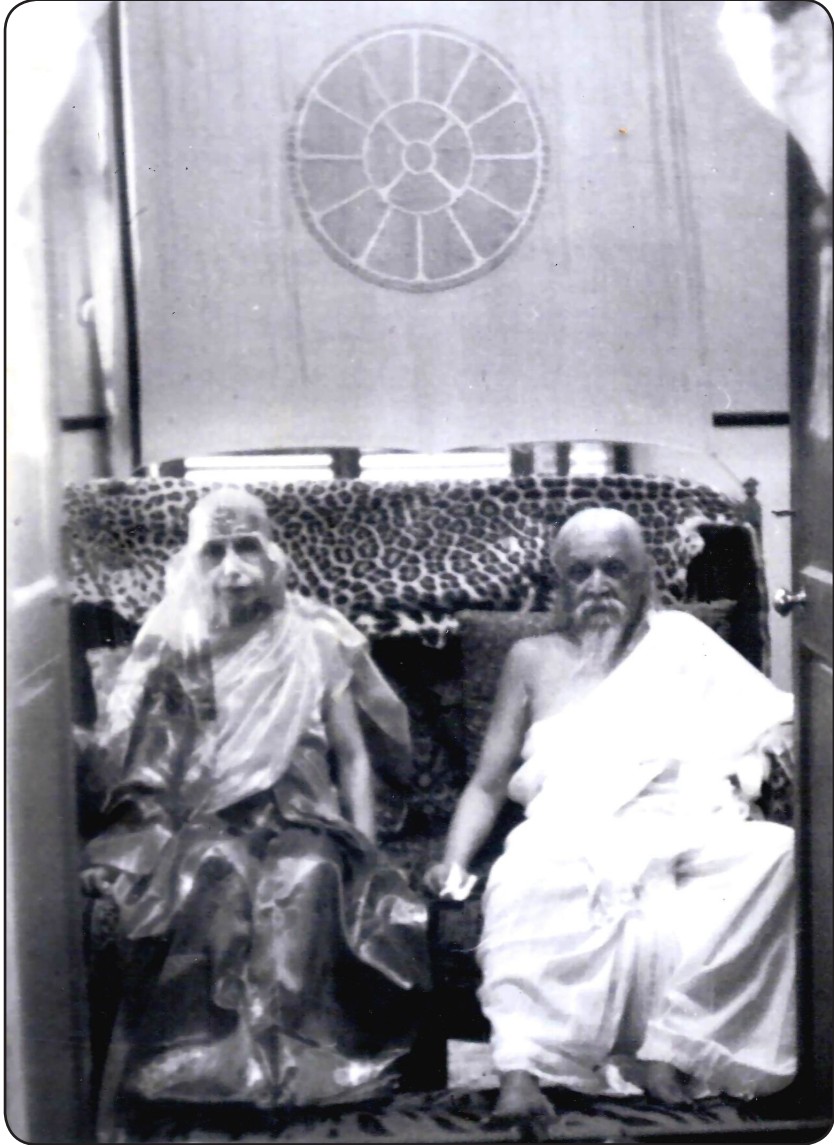


SELECTIONS FROM "ON THE MOTHER"

*K R Srinivasa Iyengar*



## THE MEETING

### I

On 3 March 1914, Mirra wrote: "As the day of departure draws near, I enter into a kind of self-communion."<sup>1</sup> A "thousand little nothings" had surrounded her all those years, and she had grown among them, basking in their companionship and friendship; and now that she was shortly to go on a voyage and would not be able to write "at this table in this calm room all charged with Thy Presence", she wondered whether those 'trifles' around her would receive from other occupants of the house the same care and solicitude, the same loving kindness, she had given them so long. Even material things are not just to be taken for granted! In after-years, as the Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, she was to admonish the sadhaks for their insensitiveness towards material things:

"Not to take care of material things which one uses is a sign of inconscience and ignorance.

