousness from one stage to another, one has to change his former views in the light of his present knowledge.

NIRODBARAN: X is just like Y. He also says one thing and then contradicts it; so X isn't justified in calling him a humbug.

SRI AUROBINDO: Does he call Y a humbug for that? I thought it was because his prophecies don't come true.

NIRODBARAN: If one makes sweeping assertions and calls them the light of knowledge, that light can't very well be trusted.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why not? (*Firmly*) When one experiences the personal God, one thinks that only the personal God exists. When one goes beyond that, one comes to the Impersonal realisation. When one transcends both, one comes to the Absolute, of which the Personal and the Impersonal are aspects.

NIRODBARAN: But then X will go on contradicting himself all the time. Today he praises Yoga and monasticism; tomorrow he damns Yoga and finds no truth in Sannyasa.

SRI AUROBINDO: He is not speaking from experience. It is a matter of opinion. (*After a pause*) If he had a wider mind he would not say things like that and lay stress only on the faults and mistakes of monasticism, losing sight of its virtues.

NIRODBARAN (*after a while*): Jyotin explains the symbolism of your poem "Trance" by saying that the star is the individual soul and the moon the universal. The storm is doubt. And when the doubt is cleared from the mental sky, the individual soul stands face to face with the universal.

SRI AUROBINDO: Good Lord! I didn't know that I had put all that philosophy into the poem. Jyotin has built a big superstructure on a small poem.

SATYENDRA: That is the commentator's job.

PURANI: Tagore also says that critics give meanings to his poems which he never intended. He tells them, "They are simply poems. Why don't you take them like that?"

SRI AUROBINDO: What I have described is a condition of inner experience.

NIRODBARAN: Yes, but the symbols do stand for something.

SRI AUROBINDO: I can't remember the poem, so I can't say anything.

NIRODBARAN: You speak of a single-pointed star.

SRI AUROBINDO: Telling me that is of no use. I must see the poem. What does Jyotin say about "The Bird of Fire?"

NIRODBARAN: He says that it is also symbolic but that this one is an example of perfect symbolism.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why?

NIRODBARAN: I don't know.

SRI AUROBINDO: People read their own minds into a poem. It's like what they make of the Rigveda's *anasah*—the “flat noses” of the European commentators. All sorts of meanings are made out of it.

NIRODBARAN (*when Sri Aurobindo was about to lie down*): Reviewers seem to be a funny race. One praises a book and another condemns it.

SRI AUROBINDO: I find nothing extraordinary in that.

NIRODBARAN: In the *New Statesman and Nation* Anthony West runs down Priestley's new book while the *Manchester Guardian* praises it. So also with Huxley's *After Many a Summer*. Anthony West calls it a spiritual failure.

SRI AUROBINDO: West is a rationalist. He won't hear of mysticism. Anything that does not savour of rationalism is damned by him.

NIRODBARAN: Huxley is already being called a Western Yogi—

SRI AUROBINDO: And a spiritual failure!

PURANI: What does Huxley know of Yoga?

NIRODBARAN: D says he had practised some Yoga and this is quite evident from his writings.

SRI AUROBINDO: His book is here, you said. Well, you can read it and see for yourself.

EVENING

Nirodbaran handed Sri Aurobindo the book in which the poem “Trance” had been printed. “What's this?” he asked. Then, on seeing the title Six Poems of Sri Aurobindo, he laughed out.

SRI AUROBINDO (*after reading the poem*): I have explained everything in the poem itself. I speak of the star of creation, the moon of ecstasy and the storm-breath of the soul-change—that is, the upheaval before the change. The trance brings in a change of the outer consciousness and nature. There is no philosophy anywhere. (*Shortly after returning the book*) Let me have the book again. (*Looking at the poem once more*) There is a big printing mistake here. A hyphen has been put between “Self” and “enraptured”. It makes neither poetry nor sense.

NIRODBARAN: I remember Amal told me the same thing when the book was out.

5 JANUARY 1940

NIRODBARAN: I have been again trying to get intuition but no luck.

SRI AUROBINDO (*with a look meaning "Is that so?"*) After your last brinjal intuition? (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: Yes, but nothing comes.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is because you lost your faith by that brinjal affair.

NIRODBARAN: Nolini Sen began to have inner guidance as soon as he set his foot into Yoga.

SRI AUROBINDO: He had been doing Yoga for some time. Only he had lost hold of it temporarily.

SATYENDRA: Inner guidance in what way?

NIRODBARAN: In his practical work.

SRI AUROBINDO: In solving practical difficulties, I suppose. He has a mind which seems open to the intuitive faculty.

Usually a man of action has a sort of insight which is half-intuition, while for a man of intellect intuition is difficult. His intellect thinks of various possibilities, saying this may happen, that may happen.

NIRODBARAN: Does a man of action have no intellect?

SRI AUROBINDO: He has one, but it does not come in the way of his action. He has a vital, not a mental, intuition about things and acts on it. I don't say he commits no mistakes but in most cases he turns out to be right.

The English are so successful because they go by this vital intuition. Often they jumble things and make mistakes but in the end that intuition comes to their help and pulls them through. The French are logical; they think and reason.

PURANI: The English now are thinking of actively helping Finland because they fear a German-Russian combination in the Baltic.

SRI AUROBINDO: But how are they going to help Finland? The English require plenty of ammunition and military equipment for themselves. I don't know whether they have enough to spare.

NIRODBARAN: What they need more badly now is man-power.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, but still ammunition is wanted.

NIRODBARAN (*after some time*): What am I to do now? Intellect comes in the way of intuition. Desire in the vital and the hard crust of the physical—everything resists. Resistance everywhere!

SRI AUROBINDO (*laughing*): Well, get rid of the crust and the desire and quiet the intellect.

SATYENDRA: But I find that Nirodbaran's vital is quiet—and his intellect too. Perhaps the desires are less so.

SRI AUROBINDO (*smiling*): Oh, is it all like that?

NIRODBARAN: The trouble is that everybody sees my progress except myself.

SRI AUROBINDO: Are you trying to apply intuition in a special way?

NIRODBARAN: Yes, in my medical work.

SRI AUROBINDO: Instead of limiting yourself to a special operation, why not try to have the faculty in a general way—in other fields also?

NIRODBARAN: I am concerned only with medical work now.

SRI AUROBINDO: But try it elsewhere too.

NIRODBARAN: For instance, in thinking?

SRI AUROBINDO: In everything. It is difficult to get intuition in a special subject, especially if one has no bent for that subject. You didn't have any particular love for medicine, did you?

NIRODBARAN: I am afraid not.

SRI AUROBINDO: Try, for instance, to find out what Satyendra will be doing next. (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: That will be difficult. I may be more correct regarding Champaklal.

SRI AUROBINDO: Or, if you are a novel-reader, try to guess what will follow. Of course, it is easy for an expert reader to do this. (*After a pause*) Many people get intuitions without knowing it.

NIRODBARAN: I know my difficulty. I came as a raw recruit to Yoga.

PURANI: Recruits are always raw.

NIRODBARAN: Not completely.

SRI AUROBINDO: They may have had some combat experience among themselves!

SATYENDRA: Try to realise the Self first, and then everything will follow.

SRI AUROBINDO: It will be automatic.

SATYENDRA: Yes; the faculties will open by themselves.

6 JANUARY 1940

NIRODBARAN: Hot water seems to have a stimulating effect on the hair cells.

SRI AUROBINDO: How?

NIRODBARAN: On your lower limbs I find a growth of hair which was not there before.

SATYENDRA: Then Nirodbaran can try hot water on his own head. (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: I was thinking of trying it, but it makes the head so hot.

SATYENDRA: Then why not try hot and cold?

SRI AUROBINDO: Cold water may take away the rest of the hair! (*Laughter*)

SATYENDRA: If Nirodbaran proves successful, we'll all try the remedy.

NIRODBARAN: No chance of success. Getting bald is hereditary.

SRI AUROBINDO: You mean it is the effect of being born bald?

SATYENDRA: Scientists consider heredity to play a great part.

NIRODBARAN: Perhaps they ascribe to heredity whatever they can't explain.

SRI AUROBINDO: They are discovering so many wonderful rays. Why don't they discover something for baldness?

NIRODBARAN: They have tried ultra-violet, but with no result.

SRI AUROBINDO: It burns up whatever hair there is? Voronoff seems to have succeeded with his monkey-gland operation. Besides doing several other things, it grows hair.

NIRODBARAN: I hope it does not grow hair everywhere – as on a monkey! (*Laughter*)

SRI AUROBINDO: Not so far. If it did, it might grow a monkey tail too.

SATYENDRA: There are plenty of advertisements for curing baldness, but the problem remains. Perhaps Nirodbaran can discover something.

NIRODBARAN: I may when I get my intuition opened or when the Supermind opens.

SATYENDRA: The Supermind opening is a long affair.

SRI AUROBINDO: Intuition would be easier to get.

PURANI: If one gets the Supermind, there will be no need to find anything out.

NIRODBARAN: Yes, the hair will grow itself. There will be a change in every cell.

PURANI: You will be all golden, I suppose.

SRI AUROBINDO: As they say in the Upanishad, the Supreme Being with the golden beard, etc.

When Sri Aurobindo was lying down, Nirodbaran read to him a letter from Tagore to Sahana on mystic poetry.

NIRODBARAN: Tagore says: "Mostly we see that those whose spiritual realisation is new cannot express that new experience in the simple and easy old ways. In their manner of expression there is something laboured."

SRI AUROBINDO: That is not true. If there is any obscurity in a truly mystic poem, it is because the poet tries to express faithfully his extraordinary vision, what he has inwardly seen. Others may find difficulty in understanding it, but it is not consciously written with a view to making it unintelligible. It is not a laboured work. On the contrary, if one tries to make it easily intelligible it becomes laboured.

NIRODBARAN: Tagore goes on: "The sculptor who erects a chapel does it on the common soil. He does not think that unless he constructs it on Kanchanjunga his art is in vain."

SRI AUROBINDO: Can't he have a private chapel of his own wherever he wants it?

NIRODBARAN: Besides, does an artist have all these motives and plans beforehand?

SRI AUROBINDO: No. He creates moved by an inner urge. What else does the letter say?

NIRODBARAN: "One who has tasted heaven, if he is an artist, will build this paradise on the earth which is accessible to all and

make ordinary clay heavenly. Language is a vessel meant to be enjoyed by all. Even if ambrosia is served, it must be in this common vessel."

SRI AUROBINDO: The artist can base his poem on heaven: why necessarily on earth? Does Tagore mean to say that everybody understands or appreciates all poetry? How many appreciate Milton and other great poets? Besides, one must have the power of understanding.

NIRODBARAN: Tagore further writes about the Ashram poets: "Among you, Nishikanto alone has proved his easy mastery over language."

SRI AUROBINDO: That is a different matter from writing with easy intelligibility for everybody.

NIRODBARAN: Why does he want us to follow the simple and easy old ways—the beaten track?

SRI AUROBINDO: Perhaps poets when they grow very old want old ways to be followed?

PURANI: But Tagore has himself gone off the beaten track. And what about his prose-poetry? What age-old way is there in it? In Gujarat, Kalelkar and Gandhi also say the same thing—that poetry must be for the masses. Kalelkar says that even the Ramayana was written for them.

SRI AUROBINDO: Good Lord!

PURANI: Yes, Kalelkar explains that Valmiki used to go from cottage to cottage reciting the Ramayana and that when the epic was finished the Rishis presented him with a Kamandalu (water pot), a Kaupin (loincloth) and a Parnakutir (thatched hut).

SRI AUROBINDO: But the Rishis were not the common people and they had retired from ordinary society. Kalelkar's is an entirely unheard-of interpretation of the Ramayana.

PURANI: He claims to have found evidence in the poem itself for his theory.

SRI AUROBINDO: Where is it said in the Ramayana? If Valmiki meant it for the masses he kept his meaning a secret. Nor did he recite it to the masses. There were the professional reciters who carried it from door to door and popularised it. That is a different thing.

PURANI: At the Ahmedabad Literary Conference, Gandhi as President asked, "What has literature done for the man who draws water from the well?"

SRI AUROBINDO: How much has the President done? The man is still drawing water! (*Laughter*)

Do the masses understand Kalelkar's own writings?

PURANI: Not quite. Gandhi alone can be said to be understood by them.

NIRODBARAN: All this seems to be an attempt by people to apply the principle of democracy everywhere. But it is democracy in terms of socialism and communism.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes.

PURANI: Tagore has also taken up the cry now, but formerly he was not quite for the common man.

SRI AUROBINDO: I suppose he has further developed his idea of the Vishwa-manava (universal man). But, truly speaking, the universal man includes the best as well as the worst, the highest no less than the lowest, whereas the Jana-sadharana, (common man) appears to leave out the best and highest.

NIRODBARAN: But Tagore's literary works—for example, his novels—can hardly be appreciated by the masses. In that sense, Sarat Chandra Chatterji can be considered more successful in living up to the democratic ideal.

PURANI: In Hindi, somebody wrote on art recently under the title "Kasmai Devaya?" ("To What God?") and said, "Fanardana", the God of the people. But in practice only "the people" are insisted on; "God" is left out of the account. Possibly there is the echo here of Vivekananda's idea of serving Daridranarayana (God the Poor).

NIRODBARAN: Vivekananda did perhaps see Narayana in the Daridra.

SRI AUROBINDO: But ordinarily, in the man drawing water from the well, people hardly have the vision of the Divine at work: they see only the peasant.

PURANI: Kalelkar says that substance is more important than form in art. He gives the analogy of the vessel and the food in it, and emphasises that the food is the real thing. I don't understand how in art the two can be separated.

SRI AUROBINDO: This is something like Tagore's ambrosia and the earthen vessel. But there can't be art without form. If substance alone counts, we don't have art. An artist has to give a body to his vision, which is the soul of his art; but in art you can't take soul and body as separate things. Those images—food and

vessel— can be applied to physical processes, not to any inner process like art creation.

PURANI: When Valmiki had the vision, he was busier giving form to it than going from cottage to cottage and popularising the Ramayana.

By the way, there is a point made by someone about Vyasa and his Mahabharata. He says that Vyasa was greater than Sri Krishna because he had universal sympathy: Vyasa expresses his sympathy with every character he created in the Mahabharata.

SRI AUROBINDO: Where does Vyasa say that? This looks like Valmiki's intention to write for the masses. Both poets have kept their meaning a secret! As for Vyasa's universal sympathy, one has to understand an important distinction in art. Every creator has to identify himself with his characters in order to make them live and bring out their essential points. This doesn't mean that he has sympathy with each and every character created. Homer put many good things into his Hector's mouth. But his sympathy was, if at all anywhere, on the side of Achilles.

7 JANUARY 1940

A few days ago Nirodbaran showed to Sri Aurobindo Nishikanto's new poem in matra-vritta blank verse, a new experiment.

SRI AUROBINDO: How do you find the rhythm?

NIRODBARAN: It seems all right. How do you find it?

SRI AUROBINDO: I can't say as I am not familiar with this *chhanda* (rhythm and metre).

NIRODBARAN: I asked Dilip today what he thought about Nishikanto's new *chhanda*. Nishikanto had told me Dilip had found it very successful. Dilip said, "It is a misrepresentation. Please tell Guru about it. (*Laughter*) I told him that his overflows were very good but here and there there was roughness. I gave him a hint but he didn't take it."

SRI AUROBINDO: I also had the impression that there was much weightage and crowding of things.

NIRODBARAN: I also thought there must be something wrong. Otherwise you wouldn't have asked me. (*Laughter*) Dilip says that

when Nishikanto tries to do something consciously he makes mistakes. He is trying many new things.

SRI AUROBINDO: He is trying to put force and strength into his poetry. One has to be very careful when trying new things that they don't become heavy. He has a remarkable gift of rhythm, hasn't he?

NIRODBARAN: Yes. I had again a talk with D about effort and told him about your emphasis on effort. He was very glad. He says Krishnaprem also lays stress on effort and that people, according to Krishnaprem, justify their supine laziness by saying they rely only on the Grace. "What is this idea," D says, "that Mother and Sri Aurobindo will do everything for us and we have only to look up at their faces?" (*Laughter*)

SATYENDRA: But there is no guarantee either that by effort we shall realise the Divine. A sloka in the Upanishad says: "The Self gives realisation to those whom the Self chooses."

SRI AUROBINDO: But it also says later on that one can't get realisation without effort.

NIRODBARAN: Effort alone may not lead to realisation. Grace is necessary. But all the same there is no Grace without effort. A little contradictory!

SATYENDRA: There are cases where people have got realisation without effort. Suddenly they got brilliant experiences and that opened them to higher planes.

NIRODBARAN: Dilip challenges anybody to show a single example.

SATYENDRA: Why? What about Ramana Maharshi?

NIRODBARAN: I thought he had to make a tremendous effort. He himself says he did forty years' meditation sitting in one fixed place.

SATYENDRA: That was after the realisation which came suddenly and then the experience itself pulled up his lower consciousness into the higher.

SRI AUROBINDO: There are cases where the opening may come suddenly, or there is a certain passage from one consciousness to another.

NIRODBARAN: But the opening may close again.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not if it is a definitive experience. It remains permanently. If there is only a glimpse it can close up. In my own case, I got a definitive experience in three days quite suddenly. That was not the result of effort.

NIRODBARAN: But you must have been making effort before.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not for this result. Lele asked me to silence the mind and throw away the thoughts if they came. I did it—in three days—and the result was that the whole being became quiet and in seven days I got the Nirvanic experience which remained with me for a long time. I couldn't have got out of it even if I had wanted to. Even afterwards, this experience remained in the background in the midst of all my activities.

NIRODBARAN: You must have been doing some Yoga.

SRI AUROBINDO: All I was doing was Pranayama for two years and the only result of it was good health and a lot of poetry. As that didn't satisfy me, I went in search of people who could help me.

CHAMPAKLAL: What does Dilip mean by effort? Effort may be the result of Grace. Formerly Nirodbaran was unable to meditate, now he can because of the Grace.

NIRODBARAN: I don't deny the Grace but I say that effort is also necessary for the Grace to be effective. From Champaklal's standpoint the fact of my being alive is the result of Grace. I don't refute this.

SRI AUROBINDO: Kanai may say his Asanas are also the result of Grace, so also Dilip's mental Asanas!

NIRODBARAN: If effort is not necessary, why does Sri Aurobindo bombard me for being lazy, for being leisurely, etc.?

CHAMPAKLAL: I can give you an opposite answer. The Mother said that one must have complete reliance on the Divine Grace and the Grace will do everything.

PURANI: Even that reliance requires effort.

NIRODBARAN: In Champaklal's case it may be complete reliance but in my case Sri Aurobindo will ask me to make effort.

SATYENDRA: Sri Aurobindo's answers are contradictory; his legal acumen nobody can question. (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: Plenty of people complain about it. They say he says one thing to one man and quite the opposite to another. (*Laughter*)

SRI AUROBINDO: Naturally, what else do they expect?

SATYENDRA: That, I suppose, regards your answering letters; there are no such contradictions in your philosophy.

SRI AUROBINDO: No, there one has to deal with general principles.

CHAMPAKLAL: There are persons who see visions and have experiences as soon as they start Yoga. Others have to wait and wait.

SRI AUROBINDO: Quite true; wait, as Satyendra says, for forty years. You may go on making effort for a long time without any result and when you have given up all effort, suddenly you get the result. But the result is not due to the effort, but to the Grace.

NIRODBARAN: Dilip may come to realise that after all effort is not everything. Grace is necessary and without it effort has no value.

SRI AUROBINDO: But he believes in Grace. He himself said that it was by the Grace that he was saved in that accident.

NIRODBARAN: Yes, he did say that, but at present effort has come to the front.

SRI AUROBINDO: One day he will find that his mind has become quiet and he has started getting experiences. Not that he had no experiences before. His body used to be absolutely still at one time and he felt the peace.

PURANI: Yes, when he was meditating with the Mother.

CHAMPAKLAL (*when Sri Aurobindo was lying in bed after his sponging*): What is then meant by complete reliance on the Divine Grace?

SRI AUROBINDO: It means what it says. (*Laughter*)

CHAMPAKLAL: No, no, I am asking a question.

SRI AUROBINDO: I am also answering. (*Laughter*) You know what is meant by reliance and what is meant by complete.

CHAMPAKLAL: Then how does effort come in?

SRI AUROBINDO: Even if you make effort, you rely on the Grace for the result. (*After a pause*) If you have to run a race you run the race but the result does not depend on the running. You have to rely on the Grace for the result. The same is the case with medicines. One of my cousins (Krishna Kumar Mitra's daughter) was on the point of death due to typhoid. Nil Ratan and everybody else gave up hope and said, "The only thing is to pray." They prayed; after the prayer they found that her consciousness had revived and she was all right. I was at Baroda at that time. They wired to me about her hopeless condition. And then there is what happened to Madhavrao's son. He was dying; the doctors had given up hope. Madhavrao wired to them to stop medicines all and pray to God. They did it and the son was cured. I know this as a fact. Madhavrao himself showed me the telegram.

PURANI: In your first quotation on Dawn in *The Life Divine*, Anilbaran finds a contradiction. He says, how can there be a first dawn if there is an eternal succession of dawns?

I told him that it is the first for those who awaken to it.

SRI AUROBINDO (*laughing*): It is like the hen's egg. It is the first for those who are coming and last for those who are passing. The world also has no beginning and no end. Yet they speak of the world as being created.

PURANI: He was also asking about the three births of Agni. First we thought it was Agni born in the physical, vital and mental. After looking it up, I found it was the three supreme births.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, it is the birth of Agni above in the Infinite.

PURANI: He referred to Sayana and found that the three births are Indra, Vayu and Agni.

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh, if he goes by Sayana, he will be finished.

PURANI: He says people won't accept your interpretation of the Veda.

SATYENDRA: Everybody has interpreted the Veda according to his own knowledge.

SRI AUROBINDO: These are matters of experience; they can't be understood by the mind.

PURANI: In *The Life Divine* there is a quotation where you have said, "May the restrainers tell us to go to other fields and conquer them." Anilbaran thought "restrainers" refers only to Yogis and Tapaswis.

SRI AUROBINDO: "Restrainers" is perhaps not the right word. "Binders" would have been better. The obstacles bind you down and point out your imperfections. When you have overcome them, they tell you as it were, "Now you have got the right to conquer other fields."

EVENING

It seemed the morning talk on effort didn't satisfy Champaklal. He was still in favour of Grace. So he raised the subject again; his tone was a little excited. All the while he was asking the question, Sri Aurobindo kept looking at the time because he did not understand what Champaklal was driving at by his analogy.

CHAMPAKLAL: If a man goes on doing physical exercise every day, and increases the hours of his exercise every day or week, he will improve his health. Can it be said that if a man meditates more and more he will get concrete results?

SRI AUROBINDO: Not necessarily.

CHAMPAKLAL: Then where is the place for effort?

SRI AUROBINDO: It's not like that. If a man is able to meditate one hour at first, he will be able to meditate two hours later and then the whole day.

CHAMPAKLAL: If he simply sits on?

SRI AUROBINDO: I said "meditate". Meditation means getting into a certain state of consciousness. Simply sitting is not meditation; If he can get into that consciousness, then he can remain there or go still further as he increases the time.

NIRODBARAN: What do you mean by "simply sitting"? Meditation doesn't come all of a sudden. One has to try to reject thoughts, concentrate, etc.

CHAMPAKLAL: There are people who go into meditation suddenly. Some people are quite unaware of themselves in meditation; they become unconscious and go into a state of sleep. What is that state?

SRI AUROBINDO: That is the first stage. One has to pass through that to the conscious stage.

CHAMPAKLAL: How can one do that?

SRI AUROBINDO: By aspiration. Aspiration is a great thing. If one is satisfied with that unconsciousness, he will remain there.

NIRODBARAN: Champaklal, I find, goes at once within and his body sways this side and that.

CHAMPAKLAL: Sometimes I am quite unconscious of everything. I forget myself.

SRI AUROBINDO: What do you mean by unconscious? Nothing happens inside?

PURANI: Sometimes it does. He gets a nightmare.

SRI AUROBINDO: From the tone of his speech, it seems there may be a lot of activity inside. (*Laughter*)

CHAMPAKLAL: Sometimes I am quite conscious of my physical posture changing or bending, but I don't correct it.

SRI AUROBINDO: The inner state doesn't take notice of the change of the body. Rajangam also has no control.

CHAMPAKLAL: No, but it is better now.

SRI AUROBINDO: Some people have to support their neck against something.

CHAMPAKLAL: Why is it so?

SRI AUROBINDO: It is habitual with some people; when they go inside they lose control of the body.

CHAMPAKLAL: Sometimes, when one is enjoying peace in meditation and somebody pokes him, he comes out of his meditation and gets disturbed, even angry. Does it mean that he had no real peace in meditation?

SRI AUROBINDO (*laughing*): It means that his vital hadn't the peace and it needs it.

CHAMPAKLAL: But sometimes I feel an actual shock.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then you may have been in deep Samadhi.

CHAMPAKLAL: I remember once when Rajangam poked Radhananda, the Mother said, "If you poke like that you will send him into another world."

NIRODBARAN: The trouble is not so much about meditation, which I admit is difficult, but about the rest of the day. One doesn't remember the Divine at all, say, in reading, writing, etc.

SRI AUROBINDO: You have to practise Abhyasa Yoga.¹

SATYENDRA: Nirodbaran is very much in earnest. You should give him some help, Sir.

PURANI: His friends say that he is completely changed.

NIRODBARAN: Yes, yes!

SRI AUROBINDO: You are outraging his modesty. He is not making progress in the way he wants perhaps.

The talk then came to art and democracy.

PURANI: There is a contradiction in these people who advocate art for the masses.

SRI AUROBINDO: How?

PURANI: If they really want art to be accessible to the masses, why don't they like cinema and radio?

NIRODBARAN: Perhaps they think that they will lower their moral standards.

SRI AUROBINDO: Common people are not concerned with morality.

PURANI: If all that is going to spoil their morality, then what should art deal with to appeal to the masses?

¹ Yoga of continuous practice.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why, Charkha, non-violence, Satyagraha.

8 JANUARY 1940

PURANI: Have you read C. V. Raman's address?

SRI AUROBINDO: I believe so.

PURANI: He says they have discovered two new elements—I don't know how.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not discovered, but created, by changing the position of the particles in the atom and making new combinations. But what are they going to do with them?

PURANI: The cost of making anything will be prohibitive, though the method of breaking the atom by means of cyclotrons is very easy. Raman has supported Einstein's theory about the unity of matter and energy.

SRI AUROBINDO: Has anybody cast doubt on it?

PURANI: No.

SRI AUROBINDO: But what is energy?

PURANI: Modern scientists have stopped asking that question. They only answer how, not why or what. But their own discoveries will make the question more pointed.

SRI AUROBINDO: Quite so, because the problem is why a different combination of particles within the atom should make a new element.

PURANI: Energy was once said to be lines of force.

SRI AUROBINDO: That means force in movement and when force is in motion we come to know energy. But what is force?

PURANI: They don't answer that question, either.

SRI AUROBINDO: Unless you accept a Being who applies the force and becomes matter, there can be no real explanation. But when this answer is given, people say, "What's this nonsense about Somebody behind?" They say that it is only the force of Nature. They, however, don't know what Nature is. Nature stands for a magic formula. Everything is supposed to be explained by that formula!

PURANI: They once held rigorously to the law of causation. But now they find it difficult to apply in the new investigations.

SRI AUROBINDO: The law of causation only means that certain conditions follow certain other conditions.

NIRODBARAN: How can one prove the existence of the Somebody you have spoken of?

SRI AUROBINDO: The proof is that there is no other explanation.

SATYENDRA: There is no "body", but only Being.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. I have said in *The Life Divine* that you can't explain the appearance of consciousness out of matter unless you accept a Being behind. That Being may either be unmanifest and involved in matter or it may become manifest.

SATYENDRA: It is Brahman playing in Brahman or with it.

SRI AUROBINDO: They will accept a playing within Brahman but not outside it.

NIRODBARAN: They want to catch Brahman with their scientific instruments.

PURANI: Even of that they have despaired now. They are now moving towards mathematics and speak of tensor equations!

9 JANUARY 1940

EVENING

PURANI: Training of the recruited people seems to have been postponed.

X and Y were very happy. X was saying that after all there is not much difference between Hitlerism and British and French imperialism. When their self-interest is at stake, they go on killing people mercilessly. I told him the British people don't go to such extremes as Hitler does.

SRI AUROBINDO: He doesn't find any difference between Hitlerism and the French Revolution? The French Revolution was only a revolutionary paroxysm which settled soon into a normal life. There were also persecutions but they were not like Hitler's persecutions. Hitler's persecution is on principle. He wants power to be kept in the hands of a few people who will rule over the whole world and thus perpetuate the rule of power, while the French Revolution, as soon as its purpose was served, established or paved the way for democracy and the democratic form of government.

10 JANUARY 1940

NIRODBARAN: There is a letter from Dr. Manilal.

SRI AUROBINDO: I see. What does he write?

NIRODBARAN: He says: "*The Life Divine* must now be in the press. So Sri Aurobindo must be having time to do the exercise I have recommended."

SRI AUROBINDO: Which exercise?

NIRODBARAN: Hanging the leg from above the knee-joint.

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh! But my *Life Divine* is still hanging. I still have two chapters to labour at.

NIRODBARAN: There's another letter—from Anilbaran—regarding the people of the Gita Prachar Party who are coming to visit the Ashram. Somebody wants you to answer the question, "Is there any effect of repeating a sacred Name and doing Kirtan even unconsciously or unwillingly?" Tulsidas says there is.

SRI AUROBINDO: If it had been so easy, it would have been delightful.

Here we all cited stories in support of Tulsidas. Satyendra narrated Ajamil's story.

NIRODBARAN: What is the upshot then?

SRI AUROBINDO: It all depends on the psychic being. If the psychic being is touched and awakens and throws its influence on the other parts, then the Name-repeating will have an effect.

CHAMPAKLAL: Then mechanical repetition has no effect.

SRI AUROBINDO: If somehow it touches the psychic being, yes.

NIRODBARAN: In Kirtan, people easily go into Dasha (a kind of trance).

SRI AUROBINDO: There are other effects too—sometimes undesirable sexual ones. Very often the vital being, instead of the psychic, is roused.

EVENING

PURANI: Some people conjecture that Hore-Belisha has resigned because of his difference with the generals.

SRI AUROBINDO: But isn't it the War Ministry that directs the war policy?

PURANI: Lloyd George in his memoirs has severely criticised the military technicians. He says that in the last war the generals didn't want to attack Germany from the South because it wasn't the right technique.

SRI AUROBINDO: In the last war the generals didn't come up to much. Only Foch and Petain stood out. Napoleon had against him all the technician generals of Europe. That is why he could defeat them.

NIRODBARAN: Have you seen the latest *New Statesman and Nation*? John Mair condemns Huxley's *After Many a Summer* as a witty parody thrown into philosophical form.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then the criticism is no worse than Anthony West's. He doesn't admit even the wit. These people seem to dislike the present famous authors. Forster also, they say, is philosophical.

NIRODBARAN: Like Tagore, they don't seem to like intellectual novels; but Tagore's own novels are intellectual.

SRI AUROBINDO: Do people want stupid rather than intellectual novels to be written?

PURANI: Tagore in his novels analyses in detail the various psychologies which common people can't understand. Sarat Chatterji can be said to be a non-intellectual writer.

NIRODBARAN: Yes, except for *Shesh Prashna* (*The Last Question*).

SRI AUROBINDO: His last novel?

NIRODBARAN: Yes; this book is seen differently by the two parties. One condemns it, the other praises it.

PURANI: So far as I have read, it doesn't appear to be very intellectual.

SRI AUROBINDO: He is not much of a thinker.

NIRODBARAN: He seems to have pleaded the cause of Western civilisation and made the arguments against it very weak. For instance, his heroine doesn't find anything grand in the conception behind the Taj Mahal.

SRI AUROBINDO: What is Western about this attitude of the heroine? If there is one thing the Europeans like in India, it is the Taj.

NIRODBARAN: I don't mean the architectural beauty. What the heroine ridicules is the idea of immortal love.

SRI AUROBINDO: Even from that point of view, the Europeans like it. Love has a great place in their life.

NIRODBARAN: But love, in the sense of being faithful to one person alone, even if that person is dead – it is this that the heroine can't bear. Isn't this a European attitude?

PURANI: Sarat Chatterji advocates free marriage or no marriage. He is for free love, as far as I can understand.

SRI AUROBINDO: But why is free love European? In Europe no one advocates such an idea except a few intellectuals. If you want to abolish the marriage system, then the Europeans will raise a hue and cry.

11 JANUARY 1940

Today we showed Sri Aurobindo the Amrita Bazar Patrika "Forecast of the Year" by one Capricornicus.

SRI AUROBINDO (*after reading it*): Hitler, it says, will be crushed in March; it may happen but there is no sign of it at present. Most of the things will happen, it seems, in the first quarter of the year.

NIRODBARAN: Congress will come to power again, it says.

SATYENDRA: Dominion Status is near perhaps. The Viceroy has promised that it will be established in the minimum amount of time but we must come to an agreement with the minorities. Is he a Scotsman?

PURANI: Yes, why?

SATYENDRA: He has donated Rs. 200 in Bombay. (*Laughter*)

PURANI: He is said to be a very good man, very polite, etc. Lalji met him in Bombay; he said that our Indian Princes are not like the old English aristocrats.

SRI AUROBINDO: The Princes are given a very bad education.

PURANI: Lalji says he is not so young as he looks in newspaper photos. He has given a ten-year-old block perhaps.

SRI AUROBINDO: He is doing like me. (*Laughter*)

Purani was shaking a finger from behind at Sri Aurobindo with much mirth.

SATYENDRA: Purani is very glad, Sir!

SRI AUROBINDO: Why?

PURANI: Because of that statement of yours.

SATYENDRA: People grumble about your photos.

PURANI: They say you look quite different when they see you at Darshan, they don't recognise you.

SRI AUROBINDO: Photos are not for recognition any more than the portraitures of modern painters. This man doesn't forecast anything about Russo-Finnish War. Perhaps it is too hazardous! But who is this Indian religious leader who is going to meet a violent death? Abul Kalam Azad?

PURANI: And who is the cinema star? Shanta Apte will again fast?

SRI AUROBINDO: And the director will kill her in a fit of rage?
(Laughter)

NIRODBARAN: Some Dev, a friend of Mohini, has come to see the Ashram.

SRI AUROBINDO: Is he one of the three brilliant students of P. C. Roy?

PURANI: He is a student of Meghnad Saha.

NIRODBARAN: He is a professor or lecturer of climatology in Calcutta University.

SRI AUROBINDO: He has come to study the climate?

NIRODBARAN: The climate of the Ashram perhaps.

EVENING

CHAMPAKLAL: It seems the Bengali professor was very much impressed by the meditation. He said, "I know now what meditation is." After the meditation he couldn't move, it seems. He also made pranam to Anilbaran.

Sri Aurobindo smiled when he heard that the man had made pranam to Anilbaran, and looked at Champaklal.

CHAMPAKLAL: Yes, he touched his feet, I am told.

NIRODBARAN: Oh, that is the Bengali manner.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is very common in Bengal. They do that to an elderly or a respectable person. It doesn't mean that he is doing it because Anilbaran is a big Yogi.

CHAMPAKLAL: But in our parts they very rarely do it. If they do pranam like that, it means only one thing. It is a sign of great respect.

SATYENDRA: It is done commonly among Sadhus.

CHAMPAKLAL: In Gujarat?

SATYENDRA: Yes, why do you doubt it?

CHAMPAKLAL: I didn't know it.

SATYENDRA: In the circles I have moved I saw it done.

SRI AUROBINDO (*after a while and looking at Satyendra*): You have read the forecast?

SATYENDRA: Yes, Sir.

SRI AUROBINDO: How do you find it?

SATYENDRA: It is too vague throughout. He speaks of a secret socialistic movement in England and India.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't find anything secret about it. Everybody knows of it.

SATYENDRA: Yes, I thought first he meant some secret organisation. But it is not so. He also speaks of Congress coming to power again. There may be some truth there.

SRI AUROBINDO: How?

SATYENDRA: Because of the Viceroy's statement. Some people seem to take it as an advance upon his previous statement.

NIRODBARAN: Because he has said that Dominion Status will be given as soon as possible?

SRI AUROBINDO: Within the minimum time, though what the minimum time is nobody knows.

SATYENDRA: Yes, that is something new though he has asked the leaders to come to an agreement with the minorities.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, he has moved a little.

SATYENDRA: There is something else too.

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh yes, that point about India's Dominion Status being equivalent to the Westminster Act?

SATYENDRA: Yes, and then he has agreed to give a few seats to the leaders in his Assembly.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is another concession, in place of his previous panel system.

SATYENDRA: But the minority problem is not the only obstacle. He also speaks of the Scheduled Castes.

SRI AUROBINDO: You mean the Rajas?

SATYENDRA: Yes and then the Princes.

SRI AUROBINDO: Let us see how. He has conceded, though it does not come to much, that Dominion Status will be given within a minimum time if we come to an agreement with the Muslims, the Rajas and Princes.

NIRODBARAN: I think he has declared these little concessions in order to prevent Congress from precipitating into action.

SRI AUROBINDO: Possibly.

SATYENDRA: This man has made one good hit about the date – about the change of British Ministry between 5th and 10th January.

SRI AUROBINDO: About the change of Ministry, there is nothing remarkable. In war-time there are always these reshufflings and changes. The date has been a bit of good luck.

SATYENDRA: He must have heard from somebody.

SRI AUROBINDO: He doesn't mention any other date except Hitler's fall in March and Congress coming to power in March.

PURANI: One of the members of the Gita Prachar Party is a Shankarite. He asked me why we don't recognise Shankara's philosophy. I told him, "We recognise it but we also hold that it is not the only truth. There are other aspects of the Truth." He says, "Your Yoga is one of surrender. Is surrender a Bhava (feeling) or a Kriya (action)?"

SRI AUROBINDO: You should have said, "It is Bhava and Kriya and everything else."

PURANI: He says there can't be Bhava without a Bhavuka (one who feels), or Kriya without Karta (doer) so perhaps it is Bodha (understanding). I said there can't be Bodha without a Bodhaka (one who understands).

SRI AUROBINDO: And there can't be surrender without a surrenderer.

PURANI: I told him not to try to understand what this or that is, but to try to feel something here.

12 JANUARY 1940

Nirodbaran read out Nolini Sen's letter to Sri Aurobindo, wherein he has written that he can't remember anything he reads. He is very elated to hear that Guru has called him an intellectual. He doesn't know how he is one.

SRI AUROBINDO: I have not used the word in the sense of intellectuality, neither have I made that statement as a result of seeing his translation of his wife's letter. "Intellectual" does not mean that one should be able to remember things. He is taking it in the sense of being educated. Nor have I used it in the sense of "clear mind".

NIRODBARAN: Nishikanto says he has changed the rhythm of his poem and avoided compound words as far as possible. I don't know who told him about it.

SRI AUROBINDO: He used too many compounds, making it seem like Sanskrit. (*To Purani*) What is the name of that Indian whom Raman mentions in his address?

SATYENDRA: It is Dr. Krishna perhaps.

SRI AUROBINDO: Perhaps. I don't remember the name. Raman mentions him as the first to experiment with the Cavendish cyclotron.

PURANI: Yes, it is he. He is a doctor of science of Madras University and was sent by Raman to England. There is a lot of research now going on in India; of course there is nothing epoch-making. In some places, they are going only into details. In the Punjab they are working on the solubility of dyes.

SRI AUROBINDO: They can do some research on the beard too: what are the different varieties and colours and what makes it long or short, or they may try to find out what is the cause of Nirodbaran's baldness. (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: The cause won't do.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why? One must know the cause first.

NIRODBARAN: Oh, they have found out many causes but no cure. That is what is wanted and I don't think they will find out any cure.

SATYENDRA: I read the story of a vendor of patent drugs for baldness. Somebody asked him, "Why then are you bald?" He replied, "My baldness is there to advertise drugs against hairiness; it is to show the ladies how to get rid of the hair which they don't want to show through their short sleeves." (*Laughter*)

PURANI: It seems Mahadev Desai has asked for a copy of *The Life Divine*.

NIRODBARAN: For Gandhi?

PURANI: No, for himself. He doesn't think that in the strict sense Gandhi has any spiritual experience or knowledge. Desai has his own Guru.

SRI AUROBINDO: One won't get anything spiritual unless one recognises that one's ideas are only ideas.

EVENING

PURANI: Nolini had a strange experience.

SRI AUROBINDO: What was it?

PURANI: Dilip brought a retired Bengali judge to introduce him to Nolini. The judge is a member of the Gita Prachar Party. The man looked at Nolini for an instant and then suddenly embraced and kissed him; then he said, "I have read your writings and I like them very much." Nolini was so surprised.

SRI AUROBINDO: Nolini didn't return the kiss? He should have returned the compliment. (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: If X were paid a compliment like that for his writings, he would be in ecstasy.

SRI AUROBINDO: Nolini could have said, "I am flattered by your reading my books."

NIRODBARAN: There is again another hitch in Bengal between Congress and Sarat Bose over the Bengal Congress parliamentary fund. Rajendra Prasad has asked Bose to hand over the fund to the Congress Parliamentary Committee and to have the accounts audited by some auditing company employed by Rajendra Prasad. Bose takes it as an insult and as loss of confidence in him. He wants to know why they have suddenly taken that step.

SRI AUROBINDO: But, I suppose, Congress can do that because the money really belongs to their fund. They don't suspect that Bose will swallow that money. He has plenty himself.

NIRODBARAN: No, they don't suspect that. I think they fear that the Bengal Congress Committee may try to get that money. It has already passed such a resolution and Rajendra Prasad has especially asked Bose not to hand over that money to the Bengal Congress Committee. In any case, Bose is hurt because he takes it personally as a lack of confidence in him and especially now when they want to have the accounts audited.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why? Congress regularly gets all the accounts of its branches checked by its auditors. Accounts have to be checked. That is the only way to keep the politicians straight.

NIRODBARAN: Bose's point is that it is a method suddenly adopted by the President and it discredits the regular auditors of

the Bengal Congress Committee and the whole thing has been done without telling him anything.

SRI AUROBINDO: What is there to mind about it? I suppose the Working Committee has the power to do such things. These people mix up social questions with politics.

PURANI: I don't know why he should object to showing the accounts. If you are sincere, the accounts will prove that. That was one strong point of Vallabhbhai. Whenever his enemies asked him to show the accounts, he was always ready.

SRI AUROBINDO: There has been a lot of misappropriation of money. A strong check is absolutely necessary. If Congress had not exercised it, its funds would have been in a much sorrier state.

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NIRODBARAN: Now from your non-committal answer Nishikanto understood that there was something wrong with his rhythm. (*Sri Aurobindo began to smile when he heard this.*) He was depressed for three days. He has now rewritten it.

After a long time I read an appreciation of X's new novel by a man who counts. He says it is not a novel in the conventional sense. It may be called an "intellectual novel". He has praised X's insight and his power of analysis, but at the same time he says that X has fallen victim to that power by overuse, so that it becomes monotonous and fatiguing to the reader.

SRI AUROBINDO: Do X's novels have a good sale?

NIRODBARAN: Well, his own publishers say they have a pretty small sale, while another firm says they sell very well. I personally think intellectual novels can't be popular.

SRI AUROBINDO: Somebody has said that X expresses all his psychology through the mouths of his characters in dialogue form and there is little left of the story itself. That is the difficulty with intellectual novels. They may have a lot of analysis and acute discussion but lack the life-push. And it is always difficult to put this life-push in dialogue form. Novels without the life-push cannot grip the public as a whole. It is not that stories with the life-push have no intellectual theme. Both can go together; but the intellectual theme is now enmeshed in the story itself and does not stick out. I understand Proust was an intellectual novelist.

NIRODBARAN: X puts in a lot of incidents and most of his characters are rich people.

SRI AUROBINDO: There may be a lot of incidents, but everything depends on how they are put in.

PURANI: Nowadays there is an attempt to write novels about the common people, the masses – socialistic novels.

SRI AUROBINDO: But the Socialists themselves have got tired of such novels.

PURANI: These books try to be realistic, depicting things as they actually are.

SRI AUROBINDO: They often exaggerate things.

SATYENDRA (*after a lull*): Some of the members of the Gita Prachar Party have died on a pilgrimage.

SRI AUROBINDO: Died?

SATYENDRA: Yes, Sir. They consider it a great virtue to have such a death – death while on a pilgrimage. They are all well-to-do people.

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh, then they can afford to die. (*Laughter*)

EVENING

NIRODBARAN: This old judge who has come here seems to be a typical Bengali. He said that Y has some high realisation. He saw A on the way and declared that she had established peace in herself.

SATYENDRA: Didn't he want to meet N?

SRI AUROBINDO: N is a Buddhist. The judge should have been told that. He would have said to N, "I see Buddha in your face." Somebody should have told the judge, "By your ready embrace it seems you have realised Bhakti." He should have been given some compliments, too.

NIRODBARAN: X is not able to get rid of his age-old idea that Y and Z are not doing your Yoga.

SRI AUROBINDO: How is that? What is his reason for thinking so?

NIRODBARAN: He says they don't mix with people, don't behave well with people, they are not courteous or sociable.

SRI AUROBINDO: Is sociableness part of my Yoga?

NIRODBARAN: I don't think he goes so far as to say that. His grievance is that they are not easy in their behaviour with others. If he makes some allowance for Y, he yet sees no excuse for Z. "Z", he

says, "lives in seclusion, isolation, which is not the aim of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga."

SRI AUROBINDO: But I myself live in isolation!

NIRODBARAN: You do it for a special purpose, he will contend.

SRI AUROBINDO: Z's isolation also may be a part of his Yoga. Besides, he has isolated himself with the consent of the Mother. And what is meant by "Sri Aurobindo's Yoga"?

PURANI: Different people have different temperaments and isolation may be a temporary necessity for Z.

CHAMPAKLAL: But he is not really isolated. He talks with many people, jokes and laughs freely.

NIRODBARAN: X asks why Z shouldn't be free and easy with people. He quotes one instance. Z, it seems, went to the length of writing five or six pages to someone on some difficulty in Yoga when he could have cleared it up by half an hour or less of talk.

SRI AUROBINDO: If he wrote, perhaps he thought that was the best way. By writing, things are cleared up more easily than by talking. If Y and Z are not doing my Yoga, then who is doing it?

NIRODBARAN: Exactly what I said.

SRI AUROBINDO (*after a pause*): X claims to be a psychologist. Why doesn't he understand that temperaments differ with people? Y and Z may be all he says, but what I object to is bringing my Yoga in. My Yoga cannot be rigidly formulated like that. Even if Y hadn't been doing Yoga, he wouldn't have run after people.

NIRODBARAN: Have you seen Amal's recent article "Can Indians Write English Poetry?"?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. He has paid a compliment to the Ashram. He has said that there is a growing band of gifted poets here. Perhaps he is paying a compliment to himself! (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: He says one must know English prose in order to write English poetry.

SRI AUROBINDO: The English language rather.

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NIRODBARAN: Suresh Dev was Vishuddhananda's disciple, it seems.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then how could he say he didn't know what meditation was?

NIRODBARAN: That is what I asked Yogananda.

SRI AUROBINDO: I wondered how he could have had that experience he spoke of if he had not done meditation before.

NIRODBARAN: Perhaps he hadn't such a decisive experience as it seems.

SRI AUROBINDO: Is Vishuddhananda dead?

NIRODBARAN: Yes.

SATYENDRA: What were his methods?

NIRODBARAN: A book I read about him was full of the miracles he used to do.

SRI AUROBINDO: Is it he who is said to have brought out jewels from his body?

NIRODBARAN: Yes, he spoke of doing some experiment with the sun's rays and called it Suryavijnana (Solar Science).

PURANI: Yes, he seems to have started a laboratory to utilise the sun's rays for material and spiritual purposes, but the laboratory was not completed.

SRI AUROBINDO: Material purposes possible, but how spiritual?

PURANI: I don't know.

SRI AUROBINDO: If he wanted to remove some physical obstacles in the body that prevent the inner opening, that may be possible. Or was it by changing the secretion of the glands?

PURANI: The glands have now gone out of fashion, perhaps.

NIRODBARAN: No, they are still going strong. Plenty of researches are still being done.

SRI AUROBINDO: Possibly after some time they will also be quite antiquated.

PURANI: Yes, the researchers may even say the glands don't exist.

SRI AUROBINDO: When I began taking an interest in science, scientists used to believe in a material Monism and Determinism. Now they speak of Indeterminism, Pluralism and the Quantum Theory. Now they say electrons are the basis of Matter. One or two decades hence, they will find that electrons are no longer the basis.

PURANI (*after a pause*): I was looking through Father Heras' pamphlet on the Mohenjodaro script. He says that the sign looking somewhat like an open bracket stands for the Tamil *kal* and that the opposite sign stands for *lak*—and together they mean "union".

SRI AUROBINDO: If you set your mind to it, you can make up any theory.

EVENING

SRI AUROBINDO (*beginning the talk*): Have you seen the prophecy by a "Seeker of Truth" in today's paper? He says that Congress will come to power on 16th January. There will be peace in India and then peace in the world. The war will stop. He gives a definite date. He has the courage of his convictions.

NIRODBARAN: Peace in India will lead to peace in the world?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, through Gandhi, I suppose, and perhaps Gandhi will be accepted as the saviour of the world!

SATYENDRA: There are only two days more. I asked a friend what had become of N. C. Vakil's horoscope.

SRI-AUROBINDO: Yes?

PURANI: He writes that Vakil is very busy with a very important thing, which is that his cat has fallen ill and then his wife and other relatives, and he has tried homeopathy on them all.

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh, his cat is the most important thing for him?

PURANI: His wife also is occupying his attention. She is worried because of the war. She is English. She is thinking of her relatives at home.

SRI AUROBINDO: He can then make a horoscope of the war and tell how the relatives will be affected by it.

NIRODBARAN: I was wondering how he could be so busy with a cat, but when Purani said he has an English wife it became clear to me.

SRI AUROBINDO: How? She belongs to the same species, you mean? (*Laughter*)

PURANI: I wrote back that now Vakil would have to make a horoscope for the reading of his horoscope.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is to say?

PURANI: Judging by the present circumstances, the stars have all changed. Everything is in a muddle.

After this Purani brought in again the issue of the Mohenjodaro script. Sri Aurobindo said that the linguistic scheme built up by the Roman Catholic father seemed to be a play of imagination.

15 JANUARY 1940

NIRODBARAN: There is a difference of opinion between A and P regarding something A has written. The sentence is: "What we give in dross we get back in gold." A means that even if our devotion, our love for the Divine, is not pure at the beginning, the Divine accepts them and gives the rewards. Purani is unable to accept it. Purani says, "The sentence should begin: 'What we give up as dross . . .'"

SRI AUROBINDO (*after a little while*): Well?

NIRODBARAN: Well? Which is correct?

SRI AUROBINDO: It may be either. A has written it and he knows what he means.

CHAMPAKLAL: I think A wants to know whether what he says is a fact. K was telling me – she studies with P – that she understood it in A's sense while Purani doesn't agree. Purani says it can't be true.

SRI AUROBINDO: Does Purani mean to say that only when one is perfect the Divine will accept the offering and give the reward? Then it would be very difficult for any human being. A is quite correct and it is a fact. Human nature is imperfect and impure. Whatever one offers at the beginning will be flawed because it is an offering of an inferior nature: the Divine accepts it and gives His response.

NIRODBARAN: X will now withdraw his objection against Z, which we discussed yesterday.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why?

NIRODBARAN: He met him yesterday at a social function at M's place. How can he say now that Z is not doing your Yoga?

CHAMPAKLAL: I hear X also had an hour's interview with Z.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then he may have thrashed out the question. But what the objection is I don't understand. Z is doing my Yoga in his own way. All people haven't the same nature. Everybody has his own way of doing my Yoga.

NIRODBARAN: If you put it that way, I suppose he won't have any objection. Only he won't call it your Yoga. He seems to say that in your Yoga you stress the acceptance of life.

SRI AUROBINDO: We don't accept life as it is. In that case what is the use of the Ashram? We may as well be at Calcutta. Does X object to Z's seclusion?

NIRODBARAN: Yes, and also Z doesn't do any work.

SRI AUROBINDO: But Y, to whom has also X objected, has heavy work to do. There are other disciples who are not doing any direct work for the Ashram. What about them?

NIRODBARAN: From his point of view they are not doing your Yoga.

SATYENDRA: Work or no work, the chief thing is somehow to realise the Divine. Each may do it according to his own way.

SRI AUROBINDO: Quite so.

NIRODBARAN: But then one can realise God in utter seclusion. That won't be this Yoga.

SATYENDRA: Sri Aurobindo's Yoga will begin after the realisation.

NIRODBARAN: There is another charge we hear very often from some people. They say that they don't find any outward sign of progress even in people who have been staying here and doing Yoga for ten to fifteen years.

SRI AUROBINDO: Have they the vision to see the inner progress?

NIRODBARAN: But there should be some sign in the outer being. They say they are just as angry, jealous, egoistic as other people.

SRI AUROBINDO: These things belong to the outer being and they are the last to change. That doesn't mean that there is no inner progress or experience.

NIRODBARAN: Nothing should be visible outside? In Ramana Maharshi, for instance, they say one can see or feel peace, calm, etc.

SRI AUROBINDO: Is there nobody in the Ashram who is quiet and peaceful?

SATYENDRA: In the world also you find people who are not jealous, who are peaceful, etc.

SRI AUROBINDO: How will you know then without inner perception? Maurice Magre saw peace and inner beauty in many faces, which he didn't see outside the Ashram. For us it is nothing compared to what is yet to be done. All the same, it is something. I see light in many people here which I don't see in worldly people.

NIRODBARAN: They say about Z also that they don't find any sign by which he can be said to have made any progress.

SRI AUROBINDO: But every time I see him I see the stamp of a Yogi on him. Of course he is not a Siddha but one who is doing Yoga.

PURANI: It is not always easy to make out, especially in people who follow an ordinary profession. I met Lele; nobody could say that he was a Yogi. He moved about just like an ordinary man.

SRI AUROBINDO: One must have the vision. There are signs also, signs in the eyes and face, which one must know.

SATYENDRA: Yes, one must have the vision. But for a long time, I hear, you have been dealing with the physical. So there should be some reflection in the outer.

SRI AUROBINDO: The physical means the physical consciousness. When that work is done, the effect may be seen on the outer physical.

NIRODBARAN: But something may be reflected before the final achievement?

SRI AUROBINDO: May be or may not.

CHAMPAKLAL: Many thefts are committed in the Ashram. Do you know who the thief is? Or perhaps you don't want to know and wish to play the part of Ignorance?

SRI AUROBINDO: Why would I know? It is not my work. It is the concern of the police. You are asking like those who ask me about the share-market or horse-racing in Bombay.

CHAMPAKLAL: The Mother said she is much bothered by these thefts. She wants to know –

SRI AUROBINDO: Does she?

CHAMPAKLAL: She sees and knows many things –

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, she sees many things that she doesn't want to see. It doesn't mean that she will see this too. We are not concerned with it and she does not use her inner power for these things.

CHAMPAKLAL: Then it is not that you can't know; only you are not concerned with it. That is what I wanted to find out.

SRI AUROBINDO (*after some time*): What is the result of the conference between the two great powers – X and Z? (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: I don't know. I haven't met X. I meet him only once a week.

PURANI: Then he will complain about you too.

NIRODBARAN: On the contrary, it is he who is not available now.

PURANI: Then he is not doing Sri Aurobindo's Yoga either.

16 JANUARY 1940

PURANI: Vakil has written a letter.

SRI AUROBINDO: What does he say?

PURANI: He was for a long time suffering from boils, he says. After homeopathy had failed, he went to a surgeon who cured him. Other troubles too were there.

SRI AUROBINDO: I hope it is not the result of meddling with my horoscope, like Manilal who meddled with my knee. (Laughter)

PURANI: I read in *Kalyan* that somebody has conquered death.

SRI AUROBINDO: Conquered death? How?

PURANI: He knew exactly when he was going to die and he died at the very date and hour. How is that a conquest of death, I wonder.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is knowing the date of death, not conquest.

PURANI: They write that he was, according to his own calculation, to die on a certain day but it was found that that day was inauspicious, so he postponed his death to a few days later and on that day he died. So they say he conquered death.

SRI AUROBINDO: Conquest of death is prolongation of life, not the knowing of the date of death. That many people know. Kasherao Jadhav's father died according to the exact date and moment predicted by an astrologer.

PURANI: Dayananda Saraswati also had control over his death. He was poisoned by his cook at the instigation of a Maharaja's concubine. Dayananda was the Guru of this Maharaja and he rebuked the Maharaja for his passion and his running after women. So this concubine was enraged and tried to poison him. He was poisoned many times before this but somehow he knew in time and used to vomit out the poison. But this time he was off his guard. The doctor examined his blood and said that it was humanly impossible for anyone to be alive with such a big quantity of poison in his blood. But Dayananda controlled his whole system. What happened after some days was that eruptions came out all over his body and he died as a result. He came to know about the cook and asked him to leave the place. Otherwise he would have been caught and punished.

SRI AUROBINDO: Sakaria Swami also had Yogic control. One day he saw a mad dog coming towards him. He held out his hand for the dog to bite. After the bite, he didn't allow the poison to go into the system but localised it. When the Surat Congress was over, he got excited and thus lost control and the poison spread in his body. He got hydrophobia and couldn't drink water. He said, "What is this nonsense? I, who was a trooper in the Mutiny and drank water from puddles, can't drink water?" He drank water and died.

SATYENDRA: Could he exercise that control in sleep also?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, Barin knew him. At one time he was his disciple.

SATYENDRA: Yes, Barin has written about him.

SRI AUROBINDO: Bejoy Goswami also was poisoned by Sannyasins but by the process called Stambhan he controlled the effect, they say.

SATYENDRA: Barin speaks of Lele also. He recounts how Lele warned him against terrorism.

SRI AUROBINDO: Doesn't he speak of the ditch? And do you know the story of how he was asked to cut his tongue loose from the lower palate?

PURANI: They do that in Khechari Mudra.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. He simply refused. They said, "You Bengali coward!" He replied, "Bengali or no Bengali, I am not doing it." (*Laughter*)

PURANI: But this Mudra is very dangerous unless one's vital being is pure.

SRI AUROBINDO: I am afraid Barin's wasn't quite pure! (*Laughter*)

PURANI (*after some time*): To go back to X and Z: X said to Z that he couldn't remain without company, etc., like Z. This is rather a compliment to Z.

NIRODBARAN: It seems people from outside are at once impressed by Z but not by Y. Only after they have had a talk with him they are much impressed.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is partly due to appearance. Z has an impressive appearance. Y has a wide and subtle mind. (*After a while*) He has a remarkable mind—original.

17 JANUARY 1940

Nirodbaran read out Tagore's letter to Nishikanto, in which Tagore says that Nishikanto's expression and rhythm are of a very high order and that he is a real artist but he complains of one thing—lack of variety: Nishikanto is like a one-stringed lyre while the poetic mind demands a variety of tunes. Tagore quotes the Upanishad's "Raso vai sah" ("He is verily the Delight.") and says that the poet's mind enters into everything.

SRI AUROBINDO (*after keeping silent for a while*): It really comes to this: "You can't be a great poet unless you write like me!" (*After a short pause*) Take, for instance, Francis Thompson's "Hound of Heaven". How many people understand and appreciate it? Does it follow that Thompson is not a great poet? Milton is not understood by many. He is not a great poet then?

NIRODBARAN: Tagore doesn't raise the question of understanding in this letter. He demands variety.

SRI AUROBINDO: What does it matter if there is no variety? Homer has written only on war and action. Can Tagore say that he is a greater poet than Homer? Sappho wrote only on love: is she not a great poet? Milton also has no variety and yet he is one of the greatest poets. Mirabai has no variety either and she is still great.

PURANI: What about the Upanishads themselves? They have only one strain.

SRI AUROBINDO: Shakespeare too has his limitations.

PURANI: All these people are trying to make art and literature democratic. They want them to be available to the masses, the proletariat.

NIRODBARAN: Tagore doesn't mean that here. He lays stress on various sides of life as necessary parts of art. Otherwise art is like a one-stringed lyre.

SRI AUROBINDO: But why should a great poet write on everything—even on matters in which he is not interested? People who are leading a spiritual life naturally express the truth and experience of that life. And do the masses appreciate poetry? I think I told you the story of a Spaniard, a commercial man, who was my brother Manmohan's friend. Whenever he came to his room he saw books on Milton lying on the table. He cried out, "What is this Milton, Milton? Can you eat Milton?" (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: Poetry without variety becomes, according to Tagore, limited, monotonous.

SRI AUROBINDO: What does it matter? Greatness of poetry doesn't depend on that but on whether the thing that has been created is great or not. Browning has a lot of variety. Can you say that he is a greater poet than Milton?

NIRODBARAN: No, but if a poet combines height, depth and variety, he reaches perfection.

SRI AUROBINDO: That poet doesn't exist and no poet is perfect. As I said, even Shakespeare has his limitations.

NIRODBARAN: Amal says that Yeats is a greater poet than A. E. I think it is because of Yeats' variety.

SRI AUROBINDO: No, it is because of his more perfect poetic style and expression.

NIRODBARAN: Tagore means to say that everybody must have variety like himself. Nishikanto saw in a vision that Tagore was satirising Nishikanto's expressions like "light-fountain" before people and saying, "What is this light-fountain?"

PURANI: But why? When he first wrote "Breaking of the fountains' dream" he had to face the same criticism.

NIRODBARAN: People say after reading our poems, "What is this God and God and God in every poem?"

SRI AUROBINDO: What else do they expect us to write about?

NIRODBARAN: We say about them, "What is all this love, love, love?"

SRI AUROBINDO: What is wrong with love if they can express it with poetic feeling and power? They are not leading the spiritual life.

NIRODBARAN: The only objection to limiting oneself to a single theme is that its appeal becomes circumscribed and not universal.

SRI AUROBINDO: Do you mean to say that poetry is understood and appreciated by all? How many appreciate "The Hound of Heaven"?

PURANI: That is the modern socialistic theory. These Socialist poets say poetry must be understood by the masses. They say Spender is very popular.

SRI AUROBINDO: Popular? I thought these modern poets had a very restricted audience.

PURANI: I think so too.

SRI AUROBINDO: If you want poetry to be appreciated by all, why stop with the masses? Why not the hill-tribes and children too?

If you speak of popular poets, Martin Tupper was a very popular poet at one time but nobody remembers him now. So with every popular poet. Longfellow, for instance: his poem with the line, "Life is real, life is earnest" was in everybody's mouth and in every schoolbook. Everyone understood him and got the Rasa.

NIRODBARAN: It has been translated into Bengali.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes? By Hem Banerji?

NIRODBARAN: I don't know by whom.

SATYENDRA: We had to commit it to memory.

SRI AUROBINDO: But now? Nobody reads Longfellow. He is quite forgotten.

PURANI: The Socialists themselves object to Longfellow's line: "Learn to labour and to wait." They won't wait.

SRI AUROBINDO: No, it should rather be: "Learn to labour and be dictated to."

PURANI: That should be Stalin's motto, but he himself doesn't labour.

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh no, he labours tremendously but to dictate. So in Stalin's case the line should be: "Learn to labour and to dictate." (*Laughter*)

(*After a little time*) This poetic theory about variety and mass appeal boils down to this, that if you have expression and rhythm, you should not only write on things which you feel within you and what you are interested in, you should not only express what is experienced in your inner consciousness and is true to your own self, but you should also express things that don't interest you, you should write in the romantic, erotic, classical, realistic styles for the sake of variety and for the masses. It looks rather absurd.

NIRODBARAN: I heard a humorous story from X about the judgment of a critic. That critic is one of his relatives. She appreciates Nishikanto very much and says, "After all, there is someone after Tagore." About X's poems she says, "Yes, they are very good, they are very interesting, etc." X says, "I am not a fool so as not to know what it means." (*Sri Aurobindo laughed.*) What X did was to send her, under Nishikanto's name, a printed poem of his own which he has quoted in his proposed book of rhythm. As it was in printed form, he thought she would take it for Nishikanto's and she did. She was simply in ecstasy over it. X said to me, "See, such are

the critics. How they go by the name!" (*Sri Aurobindo enjoyed the story very much and laughed hilariously.*)

PURANI: Tagore himself did the same thing at the beginning of his poetic career when people were abusing him. He wrote those poems called Bhanu Sinha's songs and as soon as they came out people were enthusiastic. They were made to think that Bhanu Sinha was some unrecognised Bengali poet of Chandidas's time.

SRI AUROBINDO: They are fine poems. I hear he has stopped publishing them.

18 JANUARY 1940

NIRODBARAN: We had once heard from you that Blake is greater than Shakespeare.

SRI AUROBINDO: I didn't say that. It is Housman who says Blake has more pure poetry than Shakespeare.

NIRODBARAN: What does he mean by that?

SRI AUROBINDO: He means that Blake's poetry is not vital or mental, it is not intellectual but comes from beyond the mind, expressing mystic or spiritual experiences.

NIRODBARAN: Can one really compare Blake and Shakespeare? They have two quite different spheres. But if Blake has more pure poetry, is he greater?

SRI AUROBINDO: Shakespeare is greater in some ways, Blake in other ways. Shakespeare is greater in that he has a larger poetic power and more creative force, while Blake is more expressive.

NIRODBARAN: What difference do you intend to make between "creative" and "expressive"?

SRI AUROBINDO: "Creative" is something which brings up a convincing picture of life, sets before us a whole living situation of the Spirit. "Expressive" is just that which communicates feeling, vision or experience. In Francis Thompson's "Hound of Heaven", for instance, you get a true creative picture. Blake was often confused and was a failure when he tried to be creative in his prophetic poems.

NIRODBARAN: You wrote to X that where life is concerned, Shakespeare is everywhere and Blake nowhere.

SRI AUROBINDO: Quite true.

PURANI: That is almost like Tagore's stand, his plea for variety, covering a lot of life.

NIRODBARAN: But can one compare two or more poets and decide who is greater?

SRI AUROBINDO: How can one?

NIRODBARAN: You have said that Yeats is considered greater than A. E. because of his greater poetic style.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yeats is more sustained.

NIRODBARAN: Then there is some standard?

SRI AUROBINDO: What standard? Some say Sophocles is greater than Shakespeare. Others favour Euripides. Still others say Euripides is nowhere near Sophocles. How can one decide whether Dante is greater or Shakespeare?

PURANI: It is better to ask what the criterion of great poetry is.

NIRODBARAN: All right. What is the criterion?

SRI AUROBINDO: Is there any criterion?

NIRODBARAN: Then how to judge?

SRI AUROBINDO: One feels.

NIRODBARAN: But different people feel differently. We say Nishikanto is a great poet. Tagore may not concede it.

SRI AUROBINDO: So can there be any standard? Doesn't each one go by his own feeling or liking or opinion?

PURANI: Abercrombie tries to give a general criterion. One point of his I remember: if the outlook of a poet is negative or pessimistic, his poetry can't be great. For example, Hardy's.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't see why. Usually, of course, great poets are not pessimistic. They have too much life-force in them. But generally every poet is dissatisfied with something or the other and has an element of pessimism. Sophocles said, "The best thing is not to be born." (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: Our Satyendra here will like this.

SATYENDRA: There is no harm in being born after one has had liberation in the previous birth. But for people like Nirod and myself—

NIRODBARAN: How do you know I had no liberation in my previous birth?

SATYENDRA: If you believe that, it is all right.

PURANI: When Sri Aurobindo said that Y has a remarkable mind, Nirodbaran said: "I have a remarkably thick physical crust."

SRI AUROBINDO (*smiling*): It is good to be remarkable in some way.

NIRODBARAN: I fully agree.

PURANI: Nirodbaran doesn't seem to be satisfied with your answers.

SRI AUROBINDO: "Sarvadharmā parityajya." ("Abandon all dharmas, all standards.") (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: You don't complete the sentence.

SRI AUROBINDO: Because you haven't left all standards.

NIRODBARAN: As regards poetry, I have. I want to know what your opinion is and I just abide by it.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then why not be satisfied with what I have said?

NIRODBARAN: The trouble is that some of us are always comparing Nishikanto and J. One party says the former is greater because of his mastery of rhythm, expression and variety, while others say no such comparison is possible, because the two have different domains. J is as great in the mystic field: one has to see if J has reached as great a height of perfection in that field as Nishikanto in his field.

SRI AUROBINDO: All one can say is that Nishikanto has a greater mastery over the medium and greater creative force. Why not be satisfied with that?

NIRODBARAN: What precisely did you say about creative poetry?

SRI AUROBINDO: That a complete picture of life is given. Thus "The Hound of Heaven" brings intensely before us the picture of the life of a man when pursued by God.

SATYENDRA: Thompson had some experience of what he has written.

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh, yes.

NIRODBARAN: It seems to me that Nishikanto is not quite a success in what is called mystic poetry.

SRI AUROBINDO: What do you mean by "mystic"?

NIRODBARAN: I can't define it - it is, say, Blake's poetry or J's.

SRI AUROBINDO: If you mean "occult", Nishikanto hasn't tried much in that line. But he has succeeded in what he has tried.

NIRODBARAN: But is his work mystic?

PURANI: By "mystic" Nirodbaran means perhaps the expression of the essence of things hidden behind.

NIRODBARAN: I mean the expression of the spiritual truth behind by means of symbols.

SRI AUROBINDO: Symbolic, then. There are various kinds of mystic poetry.

EVENING

NIRODBARAN: It seems difficult to have creative force in mystic symbolic poetry.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, it is difficult, but not impossible.

NIRODBARAN: Is there any creative force in Mallarmé's famous sonnet on the swan?

SRI AUROBINDO: I have forgotten the poem.

NIRODBARAN: It is the poem in which he speaks of the wings being stuck in the frozen ice so the swan can't fly.

SRI AUROBINDO: There is no creative force there. It is descriptive and expressive. In lyrical poetry it is generally difficult to give the creative force. It is more expressive and interpretative. In sonnets too there is the difficulty; only in a series of sonnets can one build up something creative, as in Meredith's "Modern Love".

NIRODBARAN: Then the creative force can come only in narrative poems?

SRI AUROBINDO: In the epic and the drama also, and, as I have said, in a series of sonnets. But the modern poets say that long poems are not poetry, only in short poems you get the essence of pure poetry.

NIRODBARAN: Some modern poets themselves have written long poems.

SRI AUROBINDO: By "long poems" they mean long like epics.

PURANI: Thomas Hardy or somebody else has written some short poems on the French Revolution which seem to have creative force.

SRI AUROBINDO: Poems on the French Revolution? Who on earth is the author?

NIRODBARAN: I suppose Tagore will score highly in the matter of creative force. He has a lot of it.

SRI AUROBINDO: Where? Where has he created? He is essentially a lyrical poet and has no more creative force in his poetry than in his drama. One of his long poems I remember, where a boy was

thrown into the sea. It is very finely descriptive, but he has not created anything.

PURANI: In "Balaka" and elsewhere he gives only a fine description of universal life and an interpretation of nature.

NIRODBARAN: Is X creative?

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't think he is; he is also lyrical.

NIRODBARAN: In that poem of his, "Transformation of Nature", doesn't he give a creative force? He first describes the aspects of ordinary consciousness and sees the utter futility of it and slowly by turning to the Divine the transformation comes.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is the description of an ideal. Does he enable you to enter into that state of consciousness, live in it? Very few poets are creative.

NIRODBARAN: But we have heard that people have been helped in their sadhana by reading his poems.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is a different matter. You don't understand what I mean. When you read *Hamlet*, you become Hamlet and you feel you are Hamlet. When you read Homer, you are Achilles living and moving and you feel you have become Achilles. That is what I mean by creativeness. On the other hand, in Shelley's "Skylark", there is no skylark at all. You don't feel you have become one with the skylark. Through that poem, Shelley has only expressed his ideas and feelings. Take that line of his:

Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thoughts.'

It is a very fine poetical statement. But it is not creative in the sense that it doesn't make you live in that truth or that expression.

NIRODBARAN: But in poems of Bhakti, devotion, you do feel the Bhakti.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is a feeling only. It doesn't create a world for you to live and move in. Feeling is not enough in order to be creative.

PURANI: Abercrombie also says that a poem should reproduce the experience.

SRI AUROBINDO: It depends on what you mean by experience. An idea or a thought may be an experience; feeling is also experience.

PURANI: In comparing Shelley and Milton, Abercrombie says that *Prometheus Unbound* does not have as great a theme as *Paradise Lost* and so it couldn't equal the latter in greatness.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is not as great because Shelley doesn't create anything there. But the theme is equally great.

PURANI: Abercrombie says that Milton has created living pictures of Satan and Christ.

SRI AUROBINDO: Satan is the only character he has created. The first four books of *Paradise Lost* are full of creative force. But Christ? I disagree with Abercrombie there. Milton has not created Christ.

PURANI: About Dante he says he has created Beatrice and her memory was always with the poet.

SRI AUROBINDO: What about Dante's political life in Florence? I am sure he was not thinking of Beatrice at that time.

PURANI: Abercrombie also says that a poet passes on his experience to his readers.

NIRODBARAN: But there are poets who don't experience anything they write of, nor do they understand what they write. They are mere transcribers. J has done that. I too have done it.

SRI AUROBINDO: Sahana also.

19 JANUARY 1940

SATYENDRA (*looking at Nirodbaran*): I see a roguish smile on his face.

SRI AUROBINDO: He wants to ask a question or say something?

NIRODBARAN: Satyendra was telling me yesterday that he wasn't quite clear about the definition of creative force as applied to Bhakti poems. Why shouldn't they be considered creative if one feels Bhakti by them?

SATYENDRA: He is putting his own question into my mouth.

SRI AUROBINDO: These poems cannot be considered creative, because you identify yourself only with the feeling and not with a man or character as in the case of *Hamlet*. They do not create a world for you. A creative poem must come out of a part of the poet's personality and you can't help identifying yourself with the world or the personality the poet has created or with the experience of the poet himself; otherwise the poem is not creative. Of course, everything is creative in a general way.

PURANI: Abercrombie says a great poet transmits his experience to the reader.

SATYENDRA: But one can transmit without oneself having the experience as some poets here, according to their own account, have done.

NIRODBARAN: So also poets can transmit or transcribe creative force without being conscious of it, and I suppose all fine poems are transcriptions.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, poets can do that, but people who have the creative force usually make it a part of themselves, they experience the thing first and then transmit it.

NIRODBARAN: How is one to get this force?

SRI AUROBINDO: You have it or you don't. Some poets are born with it.

NIRODBARAN: But can't one acquire it?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, you can develop it. Most people have it within but it may or may not come out. In Yoga, of course, it is different. There it depends on the power of opening oneself.

NIRODBARAN: Talking of J and Nishikanto, I find that the latter hasn't the former's subtlety and delicacy of expression.

SRI AUROBINDO: A poet need not have these things in order to be great.

NIRODBARAN: No. Nishikanto always gives the impression of power.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, power is his main element.

NIRODBARAN: X says Nishikanto lacks substance: he means intellectual substance such as he finds in A. E. or Tagore.

PURANI: I thought Tagore's poetry hadn't much substance of this kind; most of it is fine and decorative.

NIRODBARAN: It is rather strange that X doesn't like Yeats.

SRI AUROBINDO: He doesn't?

NIRODBARAN: He says he can't find substance in him, or whatever substance there is can't be understood by him. He is referring here to the symbolic poems.

SATYENDRA: Yeats has expressed his Irish mysticism.

SRI AUROBINDO: Those are his early poems. He has expressed other things too.

NIRODBARAN: To a man like X who appreciates and understands *chhanda* (rhythm) so much, Yeats has no appeal! It is strange.

He likes Arjava's poems and yet Arjava told him that he was greatly indebted to Yeats, and so also is Amal.

SRI AUROBINDO: Perhaps X doesn't understand English poetry sufficiently.

NIRODBARAN: But he said that Chesterton has variety in metre and he appreciates it.

SRI AUROBINDO: Chesterton?

NIRODBARAN: Yes, I think that if he doesn't understand a poem, he just doesn't bother about the rest of its qualities; the poem has no appeal for him.

SATYENDRA: Perhaps Tagore, after reading Nishikanto's book, will change his opinion and write to him.

SRI AUROBINDO: He has evaded the problem by writing before he has scanned the book.

NIRODBARAN: You think that Nishikanto has intellectual substance?

SRI AUROBINDO: I believe he has.

NIRODBARAN: Purani says your "Bird of Fire" has creative force. It is a creative symbolic poem.

SRI AUROBINDO (*smiling*): I don't know. (*Looking at Purani*) It is for Purani to pronounce.

NIRODBARAN: He also thinks your "Shiva" has it.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why not leave my poetry out of it? If you want examples, there is "The Hound of Heaven", as I have said, and there is Chesterton's "Lepanto". They have the creative force.

NIRODBARAN: What about Arjava (J. Chadwick)?

SRI AUROBINDO: He has none.

EVENING

SRI AUROBINDO: I think Tagore's "Parash Pathar" ("Philosopher's Stone") and "Urvashī" have the creative force, though it is not usual for him to have it. Tagore has created something here, not a character but a world, not an outer world but an inner one, a reality of the inner life of man. It is not simply a description. And in Nishikanto's poem, "Gorugadi" ("Bullock Cart"), the cart is real and the man in it is real, yet the cart is both a personal one and a world-cart.

Take Shelley's "Skylark" and Keats' "Nightingale". The birds in either poem are nothing. It is the thoughts and feelings of the poets that have found expression and the birds transmit those thoughts and feelings while remaining only occasions for expressing them.

By the way, I don't understand why X says that Nishikanto has no ideas.

NIRODBARAN: What he says is that Nishikanto lacks intellectual substance.

SRI AUROBINDO: What do you mean by that? You mean philosophical thought?

NIRODBARAN: I think he means ideas such as A. E. has, for instance.

SRI AUROBINDO: But he has poetical ideas and he develops them in his poems. A poet need not have intellectual ideas to be great. Homer has no intellectual ideas. There are only one or two lines that contain a great thought in the first five or six books. Otherwise the Iliad is all war and action and movement. And you can't say that Homer is not a great poet. If you do, you'll have to ignore many poets of the past. When Nishikanto started writing, I said his poems were "vital", but he made great progress afterwards.