You have no right to use any material object whatsoever if you do not take care of it. You must take care of it not because you are attached to it, but because it manifests something of the Divine Consciousness."<sup>2</sup>

Nolini Kanta Gupta too has testified how she

"taught us to use our things with care .... She uses things, not merely with care but with love and affection. For, to her, material things are not simply inanimate objects, not mere lifeless implements. They are endowed with a life of their own, even a consciousness of their own, and each thing has its own individuality and character."<sup>3</sup>

There is a hint of all this in the prayer of 3 March 1914. For Mirra, material things are created by divine Love from the dark inconscience of chaos, and hence deserving of gentle and affectionate handling.

Mirra will soon be leaving her quiet and sanctified room; she will be leaving Paris itself, and her circle of friends and fellow-seekers. As for the future, she faces it with equanimity: "I would only wish that it may be the beginning of a new inner period." In the pages of the past what's writ is writ and beyond recall; the pages of the future are blank but rich with promise. Four years earlier, Paul Richard had returned from a visit to India and told her of his meetings with Sri Aurobindo Ghose at Pondicherry. During the intervening years, letters had been exchanged between the Richards and Sri Aurobindo, and lines of possible cooperative work explored. Between Mirra and Sri Aurobindo especially, there had been established occult links of deep understanding regarding their future mission on the earth. Towards the end of 1913, Paul Richard had decided that he would himself contest one of the seats from French India for the Senate and

Chamber of Deputies in Paris. This time, Mirra was to accompany him, and they decided that irrespective of the result of the ensuing election, they would stay on in Pondicherry for about two years. In fact, Mirra had to sell about one-fourth of her modest private fortune to enable the Richards to make the journey to India and to provide for a two-year stay.<sup>4</sup> Richard's political and humanitarian mission and Mirra's pilgrimage of the Spirit were to coalesce in their March 1914 momentous passage to India, with results that perhaps even they could not have anticipated. But a Divinity does shape our ends, however little we may be aware of this; and in 1920, Mirra recalled in the course of a contribution to a Chandernagore paper:

"In the year 1910, my husband came alone to Pondicherry where, under very interesting and peculiar circumstances, he made the acquaintance of Sri Aurobindo. Since then we both strongly wished to return to India, the country which I had always cherished as my true mother-country. And in 1914 this joy was granted to us."<sup>5</sup>

## II

But such encounters — however depressing in the immediate context — didn't deflect Mirra from her deeper aims, nor ruffle her inner equanimity. If she could hardly make a dent in the Presbyterian clergyman's self protective armour of Philistinism, Mirra was rather more successful, perhaps, with some of the other fellow-travellers. For example, she recorded on 25 March:

"Silent and unseen as always, but all-powerful, Thy action has made itself felt and, in these souls that seemed to be so closed, a perception of Thy divine light is awake....

O Lord, an ardent thanksgiving mounts from me towards Thee expressing the gratitude of this sorrowing humanity which Thou illuminest, transformest and glorifiest..."<sup>6</sup>

With this sense of fulfilment and deep thankfulness, on 27 March the Richards disembarked at Colombo. That day they remained in Ceylon, spending part of their time with a noted Buddhist monk named Dharmapala.<sup>7</sup> Crossing the straits at Talaimannar and reaching Dhanushkodi, the Richards boarded the Boat Mail (as it used to be called) on 28 March.

Mirra had known throughout the long voyage the Lord's divine solicitude and protection, she had seen the writ of His law everywhere, and of course she had tried wholly to identify herself with His law and to embody it effortlessly and spontaneously. It is not surprising that Mirra was in a condition of serene acceptance and luminous understanding:

"From the time we started and every day more and more, in ail things we can see Thy divine intervention, everywhere Thy law is expressed"<sup>8</sup>

On 29 March, after a change at Villupuram, the train speeded towards Pondicherry. And long before she actually met Sri Aurobindo she may well have felt his aura, just as she was to experience it six years later when her boat was nearing Pondicherry.<sup>12</sup> And once there what possibilities lay hidden, what vast horizons stretched ahead of her! In the full conscious ness of His sovereign Presence, she turned towards the future with an undimmed vision and with unwavering faith. A passage by Sri Aurobindo about *Savitri* may be apt here:

Apparelled in her flickering-coloured robe,  
 She seemed burning towards the eternal realms  
 A bright moved torch of incense and of flame  
 That from the sky-roofed temple-soil of earth  
 A pilgrim hand lifts in an invisible shrine.<sup>9</sup>

### III

Since 1910 Sri Aurobindo had completely surrendered himself to Yoga. He had “already realised in full two of the four great realisations on which his Yoga and his spiritual philosophy are founded.”<sup>10</sup> In Pondicherry he had received a “programme” for his own Yoga which he described as *Sapta Chatushtaya*.<sup>11</sup> But self-realisation was not the only aim: “A distinct and central object of his Yoga was a change of life and existence.” And by the time Mirra joined him in 1914, four years of “silent Yoga” had enabled him to evolve a new instrument of spiritual discipline — *Purna Yoga* or *Integral Yoga* — comprehending and harmonising the two extreme categories of experience, Matter and Spirit, and the three classical paths, Knowledge (*Jnana*), Works (*Karma*) and Devotion (*Bhakti*). He had also been working towards the *Yoga of the Future*, *Supramental Yoga*. He had with him at Pondicherry a few young men, fellow-exiles from British India, all living in rather straitened circumstances. In October 1913, Sri Aurobindo moved from the small Mission Street residence to a far more spacious house — No. 41, Rue François Martin (which is now called the ‘Guest House’). Describing the house as it looked at the time Sri Aurobindo moved into it, Amrita writes:

“In the interior of the house, at one end of the verandah there was a wide staircase leading to the first floor...the house was big but it looked desolate.

The upper storey held spacious rooms and a spacious verandah... On the west, at the corner there was a wide room, adjoining which was another room and then the open terrace... The big room, the front room and the terrace — the three together being considered the best part of the house — were set apart for Sri Aurobindo.”<sup>12</sup>

In December 1913, attempts were made to make the place more habitable. The weeds were pulled out, electric lights were installed, some &ticks of furniture

were inducted; and “the house put on almost a gay appearance because of these much-needed changes.”<sup>13</sup>

It was rumoured, continues Amrita, that “two Europeans had accepted Sri Aurobindo as Guru...two persons from the topmost cultural circle of France were coming to Sri Aurobindo for practising yoga.” There was understandable excitement among the young disciples as also the revolutionaries (Subramania Bharati, V.V.S. Aiyar, Srinivasachariar, and others) who too had found political asylum in Pondicherry.

#### IV



On 29 March 1914, the very day they arrived in Pondicherry from France, Mirra and Paul Richard met Sri Aurobindo in the afternoon at 3.30. They were received at the top of the stairs that led up to the upstairs verandah. The moment Mirra had so ardently looked forward to had arrived at last, and there was a blaze of instantaneous recognition. Sri Aurobindo was clearly the Master of her occult life, the “Krishna” she had met so often in her dream-experiences. Their first meeting and the current of feelings that may have gone through them are echoed in these lines of *Savitri*:

Here first she met on the uncertain earth  
 The one for whom her heart had come so far.  
 Attracted as in heaven star by star,  
 They wondered at each other and rejoiced  
 And wove affinity in a silent gaze.  
 A moment passed that was eternity’s ray,  
 An hour began, the matrix of new Time.<sup>14</sup>

There was hardly any conversation between them; indeed, there was no need. In K.D. Sethna's words:

"Before meeting Sri Aurobindo she used to find for her various spiritual experiences and realisations a poise for life-work by giving them a mould with the enlightened mind. All kinds of powerful ideas she had for world-upliftment — ideas artistic, social, religious. At the sight of Sri Aurobindo she aspired to a total cessation of all mental moulds. She did not speak a word nor did he: she just sat at his feet and closed her eyes, keeping her mind open to him. After a while there came, from above, an infinite silence that settled in her mind. Everything was gone, all those fine and great ideas vanished and there was only a vacant imperturbable waiting for what was beyond mind."<sup>15</sup>