NIRODBARAN: Some of his poems are even psychic.

SRI AUROBINDO: His "Bullock Cart" is certainly psychic.

NIRODBARAN: X doesn't say that he is not a great poet, only that he lacks one element — that's all — and he would like him to have it.

SATYENDRA: If you want intellectual substance, I would ask you to read one Gujarati poet named Akho. He is all Vedanta.

NIRODBARAN: X has no fancy for such poetry. This morning I had an argument with Purani over your poem "Shiva". Purani says it has creative force, just as your "Bird of Fire" has.

PURANI: Didn't you agree with me?

NIRODBARAN: Yes, about "Bird of Fire". About the other I said that I didn't find creative force in it and asked, "Do you become Shiva when you read it?"

SRI AUROBINDO: It is not necessary to become Shiva. The point is whether you find the picture painted there to be living and feel that Shiva is alive in the poem.

PURANI: I find it creative in that sense. It is not merely an idea of what Shiva is or stands for that has been depicted. What I find here is a personality, a being.

SRI AUROBINDO: When you feel that, it means that the thing depicted is a piece of creation. Tagore also seems to have liked this poem very much.

NIRODBARAN: Yes, that is the only poem he liked. According to you, then, to be creative means that what is depicted is vivid, alive, appearing real.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes.

NIRODBARAN: It seems to me that your "Rose of God" has the creative force too.

SATYENDRA: He is trying to make you commit yourself!
(Laughter)

PURANI: If Sri Aurobindo doesn't want to commit himself, nobody can succeed in that game.

NIRODBARAN: I didn't have any sly intention. We only want to grasp the point clearly.

PURANI: Nirodbaran says that if there is poetic force, it will be felt; I say that not everybody will feel it. "The Hound of Heaven" won't be appreciated by all.

NIRODBARAN: By "everybody" if you mean the masses, of course not. But I meant that a poet or a literary man who has a taste for poetry will feel the force there.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, unless he has a prejudice.

PURANI: There are persons like A. C. who may not find creative force there. He is a literary man, a Ph.D. from Oxford.

SRI AUROBINDO: In philosophy?

PURANI: No, in literature; he did research in ancient English poetry.

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh, that is the skeleton of English poetry.

NIRODBARAN: Sahana says some of Tagore's dramas have creative force.

SRI AUROBINDO: Which?

NIRODBARAN: She doesn't remember which. But don't you think "Sacrifice" has it?

SRI AUROBINDO: When people talk of Tagore's dramas, they mean particularly "Sacrifice". Of course, that is the best of the lot, but there too the characters are not living. They have all come out of his mind. He has the idea that things should be like this or like that and he makes them according to his idea.

NIRODBARAN: I remember another poem of Tagore, "I will not let you go", which seems to be creative.

PURANI: It is the same as the other one, "God's Retribution" – a fine description.

SRI AUROBINDO: The girl there is also fashioned from his mind. A girl doesn't behave in that way.

NIRODBARAN: What about Madhusudan's Bengali work, "The Slaying of Meghnad"? That surely has a lot of creativeness.

SRI AUROBINDO: A poor creation. What sort of Ravana has he created? It is an outline of an idealised non-Rakshasic Rakshasa. He makes Ravana weep profusely. That is highly amusing.

Bengalis at one time were very fond of weeping. I think it was Romesh Dutt who translated the story of Savitri from the *Mahabharata* and portrayed her as weeping whereas in the original epic there is not a trace of tears. Even when her heart was being sawn in two, not a single tear came to her eyes. By making her weep, he took away the very strength on which Savitri was built.

PURANI: He wanted to make the story realistic, perhaps.

SRI AUROBINDO: He thought Vyasa had made a mess of it. Even present-day Bengalis are fond of weeping. They expect everybody to weep. When Barin was condemned, they reported that Sarojini wept and that when I met Sarojini I too began lamenting and crying! Barin had to contradict the report.

PURANI: Also when Manmohan died, some people thought you were mourning him.

SRI AUROBINDO: We brothers, I am afraid, were not so passionately fond of each other. (*Laughter*)

Yes, I was talking of Madhusudan. I don't say that his poem is not fine or that it has no force or thought in it. It is an epic – but it is not creative. It has no vital substance.

PURANI: People say he tried to imitate Milton.

SRI AUROBINDO: Milton, Homer and everybody else.

20 JANUARY 1940

Nirodbaran read to Sri Aurobindo Tagore's letter to Nishikanto praising his book. Sri Aurobindo was very glad and exclaimed, "Oh", and at the end said, "That is wonderful!" During the sponging when Satyendra and others came in Purani said, "Nirodbaran is feeling triumphant today." Satyendra didn't understand and looked sideways. He didn't know yet about Tagore's letter.

SRI AUROBINDO: Because of Tagore's eulogy on Nishikanto's poems. He has acknowledged his defeat.

SATYENDRA: He has written again?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, where is the letter?

Then the letter was produced. Sri Aurobindo translated it into English and said, "You can't say more than that."

NIRODBARAN: Purani is also triumphant because he thought Tagore would write again.

PURANI: Yes, I felt that. Tagore is very polite in that way. Anyhow he has been forced to admit Nishikanto's quality.

SATYENDRA: In view of his first letter, there seemed no chance of his writing anything.

NIRODBARAN: Now he finds that his two grievances have been satisfied; first his "common people" and then the variety because Nishikanto has made it a representative collection.

SRI AUROBINDO: His former letter meant, "Yes, you have written something but you are not a poet." (*Then addressing Purani*) This "common people" is very stupid, it seems. I have been reading the quotations you have given me. I find them clearly mystic. I don't know how these people can give a realistic meaning to them. Instead of taking the verses in their obvious mystic significance, they create all sorts of meanings—*rita* is water, fighting between Dravidians and Aryans, etc.

NIRODBARAN: I asked Nolini yesterday what people like Tagore mean by saying that only Nishikanto has an easy mastery over the language while others have not. He says that he means that our language is rather forced, not spontaneous or easy.

SRI AUROBINDO: "Forced" means something created by the mind?

NIRODBARAN: I believe so.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then it is not true. It is, on the other hand, something coming down from above by inspiration.

NIRODBARAN: Nolini also says that Nishikanto follows the Bengali tradition while Dilip and others have cut a new line and one has to enter into the new spirit to appreciate it. Some people here say that we make things deliberately difficult.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is not true; of course it is not necessary to make things unintelligible in order to be a poet.

PURANI (*after some time*): Nishikanto can now advertise Tagore's opinion.

NIRODBARAN: Yes, Tarapada has already asked him to at once send any appreciation. When I took the letter to Nishikanto and said it was from Tagore he asked, "Why again?" He expected another cold reception, but after reading the letter he became jubilant and said, "See how promptly he has replied, while to others like Jyoti he has kept quiet." (*Sri Aurobindo enjoyed this very much.*)

EVENING

SRI AUROBINDO: Why does X say that Tagore has been rude to Nishikanto?

NIRODBARAN: Where? I haven't seen anything.

SRI AUROBINDO: He has written that to me. Also that Tagore has said that Sisir Mitra came here out of emotion.

NIRODBARAN: But Tagore has written only two letters to Nishikanto and there was no mention of these things.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then perhaps it may be in some other connection. But I didn't find any rudeness in his letters. By "emotion" Tagore means bhava, I suppose. But I don't understand what is wrong with emotion.

At this point Purani came.

PURANI (*after a while*): I verified the story of the bull. The bull's name is Bholanath. Lalji himself has seen it perform. It can even pick out a man whose name has been pronounced to it. If a photograph is hidden in somebody's pocket and the bull is asked to detect the man, it can.

SRI AUROBINDO: By name also?

PURANI: Yes.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is something remarkable. Must be an intuitive bull. But how can it pick out an unknown person knowing only his name even by intuition? Even a Yogi can't do it. He can know a certain person by first seeing him but he can't know him by knowing only his name.

NIRODBARAN: It is Shiva's bull perhaps.

PURANI: It is also called Bholanath.

DR. BECHARLAL: The giving of a person's name could have been prearranged with the party.

PURANI: How? Even in an unknown crowd, the bull can do that feat.

SRI AUROBINDO: Animals have vital intuition and they find things out by it, as man does by thought. You know about the horses being trained to do arithmetic in Germany.

PURANI: Yes, Maeterlinck himself wrote about it.

SRI AUROBINDO: Did he?

PURANI: Yes.

SRI AUROBINDO: It was not only one horse, but a group of them. Animals can be trained to do many things and they can be made familiar with sounds and names by repeated utterances. But to pick out an unknown man only by his name is remarkable. Can't explain it.

(*While being sponged*) I read about another medical discovery in the *Sunday Times*. Some doctor says that an attack of asthma can be instantly relieved by inhaling from a pot of honey. The relief lasts for half an hour.

PURANI: It is very good.

SATYENDRA: But one will be tempted to eat it.

SRI AUROBINDO: J will finish a pot in one night. (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: Not possible during an acute attack because the attack is so severe that one is almost choked up in distress.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then she will finish it between the attacks.

NIRODBARAN: That is possible.

SRI AUROBINDO: Honey seems to contain many chemicals.

NIRODBARAN: What are they?

SRI AUROBINDO: I have forgotten and I am not a scientist.

SATYENDRA: It is good to forget, Sir. Scientists also have to forget at times.

NIRODBARAN: In Ayurveda honey has many properties.

SATYENDRA: Yes, you had an intuition about it?

SRI AUROBINDO: How?

SATYENDRA: Honey and brinjal were two things he found by intuition. (*Laughter*)

SRI AUROBINDO: Why don't you find something for my knee?

SATYENDRA: That is outer, Sir—though, of course, they do apply hot brinjal over eczemas.

NIRODBARAN: That is for heat.

SATYENDRA: Then why don't they simply apply hot water? But no, it should always be brinjal! (*Laughter*)

21 JANUARY 1940

Dr. Rao arrived and said that some trouble was still going on over the loss of some instruments. Nirodbaran told Sri Aurobindo about it. So when Rao came Sri Aurobindo spoke to him.

SRI AUROBINDO: I hear you are being instrumented?

DR. RAO: It is the same old thing, Sir. They say the superintendent is to blame. However, I believe within that it will be all right by your blessings. Even if some bad things happen, I will say that they are also the blessings of God.

SRI AUROBINDO (*after a while, smiling*): Yes, when anything bad happens you call it God's blessings while if anything good happens, you take the credit and become egoistic.

DR. RAO: No, Sir. (*A little later*) As you raise the question, we do say that. (*Laughter*)

PURANI: Have you heard that N. R. Sirkar and Kiran S. Roy are coming here?

SRI AUROBINDO: What for?

PURANI: For Darshan. And Nazimuddin also.

SRI AUROBINDO: Nazimuddin?

PURANI: Yes, he in August, the others in February. Nolini is wondering where to put them up.

NIRODBARAN: They have got permission?

PURANI: No, they have written for permission. L'Hotel d'Europe seems to Nolini the only place.

SRI AUROBINDO: Baron speaks of it as being quite up to the mark.

PURANI: Yes, they have rebuilt it very nicely. I don't know why Nazimuddin has taken the fancy to come. Perhaps he thinks, "If Sir Akbar can come, why not I, who am also a Sir?" (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: The supramental seems to be descending.

SRI AUROBINDO: Who knows, Fazlul Huq may come one day.

NIRODBARAN: Then the Descent will be complete. But he is more likely than others to come. He is more plastic—he was a Congressman, next a Muslim Leaguer and then a Yogi.

SRI AUROBINDO: He belongs to the Overmind then.

NIRODBARAN: Dilip told me that Sirkar, B. C. Roy and Kiran S. Roy used to take an interest in the Ashram.

SRI AUROBINDO: I see! Somebody also talked to Nazimuddin I heard, or at least he was present at a talk about the Ashram.

PURANI: There is one Hemen Roy Chowdhury, Zamindar of Mymensingh, in whose house you stayed. The name of his place is "Tress and Shrubs".

SRI AUROBINDO: No, "Trees and Shrubs". (*Laughter*) Is he still alive? (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: You are sending people to the other world! (*Laughter*)

PURANI: His nephew has written. So he may be dead.

SRI AUROBINDO: He was at that time an energetic young man, a revolutionary. I thought by now he might be dead.

NIRODBARAN: This is the third time you have said that. Sirkar has gone to Wardha.

SRI AUROBINDO: He is trying to enter the Congress again?

NIRODBARAN: Looks like it, and he is placating everybody: the Hindu Mahasabha, the Bengal Congress. He justifies the Mahasabha and says that Bengalis have reason to be dissatisfied with Congress.

SRI AUROBINDO: And he has reason to be dissatisfied with Huq, and Huq has reason to turn him out? That is a yogic attitude. He also seems to belong to the Overmind. (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: I went to Dilip today. He asked me if it was true that you had said that the spirit of your Tapasya is behind the Hindu Sabha movement.

SRI AUROBINDO: What did you say?

NIRODBARAN: I said that I didn't know. It came out in the paper under the name of the secretary, so it may be true.

SRI AUROBINDO: Who said that?

NIRODBARAN: Since it was the secretary, it may be Nolini.

PURANI: No, Anilbaran, I think. Perhaps it was written privately to somebody and they have published it.

SRI AUROBINDO (*after some time*): Who knows, the spirit of my Tapasya may be behind the Khaksar movement also. The Divine Force is everywhere.

NIRODBARAN: I told Dilip all that you had said about poetry.

SRI AUROBINDO: What was that?

NIRODBARAN: About creative force etc. He says Tagore's letter has a double value as he had to praise Nishikanto in spite of himself. Dilip says it is very funny how people make contradictory statements. As for Satyen Datta's innovations and discoveries in rhythm, Tagore appreciates them very much but when we make these experiments, he says, "What is all this nonsense they are doing about rhythm?"

SRI AUROBINDO: Tagore himself made departures in metre?

NIRODBARAN: Yes, his *matra-vritta* and *swara-vritta* were quite new. He can do everything new—in his drama, music, art, but others can't.

SRI AUROBINDO: No, they must follow the eternal ancient path.

EVENING

PURANI: Dilip told me just now that A. E. moves him very much. He has a great depth, he says.

SRI AUROBINDO: To move Dilip? (*Laughter*) But many people don't like him.

NIRODBARAN: Satyendra also likes A. E. very much, more than Yeats because of his spiritual substance.

SRI AUROBINDO: He is a spiritual poet while Yeats is occult. Of course, A. E. has a far richer mind and has more intellectual power.

PURANI: Yes, I have read his essays on Irish national reconstruction. I was glad to find that he has such a grasp over things like agriculture.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, his personality is many-sided and various. He has done more than anybody for Irish national reconstruction, while Yeats has only power of imagination.

NIRODBARAN: A. E. is a better critic also.

SRI AUROBINDO: I haven't read his criticism. Yeats is a bad critic. He is nothing else, only a good poet, a very great poet. His character doesn't seem to very much; he is said to be vain and proud.

When the Mother came, Purani read the radio news which stated that N. N. Sirkar had taken up spinning.

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh! N. R. Sirkar?

PURANI: No, it is N. N. Sirkar.

SRI AUROBINDO (*after his walk*): Are you sure it is not N. R. Sirkar? That seems to be more likely now that he is trying to enter the Congress. But why is he coming here then? Of course, if he doesn't spin himself, he will get it done by others. (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: He has also proposed an ad hoc committee.

SRI AUROBINDO: If any agreement comes out, though there is no chance of it, it is only by that sort of committee, not by the Constituent Assembly.

NIRODBARAN: V is trying to come in August with Sisir Mitra, I am told.

SRI AUROBINDO: How? She has been refused.

NIRODBARAN: No, she was to be discouraged, I heard.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, but the Mother meant practical refusal.

NIRODBARAN: X doesn't like the idea of her coming. He says she hasn't changed at all and she will only disparage us after her return. Anilbaran says she must have changed.

SRI AUROBINDO: Anilbaran is optimistic.

NIRODBARAN: He can't forget her motherly caress.

SRI AUROBINDO: That was because of politics.

NIRODBARAN: Nazimuddin got interested through Sir Akbar perhaps. He may have met him when he went to Dacca.

SRI AUROBINDO: No, Suren Ghose gave him *The Life Divine*.

NIRODBARAN: Allah Bux has now turned to Sikandar Hyat Khan.

SRI AUROBINDO: What else can he do after the refusal of the Working Committee to support him?

NIRODBARAN: It seems that the Sukkur riot is a big affair. 146 Hindus killed!

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, it is not a single riot but rioting in various villages.

PURANI: Nolini was saying that while he finds Nishikanto progressing in poetry, X is almost stagnant and seems to have fallen into a groove.

NIRODBARAN: X has never complained to you as he has to us about his repetitions?

SRI AUROBINDO: No!

PURANI: Is he so satisfied with his own creations that these defects escape him? Very surprising!

NIRODBARAN: You were speaking about “characteristicness” of poetry. Dilip says that J’s poems are distinctive and we also agree, while Nishikanto gives an impression of something familiar. (*Sri Aurobindo kept silent.*)

22 JANUARY 1940

Purani showed Sri Aurobindo four pictures of Buddha’s life by Nandalal Bose published in the Bombay Times.

SRI AUROBINDO (*after seeing them*): They are not realistic pictures. Buddha remains young till the end. His Nirvana doesn’t look like Nirvana but like going to sleep, nor does it show that he had indigestion at the time.

There were a few pictures of Mogul art about which Sri Aurobindo said “Very fine.” Then he came across a coloured picture of Krishna playing on the flute and Gopis dancing, in the usual modern style.

SRI AUROBINDO: Ah, this is a masterpiece – bacchanal!
(*Laughter*)

PURANI: I didn’t want you to see that.

SRI AUROBINDO (*after some time*): Why do they say that Buddha, after passing through four dhyanas, entered Nirvana? How do they know it?

NIRODBARAN: That is the Pali text. All of them say that.

SRI AUROBINDO: Now they are trying to prove that *sukara khanda* was not meat but some vegetable root which caused his death; *khanda* meaning root.

NIRODBARAN: My Pali teacher used to give another ingenious explanation. He said that *sukara* means what has been cooked well, and many good things jumbled and cooked together may act as a poison. It is not *khanda* but *maddava*, a stew-like preparation.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then it should not be *sukara* but *sukrita* as the adjective.

NIRODBARAN: In Pali it may be *sukara*.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is your Pali teacher’s explanation. It may be Gujarati also; *sukara* meaning “what are you doing”? (*Laughter*)

After this, some discussion followed about Aryans, Dravidians and Tamilians.

SRI AUROBINDO: Most of the Tamilians have a straight nose, very few have a flat nose.

EVENING

SRI AUROBINDO (*leading the talk*): I have finished Nishikanto's book. I don't see why Dilip says that he has no intellectual substance.

PURANI: Nishikanto was telling me about it just now. He says the poems at the end of the book contain substance.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why only those? The earlier poems have it too.

NIRODBARAN: That was Dilip's earlier statement. I don't know if he would still hold that view.

SRI AUROBINDO (*after his walk*): You have seen that Gandhi has been authorised by the Working Committee to negotiate with the Viceroy. As a matter of fact he is already doing it. He has been given the sole power.

PURANI: Perhaps the Viceroy is coming down now. The *Times* comment suggests that. Have you seen it? It says that Jinnah's demands are unreasonable. That may be the British Government's view too.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, the *Times* is their official organ.

PURANI: There is a reason too. It seems Russia and Japan are trying to come to a settlement. In that case they may have designs on India. Even if the Muslims combine with the Congress, still another difficulty remains – that of the Princes.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes.

NIRODBARAN: Gandhi says that he has no objection to the Princes if they remain like the King of England.

SRI AUROBINDO (*with a smile*): If the Princes remain at all, I am not for stinting them any power. If a Prince is capable or if he has capable ministers, he can do a lot of good which a parliament can't.

NIRODBARAN: Yes, moreover the Princes are getting wise.

PURANI: The present Gaekwar has already curtailed a large amount of his privy purse. Sayaji Rao was bad in that way. He used to grab a heavy amount for his private purse but at the same time he did a lot of public works.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, he didn't starve the public services.

NIRODBARAN: Only, he spent a lot of money in going frequently to Europe, and has also erected a lot of buildings.

SRI AUROBINDO: His European visits and the buildings have been good for the State.

PURANI: Sir Sikandar has frankly admitted that the question is after all about the loaves and fishes of office and is not religious at all.

NIRODBARAN: The Muslims don't really trust the Hindus, it seems. Even Sir Akbar said he couldn't trust Gandhi.

SRI AUROBINDO: He doesn't trust Gandhi because of his way of life and philosophy.

Sri Aurobindo then rested.

PURANI: It seems *The Life Divine* is finished now.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not yet; only the first draft is done.

PURANI: *The Psychology of Social Development* won't take much time.

SRI AUROBINDO: No.

NIRODBARAN: Is that the next book?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. (*Then looking at Purani*) *The Ideal of Human Unity* will have to be rewritten perhaps. Things have changed and Hitler is mainly responsible.

23 JANUARY 1940

NIRODBARAN: Nishikanto asks why at times he is seized with a repugnance for writing poetry. He burned a lot of his works at Santiniketan during such seizures. Here also attacks come occasionally and he questions himself, "What is the use of writing after all?" And this hampers his work, he says.

SRI AUROBINDO: These moods come to many people. They are a kind of Tamas (inertia) which should not be indulged in.

NIRODBARAN: Nishikanto says that it would be useful not to write if he could meditate or think of the Divine instead. This he can't do. "Then why not write?" he argues, but the feeling of repugnance comes all the same.

SRI AUROBINDO: It has to be rejected.

PURANI: Somebody from Gujarat has written that after you took your first few lessons in Sanskrit your teacher found that you were progressing with extreme rapidity and there was no need of a teacher any more.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't remember having any teacher in Sanskrit. I think I learnt it by myself. Many languages, in fact, I learnt by myself—German and Italian, for instance. For Bengali, however, I had a teacher.

CHAMPAKLAL: Did you learn Gujarati in Pondicherry?

SRI AUROBINDO: No. I picked it up in Baroda, as I had to read the Maharajah's files.

NIRODBARAN: Nishikanto was asking if you would write an appreciation of his book.

SRI AUROBINDO: For publication?

NIRODBARAN: Yes. I replied that you would never do it. He argued that you had done it for Dilip. I asked: "Where?" And I added, "Sri Aurobindo has only given his opinion poem by poem as he has also done in your case. If Dilip published the opinions, it was his own doing."

SRI AUROBINDO: Quite so. I cannot write a public appreciation for a member of my own Ashram. Tagore has given his appreciation. That should be enough.

24 JANUARY 1940

PURANI: Jinnah has threatened the Viceroy that if the Congress comes back to power there will be a revolution in India.

SRI AUROBINDO: The Congress, once it has resigned, can't come back to power even if it has a majority.

PURANI: Jinnah says that Gandhi is making a compromise with the Viceroy and will then crush the Muslims and other minorities. He won't tolerate this.

SRI AUROBINDO: I suppose Jinnah means: "Make me a king or —"

PURANI: "I will kick up a row."

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes.

PURANI: Different people have given different solutions regarding this problem. Professor Saha says, "A Constituent

Assembly will succeed." Sikandar Hyat proposes a committee of some seventeen persons.

SRI AUROBINDO: And let them be shut up in a room until they are able to come to a settlement. (*Laughter*)

EVENING

Professor Naren Das Gupta reviewed Sri Aurobindo's Life Divine in the Hindustan Standard.

SRI AUROBINDO: Who is this Das Gupta?

PURANI: It is Naren Das Gupta of Feni College, in Noakhali.

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh, he was Bejoy's friend.

PURANI: Here, in Pondy?

SRI AUROBINDO: No—when he first came to Calcutta.

PURANI (*to Nirodbaran*): Have you read the review?

NIRODBARAN: Yes, and Satyendra has also seen it.

SATYENDRA: The reviewer has discovered an important coincidence.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes.

PURANI: What coincidence?

SRI AUROBINDO: The *Arya* came out just at the beginning of the last World War and *The Life Divine* at the beginning of the present one.

SATYENDRA (*to Nirodbaran*): How is it that the *Hindustan Standard* has put the review on the leading page? I thought it was a Socialist paper supporting Subhas Bose.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, it is a Leftist paper. But Subhas Bose has a corner in him which has a respect for spiritual things. He is not an ordinary atheistic Socialist.

NIRODBARAN: Nishikanto has bucked up. He says, "After all, Sri Aurobindo pressed me to publish my poems. So whether they sell or not is not my look out." He believes that you gave some Force to Tagore which made Tagore change his mind about his poetry. I also believe this.

SRI AUROBINDO: You mean I put my Force on him? Anybody who has some poetic feeling will appreciate the book.

NIRODBARAN: But did you put your Force on Tagore or not?

SRI AUROBINDO (*smiling a little*): In a way. Has the book been sent for review? If it has, the monthlies are sure to notice it.

25 JANUARY 1940

PURANI: Mahadev Desai has advised poor people to wear paper if cloth runs short.

NIRODBARAN: Why wear anything at all?

PURANI: He has got this idea from Gandhi. Once Gandhi put a piece of paper in between the two folds of his loin cloth. People say that paper will be short now.

SRI AUROBINDO: Doesn't matter. Was it not Gandhi's idea once not to wear anything?

NIRODBARAN: In that way, life's problems become very much simplified, and for food one can eat grass like that English barrister.

SRI AUROBINDO: Thus two problems of life are solved. But what about the third: shelter?

PURANI: People can sleep under the stars.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not possible during the monsoon. Even Sannyasis have to seek caves.

SATYENDRA: If one could really simplify life, things would be so much better. Even if as Yogis we accept life, simplification is necessary. If one makes life complex, complexities increase and increase. The Europeans, having accepted life, have increased its complexities enormously.

SRI AUROBINDO: But to what extent to simplify?—that is the question. The Sannyasi's standpoint is to accept only what is necessary. This is understandable. But the Sannyasi does not quite accept life. If you do accept it, how far will you simplify it?

SATYENDRA: If you don't simplify it drastically, you have to accept life as the Europeans do—with complexities multiplying.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not necessarily. The Europeans have accepted life in the wrong way—that is, along with its disorders.

SATYENDRA: Some people in India, no less than in Europe, have wanted to introduce nudity. But it is hardly necessary in India.

NIRODBARAN: All the same, it would be rather comfortable, I think.

SRI AUROBINDO: A French woman went to Germany to study the nudists. When she came back she wrote an article in a paper: "*Les bonheurs de la nudité*" ("The Happiness of Nudity"). Blake also wanted to establish nudity as the rule of life. He succeeded only in taking some promenades with his wife in his own garden. (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: By the way, some people are going to celebrate Bejoy Goswami's birth-centenary at Calcutta.

SATYENDRA: Are there no translations of his works?

NIRODBARAN: I haven't seen any.

SRI AUROBINDO: I have read neither any translation nor his original work. During his time, there was quite a strong cult of him.

NIRODBARAN: Brahmo Samaj?

SRI AUROBINDO: No. He was Brahmo only at the beginning. The three nationalist leaders of the day were his disciples – the first, I forget his name, started the nationalist university, the second was Bipin Pal and the third Monoranjan Guha Thakurtha. It is said that the nationalist revolutionary movement was the outcome of his own movement.

NIRODBARAN: How?

SRI AUROBINDO: Because he used to stress work, action!

NIRODBARAN: The Calcutta people, the organisers of the celebration, want to know where in your writings you have referred to him. I read in one book your saying that the work begun by Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and Bejoy Goswami hasn't been finished. Jayantilal was telling me that you have said somewhere that Goswami couldn't give to others what he had received.

SRI AUROBINDO: Where have I said that?

NIRODBARAN: Jayantilal thinks it is in a book by Barin.

SRI AUROBINDO: The report is unreliable.

SATYENDRA: Somebody here was saying that a friend of his saw Goswami's presence standing behind a person.

SRI AUROBINDO: Goswami was a very powerful man.

NIRODBARAN: I have read that his soul was thrice brought back to life by the Brahmachari of Baradi.

SATYENDRA: You mean Lokanath?

NIRODBARAN: Yes.

SATYENDRA: Jayantilal told me that Lokanath got his realisation at the age of eighty, but that his Guru had no realisation, for which Lokanath was very sorry.

NIRODBARAN: Yes. Lokanath's Guru was Jnanamargi. Lokanath used to say, "You, my Guru, are still bound while I your disciple am free. I feel very sad about it." This Lokanath seems to have travelled to Sumeru.

SATYENDRA: Yes, he wanted to go to heaven like Yudhishtir.

SRI AUROBINDO: Did he believe that he could go to heaven bodily?

NIRODBARAN: It looks like it. And so with a friend he started along the Himalayas and, crossing them, came wandering to Sumeru where they met some people only half a yard tall who lived on vegetable roots growing beneath the snows. I believe they were Eskimos.

SRI AUROBINDO: Eskimos? But Eskimos eat fish. Who has written all this?

NIRODBARAN: Some Sitanath Banerji, one of Lokanath's disciples.

EVENING

PURANI: Have you read that book of poems by Udar's friend, Armando Menezes?

SRI AUROBINDO: I have glanced through it. He has a mastery over the language and technique, but the work still seems to be derivative except in a few places.

NIRODBARAN: Do you mean that he has no inspiration?

SRI AUROBINDO: No. He has inspiration and he has power too. Perhaps the word "derivative" is wrong. For it would mean imitation, though there is an influence of Shelley. What then shall I call his work? Perhaps I may say it is not authentic yet. It has everything else short of this, and he may achieve something.

PURANI: He is afraid to come here lest he shouldn't be able to go back.

SRI AUROBINDO: He's afraid like Nandalal Bose?

PURANI: Yes. He says he has a family and if he takes up poetry here and doesn't go back - (*Laughter*)

SRI AUROBINDO: He is one of the best among Indians who are writing in English. There is another from your part of the country.

PURANI: Jehangir Vakil?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. But he didn't arrive at anything.

NIRODBARAN: Armando Menezes' mother tongue, as well as Amal's, is practically English.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is not everything, nor does it count for much. Many Englishmen can't write poetry. The point is that Indians writing in English must do something extraordinary to be recognised while that is not so for an Englishman.

26 JANUARY 1940

PURANI: Anilbaran was asking if you would send your blessings to the centenary celebration of Bejoy Goswami's birth.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't send any blessings publicly. Ask him to send his on his own behalf.

PURANI: He asks if he can write to them that you have read their letter.

SRI AUROBINDO: What is the use?

NIRODBARAN: Somebody has written a letter to Anilbaran, in which he has put many metaphysical questions to you. (*Nirodbaran read out the letter but nobody could make head or tail of the questions.*)

SRI AUROBINDO: Let Anilbaran have the pleasure of answering them.

EVENING

The radio news said that Germany had built 2,000 pocket battleships. We were cutting jokes on that unbelievable figure.

SRI AUROBINDO: The commentator should have said a 2,000-pocket battleship—a battleship with 2,000 pockets, whatever that might mean. One battleship takes one and a half to two years to build. How could Germany have built 2,000?

NIRODBARAN (*after a while*): I understand Dilip sent you some extracts from Huxley's book *After Many a Summer*. He wants to know how you found them. Anilkumar says that he doesn't find anything there to indicate that Huxley has had any spiritual experience or has written from such experience. Dilip maintains that he must have done some sadhana in order to be able to write like that.

SRI AUROBINDO (*after some silence*): All I can say is that he has thought about the problem. And he himself says that experience is necessary. How can you say from his writings whether he has had any experience or not? You know what my uncle Krishna Kumar Mitra said? When *The Synthesis of Yoga* in the *Arya* came out, he said that it was all philosophy; there was nothing of Yoga in it.

NIRODBARAN: Did he do any Yoga?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, he had some experiences in jail.

NIRODBARAN: P wants to know how you found the criticism of his recent book.

SRI AUROBINDO: How can I say anything without reading the book? But does the critic know anything about the Veda on which there is an article in P's book?

PURANI: No, and he says that in the criticism. These people hold the socialistic theory in literature. The style and the subject of the book must be approachable by the mass. Kalelkar has developed a racy style. Munshi's style also is very good.

NIRODBARAN: Modern writers are more bent on perfecting style.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is because they have nothing to say. And what is queer, especially about the modern poets, is that they talk of writing in a popular style and about popular literature but they take care to see that their own writings may not be understandable to the people. And their popular style makes a muddle when they begin to write about serious things.

NIRODBARAN: Basanta Chatterji has left Anilbaran and has now taken up his pen against you. He has written an article, "The Veda and Sri Aurobindo", in which he says that like Westerners you have not accepted the reality of the gods. You have interpreted Agni as representing Tapa Shakti, etc.

SRI AUROBINDO: If I have spoken of Agni as representing Tapa Shakti, it doesn't mean that he is not a god. If Saraswati is represented as a symbol of learning, does it mean she is not a goddess? Where have I said that the Vedic gods are unreal?

PURANI: Sri Aurobindo has nowhere said that; on the contrary, he has spoken of them as personalities. Chatterji hasn't read anything. In *The Life Divine* itself there is a passage on this point. (*Purani read out the passage.*)

27 JANUARY 1940

PURANI: Anilbaran was asking if a contradiction of Basanta Chatterji could be written, pointing out his mistake or his ignorance.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, that can be done.

SATYENDRA: Who is this man?

SRI AUROBINDO: He is Anilbaran's pet controversialist. (*Laughter*)

SATYENDRA: He hasn't read your *Hymns of the Atris* probably. There you have distinctly spoken about the Vedic gods.

PURANI: In *The Life Divine's* chapter on the Overmind, too.

SATYENDRA: He can be referred to that chapter.

PURANI: Better not refer him to it. He will say, "Now what is this Overmind?"

NIRODBARAN: He is sure to misunderstand it.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't know what he will not misunderstand.

NIRODBARAN: He says the Gita is Sri Aurobindo's favourite book. But the Gita also speaks of the gods.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not only the Gita, but also Sri Aurobindo speaks of them. (*Laughter*)

After the sponging Sri Aurobindo asked for the Hymns of the Atris. He said he had forgotten what he had written there and wanted to verify Satyendra's reference.

NIRODBARAN: Your critic also says that you have criticised Sayana's polytheistic interpretation of the Vedas.

SRI AUROBINDO: Where have I done so?

NIRODBARAN: He doesn't say.

PURANI: We find that you have translated most of the Suktas of the Swetashwatara Upanishad.

SRI AUROBINDO: I translated this Upanishad long ago and the book came out from somewhere. I don't remember who published it, but I know that the publisher didn't even take my permission. I translated the Swetashwatara Upanishad while I was in Bengal. The manuscript is still with me.

EVENING

SRI AUROBINDO (*before Purani and Satyendra came in*): I have read the *Hymns*. There I have distinctly said that the Vedic gods are no mere imageries but realities. I don't understand where this Basanta Chatterji found me denying them.

NIRODBARAN: Satyendra has also shown me what you have written.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't remember if I have written anything against Sayana in my introduction to *The Secret of the Veda*. I have to ask Purani.

When Purani came in, Sri Aurobindo asked him the question.

PURANI: I don't think you have written anything against Sayana's polytheism. However, I'll look up the introduction.

SRI AUROBINDO: In the *Hymns* I have clearly held the gods to be realities and I have marked two or three passages saying so.

PURANI: Going back to Armando Menezes and his work, do you know that Harin told Armando that his poetry has a mystic element? Armando replied that he wasn't aware of it.

SRI AUROBINDO: What is meant by "mystic"? If you mean something beyond the external material existence, then there are several mystic passages in his poems.

NIRODBARAN: Dilip asks whether Francis Thompson can be called a great poet.

SRI AUROBINDO: Here, again, we must ask: what is meant by "great"? At any rate, Thompson has written one great poem, "The Hound of Heaven", and he who writes a great poem is necessarily great.

NIRODBARAN: Dilip does admit that he has written a great poem.

SRI AUROBINDO: But he holds, I suppose, that the writer is still a small poet?

NIRODBARAN: No. What he wants to ascertain is whether by writing a single great poem one becomes a great poet. In that case Oscar Wilde and Chesterton are also great because they have each written a great poem.

SRI AUROBINDO: Thompson's poem is great in a peculiar way. Of course, if you take the mass of his work into account you may say he is not great. "Greatness" too can be variously defined.

NIRODBARAN: I can only say that poets like Shakespeare are great. Also Wordsworth and Shelley can be called great poets.

PURANI: Through "The Hound of Heaven" Thompson has expressed a whole life-experience and has achieved the summit of art while doing so. Considering these two points I think he must be called great.

SRI AUROBINDO: I may add that he has expressed a whole life-experience not only in an individual sense but also in a universal one. Whoever goes through the spiritual life experiences what he has expressed. And yet can one jump to an absolute assertion from single poems? As I said, greatness can be variously defined. Look at the French poet Villon. He is called great. If you take his poems one

by one he is equal in greatness to any other poet. But if you take his work in a mass you can't justify his greatness.

Petrarch has written only sonnets and these too on merely one subject. And yet he is considered a great poet and given a place next to Dante. Simonides has not a single surviving complete poem; he is known only by his fragments. But he is ranked as a great poet, second only to Pindar who is the greatest Greek lyricist. Nor has Pindar himself written very much. Sappho has come down to us in only one complete poem: the rest of her is in mere snatches. Still, she is hailed as a great poet. So there can be no fixed standard by which one can judge the greatness of a poet.

As to Thompson and Wilde and Chesterton, I believe "The Hound of Heaven" is greater than any poem by the last two.

28 JANUARY 1940

PURANI: I have read *The Secret of the Veda*. There is no pronouncement against Sayana. I don't know if Nolini's introduction to his own *madhuchhanda* has any reference to him. (*Sri Aurobindo read the introduction.*)

Abhay has come; he had to go to Hyderabad and through the intercession of Sir Akbar managed to obtain the release of two local Arya Samaj prisoners. The Nizam by his reserve power refused to release them as he feared that they, being local people, might start trouble again. Sir Akbar told him through his secretary that if he didn't release them the people would again start the agitation and Sir Akbar shouldn't be held responsible. The Nizam had to give way.

NIRODBARAN: What about the Nizam's reforms? When do they come into operation?

PURANI: I don't know. He seems to be thinking of an independent kingdom and of being a king like the king of England.

SRI AUROBINDO: He wants to include Berar also—it seems very easy!

PURANI: He has plans of conquering India too after the British have left.

SRI AUROBINDO: But he seems to have said that the native states wouldn't exist for long if India got Dominion Status. In any case their existence is now at an end. He is a man who has moods; so he may say different things in different moods.

PURANI (*showing a book*): Abhay has given this Vedic concordance to us. A man is bringing out the Vedas at a very cheap rate – five rupees for the three Vedas.

SRI AUROBINDO: We should get a copy then.

PURANI: He will send it, I think.

SRI AUROBINDO: To me or to the library?

PURANI: To you.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then it won't go to the library. (*Laughter*)

PURANI: The library doesn't need it. Who will read such books? Those who are interested have copies – like Vedavrata and myself.

NIRODBARAN: Why? We all may read it some day.

SRI AUROBINDO: After the supramental?

NIRODBARAN: Yes.

SATYENDRA: A remote chance.

NIRODBARAN: Everything is remote. The divine realisation is no less so.

SATYENDRA: I am not concerned with these things or what will happen in the next life.

NIRODBARAN: I am not talking of the next life.

SATYENDRA: If the sun burns out after millions of years as scientists say, it doesn't interest me. I am concerned with this life.

SRI AUROBINDO: The stars may collide. The astronomers are always predicting that.

NIRODBARAN: You seem to mean that the divine realisation is quite possible in this life.

PURANI: Everything is possible.

NIRODBARAN: Then why not the supermind?

SRI AUROBINDO: You mean you are within reach of the Divine?

Satyendra couldn't give an answer and began to smile.

PURANI: I heard of a *chhaya-jyotish* (shadow-astrologer) who by measuring the shadow of a person and then correlating the signs, can exactly predict the future. A friend of mine had the experience of such a prediction.

SRI AUROBINDO: The *bhri-gu-jyotish* also, by studying the lines of the hands, can predict things. The pattern of the lines of the thumb seem to indicate the individuality of persons and no two

patterns are alike. I showed my hand twice or thrice but the readings about the future didn't come true.

NIRODBARAN (*after a lull*): Tagore will present a copy of his entire works to the Ashram. Sisir Mitra told him that since he gets a copy of every new book of yours, he should also present us with his own books.

SRI AUROBINDO: Does he get my books?

NIRODBARAN: Yes, the Arya Publishing House sends them to him.

PURANI: It is a matter of common courtesy to return the compliment.

SRI AUROBINDO: You can't expect uncommon people to act in the common way.

PURANI: Some astrologers have said that Gandhi will see India realise her freedom during his lifetime.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is quite possible. If by freedom is meant Dominion Status, India can get it tomorrow if Jinnah comes round.

NIRODBARAN: It seems Gandhi is ready to accept Dominion Status.

SRI AUROBINDO: Of course. That is common sense. If after Dominion Status you can secede from the British Government at any time and thus get without fighting what you want, what is the sense of fighting now? Only the defence question and British interests will remain. After a few years, when these problems have been solved, you can get rid of the British Government.

NIRODBARAN: As Ireland did?

PURANI: Yes. See how England can't force Ireland to enter the war. The Irish are quite independent, though so near to England.

SRI AUROBINDO: Only, there is a Northern Ireland there. That is due to people – the Southerners – who didn't want to join the British Empire. Otherwise the British Government would have been willing to concede full Dominion Status to Ireland as one whole. In India, if Jinnah had had the good sense to come to an agreement with the Congress, the British Government would have granted Dominion Status. The real problem then would have been after Dominion Status, what?

NIRODBARAN: Why?

SRI AUROBINDO: There would have been a fight between the communities, and also the extreme Socialists would have had to be fought.

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SRI AUROBINDO (*addressing Purani*): I have been reading a book of prophecy on the war.

PURANI: Prophecy by studying planets?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, the author says that there is going to be peace but it won't be a satisfactory peace. Germany will fare badly, Hitler will go down and the Third Reich will come to power. Peace is likely to come by March, it will certainly make headway by September. Then he says that Stalin will win. After that he says catastrophic things will happen. There will be terrible destruction—communism will be established everywhere, in England, France, Germany. In England there will be two more dynasties of kings. There will be two more Popes. A new race will come but only after a long age. The time-factor, he says, is problematic. Calculating according to the human year, the astrologers can only speak of events near at hand; far-off events can be predicted accurately only according to the year of the gods. This year of the gods, the author says, is well known to the Hindus in India and by that calculation things have always been correctly predicted.

At the end of the book he brings in my name and says that I have also said that after the violence, destruction and storm, a new race will come.

SATYENDRA: He has quoted just what suits him.

SRI AUROBINDO: Do you know anything about the year of the gods?

PURANI: No, I will ask Kapali if he knows anything.

SATYENDRA: Does he say anything about America?

SRI AUROBINDO: He says America will also be involved in the war.

SATYENDRA: There won't be any communism there?

SRI AUROBINDO: No, they will have a mystic evolution. This man brings out a book of prophecy every year and sends me a copy every time. He is a friend of Maurice Magre. He says that in this dark world I am the only one who can be called a real man. (*Sri Aurobindo said this laughing.*)

SATYENDRA: *The Life Divine* has come out at the right time then.

NIRODBARAN: Your books have a good sale.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, not only my books; the Ramakrishna Mission books also are selling well now.

NIRODBARAN: But according to this astrologer the supramental race is still far away.

SATYENDRA (*smiling*): I told you so.

PURANI: He doesn't speak of the supramental race.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, by the new race he means a being more highly evolved than man.

NIRODBARAN: Satyendra's prediction is correct.

SRI AUROBINDO: But he doesn't say on what basis he makes that prediction.

SATYENDRA: By looking at ourselves.

PURANI: England and France speak of attacking Germany from the south.

SRI AUROBINDO: Through Rumania?

PURANI: Yes.

SRI AUROBINDO: They will have to violate the Rumanians' neutrality. Even then it won't be enough. They will have to pass through Bulgaria also.

PURANI: But if Rumania is attacked by Russia the allies may help Rumania.

SRI AUROBINDO: In that case they will have to take in Turkey. Turkey is not willing to fight Russia.

PURANI: England is building a naval Maginot Line.

SRI AUROBINDO: For what? Against German marines?

PURANI: Perhaps to prevent the landing of troops in England.

SRI AUROBINDO: Troops?

PURANI: Or to prevent an attack by the German Navy.

SRI AUROBINDO: The German Navy can't attack. If it comes out into the open, it will be smashed. And the Russian Navy is also nothing to speak of. No, it may be to prevent the laying of mines by German aeroplanes.

We had with us Krishnaprem's letter to Dilip on Grace versus Tapasya. Nirodbaran was looking up a word in the dictionary.

SATYENDRA: Do you want to know the meaning of "androgynous" in Krishnaprem's statement: "Male and female are the two elements of our androgynous psyche"?

SRI AUROBINDO (*looking at Satyendra*): How do you feel about it?

SATYENDRA: It may be true. Receptiveness, it seems, characterises the soul and that is a feminine quality. Krishnaprem says that Newman refers to the soul as a woman. Krishnaprem also speaks of the Vaishnavas trying to identify themselves with the Gopis in order to love Krishna.

SRI AUROBINDO: The soul, he says, may be considered a marriage of receptiveness and Tapasya—it is a married couple. The Upanishad also speaks of *eko vaśi* (one controller).

PURANI: Can receptiveness be said to be the same as Grace?

SRI AUROBINDO: No, Grace is conditioned by receptiveness.

PURANI: What Krishnaprem means by receptiveness appears to be the same as Bhakti, devotion.

SRI AUROBINDO: People who follow the path of love and Bhakti rely most on Grace.

PURANI: We hear that Grace is always present. Whenever one opens to it, one gets the response.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, you have to open to it.

NIRODBARAN: Krishnaprem makes a distinction between power, which is the reward of Tapasya, and Grace, which is the reward of receptiveness. Does it mean that only receptive persons get Grace?

SRI AUROBINDO: How can you have Grace without receptiveness? Even if there is Tapasya, the result doesn't depend on Tapasya. As they say, only the Grace of Brahman can give the result.

PURANI: The Upanishad also says: "To him whom the Spirit chooses, He reveals Himself."

NIRODBARAN: The Buddhists don't believe in Grace.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. They say you have to do everything by yourself. They don't believe in the soul, so male-female doesn't count.

CHAMPAKLAL: If a man is not receptive, the Grace won't act?

SRI AUROBINDO: It acts in order to make him receptive.

CHAMPAKLAL: He receives the Grace then?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, but it doesn't descend into him.

CHAMPAKLAL: How is that?

NIRODBARAN: It means it acts only from above.

SATYENDRA: From behind also, till he gets an opening, and then it descends.

DR. BECHARLAL: Just as, whether a man is conscious or not, the Agni burns in him, doesn't Grace act irrespective of everything?

SRI AUROBINDO: It doesn't follow that there is no difference in its action in a conscious man and an unconscious one.

NIRODBARAN: You mean there is a difference in the degree of action? A man who is more conscious receives more?

SRI AUROBINDO: Of course. That goes without saying. Otherwise there would be no difference between a worldly man and a seeker. Grace could as well make the worldly man realise the Divine and it would act equally in both. As the consciousness increases, one becomes more and more receptive and the progress also is quicker.

NIRODBARAN: How does it act more effectively? Because it creates faith?

SRI AUROBINDO: It acts in every way.

CHAMPAKLAL: There are some people who have no faith in you or the Mother. Even then they receive something from a flower sent to them.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, even if there is no faith, Grace can act. You know about St. Paul. He used to persecute the Christians. Once in the midst of his persecution he suddenly got a vision and was converted. Sarat Chatterji had no faith; yet he was saved twice by a flower and he came to believe and feel that there was something. Everybody is receptive in some way or other.

CHAMPAKLAL: Sometimes one finds that an outsider who has come here feels or receives something from a flower while a sadhak doesn't. Does it mean that the outsider is more receptive?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, in that particular respect.

PURANI: Krishnaprem's distinction is rather strange, because Tantra implies just the opposite of what he says. Tantra makes the female the active part.

SRI AUROBINDO: There are two ways of seeing it. In one, the masculine is active and the feminine is passive, while, in the other, Prakriti, the feminine, is the executive force and Purusha, the masculine, is the witness.

SATYENDRA: In commenting on the Veda you have interpreted the Supreme as male, female and neither.

SRI AUROBINDO (*laughing*): Yes—the Gita also makes the Divine appear variously: the Divine says, "I am in everybody",

and then, "Everybody is in me", and finally, "Everybody is in me but I am not in them."

SATYENDRA: Krishnaprem's view is that one element should not be subordinate to the other.

SRI AUROBINDO: That doesn't rule out the fact that one element may be predominant and outweigh the other.

NIRODBARAN: I somehow don't like the clear-cut distinction made by him. He says that the flow of power comes to make the Tapasya. But that itself is due to the receptivity of the one who does the Tapasya and consequently due to Grace.

SATYENDRA: He himself doesn't say that it is the whole truth.

SRI AUROBINDO: No, it is not the whole truth; it contains only an element. The truth is infinite, and Krishnaprem states one aspect of the infinite truth. Infinite factors enter into it and there are infinite ways of action.

Krishnaprem has objected to the word Grace as taken and understood by the Christians. The Christians say that nothing can be done or achieved except by Grace and they leave everything to it.

EVENING

The morning talk did not quite satisfy Nirodbaran: there were still some points to be cleared up, especially regarding Grace versus effort. Nirodbaran told Champaklal that he would raise the topic again and inform Sri Aurobindo that Champaklal also did not believe in Tapasya. Champaklal said that Nirodbaran could tell this to Sri Aurobindo but only when Champaklal was present. In the evening Champaklal himself was in the mood to ask something and everybody saw him slowly approaching Sri Aurobindo; his expression made Nirodbaran laugh.

SRI AUROBINDO: What is the matter?

NIRODBARAN: Champaklal is going to ask something.

CHAMPAKLAL: No, no. (*Immediately afterwards*) Can a person receive something without his knowledge?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes; man doesn't know everything. He doesn't know what he is or can be.

CHAMPAKLAL: Sometimes is it not better that he doesn't know?

SRI AUROBINDO (*smiling and with a stress*): Sometimes.

Later, after Purani had come, there was an expectation that Nirodbaran would ask a question. All were looking at one another. The situation was so funny that Nirodbaran burst into laughter.

PURANI: Nirodbaran is on the point of asking some question.

SRI AUROBINDO: Is it a formidable question?

NIRODBARAN: Oh, no. But did you say in the morning that the female element Krishnaprem speaks of corresponds or is equivalent to love, devotion, etc.?

SRI AUROBINDO: No, I didn't say that. Why should it be so?

SATYENDRA: Yes, why? Doesn't Sachchidananda have love?

NIRODBARAN: As Krishnaprem speaks of the Vaishnavas' self-identification with the Gopis, I thought it comes to that. Otherwise, why does he associate receptiveness with the female element?

SRI AUROBINDO: Because the female is passive, dependent—though she may be passively active! The male is active, strong and self-reliant. That, at any rate, is what the word “male” suggests in English.

SATYENDRA: Receptiveness includes these things and is a way of representing the inner life and working.

PURANI: Even if you accept that, you can't say that the male aspect is without love.

SRI AUROBINDO: The male aspect also loves – it is devoted to a woman – but in a different way. Similarly the female has other aspects than love.

PURANI: We have to consider the Tantric idea of Shakti.

SRI AUROBINDO: Quite so.

NIRODBARAN: At the end of his letter Krishnaprem says that both the elements should be equal; one mustn't stress one aspect more. Is this true?

SRI AUROBINDO: What do you mean by “true”? If you mean true as a fact, then it is not. But he says “should be.”

NIRODBARAN: But is the idea correct?

PURANI: Perhaps he means that in an ideal case there would be equality.

NIRODBARAN: But why? There may be people, even if exceptional, who don't believe in the male element, that is, in Tapasya. For instance, Girish Ghosh refused point-blank to take Ramakrishna's name when asked to. He said, “I can't. You have to

do everything for me." And, as far as I know, there was a great change in his life.

PURANI: I have heard that he wasn't able to give himself completely to Ramakrishna.

SRI AUROBINDO: You mean that he made some personal effort?

PURANI: He found at the end that he hadn't left everything to Ramakrishna.

SRI AUROBINDO: That means he put in some effort of his own.

NIRODBARAN: I haven't heard this.

SATYENDRA: Then he must have had entire faith in Ramakrishna.

NIRODBARAN: Yes. So I say that if one has a living faith, one is not required to do Tapasya. Isn't that true?

SRI-AUROBINDO: Yes.

SATYENDRA: But aren't some effort and straining inevitable?

NIRODBARAN: As for myself, I have found that many things have dropped away—maybe temporarily—from me without my making any effort worth the name.

SRI AUROBINDO: But you wanted sincerely to drop them.

NIRODBARAN: Yes, I did, but without making any effort. So I say it was due to Grace.

SRI AUROBINDO: That may be so in your case.

NIRODBARAN: No. In many cases I have known things to have happened in this way.

PURANI: There was some effort. Only, you can say that the effort was negligible in proportion to the success.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is not a question of proportion. One may have put in a great deal of effort and yet there could be no result because there was not a complete and total sincerity. On the other hand, when the result comes with little effort it is because the whole being has responded—and Grace found it possible to act. All the same, effort is a contributory factor. Sometimes one goes on making an effort with no result or even the condition becomes worse. And when one has given it up, one finds suddenly that the result has come. It may be that the effort was keeping up the resistance too. And when the effort is given up, the resistance says, "This fellow has given up effort. What is the use of resisting any more?" (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: Champaklal also doesn't believe in Tapasya.

CHAMPAKLAL: By that I don't mean one must indulge in the lower nature. But otherwise I don't believe in Tapasya — it's true.

SRI AUROBINDO: But when one wants something, one has to concentrate one's energies on a particular point.

NIRODBARAN: That, of course; but is that the sense of the word Tapasya? By "Tapasya" we mean something done against one's nature, something unpleasant and requiring effort.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is the popular idea of Tapasya. People think it means standing on their heads, sitting on nails, etc. It is not the correct idea. The correct idea is: concentration of all one's energies in order to gain a particular object or aim which one wants, and this is not always unpleasant or difficult.

PURANI: Why does Nirodbaran think that effort is always associated with struggle, unpleasantness?

SRI AUROBINDO: Tapasya can surely be done for something one likes or wishes to have.

NIRODBARAN: But when I sit in meditation, for instance, I have to make an effort to gather up my scattered mind which is moving about. And it is an unpleasant laborious effort.

SRI AUROBINDO: But something in you wants to do it. Otherwise you wouldn't do it. You gather up your energies and put them on a particular point.

NIRODBARAN: Yes, but even for that gathering up, some effort is necessary, which is not always easy.

SRI AUROBINDO: When you want a thing, effort will always be there to get it. It is more a concentration of energy, I should say.

CHAMPAKLAL: A man may find it easy to meditate for many hours.

SRI AUROBINDO: But there also you have to concentrate all your energy. A man who is playing cricket has to concentrate on the ball, the bat, the wicket, etc., gathering up all his energies from other fields.

NIRODBARAN: That is comparatively easy because he finds interest in the game.

PURANI: But it wouldn't be easy for a man who doesn't like cricket but likes hockey.

NIRODBARAN: A sportsman can shift his interest without much difficulty.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is said in the Upanishad that God created the world by Tapas. I believe he didn't find it difficult, though he had to make an effort. (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: If you bring in God, we mortals have no chance.

PURANI: That is only an illustration.

SRI AUROBINDO: I myself have to make an effort to read and interpret the Vedas, but I don't find it unpleasant; another may. (*To Nirodbaran*) When you write poetry, you have to make an effort, but it is not unpleasant.

NIRODBARAN: Sometimes I am on the verge of kicking away pencil and book.

SATYENDRA: There are instances in literature to explain some points about concentration of energy. For example, a woman goes about doing various works while she keeps a pitcher on her head. Her inner mind is concentrated on the pitcher though the outer is otherwise engaged.

NIRODBARAN: But she had to practise keeping the pitcher on her head.

SATYENDRA: In the case of the Gopis, it was not that they had to make a difficult effort to remember Krishna: they spontaneously fell in love with him and something in them was on fire. So when something in the being is touched the concentration doesn't require labour or effort.

By the way, at times one may make an effort for a thing, but the result comes in quite a different way.

SRI AUROBINDO: That very often happens. In my case, Lele wanted me to get devotion, love and hear the inner voice, but instead I got the experience of the silent Brahman.

SATYENDRA: And he prayed and prayed with incantations, etc., to pull you up to the other condition. (*Laughter*)

SRI AUROBINDO: No rigid rule is possible to make in these matters.

NIRODBARAN: That is why I don't quite like the last part of Krishnaprem's letter where he says that male and female must be equal and that one can't be without the other, and such things.

SRI AUROBINDO: He says "should be", not "must be".

NIRODBARAN: But why should it be?

SRI AUROBINDO: That is his point of view. He is free to hold it.

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NIRODBARAN: X was converted from Tapasya to Grace by the effectivity of Grace in stopping his chess-playing! He says that all his resolutions were of no avail and so he prayed and prayed one night for help to stop it. From the next day till now he has played chess only two or three times. The result, he says, can't but be due to Grace.

SRI AUROBINDO (*enjoying the story*): The salvation from chess was the starting point of his belief in Grace! Is that the only instance he has had?

NIRODBARAN: He particularly remembers this one. Now to return to the subject of poetry. Did you not say that, taken poem by poem, Villon's work is as great as any other poet's while, taken in a mass, one can't justify the comparison?

SRI AUROBINDO: I didn't speak about mass. Villon is considered a great poet in France and certainly he is the greatest that preceded Corneille and Racine.

NIRODBARAN: But I thought you said that his poems taken singly are as great as those of any other poet.

SRI AUROBINDO: I didn't put it in that way, but that is the impression he creates. (*After a pause*) His life is very interesting. He was a murderer, robber, vagabond. It was almost his profession. He was a profligate of the worst type throughout his life, belonging to the lowest criminal class.

NIRODBARAN: Maupassant also was like that?

SRI AUROBINDO: Like that?

NIRODBARAN: I mean a loose character.

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh, many writers are pretty loose in character.

NIRODBARAN: Dilip says his idea of the greatness of a poet is still hazy. He wants to know if by writing a single great poem one can deserve to be called a great poet.

SRI AUROBINDO: Haven't we already dealt with this question? All depends on the poem. If a poet has written a few perfect lyrics he can be called great. Francis Thompson's "Hound of Heaven" makes him great. We spoke also of Sappho and Simonides.

NIRODBARAN: Yes, I told Dilip about Sappho and about the fragments Simonides wrote.

SRI AUROBINDO: Simonides did not write fragments, but only fragments are left of what he wrote. And from them one can judge that he is a great poet.

NIRODBARAN: Dilip says these are Greek poets and we know nothing of Greek, so we can't judge them.

SRI AUROBINDO: But we know about them and by that we can call them great.

NIRODBARAN: Now take the Bengali poet Govind Das, he says. His poem beginning, "I love you with your bone and flesh," is regarded as a great poem. It has much power but this is the only poem that is great in his works. The others are no good. Can we call him a great poet?

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh, that Govind Das! I have read some of his poems. But I don't think this poem of his is as great as "The Hound of Heaven."

NIRODBARAN: When I said that Petrarch is considered second in greatness to Dante, Dilip replied, "That may be, but surely there is a vast difference between their greatnesses."

SRI AUROBINDO: Still, both are great.

NIRODBARAN: The difference is that Dante has reached a very great height which Petrarch hasn't.

SRI AUROBINDO: Petrarch is a great poet all the same. There are people who hold that Petrarch has a greater perfection of form than Dante.

NIRODBARAN: But, say if Tagore had written only "Urvasi" and nothing else, could he have been called a great poet?

SRI AUROBINDO: "Urvasi" is not such a great poem that it could take its place in world literature.

NIRODBARAN: Dilip's idea of a great poet is that he must have what he calls "girth" (*parishar*), wideness, volume, just as Wordsworth and Shelley have.

SRI AUROBINDO: Poetry can also have height, depth and intensity: it need not have "girth". Besides, nowadays people consider that mass, volume, is a heavy baggage that weighs poetry down.

NIRODBARAN: Dilip says he does not know how to define greatness but one can say that Shakespeare, Dante, Wordsworth, Shelley are great and one should reserve the epithet for such men only.

SRI AUROBINDO: Shakespeare and Dante are among the greatest. A poet like Browning has plenty of mass, volume,

“girth”, as you say, but he is a different case. Once he used to be rated a great poet.

NIRODBARAN: Browning?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. Both Browning and Tennyson ranked as great—they were just below Shakespeare and Milton. But can Browning be taken to be a greater poet than Thompson? Has he any single poem as great as “The Hound of Heaven”?

NIRODBARAN: Satyendra Dutt was also called a great poet once.

SRI AUROBINDO: Is he equal to Browning?

NIRODBARAN: Dilip says English critics don't think of Thompson as a great poet, certainly not as being on a level with Wordsworth and Shelley.

SRI AUROBINDO: Who are these English critics? Wordsworth and Shelley have an established reputation. I consider Thompson a great poet because he has expressed an aspect of Truth with such force and richness as no other poet before him has done, and he has dealt with one of the greatest subjects the human mind can take up. But what is the general opinion of his other poems?

NIRODBARAN: I don't know. Dilip doesn't find much in them. Thompson is known only by this one poem, he says.

PURANI: His other poems also are very good.

SRI AUROBINDO: Amal also says that several of Thompson's poems are original and inspired.

NIRODBARAN: Apropos of Madhusudan you seem to have written to Dilip that to be a great poet power is not enough.

SRI AUROBINDO: It depends on the content of the power. The subject Madhusudan deals with is poor in substance. I don't say he is not a great poet, but with his power of style, expression and rhythm he should have got the first rank like Milton, but he didn't because of the lack of substance. He has said things in a great way but what he has said is not great.

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PURANI: I asked Kapali if he knew anything about the year of the gods. He says he can't exactly make out what is meant and doubts if it was Indian at all and wonders whether the asttologer has not simply put India's name to it. He will look up Varahamihira.

SRI AUROBINDO: No, it can't simply be imaginary because the astrologer has given exact and precise details and says that things have come out true according to it.

PURANI: Science has discovered many new planets now which weren't known before and couldn't be used by astrologers.

SRI AUROBINDO: He speaks of Uranus as well as Neptune; there is one Kutsa which I haven't heard of. But he has placed all these new planets in his calculations. Uranus seems to be the planet of dictators. Stalin is one and Daladier also.

PURANI: Daladier also?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, he is now coming forth as a dictator and is practically one.

PURANI: Kapali says that instead of asking him you could yourself say something about the time of the year of the gods.

SRI AUROBINDO: The gods perhaps don't know anything about it.

SATYENDRA: They may have a different time-value.

SRI AUROBINDO: Based on astrological data perhaps, and so it is the astrologers who should know about it.

NIRODBARAN: Nishikanto had another letter from Tagore in reply to his. Nishikanto, advised by Dilip, wrote to Tagore informing him of the refusal of Viswa Bharati to publish his book.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why? Tagore didn't know about it?

NIRODBARAN: They say he may not have as it is under the management of the committee with which Tagore has nothing to do.

SRI AUROBINDO: What does he write?

NIRODBARAN: Tagore says the same thing—that he has nothing to do with them. Any publication depends on financial considerations. They don't want to incur any loss over any book and that is why they refused Nishikanto's book. The next point he writes about is that Nishikanto, being a Yogi, shouldn't mind if some people don't like his poems; different people have different tastes; it is foolishness to go out with a stick and fight with people who don't appreciate one's poetry. He says he has had to face people's criticism.

SRI AUROBINDO: He felt very bitter, didn't he?

NIRODBARAN: Yes, he admits that. By the way, I had a vision in which you were giving a hypothetical medical guidance. In meditation I was discussing with somebody the diagnosis of a case.

Suddenly I heard your voice saying, "Are you sure it is not typhoid?" There was no possibility of typhoid but because of your suggestion I had to think about it.

SRI AUROBINDO: Was it a vision or a dream?

NIRODBARAN: I don't know; it may have been either but I heard your voice distinctly.

SRI AUROBINDO: When was it?

NIRODBARAN: While you were walking. Does it indicate your possible future guidance or any cases coming?

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't know; it may possibly be guidance.

PURANI: Champaklal had a vision.

CHAMPAKLAL: I saw Nirodbaran meditating under a canopy in a Buddha-like posture. Does it mean anything?

SRI AUROBINDO: I can't say.

CHAMPAKLAL: I also saw him doing pranam, and you patting him.

SRI AUROBINDO: Do you see many visions of him?

CHAMPAKLAL: I have had three or four.

While Sri Aurobindo was lying in bed, Nirodbaran read out Tagore's letter.

SRI AUROBINDO: It seems Nishikanto was vexed because his book was not published.

NIRODBARAN: Nishikanto told me he didn't write about any vexation but he must have been vexed and a little of it must have found expression in the letter.

1 FEBRUARY 1940

PURANI: I spoke to Kapali yesterday, and gave him the data from that book. He says the calculation of time according to the year of the gods must be different – 365 days of the human year would be one day of theirs or something like that. Then Kapali says that these calculations have been based on newly discovered planets which were unknown before. So how could any calculations have been made using the year of the gods when these planets didn't exist?

SRI AUROBINDO: But the principle was there. They have introduced these planets now. We must also do the same. These

calculations aren't based on astrology but on prophecy and the prophecies also are based on the old Book of Nostradamus. The Mother has seen this book in the original form and she says that anything could be made out of anything from it.

PURANI: As from the Rigveda?

NIRODBARAN (to Satyendra): So you see.

SATYENDRA: See what?

NIRODBARAN: You said the Supramental is still far off.

PURANI: It may be tomorrow.

SATYENDRA: How? What are you driving at?

NIRODBARAN: This man's prophecy about the new race isn't correct, as anything can be made out of anything, and you said that by his reading the Supermind is far off. That is what I am driving at. (*Sri Aurobindo was laughing all the time.*)

SATYENDRA: It may be possible for one man but not for the race:

SRI AUROBINDO: For the race he says a millennium.

SATYENDRA: But according to this man, our continent will be submerged under water.

SRI AUROBINDO: Like Atlantis? And your intuition of brinjal and typhoid won't have any chance. (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: Quite welcome.

PURANI: He has brought out new planets: Neptune, Uranus.

SRI AUROBINDO: And Pluto. Uranus, he says, is more psychic in nature.

NIRODBARAN: How can that be when Stalin is under Uranus?

SRI AUROBINDO: Why not? Dictators sometimes bring about profound changes. Daladier also. It is the planet of the dictators.

PURANI: Mussolini too.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes; this astrologer is impressed by Mussolini, and is a violent anti-communist. But for England to become communist would be a tremendous change as well as for the Scandinavian countries.

PURANI (*after some time*): Anilbaran wants to know if he should reply to Basanta Chatterji.

SRI AUROBINDO (*after a short pause*): Yes, he can write that Sri Aurobindo hasn't denied the existence of the gods; on the contrary he has affirmed it. He has said that in the Vedas they are not psychological images but realities. Chatterji has misinterpreted Sri Aurobindo. Anilbaran can also write that the Vedic hymns have

both inner and outer interpretations. According to the inner esoteric interpretation, one may speak of the gods as well as of principles. If I speak of Agni as Tapas¹ it is as a psychological principle. It doesn't mean that by being a god of Tapas he is no more a god of the fire of sacrifice. Agni is taken as a psychological principle as well as a god.

(*After a while*) And he can also quote the Chandi where it says the goddess inhabits all creatures in the form of benevolence. It doesn't mean that because she inhabits them in the form of benevolence she is not a goddess. As a psychological image she is described in the form of benevolence. Similarly, Agni can take the form of Tapas.

He can also say that Sri Aurobindo hasn't criticised Sayana's polytheistic interpretation of the Vedas but rather his predominantly ritualistic interpretation. And he can point out that Sri Aurobindo has no Western stamp in his interpretation. At the same time Sri Aurobindo speaks of one Supreme God from whom all other gods have emanated.

PURANI (*after a long break in the talk*): In Gurukul they have an exercise or drill of laughter. When students are asked to laugh, they have to laugh.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not cry? In Baroda the military department instituted a drill of urination. (*Laughter*) As soon as the order was passed, everybody would urinate together.

EVENING

PURANI: J has sent a letter saying that he was arrested by the Government because of his anti-war pamphlet and that he was released on personal security.

SRI AUROBINDO: What a genius for getting into trouble!

2 FEBRUARY 1940

PURANI: Somebody from Oundh is trying to bring out the Vedas, classifying the Suktas according to hymns and also according to the Rishis addressed.

¹ Tapas: concentrated energy.

SRI AUROBINDO: That was my idea too. I wanted to translate and arrange the Suktas in that way.

EVENING

PURANI: Abhay was telling me that in his presence an Arya Samaj leader had a talk with Gandhi about the Hindu-Muslim problem. Gandhi and other Congress leaders seem to have realised that these Muslims are becoming more and more threatening and it would be good for the Hindus also to organise themselves. Gandhi seems to have said to this leader that instead of sitting idle and being beaten by the Muslims they should also organise and fight. "If you can't accept non-violence as your principle I have never asked you to accept defeat. Instead of sitting like cowards, violence is better."

SRI AUROBINDO: The leader should have said, "It will help our cause if you do some violence." (*Laughter*)

PURANI: C. R. also gave him the same advice; only, he asked him not to mention his name. (*Laughter*)

3 FEBRUARY 1940

PURANI: Many people are coming from Bengal for the darshan and many Zamindars too.

NIRODBARAN: Zamindars? Only in name, perhaps.

SRI AUROBINDO: Kiran S. Roy is coming. Suren Ghose seems to be arranging for seven persons to accompany him. I don't know how many will actually come.

NIRODBARAN: I am glad that Bengal is turning now to Sri Aurobindo.

PURANI: How do you mean? You can say the "non-public" is coming now.

NIRODBARAN: Charupada and Sotuda will be very glad.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why?

NIRODBARAN: Because they were worrying about what would happen to Bengal after this Muslim Raj.

SRI AUROBINDO: What will happen to Bengal depends on Charupada and Sotuda.

NIRODBARAN: Anyhow, it is the effect of the Muslim Raj.

PURANI: It seems Huq is trying to come to an agreement with the Bengal Hindu leaders.

SRI AUROBINDO: He is not out to get Muslim Raj?

PURANI: He may have realised that it wouldn't do. It seems that among the Muslims there is a Socialist party which says that the problem is not at all religious but economic.

SRI AUROBINDO: One can look at any question as one likes. (*Laughter*).

PURANI: Professor Kabir and others are for an agreement with the Hindus. The Viceroy is seeing Jinnah on the 6th. It is not known whether the Viceroy has called him or Jinnah himself has asked to see him.

SRI AUROBINDO: The Viceroy must have called him.

PURANI: It would be better if Sikandar Hyat Khan were to be with him.

SRI AUROBINDO: The Viceroy has already seen him. The Viceroy has some plan perhaps. He may be coming to a compromise with Gandhi and wants to warn Jinnah or tell him to square up.

SATYENDRA: It is strange that Jinnah has never said what he wants.

SRI AUROBINDO: Perhaps he doesn't know it himself—unless he wants to be a Minister.

NIRODBARAN: And that he can't say publicly.

SRI AUROBINDO: But it is clear what he wants. He wants either a Muslim half of India over which he can rule or some arrangement by which he can rule at Delhi. In that way Sikandar is clever. His scheme looks democratic and at the same time will satisfy what he wants.

PURANI: Sir Raja Ali is angry with Gandhi because Gandhi says most of the Muslims were originally Hindus. Raja Ali says it is insulting.

SRI AUROBINDO (*laughing*): But it is true. Most of the Muslims were Hindus.

PURANI: Raja Ali says the Muslims are democratic.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is a different story. It does not exclude the fact that they were Hindus.

PURANI: No. From Shah Jehan onwards a new relationship began between Muslims and Hindus.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. Dara, Shah Jehan's son, was almost a Hindu.

PURANI: One Dr. Kantilal has asked what one should do, and how to become fit in order to come here.

SRI AUROBINDO: He can do anything that would make him fit. (*Laughter*)

PURANI: No, he wants some guidance or direction.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is another matter. He wanted to "become" something. If he wants guidance, then consecration and quietude of mind.

PURANI: I shall write that to him.

SATYENDRA: I know him intimately. He came here once. He wanted advice from me, but as I kept silent he wrote to Purani. He has been in contact with many Yogis but remains unsatisfied. He has read the *Arya* too.

CHAMPAKLAL: Pujalal was saying that Parvati, worshipping the sun by gazing at it, obtained Shiva. How is it she didn't go blind by gazing at the sun?

SRI AUROBINDO: Why should she go blind?

CHAMPAKLAL: We have a saying that by gazing at the sun one goes blind.

PURANI: Because of its strong rays, especially at midday.

SRI AUROBINDO: If you start by gazing at midday you will go blind.

CHAMPAKLAL: Is that a symbolic sun at which one has to gaze?

SRI AUROBINDO: No; one can gaze at the physical sun by practising gradually, little by little. I asked R to practise. He said, "Oh, I will go blind!" But I didn't go blind.

CHAMPAKLAL: You also practised it?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. Of course everyone can't do it.

PURANI: One has to start with the morning sun. I could gaze for about three hours.

EVENING

CHAMPAKLAL: Pujalal was asking if the light of the sun can help one spiritually.

SRI AUROBINDO: Spiritually? It can help indirectly.

CHAMPAKLAL: He was also asking what effect the practice of eating leaves, fasting, etc., can have.

SRI AUROBINDO: They help one to get mastery over the body and will.

CHAMPAKLAL: And does the light of the sun also help physically?

SRI AUROBINDO: That is Agarwal's department. (*Laughter*) It is a yogic practice. Of course, it does not give you the knowledge of the Brahman but it helps indirectly, as I said, by preparing you for it.

PURANI: An advocate from Calcutta was angry with Nolini because he wasn't given a room to stay in the Ashram.

SRI AUROBINDO: Did he think it was a free hotel?

PURANI: Afterwards Y met him and explained to him that this Ashram is not like others. So he had no reason to be angry with Nolini. Y was on the point of becoming angry with the advocate because he flared up against Nolini.

Purani read out a fine joke from the Indian Express which Sri Aurobindo enjoyed very much.

SRI AUROBINDO (*replying in the same vein*): You saw the article about Hitler's secret weapon? Somebody writes that Hitler will drop gas bombs on England and people will fall asleep for a fortnight. When they wake up they will find themselves already invaded by Germany! (*Laughter*)

PURANI: And the German invaders won't fall asleep by the effect of the gas?

SATYENDRA: The descent of Supermind will be like that. Nirodbaran will fall asleep and on waking up he will see that it has descended.

NIRODBARAN: And that Satyendra is supramentalised!

SRI AUROBINDO: Or it may be like the case of Haranath.

SATYENDRA: That was really remarkable. The colour of Haranath's skin changed during a serious illness when he was lying unconscious; his companions thought he was dead and started arranging for his funeral.

4 FEBRUARY 1940

NIRODBARAN: Anilbaran has forwarded a letter from some Rajkumar Bhattacharya of Dacca, who seems to be a permanent invalid from asthma and bronchitis and has no energy left for

sadhana. He has half a dozen children. His wife died last year. He says that strangely enough he didn't cough a single time while writing the letter.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then he can go on writing such letters. But why did he spend all his energy in creating and rearing children, so that none is left for sadhana?

NIRODBARAN: Do you think birth control would have helped? People say birth control has no religious sanction. Children are supposed to be given by God.

SRI AUROBINDO: So is asthma then. Why take any treatment for it?

NIRODBARAN: Birth control is an artificial means. Gandhi is against it.

SRI AUROBINDO: I know. But civilisation is also artificial, and even Gandhi's loin-cloth. What do you say?

NIRODBARAN: But the loin-cloth is such a small artificiality. Gandhi says one should practise self-control instead of birth control. The latter is likely to create more indulgence.

SRI AUROBINDO: Of course if one can exercise self-control, it is best. But why didn't this man do that instead of producing six children and causing the death of his wife? Birth control is not creating more indulgence in Europe. Indulgence in which respect? Legitimate or illegitimate?

NIRODBARAN: Even in legitimate relationships, it is said that birth control will remove the restraint imposed on people by the fear of having a large family.

SRI AUROBINDO: Does Gandhi say that?

NIRODBARAN: I don't know precisely, but he says that such artificial means cause more harm than good.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is a different matter. But I don't think any fear can stop indulgence. People will indulge all the same in spite of fear of consequences when they have an impulse.

NIRODBARAN: Under present economic conditions it is better, I think, to adopt birth control.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, since most people can't exercise restraint.

NIRODBARAN: There is a divergence of medical opinion on the subject. Some say that restraint produces neurasthenia.

SRI AUROBINDO: But plenty of doctors hold the opposite view, and that is now almost accepted.

NIRODBARAN: Some doctors say that early marriage is bad, especially for the woman because her body is still immature and undeveloped and the strain of pregnancy will tell on her health, and that the children born will also be unhealthy. But in ancient India early marriage was the custom and yet people seem to have lived to a ripe old age.

SRI AUROBINDO: The long life was due to the early state of mankind.

PURANI: There was no economic struggle then.

SRI AUROBINDO: Apart from that, their habits were vigorous and natural. What, according to medical science, should be the marriage age?

NIRODBARAN: Twenty or after. Of course, there is again another school. One famous authority says that early marriage is good and very healthy. After twenty the bones become fixed and rigid. Flexibility of the organs is lost and this causes great difficulty during labour.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is true. No rules can be fixed for these things. Formerly sixteen to eighteen was the age for marriage. I know about someone in my uncle's family. I mean Hatkhola Dutta's children. The girl was only thirteen when she first delivered. She got a boy, who I saw when he was thirteen or fourteen. He was very tall, healthy and handsome. The rest of the children, among them three girls, were a little shorter but all handsome. The three girls were the most beautiful I have ever seen and all the children were remarkable specimens of humanity. You know the story of Akshay Maitra?

NIRODBARAN: No.

SRI AUROBINDO: He was a great social reformer. Once at a meeting he was holding forth against early marriage. After his speech, his father who was present got up and said, "The lecture was very interesting, but the lecturer is my son and was born out of my early marriage. You see how tall and strong and healthy he is? Then he has himself married early and he too has a son who is so strong and rowdy that it is difficult for us to stay at home." *(Laughter)*

NIRODBARAN: The old man must have carried the meeting. Another point in favour of early marriage is that the girl being quite young can be moulded and adapted to the family and there is thus more prospect of happiness.