There is also the report by Nolini Kanta Gupta about the Mother:

"The first time Sri Aurobindo happened to describe her qualities, he said he had never seen anywhere a self-surrender so absolute and unreserved. He had added a comment that perhaps it was only women who were capable of giving themselves so entirely and with such sovereign ease. This implies a complete obliteration of the past, erasing it with its virtues and faults....

When she came here, she gave herself up to the Lord, Sri Aurobindo, with the candid simplicity of a child, after erasing from herself all her past, all her spiritual attainments, all the riches of her consciousness. Like a new born babe, she felt she possessed nothing, she was to learn everything right from the start, as if she had known or heard about nothing."<sup>16</sup>

Her own recollection of the meeting, sixteen years after, was significant:

"When I first met Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry, I was in deep concentration, seeing things in the Supermind, things that were to be but which were somehow not manifesting.

I told Sri Aurobindo what I had seen and asked him if they would manifest. He simply said, "Yes." And immediately I saw that the Supramental had touched the earth and was beginning to be realised!

This was the first time I had witnessed the power to make real what is true."<sup>17</sup>

It is probable that it was at one of the early meetings that Mirra asked her question about 'Samadhi', to which she was to refer forty years later:

"When I came here, one of my first questions to Sri Aurobindo was: "What do you think of samadhi, that state of trance one does not remember? One enters into a condition which seems blissful, but when one comes out of

it, one does not know at all what has happened." Then he looked at me, saw what I meant and told me, "It is unconsciousness." I asked him for an explanation.... He told me, "Yes, you enter into what is called samadhi when you go out of your conscious being and enter a part of your being which is completely unconscious, or rather a domain where you have no corresponding consciousness... a region where you are no longer conscious ... that is why, naturally, you remember nothing ..." So this reassured me and I said, "Well, this has never happened to me." He replied, "Nor to me."<sup>18</sup>

## V

It may be presumed, then, that when Sri Aurobindo and Mirra met on 29 March 1914, what passed between them was rather more of a wordless communion than any formal or detailed conversation. Writing with the available hindsight, K.D. Sethna comments on it as follows:

"The meeting of the two represents the coming together of the necessary creative powers by whom a new age would be born. And it is to be noted that both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had been pursuing the inner life on essentially identical lines which would unite Spirit and Matter. So their joining of forces was the most natural thing. And it was not only a doubling of strengths but also a linking of complementaries. Sri Aurobindo's main movement of consciousness may be said to have been an immense Knowledge-Power from above the mind, though whatever was necessary for an integral spirituality was also there in one form or another. The Mother's chief movement may be said to have been an intense Love-Power from behind the heart, even if all else needed for an all-round Yoga was present as a ready accessory. When she and Sri Aurobindo met, they completed each other, brought fully into play the spiritual energies in both and started the work of total earth-transformation from high above and deep within."<sup>19</sup>

If Sri Aurobindo was an embodiment of the East-West synthesis and contained within himself "the multi-dimensional spiritual consciousness of India", Mirra was the finest flower of European culture with deep spiritual filiations with India and the East as also with Africa, and she incarnated "a practical genius of a rare order, with powers of wide yet precise organization." Little wonder that they completed, when they met at last as if by divine dispensation, "the entire circle of the higher human activities" and were "supremely fitted to bring the East and the West together and, blending them, lead to a common all-consummating goal."<sup>20</sup> But all this marvellous possibility was only for the yet hidden future. In the immediate context, however, the one supreme gain was the mere fact of the coming together of two rare spiritual powers and personalities, each feeling vastly strengthened by the other. The Richards returned to their hotel in a condition of calm fulfilment and with a hope of

exciting new possibilities. Mirra could withdraw into herself, assess the new turn in her life, and re dedicate herself to the Divine. Her deep-felt feelings found memorable expression in her diary-entry for 30 March 1914:

“Gradually the horizon becomes distinct, the path grows clear, and we move towards a greater and greater certitude.