SATYENDRA: That is a point because of the joint-family system.

NIRODBARAN: No, even otherwise it tends to make the married life of the couple happy. If the girl is already grown up, she has an individuality of her own and is no longer plastic.

SRI AUROBINDO: You mean that the girl should always be educated with a view to marriage and she should have no individuality of her own? Most women, of course, think only of marriage and in India they do not have their own individuality.

NIRODBARAN: Another interesting argument against birth control is advanced by people who ask: "In cases where an illustrious son is born after the second or third child, what would have happened if birth control had been practised?"

SRI AUROBINDO (*laughing*): What about the majority of people who are not illustrious? Or the majority of parents who have no illustrious sons?

SATYENDRA: Huxley says that everything on the human level is evil.

NIRODBARAN: But it is the few illustrious people who raise the level of humanity.

SRI AUROBINDO: Some say illustrious people are insane. One valid argument against birth control is the diminution of population. In France, because of the universal practice of it, the population is very low.

SATYENDRA: Besides, birth control is still only in an experimental stage. It is too early to say what effects it will have.

NIRODBARAN: All the same, it is more extensively practised now.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, in Europe it is practically universal.

SATYENDRA: There is an increased number of lunatics in the West, probably due to excessive indulgence.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't think lunacy is due to indulgence. Besides, indulgence is not more now than, say, in the eighteenth century. That period was remarkable for licentiousness.

SATYENDRA: If we are to believe what is said in the papers, there is much indulgence today, especially among the aristocrats.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not only among them but among the common people too.

SATYENDRA: When one reads Balzac, one wonders why people in France marry at all.

NIRODBARAN: As Sri Aurobindo once said, "To love another!"

SRI AUROBINDO: Marriage among the French is more for an economic advantage.

SATYENDRA: Chastity doesn't seem to exist in France.

NIRODBARAN: That is why modernists say chastity is a superstition.

SRI AUROBINDO: Bertrand Russell? Chastity is considered a moral need which one outgrows as soon as the need is over.

NIRODBARAN: Morality is also regarded as a superstition. But isn't there something good in chastity?

SRI AUROBINDO: Any restraint gives one power and strength. Half of Hitler's energy comes from his restraint, though his opponents say that he is a sexual pervert and a lunatic.

NIRODBARAN: They call his condition of mind schizophrenia—a psychological disease due to sex-repression.

SRI AUROBINDO: I suppose they will call spiritual sex-control mystical schizophrenia.

NIRODBARAN: Anthony West and others will say that about Huxley.

SRI AUROBINDO: "Spiritual failures!"

5 FEBRUARY 1940

NIRODBARAN: Anilbaran asks if he could send your blessings to the invalid asthmatic patient.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, he can but it doesn't mean that the patient is going to recover.

NIRODBARAN: He may get some palliation. But why shouldn't he recover?

SRI AUROBINDO: His asthma has been of very long standing and he also has fear.

SATYENDRA: Yes, he speaks of fear of death.

SRI AUROBINDO: In chronic cases the body forms fixed habits which don't want to go and they throw up strong resistance.

NIRODBARAN: But some chronic cases have been cured, for example, Sahana's sister.

SRI AUROBINDO: That was not so bad a case, and moreover it depends on the receptivity.

SATYENDRA: Diseases are due to attacks of forces.

NIRODBARAN: If it is a question of forces it should be easy to deal with them.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why? Everything is due to the action of forces but it is not easy to deal with them.

NIRODBARAN: Of course if some permanent structural change takes place it may be difficult.

SRI AUROBINDO: The body also acquires structural and organic resistances – habits of the nerves and organs.

NIRODBARAN: We speak of forces and beings. What is the difference between them? Are the forces also some kind of beings?

SRI AUROBINDO: How do you mean?

NIRODBARAN: I mean, are the forces separate entities, like the beings?

SRI AUROBINDO: The forces act through a being when they can seize on it or when the being is open to them but they do not belong to the being.

NIRODBARAN: The forces are not separate entities?

SRI AUROBINDO: They are a part of the universal, like the forces of Nature.

NIRODBARAN: Are they self-directed? Have they some idea or consciousness behind them?

SRI AUROBINDO: They are directed by the universal or the Supreme Being. The consciousness comes from the universal which is ultimately directed by the Supreme.

PURANI: Are they individualised?

SRI AUROBINDO: What do you mean by that? They are universal forces. For instance, the universal force of love seizes upon a man and he becomes a lover. When the force leaves him, he ceases to be a lover.

NIRODBARAN: But the force that is manifested through a being is its own force.

SRI AUROBINDO: The force that is manifested through the being is the universal force and the being is part of the universal being. Both derive their support from the universal or the Supreme.

SATYENDRA: We want to know if the attacks of diseases on people are attacks of forces or of beings.

SRI AUROBINDO: Forces of the universal vital nature or beings.

NIRODBARAN: The force of electricity or the force of Nature which causes an earthquake or a cyclone – is it a universal force or the force of a being?

SRI AUROBINDO: What kind of being?

NIRODBARAN: Universal being.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, it may be the action of a universal being or force. We see the force as a movement.

NIRODBARAN: Sometimes people on their death-bed shout out at some invisible forces, "Go away! I am not coming with you. Oh, they have come to fetch me away," etc., etc. Are there some forces they see?

SRI AUROBINDO: There are forces or beings of the other world which they may see at such a time. Usually some parts of their being are already in the other world.

NIRODBARAN (*after a while*): Subhas Bose seems to have hinted at a separate Congress if the Rightists come to a compromise. He says that he hoped to capture the Congress in a year but the Rightists have disregarded the rules of the game and he has no such hope now. The masses are also with them.

SRI AUROBINDO: The masses are with them? Is that why he doesn't want an election in Bengal now?

NIRODBARAN: It is a queer argument they have given against the election.

PURANI: And did he always play according to the rules of the game?

SRI AUROBINDO: Doing what he says is playing by the rules of the game? He seems to cherish many illusions, one of them being to capture the Congress in a year.

NIRODBARAN: He still seems to have a big following. In Calcutta he addressed a large gathering.

SRI AUROBINDO: Who says "large"?

NIRODBARAN: The *Amrita Bazar* reported it.

SRI AUROBINDO: In places like Calcutta and Bombay the Leftists seem to be large in number but even around Bombay they were badly defeated in the elections.

If the Congress can get Dominion Status without any fighting or struggle, I don't see why it shouldn't accept it. It can then build up our defence and when that is ready, it can easily cut off the British connection.

NIRODBARAN: Subhas calls Dominion Status a compromise. He wants independence.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is a compromise on the surface but it is practically independence. You get all you want without an

unnecessary struggle. When you can secede at your will from the British connection, it is practically independence. Independence is all right if you are prepared for a revolution. But is the country ready for it?

NIRODBARAN: According to Subhas it is; he says Gandhi and company are not in touch with the progressive elements in the country. So they don't know the Kisans, the Socialists, etc.

SRI AUROBINDO: Can he lead? What will the Kisans do? They are strong only in U.P. When the repression starts, the Kisans will at once sink under military pressure.

EVENING

Purani read a letter from Armando Menezes, written to Udar.

NIRODBARAN: Another poet will be added to the Ashram if Menezes comes. Somebody complained to me that there are many poets and artists in the Ashram but very few musicians. He says that music is not encouraged and developed here.

SRI AUROBINDO: It may not have developed but it is encouraged.

NIRODBARAN: He says that Sri Aurobindo being a poet can guide one even in the technical details of poetry. He says that Sri Aurobindo encourages painting too.

SRI AUROBINDO: I am not a painter.

NIRODBARAN: But you have a thorough knowledge of painting and as you don't know much about music, it does not get much impetus.

SRI AUROBINDO: As a matter of fact it is the Mother who directs painting and music.

NIRODBARAN: But he says that the Mother doesn't know much Indian music nor the technique of it.

SRI AUROBINDO: He seems to be an ass. Venkataraman says that the Mother used to produce many Carnatic notes in her music while Nandini complained that the Mother brought Indian mixtures into her music.

NIRODBARAN: But she can't guide in the technique of Indian music as you guide in poetry.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why not? When Sahana used to sing, the Mother could detect wrong notes at once. Music is a question of the

ear. The Mother doesn't know Indian painting. She paints in oils. So how does she direct the artists here?

She is not an architect but she finds mistakes in the plans of a building or in its execution, which Chandulal hasn't seen, and afterwards the mistakes prove to be there. When we bought the new paint Silexore, nobody knew how to apply it, including the Mother, but when she took the brush and applied it, the paint stuck to the wall quite all right.

NIRODBARAN: Our complainant says that music hasn't got the Divine's sanction and has no place in the future creation, Sri Aurobindo himself not being a musician.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is perfectly idiotic.

PURANI: I think the fault lies with the musician himself.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, Romen, for instance, would have been a very great musician, but he didn't apply himself.

PURANI: The trouble is that when our musicians take up music they don't try to perfect it but take it up only as a means for Divine realisation.

SRI AUROBINDO: Who are these musicians?

NIRODBARAN: Yes, who are they? You can't say that Dilip doesn't try to perfect his music.

SRI AUROBINDO: Dilip and Sahana are people who have real music in them. But the difficulty in music is the tendency for self-admiration to grow in the musician.

NIRODBARAN: But so is it in poetry.

PURANI: After all there aren't many artists here—

NIRODBARAN: Quite a lot: Krishnalal, Anilkumar, Nishikanto, Jayantilal.

PURANI: Nishikanto is defunct.

NIRODBARAN: Nonetheless he is an artist and there are others—Champaklal, Sanjiban, etc., etc.

PURANI: There are many musicians too—Dilip, Sahana, Anilbaran.

NIRODBARAN: Anilbaran? If he is a musician, so are you.

PURANI: Anilbaran sings all right; I have a taste for music and art.

NIRODBARAN (*not hearing properly*): Who has a taste? Anilbaran?

SRI AUROBINDO: No, he is speaking about himself.

6 FEBRUARY 1940

NIRODBARAN: Anilbaran has sent you a philosophical letter from Ardhendu's friend, you remember?

SRI AUROBINDO: There are so many philosophical letters coming to Anilbaran that it is difficult to remember which is which. (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: This man is a Sannyasi. Anilbaran replied to him. He was very happy with the reply and wants to come to have darshan.

SRI AUROBINDO: Anilbaran's darshan? (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: But he has no passage money. So he has requested Anilbaran to pay for the passage just as he has found spiritual passage for him.

SRI AUROBINDO: Anilbaran can write that he has just as much money as his correspondent. (*Laughter*)

EVENING

NIRODBARAN (*waving a foolscap sheet*): Anilbaran has sent a specimen of the kind of letters he receives from people. The man has asked Anilbaran for Rs. 10,000 to help him out of his difficulty and has asked for your blessings.

SRI AUROBINDO: Blessings can be sent, but Rs. 10,000?

NIRODBARAN: It seems this man did some good to Anilbaran a long time ago and Anilbaran in return offered to help him, if he needed help at any time. This was sixteen or seventeen years ago.

CHAMPAKLAL: Anilbaran says the man has always been very honest but has been cheated by everybody.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is the fate of honest people. The rule is: you shouldn't cheat but you should know how it is done. (*Laughter*)

CHAMPAKLAL: What is your opinion about Nandalal's paintings you saw in the morning? (*Purani had shown them.*)

PURANI: He hasn't yet seen the complete set.

CHAMPAKLAL: But he can speak about what he has seen.

SRI AUROBINDO (*looking at Champaklal*): What I saw, I saw.

PURANI: Nandalal is trying to follow the modern tendency—democratic art. His modern paintings seem to be like that: for example the village minstrel.

SRI AUROBINDO: They tried to be grotesque, didn't they?

PURANI: Yes.

Purani again showed some of Nandalal's and Tagore's paintings that have come out in Viswa Bharati. About Nandalal's painting of Arjuna represented as Purusha Sinha (Man-lion), Sri Aurobindo said, "All I can say is that it is queer. His goat is better than this." About some of the modern paintings, he said, "Is this democratic art?" Seeing Radha's picture in a lying position, he remarked, "She doesn't seem to be sleeping."

7 FEBRUARY 1940

EVENING

NIRODBARAN: I find in the *Life of Barodi Brahmachari* that he tried to cross the Sun-world three times but failed. It seems that those who cross it don't take birth again.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is the Upanishad's saying—the Upanishad speaks both of the rays of the Sun and the gate of the Sun. Those who can't pass through the rays return to the earth and are born again.

NIRODBARAN: When he was leaving the body he said that if the day remained bright and did not become cloudy his disciples would know that he had succeeded in crossing the Sun-world. Is it the Supermind that is spoken of in the Upanishad?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. It is only by going to the Supermind that birth ceases. But I don't know what is meant here. In the subtle world there are many suns and moons.

NIRODBARAN: We find an example of Barodi Brahmachari's unusual eyesight. Once when he was taken to court as a witness and asked about his age, he replied, "One hundred." "In that case," the pleader said, "you couldn't have seen that incident from such a distance." He asked the pleader, "Look through that window at that tree. Do you see anything?" "No," the pleader replied. Then Barodi Brahmachari said, "But I see a large number of red ants climbing up the tree." All the people were startled to find that it was true!

DR. BECHARLAL: Is that outer vision or inner?

SRI AUROBINDO: It can be either. By training one's vision one can see things at a distance. Training of the inner vision may produce a corresponding effect on the outer as well.

NIRODBARAN: He used to read other people's thoughts by separating the mind from the body.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is done by going to the mental plane.

NIRODBARAN: When asked if he remembered the circumstances in his mother's womb just prior to his present physical birth he replied, "All I remember is that at a certain stage I felt a great pressure jamming me from all sides. I was cramped for space. As I tried to get out, I suddenly discovered a passage and rushed out." This is the description of his condition. What interests me in this is that medical science doesn't know so many things—for example, the exact cause that starts the labour pain: why should it start at the end of a particular month? The doctors can't find any scientific reason.

SRI AUROBINDO: There may be two reasons. Either the body consciousness of the mother feels by some subconscious instinct that it is time for the foetus to be expelled or the foetus feels that it has reached the last stage of its development and must now come out. Science, of course, doesn't take account of these factors; it tries to explain things by mechanical laws.

NIRODBARAN: One queer incident in Barodi Brahmachari's life rather puzzles me. He wanted to see by the actual sex-act if he had really conquered the sex-impulse. He found that he had conquered it and his lack of sex-impulse was not due to any incapacity of old age because he saw that his reactions were quite normal. Now why should a realised man test himself in that way?

SRI AUROBINDO: Realisation is a vast field. Unless one knows what this man has realised, it is difficult to say anything.

8 FEBRUARY 1940

CHAMPAKLAL: Somebody has written to Gandhi that he suffers terribly from sex desire. The sight of a woman wakes up passion in him. He can't even go out because of that. So he asked Gandhi who is a saint about the remedy and what to do in such a case.

SRI AUROBINDO: Or he asked him, "What did you do?"
(Laughter)

CHAMPAKLAL: His wife has suggested to him that he keep her with him when he goes out. Gandhi praised the frankness of the man and advised him to wear blue glasses when he goes out, always to look down, not to go to cinemas and to have faith in God and aspire to Him.

SRI AUROBINDO: What is the idea behind the blue glasses?

PURANI: It will disguise the female form.

SRI AUROBINDO: How?

PURANI: Because everything will assume one colour and there won't be any differentiation.

SRI AUROBINDO: That's a different matter. But if the women could be made to look hideous, it might help still more.

9 FEBRUARY 1940

NIRODBARAN: We are confronted with a difficult diagnosis. Although clinically the case looks like septicaemia, the blood culture is negative.

SRI AUROBINDO: What does that mean? It is not septicaemia then?

NIRODBARAN: One can't say that. Dr. André says that there is something in the blood – some infection, even though the culture is negative.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then why is it negative? Can the case be septicaemia even if it is negative? If it can, medical science is not very exact.

NIRODBARAN: It may be septicaemia. Sometimes one has to make repeated examinations. For instance, in T.B. one has to search for the bacillus plenty of times.

PURANI: Even if they find the bacillus, it may not be T.B.

NIRODBARAN: That doesn't happen.

PURANI: Why? In stools they sometimes find the T.B. bacillus.

NIRODBARAN: Stools are a different matter.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is thought that bacilli and germs are the cause of a disease. But they may have nothing to do with it.

NIRODBARAN: If not the cause, they are an instrument. In diphtheria, for example, when the antitoxin is given, many patients are cured.

SRI AUROBINDO: That may be coincidence.

NIRODBARAN: Coincidence in thousands of cases?

SRI AUROBINDO: Why not?

PURANI: If not, why in some cases does the antitoxin fail? Or why are some people attacked by a particular germ when exposed to it while others are safe?

SRI AUROBINDO: Doctors don't recognise any factors beyond these organisms.

SATYENDRA: In homeopathy, something prior to the disease is said to be there. In allopathy, this is called "low resistance".

SRI AUROBINDO: The yogic view is also of something prior. There are unseen or unknown factors which operate in the causation of a disease and the germs are only concomitant factors.

PURANI: Otherwise I don't see why among people working in cholera epidemics some are attacked and others escape. I myself worked in their midst but nothing happened to me.

SRI AUROBINDO: I lived in areas where there was plague all around.

SATYENDRA: I have myself removed with my own hands plague-infected rats.

PURANI: Medical men sometimes build up their theories and then try to fit facts to them.

NIRODBARAN: Everybody does that sort of thing—including the philosophers!

SRI AUROBINDO: The difference between medical science and proper science is that in medical science one negative instance doesn't disprove the theory, while in proper science a single negative example will throw out a whole theory and the scientists will have to begin work on a new basis.

EVENING

NIRODBARAN: Satyendra is rather worried over A's case.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why?

NIRODBARAN: He thinks he is responsible for her disease.

SRI AUROBINDO: How?

NIRODBARAN: It started after the wisdom-tooth trouble. Although he didn't use a knife, still he feels himself responsible.

SRI AUROBINDO: A knife? What for?

NIRODBARAN: For cutting the gums. Sometimes one has to cut them to make more space.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why should he be responsible?

X considers it a great crime to cut the gums. He denounces in strong terms all who do it. He says it causes madness in the patients. If you tell him that there are plenty of people who haven't gone mad because of it, he replies that they just don't know they are mad!
(Laughter)

NIRODBARAN: Perhaps just as he himself doesn't know it?

PURANI: I was staggered when he said that Anilbaran ran the risk of madness if his headache remained uncured.

(After some time) Dr. Kantilal has two questions to ask. First, can one have more than one Guru? Dattatreya had about twenty Gurus, he says, and profited by each. From a bird he learnt something, from a butcher something else and so on.

SRI AUROBINDO: Such Gurus one can have even twenty thousand of. Why only twenty?

PURANI: His second question is: Can't one make spiritual progress by seeing the Divine in the Gurus?

SRI AUROBINDO: The Divine is in everybody. So he can see the Divine in all. Why only in the Gurus?

NIRODBARAN: But in the spiritual teachers one can feel the Divine more easily because they have realised Him.

SRI AUROBINDO: That does not mean that the Divine is not in everybody. If one actually *sees* the Divine, it is a different matter. But if it is a question of thinking, one can think as well that the Divine is in all.

PURANI: He asks if one can't have more than one Guru and if it is disloyal to change one's Guru.

SRI AUROBINDO: If one wants to get somewhere, it is better to have one Guru and stick to him. Only under exceptional circumstances can the Guru be changed.

PURANI: He says he has visited many Gurus but nobody has satisfied him.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is not the fault of the Gurus. If he goes on changing like that, he will get nowhere. Moreover, there will be a play of contrary influences.

CHAMPAKLAL: But if one visits spiritual people one can get some help on the spiritual path. They say that Satsang has a great value in life.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, one can get some influence, but that is for ordinary people who want some good influence to help them in

their lives, not for those who want to do Yoga. Besides, even then there may be a conflict of influences—different people's good influences may also conflict.

PURANI: What one has gained from one may go counter to what one gets from another. Now I understand why you asked Dr. Kantilal to quiet his mind. His mind seems to be roaming about from place to place. (*Sri Aurobindo was smiling at this.*)

10 FEBRUARY 1940

NIRODBARAN: If organisms are not the cause of a disease, can you sum up the etiology of a disease?

SRI AUROBINDO (*laughing*): You have to take into consideration all the factors, from the metaphysical down to the physical.

NIRODBARAN: That's why I said "sum up". What could be the direct cause of a disease? We speak of "lowered resistance", due to which one becomes vulnerable to the attacks of micro-organisms.

SRI AUROBINDO: "Lowered resistance" is a vague general expression.

NIRODBARAN: You have spoken of the nervous aura. If that aura is strong, no disease can come in.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, so long as the nervous aura is not penetrated, one is quite safe from any disease. Those who have strong auras are practically immune, except from some minor ailments. The resistance of the aura depends on its reaction to the impacts of life, the world, the environment, etc.

PURANI: A has never been a strong girl. From her childhood she has suffered from one disease or another. Her nerves are very weak.

SATYENDRA: Among these children T is the strongest.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, he is strong in every way and he has a certain element of mental common sense. He had tremendous difficulties in England but he overcame them all while M's nervous system is rather weak. Any difficulty knocks him down at once. Though apparently he has a strong and well-built body, his nervous sheath is not strong. That is why he has been attacked by asthma which is more a nervous than a physical disease. It is those people whose nervous system is weak and unstable who get asthma.

NIRODBARAN: But M is said to be more receptive or psychic.

SRI AUROBINDO: Said by whom?

NIRODBARAN: That is the general impression.

SRI AUROBINDO: Your impression?

NIRODBARAN: Not particularly mine.

SATYENDRA: People here have impressions of many things which may not happen to be correct.

CHAMPAKLAL: Very often people form their impressions from the Mother's way of dealing with people. Some say that those who remain near her are more receptive. Because they are more receptive the Mother keeps them with her or sees them often. They are more psychic.

SRI AUROBINDO: There are many psychically advanced sadhaks whom the Mother sees only once or twice a year. Receptivity is a complex phenomenon. One may be receptive in one way, another in another way.

CHAMPAKLAL: Sometimes people hear something said by the Mother about somebody and they build up a story. For example, Y was said to be very receptive and to have had a past relation with the Mother and so was called by the Mother for special pranams, etc.

SRI AUROBINDO: Past relation? Receptivity is a different thing. There is no single reason for which the Mother sees people.

CHAMPAKLAL: Of course, they also say that the Mother may see some people very often because of their special needs or difficulties.

SRI AUROBINDO (*smiling*): All that is humbug, because it is deduced by mental reasoning. If it were a question of seeing or feeling, it would be a different matter.

EVENING

PURANI: J asks: Is there a universal plane called the universal psychic, like the universal vital or the universal mental? He thinks of the psychic as being only individual.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is a mistake to suppose that the psychic is only individual or consists only of individuality. There is a universal psychic like the rest.

PURANI: Is it there that the soul retires after leaving the body and gathers material for a new birth?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes.

PURANI: He also asks how the distinction is made in *The Life Divine* between Being and Non-Being. Does the Non-Being come after Overmind— or before it?

SRI AUROBINDO: Why is he particular about the Non-Being? You arrive at the Non-Being by following the negative path. That is to say, when you start from mind, I mean spiritual mind, you come or open yourself to the experience of Nirvana. This Nirvana is the negation of all that the mind can affirm as the Being but it is only a gate of entry into the Absolute. From this Nirvana you can either take up the negative or the affirmative path. By the negative you reach the Non-Being or what the Gita calls *anirdeshyam* (the Indeterminate). This Non-Being is the Buddhist Nirvana or the Chinese Tao. The Buddhists consider it as Shunya, the Void, while to the Taoists this Void contains everything. Again, this Nirvana is not the same as the Brahmanirvana of the Gita.

By following the affirmative path you arrive at the Supermind and pass through it to the Sachchidananda. In my own case, I passed to the Supermind from a Nirvana which was not of the Buddhist type but a state of mere being with a most indispensable positive element. The Goraknath people also follow this affirmative way.

From the point of view of realisation, there are three aspects of Brahman — Atman or Self, Purusha or Soul, Ishwara or God. The Adwaitins negate both Purusha and Ishwara and arrive at the unity of Atman and Brahman. The Buddhists negate all the three aspects and arrive at the Non-Being.

11 FEBRUARY 1940

PURANI: Paul Brunton has come out again with an article on Yoga in the *Indian Review*.

SRI AUROBINDO: What does he say?

PURANI: The same old thing— that Yoga must be practised for humanity, so that humanity may benefit.

SRI AUROBINDO: He has always said that.

PURANI: He says that now he is under the guidance of a great Yogi who doesn't want to reveal himself. The Yogi has an eminent disciple whom everybody knows. If the disciple's name is disclosed, the Yogi will immediately be spotted. I wonder if he is hinting at you.

SRI AUROBINDO: Me? But I have no eminent disciple!

PURANI: What about Sir Akbar Hydari?

SRI AUROBINDO: He is not exactly a disciple.

SATYENDRA: Perhaps Brunton himself is a disciple eminent enough?

PURANI: He also says that he is not after money. The proof he gives is that if he were, he would not be contradicting his own past statements, as he is doing, and thereby risking his popularity.

SRI AUROBINDO: Are people complaining that he is contradicting himself for the sake of money?

PURANI: Yes. But he is contradicting himself, he says, for the sake of Truth.

SATYENDRA: The trouble is that he has started being a teacher before being sufficiently a student of Yoga.

PURANI: Wasn't he giving directions to people from the beginning?

SRI AUROBINDO: He has formed a group of his own, I believe.

PURANI: He doesn't accept the theory of World-Illusion. He says it is a theory difficult to practise in life.

SRI AUROBINDO: Practise in life? Nobody practises it. No Illusionist ever does.

PURANI: What Brunton means is that he cannot carry out in life the theory of Illusion.

SRI AUROBINDO: He means to accept of life only as much as is needed for the body?

SATYENDRA: He has spoken of an Egyptian stranger who talked to him in an Oxford accent and even knew his name. Hansraj also has written a book where another such instance is given. When he went to the Himalayas he met a Sannyasi who at once addressed him by his name and then spoke in Marathi fluently although he wasn't a Maratha. What surprised Hansraj was that he soon began to speak in English. How did he know that Hansraj knew English?

SRI AUROBINDO: If he knew Hansraj's name, it was not difficult to know other things.

SATYENDRA: Yes. That didn't strike me.

EVENING

SATYENDRA: The 13th seems to be an important date because Mars and Saturn are coming very close together on that day. Already

they are pretty close. Astrologers fear some catastrophic destruction on that occasion, a great upheaval. But Jupiter and Venus are coming together on the 21st to counteract Mars and Saturn.

NIRODBARAN: How can they counteract after the upheaval has taken place?

SRI AUROBINDO: After the upheaval, there will be a deheaval? (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: Meenakshi's comment was, "See the goodness of God!"

SATYENDRA: I replied, "If God is so good, why has He planned the destruction at all?"

SRI AUROBINDO: In order that you may appreciate His goodness. (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN (*to Satyendra*): Did you say on the 21st?

SATYENDRA: Yes.

NIRODBARAN: On 21st February it can only be my long-expected Supramental Descent. (*Sri Aurobindo smiled.*)

SATYENDRA: N is not satisfied with anything less.

NIRODBARAN: Mars and Saturn must be Hitler.

SRI AUROBINDO: And Stalin? By the way, the author of that book, *Inside Europe*, seems pro-Stalin. He says that Stalin is almost ideal except for a touch of blood-thirstiness.

NIRODBARAN: What will he say now?

SATYENDRA: He will say that the principles are all right. The man who practises them may turn bad.

NIRODBARAN: Nehru has been disillusioned. But Bose, it seems, is supporting Russia against the Finns.

12 FEBRUARY 1940

PURANI: Viswanath has brought a proposal from Arthur Moore. Moore said to him, "Why don't you bring out a Sri Aurobindo Memorial Volume on the occasion of his seventieth birthday, just as they have done for Tagore and Gandhi?" Viswanath replied, "It needs plenty of money." To this, Moore said, "All right, I will offer Rs. 500." (*Sri Aurobindo kept silent.*) Various people will be asked to contribute. Perhaps Sircar will come in too.

SRI AUROBINDO: Isn't a Memorial meant for those who have gone away? Does Moore want me also to go away? (*Laughter*)

PURANI: Well, we'll call it then an Anniversary Volume.

NIRODBARAN: For Tagore it is all right, because he is on the point of going away.

SRI AUROBINDO: He has been going away for the last twenty years. It is like in the theatres: "Today: Last Night Performance."

NIRODBARAN: Gandhi is a well-known figure and there will be many contributors.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, everybody has met him and knows about him. That is not the case with me.

NIRODBARAN: Perhaps Nolini, Anilbaran and Purani will have to write in your case. (*Laughter*)

SRI AUROBINDO: And each will understand my philosophy in his own way and produce his own interpretation. Mahendra Sircar will come in too and there will be Veerabhadra after him. (*Laughter*)

PURANI: Veerabhadra will equate you with Shankara or he will say that you have explained what Shankara meant.

SRI AUROBINDO: That will be easier. Or it may be like the Theosophists' idea of Buddha and Shankara. You don't know what it is?

PURANI: No.

SRI AUROBINDO: They say that Shankara came as a disguised Buddha in order to correct what he said. Shankara, according to them, was born in the first century B. C. or A. D., I don't remember which, but in any case not long after Buddha's death. That means that Buddha realised he had committed some errors in his philosophy and came back soon to rectify them. And now it shall be supposed that I have come back as another Shankara to correct what the first Shankara said and that I am explaining either what he meant but didn't say or what he said but didn't mean.

NIRODBARAN: Isn't that what Avatars do? If we accept Ramakrishna as an Avatar, we have his saying that the body is an iron cage and now you as an Avatar are saying that it is a golden temple!

SRI AUROBINDO: Not quite. I say that it is an instrument of the Spirit.

NIRODBARAN: Yes, an instrument to be transformed for divine service.

SATYENDRA: But that transformation comes last. Some people want it to be first. The early sages called life in the body unreal because it was too much with them. They had to hammer and

hammer away at the idea that it was unreal. But after all, it is a secondary thing. The first thing to achieve is the divine consciousness and not body transformation.

NIRODBARAN: Sotuda has offered his pranams and informs you that he is stagnating. But his body doesn't seem to be doing so.

SRI AUROBINDO: Is that why he feels he is stagnating? The flesh is becoming too heavy for the Spirit?

SATYENDRA: But his face is shining.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then his body must be getting transformed!

SATYENDRA: I hope the transformation won't stop with the face.

PURANI: He says it is a shame that you call him Sotuda. How can a father call a son that?

SRI AUROBINDO: Why not? A father calls his daughter "Ma". Does he want me to drop the "da" and just say "Sotu"?

CHAMPAKLAL: Why not? There is Bapu here—and the Mother calls him Bapu. It doesn't mean he is the Mother's father. Bapu has simply become his name now.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes.

NIRODBARAN: So Sotuda is not brother Sotu.

SATYENDRA: Sotuda said he saw some prophecies in which it was foretold that the war would last till 1941 or 1943.

SRI AUROBINDO: Good Lord!

SATYENDRA: The whole world will be destroyed and Satyayuga will reign at the end of 1943.

SRI AUROBINDO: Nobody will be left then to enjoy the Satyayuga.

CHAMPAKLAL: It doesn't matter much to Satyendra if the world is destroyed.

SATYENDRA (*smiling*): No, what is the use of repeating and repeating the same old thing?

PURANI: To go back to the idea of Moore: there is another proposal by Nolini and me to make an anthology out of all your works. People who have read your books will select passages and from these a final selection will be made.

SATYENDRA: That is something like Raja Rao's idea.

PURANI: Yes, but he seems to have dropped away.

SATYENDRA: Because he wasn't encouraged.

SRI AUROBINDO: He found it impossible to make a popular edition perhaps. I don't know how it can be done.

NIRODBARAN: Dilip says that an English friend of his writes that Aldous Huxley has lost all his influence with publishers and modern writers since his turning a mystic.

SRI AUROBINDO: Except in the *New Statesman* where his books are still well-reviewed.

SATYENDRA: He has written only two books of a mystical kind: *Ends and Means* and *After Many a Summer*.

SRI AUROBINDO: *Eyeless in Gaza* also.

SATYENDRA: Is that mystical too?

NIRODBARAN: That was the first.

Meher Baba has declared Mysore to be the spiritual capital of the world.

SATYENDRA: Yes, in the *Sunday Times*.

SRI AUROBINDO: Where?

SATYENDRA: Yes, Sir, it is there. You haven't seen it?

SRI AUROBINDO: No.

NIRODBARAN: It is in that article on birth-control.

SRI AUROBINDO: I didn't see it.

NIRODBARAN: It's at the end.

SRI AUROBINDO: He has said that before.

NIRODBARAN: He is against birth-control, calls it artificial. He advocates mental control.

SATYENDRA: He also says that married life can be a great step forward in spirituality.

NIRODBARAN: And that we should consider the children as the gifts of God.

SRI AUROBINDO: In advocating mental control, he means that people should not have children but that if they do they must be accepted.

NIRODBARAN: Yes, as God's gifts.

SRI AUROBINDO: Of course. If anything happens in spite of yourself you must call it God's gift.

NIRODBARAN: I don't understand how birth-control can prevent incentive to mental control.

SRI AUROBINDO: He means that without birth-control there will be a fear of consequences and so one has to exercise mental control.

NIRODBARAN: Is that necessarily true?

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't think so. When one has an erotic impulse, one will satisfy it somehow, in spite of the fear of consequences. That fear won't stand in the way.

NIRODBARAN: One other argument against birth-control is the fear of increased promiscuous illegitimate indulgence.

SRI AUROBINDO: There is plenty of it already; a little increase won't matter.

NIRODBARAN: But in India there is not so much. In Europe, maybe. Vivekananda said that there is not a single virgin in Europe.

SATYENDRA: That is too much to say.

SRI AUROBINDO: Did Vivekananda really say that?

NIRODBARAN: Yes, I have read it.

SATYENDRA: But he said that in America many women are pure.

NIRODBARAN: That may be in America. He spoke of Europe.

SRI AUROBINDO: America is no better or worse than Europe. I don't know if it was different in his time.

PURANI: Anilbaran was saying that in Europe couples are changing their partners. There was a case in the court about it.

SRI AUROBINDO: You mean trial marriages?

PURANI: No. A member of one couple is exchanged for a member of another couple after having five or six children.

SRI AUROBINDO: After having children?

PURANI: Yes. The original members don't agree well, so they want to change.

SRI AUROBINDO: Like having a change of air, I suppose.
(Laughter)

SATYENDRA: In Europe there are trial marriages.

SRI AUROBINDO: Companionate marriages. The artists in Paris very often have them.

NIRODBARAN: What is companionate marriage? Freedom to separate?

SRI AUROBINDO: They live together as husband and wife but whenever one wants to separate one can do so. It has been found that these marriages can be as lasting as the usual thing.

NIRODBARAN: During their stay together, do they have no freedom?

SRI AUROBINDO: They live just as ordinary husbands and wives do. Even in the usual marriage, each sometimes has an independent life by mutual consent.

NIRODBARAN: Yes, I have read of it in Romain Rolland.

SRI AUROBINDO: Bertrand Russell is an advocate of this kind of companionate marriage, with freedom to do whatever one likes.

NIRODBARAN: That is why he has divorced his wife and married his secretary.

SRI AUROBINDO: Has he? I didn't know that. When?

NIRODBARAN: Some years ago.

PURANI: It came as a great shock to Dilip. Russell had spoken to him of his happy ideal married life.

SRI AUROBINDO: I suppose it is like wanting to have *vridhdasya taruni barya*¹ though the wife may not be *barya*. You know Maeterlinck did the same. In his old age he took up a beautiful young girl who was not at all intellectual and he forsook the wife who had inspired all his earlier works. He brought the girl home. The wife didn't object—but ultimately the girl drove her out of the house.

EVENING

Dr. Manilal had advised Sri Aurobindo to hang the injured leg from the edge of the bed. This was meant to increase the flexion of the knee. Sri Aurobindo did it for one day and then stopped. He said, "After finishing The Life Divine I'll take it up again." In the meantime Manilal once inquired from Gujarat if Sri Aurobindo had started hanging the leg again. To this Sri Aurobindo replied, "The Life Divine is still hanging." Now Nirodbaran announced that Manilal was due to arrive on the 19th or the 20th.

SRI AUROBINDO: And I am going to start hanging my leg tomorrow. (*Laughter*) The last two chapters of *The Life Divine* were sent off today.

SATYENDRA (*laughing*): Manilal seems to strike terror into you. (*Sri Aurobindo laughed.*) When is Dr. Rao coming? Both will meet now.

NIRODBARAN: Dr. Rao has got badly entangled in the State.

SRI AUROBINDO: He will carry pleasant memories of his State service just before retirement. Now his sympathy for the Congress Government will increase.

SATYENDRA: He seems to be hanging too.

¹ Old man's young wife.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, and the Personal Assistant is throwing stones at him in an attempt to dislodge him.

NIRODBARAN: We thought this promotion of his was a divine gift for his services but he is having plenty of thorns.

SRI AUROBINDO: Divine gifts are like that.

SATYENDRA: It may be a divine gift because whatever desires he may still have will be driven out by it. Tomorrow, by the way, is the 13th, the day of catastrophes.

SRI AUROBINDO: After all, nothing may happen.

NIRODBARAN: Or perhaps some more patrol activity on the Western front.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, the Germans will claim to have brought down 300 planes and England will deny it.

When the others had gone, Purani brought up again the subject of Non-Being.

PURANI: Did you say the other day that by following the affirmative way one also arrives at Non-Being? I was not very clear about it.

SRI AUROBINDO (*with a surprised look*): No. Only by the negative path do you arrive at Non-Being, or what the Gita calls the Indeterminate. As I said, it is the same as in Taoism and Buddhism. But it is not really Nothing. What we can say is that no attribute of Being can be posited of it. Taoism says that Non-Being is Everything rather than Nothing. By the affirmative path you come through Supermind to Sachchidananda which is both static and dynamic, while through the negative path you come to Non-Being.

PURANI: Then the negative path doesn't lead to Sachchidananda?

SRI AUROBINDO: No.

NIRODBARAN: Is Non-Being the final stage of the negative path or does one pass through it to something else?

SRI AUROBINDO: Non-Being is only a term of the mind to express the Supreme Existence. It is the Buddhists' way of expressing the Supreme they contact. In reality it is nothing but an aspect of the Supreme. What is called the Indeterminate is not really indeterminate. It can be called so because it is not limited or confined to any one determination, not because it is incapable of

any determination. That is what I have tried to show in *The Life Divine*.

PURANI: In fact, it is the source of infinite determination. How is Non-Being related to the Supermind, etc., of the affirmative way?

SRI AUROBINDO: Both are gates to the Absolute. Non-Being is an aspect of the Absolute. When you enter the Absolute you can't describe it.

PURANI: Jayantilal's friend was asking if the inner mind, inner vital and physical are psychic in their nature.

SRI AUROBINDO: No, they are supported by the psychic. These inner parts can have good and bad things, both light and darkness.

PURANI: The psychic coming to the front acts through them?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes.

PURANI: He was also asking how the six chakras are related to the three parts of the being—the mental, the vital, the physical.

SRI AUROBINDO: In fact, there are seven chakras. But you can take eye and throat together, and also heart and navel, and the last two centres as one.

NIRODBARAN: If there was a medical chakra, I would try to open it.

SRI AUROBINDO: In that case you should call in Dhanwantari or Ashwinikumar.

PURANI: R says he is Dhanwantari.

NIRODBARAN: If I call him, he will come then.

SRI AUROBINDO: He will sit on the top of your head and swear at you. (*Laughter*)

13 FEBRUARY 1940

R. N. wrote an English poem for the special number that the Indian Express will bring out on February 21. The poem was given to Sri Aurobindo by Purani.

SRI AUROBINDO (*after reading it*): How can he rhyme "era" with "aura"?

NIRODBARAN: Modern rhymes, I suppose. Dilip was surprised that a poem with so many metrical errors was being sent for publication.

PURANI: Nolini has kept it back. Of course R. N. doesn't know of it yet.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is not a poem at all. His French poems are very beautiful. That is because he has training from the Mother. In English he has no training.

SATYENDRA: He is a very prolific writer, I hear—with a great flow.

SRI AUROBINDO: A tremendous flow. "Flow" is too mild a term. The energy is tremendous.

SATYENDRA: He has written many books in Tamil. He is considered a great Tamil writer.

NIRODBARAN: Dilip says his English is very bad.

SATYENDRA: He has written an English book on Sri Aurobindo's Yoga. It contains everything—chapters on Asanas, on Pranayama, etc.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is not on my Yoga in particular. It is just on Yoga. His English is Tamil English. One must have the true English style to make *things* effective.

SATYENDRA: He always speaks in superlatives. But he seems to be a great figure. He has many admirers and followers in South India.

NIRODBARAN: You must have seen in yesterday's *Hindu* the review of an annual of English literature. It is a symposium of many writers of the British Empire. From India four names have been chosen—one Kashi Prasad Ghose, Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu and *yourself*. Do you know this Kashi Prasad Ghose?

SRI AUROBINDO: No. Who is he?

NIRODBARAN: Only poets have been included, and the Indian selection has been made by an Indian professor.

SRI AUROBINDO: I wonder which poems of mine he has taken. Does he not mention Harin or my brother?

NIRODBARAN: No.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then I don't understand the rationale of the selection. Sarojini is all right. But, except for a few things, Toru Dutt does not come to much. And, if Toru can be included, surely Harin and Manmohan ought to be. They are better writers than she. If Romesh Dutt was still alive, he would have protested against his exclusion. He would have said, "If Toru, why not Romesh too?"

NIRODBARAN: The *Hindu* reviewer has complained that only poets have been mentioned and not prose writers when there are many good English prose writers in India.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't see a single really good prose writer.

NIRODBARAN: The *Hindu* says there are some among the moderns.

SRI AUROBINDO: Does it mean Nehru and Gandhi?

NIRODBARAN: I don't know.

SRI AUROBINDO: They are good, but they can't be ranked as literary prose writers.

NIRODBARAN: What about Amal?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, but he is not known.

NIRODBARAN: Nor has he written much.

SRI AUROBINDO: No.

SATYENDRA: But his style seems to have a sense of effort.

PURANI: Yes, it seems to give an impression of hammering.

SATYENDRA: Hammering may be allowed but there should not be any sense of effort.

SRI AUROBINDO: He writes in the Victorian style.

NIRODBARAN: Yes, it is not a modern style.

SRI AUROBINDO: No.

SATYENDRA: Radhakrishnan seems to have a modern style.

SRI AUROBINDO: No, he also has a Victorian stamp.

NIRODBARAN: People call Sri Aurobindo's style heavy, while according to them Nehru is the best writer.

PURANI: If the "best" writers wrote on philosophy instead of topical subjects, people would find them difficult too.

SATYENDRA: Amal, before he first came here in 1927, brought out a book of poems which, I hear, had to be suppressed.

SRI AUROBINDO: Or did it suppress itself? (*Laughter*)

SATYENDRA: The publishers didn't realise beforehand what sort of a book it was and when it came out they felt scandalised.

PURANI: Amal told me about this book when he first came. He was persuaded by his friends to stop its circulation. Otherwise he would have lost his name. His motto was, like Oscar Wilde's, to write on anything he liked.

SRI AUROBINDO: It depends on how you write. Wilde would have been the last man to approve of writing anything in any way.

PURANI: I mean writing about erotic things.

SATYENDRA: In English books whenever they have to say anything erotic they put the French word for it, not the English.

Take the *Decameron*. In the English translation there are so many things in French.

SRI AUROBINDO: I am reminded of Gibbon. Whenever he wanted to quote anything which might offend the current taste, he used its Latin form. But in English there are more outspoken things than in Boccaccio's *Decameron*. Many English novels deal with erotic, even vulgar, matters.

NIRODBARAN: Why then did they make such a fuss over Lawrence's *Lady Chatterly's Lover*?

SRI AUROBINDO: Because it made a public noise. The English people's puritanism, I suppose, came out against it.

PURANI: In French such things are quite commonly said now. People have become accustomed to them.

SRI AUROBINDO: In France it has always been so. Except in England and America you find free expression of them everywhere. Our ancient literature also dealt with them and nobody took any particular notice. The English write of them more crudely than the French — as a reaction, I suppose, to the suppression. It is during the Puritan and Non-conformist period that people suddenly became sex-conscious and felt ashamed.

EVENING

SRI AUROBINDO (*after trying out flexion of his knee, as medically advised*): Can't see if the flexion is increasing. It is a very slow process.

SATYENDRA: Yes, Sir. Something like the opening of Nirod's physical crust.

SRI AUROBINDO: What?

NIRODBARAN: Satyendra is giving an analogy. He means that your knee-flexion is as slow as the opening of my physical crust. (*Sri Aurobindo laughed.*)

SATYENDRA: N is all the time muttering about his crust.

PURANI: He is now trying to open his medical chakra to get some intuition.

SRI AUROBINDO: Or the medical plane?

NIRODBARAN: No, not plane. I said that if there was a medical chakra like the other chakras I would try to open it and get some intuition.

SATYENDRA: If you can open the other chakras they will do the job you want.

SRI AUROBINDO (*after laughing*): It depends on what intuition is wanted. There are many kinds of intuition: vital intuition, heart intuition and others.

NIRODBARAN: Vital intuition is mixed. I want a pure intuition which can be had with comparatively greater ease.

SRI AUROBINDO: Vital intuitions are sometimes extremely correct and pure. Animals are guided by them—animals and Englishmen. Then there is physical intuition.

SATYENDRA (*after a long pause*): The 13th is passing away, but nothing has happened. The astrologers have proved faulty. Of course, something has happened to me.

SRI AUROBINDO: What is it?

SATYENDRA: I had a knock. (*Laughter*) Modern architecture is going in for everything plain, sharp and clear-cut. (*Puzzled look on all faces*) That's why I got the knock. The sharp edge of my bed gave it.

SRI AUROBINDO (*laughing*): You can call it a modernistic knock.

SATYENDRA: Purani also had a knock some time back.

PURANI: Yes, and it is still giving me pain.

SRI AUROBINDO: Purani! Oh, Purani has an athletic movement. He knocks against anything and everything. He would even knock against the Mannerheim Line. (*Laughter*)

14 FEBRUARY 1940

PURANI: Some Chakravathy, a final year medical student, has written to you through Nolini that his father Bhuban Mohan Chakravathy had been your Bengali teacher.

SRI AUROBINDO (*extremely surprised*): How? When? Where?

PURANI: That is the mystery.

SRI AUROBINDO: My only Bengali teacher was Dinen Roy—unless he had another name.

PURANI: “Chakravathy” and “Roy” are a little far off from each other.

SATYENDRA: Besides, how can he be the son of that teacher? Sri Aurobindo has been here for a long time.

SRI AUROBINDO: That won't be a test, for he could have been a teacher long before the son was born.

PURANI: He writes that he can produce a most authentic proof—a letter you have written to his father.

SRI AUROBINDO: I?

PURANI: Yes, and he can send the letter if you want. He has asked for a loan from you to carry out his studies. He will repay you afterwards.

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh, that is the reason! (*After some time, to Purani*) Have those articles been sent off to the *Indian Express* for the special number of February 21?

PURANI: I don't know. I shall ask Nolini. Is there anything wrong?

SRI AUROBINDO: Radhanand, in his article on the Mother, has claimed that she is an Incarnation. That is something we have not yet said publicly.

PURANI: Radhanand said that whatever he had written had been gathered from talks, etc.

SRI AUROBINDO: The body of the article is all right. But at the beginning he makes this claim.

PURANI: We can then send a modification.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. State simply that it is the birthday of the Mother.

Two days later we saw that the article was published as it was, along with a poem by Radhanand.

In the morning the Mother told a very interesting story to Sri Aurobindo.

THE MOTHER: J has written that she and her son want to go on an outing for a few days, stay in a bungalow and return just two or three days before Darshan. She wants to know what I would say. I have seen that she doesn't want to know. Already they went once and found that the bungalow was occupied by another European. Finding no room, they came back and said that they would start again after a few days. I clearly saw that if she went again some accident would happen to her and she would miss the Darshan as she had done before.

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh, did she miss it once once before?

THE MOTHER: Yes, it was when she went to see her son. They don't take a hint. Then she wrote to me that they couldn't go as they

couldn't get hold of a chauffeur. I was tempted to write to her that the Divine Grace (*here the Mother spoke in French; the sense seemed to be that the Divine Grace had saved her.*)

15 FEBRUARY 1940

NIRODBARAN: Sotuda has brought the news that Nishikanto's book is selling now.

PURANI: It is still too soon to expect any sales. No reviews have come out yet, though reviews don't influence the sale.

SRI AUROBINDO: In England they do. Plenty of people read the reviews. Any book recommended by the Book Club has a good sale.

EVENING

PURANI: Jinnah is getting impossible. He says that India is one country but with two nations in it – Hindu and Muslim.

SRI AUROBINDO: Two heads on one body? Why two only? As the *Hindu* points out, there are other minorities that can also claim to be separate nations – five or six heads!

PURANI: Vallabhbhai Patel says that the British Government is keeping up the division by playing one party against the other.

SRI AUROBINDO: What else does he expect? So long as there are different parties, the Government will act like that. If they don't do so but simply leave India, the Russians may come in and do the same thing.

16 FEBRUARY 1940

NIRODBARAN: I met Charu Dutt this morning. He seems to be an interesting man.

SRI AUROBINDO: In what way?

NIRODBARAN: Well, the way he talks, the unlimited stock of anecdotes he seems to have. He was saying that when they were starting the *Bande Mataram* C. R. Das insisted that Bipin Pal should be the editor, while they insisted that Sri Aurobindo should be the

editor. Dutt told Das, "We have persuaded him to come from Baroda to take up the editorship of the paper."

SRI AUROBINDO: What? Who persuaded me? I came on my own to start a nationalist movement. There was no C. R. Das at that time. In fact, Bipin Pal had himself started the paper with Rs. 500 as capital. When he went on a tour of West Bengal he asked me to edit it for the time being. I had accepted the principalship of the National College for Rs. 150 a month.

Tilak was coming to Calcutta as President of the Congress. We wanted to have a militant programme and our own organ. So I called a meeting of the extremist leaders – there we decided to have a paper and Subodh Mullick offered to finance it.

Shyam Sundar and Hem Ghose were not pleased with Pal's editorship. They said he was too moderate and when I was dangerously ill – the illness almost took me away – they published my name as editor without my consent and in Pal's absence. I called them and remonstrated strongly. They said they wouldn't have anything to do with the paper if Pal remained editor, and so he was pushed out.

NIRODBARAN: Dutt also said to Das, "We have brought Sri Aurobindo from Baroda almost against the Maharaja's wishes. The Maharaja is coming to the Congress. What will he say?"

SRI AUROBINDO: Which Congress? How could he attend the Congress?

PURANI: Perhaps some Industrial Congress or Exhibition. Some such thing was taking place at that time in Calcutta.

SRI AUROBINDO: In Calcutta?

PURANI: I am not sure if in Calcutta. But on that side.

SRI AUROBINDO: Dutt seems to have a strong imagination. He can't be entrusted with writing my biography. I think it should be made a rule that nobody shall write a biography without the consent of the man.

EVENING

NIRODBARAN: X has suddenly developed a soft corner for Anilbaran. He was saying to Dutt, "Have a talk with him. He is the one man whom we can present to others."

SRI AUROBINDO: Because of his shining face? (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: He has made surrender practicable in his own life, X says. One day Anilbaran asked X to sing and then gave a high

tribute to his songs—psychic, wonderful development, etc. From that day perhaps X softened down. (*Sri Aurobindo began to laugh.*)

CHAMPAKLAL: Anilbaran is extremely clever. He knows very well how to please a man. Looking at my pictures, he would exclaim, "O Champaklal, it is wonderful, marvellous!" Then, looking from increasing distances of one foot, two feet and three feet he would go on, "Admirable, excellent!"

SRI AUROBINDO (*laughing*): And you were pleased in spite of yourself. (*Laughter*)

CHAMPAKLAL: Now I don't believe what he says. Akbar Hydari told him, "Only the Mother shows me my faults and mistakes; everybody else praises me." Anilbaran asked me, "Was Hydari hinting to me?" (*Laughter*)

SATYENDRA: Where did he learn this art?

SRI AUROBINDO: You mean it may be a Yogic Siddhi. (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: It seems Tagore was asked his opinion of *The Life Divine* and he said, "All that about sadhana in solitude I don't understand." Charu Dutt replied, "How is that? You yourself had to retire to a boat to write poetry. And I have seen you meditating all alone in the early morning. Then how can you make that remark? Can you write poetry in the market-place?"

SRI AUROBINDO: I was doing Yoga even during my political activity. Solitude is only a temporary period in sadhana.

NIRODBARAN: Dutt had a discussion with Tagore over Nishikanto's book *Alakananda*. Tagore's point is that he can't believe that a man can remain unmoved and calm and tranquil amidst pain and suffering, sorrow and distress. "If a man falls from a height, how can he escape being hurt?" he asks.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is not a question of being hurt. The question is of remaining unmoved and unshaken by the hurt.

NIRODBARAN: Tagore himself in *Prabasi* speaks of unperturbed peace.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, but that should be the ideal, it is not realisable in life: that is perhaps his view.

NIRODBARAN: But he says one must have it.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, have it as an ideal.

NIRODBARAN: Am I to believe that in the long period of his life he has not met a single man like that?

SATYENDRA: He may not have.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why shouldn't he have? If he hasn't he should be sent to Finland and he will see many people there remaining calm and tranquil in the midst of all knocks and attacks.

NIRODBARAN: Tagore says Nishikanto's poetry is not for the mass, that it is not within their experience. By 'mass' he means himself and a few hundred people like him, Dutt said, while the rest, like Dutt himself, understand it quite well. Another funny thing Dutt said was that Nishikanto could have written equally well in Shantiniketan and with better substance too.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, substance which the mass would understand, perhaps.

17 FEBRUARY 1940

NIRODBARAN: It is reported by Dutt that, apprehensive of a big row at the Surat Congress and the risk of physical injury to you, your friends made special arrangements with Barin to keep you safe.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't know about any row. A Maratha leader—a lieutenant—came to me and asked me whether they should break the Congress. I said, "You must either swamp it or break it." They couldn't swamp it as the other party was too strong in number. So they broke it. There was no question of any row.

I had very little personal contact with Dutt. I think I met him and Mullick first at Thana. I mixed intimately with Mullick. Dutt was most of the time occupied with his judgeship; he was known as a revolutionary judge.

NIRODBARAN: People say you had three very intimate friends. One of them is dead, one still alive. We don't know about the remaining one.

SRI AUROBINDO: One was Deshpande who was very intimate: he is dead. Madhavrao was another: he is also dead. Who was the third?

PURANI: Kasherao?

SRI AUROBINDO: Kasherao was not so intimate.

NIRODBARAN: Dutt speaks of going back once more and then coming to stay here.

SRI AUROBINDO: I hear he wants to end his last days here which I don't approve of. This is not Benares.

SATYENDRA: But if people want to come here for that purpose, Sir, why should you object?

CHAMPAKLAL: A's mother came with that object.

NIRODBARAN: There is a precedent then. But it will be terrible for us. We can't welcome them.

SRI AUROBINDO: Nirod will be presiding over the deaths of people. They say in English, "Dying on the doctor's hands." It will be on Nirod's hands.

18 FEBRUARY 1940

Purani brought a collection of Nandalal Bose's and Abanindranath Tagore's paintings for Sri Aurobindo's inspection.

SRI AUROBINDO (after seeing one or two of Abanindranath's): Obviously, on the whole he is a greater artist than Nandalal.

PURANI: Jayantilal says that in some individual paintings Nandalal has shown greater genius, and he considers him potentially a greater artist than Tagore but his potentialities haven't fulfilled themselves.

SRI AUROBINDO: Abanindranath has more force of imagination and a greater power of expression.

PURANI: Jayantilal says that he doesn't hold the modernist view of art.

SRI AUROBINDO: Art for the mass?

PURANI: Yes, he is more aristocratic and conservative. How do you find Gaganendranath Tagore?

SRI AUROBINDO: He has rather a brilliant fancy than true imagination. Sometimes he is imaginative, but mostly he is fanciful. In Bengal art, these are the three great artists.

PURANI: Gandhi is now going to Shantiniketan. It seems the tie between Gandhi and Tagore will get stronger now. You know that it was through Gandhi that Tagore got Rs. 60,000 for his Shantiniketan. When Gandhi went to Delhi and saw that Tagore had come there at such an old age to collect money, he said to him, "You go back. I will arrange for the money." And he asked Birla to pay the sum. In America people generously donate money for such public things.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes.

NIRODBARAN: But in America people who give away their wealth are businessmen.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, but they know something of life too.

PURANI: Gandhi has come out with a strong comment on Zetland's statement. He says, "If such is the mentality of Englishmen I don't see why I should pray for their victory."

SRI AUROBINDO: I see! Zetland is making blunders. If he had left it to Linlithgow, he would have managed it much better.

20 FEBRUARY 1940

Dr. Manilal arrived at 10.00 a.m.; he made pranam to Sri Aurobindo and asked about the injured leg, for which he had advised "hanging" from the knee to help the flexion.

SRI AUROBINDO: The leg is hanging very well.

DR. MANILAL: I have brought some Ayurvedic medicine for you. I got it from a Madras lady who is an automatic writer and has great bhakti. She keeps your photo and Ramana Maharshi's and goes into trances. In her planchette sittings, some Rishi comes and dictates to her. I asked her about the defective flexion of your knee and she gave me this medicine, which is quite harmless—it is white mustard and *raktapillai*. She says your knee will be all right in six days. The treatment is prescribed by a Rishi.

SRI AUROBINDO: Very kind of the Rishi.

DR. MANILAL: I got a prescription for myself too. It is rice-water and flour of *dal* (lentil) to be poured on the head. It will cure headache and blood-pressure.

After the sponging of Sri Aurobindo had begun, Dr. Manilal started the talk.

DR. MANILAL: The late Gaekwad wanted to have translations of English books into Gujarati. The word "jailor" was rendered *karagrihadhikari*, the "superintendent of jail" was rendered *karagrihadhyaksha* and so on. Sometimes it is very difficult to understand what is meant. They have to put English equivalents in brackets.

PURANI: But in former times people easily understood such words as *amatya*, *Suba*, etc.

DR. MANILAL: Now *Suba* is more easily understood. But when they write *Mahasabha* for Congress, I take it to be the Hindu *Mahasabha*.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why? You can then take Congress as the American Congress. (*Laughter*) Even in England it was not always easy. The word “telegraph”, for instance, was not at all easy at the beginning. By constant use words become familiar. So there is no reason why one shouldn’t have one’s own language.

DR. MANILAL: At present Urdu words are much favoured.

SRI AUROBINDO: When we have Sanskrit, why should we leave it and go to Urdu?

DR. MANILAL: What about a word like “collector”? Isn’t the Urdu equivalent—*jilladhisha*—preferable?

SRI AUROBINDO: The English word “collector” is itself far better.

DR. MANILAL (*after a while*): I find *The Life Divine* very difficult, Sir.

SRI AUROBINDO: What is the difficulty? The language or the thought?

DR. MANILAL: It is the language that I can’t follow. Can’t it be made easier?

SRI AUROBINDO (*smiling and shaking his head*): Ask the Grace of God to aid you. (*Laughter*)

PURANI: The language is not the difficulty, and it can’t be made any easier. It is the thought that is difficult to follow. Some people find it very easy.

SRI AUROBINDO: Sisir Mitra is one. He found the book very clear and remarked that after reading it there could be no questions left.

PURANI: Quite so. One may not accept the conclusions but one has to admit that all arguments and questions have been answered.

SRI AUROBINDO (*to Manilal*): You have to wait for some translations into Gujarati then.

DR. MANILAL: Translations are even more difficult—if Purani, who is a translator, doesn’t mind my saying so.

PURANI: No. I don’t mind. I know.

DR. MANILAL: I understood Purani's original writings better than his translations.

SRI AUROBINDO: Have you read Kant? (*Laughter*)

DR. MANILAL: No, Sir!

PURANI: After Kant you would realise how easy *The Life Divine* is.

NIRODBARAN: Don't worry, Dr. Manilal, I am in the same boat as you.

PURANI: Many doctors will be in it.

CHAMPAKLAL: But Rajangam finds *The Life Divine* easy. He says that one shouldn't read anything else except this book. He is in ecstasies over it.

PURANI: I also find it very clear.

SRI AUROBINDO: One should have a little knowledge of philosophy. What I have tried to give in the book is a metaphysical foundation of Yoga and a new view of life. Any book of philosophy has to be metaphysical. Even then Haridas Chaudhuri writes that some people may consider it dogmatic—lacking in enough argumentative dialectics.

DR. MANILAL: But Vivekananda's books on Yoga are very easy to follow.

SRI AUROBINDO: His books are made from speeches and he speaks of what everybody ought to know.

DR. MANILAL: He is a philosopher also.

SRI AUROBINDO: Philosophers may not accept him as one.

NIRODBARAN: He doesn't go into the principles of things and the various arguments pro and con.

SRI AUROBINDO: No. (*To Dr. Manilal*) As for *The Life Divine*, it is not the language but the thought-substance that may be difficult to follow. If I had written about the Congress in the same language, then you would have understood. (*Laughter*)

PURANI: One has to go on reading and reading. The first reading may be very dry and difficult.

DR. MANILAL: Yes. That was also the case with midwifery. When I first read the book not a single word entered my head. Afterwards, it became my greatest favourite.

SRI AUROBINDO: So *The Life Divine* may take the place of your midwifery.

NIRODBARAN: Another difficulty besides understanding is that of keeping it all in the memory.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is a different matter. It depends on the mind's capacity to retain things. V will understand and remember everything, I suppose.

NIRODBARAN: And also add much of his own.

SATYENDRA: A commentator can do that.

SRI AUROBINDO: I read many commentaries on Shankara but not a single one agreed with the other. Some were even contradictory in themselves.

DR. MANILAL: To go back to my medicine, will you try it?

NIRODBARAN: The time-limit of six days makes me all the more sceptical of its efficacy. Why not first try on yourself the medicine prescribed for your own trouble?

SATYENDRA (*who had come in after the medicine had been talked about*): What has been prescribed for Dr. Manilal?

NIRODBARAN: Rice-water to be applied.

SATYENDRA: Applied where?

SRI AUROBINDO: On his head. Not for his hair! (*Laughter*) The medicine has been given by a Rishi through the planchette. It will cure Manilal's headache and blood-pressure.

DR. MANILAL: The lady who works the planchette is very devotional and one feels an atmosphere of peace at her place. After one asks questions, she gives the blessings of Panduranga. That means that one should stop.

SRI AUROBINDO: Did she bless you?

DR. MANILAL: Yes, Sir.

SRI AUROBINDO: After your questions?

DR. MANILAL: Yes, Sir.

NIRODBARAN: You asked only one question?

DR. MANILAL: No; I asked two more, but they are personal.

NIRODBARAN: Ah! Let us hear them.

CHAMPAKLAL: Are they about some future fulfilment?

SRI AUROBINDO: He is keeping the interesting parts secret.

DR. MANILAL: No, Sir. There can be nothing secret from you. But if I speak of them I may lose faith.

CHAMPAKLAL: But does a prophecy's success depend on telling or not telling it? If it is to come true, it will do so in any case.

SRI AUROBINDO: He may lose the consolation of mind which comes from faith in the future.

DR. MANILAL: You said last time about a disciple that when he spoke of his experiences to his Guru, the experiences stopped and the Guru said, "The Devil has caught hold of you."

SRI AUROBINDO: I? I don't remember. (*After a while*) Yes, I remember now. It was about a Sannyasi in the Ramakrishna Mission.

DR. MANILAL: Lele also said something like that to you. And you said you would then surrender to the Devil.

SRI AUROBINDO: That was a different matter. I didn't say that to him. I said it to myself: "You have handed me over to the Divine and if as a result of that the Devil catches hold of me, I will say that the Divine has sent the Devil and I will follow him."

By now the sponging was over and Sri Aurobindo was hanging his leg while sitting in a chair.

SRI AUROBINDO (*to Dr. Manilal*): You see, I have kept my promise. I said that as soon as *The Life Divine* was finished I would hang my leg.

DR. MANILAL: I am grateful for it, Sir. But it has taken a long time to finish.

SRI AUROBINDO: I didn't know myself that it would take so long.

DR. MANILAL: Can't a Yogi know whether a medicine proposed is right or not?

SRI AUROBINDO: He can, but will he try to do so?

DR. MANILAL: I already see more bending in the knee, Sir, by the very talk of the application.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not by the talk, but by your very contact with the lady, which I yogically came to know of. (*Laughter*)

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SATYENDRA: Today is another great day according to astrology. Nothing happened on the 13th.

DR. MANILAL: Why is today a great day?

PURANI: You don't know? Jupiter and Venus have come very close together and that portends great events.

DR. MANILAL: They are always close.

SATYENDRA: No, this is the first time they are so near each other.

SRI AUROBINDO: They are supposed to counteract the influences of Saturn and Mars which foreboded a great event.

SATYENDRA: Saturn and Mars came close to each other on the 13th, but nothing happened. Girdharlal says that it does not mean that the results will be immediate. They may happen long after.

SRI AUROBINDO: Something may have happened already. Some more Finns were probably killed. And this Altmark incident may be due to Saturn and Mars!

DR. MANILAL: The astrologers recommend various ceremonies to propitiate Saturn. This really just means propitiating themselves!

SRI AUROBINDO: If you propitiate Saturn now, in ten years Saturn will have forgotten all about it. How then will results come long after?

DR. MANILAL: But do these astrological signs mean anything? What do you think, Sir?

SRI AUROBINDO: I never think. (*Laughter*)

DR. MANILAL: What is your opinion then?

SRI AUROBINDO: I have no opinion. (*Laughter*) The signs may be indicative or effective. One has to find out the explanations according to one's own light.

DR. MANILAL: There are plenty of people who go about as astrologers just to rob people. They know practically nothing. I remember an astrologer who once came to my place to cast the horoscope of some baby. He was mainly after getting some money by saying he would have to propitiate this *graha* (asterism) and that *graha*. But he didn't know that I was a hard master to deal with.

SRI AUROBINDO: He would have to propitiate Saturn before coming to you. (*Laughter*)

PURANI: There was one astrologer of the Gaekwad—

DR. MANILAL: Yes, he was a good man. He is dead.

SRI AUROBINDO: And this is a bad man who is alive! (*Laughter*)

DR. RAO (*who had come for the Darshan after five weeks of absence, a delay due to his usual trouble with the officials*): These astrologers, Sir, are quite accurate about the past but they can't predict the future correctly. Many of my friends have had that experience.

SRI AUROBINDO: I also had that experience with the Bhrigu Samhita people.

DR. MANILAL: One Bhrigu Samhita man came to Baroda and swindled a lot of people, and many became insolvent.

SRI AUROBINDO: How?

DR. MANILAL: People began to speculate heavily, relying on his forecasts and they lost a lot. Even some business people came to grief.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then they deserved it. Business people ought to have some sense.

DR. MANILAL: V told me that he began hearing all sorts of ragas after he started Yoga.

SRI AUROBINDO: Plenty of musicians hear ragas without doing Yoga.

NIRODBARAN: Dr. Manilal can have a shot with this Hanumant Rao who, he says, can cure simply by spreading his hands over the patient, but it will be difficult as he has no faith.

DR. MANILAL: But if he can cure me he will make a name.

SRI AUROBINDO: Become immortal. (*Laughter*)

DR. MANILAL: People will say he has cured Manilal.

SRI AUROBINDO: Even Manilal! (*After a while*) Mother says Dutt looks very old and looks really like a story-teller. (*Laughter*)

EVENING

SRI AUROBINDO (*soon after lying down in bed*): I have seen at Darshan in the afternoon one remarkable man among the whole crowd: Buddhadev. (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: The product of an early marriage!

At this time only Dr. Becharlal, Dr. Manilal, Champaklal and Nirodbaran were present. In the morning we had already indicated to Sri Aurobindo the huge proportions in length and breadth of Buddhadev. That is why he knew his name now. At sponging time Satyendra again raised the topic.

SATYENDRA: Could you make out Buddhadev, Sir?

SRI AUROBINDO: I cannot but remember him as the one remarkable man in the whole crowd.

NIRODBARAN: Superman!

SRI AUROBINDO: Sample of the coming superman. (*Laughter*)

Somebody brought in the question of astrologers again and said that what Naik had learned about an astrologer regarding the Darshan was not correct. It first seemed some Bombay astrologer had said before the accident to Sri Aurobindo's right leg that there would be no Darshan in November 1938 – the month of the accident. Now it was disclosed that the astrologer had said it only after the accident. The whole question was about the predictions by astrologers of future events. In most cases they cannot predict the future correctly.

SRI AUROBINDO: The Mother told me of a French astrologer whose prediction of the future came true. He predicted that a particular man would die of sea-water. He gave the date, even the time. His family kept him away from the sea, and on the day the accident was to take place they were dining together. Someone remarked ironically, "Where is the astrologer's prophecy now? The time he gave is passing away and there is no sea here!" Just at that moment the man was eating a sea-fish, got a bone stuck in his throat and at once died. The hour was exactly the one mentioned by the astrologer.

CHAMPAKLAL: It was fated that he should die.

SRI AUROBINDO: In this case it was.

DR. MANILAL: If one is destined to die, one can't escape.

SRI AUROBINDO: There is not always a fixed destiny. Destiny can be changed. And there are many destinies. Astrologers usually go by a rule of thumb. So some cases come out right, most are wrong. In order to be correct, one must have the power of intuition.

DR. MANILAL: Cheiro made prophecies, some of which have come very true. For example, he said that Prince Edward, son of George V, would lose the throne because of a woman. He also said that the Jews would be persecuted and driven out everywhere.

SRI AUROBINDO: This prophecy about the Jews is a very old one. According to it, when the Jews will be persecuted and driven out of every country, it will be a sign of the coming of the millennium. Usually, the prophecies that come true are the only ones noticed. Nobody notices most of those that don't come true.

(*After a while*) This time Nirod's intuition is proving to be correct, (*To Nirodbaran who, puzzled, had begun looking at him*)

I mean your intuition about typhoid.¹ Today's case, you said, may be typhoid.

NIRODBARAN: Oh, I see.

SRI AUROBINDO: That kind of intuition is very convenient, as it doesn't refer to any particular case. It can be applied to any case.

DR. MANILAL: It seems Tagore has advised Gandhi to give up politics.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why? Gandhi could as well ask Tagore to give up poetry.

DR. MANILAL: And Gandhi has replied that life is impossible without politics. Perhaps because of the factions in the Congress, Tagore advised him like that.

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Sri Aurobindo had finished walking and was sitting in his chair. Dr. Manilal slowly walked up and stood in front of him, evidently to ask something.

NIRODBARAN: Dr. Manilal's face is shining.

SRI AUROBINDO (*looking at Dr. Manilal, who was smiling*): Luminosity of revelation?

DR. MANILAL: I sat near Dr. Becharlal, Sir. He was ecstatic. So I asked him if he has had an experience. He said it was a simple feeling of Ananda. Perhaps I may have got something from him by breathing his air.

SATYENDRA: You get more by breathing his air than by breathing Sri Aurobindo's. (*Laughter*)

DR. MANILAL: Among us all, Dr. Becharlal seems to have profited the most by staying here.

SRI AUROBINDO: I see. (*After a pause, to Nirodbaran*) What does Buddhadev say? Is he satisfied with the Ashram or does he find the people too small for him? (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: I don't know. I will ask him. (*To Dr. Manilal, who was looking sideways at Sri Aurobindo*) Do you know Buddhadev?

DR. MANILAL: Yes.

¹ A few days back, in meditation, Nirodbaran had seen that all were puzzled about the diagnosis of an imaginary case. Then he heard Sri Aurobindo say, "Are you sure it is not typhoid?"

SRI AUROBINDO: Who is he?

DR. MANILAL: Why, Sir, Bhagawan Buddha? (*Laughter*)

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, Buddha has come for the Darshan.

DR. MANILAL (*on being told about Buddhadev's size*): Oh, I know now. We came here in the same compartment. He occupied the top berth just above me. I told him he had better take the lower one.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not safe for you?

DR. MANILAL: No, Sir. He is a professor of mathematics.

NIRODBARAN: No, of Sanskrit.

SATYENDRA (*to Sri Aurobindo*): Did you recognise your old friend Charu Dutt, Sir?

SRI AUROBINDO: I was looking for him, but he went away so hurriedly that I couldn't see him very well.

NIRODBARAN: He said he was feeling rather nervous, wondering what account he could give you of his deeds and misdeeds during the thirty years since he saw you last. (*Laughter*) All the same he had a good look at you from a distance and you also gave him a straight sharp glance, he says.

SRI AUROBINDO: I give a sharp glance to everybody who is not a known face.

PURANI: One of his reminiscences of you is that you signed your name in support of the Suddhi movement. They were taking down the names of people who favoured the movement and you gave yours.

SRI AUROBINDO: When and where?

PURANI: At Delhi.

SRI AUROBINDO: Delhi station? When?

PURANI: After the Surat Congress.

SRI AUROBINDO: Can't be. I don't think I went to Delhi after it. It must have been somebody else and he mistook him for me.

PURANI: You are supposed to have gone about places for propaganda.

SRI AUROBINDO: I never committed the crime of making propaganda in my life.

PURANI: Perhaps you were passing through Delhi station.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is conceivable. That is why I asked about Delhi station.

DR. MANILAL: You can take your bath now, Sir. It will be more pleasant for you.

SRI AUROBINDO: Everything will come in its right time. (*Laughter*) Shanaih, shanaih, langhate girim. (Climbing the hills step by step.)

NIRODBARAN: My typhoid intuition seems to have failed.

SRI AUROBINDO (*laughing*): I see. How is that?

NIRODBARAN: That fellow came to see me today quite all right: no fever!

Bala of the Atelier had had continuous fever for three days. The doctors thought it could be anything, even typhoid – so he was not allowed to go for Darshan. The day after Darshan his fever was gone.

CHAMPAKLAL: So it was only to prevent him from going to Darshan that the fever came.

NIRODBARAN: Looks like it.

CHAMPAKLAL (*to Sri Aurobindo*): Is it a coincidence? Or are there forces which put such obstacles on the way? They say that forces put these obstacles.

DR. MANILAL: If a man is keen, he can put down all obstacles or come for Darshan in spite of the fever.

CHAMPAKLAL: Even if a man is keen, sometimes things happen which he can't prevent and he is overcome by them or can't fight against them.

SRI AUROBINDO: It depends on the case.

CHAMPAKLAL: This particular case, for example?

SRI AUROBINDO: I have not studied this case, so I don't know.

DR. MANILAL: But he must have been keen to come for the Darshan.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why did he want to come for the Darshan?

DR. MANILAL: As usual, it must be for the elevation of his soul, Sir.

SRI AUROBINDO: Are you sure? Did he tell you that? If he wanted to come for that "usual" reason, the fever came as an unusual factor. (*Laughter*)

PURANI: There are plenty of reasons why one wants Darshan.

DR. MANILAL (*to Sri Aurobindo*): How did you find this Darshan, Sir?

SRI AUROBINDO: In what way?

DR. MANILAL: I mean, did you find any improvement?

SRI AUROBINDO: Again, improvement in what way?

DR. MANILAL: Subjectively and objectively, compared to the last Darshan.

SRI AUROBINDO: Subjectively, shall I say, as per usual. (*Laughter*) Objectively, I saw a greater man than had ever come before. (*Laughter*)

DR. MANILAL: Shall we send a telegram to Puranmal?

SRI AUROBINDO: What for?

DR. MANILAL: He said that when Supermind descended he was to be informed. It is also Puranmal who staggered Hukumchand by saying that he had given Rs. 30,000 to the Ashram. Hukumchand didn't dare to give anything.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why?

DR. MANILAL: Because he thought that if Puranmal gave so much he must either give more or nothing at all. He chose the latter course.

SRI AUROBINDO: I hear he has lost heavily.

CHAMPAKLAL: It is right punishment for him. Not only did he not give anything; he took away one loaf of bread from here. (*Sri Aurobindo laughed.*)

DR. MANILAL: How can it be a punishment? The Divine can't be vindictive.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why not?

DR. MANILAL: We know of the Divine as protective, kind and benevolent.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is Vishnu. There is also Shiva.

DR. MANILAL: Shiva is Bholanath.¹

SRI AUROBINDO: He is also Rudra.²

DR. MANILAL: But he can't be vindictive to a Bhakta for such things.

SRI AUROBINDO: It depends on the mood the Divine is in.

NIRODBARAN (*to Dr. Manilal*): What do you mean by the expression "such things"? Go to Dilip. He will say, "Whether a man is a Bhakta or not can be judged only by his dealing with money. Money is the test. If you can't offer money to the Divine, your sincerity is not genuine."

¹ The Lord who forgives and forgets.

² The Lord of violent force.

CHAMPAKLAL: There are plenty of people who are Bhaktas, but when the money-question comes, their Bhakti disappears. (*Sri Aurobindo was enjoying the talk.*)

DR. MANILAL: If money is the test, then robbers also are Bhaktas. Some of them rob people and offer part of their plunder to their god. Is that Bhakti?

SRI AUROBINDO: Why not?

DR. MANILAL: How can it be, Sir? They get the money by robbing others and offer it as a bribe. Is that true Bhakti?

SRI AUROBINDO: What is true Bhakti? There is no true or false Bhakti. Bhakti is Bhakti. Commercial people rob others and give offerings to God. Is it not Bhakti?

DR. MANILAL: But somehow I can't accept it, Sir, that a robber or murderer who offers money obtained by doubtful means does that out of Bhakti.

SRI AUROBINDO: Is a robber worse than a conqueror? A conqueror does the same thing. Where is the difference? A robber too may be brave and noble. When Rama on the battlefield prayed to Durga for help, it was not out of Bhakti he did it. What you say is an ethical or moral point. It has nothing to do with spirituality. The question is whether one feels the Bhakti and, if he feels it, it is quite genuine.