It matters little that there are thousands of beings plunged in the densest ignorance, He whom we saw yesterday is on earth; his presence is enough to prove that a day will come when darkness shall be transformed into light, and Thy reign shall be indeed established upon earth.

O Lord, Divine Builder of this marvel, my heart overflows with joy and gratitude when I think of it, and my hope has no bounds.

My adoration is beyond all words, my reverence is silent.”<sup>21</sup>

She had found in Sri Aurobindo a being who had “attained the perfect consciousness” and become integrally one of “Thy servitors”, and it had seemed to her that she was “still far, very far from what I yearn to realize.” But she was happy that a new Dawn in her life had arrived, and would now take her to the beckoning Noon. She recorded on 1 April:

“A great joy, a deep peace reign in me, and yet all my inner constructions have vanished like a vain dream and I find myself now, before Thy immensity, without a frame or system, like a being not yet individualised. All the past in its external form seems ridiculously arbitrary to me, and yet I know it was useful in its own time.

But now all is changed: a new stage has begun.”<sup>22</sup>

The stress is on the new — the new bearings — the new orientations — the new alignment of forces in the service of the Divine. The old is not altogether annulled or annihilated; like organic filaments, they are but to be melted and moulded into the new instruments. The day has ended, the day has begun. In my beginning is my end; in my end is my beginning! Thus Mirra in her meditation on the morning of 2 April:

“Every day, when I want to write, I am interrupted, as though the new period opening now before us were a period of expansion rather than of concentration.”<sup>23</sup>

And on the next day:

“It seems to me that I am being born to a new life and all the methods, the habits of the past can no longer be of any use. It seems to me that what I thought were results is nothing more than a preparation.... It is as though I were stripped of my entire past, of its errors as well as its conquests, as



though all that has vanished and made room for a new-born child whose whole existence is yet to be lived....

An immense gratitude rises from my heart, it seems to me that I have at last reached the threshold I sought so much."<sup>24</sup>

These diary-entries only corroborate Nolini's and Sethna's remarks quoted earlier: Mirra's absolute and unreserved surrender really meant "a complete obliteration of the past", and instead "an infinite silence settled in her mind."

## References

1. *Collected Works of the Mother*, cent. ed., Vol. 1, p. 87
2. *ibid.*, Vol. 14, p. 345
3. *Reminiscences*, Nolini K. Gupta and Amrita, 1969, p. 80
4. *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library*, Vol. 27, pp. 450-51
5. *Collected Works of the Mother*, cent. ed., Vol. 13, p. 39
6. *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library*, Vol. 27, p. 442
7. *Sri Aurobindo: Archives and Research*, Apr-89, p. 116
8. *Collected Works of the Mother*, cent. ed., Vol. 1, p. 111
9. *The Mother - Past, Present and Future*, K.D. Sethna, 1977, p. 6
10. *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo, revised edition, 1993, p. 372
11. *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library*, Vol. 26, p. 64
12. *Sri Aurobindo: Archives and Research*, Apr-86, p. lff
13. *Reminiscences*, Nolini K. Gupta and Amrita, 1969, p. 163
14. *ibid.*, p. 165
15. *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo, revised edition, 1993, p. 393; 399
16. *The Mother - Past, Present and Future*, K.D. Sethna, 1977, p. 7
17. *Reminiscences*, Nolini K. Gupta and Amrita, 1969, p. 81
18. *Collected Works of the Mother*, cent. ed., Vol. 3, p. 141
19. *ibid.*, Vol. 8, pp. 275-76
20. *Mother India*, Feb-73, pp. 111-12
21. *ibid.*, p. 112
22. *Collected Works of the Mother*, cent. ed., Vol. 1, p. 114
23. *ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 115
24. *ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 116