DR. MANILAL: According to Jainism, Sir, (*great laughter*) only that is true Bhakti which has no motive in it and only an offering acquired in a pure or virtuous way is a real offering. The robber is neither motiveless nor is his money acquired in a virtuous way. He offers a small sum of money as a bribe to God.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't understand the point about motive here. There are two kinds of Bhakti: Sahaituki and Ahaituki. Sahaituki Bhakti is that type which may have a motive but it does not mean that it is not Bhakti. Ahaituki is, of course, without motive or demand. If the Divine were to accept offerings only from virtuous people, it would be a hard outlook for the world. (*Laughter*) Your mention of bribe and small amount reminds me of X! He says that people simply thrust the money on him and he can't but accept it. After all, it is a small bribe, he says. I was reminded then of the maidservant's story. Have I told it to you?

DR. MANILAL: No, Sir.

SRI AUROBINDO: A maidservant got an illegitimate child. The mistress of the house was very angry and rebuked her severely for the

baby. The maidservant replied, "But Madam, it is such a small one."
(*Laughter*)

EVENING,

SATYENDRA (*suddenly*): Are you taking the same diet as before, Sir?

SRI AUROBINDO: No, why?

SATYENDRA: I thought that because you seemed to have had more blood formerly.

NIRODBARAN: Why do you say so?

SATYENDRA: From the nails. They were more pink. (*To Sri Aurobindo*) Your diet lacks blood-forming substances.

SRI AUROBINDO: The change is good, then; for I used to feel giddy before; it may have been due to an excess of blood.

NIRODBARAN: It may have been due to an excess of correspondence. (*Sri Aurobindo laughed.*)

SRI AUROBINDO: Very possibly.

DR. MANILAL: Or due to poetry-correction.

SRI AUROBINDO: On the contrary, giddiness comes when I can't write poetry; as soon as I start to write it, it disappears.

DR. MANILAL: No, Sir, I was talking of Nirodbaran's poetry.

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh, but he was not writing frequently. What are the blood-forming substances?

SATYENDRA: Dr. Manilal can tell you of them. Milk is one.

SRI AUROBINDO: Milk I never take.

DR. MANILAL: I think that what you do take has blood-forming elements – fruits and vegetables, etc.

SRI AUROBINDO: I was taking more stuff before, of course – almond juice and other things.

DR. MANILAL: Almond is not good, Sir.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why?

DR. MANILAL: It is very rich and hard to digest. It has plenty of protein and may cause an excess of uric acid.

PURANI: How?

SATYENDRA: Plenty of people take almond. The Westerners take any amount. I take it myself. I don't find it hard to digest.

DR. MANILAL: Because it is hard on the digestion wrestlers don't live long. As I said, it is very rich in protein – and in oil – like meat, and therefore harmful.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't agree.

PURANI: It depends on the person. Some people can digest it, others can't. Just like wine – some can drink any amount and live up to an old age.

SRI AUROBINDO: Rajen Mitra, the antiquarian, used to drink one bottle of brandy every day and yet he lived up to the age of eighty.

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PURANI: Nolini was telling me a story of Charu Dutt's. It is about the Bomb Case. It seems that when you were arrested you wanted to confess to the Police. Subodh Mullick wired to Dutt about it, and Dutt wired back to you, "No theatricals, please!"

SRI AUROBINDO: What is that? I wanted to confess?

NIRODBARAN: No, the story was like this. I was also present. When you were arrested for the first time, you wanted to plead guilty.

SRI AUROBINDO: Arrested for what? For the Bomb Case? For heaven's sake let us make it clear first.

NIRODBARAN: He said it was for an article you had written in the *Bande Mataram*.

SRI AUROBINDO: It was not an article of mine for which I was arrested. It was a reprint from the *Jugantar* that was put in the *Bande Mataram*. Then?

NIRODBARAN: Then the Police didn't know who was the editor. You seem to have thought of pleading guilty. So Subodh Mullick sent a wire to Dutt.

SRI AUROBINDO: But where was Subodh Mullick at that time? I thought he was a detinue somewhere in the North. Then?

NIRODBARAN: He wired to Dutt that you were going to be theatrical.

SRI AUROBINDO: Theatrical? I had common sense enough not to plead guilty.

PURANI: And Dutt wired to you, "No theatricals, please!"

NIRODBARAN: No, not to Sri Aurobindo but to Mullick. Dutt himself first thought of going personally and persuading Sri Aurobindo but thought better of it and wired back and sent Barin with instructions.

SRI AUROBINDO: Where was Dutt at that time? I thought he was in Bombay. It was the editorial staff of the *Bande Mataram* who arranged for the defence and gave evidence, which was rather made-up. (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: Dutt said there was no evidence that you were the editor.

SRI AUROBINDO (*laughing*): There was, but it was erased by the knife.

NIRODBARAN: Some other stories about you occur in Dutt's *Reminiscences*. They are about cards and shooting.

SRI AUROBINDO: What has he said?

NIRODBARAN: That you knew only one card game.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is really going too far.

NIRODBARAN: He taught you the game and at once you picked it up and beat them all because you read their hands!

SRI AUROBINDO: All I remember is that it was a game of bridge which I didn't know and I and Mrs. Dutt were thoroughly beaten by the opposite party. (*Laughter*)

Dr. MANILAL: And the shooting story?

NIRODBARAN: When Dutt and others were practising shooting, Sri Aurobindo came in and he was asked to try. He didn't know how to handle a gun. He was shown how and every time he fired he hit the target which was the tip of a matchstick.

SRI AUROBINDO: What was actually the case was that I and Barin went somewhere in Midnapur to practise shooting. No doubt, it is true that I didn't know how to handle a gun. (*Laughter*)

CHAMPAKLAL: But Anilbaran says you may not remember these incidents.

PURANI: That is not possible. When circumstances and events are described, one can bring them back to memory.

CHAMPAKLAL: Dutt says that at the Surat Congress Sri Aurobindo was protected by men with pistols.

DR. MANILAL: Was there any chance of personal injury, Sir?

SRI AUROBINDO: Not that I know of. Only Satyen Bose was with me and he had a pistol. He said to me, "I have a pistol with me. Shall I shoot Suren Banerji?" I said, "For heaven's sake, don't do that." (*Laughter*)

DR. MANILAL: But why did he want to shoot him?

SRI AUROBINDO: He must have got very excited. At any rate there was a pistol, there was Satyen and there was Banerji. (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: So why not shoot him?

DR. MANILAL: Is it true, Sir, that the British Government wanted to kidnap you and but you were guarded by men with pistols?

SRI AUROBINDO: Maybe.

DR. MANILAL: I was also present at the Congress. I didn't know of any row.

NIRODBARAN: You might have been one of the protectors of Sri Aurobindo, as our Dr. Savor was.

SATYENDRA: I was a child at that time. I was standing far off at a safe distance in a volunteer's uniform and saw the procession going by.

DR. MANILAL: Champaklal applied that medicine, Sir. Nothing untoward has happened to him.

NIRODBARAN: There was also nothing untoward in him.

SRI AUROBINDO: Quite so.

NIRODBARAN: What about Purani?

PURANI: There is a little redness that is due to my cloth sticking to the paste. I wanted to pull it out and, as the hairs were also stuck in the paste, the skin got irritated a little.

SATYENDRA: I also applied it. It gets dry in no time.

CHAMPAKLAL: But one can't walk with it.

SRI AUROBINDO: The leg has to be immobile? It will then be more ankylosed. (*Laughter*)

DR. MANILAL: No, it can be applied at night and removed in the morning.

SRI AUROBINDO: But I don't see how a medicine meant to remove pain and swelling can produce flexion.

DR. MANILAL: Neither do I, Sir, but the lady said it would.

CHAMPAKLAL: Is it because of the Rishi that you have faith in it?

DR. MANILAL: Yes, but the Rishi is not only a Rishi; he gave it with the blessings of Panduranga who is Sri Krishna himself.

SRI AUROBINDO: To prove its effectiveness it must be tried on Purani first.

DR. MANILAL: Yes, we can apply it on his other knee.

NIRODBARAN: Buddhadev Bhattacharya was very happy at your remark.

SRI AUROBINDO: What remark?

NIRODBARAN: You said he was a remarkable man.

SRI AUROBINDO: I see. But why was he happy?

NIRODBARAN: Just because you took his name.

DR. MANILAL: Couldn't you say, Sir, whether this lady who gave the medicine had something genuine in her and in her planchette?

SRI AUROBINDO: There may be something as she goes into a trance, which means that she becomes a medium.

SATYENDRA: She does automatic writing—just like your book, *Yogic Sadhan*.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, in automatic writing one becomes a medium of some power. I don't think that whatever is written in that way is necessarily correct or right. At least I haven't seen it to be so.

CHAMPAKLAL: Sometimes other powers come in too in the name of somebody else.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, they take up and come in others' roles. So it depends on the medium and the nature of the link one has established with the occult worlds. These worlds have their own laws. There are good and bad vital worlds and the results will depend on the connection one has made.

NIRODBARAN: All these powers come from the vital worlds?

SRI AUROBINDO: Of course.

NIRODBARAN: It would be good then if one could establish a connection with good vital worlds and cure cases.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why, one can cure by a connection with bad ones also.

SATYENDRA: It is not always safe for the mediums.

SRI AUROBINDO: No. Sometimes they suffer very badly, either from a deterioration in health or some other trouble.

SATYENDRA: It is not easy, either, to open into those worlds.

NIRODBARAN: It is easier than into the intuitive planes.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes.

NIRODBARAN: How can one open then?

SRI AUROBINDO: By making one's vital pure. There is also an indifferent vital, as there is a good vital and a bad one.

SATYENDRA: Nirodbaran thinks he can open simply by asking.

NIRODBARAN: There are successful doctors with an impure vital.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is a different matter.

DR. MANILAL: When a person inwardly calls you, do you hear, Sir?

SRI AUROBINDO: I may or may not. It depends on the nature and the circumstances of the case.

DR. MANILAL: When one says one hears your voice, do you know about it?

NIRODBARAN: I also want to know about that point. For instance, D said he heard your voice asking him to get up at four o'clock. Do you know about it?

SRI AUROBINDO: You mean whether I spoke?

DR. MANILAL: Do you know about these voices which they say are yours?

SATYENDRA: It may be from the Universal that the response comes and they hear your voice because they have faith in you.

SRI AUROBINDO: Quite so. It depends on some opening in them, either in the mental, psychic or some larger vital part and they may get responses from these planes. Surely I am not going to bother about such things as D's rising up so early.

DR. MANILAL: The Mother or you don't hear the calls of people?

NIRODBARAN: Sri Aurobindo says that the Mother hears prayers from different parts of the world.

CHAMPAKLAL: The Mother narrated in the Store Room how she heard the call of people from Gujarat during a certain ceremony.

SRI AUROBINDO: The Mother hears. I may or may not. The Mother has developed this power from her early age and she used to hear even in her childhood.

DR. MANILAL: At what stage, say, of an illness does the response come?

SRI AUROBINDO: What do you mean?

DR. MANILAL: For instance, I call the Mother during an attack of illness and get no response. Does it mean that the disease has passed the stage when one can get a response?

NIRODBARAN: How can that be? In that case very few people would benefit.

SRI AUROBINDO: It depends on the person. A response can be had at any stage. People have been cured at critical stages, even on their death-bed. You know my maternal uncle Krishna Kumar Mitra's daughter was saved from her death-bed by simple prayer. The doctors had given up all hope after trying all remedies, even snake-poison. She was a typhoid case—the consciousness wouldn't

come back. Then they prayed and soon after the prayer the signs of life returned. Without prayer she would not have been saved.

NIRODBARAN: Charu Dutt says that the Mother's face is not one of a human being but of a goddess though he couldn't look at it at pranam; but when he bowed down, he caressed her feet for some time; he was feeling so happy.

SRI AUROBINDO: If he couldn't look at the Mother's face, how could he say it was not the face of a human being?

NIRODBARAN: He must have looked while waiting for the pranam. He also said that he tried to call the Mother's Presence before coming here but couldn't succeed except once when he felt her compassionate look.

EVENING

CHAMPAKLAL: Today I told Anilbaran about those stories of Dutt and what you had said about them.

SRI AUROBINDO: I may not remember everything about the card incident and in one game I may have been able to tell the others' hands. But I can't forget the shooting incident because that was the first time I handled a gun.

NIRODBARAN: And what about aiming at the tip of the matchstick?

SRI AUROBINDO: That is all fantasy.

SATYENDRA: But do not fantasies become truths? It is in that way that God creates the world probably. Looking at hippopotamuses, zebras and all queer animals, I have come to that view.

DR. MANILAL: Why should God have created the world? Was He unhappy?

SRI AUROBINDO: Does one create when one is unhappy? Or do you think like that because Nirodbaran creates poetry with such difficulty and struggle? (*Laughter*)

DR. MANILAL: He creates for more joy, Sir.

SRI AUROBINDO: That means he is full of joy?

DR. MANILAL: God is always full of joy.

SRI AUROBINDO: I am not talking of God. I am talking of Nirodbaran. (*Laughter*)

SATYENDRA (*to Manilal*): What is your idea about creation?

DR. MANILAL: Creation is Swayambhu (self-born). It is infinite and so has neither beginning nor end.

SRI AUROBINDO: The hippopotamus is also Swayambhu?

DR. MANILAL: Why not, Sir?

SRI AUROBINDO: That is not science. Evolution doesn't say that.

SATYENDRA (to Manilal): According to you, the world was and will be just as it is: everything, space and air compact with the Nigodha or Jiva from eternity? (Laughter)

SRI AUROBINDO: Space is also Swayambhu then?

DR. MANILAL: Yes, Sir, the creation is infinite; it has no beginning, no end, like a tennis ball! (Laughter)

SRI AUROBINDO: And self-existent with Eliot and his hippopotamus existing from eternity? (Laughter)

SATYENDRA (to Dr. Manilal): If you don't believe God has created this world then God can't help you to get liberation. You have to rely absolutely on your Purushartha (self-effort).

SRI AUROBINDO: Quite so.

SATYENDRA (seeing Dr. Manilal sprinkling on his body the water in which Sri Aurobindo's feet had been washed): And why are you doing this?

DR. MANILAL: I believe in Grace. (Laughter) It is Jainism I am talking of. It says each one gets his liberation by his own effort. Even the Tirthankaras don't help.

SATYENDRA: It is better to foist all responsibility on God for all creation good and bad. Dr. Manilal objects to this because of the creation of Rakshasas.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why? Rakshasas can be interesting.

SATYENDRA: He objects too because of his own bad gall-bladder and heart.

SRI AUROBINDO: That also may be interesting to God. (Laughter) I was thinking that if the Tirthankaras don't help, of what use are they?

DR. MANILAL: They serve as examples.

SRI AUROBINDO: If one has to rely on one's own effort, examples won't matter. He will have to make an effort in any case.

DR. MANILAL: The beings that help are the Sashanadevas who worship the Tirthankaras.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then you can worship them; why the Tirthankaras? If the Devas worship the Tirthankaras, they shouldn't help either, because their ideal is also the attainment of a Tirthankara. Why should they help? Besides, it is a contradiction of the true law of

Karma. If Karma brings its reward inevitably, then the help of God is unnecessary. If God helps and intervenes effectively and changes the result of action, the law of Karma is not true.

DR. MANILAL: Though Jainism believes in Purushartha one can pray for help.

SRI AUROBINDO: Ah, you speak of Purushartha as well as of help? The former means that you do everything by your own effort. How does help come in? It is illogical.

DR. MANILAL: According to Jainism, each one is alone and the Jain prays, "I come alone, I shall go alone." He practises this Ekatvam (aleness) in order to get Vairagya (renunciation). But it is not outer Vairagya, like putting on the garb of a Sadhu or monk.

SRI AUROBINDO: But if one is alone and has to become free by his own effort, how do the Tirthankaras, Acharyas and such an infinite number of Siddhas crowded in Siddhasila, come in? Like all religions, it is fantastically illogical. Buddha also said the same thing but the religion said, "I can take refuge in Buddha."

PURANI: There is some similarity between Buddhism and Jainism. Buddha and Mahavira were contemporaries, though they don't seem to have met. Mahavira was born in Vaisali.

DR. MANILAL: In Jainism each soul is bound by ignorance and there are four Lokas represented by the Swastika.

SRI AUROBINDO: Hitler got the Swastika from there then? (Laughter)

SATYENDRA: What is the destiny of the individual according to Jainism?

DR. MANILAL: Mukti.

SATYENDRA: Does one become a Tirthankara?

DR. MANILAL: Nobody can become a Tirthankara. There are only twenty four Tirthankaras for each cycle and they go on cycle after cycle *ad infinitum*.

SRI AUROBINDO: Twenty-four times Infinity? Or Infinity times twenty-four? (Laughter)

NIRODBARAN (to DR. Manilal): I am staggered by your knowledge of Jainism and am surprised that you don't understand *The Life Divine* which is no patch on all these complexities. (Laughter)

DR. MANILAL: Really I don't understand *The Life Divine*. I have tried. What should I do, Sir?

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't know.

NIRODBARAN: Sisir Mitra says X is also thinking of coming for Darshan.

DR. MANILAL: How do you decide, Sir, when to give permission for Darshan?

SRI AUROBINDO: It is the Mother who decides. She consults me only for important cases or when she thinks I should be consulted.

DR. MANILAL: Still you can give some idea, Sir. What aspects do you consider?

SRI AUROBINDO: No aspects.

DR. MANILAL: Or whether which person will benefit, which won't.

SRI AUROBINDO: No such consideration. Each case is judged individually. It depends on each case.

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During breakfast the Mother spoke to Sri Aurobindo about his leg.

THE MOTHER: An offer to cure your leg has come from Agarwal. He says he has got some Force by which he will rub his hand over your knee and cure it. He has cured one case of fracture like that.

SRI AUROBINDO (*shaking his head*): You know there was another man who seemed to have such powers?

THE MOTHER: No.

CHAMPAKLAL: Yes, Mother; he has come for Darshan. Anilbaran says he has cured many cases of leprosy, typhoid and other illnesses. He cures by calling down your Force.

THE MOTHER: If he cures with my Force, I can myself cure Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo can himself do it. Somebody else need not do it.

CHAMPAKLAL: He has not offered to do anything. We simply heard about him. He had come for Darshan before too. His name is Hanumant Rao.

THE MOTHER: Oh, yes, I remember him now.

CHAMPAKLAL: Mother, why don't you cure Sri Aurobindo or why doesn't Sri Aurobindo himself do it? (*The Mother simply smiled.*)

SATYENDRA: Sri Aurobindo has said the body can be transformed only after the descent of the Supermind into the subconscious.

THE MOTHER: Naturally.

CHAMPAKLAL: It can't be cured before that?

THE MOTHER: It can be.

SATYENDRA: When the Supermind conquers the subconscious physical, it will be automatically all right.

THE MOTHER (*smiling*): Not automatically.

SATYENDRA: Because it was not done before, Sri Krishna had to leave his body?

THE MOTHER: It is only Sri Aurobindo's case and mine that are difficult. Other cases are comparatively much easier. And already some cases have been cured.

SATYENDRA: Even ankylosis, Mother?

THE MOTHER: Yes, even a spinal case when the doctors had given up all hope. By two hours' constant concentration he was cured, not only cured but he married afterwards and had children.

CHAMPAKLAL (*addressing Satyendra*): Do you hear?

SATYENDRA: Yes. I didn't say I didn't believe in miracles. I have myself seen many.

CHAMPAKLAL: You believe in them somewhere else but not here!

After the sponging, Champaklal gave Sri Aurobindo a book with some pictures by Krishnalal's brother to look at. This brother had come to the Ashram. He became a little deranged and had to go back. Some time later we heard that he died of burns.

CHAMPAKLAL: Pictures by Krishnalal's brother.

SRI AUROBINDO: Krishna's brother? (*Laughter. After looking at the pictures*) He is better as a sculptor than as a painter. His paintings are weak and poor imitations, but the sculptures have power and individuality. (*Seeing a photograph of him in which his head was bandaged as a result of a lathi charge during the Non-cooperation Movement.*) He looks as if he was suffering. (*Returning the book*) He was predestined to die as he did.

NIRODBARAN: Why such a destiny?

SRI AUROBINDO: His past Karma required some such experience.

DR. MANILAL: But Karma . . .

SRI AUROBINDO: Not Karma in the ordinary sense. It is his psychic being, his soul, that had to pass through such an experience in order to exhaust some Karma left over.

PURANI (*after some time*): I have consulted Shivji. He says the Jains believe that the world is Swayambhu. So from the beginning all species have been the same and the Tirthankara is a Nimitta-karana (instrumental cause). The whole secret of liberation consists in bringing together Nimitta (instrument) and Upadana. Upadana is inherent capacity. Every soul is essentially free and its freedom can be realised with the help of Nimitta and Kala, time. It is like a seed with all potentialities in it but it must have time, environment and other circumstances for its fruition. The Tirthankara is only a Nimitta. Everything has to be done by the Upadana from within. It is like being a lion cub living in a group of lambs; he thinks he is a lamb. But when he sees another lion, he becomes conscious and free. The other lion actually does nothing.

SRI AUROBINDO: How does he become free then? Is there any influence that goes out from a Tirthankara? Does anything help?

PURANI: No. Nothing helps.

DR. MANILAL: It is like this, Sir: you have a house with a garden.

SRI AUROBINDO: All that is metaphor. My question is whether a Tirthankara exerts any influence.

DR. MANILAL: The Acharyas by their teachings.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is a mental influence. I don't want to know about mental and philosophical influence. I want to know if any psychological influence is exerted. The Shishya (disciple) of course may or may not benefit, according to his capacity, openness, etc.; that is granted. But a Guru does give something direct from himself to the disciple. I want to know whether such an influence is given by a Tirthankara.

PURANI: No.

DR. MANILAL: It is said that wherever a Tirthankara is within a radius of four Yojanas¹, all creatures, animals, human beings, etc., live in peace and lose their enmity.

¹ A yojana is a varying measure, commonly equal to about eight miles but in ancient times four and a half or even only two and a half miles.

PURANI: Yes, Dharamchand was telling me of a vision he had about a Tirthankara sitting on a central throne and all of the species listening to him.

SRI AUROBINDO: You wanted to be one of the species?
(*Laughter*)

SATYENDRA: If what Dr. Manilal says is true, then there is some influence emanating from the Tirthankara.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is due to his aura.

PURANI (*addressing Dr. Manilal*): Are there no instances in the life of Mahavira explaining this?

DR. MANILAL: I don't know. I have to make a research. (*To Sri Aurobindo*) You also have an aura, Sir – all around Pondicherry, it is said.

SRI AUROBINDO: You mean to say that there is no fighting in Pondicherry? (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: Not that; but there should be less trouble, disharmony, suffering.

SRI AUROBINDO: Do some research. (*Laughter*)

CHAMPAKLAL: When the Mother's car met with an accident a long time ago, it was said that it could happen only because the car had gone beyond your aura.

SRI AUROBINDO: Which accident? When the chauffeur was injured?

CHAMPAKLAL: Yes.

NIRODBARAN: We have heard that there is a protective aura up to a certain limit. Beyond that one is not always safe.

SATYENDRA: Does it mean that people living in Bombay or Calcutta don't get help?

SRI AUROBINDO: It is not like that. An aura is something that projects itself from the vital and physical being; those who are open can feel it and be influenced by it.

DR. MANILAL: When I come for the Mother's interview or even stay here I feel something everywhere, while at Baroda I don't get that peace and calm. Why?

SRI AUROBINDO: Surely there ought to be a difference between Baroda and here? There is no Vallabhbhai here, no office work and no family affairs.

PURANI: About Nigodha, not Jiva, the Jains say there are many micro-organisms inhabiting our body and several other things. A potato, for instance, is compact with these Jivas.

SATYENDRA: That is why the Jains don't eat potatoes.

PURANI: All vegetables that grow underground have these Jivas.

SRI AUROBINDO: And do the vegetables that grow above the ground have fewer Jivas? For example, in dal or flour are there fewer?

PURANI: Yes. To return to Jainism: each soul, according to it, is free but has chosen to be bound and so it is bound.

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh, it is bound because it has chosen not to be free?

PURANI: And the creation, as we said, is Swayambhu: all species and all forms have been the same from eternity and will remain so.

SRI AUROBINDO: All forms, too? What about the dinosaurs then—and other prehistoric animals? Where are they?

DR. MANILAL: They must be somewhere. (*Laughter*) It is as in chemistry: in some form they exist somewhere. According to science, nothing can be lost.

SRI AUROBINDO: Does it also mean that you, Manilal, have been just the same Manilal from the very beginning of creation? (*Laughter*)

DR. MANILAL: Maybe, Sir.

CHAMPAKLAL (*to Dr. Manilal*): When are you going?

DR. MANILAL: Tomorrow.

SRI AUROBINDO: Tomorrow?

DR. MANILAL: Yes, Sir.

CHAMPAKLAL: You don't want to see the results of your treatment?

DR. MANILAL: Sri Aurobindo doesn't want to try.

NIRODBARAN: But you didn't prove its effectiveness on Purani, as Sri Aurobindo suggested.

SATYENDRA: If you try that rice and dal treatment for the head, let us know the results.

SRI AUROBINDO: Dinner to the head?

NIRODBARAN (*to Dr. Manilal*): When are you coming again?

DR. MANILAL: August.

SRI AUROBINDO: Or April?

NIRODBARAN (*to Dr. Manilal*): But next time you may find the door locked.

DR. MANILAL: Send me a wire.

SRI AUROBINDO: What is that?

CHAMPAKLAL: Nirodbaran says that no more service may be required of you and so we will all be driven out of your room. He may be right.

DR. MANILAL (to Champaklal): Why do you expect this?

SATYENDRA: It is not his expectation but his fear.

SRI AUROBINDO: Expectation on Champaklal's part in the sense of the French *espérer*, which means both hope and expectation of what is to come!

DR. MANILAL: I always feel inspired by an image of Buddha or a photo of Christ.

SRI AUROBINDO: Photo? There was no photography at that time.

DR. MANILAL: I mean picture. I feel peace within whenever I see one.

SRI AUROBINDO: You may have been a Christian, then, in a past life.

DR. MANILAL: But Shankara does not give me any peace.

EVENING

DR BECHARLAL: Is remaining in the Mother's consciousness the same as Japa?

SRI AUROBINDO: How do you mean?

DR BECHARLAL: Are we not in the same state?

SRI AUROBINDO: No. Japa is a means to the other, just like constant remembrance; both lead to the Mother's consciousness.

DR BECHARLAL: Aren't Japa and remembrance the same thing?

SRI AUROBINDO: Remembrance is done by the mind, while Japa is done by speech, the use of a name or something equivalent to it.

DR. MANILAL: Which is better, Sir?

SRI AUROBINDO: Both can be effective.

DR. MANILAL: But which is better? Doesn't Japa sometimes tend to be mechanical?

SRI AUROBINDO: It depends on the person.

At this point the Mother came and the talk stopped. During the sponging, Dr. Manilal wanted Dr. Becharlal to resume the talk.

DR. MANILAL: Becharlal wants to ask you something more. His questions were not answered.

SRI AUROBINDO: They were.

DR. MANILAL: But not completely.

SRI AUROBINDO: What was incomplete? If you want to ask anything more, ask.

DR. MANILAL: Japa and remembrance seem to me to be the same, Sir.

SRI AUROBINDO: How can they be the same? As I said, you do Japa of a name or some mantra without there being any mental element in it, while you remember something with your mind.

DR. MANILAL: But when I do Japa in my heart, I remember the name of Miraravinda, Miraravinda.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is a name! That is a name!

DR. MANILAL: How can one remember without a name, then?

SRI AUROBINDO: Why not? I can remember you though I may be confused about your name and call you Murtilal instead of Manilal. (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN (*to Dr. Manilal*): When you go away we shall still remember you.

DR. MANILAL: That will be in connection with my name.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why? It will be your Rupa and Swarupa. (*Laughter*) Remembrance is dwelling on the idea of God or, if you like, his image.

DR. MANILAL: Japa tends to be mechanical, Sir; one does Japa but at the same time thinks of his household matters, as when one says, "The cow is getting loose!"

SRI AUROBINDO: But sometimes Japa may go on, the cow may also be there, but the mind gets loose. (*Laughter*)

DR. MANILAL: Which is better, Sir?

SRI AUROBINDO: That depends on the person and the way he does it.

DR. MANILAL: There is Manilal and there is Becharlal, Sir.

SRI AUROBINDO: Ask Becharlal. Which do you find better?

DR. BECHARLAL: Remaining in the Mother's consciousness—that is, feeling the Mother's presence and influence, feeling her action in oneself.

SRI AUROBINDO: That, of course.

DR. MANILAL: What is meant by the Mother's consciousness?

SRI AUROBINDO: As he said, feeling the presence and the influence.

DR. MANILAL: Remembrance is also getting the presence—they are the same.

SRI AUROBINDO: How? When you are not here, we remember you; when you are here, we don't need to do so, for we have your presence.

SATYENDRA: That means you haven't got the true consciousness; you still have to go by the mind. (*Laughter*)

DR. MANILAL (*after some time*): People who worship images—do they get their Ishta (chosen deity)?

SRI AUROBINDO: It depends on their faith. There are plenty of instances where people have got what they wanted by worshipping images. Images are only forms.

PURANI: At the age of ten, during my sacred thread ceremony at the Ambaji temple in Gujarat, I saw a lot of visions, various lights, many forms of the Mother. I thought that everybody was seeing these things. I had faith, of course.

SRI AUROBINDO: There must have been a living Presence in that temple.

SATYENDRA: Yes, Sir. Plenty of people have seen visions there, and people go there with a living faith.

NIRODBARAN (*to Purani*): How do you know they were the Mother's forms?

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh, that is easy.

PURANI: Those who don't see visions hear sounds.

NIRODBARAN (*to Dr. Manilal*): Which did you get?

DR. MANILAL: Neither.

NIRODBARAN: I would have been in the same boat. We seem to be alike. We must have had some relation in a previous life.

SRI AUROBINDO: I suppose that is why both of you have come back as doctors in this life!

DR. MANILAL: But I was not a doctor at the time I went to that temple.

SRI AUROBINDO: Ah, but the doctor must have been latent in you.

DR. MANILAL: Becharlal also is a doctor.

SRI AUROBINDO: He is less of a doctor.

PURANI: He is more of a devotee.

NIRODBARAN: I am less of a doctor too.

SATYENDRA: You! You are both a doctor and a devotee. (*To Sri Aurobindo*) Today, when he was wondering whether to put a sling or not, I told him, "Go to the next room and meditate."

SRI AUROBINDO: Meditate? For what?

NIRODBARAN: To get the decision by intuition.

SRI AUROBINDO: Indecision? (*Laughter*)

DR. MANILAL: What case?

SATYENDRA: Anusuya's. Nirodbaran says he no longer needs to meditate about it. The decision is automatic now. (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: Talking of visions, Sisir Mitra told me that Nandalal had a vision of Vishnu in an image. He was going somewhere and on the way he saw an image of Vishnu in a temple. It was nothing beautiful but he kept on gazing at it till suddenly he saw Vishnu come out from the image and enter into him. When his pupil came to call him he replied in a sort of trance, "Do you know who I am?" Again, once while taking his bath, he saw that it was somebody else who was doing it, not he. Two or three recent paintings he has done just like a passive instrument. He was much amazed.

SRI AUROBINDO: That happens to artists and poets.

NIRODBARAN: But he never had this experience before.

SATYENDRA: These are recent experiences?

NIRODBARAN: Yes.

SRI AUROBINDO: Is he in the habit of doing meditation?

NIRODBARAN: I don't know.

SRI AUROBINDO: If he is, then these experiences may come now and then. There is something there in the consciousness which has been prepared by meditation and one gets these visions and experiences as a result. Otherwise it must have been a natural opening.

NIRODBARAN: He had a two hours' talk with Sisir and was so much moved by Sisir's account of the Ashram that he embraced him.

SRI AUROBINDO: Did Sisir meet him after going from here?

NIRODBARAN: Yes. Tagore seems to be saying that what we are writing here is neither Bengali nor Sanskrit. That won't do in Bengali poetry. Of course Nishikanto is excluded.

PURANI: He wants everybody to follow him. He can't like Dilip since he published Harin's letter in *Anami*.

SRI AUROBINDO: What letter?

PURANI: Harin wrote to Dilip that if they want something new in Bengali they must get rid of Tagore's influence. Tagore is dominating too much.

SRI AUROBINDO (*smiling*): That is not untrue. I didn't see that letter.

PURANI: Yes, it is there. Dilip also made comments, after which Tagore can't like him. Then you also wrote to Dilip that he has brought some new element in his poems, the element of Bhakti—which no other poet had done before.

SRI AUROBINDO: Bhakti? I couldn't have said that.

PURANI: Perhaps the psychic element, and you didn't include Tagore.

SRI AUROBINDO: About this new poetry, is it true that it is not Bengali?

NIRODBARAN: I don't know. Tagore admits that there may be a spiritual element.

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh, he admits this?

NIRODBARAN: Yes. But, though he may not understand it, why shouldn't it be Bengali? He says he was rather surprised to hear that Sahana had taken up building work instead of music.

SRI AUROBINDO: He heard that? He ought to be pleased as it is a work for the masses.

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PURANI: You know Govardhan Das of Punjab? He was a Congress leader. In 1919 he came here to evade arrest during Non-cooperation. He asked you if he could be arrested here too. You said, "No, one can get protection here." But he was asked by Gandhi to come out of Pondicherry and as soon as he reached Villipuram he was arrested. After that he was sent to jail many times in connection with the Non-cooperation movement. Afterwards he got a job in some Canadian insurance company and made money. He is here now and wants to stay and lead a spiritual life.

CHAMPAKLAL: Does this going to jail benefit one?

SRI AUROBINDO: Benefit in which way? You get the benefit of the experience of jail. (*Laughter*)

CHAMPAKLAL: I mean: Is one helped in any way by trying to keep one's promise and going to jail? Should one always keep one's promise? He had to go from Pondicherry because as a non-violent worker he could not do anything else.

SRI AUROBINDO: If one has made a promise to steal, one is not bound to keep it.

PURANI: Gandhi's view is that one has no right to forsake his duty and if by doing his duty he courts arrest he must do it. That is why Gandhi asked Das to come out of Pondicherry. Not only that: one has no right, he says, to break a promise. For instance, he told our Govindbhai that he had deserted his duty and he should go back to nationalist work.

CHAMPAKLAL: Is one bound to keep such promises and does one profit by keeping them?

SRI AUROBINDO: There is no rule covering all promises. It is not a question of benefit but of doing one's duty. If one has taken up a duty, he has to discharge it so long as he feels bound by it. Otherwise it would be a fault on his part to forsake it. But if he feels that the object which he served has no longer the same value for him, he is no longer bound by any duty.

PURANI: But Gandhi thinks that one can't forsake one's duty once it has been taken up, nor can a promise be broken for any reason.

SATYENDRA: We are mixing up two standards. Gandhi stands for the ethical or moral standard, and anybody abandoning that standard is guilty in his eyes. He does not take his stand on a spiritual standard.

SRI AUROBINDO: The question is not that. The question is whether one is bound to keep one's promise, bound to do one's duty.

CHAMPAKLAL: That is the point on which we want to know your view.

SRI AUROBINDO: One is not bound to keep a promise if there is a call felt for a higher life or if the object or goal of life for which the promise was made has quite changed. Duty exists so long as you are on the moral plane. On the spiritual plane, one has to go where the call of the Spirit leads him. Duty no more binds him.

DR. MANILAL: When people come here for Darshan and don't go back they receive plenty of letters accusing them of forsaking their duty.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes—and we also receive letters!

DR. MANILAL (*after a while*): Today I got peace again in meditation, Sir. But that gall-bladder pain came back. It comes now and then.

SRI AUROBINDO: Can't you get rid of the habit?

DR. MANILAL: No, Sir. I have left it to the Grace. (*Laughter*)

PURANI: Perhaps you want to keep the habit?

DR. MANILAL: No, no, I don't want to keep it at all.

SRI AUROBINDO: But something in you may want it. Otherwise why should it come?

DR. MANILAL: Which part of me wants it, Sir? I myself don't know.

SRI AUROBINDO: The body consciousness may respond to the habit and the vital consciousness may want to accept the law of pain.

PURANI: The Pudgals (material elements), perhaps. (*Laughter*)

SRI AUROBINDO: The Pudgals are hard to deal with.

DR. MANILAL: But can't one get rid of them?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, it is possible but rather difficult.

DR. MANILAL: Can I follow the process?

SRI AUROBINDO: Not yet, I think. (*Laughter*)

CHAMPAKLAL: Perhaps some Karma still remains. (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN (*to Dr. Manilal*): But the pain may be good for you in some way.

DR. MANILAL: On the contrary it comes in the way of my divine consciousness. (*Laughter*) I mean that when the pain comes I forget the Divine and all my concentration goes to the pain. I can remember the Divine more when there is no pain.

SRI AUROBINDO: But there are people who forget God when they are happy, and remember more in the midst of suffering.

SATYENDRA (*to Dr. Manilal*): Like the Sufis and the Bhaktas you should rejoice in the suffering and think that it is a message of the Beloved.

NIRODBARAN: God may have given you suffering in order to help the growth of your soul.

SRI AUROBINDO: The commentators on Shakespeare say that when he was in trouble he wrote the great tragedies.

DR. MANILAL: It is like Nero fiddling when Rome was burning.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is a different matter. God may smile and say, "Suffering will do good to Manilal." (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN (*to Dr. Manilal*): Is there no gospel of suffering in Jainism?

PURANI: Yes, there is. Jainism says that suffering helps the soul to grow from a lower to a higher status and that suffering is the result of past Karma.

DR. MANILAL: That is Nirjhar. There are two kinds of suffering: Sakama (with desire) and Akama (without desire). Sakama is that which one imposes on oneself and Akama is what comes uninvited to one.

PURANI: Fasting has a great place in Jainism.

DR. MANILAL: Mahavira used to fast for more than six months at a time. But I cannot fast at all. When not hungry, I can live on very little milk.

SRI AUROBINDO: Americans fast for forty days. Goethe used to take only one meal a day, but that meal was very big.

DR. MANILAL: How shall I get rid of this pain in the gall-bladder, Sir?

NIRODBARAN: Concentrate on your Self and forget the pain.

DR. MANILAL: I can't forget it. If I try, it says, "I am, I am."
(*Laughter*)

SRI AUROBINDO: Can't you separate yourself from the body? You should try to think you are not the body, you are not the mind. Then you won't suffer.

DR. MANILAL: No, Sir, I can't separate myself. I try to keep quiet and detached, but when the pain comes, I forget everything. I want to be so strong that nothing will shake me. (*As Dr. Manilal said this, he gave Satyendra a blow from behind. Satyendra started smiling.*)

NIRODBARAN: He is emphasising his strength by a blow on Satyen's back.

DR. MANILAL: I am not beating Satyen.

PURANI: Nobody beats him.

SRI AUROBINDO: Nobody can beat anybody.

DR. MANILAL: It is like the story about Alexander, Sir. Alexander wanted to take away an Indian Sadhu with him. The Sadhu refused. Alexander threatened him with punishment of death. The Sadhu replied, "You have never uttered a greater lie in your life." (*Laughter*) I believe, Sir, that you can take any poison without any harm. You seemed to have said this to somebody, not to me.

SRI AUROBINDO: Nor to anybody else. (*After a pause*) But such a thing is possible. There are people who can do that. They have to

do some Kriya after taking the poison. Also, one can accustom oneself to poison by taking it in small quantities. You know the story of Mithridates, the great enemy of the Romans. He accustomed himself to all poisons. There was no poison that could kill him. But when he was in danger of being caught by the Romans, he couldn't kill himself by taking poison. He had to ask somebody to slay him.

EVENING

SATYENDRA: You have said, Sir, in *The Life Divine* that only the absolute idealist can persist in this path. How, then, can ordinary mortals like us—

SRI AUROBINDO (*smiling*): It is not for ordinary mortals.

SATYENDRA: Even the Vedantic realisation is too high, they say, for the Kaliyuga—and your path is so much longer.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not so much a longer path as a new path—one that has not been trod before by others.

SATYENDRA: Will it be easier for those to come, just because we are treading it?

SRI AUROBINDO (*smiling*): Naturally.

NIRODBARAN (*to Satyendra*): But you will have the glory of having been a pioneer.

SATYENDRA: I don't want to be a pioneer. I am satisfied with much less. (*To Sri Aurobindo*) Thinking of your Yoga, Sir, I feel like Arjuna when he laid down his bow after seeing the two vast armies on the battlefield ready to slaughter each other, and said to Krishna, "I am not able to stand and my mind seems to be whirling."

NIRODBARAN: Perhaps you have come as Arjuna in this new play of Krishna.

SATYENDRA: For you it is all right. You have begun with Intuition on the way to Supermind.

SRI AUROBINDO (*referring to Nirod's famous intuition about brinjal*): From Brinjal to Supermind? (*Laughter*)

SATYENDRA: I am satisfied with the realisation of the Self. Supermind can be left to Manilal.

NIRODBARAN: Intuition is the first step to Supermind, isn't it?

SRI AUROBINDO: First step?

NIRODBARAN: When Manilal asked you what Vivekananda had taught you during your inner contact with him in jail, you

replied that he had taught you about Intuition as a first step to Supermind.

SRI AUROBINDO: I may have said something like that, but I didn't mean it as you understand it. What I meant is that one can get a glimpse of Supermind from the Intuition level, and such a glimpse was my first step.

PURANI (*after a while*): I believe Nirodbaran feels a little dull tonight for want of discussion of Jainism.

SRI AUROBINDO: How?

PURANI: Because of Dr. Manilal's departure.

SRI AUROBINDO: Is all that Manilal says about Jainism correct?

SATYENDRA: He seems to have learnt the popular side more than the philosophic.

SRI AUROBINDO: Their Tirthankaras seem to have tremendous powers which even the Avatars don't have. The Avatars have to fight all the way with Rakshasas like Ravana.

SATYENDRA: Don't the Avatars come for particular purposes and are they not concerned only with them, so that their field of action is limited?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes.

SATYENDRA: The Tirthankaras appear to be somewhat like Avatars, because a Tirthankara does not allow knowledge to get lost.

SRI AUROBINDO: Can anybody become a Tirthankara?

SATYENDRA: According to Manilal, no.

PURANI: No, they can be siddhas. Siddhas are something like gods, and there are any number of them, whereas the Tirthankaras are only twenty-four in a cycle.

NIRODBARAN: The question is how the Tirthankaras radiate their influence.

PURANI: On that we are not very clear. Satyendra was saying that something goes out from their aura that makes all get the influence and lose their enmity or their lower nature.

SATYENDRA: What comes from their aura is not the same as what Sri Aurobindo has said about something imparted directly by the Guru.

PURANI: They say that wherever a Tirthankara stands, everybody receives according to his language, opening, etc., and all animals forget their nature, just as when the Mother stands in meditation each receives according to his mode of being.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is a different matter. Each one will of course receive in his own language. An Englishman won't receive in Bengali or Gujarati. That depends on the response of the mind, the vital being or whatever it may be. About Ahimsa (non-violence), animals feel if a person is really non-violent or not and they approach a person according to that feeling. But what I want to know is whether Jainism accepts any intermediary such as a Guru who helps a disciple in the spiritual path. There are religions like Buddhism which don't believe in such things. Buddhism strongly says that one has to rely on one's own effort. Nobody can help one. By the teachings or precepts or instructions, the path can be shown – that's all – but no other direct and active help can be given. Is that the case in Jainism too?

PURANI: Yes. They give the example of a cow and grass. If the grass is supplied, the cow has to manufacture its own milk from it by its own endeavour. Nobody can help the cow in that process. Thirthankaras are only Nimittas (instruments).

NIRODBARAN: Surendra Mohan Ghose said to Sahana that there was a rumour in Calcutta that she had been given the Building Service work as a punishment for her egoism as a singer.

SRI AUROBINDO (*laughing*): Then Nishikanto has been given cooking work as a punishment for his being a poet? And isn't Sahana singing every day now?

NIRODBARAN: They must have come to their conclusion at the time when she had stopped her music for a while.

SRI AUROBINDO: And now is her egoism gone since she is singing as well as doing Building Service work?

NIRODBARAN: Sisir says that one of the reasons for A's anger against the Ashram is Dilip, since he attacks people for their criticism of his poetry. A says, "Why doesn't Sri Aurobindo say anything?"

SRI AUROBINDO: How is that? He can express his own views.

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NIRODBARAN: The Princess of Gauripur, whenever she looks at the Mother, finds tears flowing from her eyes. She can't look at the Mother!

SRI AUROBINDO (*smiling*): She can look at her but can't see her.

NIRODBARAN: She doesn't know why the tears come. She can't analyse her feelings.

SRI AUROBINDO: They are psychic tears. Her psychic being is behind the veil but sufficiently near the surface.

NIRODBARAN: She says she is seeking refuge, inner refuge.

SRI AUROBINDO: Of course.

NIRODBARAN: But she doesn't know where to get it. Her family life is in a way quite happy. She is the pet of the family. Her husband loves her very much but she feels guilty that she cannot give him any response.

SRI AUROBINDO: These things can't be helped.

NIRODBARAN: Family life doesn't appeal to her. When her mother was dying, she prayed to God to spare her but God didn't listen, so she thought, "If God doesn't listen, what is the use of calling him?" She said, "If he does everything according to his own will, I have no use for God." So she became indifferent.

SRI AUROBINDO: She wanted God to act according to her will and not his own? (*Laughter*)

PURANI: A wanted to know what you thought of his guru, S. He was telling me that S once heard a voice: "A needs help." At that time A was passing through some difficulty. S came to him and told him about the voice. A admitted his difficulty but said it would get all right. Some time later A came by a copy of your *Essays on the Gita* and when he was reading it he was possessed by some power and he felt that you alone could give him guidance. By the time S came to give him the Rama Mantra which had been given to him by somebody, A had already got the same Mantra automatically; so there was no question of taking it again. Because of this connection with S, A has an attachment to him and so he has requested you to let S have your darshan. S has come here both from curiosity and because of A. He was telling A that when he was coming for the Darshan he heard a voice which was your voice, saying to him, "You are a special personality and you are welcome." He hasn't spoken of his impression of you or the Mother or of his own feelings; he praised only the external side of the Ashram. So I thought that to come all the way merely to hear that voice was a rather poor result. (*Sri Aurobindo smiled when he heard about the voice.*)

NIRODBARAN: He didn't come in order to hear that voice.

SATYENDRA: But it may have a far-reaching result for him. (*Laughter*)

SRI AUROBINDO: If he is a special personality, he need not have come all the way here to know that. (*Laughter*)

SATYENDRA: That special personality was hiding there, Sir, and it came out here. (*Laughter*)

PURANI: He hears many voices and attaches great importance to them. And because he has got some correct guidance at times from such voices he takes them as authentic. Just before the Hindu-Muslim riot in Lahore, he heard a voice predicting that a great calamity would befall him but that he would in the end be all right. Actually he got stabbed in the back. The voice told him not to be perturbed and he became well soon.

SRI AUROBINDO: There are many kinds of voices. Some are of greater beings who have more knowledge than human beings. Some voices come from one's own mental, vital and physical planes. And then there are voices of the inner being which are very difficult to distinguish.

PURANI: In external affairs too he is guided by his voices, for example, in connection with changing houses. He gets warnings about accidents also.

SRI AUROBINDO: Such voices are good for the external life and they can be beneficial but they don't carry one far in the inner life.

PURANI: And this voice about special personality? I can't believe that at all. He must have wanted to hear such a voice.

SRI AUROBINDO: Wish-fulfilment? (*Laughter*)

SATYENDRA: The voices sometimes want to mock him perhaps. (*Laughter*)

SRI AUROBINDO: The man has force and a great ambition but he has not gone very deep. That was the Mother's impression.

PURANI: When V went back from here S asked him to take initiation from him. V refused, saying, "I have had my initiation."

SRI AUROBINDO: S has the ambition to be a Guru.

PURANI: It's very strange he didn't feel anything else here, while Ganapati who is also not a disciple felt a higher consciousness here.

SRI AUROBINDO: Ganapati had considerable spiritual experience. S didn't appear to have gone very deep. Does he know the source of his voices?

PURANI: He says that they come from the Overmind.

SATYENDRA: That is your term, Sir.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. (*Laughter*)

PURANI: According to S he goes to the Truth above the mind and hears the voices.

SRI AUROBINDO: From the Truth-Consciousness? (*Laughter*)

PURANI: Yes. By Overmind he means anything above the mind. He has many influential disciples and many rich persons follow him.

SATYENDRA: It is all right if he only gives them Rama-nama and stops there.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, otherwise, if they go by voices, they will land themselves in difficulties.

SATYENDRA: I was the first to come in contact with him, Sir. He had some tooth-trouble and he came to me. I may have passed something to him! Anyway, he seems to be in fine health and is a personality.

SRI AUROBINDO: He is a fine-looking man.

PURANI: A was anxious to know what your impression of him was, and also of his spiritual destiny. He feels that S is stuck. But can't he be helped out?

SRI AUROBINDO: It is very difficult to help people who are self-satisfied with their condition, and, unless he gets rid of his ambition, further advance may be difficult.

PURANI: When somebody said to him that the work here is different from that outside, he answered, "This is said to create faith in the followers. Every great man says about whatever work he is doing that it is divine. Gandhi calls his Harijan work divine work."

SRI AUROBINDO: Why not? The Divine has several works.

SATYENDRA (*after some time*): I find that you are the first to distinguish the planes above the mind.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why? I have met many Sannyasins who spoke to me about them. They call these planes Bhumis. They didn't give any names to them but they knew about them.

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NIRODBARAN: Anilbaran's letter. This time it is about politics. He writes: "A Zamindar of Mymensingh named Umapada came to see me and said that oppression by the Muslim League has terribly increased."

SRI AUROBINDO: Suren Ghose in his interview with the Mother has spoken all about it and the Mother has said whatever is necessary.

NIRODBARAN: The letter continues: "Brajendra says that communism is spreading among the youth and Congress can't stand against it. The only way, I told him, is to propagate Sri Aurobindo's ideas and, leaving Gandhi's constructive programme, take up the old village communism."

SRI AUROBINDO: Communism? All that is an old formula. It won't do at all. How is he going to link Sri Aurobindo's ideas to communism? And where was there ever village communism in India?

NIRODBARAN: Why? What about the Panchayat systems, etc.?

SRI AUROBINDO: That is the village commune, not communism. Communism means having common property.

NIRODBARAN: I think he means commune. Then he says: "About politics there is no necessity to fight the British any more, because they can't stand now against India's will. Now by exerting pressure on government, we must get power and accept ministries as a corollary."

SRI AUROBINDO: All that is old; there is nothing new in it. Next?

NIRODBARAN: "To make this effective we must have unity and the pressure of a united will."

SRI AUROBINDO: How is he going to get it?

NIRODBARAN: By following your trends of thought. Unity not only of India but of the whole world: the principle of unity lies there. Now Public Enemy No. 1 is Bolshevism, No. 2 Communalism, No. 3 perhaps Gandhism.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why perhaps? (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: The remedy is to broadcast Sri Aurobindo's ideas and ideals extensively and to try large-scale production.

SRI AUROBINDO: Large-scale production of what?

NIRODBARAN: Don't know.

SATYENDRA: Industrial production he means.

NIRODBARAN: Or perhaps human production. (*Laughter*)

PURANI: He speaks of Gandhism as Public Enemy No. 3 because he overvalues Gandhi's influence and his philosophy. His programme is accepted because there is no other.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, Gandhi's programme is the only one at present.

PURANI: When some revolutionary approached Tilak, Tilak said, "If you can show me even a fifty-five percent chance of success of a revolution I shall be ready to raise the standard of revolt. But is the country ready? Are the people willing to join the army? What will you do when the British army attacks you?" The revolutionary couldn't convince Tilak.

SRI AUROBINDO: Armed revolution is impossible at present. At the time we started work, there was some chance of success because the instruments of war were not so developed. If irregular and guerilla warfare had been carried out on a country-wide scale, there might have been some chance. But now with aeroplanes and machine-guns, etc., armed revolution would be crushed in no time.

NIRODBARAN: Perhaps the aim of the revolutionaries is not so much to fight the British army as to intimidate the British Government.

SRI AUROBINDO: A small number of revolutionaries won't intimidate the Government. Even if they succeed, the Government will not give independence but Dominion Status, which they are willing even now to give after some time. England will give up India only when she finds it impossible to retain her, either because of the threat of defeat or because the whole nation is united behind the demand for independence.

NIRODBARAN: In Ireland they were forced to submit. They could have crushed Ireland if they had wanted to.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is what Lloyd George threatened – that if De Valera didn't accept the treaty, Ireland would be crushed. All the Irish people were united in one demand and object. Every woman and child was a revolutionary and carried out what the leaders told them. Even then De Valera had to accept the treaty. In India there is no such possibility of country-wide rebellion, even of unarmed rebellion.

NIRODBARAN: When you started the revolutionary movement, did you think it would succeed?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, I had the idea that it would succeed but found that it was not possible.

SATYENDRA (*after the talk had touched on several topics*): There was a Jain saint, Rajchandra. He seems to have predicted the death of a man, the exact time and date. According to the prediction he

was to die at night. The saint said, "Unless my consciousness is clouded he will die at night." The man died during the day but on the same date. Sir, is death predestined? Can the exact date be predicted?

SRI AUROBINDO: The date can vary. There are many factors that may come in and push it off this way or that way.

EVENING

NIRODBARAN: Charu Dutt says that the first time he met you was at the train station at Baroda. He was passing through Baroda and you had come to the station to see somebody off. You were accompanied by Hesh and Deshpande. Dutt was travelling with an Englishman, an I.C.S. man probably, and just before Baroda station the Englishman asked, "Do you know where Ghose is now?" "Which Ghose?" "That Classical scholar of Cambridge who has come away to India to waste his future." Dutt told him that you were at Baroda. When the train stopped there, Hesh saw Dutt and shouted to him: "Dutt, do you know Ghose?" Then he introduced you. Dutt said to the Englishman, "Here is Ghose." "That?" the Englishman exclaimed in great surprise, because you had come to the station in the Indian official dress and turban.

SRI AUROBINDO: Turban? Does he mean Palleri cap?

NIRODBARAN: Probably.

SRI AUROBINDO: But the official dress also? I don't remember. It is true that at times I used to put on the Marathi dress. Then?

NIRODBARAN: That was the first meeting. The second was at his own house in Bombay, where you came with a bundle of papers containing the scheme of the Bhavani Mandir. Oh yes, Jatin Banerji was also at Baroda station.

PURANI: Which Jatin?

SRI AUROBINDO: The one who was at the head of the Baroda army and then went to Calcutta and became head of the young people's revolutionary movement and afterwards became the Sannyasi Niralamba.

NIRODBARAN: You spoke to Dutt, it seems, about the scheme of work for the country, that it should be a many-sided activity based on Yoga and Brahmacharya. The idea and programme of work for the country were the same as his own except for Brahmacharya.

SRI AUROBINDO: He couldn't accept it?

NIRODBARAN: No, and there was opposition to it among the other workers too. And for that reason you had to give it up.

SRI AUROBINDO: Which other workers? I didn't know anybody else. Barin and I were concerned with the scheme but I didn't give it up because of any opposition. Barin was knocking about for a temple in the hills. He only got hill-fever and not the temple. The whole thing fizzled out. It was not a failure because it was never started. I knew that it wouldn't work out. It was not meant to be a success.

NIRODBARAN: Barin got the conception of the Mandir.

SRI AUROBINDO: In automatic writing.

NIRODBARAN: No, in trance, Dutt says.

SRI AUROBINDO: Trance? I never knew that Barin went into trance. And if he had got it in trance he would have told me.

NIRODBARAN: Dutt says it was in a trance in which he had a vision of a temple on a rugged conical hill somewhere between Modhupur and Benaras.

SRI AUROBINDO: The hill was near Benaras.

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NIRODBARAN: I have increased my stock of knowledge today.

PURANI: From where you left off yesterday?

NIRODBARAN: Yes. Sakariababa knew beforehand about the mission but he refused. They told him that you had sent them.

SRI AUROBINDO: How could I? I didn't know him. It was Barin who knew him.

NIRODBARAN: As no entreaty was of avail, Dutt said, "We will send Barin then." He knew Sakaria was very fond of Barin. He then agreed that three months in a year he would stay. The second visit of yours was to his place at Thana.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is right.

NIRODBARAN: There were two Marathis present, one of them was Kaka Patil, I think.

SRI AUROBINDO: Kaka Patil? I seem to remember a name like that.

NIRODBARAN: You had a long argument with them and Dutt about the feasibility of the Mandir. They were practical people and they didn't want to mix up Yoga with politics. In the argument,

Dutt felt that you yourself were shaky about the idea and you couldn't argue very well.

SRI AUROBINDO: I was shaky?

NIRODBARAN: Yes.

SRI AUROBINDO: Arguing with them? I was never in the habit of arguing. He seems to have given me a character which I never had.

NIRODBARAN: At last you said, "Charu, I give it up."

SRI AUROBINDO: Good Lord! I don't remember having any argument and saying that.

SATYENDRA: But he remembers, Sir. (*Laughter*)

NIRODBARAN: Though the scheme was given up, Barin and Upen were going ahead in Maniktala training boys in Yoga. Oh yes, when I told him that yesterday he said that you were at Calcutta, so how could you meet him at Bombay? He said it might have been in one of your comings and goings.

SRI AUROBINDO: My comings and goings? I had not much money to come and go. (*Laughter*) And then?

NIRODBARAN: There were two boys among them who were very remarkable—Prafulla Chaki and Prafulla Chakravarty. Then he related an incident about Chaki to show what stuff he was made of. It seems Chaki had a hand-grenade in his pocket given by Dutt. They were sitting together somewhere with Bidhan Roy by the side of Dutt.

SRI AUROBINDO: Bidhan Roy?

NIRODBARAN: Yes, but Roy didn't know anything at all about those things, nor did Dutt tell him. Chaki was sitting perfectly calm and composed, a boy who was to kill thirty or forty people at any moment. There was to be a cricket match to which Sir Andrew Fraser was to come, but he didn't turn up because he suspected something. So the thing didn't come off. When Dutt met Chaki the next time at Darjeeling—

SRI AUROBINDO: Charu Dutt seems to be everywhere. Yet I never knew that he was actually in the movement. Next?

SATYENDRA: He must have been playing a big role, Sir.

NIRODBARAN: Just to test him Dutt said to Chaki, "Prafulla, what do you think about our leaders who are remaining safe behind the scene while putting you young people in danger?" Chaki suddenly clasped Charu's feet and said, "Are you testing me? My duty is to do what I am commanded." "Such was the material,"

Charu said, "first-rate boys and, added to everything else, the yogic force made them remarkable." It seems Barin was giving them spiritual training.

SRI AUROBINDO: It was Lele who gave them the initiation into Yoga. Barin called down Lele from Bombay for that purpose.

NIRODBARAN: Lele, it appears, after seeing Chaki was very much impressed and picked him out from the group. He wanted to take Chaki with him to make him a fine Yogi and consulted you and you replied that he should ask Dutt. Lele remarked that such fine boys were being wasted in the movement.

SRI AUROBINDO: I said Dutt should be asked? But does he mean to say that Lele knew about the movement? He knew nothing at all except at the end when he said to Barin, "You have all along deceived me. I thought you wanted to practise Yoga and for that reason you called me. Now give it up, give it up, otherwise you will fall into a ditch."

NIRODBARAN: Dutt said, "These boys are being wasted," so Lele knew perhaps.

SRI AUROBINDO: If he had known, he would have immediately left them. He thought all along that they were practising Yoga. If he had known, Noren Goswami would have brought it into the trial as evidence. The only thing that came out about him was a note, "Rub me with ghee," written by Lele himself on a piece of paper (*laughter*), as a sort of service to him. Now go on.

NIRODBARAN: You asked Lele to consult Dutt about Chaki.

SRI AUROBINDO: Nonsense! Never mind. Then?

NIRODBARAN: So you called Dutt to your house. It was a single-storeyed house, he said, rather low, with a low basement or ground floor.

SRI AUROBINDO: When was it? If it was my house it must have been after the Surat Congress when Lele came to Calcutta.

NIRODBARAN: May be. Dutt entered the house, found you and Lele sitting while Chaki was loitering outside.

SRI AUROBINDO: Chaki was there?

NIRODBARAN: Yes. Lele asked Dutt about Chaki. Dutt simply refused and referred him to you. You said, "I have nothing to say in the matter."

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't know anything about it at all. When did Dutt come to my house? Where was he then? Of course, I

would have given that answer if I had been asked. God knows where he has got all this from.

SATYENDRA: Must be out of his own fertile brain, Sir.

NIRODBARAN: The boy himself was called and asked his opinion. He said, pointing to you—

SRI AUROBINDO: Me? Good Lord! I had nothing to do with them. It was all Barin's work. I never knew who these boys were and never saw them. Only once Barin brought a troop of them to my house but they all waited below. It is true that Barin used to consult me or Mullick for any advice. But the whole movement was in his hands. I had no time for it. I was busy with Congress politics and *Bande Mataram*. My part in it was most undramatic. If Dutt had been in the movement, Barin would surely have told me but he never mentioned Dutt's name. If I had been the head, I would have been more cautious.

NIRODBARAN: Barin also wrote that you were the leader and brain of the movement.

SRI AUROBINDO: My connection with the movement began before I openly joined politics. Okakura started the revolutionary movement at Calcutta, but there was always a quarrel going on among the members. When I came to Calcutta, I came in contact with the party. They had no organisation at all. Their main programme was to beat some magistrates, and quarrels were going on. So I organised them and reconciled their quarrels and went back to Baroda. Again a quarrel broke out, again I came and reconciled them; the whole thing then went into Barin's hands. Terrorism was only a subordinate movement. It could have been important if the armed revolution would have come, the revolution for which we wanted to prepare the whole country, but I was too busy with the open political movement to prepare the country in that way. This terroristic movement was to prepare the young men with some sort of a military training, to kill and get killed. Otherwise it was never my idea that by throwing a few bombs we could overthrow the British Government. And that probably was the reason for the split among them. P. Mitra was for original idea while Barin was for this terrorism. I was never in direct contact with the movement nor with the young men and didn't know them. Only in jail did I come in contact with them, especially Nolini, Bejoy, etc. When I came out of jail, Jatin Banerji and others again approached me and I organised the party again.

NIRODBARAN: There is no Dutt in the picture. What part did he play then?

SRI AUROBINDO: He was only in the know of the movement. Most of the time he was at his judgeship at Bombay.

NIRODBARAN: As for Chaki, it seems he shot himself.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, it was in the Kingsford case, along with Khudiram.

NIRODBARAN: About Prafulla Chakravarty, Dutt said he died in Deoghar in the hills where Barin and others went to experiment with explosives. It seems a bomb exploded in mid air instead of on the ground and a splinter struck Chakravarty in the head, by which he died.

SRI AUROBINDO: I see. I didn't know that.

NIRODBARAN: After the accident, Barin and Upen etc., called for Dutt. Dutt arrived and saw that something had gone wrong. Charu Dutt again! How could he be consulted?

SRI AUROBINDO: Where was he?

NIRODBARAN: Maybe in Calcutta. I am not sure. They were very dejected. They explained what had happened to him and asked how to dispose of the body. Something had to be done. Otherwise the body would be found and identified.

SRI AUROBINDO: Good Lord! Does it mean that Barin left the body there and came to Calcutta for advice? Barin might have been rash but he was not so foolish.

NIRODBARAN: Dutt advised them to disfigure the face.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is taken from Pulin Das. Pulin Das did the same thing in a case like that.

NIRODBARAN: Now it seems some people were arrested but no trace could be found of Chakravarty. His father was very worried.

SRI AUROBINDO: I thought his father knew all about his son's movements and said that he had become a Sannyasi.

NIRODBARAN: But he didn't know about his death. Dutt was at that time interned at Cooch Bihar. He had no means of communication with anybody. He asked a pleader friend of his at Rangpur to see him about some legal affair. When he came, Dutt told him to communicate the news to the father.

SRI AUROBINDO: Barin was very reckless. On the eve of the search he brought two bombs to my house. I told him, "Take them away. Don't you know that the house is going to be searched? And

remove the things from Maniktala." He took the bombs away but didn't do anything at Maniktala.

SATYENDRA: He has written about it in his book. Just as he was removing things the police came, he said. He seemed to be a man on whom responsibility was sitting very lightly.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then he knew that the police were watching him but didn't care about it at all.

NIRODBARAN: Dutt said that the mistakes and accidents happened because you were passing through some new phase in sadhana, on account of which you couldn't be vigilant enough. Sisir Mitra and Nolini don't believe that you would have been so careless with such a heavy responsibility on you.

SRI AUROBINDO: As I said, I had nothing to do directly with the movement. I would have been very cautious.

DR. MANILAL: I asked Dutt if the spiritual force he spoke of among the boys had been imparted by you.

SRI AUROBINDO: I didn't impart anything.

NIRODBARAN: He said, "I doubt it. Firstly Sri Aurobindo had not advanced sufficiently in Yoga at that time to do that, and secondly he was himself passing through a struggle."

SRI AUROBINDO: No, I didn't give them any force. There was at that time a break in my sadhana because the pressure of work was too much. The sadhana was renewed after my contact with Lele. The boys were revolutionary from the beginning; it was their own force that moved them.

EVENING

NIRODBARAN: I have another letter from A. He has come out again with his scheme of village reconstruction. It is more elaborate now. One interesting point I find is a common kitchen.

PURANI: That is nothing new, and I doubt very much how far it will work out. Village people have a strong individuality in these things. They will hardly agree to share common cooked food.

SATYENDRA: In this land of caste and creed and untouchability, how can they accept a common kitchen?

NIRODBARAN: A further writes: "I now see that my ideas came from the universal mind."

SRI AUROBINDO: Universal mind? That is too much to say.

NIRODBARAN: It's my mistake. Instead of "general" I read "universal".

SRI AUROBINDO: Then?

NIRODBARAN: Then he says: "They come out with such force that it seems there must be some truth in them."

SRI AUROBINDO: That's right.

NIRODBARAN: He continues: "So I must know their Swarupa, true form, either to accept or reject them. Now the most urgent need of the country is some sort of unity, and unity can only come if the country has a vigorous and living programme of work acceptable to all and sundry."

SRI AUROBINDO: Good Lord!

NIRODBARAN: "For this," says A, "I have fixed a programme —"

SRI AUROBINDO: For your approval. (*Laughter*) Then?

NIRODBARAN: "The programme is: (1) none shall go unfed, (2) none untreated, and (3) none uneducated. This is very possible if all villagers are combined—as was in ancient India."

SRI AUROBINDO: How does he know it was so in ancient India?

NIRODBARAN: I don't know. He goes on: "There was no common property in India. Following the ancient way, my idea is to have village institutions fitting present conditions. The main thing is a common kitchen."

SRI AUROBINDO: Why not have everything else in common too? (*Laughter*)

SATYENDRA: Everybody will come and eat anything they like in the common kitchen?

NIRODBARAN: No, according to one's needs. In such an institution, poor people who go without food will be fed.

SRI AUROBINDO: How is it to run? Who will pay the expenses?

NIRODBARAN: According to one's means one will contribute. If it is run on a large scale, expenses will be much less.

PURANI: Then nobody will pay and everybody will come to eat.

SRI AUROBINDO: Quite so — and it will encourage idleness.

NIRODBARAN: There will also be a dispensary under the supervision of a qualified doctor who will be maintained by two or three villages combined.

PURANI: If A goes to the villages he will find out how very difficult it is to get people to pay the expenses. Unless the Government gives support, the public can't run the dispensaries.

NIRODBARAN: And if the Government doesn't?

PURANI: Then try to capture the Government itself.

NIRODBARAN: That is more easily said than done. Both constructive work and the fight for freedom would have to go hand in hand, as with Gandhi at present.

SRI AUROBINDO: With very little success, I am afraid.

PURANI: I know of cases where people wanted to help the villagers by paying off their loans, etc., but it was found that the villagers were very shrewd, astute folk, who were more than a match for the city people.

SRI AUROBINDO: A is living in his mind; he has lost touch with practical reality.

SATYENDRA (*seeing N trying to translate A's Bengali into English*): Why doesn't he write in English? That will save you the trouble of translation.

NIRODBARAN: Now I will ask him to.

SRI AUROBINDO: Now? (*Laughter*) I thought he had finished all his questions.

NIRODBARAN: He may begin some other theme. In the present letter, the last item is: to propagate Sri Aurobindo's ideas through books, essays, etc., in order to have a spiritual foundation.

SATYENDRA: They will understand the books?

SRI AUROBINDO: Even if they understand, will they be able to execute the ideas?

NIRODBARAN: A seems to have said to Dilip that he still has one weakness—the desire to work for the country.

SRI AUROBINDO (*smiling*): A great weakness. If he tries, he will meet with no better fate than Barin—namely, failure.

SATYENDRA: Barin and A are different personalities.

SRI AUROBINDO: Even then he will have the same fate. Barin went out to revolutionise the world.

NIRODBARAN: And he ended by revolutionising himself ! (*Laughter*) A is putting out all these ideas from his own unpublished novel.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, he wanted to publish it but the Mother sat tight on the proposal. If he wants to write about politics, village reform, etc., he can do it for his own satisfaction but not for publication.

29 FEBRUARY 1940

NIRODBARAN: While talking of the Burma rebellion and the Chittagong Armoury raid, Dutt came out with the belief that by such uprisings India can get independence.

SRI AUROBINDO: How will India do it?

NIRODBARAN: D asked Dutt what Surya Sen would have done if the British army had attacked. Dutt replied, "Where is the British army? It is a myth. There is only the Indian army and they won't shoot their own people. If in a few more places rebellion had occurred and succeeded, the country would have been converted."

SRI AUROBINDO: Would a few places like that convert the whole of India? Besides, what about the British navy and the British aeroplanes? England can bring her own army from home. Even as regards the Indian army, it would only be a part of it that would refuse to fight.

NIRODBARAN: Dutt says that during the Non-cooperation movement, the Gharwallis refused to shoot their own people.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, yes, but there are other troops that will shoot.

PURANI: The Gharwallis were afterwards court-martialled.

NIRODBARAN: Dutt also told a story of how at one time foreign governments were sought who were interested in India's struggle with the British. Actually, during the Bengal movement it seems a ship of ammunition from Germany was captured by the British Government.

SRI AUROBINDO: That was at the time of Rashbehari Ghose, perhaps in 1905 or 1908. The idea of revolution at that time was intelligible. But now, after the First World War, with so much development of the means of warfare, it is impossible.

NIRODBARAN: Dutt is going to write a review of your *Life Divine*.

SRI AUROBINDO: Is he a philosopher?

NIRODBARAN: I don't think so. Sisir Mitra seems to have asked him to do it.

PURANI: He can begin with a story.

SRI AUROBINDO: And end with a story. (*Laughter*)

PURANI: Barin appears to have written well about the Mother in *Khulna Basi*. (*Sri Aurobindo smiled.*)

NIRODBARAN: Is what he says about the Mother true? He says that what would have taken you ten years in sadhana was done in one year by your contact with her.

SRI AUROBINDO: I may have said something like that – not these very words but the same substance.

APPENDIX

SRI AUROBINDO ON WRITING IN ENGLISH
AND ON STYLE IN WRITING

As in these Talks there are remarks by Sri Aurobindo on Indians writing in English and on literature in general, it will be both interesting and instructive to quote a few passages from his letters to poet-disciples apropos of these themes.

I

Indians have naturally in writing English a tendency to be too coloured, sometimes flowery, sometimes rhetorical. . . . One ought to have in writing English a style which is at its base capable of going to the point, saying with a simple and energetic straight-forwardness what one means to say, so that one can add grace of language without disturbing this basis. Arnold is a very good model for this purpose.

(To Dilip Kumar Roy)

16 May 1932

2

Avoid over-writing; let all your sentences be the vehicle of something worth saying and say it with a vivid precision neither defective nor excessive. Don't let either thought or speech trail or drag or circumvolute. Don't let the language be more abundant than the sense. Don't indulge in mere clever ingenuities without a living truth behind them.

(To Amal Kiran)

14 May 1935

3

If you want to write English poetry which can stand, I would suggest three rules for you:

(1) Avoid rhetorical turns and artifices and the rhetorical tone generally. An English poet can use these things at will because he has the intrinsic sense of his language and can keep the right proportion and measure. An Indian using them kills his poetry and produces a scholastic exercise.

(2) Write modern English. Avoid frequent inversions or turns of language that belong to the past poetic styles. Modern English poetry uses a straightforward order and a natural style, not different in vocabulary, syntax, etc., from that of prose. An inversion can be used sometimes, but it must be done deliberately and for a distinct and particular effect.

(3) For poetic effect rely wholly on the power of your substance, the magic of rhythm and the sincerity of your expression – if you can add subtlety so much the better, but not at the cost of sincerity and straightforwardness. Do not construct your poetry with the brain-mind, the mere intellect – that is not the source of true inspiration: write from the inner heart of emotion and vision.

(To Amal Kiran)

4

Each poet should write in the way suited to his own imagination and substance; it is a habit of the human mind fond of erecting rules and rigidities to put one way forward as a general law for all. . . . In any case it was far from my intention to impose any strict rule of bare simplicity and directness as a general law of poetic style. I was speaking of “Twentieth-century English poetry” and of what was necessary for Amal, an Indian writing in the English tongue. English poetry in former times used inversions freely and had a law of its own – at that time natural and right, but the same thing nowadays sounds artificial and false. English has now acquired a richness and flexibility and power of many-sided suggestion which makes it unnecessary for poetry to depart from the ordinary style and form of the language. But there are other languages in which this is not yet true. Bengali is in its youth, in full process of growth and has many things not yet done, many powers and voices it has still to acquire. It is necessary that its poets should keep a full and entire freedom to turn in whatever way the genius leads, to find new forms and movements.

(To Dilip Kumar Roy)

5

Too violent condensations of language or too compressed thoughts always create a sense either of obscurity or, if not that,

then of effort and artifice, even if a powerful and inspired artifice. Yet very great poets and writers have used them, so great a poet as Aeschylus or so great a prose stylist as Tacitus. Then there are the famous "knots" in the Mahabharata. I think one can say that these condensations are justified when they say something with more power and depth and full, if sometimes recondite, significance than an easier speech would give, but to make it a constant element of the language (without a constant justification of that kind) would turn it into a mannerism or artifice.

(To Arjava)

6

Most modern (contemporary) English poetry, at least what I have seen of it, is all very carefully written and versified, *recherché* in thought and expression; it lacks only two things—the inspired phrase and inevitable word and the rhythm that keeps a poem for ever alive. . . . There are something like a hundred "great" poets (if you can believe their admirers) writing like that in England just now. It will be easy for you to be the hundred and first, if you like, but I would not advise you to proceed farther on that kind of modern line. It is not the irregular verse or rhymes that matter, one can make perfection out of irregularity—it is that they write from the cultured mind, not from the elemental soul-power within. Not a principle to accept or a method to imitate!

(To Amal Kiran)

June 1931

7

I stand rather aghast at your summons to stand and deliver the names of the ten or twelve best prose styles in the world's literature. . . . There are great writers in prose and great prose-writers and the two are by no means the same thing. Dickens and Balzac are great novelists, but their style or their frequent absence of style had better not be described; Scott attempts a style, but it is neither blameless nor is it his distinguishing merit. Other novelists have an adequate style and a good one but their prose is not quoted as a model and they are remembered not for that but as creators. . . . What was in my mind was those achievements in which language reached its acme of perfection in one manner or

another so that whatever the writer touched became a thing of beauty – no matter what its substance – or a perfect form and memorable. Bankim seemed to me to have achieved that in his own way as Plato in his or Cicero or Tacitus in theirs or in French Literature Voltaire, Flaubert or Anatole France. I could name many more, especially in French which is the greatest store-house of fine prose among the world's languages – there is no other to match it. . . . All prose of other languages seems beside its perfection, lucidity, measure almost clumsy. . . . The great prose-writers in English seem to seize you by the personality they express in their style rather than by its perfection as an instrument. . . .

(To Dilip Kumar Roy)

8

I am in general agreement with your answer to M's strictures on certain points in your style and your use of English language. His objections have usually some ground, but are not unquestionably valid; they would be so if the English language were a fixed and unprogressive and invariable medium demanding a scrupulous correctness and purity and chaste exactness like the French; but this language is constantly changing and escaping from boundaries and previously fixed rules and its character and style, you might almost say, is whatever the writer likes to make it. Stephen Phillips once said of it in a libertine image that the English language is like a woman who will not love you unless you take liberties with her. . . .

As for "aspire for", it may be less correct than "aspire to" or "aspire after", but it is psychologically called for; it seems to me to be much more appropriate than "aspire at" which I would never think of using. . . . "To contact" is a phrase that has established itself and it is futile to try to keep America at arm's length any longer; "global" also has established itself and it is too useful and indeed indispensable to reject; there is no other word that can express exactly the same shade of meaning. I heard it first from Arjava who described the language of *Arya* as expressing a global thinking and I at once caught it up as the right and only word for certain things, for instance, the thinking in masses which is a frequent characteristic of the Overmind. As for the use of current French and Latin phrases, it may be condemned as objectionable on the same ground as the use of clichés and stock phrases in literary style, but they often hit the

target more forcibly than any English equivalent and have a more lively effect on the mind of the reader. That may not justify a too frequent use of them, but in moderation it is at least a good excuse for it. I think the expression "bears around it a halo" has been or can be used and it is at least not worn out like the ordinary "wears a halo." One would more usually apply the expression "devoid of method" to an action or procedure than to a person, but the latter turn seems to me admissible. I do not think I need say anything in particular about other objections, they are questions of style and on that there can be different opinions; but you are right in altering the obviously mixed metaphor "in full cry", though I do not think any of your four substitutes have anything of its liveliness and force. Colloquial expressions have, if rightly used, the advantage of giving point, flavour, alertness and I think in your use of them they do that; they can also lower and damage the style, but that damage is mostly when there is a set character of uniform dignity or elevation. The chief character of your style is rather a constant life and vividness and supple and ample abounding energy of thought and language which can soar or run or sweep along at will but does not simply walk or creep or saunter and in such a style forcible colloquialisms can do good service.

(To Amal Kiran)

2 April 1947